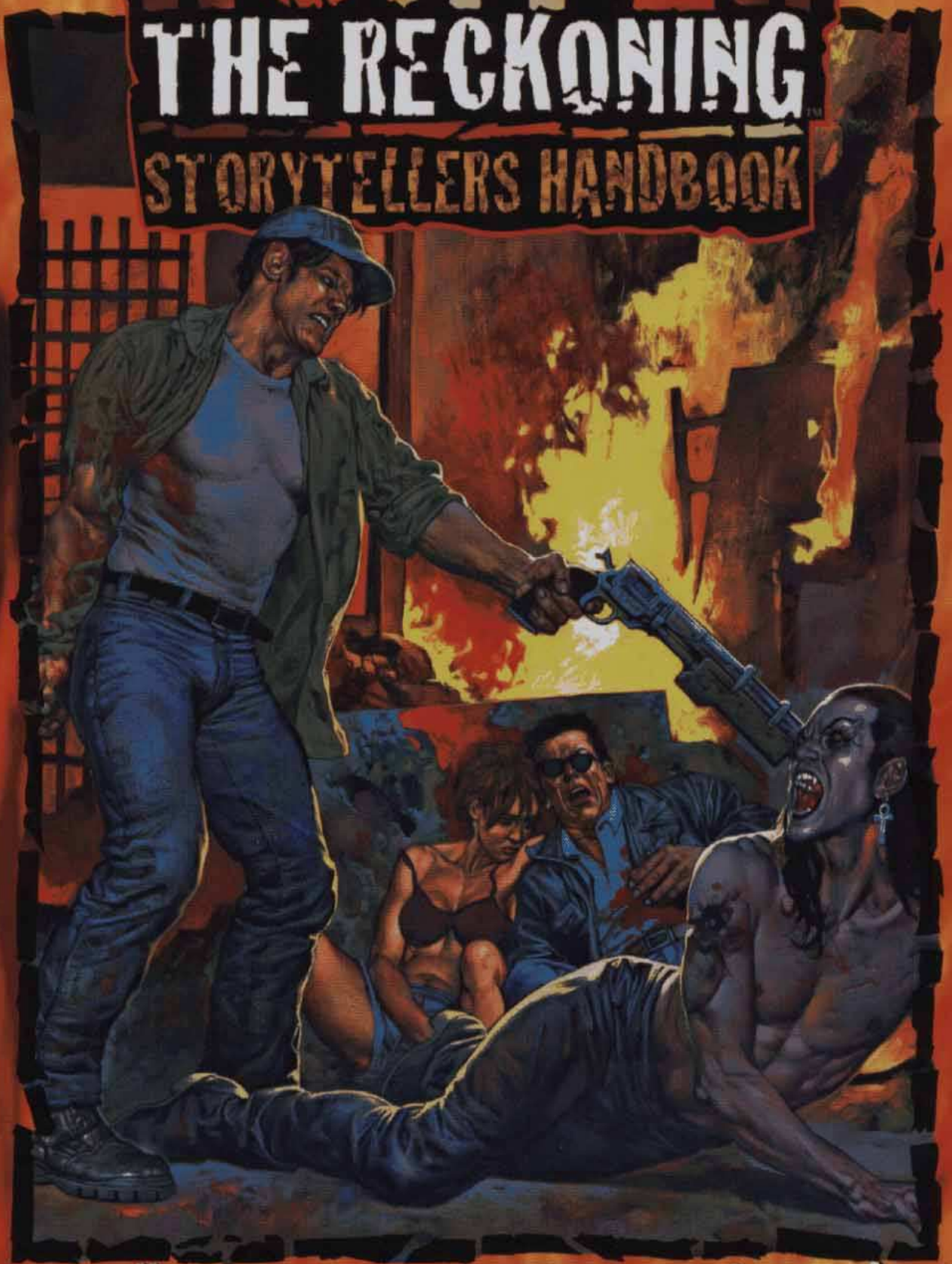
HUNTER

THE RECKONING

STORYTELLERS HANDBOOK



A Storytellers Resource for Hunter: The Reckoning®

HUNTER
THE RECKONING
STORYTELLERS HANDBOOK

And they shall know that I am the Lord. . .

Hunters have been exposed to the truth of the World of Darkness — that monsters exist, preying upon humanity — and they confront their oppressors. But how do the world and monsters respond to these dangerous people? Does the supernatural even notice them? Is hunters' crusade in vain?

When I shall lay my vengeance upon them

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HUNTER
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HUNTER

THE RECKONING™

STORYTELLERS HANDBOOK

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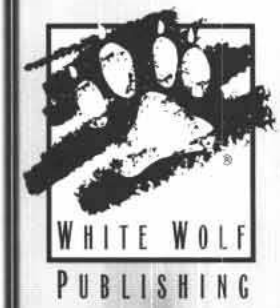

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SHE KNOWS
PRESCOTT

PROLOGUE: SHE KNOWS

Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me now thy way, that I may know thee
— Exodus 33:13

On the last morning of his normal life, Ian Willis dreamed. He was stepping out of a car onto the sidewalk in front of an apartment building. The building was not the one he'd grown up in, but it felt familiar nonetheless. He held a stack of textbooks like the ones he'd carried to school as a kid. He had to struggle not to drop them. No sooner had he shut the door awkwardly with his knee than the car started to pull away and the book at the top of the stack started sliding off. He tried to catch it, which only sent two more books tumbling down. He saw the kids in the back of the car laughing as one book flipped open and the wind caught the papers and worksheets that had been folded up inside. Without even thinking, Ian put down the rest of the stack and chased the wind-blown papers before they got away. They were homework. His teacher would be mad if they were lost.

Only too late did Ian realize that he'd done a very bad thing. He heard a scream and a shadow fell over him. As his papers crossed the street's double yellow line, he turned to face the hateful white eyes of a monster.

* * *

Ian bolted upright to find himself on the almost-empty city bus he'd boarded to get home. He'd been sitting with his forehead against the vibrating window, staring at the drab gray world rolling by and must have dozed off. The faint tug of the bus starting and stopping registered only vaguely on his consciousness, and he'd paid no attention to the people getting on or off. Now he wasn't entirely sure where he was. He might have stayed asleep even longer if the headlights of a passing car hadn't shone directly into his eyes. A bleary look around told him that he hadn't missed his stop yet. That was lucky, at least.

Ian put his head back against the window and closed his eyes once again. Damn, he was tired. He'd just pulled two shifts at the all-night diner where he worked and stumbled out of there in such a haze that he almost forgot to clock out. Double shifts like that put money in his pocket, but he needed a lot more where that came from if he hoped to move out of his mother's apartment before he turned 21. He needed a real job where he wasn't surrounded by dirty dishes and grease for eight hours at a stretch. He needed a job where he didn't have to work double shifts just to cover his mother's rent and set aside money to go to college one day. But first things first — he needed some sleep.

He had just drifted off again when the bounce and squeak of someone sitting down on the same bench roused him. With a yawn and an unintentional scowl, Ian rubbed his face with both hands before looking to see who'd joined him.

His fellow passenger was a pretty, brown-haired girl of about seven or eight, wearing a powder-blue dress. Her hair hung in two braids, each bound with satin ribbons that matched her dress. She smoothed her white stockings and folded her hands in her lap, paying no attention whatsoever to Ian. She hummed to herself and swung patent-leather shoes that didn't quite reach the floor.

"Hi there," Ian yawned.

The little girl started and looked up with pretty blue eyes. "Hello," she said softly.

"Where are you going so early in the morning?" Ian asked.

"I'm sorry," the little girl said. "Is it okay if I sit here?"

Ian looked around the bus at the mostly empty seats and shrugged. He might look unkempt and wrung out, he thought, but he looked friendlier than the few weirdoes who were on board at this hour.

"It's okay," he said, scratching his cheek. "Where do you get off?"

"Home."

"Me, too. Is someone meeting you?"

"My mommy's supposed to be there," the girl said. "Do you like riding the bus?"

"Sure," Ian said with a shrug, "but I don't really have much—"

"I hate it." The little girl ducked her head and looked back at her hands. She started to swing her legs in unison and kick the seat in front of her.

"Why is that?" Ian asked.

"Sometimes I get scared, and nobody ever talks to me."

"Really?" Ian asked, rubbing gunk from the corner of his eye. "Nobody talks to a pretty girl like you? I was just about to ask you for a date."

"No way. You're weird."

"Thanks a lot."

"And you're too old."

"You probably think you're too pretty for me, too. I bet you'd go out with Ricky Martin if *he* asked."

The little girl giggled and alternated feet kicking the seat in front of her. "You'd probably kiss Britney Spears," she said.

"I think I'm too old for her, too."

The girl giggled again. "You're funny."

Ian put on a tired smile and looked back out the window. The sun was just rising on a gray April morning. "So why are you so dressed up this morning?"

"Picture day," the little girl said. "I hate this dress. I always wear it."

"It looks fine to me."

"It's old. I hate it."

"Whatever you say," Ian said, rolling his eyes. He decided that he didn't have the energy for a conversation — much less an argument — with a child. He remembered what it was like when his only problem in life was the way his mother dressed him for school. This little girl needed a few years and a healthy dose of perspective. Ian opted not to be the one to enlighten her and passed the last few minutes of the ride in silence. When the bus pulled over at Ian's stop, he stood up and waited for the little girl to rise to let him out. She looked strangely uncertain.

"This is my stop. Do you get off here, too?" he asked.

"I don't think I should," she said, looking up at Ian with large, helpless blue eyes, then looking past him out the window. "I'm not supposed to get off alone."

"Somebody should have thought of that before putting you on the bus," Ian said. "Come on. I'll wait with you. It's all right."

The girl hopped up, hopeful trust shining in her eyes. She took Ian's hand and allowed him to walk her down the aisle and off the bus. The girl had powers, Ian had to admit. That helpless routine was going to be irresistible once she matured into a young lady. He led her away from the curb as the bus doors closed behind them, then looked down at her with tired, bloodshot eyes.

"So where's your mom?" he asked, yawning behind his free hand.

"I don't know," the girl said. Her eyes were glassy and she started to pull on Ian's hand uneasily. "Where is she? This isn't right."

"Okay," Ian said, looking around. "Don't panic. She's probably around here somewhere."

No one was waiting at the bus stop and no one else had gotten off the bus. Ian looked up and down both sides of the street. Hardly anyone was out this early in the morning. He could feel the girl's anxiety resonating like a palpable force. She clung to his hand as if she were dangling over the edge of a cliff. Ian was starting to feel anxious himself until he saw a woman turn the corner down the block and start heading their way. He perked up and gave the girl's hand a tug.

"Here we go," he said.

"This is wrong," the little girl murmured, looking over her shoulder at the bus as it pulled away.

"Is this your mom coming?" Ian asked. When he got no response, he took a few steps to approach the woman as she neared the bus stop. Before he could say anything, his head swam and he thought for a second

that the road sign behind her said, "SHE KNOWS." By the time Ian caught himself, the hallucination was gone. He really needed some sleep.

"Excuse me... Ma'am," he said. "Is this your daughter?"

"Let go of me," the little girl said, jerking her hand free with surprising force. Ian let go without protest.

Rather than gather the girl up in her arms and thank Ian for helping, the woman — a middle-aged housewife with lank, graying hair and crow's feet at the corners of her eyes — recoiled and put her hand up in front of her mouth. Her eyes were wide open and focused on the girl. "Get away," she said in a breathless voice.

"What?" Ian said. "What's wrong with you?" He turned to look down at the little girl. "Isn't this your...."

The words caught in Ian's throat and he staggered backward reflexively. Where there had been a little girl just seconds before, there now stood an ugly, mangled mockery of a person. It was still the same size and shape as the girl who had been on the bus, but its clothes were torn, its skin was discolored and swollen with bloody bruises, and it held itself upright on broken legs that were clad in torn white stockings. Ian's thoughts swirled into chaos and his mouth gaped open.

"I said get away," the middle-aged woman said louder. But instead of retreating herself, she took a step toward the *thing* that Ian had somehow mistaken for a normal child. She put both of her hands out and shouted, "Get away from *him*!"

The thing shrieked and stumbled as if the woman had actually shoved her down. It then surged to its feet with a discomforting, fluid ease. When it tried to come forward again, it stopped as if it struck a glass barrier.

"You brought me!" the girl-thing shouted. She glared at Ian. He could *feel* hatred blazing in her blood-filmed eyes. "I don't go here!"

Ian backed up again so that he was now standing farther away from the girl than the woman was. His mouth worked, but no words came out. Only two things stood out in the chaos of his thoughts: That what he was seeing was simply *wrong*. It violated nature. The second was that if he knew what to do to make it right, he'd do it. Nothing occurred to him, though. Terror and exhaustion robbed him of his faculties so that all he could do was blurt out, "What do you want?"

The girl-thing growled, which quickly turned into a scream of rage. "I want to go home!" The words came out in English, but they weren't human in origin. The voice was anger and pain made tangible. "I don't go here! I want to go home!"

Before either Ian or the woman could do anything, a wind rose up around them. Stinging dust and a stench of rot assaulted them, and they both turned their heads and covered their eyes. When they could see again, dust and scraps of paper blew into the street to be tossed into the wake of passing cars. No sign remained that a monstrosity or a little girl had ever been there.

"Are you all right?" the middle-aged woman asked after a long silence. "Did that thing hurt you? What was it?" Her voice wavered and she put a shaking hand on Ian's shoulder.

He jumped as if he'd been jolted with electricity. He could hear the woman speaking to him, but the words made no sense. Even his own voice sounded far away and strange. He thought he babbled some sort of apology and then was running. He ignored the woman calling after him and just let his legs carry him home as fast as they could.

* * *

The apartment door slammed behind Ian and the sound woke his mother. She sat up on the sofa where she'd passed out the night before, and she kicked at the threadbare Afghan tangled around her scrawny legs. The flapping blanket knocked over the bottle of booze that had helped her get to sleep. Her flailing attempt to find the remote and shut off the TV succeeded only in upsetting the ashtray on the coffee table. Ian leaned back against the door with his head in his hands.

"Shit, boy," his mother rasped when she realized what had woken her. "What are you doing? What's the matter with you?"

Ian looked up and walked toward his mother on trembling legs. He sank down to his knees in front of the couch and tried to get his breathing under control.

She cuffed him on the back of the head. "I'm trying to sleep here. You know I got work later."

"Sorry," Ian said over a lump in his throat. He didn't even feel where she'd hit him.

"What's your problem? Are you crying?"

"No, Ma'am," he said automatically. He sniffled right afterward, though, allowing himself the lie. He shut his eyes tight and hung his head. "Mom...."

"What time is it?" his mother growled. "Are you drunk, boy?"

When Ian couldn't hold back anymore, he did something he hadn't done since the night before he started junior high. He crawled onto the couch with his mother, put his head down on her knees and cried himself to sleep.

* * *

Ian had his hands against the back window when it happened. Dumb Shannon had just gotten out of the car when she dropped all her books. First one, then more, sending her homework all over the place. Ian and his friends pointed and laughed. Shannon was so stupid. She'd drop her head if she could.

"You are so dumb!" one of his friends sang over the lyrics of the Backstreet Boys song that was playing on the radio.

Facing backward as he was, Ian was the first to see what was going to happen. He stopped laughing. Shannon's papers were blowing into the street. She put down the rest of her stuff and ran after them. Ian saw the bus right behind her, but Shannon didn't even seem to hear it. She looked up only at the last second. Even if she hadn't frozen, she couldn't have gotten out of the way in time. The bus was going too fast.

Ian covered his eyes, but he couldn't stop up his ears. Even over the squeal of brakes and smoking tires, he heard what happened. He heard the last sound Shannon made before she died. But the last thing he heard before the car he was in jerked to a stop was a deep and ancient voice whispering on the radio, just beneath the lyrics of the song.

"SHE KNOWS," it said. "SHE KNOWS."

* * *

Ian was shaken awake roughly. He found himself on the living-room couch with the sun shining on his face. The light was coming through the window across from the television, which meant it was already well after noon. His mother's Marlboro breath brought him around, and the first thing he saw clearly was her yellow-stained teeth.

"Get up," the old woman said. "Come on. Up. Up."

Ian heaved himself upright to a sitting position and ran his hands through his oily, matted hair. He felt like he'd slept ten, maybe twenty, minutes. He mumbled an incoherent request for the time and wondered if even acid would get rid of the putrid taste in his mouth.

"I said get up, boy," his mother yelled, poking him hard in the shoulder. "Your sissy-fit better be over. You've got to get to work in half an hour.

"Half an hour?" he moaned. "How long was I asleep?"

"All day, you lazy bum. You come home drunk and crying, then sprawl out here all day while I'm working. Christ, you haven't moved since I left!"

"I wasn't drunk. I had a bad night," Ian said as he stood up. "And weird dreams. I saw something really bad."

Ian's mother crossed her arms and frowned at her son. "Don't be such a little girl. Just go to work. You stink and you don't have time to take a shower."

"Yes, Ma'am," Ian said. "I'm going."

Ian retreated and got out of the apartment as quickly as he could. When he went to close the door behind him, bile pooled in his stomach. Lying outside the front door was a faded and frayed powder-blue ribbon.

* * *

The shift manager was waiting when Ian came out of the men's room. JP was a tall barrel of a man with more hair on his chin than on top of his head. He stood with one hand scratching his beard and the other resting across his belly as if it were hanging in a sling. JP peered down his snub nose at Ian and kept right on scratching.

"You're late," his boss said. "And you look like garbage."

"Sorry, JP," Ian mumbled. He crammed his paper hat down over his head and wiped oily water from his face. He'd tried to slick back his hair under the sink and wash his face, but the water in the diner's bathroom came out in a pathetic stream, and the soap dispenser hadn't been filled in months. Now, instead of looking dirty and exhausted, Ian looked dirty, exhausted and wet. "I had a bad morning."

"I need to count on you, Ian," JP said. "All I got besides you is beaners and black women on this shift. I need somebody I can count on, and now I can't even put you out front for the customers."

"Sorry, JP," Ian said again. "I haven't been sle—"

"You're going to have to take grease mats and dishes tonight," JP said. He switched hands but kept scratching his beard as if he had fleas or lice. "You get here last looking like a bum, you get grease mats and dishes. I hate to do it to you."

"No," Ian sighed. "I understand."

Ian shuffled past JP through the employee-only door to the kitchen and made his way to where the first set of mats awaited him. The area where this unpleasant operation took place was the lot behind the diner. It was bordered on one side by the air conditioner, on the other by the dumpster and on the last by a short chain-link fence. The dank space was littered with cigarette butts, bird crap, trash — and grease. The entire run of ground was saturated with so much grease that sandblasting probably wouldn't remove it all. The stuff rained down from the thatched rubber mats that employees laid atop the fence and sprayed clean with an ancient garden hose attached to the spigot next to the door. The staff was supposed to spray the gunk down the rocky incline on the other side of the fence into the drainage ditch beyond, but everyone settled for simply spraying the mats quickly.

Ian usually set to this task with grim diligence, but today he took it on with weary resignation. He had two shifts worth of this to look forward to. Spraying mats and scrubbing dishes, and probably filling in if any of JP's less reliable cooks decided not to show. Two shifts tonight, more for the rest of this week, and God knew how many more before he finally had enough money to get out of this hellish life and on his own.

Ian picked up the hose and let his mind drift to the future. Someday, he'd have a college degree, a real job in an office and an apartment that he didn't have to share with anybody. He could have one refrigerator in the kitchen for all his food and necessities, plus another smaller one in his bedroom for a six-pack of beer and some junk food. He'd have a new sofa that didn't stink and a new television that got more than basic cable. He'd be set. He could even buy a car — a better one than his mother's old Civic — and start having girls over. He hadn't even been on a date since… God only knew.

The real world intruded on Ian's pleasant diversion, however, when the hose suddenly went slack and the stream from the nozzle dribbled off to a trickle. Ian pressed the trigger a few times but nothing happened. The pressure just wasn't there. The hose had probably sprung another leak or the washer in the spigot had rotted away at last. Ian dropped the hose in disgust.

When he turned to see what was wrong, he found himself looking down at someone sitting on the hose and cutting off the flow of water. Someone with two braids and who wore a faded powder-blue dress.

"I don't go here," the little girl insisted. "You got me lost." She sat with her head down, hugging her knees to her chest and shivering. Ian could see black on her arms where they'd been broken, and her back was a mess of gravel, blood and torn fabric. The skin on the back of her head hung open in one ragged flap. She'd been thrown on her back, Ian knew, by the bus that killed her.

Struggling to gulp down air, Ian backed away. The door to the kitchen was open a crack, but he couldn't even draw breath to cry out. JP would eventually come see what was taking him so long, but Ian had only been out for a couple of minutes. There was no telling what this thing would do to him if he just stood and waited. This thing was what he'd been dreaming about, on the bus in the morning and at home in the afternoon. It was a dead girl. A walking, talking dead girl. What was worse, it wanted something from him. It had followed him home. It had

followed him here. Who knew how long it had been following him before that?

Ian backed all the way to fence. The touch of the cold, slimy grease mats startled him. He jumped at the sensation, slipped and went down on his butt hard enough to rattle his fillings. The dead girl lifted her head. Her left eye was swollen shut, and her jaw stuck out from its proper alignment by an inch. Her good eye was filmed with blood and shadowed by the unnatural angle of her broken nose. "I don't go here," she said, without moving her mouth. The sound simply emanated from her on what seemed a wave of anger.

"What do you want?" Ian rasped.

"I want to go home!" the girl shouted, looking Ian directly in the eyes. "You got me lost when I was going home! I hate you!"

A rush of energy struck Ian when the girl shouted, driving him back against the fence again.

"You made me get lost!" the girl shouted, standing up. "You won't let me go home!" She began stalking toward Ian and raised her voice. "I hate you, I HATE YOU, *I HATE YOU*!"

More waves of rage made physical struck Ian as the girl screamed, pushing him back harder. He tried to grab the fence to pull himself up, but his fingers found purchase only in the thatch of the hanging mats. His shoes found no traction on the wet scum and he succeeded only in pulling one of the mats down into his lap.

"You said it was okay," the little girl screamed, "but you got me lost!"

"I'm sorry," Ian stammered. Why weren't the people inside coming to see what all the noise was about? Didn't they realize what was happening? "I know you want to go home… and I messed up."

"You messed up everything!"

"But I can take you now," Ian said in desperation. "I saw what happened to you." The girl paused and her gaze clouded in confusion. Ian started to rise. "I saw where it happened. I can take you there if—"

"No! You tricked me! You got me lost!"

Ian finally found the chain links and got his feet under himself. "I didn't understand before," he said as he rose slowly, keeping one hand on the fence and one on the mat he'd pulled down. "Now I think I—"

"Shut up! You're a liar! I hate you!"

The girl stepped toward Ian and the temperature of the air between them plummeted. Hatred was aflame on the girl's face. She looked ready to commit bloody murder. Ian had no idea what the thing was capable of, but he wasn't fool enough to test his luck. Panicking, he threw the heavy rubber with one hand. The little girl knocked it aside with two hands, but the distraction was as much as Ian needed. He bolted like a deer over the fence, stumbled down the shallow incline and ran. Yet even over the rush and clatter of his retreat, he could hear the girl coming over the fence and down the gravelly slope after him.

Ian didn't know exactly where he was going, but he had enough sense not to head into the woods behind the diner. He knew that he'd eventually come out at I-40 if he kept moving in that direction, but it was getting dark and he could see himself twisting his ankle on a root or something as the dead girl came after him. He didn't simply fear that would happen, he somehow *knew* it would. He became aware of it with a clarity that was uncharacteristic for him. Instead, he followed the drainage ditch back toward the main road.

With his feet on paved ground, he headed back across the front of the diner. He didn't stop there, though. Part of him thought he'd be safe inside, surrounded by people, but he didn't trust that instinct. He could too easily imagine the broken little girl walking unseen through the customers and cornering him. He knew it would happen without thinking about it. It was as if his survival instinct had taken over and was giving orders. He was thankful for it because left to his own devices he would have been beyond rational thought. Continuing to obey, Ian hurried down the block. He had to get out of there.

As he rounded the corner, a bus was pulling away from the nearest stop. It was on the same line he took home — on the one where he met the little girl earlier that day. He had to get away, but if she was following him, maybe she would appear on board and he could get her home, once and for all.

Ian dashed into the road, narrowly avoiding an oncoming pickup truck, and chased the bus. He waved and shouted. The driver either didn't see him or didn't care. Ian had to catch up, run alongside and bang on the window to get anyone's attention. Even then, it wasn't the driver who turned to look, but a passenger who was sitting at that window. Her head whipped around and she jumped to her feet in shock. She looked familiar somehow. Ian could see her say something to the driver, who finally pulled over. Ian ran around the front and climbed aboard on wobbling, burning legs.

When the bus started to move again, the woman who responded stopped Ian in the middle of the aisle. She stared at him strangely. Ian gasped out a thanks. It wasn't until he flopped down in a seat that he recognized her.

"It's you," he wheezed. "From this morning."

The middle-aged woman looked up and down the aisle, as if deciding whether anyone could hear. Seemingly satisfied, she sat across the aisle from Ian and looked at him intently, and a little bit afraid. "I can't believe I found you. I've been riding this bus all day looking for you. Ever since.... What happened this morning? What was that... thing?"

A million lies ran through Ian's mind, none of which would make him sound crazy, but he couldn't say any of them. This woman had seen the same thing he had. Although no one else on the bus that morning seemed to sense anything amiss, and no one else Ian knew cared to hear about what happened, this complete stranger was there. "She knows," Ian thought with weary relief.

"It's been following me," Ian said, looking over his shoulder down the aisle, half expecting the girl to be standing there. "I was running from it."

"My God," the woman gasped. "It's real? I really saw it?"

"I think we both did," Ian said, checking over his shoulder again.

"How... What does it want?" the woman asked.

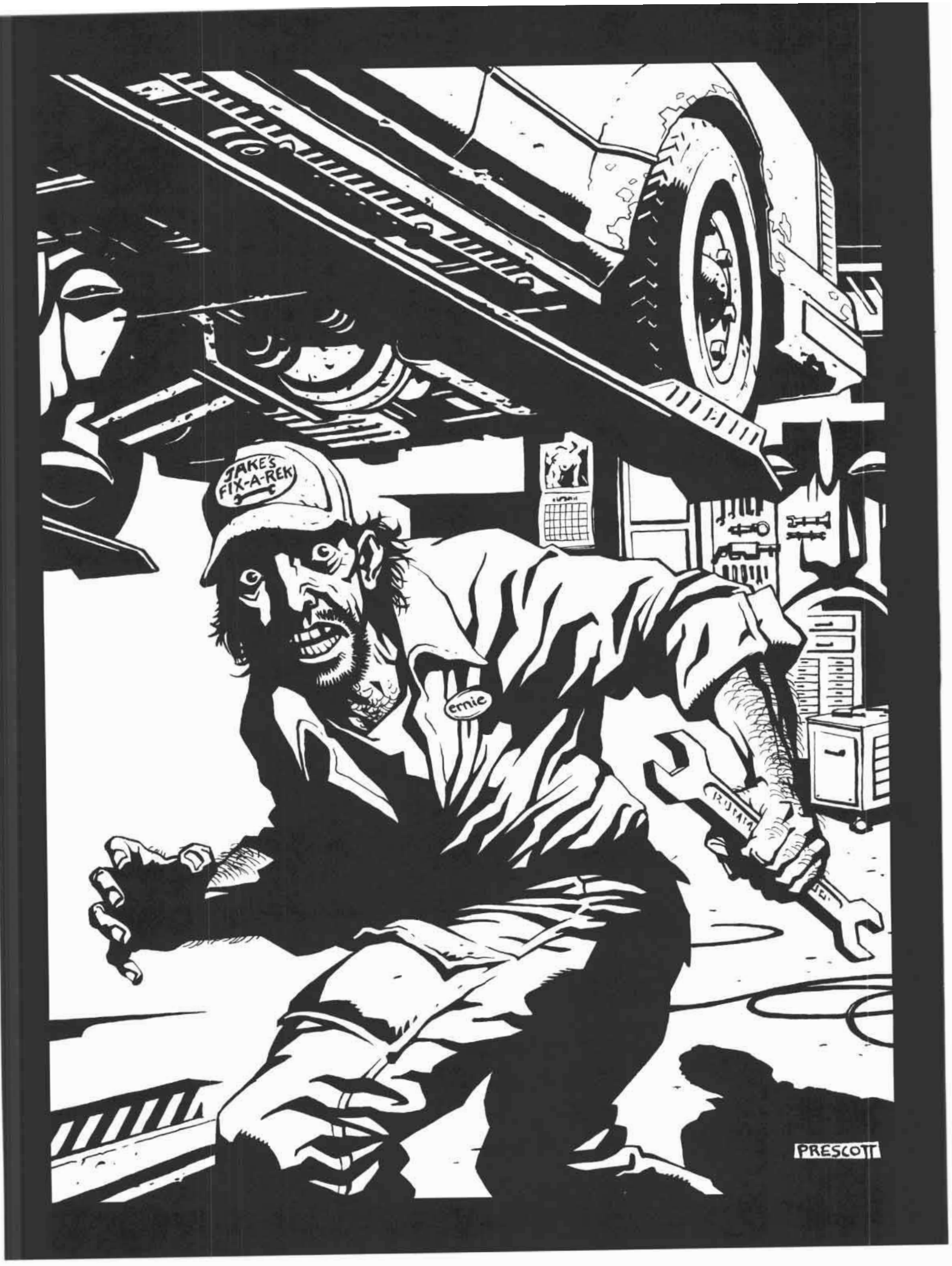
"I think I know, but...."

"But what?"

"This is crazy. I don't even know who you are."

"My name's Katherine. Katherine Niven. I thought I was crazy, too, but now that you're here...." The woman reached over and put her hand on Ian's arm, just as a mother would to comfort an upset child. Ian soaked up the warmth of her touch, trying to find some courage. He sniffed once, rubbed his eyes with his dirty fingers and sat up straight.

"My name is Ian Willis.... Twice today I dreamed about a little girl named Shannon. She died."


JAKE'S
FIX-A-REK
ernie
PRESCOTT

INTRODUCTION

And take not the word of truth utterly out of my mouth; for I have hoped in thy judgments.
— Psalms 119:43

At its most superficial, **Hunter** seems like a game about people who are blessed with superpowers and who go out and whoop some monster ass in the World of Darkness. Look a little deeper, however, and the true possibilities and meanings of the game become evident. The imbued are regular folks forced to contend with a world they can't possibly understand, deal with entities that terrify them and hold lives together while carrying out these agendas — all when no one but their fellow chosen understand the truth. When you get down to these intricacies of theme, mood and storytelling, the game turns from comic-book action to genuine human drama.

Under these circumstances, **Hunter** players have it relatively easy. Sure, they have to create plausible, realistic and compelling characters who try to come to grips with reality. But for the most part, players are plausible, realistic and compelling people in their own right, so they have the vast reference of their own lives from which to draw. Roleplaying a normal person should be the most natural kind of character portrayal once a player understands the concept of just being a regular Joe.

You, as Storyteller, don't have it so easy. The players expect you to make the world and its denizens just as gripping and convincing as the hunters themselves. The players expect a game or chronicle that respects the genuine themes and qualities of their characters — but that means devising an entire setting, not just one character.

Thankfully, you're not alone. The **Hunter Storytellers Handbook** is dedicated to helping you create settings, define supporting characters and tell stories in **Hunter**'s everyman spirit. In fact, not only does this book explore various ways to compose and run a chronicle, it delves into the truths that have been hinted at in the game's rulebook and throughout its supplements so that you finally know and can do what

you like with the cosmology that has led to the creation of the imbued and inspired them to go out into the night — and driven the game.

Players, this book is not meant for your eyes. If you read any further, you might learn secrets about your character or the Heralds or your Storyteller's plans that you don't want to and should not know. Be fair to your gaming group and leave this book behind the Storyteller's screen.

What You Get

You want ideas and tips on how to create plausible monsters, devise epic plots in which to immerse your players and on how to throw curves at the hunters to keep them on their toes? This book is chock full of 'em — introducing monstrous masterminds who work from the shadows, showing the imbued the human consequences of their actions and exploring new and unique types of stories to tell with your troupe.

Chapter 1: Unveiling the Night investigates ways to create antagonists for your games who suit the common-person theme of the imbued.

Chapter 2: Creating Human Drama helps you help players create realistic everyday people as characters and remain true to their hunters' roots once monsters rear their ugly heads.

Chapter 3: Guides on the Hunt explores different interpretations of hunters, their calling, the Messengers and the stories you can tell to keep your chronicle vibrant and terrifying.

Hunter: The Whole Story

The unfolding story of **Hunter: The Reckoning** depends on maintaining a degree of mystery about the true origins and purpose of the imbued. Grappling with that mystery is a central theme of the game since it supports the notion of hunters as ordinary men and women thrown headlong into circumstances they do not fully understand. Unfortunately, that same mystery poses a problem for Storytellers, who quite rightly need to know more than players do if they're to run a successful **Hunter** chronicle.

What follows is a brief explanation of the cosmology that underpins **Hunter**'s story for the benefit of you, the Storyteller. Its presentation here has two distinct but related purposes. First, it gives you information that's been alluded to and suggested but never stated overtly until now, enabling you to take full advantage of **Hunter**'s backstory as it has quietly unfolded in all the game's supplements. Second, the information here provides you with an option-laden framework into which you can set a wide variety of chronicles. Its purpose is not to present a single interpretation of the Reckoning but to offer many alternatives, each of which works equally well with the game's story.

The revelations presented here don't diverge from what's been suggested elsewhere about, say, the origin of the imbued or the Heralds. Rather, this backstory is sufficiently open-ended that any spins on such origins that you've already established in your game are hopefully not undermined (and if they are, just take what you like of what you read here). At base, **Hunter** is a game about questions and the search for answers. Although there is indeed an "official" explanation for the recent appearance of the imbued, as well as for their mission, it's up to you to decide how much of that explanation you wish to adopt in your own chronicle. That's why there's some flexibility in this section: to allow you to make **Hunter** the game you want it to be while still keeping it compatible with published material.

Questions

The imbuing confronts a hunter with the realization that the world is inhabited by monsters that prey on humanity and grants the ability to contend with these creatures, but it provides neither answers nor guidance to aid the chosen in their mission. That's in part why hunters seek each other out and even form communities such as that on hunter-net: to discover what their creators have denied them. The search for answers is also why **Hunter** chronicles are often as introspective as they are action-packed. The quest for understanding is as much a part of being one of the chosen as is putting the smack down on bloodsuckers and shapechangers — maybe more so.

Broadly speaking, the questions the imbued have fall into one of four categories: their origins (including that of monsters and the Heralds), their mission, their relationship to other imbued and their future and purpose. Not coincidentally, the in-character chapters of **Hunter**'s creed books are also dedicated to these questions. They're natural categories that stem from concerns that cut across all personalities, creeds and Virtues. By looking at each of these categories of inquiry, you not only get a better sense of hunters' hopes and fears but also of how they might serve a dramatic purpose in your game.

Origins: The imbuing does not come with an instruction manual. It's therefore not surprising that hunters all have their own ideas as to how they obtained their second sight and edges, where mon-

sters come from and who or what awoke them to reality. Because the imbuing experience varies from person to person, it also has led to an even wider variety of different — and often conflicting — theories on hunter origins. Perhaps only the presence of supernatural entities, whether they be rots, goblins or warlocks, unites the chosen. Hunters thus debate who or what granted them their abilities, with little consensus being reached. Without a common understanding of their origins, the imbued remain fractious and divided.

Mission: Even more contentious than hunters' origin is the matter of their mission. Because of the differences that outlook, belief and personality (and creed and Virtue) bring to the imbued perspective, there is no clear consensus on how the chosen should use their newfound abilities. Are they supposed to destroy the supernatural creatures they encounter, reconcile them, try to understand them or some complex combination of the three?

Ties: The diversity of people who answer the call only muddies the waters more. The imbued recognize that a variety of individuals number among them, and all seem to wield strange and different capabilities, but they have little sense of how they all fit together. Assuming there is a common origin to hunters (which is far from certain), how can the chosen with radically different goals or outlooks possibly work together? Should they do so? What is the proper relationship between hunters with different objectives, values and powers? Without guidance from the force or forces that created them in the first place, the imbued must draw their own conclusions about the best way to build a working relationship between their various conflicting elements.

Future: If the imbued have a common origin and mission, what does the future hold for them? Does their emergence indicate the end of the world — or the beginning of a new one? Does humanity have a future or are the chosen the vanguard of a new race to succeed a corrupted mankind?

These questions barely scratch the surface of those that the imbued have about monsters, the Heralds, the world, themselves and their own place in the greater scheme of things. Even so, these questions suggest the types of answers hunters seek, suggesting the inquiries you might need to answer at some point in your chronicle.

Make no mistake: Mystery is an essential ingredient to any **Hunter** game. You're under no obligation to dispense answers to the players freely or without effort. Indeed, you have every reason to keep the characters in the dark for as long as is reasonable. Yet, at some point there should probably be an end to the hunters' (and players') fruitless inquiries. The characters should achieve some answers lest your chronicle become a reenactment of the Sisyphus myth — forever pursuing without ever attaining. In the end, you should strike a balance between giving away secrets too freely and frustrating the players by keeping your cards too close to your chest. Both extremes are detrimental to the long-term health of your game.

Answers

Of course, providing answers needn't be a straightforward matter of handing the players the unambiguous truth. In the case of **Hunter**, the truth remains a slippery concept that defies easy explanation. Storytellers are encouraged to adopt and adapt the following version of the truth to best suit their own needs and interests.

The imbued of modern times are very much like "aware" individuals from past ages, when prophets and warriors protected humanity from the dangers that lurked in the shadows. These aware individuals enjoyed the blessings of what can be best called "the Ministers": agents of the Creator of the universe. Then and now, the Creator concerned himself little with his creation, preferring to allow it to develop on its own. Although this preference allowed humanity to grow and thrive without interference, it also made humanity vulnerable to the dark forces that waited in the shadows. Unlike the Creator, these forces had little compunction about interfering with the world for their own benefit.

The Ministers, meanwhile, were unwilling to sit back and do nothing while the darkness had its way with humanity. The Ministers used a portion of their own powers to uplift certain mortals — the original hunters — to become defenders of their kind. Unfortunately, these predecessors of the imbued eventually became drunk on their own power and succumbed to corruption. Their crimes became so great that even the self-absorbed Creator noticed and punished them. He then ordered his Ministers to turn their backs on the world and abandon it once more.

And so for untold generations, mankind went without defenders, left helpless to the depredations of the forces that still inhabited the dark places. These entities grew more powerful with the turning of each age until they at last threatened to bring about hell on earth. To the Creator,

this was all as it should be, for history is a great wheel that ever turns, moving from order to chaos and back again.

Yet the Ministers were distressed by humanity's plight. Once more, they considered the problem of protecting mankind from the forces of evil. Remembering their past failure, the Ministers decided to act more subtly — both for the ultimate benefit of the world and to avoid attracting the attention of the Creator. This time they selected weaker vessels as their agents against the darkness — the modern imbued — believing that these heroes would be less likely to succumb to corruption than the mighty heroes of the past.

The Ministers represented two divergent perspectives, cosmic opposites whose interaction had given form to the diversity of the universe. One perspective was active and the other passive; both necessary for the proper working of the cosmos. The Virtue of Zeal represented the active principle, while Mercy represented the passive. But neither was sufficient in itself, nor without the guidance of a third, mixed principle that took the best from each perspective. Thus was born the Vision Virtue.

But unlike the Creator, the Ministers might have been fallible beings and their initial efforts to create a new kind of agent were inadequate. The result was the so-called "lost" creeds — Hermits and Waywards — whom the Ministers intended to serve as the leaders of their respective heroes. The Hermits were to be intelligence gatherers, capable of understanding the dark forces, discerning their weaknesses and receiving commands from above. The Waywards were to form a "war council" that would plot the strategy of the struggle against the enemy.

Unfortunately, the Ministers had not dealt with humanity for ages and failed to understand how to bless them with the powers needed for the coming battle. Perhaps millennia of exposure to shadowy influences diminished human potential in general. Or maybe the turning of the ages and the approach of ruin tainted the human soul. Regardless, those who would become known as Hermits and Waywards suffered from too close a relationship with the Ministers. Quite simply, these chosen could not cope with the direct attention of their divine patrons, becoming less than ideal for their intended use as leaders of armies for Mercy and Zeal.

Learning from their mistakes, the Ministers worked together to create the Visionaries as the overall leaders of the imbued. In this case, however, the Ministers did not (and still do not) interact as immediately with their new creations or with the other hunters they also created — the bands of heroes the new leaders would command. Instead, the Ministers touched their children indirectly, through brief moments of insight. Seemingly bizarre sensory perceptions such as disembodied voices and the hunter code evolved as a means of conveying information to the imbued without overloading the fragile human mind.

In a sense, the Ministers' initial errors with their most recent chosen reinforced their desire to create agents who were weaker — and less prone to corruption — than the chosen of the ancient past. No longer in direct connection with the divine and bestowed lesser gifts, the modern imbued would have to rely on their own wits — and each other — to contend with the darkness. Sadly, the lack of direct communication between the Ministers and these imbued left hunters without any more direction than they could learn for themselves. Even the new, intended leaders had only the most fragmentary understanding of the true purpose of the chosen and the nature of the hunt.

The Merciful were intended to seek out and save those supernatural beings that they could, while the Zealous would destroy those who could not be saved. Visionaries, meanwhile, were to find solutions to the thorny problems that defied easy categorization. And then, even the first, failed imbued still had some purpose — to convey what little knowledge they could understand and to be tremendous weapons against those dark powers that no "lesser" imbued could hope to defeat, so they were both still created on rare occasions. Thus, the imbued prepared the world for the next turning of the great cycle.

What the imbued do not fully understand is that the next age is one of chaos and ruin, not a golden age as many hope. Not even the Ministers can change the ironclad laws of the cosmos, meaning that an age of order such as the present one can be followed only by one of chaos. The Ministers *might* minimize the damage caused by the turning of a new age, however. This is hunters' true purpose: to prepare for the time when they and their allies may "inherit the earth." Yet, that time is not now nor is it the next age. The war against the darkness will take many generations and the best that can be expected is to hold its destruction in check rather than to avert it completely.

Very few (perhaps no) hunters realize the Ministers' true purpose in imbuing people. This ignorance

serves the Ministers well enough, but poses a grave danger to the success of the hunt. If the chosen ever realize that they are not supposed to stave off an apocalypse but are to merely minimize it, some imbued may rebel against their divine patrons, making the situation even more unstable.

The truth also presents an opportunity for the malignant forces that still linger in the world to undo the Ministers' work. Weak, without direct communication and kept in the dark, the modern imbued are ironically ripe for corruption, just like their ancient predecessors. Despite the best efforts of the Ministers, the forces of evil can offer much to turn hunters against their divine patrons. No small temptation from the mission is the offer of knowledge about hunters' true origins and purpose — at least as the demons understand it. (And in game terms, while the Ministers deny hunters access to level-five edges for fear of distracting the imbued with too much power, the forces of darkness are quick to offer such "rewards" in return for favors and allegiance.)

Perhaps most disturbing, there's no guarantee that the Ministers' plan will succeed. In the past, the Creator turned his eternal gaze back upon the earth and prevented long-term interference in creation. Likewise, he recognized the folly of employing mortal agents. Might he do so again? Might the imbued become another failed experiment? Or is it possible that the chosen may find their own way, one that not even their patrons can foresee? This is the story of **Hunter: The Reckoning**.

What's It All About?

"That's all well and good," you may say, "but it doesn't have anything to do with my chronicle." That's a natural response. **Hunter**'s backstory should remain just that — backstory. If it ever dominates the action of your chronicle, the players have reason to complain. Their characters — not some cosmic power play — should be the center of attention. For all intents and purposes, the players' characters are the most important people in the world.

But at the same time, **Hunter**'s backstory can have consequences for your chronicle. Knowing the true nature of the lost creeds, for example, provides a rationale for the inclusion (or exclusion) of those character types from your game. Likewise, understanding that the Ministers cannot speak directly to the imbued without driving them insane stresses the human element on which the game so heavily depends. Hunters are not superhuman beings. They are ordinary folks called upon to preserve their race in the face of an apocalypse that they can neither fully understand nor avert. From that realization flows a great deal of drama.

Because the game's backstory should never dominate *your* story, you're free to tweak its details or couch them in terms with which you and your players are comfortable. In the final analysis, the most important elements are a distant Creator, meddling Ministers, dark forces of corruption, a cosmic cycle — and frail humanity. Taken together, these are enough to recreate **Hunter: The Reckoning** in a variety of ways.

Since no hunter, not even the most farseeing Visionary or prophetic Hermit, knows the whole truth, there's no reason not to tailor the backstory to the needs of your game. If you want to put an explicitly Judeo-Christian spin on the metaplot by identifying God with the Creator and angels with the Ministers, there's no reason not to do so. A Buddhist, Hindu or Gnostic perspective is equally valid. Provided the primary elements are present, the net effect is the same.

Hunter's story is about humanity's struggle in the face of a supernatural End. Elements like the Creator, the Ministers and the dark forces are simply the means to facilitate telling the story. That's why they can be altered without doing violence to the central plot. If you read the differing theories of hunter origins, their mission and future in the rulebook and the various creed books, you can see this approach in varied action. Individual imbued see their struggle in terms they can understand, using metaphors drawn from their own experiences and backgrounds. Any one of them could be correct; they all attempt to make sense of the fragmentary information at their disposal. The players in your game are no different.

As long as you keep **Hunter**'s themes in mind any number of interpretations of its elements is possible. In the end, the game is more than any specific terms or background information; it transcends such specificity. Indeed, its power rests in its universality, in its ability to encompass many different — and often contradictory — perspectives on the chosen and their mission. A skillful Storyteller can harness that potential to create fascinating, personal stories. The game's backstory can be manipulated in the same way. By using and presenting it as you see fit, you can make **Hunter** your own, which is exactly how it was intended.

Frequently Asked Questions

Since **Hunter**'s release, players and Storytellers have asked a few questions about how some systems work or about what calls to make under special circumstances. Or they've simply requested further clarification of some rules. Online forums and chat lists have been a primary source of these discussions, and many of the following come from those venues — in particular from the fan site Ex Libris Nocturnis. The following are answers and responses to some of the most common questions and problems we've encountered.

Q: Can monsters detect hunters?

A: Usually, no. Sometimes, yes. Not very helpful, eh? The fine point is that hunters usually go overlooked by monsters because the supernatural beings of the World of Darkness are accustomed to humans being stupid, oblivious and weak. Individuals in the masses don't bear attention. Monsters don't usually detect hunters, because they don't think or even know to look for the imbued. The article "Building Better Monsters" on p. 47 of this book explains creatures' disregard for people and therefore hunters in more detail.

Now, that doesn't mean the supernatural can't recognize that something is wrong or odd about hunters. When the imbued activate edges with overt effects such as Bluster, Brand, Burden, Illuminate, Ravage or Ward, monsters certainly take notice. Normal people just aren't capable of performing such feats. Similarly, hunters' active second sight makes them immune to creatures' mind-, body- and emotion-control powers. Ordinary people just aren't supposed to resist those effects. Monsters recognize that something is different about these individuals when such events occur.

Since the imbued are a new phenomenon compared to the entire existence of the supernatural, there's no telling what hunters might actually be. Assuming that a particular creature is even painstakingly familiar with all the other beings of the world, he probably doesn't know who or what the imbued are, how they got their powers or where they came from. The chosen are a complete enigma. Since few monsters actually know much about the other kinds of beings that lurk out there (vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings, ghosts, mummies and hunters), the majority of creatures that encounter the imbued chock them up as one of the other types of critters — certainly not as regular people empowered to contend with monsters' very existence.

It's also possible for a particularly powerful or ancient creature to innately sense that there's something different or special about hunters. You, as Storyteller, get to decide if a creature in your game can "spot" the imbued. Even then, however, the actual quality of hunters' condition is elusive. And all this assumes that a truly powerful or ancient monster would even associate with humans, encounter hunters directly or believe underlings' reports of such people.

Monsters might be able to *look* at hunters, but they rarely *detect* them.

Q: As an addendum to the previous question, Nights of Prophecy states that hunters have a golden aura when looked at with Auspex 2. How can hunters be "invisible" among humans, and presumably be regular people, but still show up under such supernatural scrutiny?

A: It's true that hunters wield amazing powers and can do things that most humans cannot. Ostensibly, they would seem inhuman as a result and could be defined that way in terms of a strictly conservative definition of what's human and what's not. **Hunter** defines the imbued as regular, human folks by the lives that the chosen tend to lead after the imbuing, not by what those people are capable of. Many hunters seek to retain contact with their families. They try to maintain their day jobs and answer the call when it's possible. The imbued cling to their old lives because doing do keeps them (partly) sane and it helps them believe that they're not monsters themselves, despite the inexplicable things they can do. It's almost as if hunters lie to themselves, whether consciously or not, in a desperate bid to believe that have not been turned into the very things they face. Maybe they're supernatural creatures in denial or maybe they're still ordinary people because of the mundane values they hold dear.

Vampires with Auspex might see hunters' auras and perceive them to be unusual, but the meaning of such images largely eludes the undead for the very reasons given in the previous answer. In theory, possession of Auspex and the knowledge to turn it on one of the cattle illustrates how hunters might be detected by a vampire. In practice, that rarely happens, the discovery is misunderstood or a report of the encounter is dismissed by elders when it does happen. Vampires just don't understand what hunters are, even if a bloodsucker Discipline does set the imbued apart from the herd.

Q: What do monsters look like under second sight?

A: Second sight is typically moderated by use of guidelines rather than by hard-and-fast rules. As useful as it is to players, second sight is even more useful to you, the Storyteller, as a narrative tool to frighten and keep characters on their toes.

The most important point to remember about the sight is that it does not inherently inform hunters of what they look at. It suggests to the hunter psyche that a being is not human, is somehow wrong, is bestial or perhaps is forlorn, sympathetic or in pain and worth meeting on equal terms. A hunter's interpretation of a creature through second sight is often influenced by her general outlook on monsters (by her creed), whether she considers them abominations to be destroyed, lost souls worth saving or anomalies of nature that should be studied. The article "Playing God: The Messengers," p. 177 of this book, helps you decide how the Heralds might "help" hunters interpret monsters through second sight to encourage different kinds of reactions.

For our purposes here, second sight simply implies that most creatures are unnatural through an instinctive sensation. A hunter might see a flash of an animalistic face over a creature's otherwise human guise or the being might seem to stand in shadows even when in direct sunlight. A being that seeks to hide by supernatural means might appear obvious to a hunter's vision, yet the beast still behaves as hidden, whether keeping to the periphery of an area, standing just out of reach at all times or sheltering partially behind objects.

Ghosts that are not apparent to regular vision may suddenly appear when second sight is activated. Spirits might obviously be dead, with terrible wounds or forms that are worm-eaten despite being incorporeal. If a ghost bears no obvious deathmarks, it still strikes a hunter as unliving, wrong or offensive.

Those spirits or beings that possess creatures and people can appear superimposed upon their hosts. Or such "riders" might appear to hover around or near a host, maybe reaching into the body and making it work like a puppet.

Other senses could be affected, too. Second "sight" might actually trigger nausea in the presence of a creature. A hunter might smell rotted meat in the vicinity of a zombie or vampire. Vertigo could overcome one of the chosen when a shapechanger is near. Never feel restricted to depicting monstrous presence through visual input when other senses can inspire different feelings and responses in the imbued.

Because second sight confers rather vague and general information about creatures, and in a potential variety of forms, it helps you keep hunters and players in the dark about what exactly a monster is. Is a person who reeks of the grave a bloodsucker or one of the walking dead? Is a "normal" person who strikes a hunter as unquestionably "wrong," but who bears no signs of inhumanity, a wizard or a skinchanger? Hunters and players don't know until they take the chance of finding out, and they can often learn the hard way if they don't study a target for some time before acting. Second sight is therefore an invaluable tool that helps you foster hunter ignorance and helps make characters genuinely afraid of what they encounter.

You can even mix up the observations hunters make when they encounter creatures through second sight. Not all zombies have to smell of rotting meat. Each encounter with a creature can trigger a different stimulus in the imbued, from a cold breeze to a sickly creaking sound as bones grind and crack during the creature's posthumous locomotion. That way, characters and players don't form recognition patterns for different creature types based on previous encounters, and don't know if previous techniques for dealing with creatures will work each new time.

Finally, if you really want to test hunters and troupe members to the limit, you can describe different second sight sensations each time hunters encounter the same, individual creature. A hunter might spot a vampire and see a flash of blood smeared across the monster's mouth one time and hear its brittle skin crackle and split the next time. If the thing keeps appearing different to hunters, they may never arrive at a reliable assumption of what they're up against. Or, if you have a range of sensory experiences in your descriptive repertoire, you can have each hunter in a group detect something different about a monster when they all encounter the beast. All those mixed signals can really create confusion and dissent about what the thing is and what to do about it.

Q: What are the differences between second sight and observation edges?

A: The most important thing to remember about second sight is that it alone doesn't give much or any information by which characters can deduce what a monster is. The Heralds don't simply let hunters know this is a werewolf and that's a vampire. Nor do they say destroy this or save that. Hunters must arrive at their own conclusions about what monsters are and how to respond to them.

Fortunately, some observation edges such as Discern, Illuminate and Witness can offer greater insight into creatures' activity, behavior and perhaps even personality to help the imbued deduce what they're up against.

These edges increase hunters' powers of perception. Discern helps characters notice details about creatures by which those hunters can try to determine the monsters' nature. Illuminate reveals beings nearby as inhuman and can cast some in auras that indicate their nature. Witness also reveals creatures in a hunter's proximity, but can suggest what actions a monster has performed recently in regard to humans and therefore might suggest whether a being is generally violent, repentant, thoughtful or predatory. Observation edges thus tend to offer in-depth information beyond the superficial impressions that second sight alone conveys.

Remember, however, that such edges confer no protection against monsters' mind-, body- and emotion-control powers, so they can't be relied on as a substitute for second sight's associated defenses. Wise hunters rely on second sight whenever they think they're in trouble, to detect creatures and to retain control of themselves. Once monsters are discovered, they can turn to observation edges to learn more. Those edges and second sight can even function simultaneously, offering the best of an edge's sensory input and the best of second sight's protection.

Q: Can second sight and observation edges be used to notice or recognize supernatural items or places?

A: Sure, if you want them to. Second sight and observation edges essentially operate with items and places as they do with monsters. The sight gives the impression that the object or locale is wrong or off or odd or unnatural. It might also inspire nausea or tremors or inexplicable sweats. But just as when dealing with creatures, the exact nature of the item or place is not implicit. Hunters have to learn how it's unique through investigation.

Edges such as Discern, Illuminate and Witness are all open to your interpretation when used on objects or locations. Discern might reveal that an item was created to be held in a grip *much* larger than the average human's and that the wood used in its construction has a grain that runs around the handle rather than along it, implying inhuman manufacture. Illuminate might reveal an item or place's aura that a character has encountered previously in relation to wizards, for example, implying a connection between the two. And Witness might cause a hunter to glimpse

the fate of a person who last contacted an item or was in a locale, perhaps suggesting a malevolence or benevolence about the subject.

Now, if you don't want second sight or edges to confer this kind of information about things and locales, that's cool, too. Maybe the Heralds can manage to communicate information to hunters about beings alone, not inanimate objects. Maybe the Messengers simply don't put much stock in the importance of items or places and hunters receive no special information about them. You could even allow second sight and edges to work when contemplating some objects, but not others, almost haphazardly. Who says these mysterious capabilities that hunters receive need to be consistent or utterly reliable. You might go this last route if you don't want every supernatural locale that the imbued pass to draw their attention or pique their curiosity.

Q: How many edges can a hunter activate simultaneously?

A: There's no firm answer to this question, only rules of thumb. The more gritty and desperate your game, the fewer edges hunters should be able to handle. The wilder and more aggressive your game, the more you might let hunters wield. In the first case, we recommend that no more than one edge be operating at any one time. If a character wants to activate another, he has to discontinue the first. Think of edges as foreign and alien tools with which hunters work. Practice might help them learn how to use one of those tools adequately, but a wielder never quite grows comfortable with it. The tool never quite fits his hand or works completely intuitively because an inhuman devised it. Trying to operate two or more such tools simultaneously is therefore impossible.

Of course, you get to decide when some edges can overlap. A Judge might be able to maintain Discern and Cleave simultaneously to see and strike his target, but once you open that can of worms, players will spill it all over the table and try to combine edges in all kinds of bizarre ways to get the most out of them. It might be better overall to stick to a "one at a time" call.

There are also some edges that can be used for only a scene or even once a day, so have limited application. You can decree that these powers require so much attention or will that they can't be combined with any others.

If you want to play a sky's-the-limit game, you can let players combine edges as they please to create all kinds of chaos. Understand that this approach strays from **Hunter**'s regular-person theme. Overlapping edges enter the realm of superpowers for which hunters demonstrate mastery, not confusing capabilities of which the imbued are more than a little afraid. If you still want to go this route, we suggest no more than two powers at work at any one time. Also be prepared for all kinds of rules questions and systems complications based on the situations that arise in your game. A wild combination of powers simply surpasses our ability to anticipate how edges might operate under every contingency. That's when you have to adjudicate the outcome of what happens.

Q: Do any edges cause aggravated damage?

A: Rules for aggravated damage don't appear in the **Hunter** rulebook because the game is about ordinary folks, first and foremost. The Storyteller system doesn't normally afford those kinds of people a lot of resistance to "greater" forms of harm; the lethal and aggravated damage that many monsters suffer is all treated as "lethal" for humans, and can't be soaked. Rules for aggravated damage from the other World of Darkness games are therefore incorporated into a bashing and lethal dichotomy in the **Storytellers Companion** to make vampires, werewolves and the rest all work under **Hunter**'s systems. So, no, edges don't do aggravated damage in an official sense. This game imports other character types into **Hunter** and makes them work by its rules.

That doesn't mean you can't make edges capable of aggravated damage, though. You might want to have some hunters turn up in a **Vampire** game or make some leeches in your **Hunter** game truer to their "native" rules than to those of the imbued. That's all cool. Just consider monsters' traditional types of aggravated damage — fire, sunlight, silver, cold iron — and decide if any edges can inflict the appropriate kinds of harm. As written, Cleave, for example, simply allows a hunter to swing a melee weapon with amazing force. If you look closely at the rules, very few hunters actually manifest flaming weapons. Maybe in your game those few "firebrands" are capable of inflicting aggravated damage on vampires, while "lesser" possessors of Cleave still inflict lethal damage. Or maybe all uses of Cleave are considered aggravated in your game. You probably want to record which edges are capable of doing aggravated damage so your rules and game remain consistent.

Ultimately, we recommend that hunters themselves remain human in your chronicle and cannot endure aggravated damage. They should continue to

suffer bashing and lethal, and that's all. Otherwise, they truly become inhuman.

Q: What monsters do hunters encounter most? And least?

A: It's your game. You can have hunters run afoul of whatever monsters you like. Given that hunters are pretty low-powered and are new to the true World of Darkness, however, we suggest that other low-powered, inexperienced and relatively common beings, regardless of type, run into them as well. The "Building Better Monsters" article on p. 47 explains further.

Otherwise, you're free to decide if the imbued in your chronicle face the walking dead, vampires, ghosts, mages, shapechangers or goblins most often. In composing **Hunter** supplements, we use a general guideline to determine what kinds of creatures are encountered most and least. The walking dead and ghosts, as tied to the imbued in terms of creation and influx into the world, are faced most often. They're often blatant or stupid — easy to spot and face. Next come vampires, followed by shapechangers. Next up are mages and finally come goblins (nightmares).

Broken down into percentages, these encounters would range something like this:

Walking Dead/Ghosts	50%
Vampires	30%
Shapechangers	10%
Mages	8%
Goblins	2%

We set these parameters because some monster types are close to humanity in ideology or goals, or they need or prey upon humanity in some regard and thus lurk in, as a part of or on the periphery of mortal circles. The result is that these beings discover or are discovered by hunters relatively often. Other creatures such as shapechangers, mages and goblins are capable of straying beyond the trappings of human society and can enter their own realms of interest or understanding. Hunters don't contact them as much as the others as a result.

Again, these are just the loose parameters used to decide what monsters are contacted in **Hunters** books. Even then, the order is observed more than it's obeyed. You can present whatever monsters you like. If you want to capture the feel of the sourcebooks you might try the same order proposed here.

Q: Can Willpower be used in a roll that involves investing Conviction?

A: No. Willpower can never be applied to edge rolls to get successes. Willpower is the product of the human psyche and desire to succeed and survive. It applies to the mundane actions that hunters can perform — jumping, researching, remaining conscious — the same ones they could perform before being imbued. Conviction applies to the capabilities (edges) that hunters have and the actions they can perform (activating second sight) after the imbuing, as handed down by the Heralds. Neither Willpower nor Conviction applies to the purview of the other.

Q: Can the Visionary edge Foresee be used on any action or on only those that involve confronting the supernatural?

A: The edge write-up doesn't specify, so the power could be used to anticipate the results of actions in mundane or supernatural circumstances. Applying it to mundane efforts does run the risk of denying insight when it's really needed against monsters, though, so hunters may want to be sparing with its use. If you, as Storyteller, feel that players and characters abuse the edge in mundane life, you can decree that it must be applied in regard to or in the presence of the supernatural.

Q: My players are dissatisfied with how little Conviction they gain through risking it on edge-related rolls. What can I do?

A: Certain edges such as **Hunter Book: Visionary**'s Rally and **Hunter Book: Avenger**'s Fuel allow hunters to bolster the Conviction scores of their allies or themselves. These capabilities aren't universally available to help all imbued groups gain more Conviction, however. You have a couple options at your disposal if characters in your group just aren't gaining many points through risking Conviction on edge rolls. One is to award more than a single point when Conviction gambles are successful. **Hunter**, p. 137, explains how more than one point may be awarded.

Individual characters can also gain (or lose) points for actions that (or fail to) reinforce their values and beliefs along creed lines. These points are awarded for efforts made through roleplaying, not for Conviction points risked in die rolls. **Hunter**, p. 139, discusses general ways in which hunters' beliefs may be affirmed and bolstered, awarding them Conviction. Chapter 5 of the various creed books also lists numerous actions and achievements that the imbued can undertake to gain confidence in their pursuit of the mission. Ideally, good roleplaying should be rewarded more than successful die rolls are, so if imbued in your game just aren't earning the Conviction that they and you would like, encourage them to get deep into character to fulfill personal (and thus creed) goals on the hunt.

Q: Are walking dead the same thing as risen?

A: No. Risen are spirits that return to the living world by their own will in their old or borrowed bodies, typically to seek revenge against people or to fulfill a lingering goal. (Rules for them can be found in **Wraith: The Oblivion**.) Crossing back over is an arduous effort for these spirits and they're extremely powerful as a result. The walking dead that hunters typically encounter — shamblers, walkers and hidden — are a different breed of zombie. They are usually the result of spirits blasted from the land of the dead into the land of the living by cataclysmic events in the next world. As **Hunter: The Walking Dead** suggests, hunters' emergence in the present day could be tied to that cataclysm and the resulting influx of ghosts. When the spirits were blasted over, many collided with or scurried into physical bodies and animated or took them over. There was no effort made on these spirits' part to cross the boundary between the living and dead. Nor did these ghosts necessarily have a pre-existing agenda on this side, as risen do. The result is walking dead — including hidden — that are a different and often much weaker breed than genuine risen.

Q: Can the sum of a character's other two Virtues exceed her primary Virtue?

A: Yes.

A character's primary Virtue can be exceeded by no other *single* Virtue. A Martyr with 4 Mercy, 2 Zeal and 3 Vision is perfectly legal according to the rules. Her primary Virtue Mercy is not exceeded by either her Vision or her Zeal score. That Vision and Zeal added together (5) exceed her Mercy rating (4) doesn't matter.

Q: Can Cleave be used with an improvised weapon such as a chair, plant pot or framed painting? If so, what statistics are used for the weapon and how long will it last?

A: Cleave can be used with improvised weapons, but they should be items that could already be used to cause harm when swung without Cleave's help. Beating someone with a Cleave-empowered pillow doesn't work. Beating someone with a Cleave-empowered chair, plant pot or picture frame could. As a rule of thumb, assume that all improvised melee weapons inflict Strength +1 damage. That means they can withstand the rigors of Cleave for one turn unless the wielder's player makes successful Zeal rolls to keep an improvised weapon functional.

Q: Are Avengers really two-dimensional fighting machines as most people seem to portray them? Or do people simply want to play them as psycho killers?

A: There's lots more to Avengers than meets the eye, if you look deep enough. Granted, Avengers are probably the creed of choice for die-hard action-adventure roleplayers. If you don't want to read any deeper than "Guns, guns, guns," this is who to play.

There's far more to these characters than violence, though. The key to their motivation is vengeance. Most people interpret that as constant anger and dishing out harm to whoever comes along, but that's not really accurate. Seeking revenge means that somehow, somewhere in your past someone has committed a wrong against you that's so heinous, so unforgivable that inflicting it back upon the perpetrator becomes the focus of life itself. You have been violated, traumatized or victimized so severely that you forego who you used to be and dedicate yourself to returning your suffering in kind. Avengers aren't bullies or aggressors; they're the ultimate victims. Not only has someone (or thing) done them wrong, these people have done wrong to themselves by denying themselves an opportunity for healing or forgiveness. They've turned their own suffering into a mission statement of retribution. They're bigger martyrs (little "m") than Martyrs (capital "M"). They're just so blinded by their own focus that they fail to recognize their own vulnerability.

A person who plays an Avenger as a wanton killing machine may be missing the point. That kind of character isn't bent on justice or balance or fulfillment. He's a mass murderer. There's a big difference. The first is heroic. The second is psychopathic (and may actually be a Wayward).

Cop90 was the premiere Avenger before his death in **Walking Dead**. He was dedicated to harming those who harmed the defenseless. His own life had been ruined by monsters and he sought to return his pain upon other oppressors. But at no point did he kill anyone and everyone who crossed him. In fact, before his death he warned other hunters who threatened such actions that he would seek them out personally. That's a man with a valiant mission, not a random killer.

Q: Where is the Hunter metaplot going? Is it separate from the other Storyteller games' metaplots, integrated with those games' signature characters, or a combination?

A: The course of future **Hunter** events is already out there, laid out in different books and character statements, and encapsulated earlier in this chapter for your reference! Although **Hunter** has a metaplot, it's nothing so overt that it has direct control over your game, and developments in it won't undermine your years-long chronicle. The motivating events behind the line's books are all very subtle and unobtrusive to the individual imbued. You can integrate and run with as much as you already do because the metaplot is already well underway. If your game is going well now and the books haven't turned your chronicle on its ear (which they hopefully haven't), then you don't have to worry for the future.

As for integrating **Hunter** events into other game lines' developments, that's a bigger question, and more about metagaming than gaming itself. Although the Storyteller games are all based on essentially the same rules and are set in the same world, the characters that each presents are largely unique and distinct. Vampires, werewolves, wraiths, mages, changelings and hunters all have their own societies and cultures. Although critters of each type are *capable* of interacting, their status as supernatural or even abnormal is not enough *in itself* to make them interact freely. In fact, the games' developers have taken pains in many cases to emphasize that vampires, werewolves, hunters and the rest know and can do very little about each other. These critters' collective *difference from* humanity is still not enough to make them a cohesive group *apart from* humanity. As a result, the various game lines' cosmologies often mirror or coincide with each other, but they don't actually intersect and interact as often as you might think. In fact, hunters' ignorance of the World of Darkness' denizens is largely echoed by those denizens' knowledge of each other. Many vampires, particularly lowly or weak ones, aren't even familiar with the term "Garou," for example.

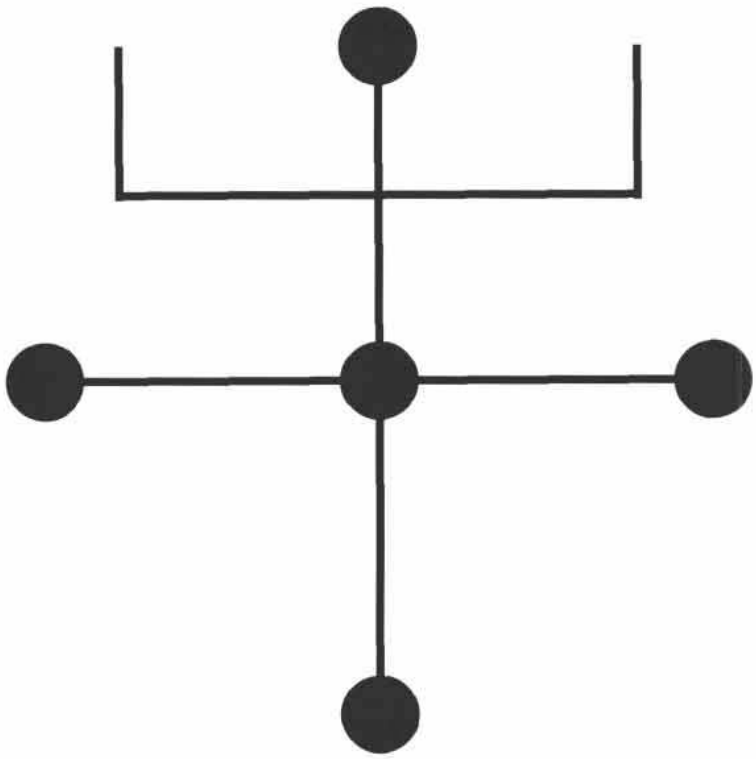
So, long story short, **Hunter**'s metaplot proceeds in ways alluded to above and in the supplements, but it doesn't overtly intertwine with those of the other Storyteller game lines. Such interactions are usually subtle and veiled, instead. That way they're more fun, too.

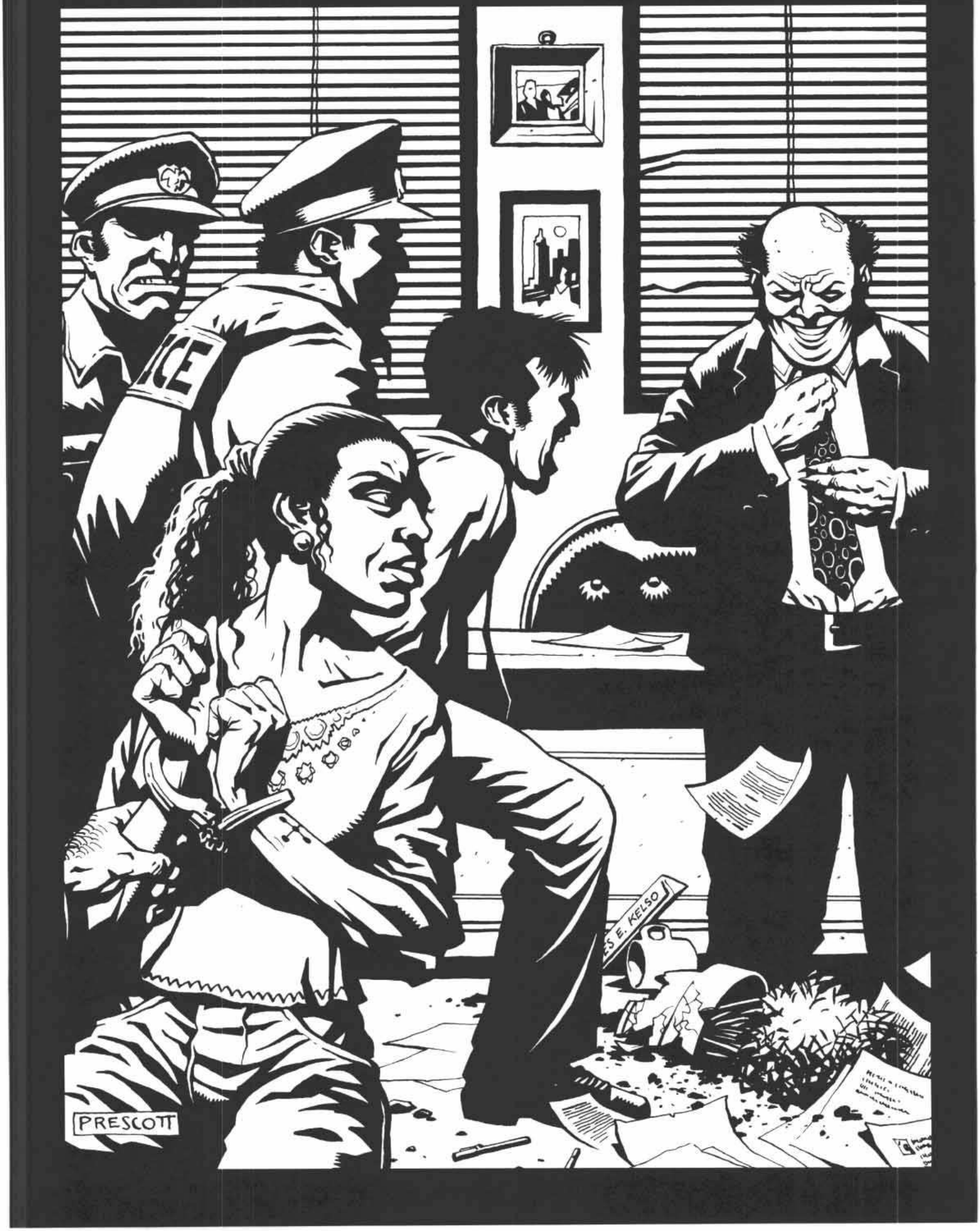
Q: Fans have complained that the artwork in Hunter books is far too "Rambo-ish," that it both detracts from the feel of the game and helps spread misconceptions of what Hunter is about. What approach is taken to the books' illustrations?

A: We've actually applied different philosophies to art in the rulebook and in supplements. The illustrations in the rulebook tend toward high action, but they have gradually moved toward low action as more supplements have come out. The

transition is intended. Though it'd be nice if everyone thought extensively about the character and storytelling possibilities of games, resulting in dramatic, moving sessions, not all of us do. A lot of us enjoy the action-adventure side, which means shooting, fighting and killing. In fact, most gamers lean toward the latter. There's certainly nothing wrong with that. Even the most personal, character-driven story needs to involve some kind of conflict and contention. But the fact is that a lot of us are attracted to action-adventure first and dramatic storytelling second. We hoped that by offering "Rambo" art and "personal" content in the rulebook, we could capture all interests.

In supplements, we've taken pains to move toward more "low-action" artwork to coincide with the text's message, as all readers hopefully embrace the humanity theme of the game. These days, two-gun-justice art is usually reserved for sections of supplements that call for it. Compare the illustrations in **Hunter Apocrypha** to those in the rulebook, for example.




PRESCOTT

Chapter 1: Unveiling the Night

Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbour, neither rob him: the wages of him that is hired shall not abide with thee all night until the morning.

— Leviticus 19:13

As a **Hunter** Storyteller, your first job after helping the players create their characters is choosing and creating the creatures that the imbued face. As you soon learn, deciding upon antagonists befitting the chosen is no easy task. Hunters know very little about the real world into which they're thrust. They understand almost nothing of the beings they encounter. And, the imbued are still human beings — easy kills to any but the weakest or dumbest of the supernatural. So how do protagonists and antagonists meet and tell stories under such delicate circumstances? How do you challenge hunters yet allow them enough latitude in your setting to survive more than one night? How do you create monsters that reinforce hunters' minimal preconceptions of the otherworldly yet do not drive them insane through confrontations with the unknowable? This chapter seeks to help you find that fine balance in what makes ideal and compelling monsters for a **Hunter** game.

Building an Evil Empire

"So what did your friend learn?" Rifaat sat down at the kitchen table across from Abd Al-Samad and slid him a packet. The younger man unwrapped the sandwich and took a bite before answering.

"Well, that warehouse is owned by the most honorable and highly respected Jamal Abu Nahleh. The same who sent those men into the refugee camps to take the kids." Rifaat sighed and slid another shawarma *to Samira, who sat quietly at the far end of the table. She reached out to take it without speaking, and he patted her hand reassuringly.*

"So that's it, then. The trucks from yesterday must be the ones he used to get the children to the coast. They're the same model as the ones we saw with the boats last week, correct?"

Samira nodded but said nothing.

Rifaat couldn't blame her for being quiet. Three weeks before, in the north, the two of them had been part of a group of five trying to protect a small town from invading creatures. They never found out what the monsters wanted or where they came from, but three friends were killed before Samira and Rifaat fled. He wanted to stay and try to keep the creatures from the town, but with no help, what could they do?

There was a knock at the door. Abd stood to answer. Rifaat was thankful for the man's inexperience and fearlessness. An older, more cautious kiswah *— hunter —*

wouldn't have let two strangers stay in his home. Rifaat turned to Samira.

"Hey."

She didn't look up, but kept chewing her sandwich thoughtfully. "We're going to get this one. It won't be like... like last time." Rifaat regretted his words immediately as she turned away. One of their deceased allies had been a childhood friend of Samira's. Any coping or acceptance of their new way of life that she had achieved was completely undone by the man's death. She was going through the same trauma and pain that Rifaat suffered when he lost his family. Rifaat's wife miscarried and died when ghosts terrorized his town four months ago. His five-year-old son was kidnapped a year before that, and Rifaat now thought he knew who was responsible: Abu Nahleh.

"Newspaper." Abd threw a copy of the day's Al-Quds *on the table. Rifaat wondered how long it would be before the young* kiswah *had so many regrets and fears weighing on his shoulders that he couldn't talk about anything outside the calling. "It's happened to me," he thought absently. "All I know these days is my own loss."*

"My friend found out where Abu Nahleh lives," Abd announced. It'll take us about an hour to get there.

Rifaat nodded.

"It's a house," Abd continued. "I imagine we'll have to break in."

Rifaat began to respond but was cut short by a gasp from Samira. His heart stopped when he saw her frozen eyes and trembling hand. She pointed at the newspaper.

"Yes, that's him. Plain as day." Abd gestured at the paper, and Rifaat finally saw Abu Nahleh's picture on the front page.

"No..." Samira's voice shook and she took a deep breath. "Behind...."

Rifaat picked up the newspaper and took a hard look. The photograph showed a group of businessmen standing together. Samira ran her finger along the page to one in particular: Bashar Khalil, Abu Nahleh's son-in-law and the owner of several small companies, as well as a small fleet of transport lorries.

"He is the master," Samira said.

The creatures that had killed their allies days before were led by one called "the master." It somehow controlled the others and could not be touched. Now Samira simply seemed to understand that this thing was controlling Abu Nahleh. It was the one kidnapping the children.

Introduction

Putting together a complete, compelling and fun **Hunter** chronicle is no easy thing to do. The same mystery and misunderstanding among the imbued that makes **Hunter** so much fun to play is a serious handicap for Storytellers. The imbued know nothing of the real world in which they live or of the creatures that lurk in it, so you have to build a chronicle from the ground up, without any pre-existing foundation on which characters or events may develop. Hunters spring from the unwashed masses and know nothing about what they've become or what to do with their capabilities. They have no larger cultural context of clans or organizations from which to learn. No ancestral lineage to draw upon for understanding (that they know of, anyway). That means you have to propose possible directions for characters and you need to set up goals for them to accomplish, all from scratch — to find individual purpose on the hunt, to ferret out secrets of the walking dead, to put spirits to rest. Without such personal agendas and self-discovery in your game, a **Hunter** chronicle quickly devolves into blasting away at a new bad guy each week. That's fun for only so long. This chapter explores ways to create an ongoing game, brick by brick, so that sweeping events catch characters up and present them with purpose beyond confrontation with monster after monster. Hopefully that purpose makes your chronicle exciting, and players will come back session after session to see how their hunters develop.

There are essentially two ways to build a chronicle: story up or antagonist down. With the first, you start with an interesting plot line that gets the characters together. You think short term, find out what kinds of characters your troupe members want to play and decide how to tell their tale. We've all done this kind of storytelling — the heroes need to save the kidnapped princess or a lost relic needs to be recovered. Once you know the circumstances that inspire the story, you create an antagonist who commits the crime or challenges the heroes on their quest.

Even though story-driven game creation has its advantages, such as pulling characters in and giving them a quick goal to fulfill, it doesn't inherently demand a complex or convincing villain. The antagonist is simply the last of a series of obstacles to overcome. He fits that single story arc, but how useful is he beyond it? Unless you're really creative and put a lot of work into the villain, he might not lend himself to long-term motivations and could lack the detail to be a rewarding counterpoint to the characters for an extended chronicle. The story-driven villain ideally lends himself to a one-shot game.

If your chronicle is going to continue for some time, you should define its world and inhabitants thoroughly so they form a convincing background to ongoing events. The world revolves around the players' characters, but it also revolves around your

antagonists because they're the ones who rival the hunters. The villains of your game are *your* characters. If you want them to be convincing, you might try building your game world around players' characters *and* your antagonists. Decide who a villain is and what motivates him, and stories spring to mind as his efforts and the hunters' clash — ideally, over and over. If Darth Vader was simply a two-dimensional bad guy needed to oppose Luke Skywalker, he would have been destroyed along with the Death Star, ending one adventure and one villain in a single movie. But Vader is much more complex and, therefore, the springboard for multiple stories. This second approach to chronicle building is antagonist-driven rather than story-driven.

The first thing you need to do in creating an antagonist-driven chronicle is figure out what kind of villain you want. The choice depends on the kind of game you and your players enjoy. A chronicle rife with intrigue should focus on some kind of politician or schemer. A game rife with industrial espionage probably needs to be based on a large company and its leader(s). *Your* character aspires to something malicious or self-fulfilling that can do the players' characters, a neighborhood or the world harm. It's up to the hunters to stop him, but each time they clash, only one of the villain's efforts is undermined. He has plenty more underway. The heroes start out as an annoyance, but as they do more harm and get closer to striking at the mastermind himself, they became a hindrance and eventually a danger.

You've seen this kind of Storytelling before. It's the foundation of comics, movies and books about ongoing characters and their rivals. You're playing **Hunter**, though. The world to which the imbued awaken is nothing they've known before. Reality is a mystery and threat to hunters because they don't know who or what monsters really are. Nor do they know who or what they themselves are. We therefore shouldn't be limited to the conventions of antagonist-driven games. We don't want to pander to players' familiarity with storytelling when their characters are in the dark. We want players to experience the same confusion and mystery that their characters do. That means putting a new spin on antagonist-driven storytelling.

The trick to creating a villain-motivated chronicle — **Hunter**-style — is keeping your players as well as their characters guessing. In an intrigue-oriented game, for example, instead of making the mastermind a politician or lobbyist, have a well-known political philanthropist use her money to influence such people. Looking from the top of the power structure down, this is a very simple tactic to accomplish. The politicians seem corrupt or tainted but in truth there's someone above even them. The players' characters have to discover the chronicle's prime mover from the ground up. They see the political structure from the bottom. They start their struggle with the small fish in the structure — perhaps cops who are supernatural pawns — and work their way up to the creatures they think are in charge. But when the seeming political powers that be are defeated, yet another layer of intrigue is revealed.

And then, the connections between the real mastermind and the apparent ones might be so thin that they're almost imperceptible (at first, anyway). You might decide that the person who's really pulling the strings isn't directly a part of what's going on at all. Maybe she has no known political ties or interests. A supposedly small-time business owner with supernatural aid and no scruples is really the master criminal. She's put her people in the right places over the years, whispering in city councilmen's ears, stuffing ballot boxes and discretely finding "support" for the mayor's pet projects. With this network established, she finds out about contract bids and gets tax breaks, not to mention gathering enough dirt on politicians to sink them. This "small-time" businessperson actually runs the whole town, but the characters only know her as an insignificant storeowner.

The point is, entertaining, ongoing games involve challenging, determined and deceptive villains. They give the hunters and the players someone to love and hate at the same time. But in **Hunter**, such antagonists' motivations and plans should be just as veiled and elusive to players as the nature of monsters is to the imbued. Just as the chosen may learn more about the supernatural bit by bit as they encounter bloodsuckers or rots, so may players learn more about the true powers that be in your game and how they may be defeated.

There are a few different ways to design a rewarding **Hunter** antagonist. Three useful templates are the organization, the conspiracy and the climber. With each, you start with your main bad guy and build a network around him. The climber is a special case with which you propose a young version of the villain and follow him through his career, letting his organization's structure grow around him as he gains power and influence. Creating a climber is kind of like running a solo chronicle for your mastermind, building him up until he's ready to take on your players' characters. Let's consider these models one by one.

The Organization

A single, large-scale organization makes a great antagonist for a **Hunter** chronicle. For our purposes, we'll just talk about the kind that has one big cheese running the show. A board or group of partners might officially be in charge, but we'll just consider them one collective "mastermind."

To start, consider the kind of organization you want to work with, whether a company, religious group or institution. Do you want this group to pull economic, emotional or political strings? Think briefly about who and what the mastermind himself is, then decide on the public image you want for that character. Don't worry about too much detail on the mastermind just yet. For now, write a brief description of what he really is and what he wants to accomplish. Also remember that any slick supernatural or evil human you use should be good at hiding his real activities behind his organization. That mastermind shows a very different image to the public than who he really is, and the hunters are going to see that image first.

Establish the mastermind's relationships with any other people in the upper echelons of the organization. How does he keep them in line? Do they know about his "real" life? The mastermind might have a trusted lieutenant or two in the upper ranks of the organization — people who know the truth and who work directly for him. On the other hand, he might control other higher-ups using supernatural powers or plain old business tactics. Maybe he has some kind of magic and he uses it on them, or perhaps he bought out their companies and they have to work for him. Use these links to establish the organization's power structure.

Also, consider how the managers fit into the organization's public image. Some might be totally unknown while others are figures everyone has heard of. In fact, the mastermind himself might stay out of the spotlight altogether, working through his network and never making his relationship with the organization known. Once the characters unravel the organization and discover whom they think the bad guy is, they find out that they have to go after a completely different party to reach the real mastermind.

If you go the route of a villain having a second, secret cabal beyond his organization, you need only sketch out this other group at this point. The characters won't actually run into it until much later in the chronicle, so you might want to save the detail development until then, when a lot of your game world is established and you can draw from that

material. For now, the characters see only the first organization, the public one, and the effects of the mastermind's efforts through it.

Example: Estevan Inc. is a private consulting company. Its clients, medium- to small-sized businesses, all have dark secrets such as owners' affairs or backroom payoffs that Estevan holds over their heads for money and cooperation. In some cases, the consulting firm perpetrated these scandals in client companies. Estevan Inc. is controlled by a board of directors with three members. Two are the company's co-founders. The other came on later to help manage it.

One of the founders is an obvious figurehead, making Estevan's corporate announcements and attending its charity events. The other is, from what the public sees, very quiet, preferring board meetings and subtle moves to noisy corporate politics. The third is a young up-and-comer, recently promoted after rising through the ranks of middle management.

Once the hunters figure out that someone else put the monsters controlling several local companies in place, they eventually discover Estevan Inc. They follow the chain of command up to the board of directors and decide to go after all three or just one. The best target seems to be the quiet founder. Rarely seen in person, yet secretly known as a mover and shaker. Everything about this board member screams "secret." You can even leave subtle hints here and there pointing directly to him.

In truth, both founders are actually the puppets of the newest member. In fact, this youngster is really an observer sent by the true mastermind, someone with no official ties to Estevan at all. The mastermind uncovered the company's blackmail schemes and put enough evidence together to use the company's own trick against it, making Estevan work for him.

* * *

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
From: hajirah252
Subject: Re: Unstoppable

One of my companions and I tried to kill the new master rot today. We managed to destroy its car, but the monster leapt from the burning heap and came for us. I fear that I would have died had my friend not dragged me off and driven us away. I still cannot believe how powerful the beast is.

Please, we need an idea. Howitzer, did you say you had fought master creatures before? How do we destroy this thing before it kills more?

* * *

Fleshing It Out

Now that you've designed the basics of your organizational antagonist, it's time to fill in some details. The first step is to create the power structure involved. Start with whomever runs the show and work your way down. The middle of the power tree can be tricky. Estevan's office manager doesn't make critical decisions affecting the company's future, but she's still an important figure. Does she work directly for the young board member or can she act only by the board's consensus? Is she in fact another of the mastermind's spies, placed there to keep an eye on the internal workings of the company? Although you can come up with these details mid-game, it's helpful to sort them out before play begins. Preparation on this level helps you keep track of different people's motivations and what they'll do in given situations, plus you'll avoid embarrassing mix-ups.

While you want to establish many characters in the organization tree in advance, you also want to leave a few less critical spots open as wild cards for later in the chronicle. That gives you the latitude to introduce new characters to mix things up and keep the players on their toes. For example, one of Estevan's parking attendants could be a hunter watching the company on his own. He may be a valuable ally or enemy for the players' characters, depending on the circumstances.

Maybe he has plans to use the company's resources for his own ends. The characters' attempts to work against Estevan could become a problem for him and he might do something about them. Say this hunter knows that one of Estevan's mid-level managers is a rot. He feels confidant that the rot can't recognize him, so he decides to blackmail it. Anonymity is a big advantage here. The hunter watches the rot every day, but the rot never knows the attendant isn't one of the herd unless he plays his hand. So, the hunter sends the rot letters threatening to expose its true nature unless it pays up.

These wildcard characters in your supporting cast keep things interesting in your game after the hunters' opponents seem to have been firmly established. These newcomers don't need to be decided yet. Just write down a few possibilities and save their development for later, when the players believe they know what their goal is, or wait until a new person is needed to throw a wrench into the works.

Infrastructure

Once you've established your organization's power structure, establish its resources. How big does the company, political party or society have to be to accomplish what it wants? How much money do mem-

bers need and what kinds of equipment or facilities are required? Outline the general buildings, computer networks, warehouses, machine stores and other large pieces of infrastructure your antagonist needs to fulfill its public image and mundane role.

Then consider how much of that equipment can be used for your antagonist's secret activities. Estevan Inc. doesn't need a separate secret building to house the records it uses to blackmail its pawns. That information can be kept in the company's native computer network. Personnel can also contribute to the company's illicit cause. Rather than hire outsiders to do its dirty work, Estevan might employ an assistant manager who's actually an ex-thief. His real job is to plant and gather incriminating evidence about other companies. He draws pay like a normal employee (though at a considerably higher rate than his peers) and is known at the office as a project manager who always seems to be on call somewhere.

This kind of supporting character is also a good lead-in for the hunters. Say one of the players' characters interviews for a job at your organization, and the interviewer happens to be the ex-thief. Imagine the hunter's surprise when he spies that same man down by the docks while investigating one of the walking dead. From a setup like this, you not only introduce the hunters to your organization, you establish a small-time opponent whom the imbued may interact with for some time, and who leads the hunters into deeper supernatural water.

You might want to put off designing *all* of your antagonist's facilities. It's hard to anticipate all of a large organization's means in advance. Sooner or later, players will want to investigate a warehouse or related shipper that you didn't anticipate. Flesh the organization's facilities out session by session. Anticipate the infrastructure you think will be relevant in the next game and save your notes or maps. Before long, your organization will have extensive means and materials.

External Relations

With the internal workings of the antagonist established and enough room left to make some things up on the fly, think about how your antagonist deals with the outside world. If it's a company, who are its rivals? What other companies or groups does it work with? Every large structure needs others to support it. A software company requires a partner to take care of its distribution, another for marketing and advertising and perhaps a third from which to buy raw materials. These groups, in turn, are parts of a network, and each section of the network is a potential source of allies, minor antagonists and red herrings.

Example: The New Hope Congregation is a branch of an evangelical church based in your setting. Its clergy runs a scam whereby members' confessions are used to pick out people who might do monsters' work. The church's methods and internal workings are very complicated, but in terms of support structure, New Hope has ties with a few different groups. First, there's the parent church, located in another city. Next is Johnson Printing, a local company that prints the church's weekly newsletter. This particular chapter of the church is brand new, so it rents space for offices near the actual church until that building can be remodeled and expanded.

The first scam your characters might suspect once they realize that monsters are involved with New Hope

The Dark Patron

If you want your chronicle to end in a final, climactic battle, try giving your organization-mastermind an evil patron. This is a creature so wicked and nasty that even the Merciful can recognize the need to destroy it. It could be the mastermind's tutor or perhaps the source of his supernatural influence or power. Destroying the patron is effectively a "win" over the mastermind because the antagonist loses most of his potency. At the same time, most of the world never knows what really happens behind the scenes because your organization is still in place and the mastermind may even remain, broken and defeated. Remember that **Hunter** isn't necessarily about blowing shit up and making a lot of noise. Your players get to make the world a better place, but they may have to do it quietly to stay alive.

Beware making the patron too powerful. It should elude the characters until the end of the chronicle, but shouldn't be so forceful or ancient that it can't be undone by some means. You can also allude to it well before the being makes an appearance. The hunters might hear rumors about an "unnamed dividend holder" or "corporate sponsor" from the "old country." Or the hunters might even run into it once or twice, never knowing what they face at that time or having to cut off an encounter prematurely because of more pressing business such as escaping from security guards. It's only in the finale of your game that the hunters get to settle the matter with the patron, once and for all.

is an "obvious" theft of donations and abuse of the congregation's trust. Since the church has financial ties to both Johnson Printing and the owners of the office building, the characters might follow those false trails instead of looking within the church itself for the real problem. If the owner of the printer is under the clergy's sway, they might force the printer to take the fall for the missing donations to avert attention from the church's real activities.

Occam's Razor

The antagonist has been established, fleshed out and set within a framework. The only major task left is to fill in a few misleads and distractions that help protect your organization and that keep the hunters from going straight to the top right away. These distractions are different from false trails that the antagonist itself creates, whether through external or internal relations because these red herrings don't have any actual ties to your bad guy. They're leads that you interject into your chronicle that don't actually impact your organization and that create color in other realms of your game than the antagonist itself.

A trail of clues might lead to an office manager who's involved with a group of computer thieves. The lead doesn't take the characters to the manager's boss, the real mastermind, however. Or say the hunters discover some rots who all work in the same office. In storytelling, the simplest answer is often believed correct — at least until proved otherwise. So, when the hunters learn that there's another corporate group of creatures at work in the city, they probably assume it's affiliated with your organization. Players and characters may look hard for connections and imagine them where none exist. You can even encourage such explorations by leaving hints of connections, such as both companies using the same distributor. In fact, the two know nothing about each other and each continues to pursue its plans while the hunters waste valuable time trying to connect them. Once you've finished outlining your antagonist's internal and external structure, look around for unrelated decoys.

Example: The hunters have finally gotten a break investigating a group of ghosts who are apparently able to travel across telephone lines. The hunters trace the calls used and narrow the source of the ghosts down to a certain city block. They find a mortuary in the area and set up surveillance.

Things don't proceed as the hunters hope, however. No supernatural activity is noticed at the mortuary. Days later, one of the characters reads a newspaper chapter about a multiple homicide committed in the city the week before — and it happened in an apartment *behind* the mortuary.

Realizing their mistake, the characters rush up to the apartment but don't find any supernatural presence. The ghosts have gained several days' time while the characters were busy staking out the wrong side of the block. The ghosts moved their possessed bodies elsewhere to continue their plans. The characters have had a taste of the enemy and, after coming so close, now pursue the spirits with even more vigor.

Power Structure Diagrams

You can save yourself a lot of trouble during antagonist creation by drawing out your enemy's power structure as a diagram. Instead of flipping through a bunch of disorganized notes during a game, you can create a chart that illustrates how cast members relate to and interact with each other, and you can reference it in a flash.

Start by putting the name of your main bad guy at the top of a piece of paper. Next, draw in the antagonist's middle management, then its pawns and underlings, starting a new line beneath the mastermind as you account for increasingly smaller players in your plan. Finally, fill in the red herrings. The result should be something of a family tree, narrow on top and wide on the bottom, as participants become more numerous but less crucial or powerful.

Among and between participants who have any kinds of connections, draw arrows and write the nature of those connections along the arrows. Labels could be "hatred," "mistrust" or "obedience." These lines and labels may be created between participants up and down the chain of command and among peers on the same levels.

(For a conspiracy, put the unifying goal at the top of the page and write the conspirators' names under that goal. Then you can connect them so you know who's friendly or unfriendly with whom.)

You might also create a symbol system to indicate who is a supernatural creature and what kind. Few things are as annoying as being ready to introduce a supporting character and forgetting what kind of creature it is.

The most important thing about this diagram is that you understand what's on it. Make it clear and include the key information you'll need later. You can even update it as your chronicle proceeds; participants may die or be replaced and relationships can change.

Putting Things Together

Now that your organization is composed, your antagonists are in place and you've prepared some distractions for the characters, it's pretty easy to find a starting point for your chronicle. If your mastermind is cunning and capable, his plan should unfold without anyone being the wiser. That assumes everything goes off flawlessly. Unfortunately, mistakes happen, pawns can fail and agents can go rogue. These pitfalls can attract hunters' attention to a problem, then to the larger plan that unfolds and then to your antagonist. Maybe a murder is performed sloppily, an undead servant doesn't cover his tracks well and leads hunters to the corporate office or a well-publicized business meeting brings numerous supernatural beings together and hunters' second sight alerts them to dangerous inhuman goings-on. Have something go wrong in your organization's scheme, present the characters with the evidence or simply an unexplained event, and the game begins.

The Conspiracy

The identity of an antagonist — the brains behind the scheme — can be broken down into two main types: mastermind and conspiracy. A mastermind's is a single person or tight-knit group with the will and resources to achieve its goals, usually illicit ones. A conspiracy also seeks to achieve goals, but is made up of several independent leaders or organizations and the contributions they bring to the effort. A shipping company might team up with a soda bottler and several crooked cops to bring and distribute drugs into a town. Each group can exist on its own, but all three are needed for the job at hand. Whereas a mastermind runs the show alone and his organization is usually stable, conspirators work together and have a lot of internal problems. Conspiracies have more brainpower on which to draw, however, not to mention that each member can have significant resources. What conspirators give up in stability — contributors might distrust or even scheme against each other — is made up for in raw wealth and power.

We've already looked at how to build a single mastermind's organization, so let's consider the conspiracy. Although they work together, conspirators are usually in it for themselves. They can lie to, cheat and steal from their cohorts whenever it helps them get ahead. This is especially true when the goal of the conspiracy is to impress some kind of higher power such as a boss or vast supernatural entity. Wealth, strength and glory are the names of the game, and most of the time the only way to get them is to steal from someone else. Remember that every conspiracy has its backstabbers. With this inherent truth firmly in mind, building a conspiracy is only slightly harder than putting together an organization.

What Do They Want

Obviously, the most important aspect of a conspiracy is the goal for which members conspire. What brings everyone together? What do they have in common and wish to achieve? In **Hunter**, the goal is undoubtedly supernatural in nature — perhaps to raise a potent vampire who has been left for destroyed for years, but who is actually alive and slumbering somewhere. Or beings of the same variety might hope to topple the local reigning member of their kind. It's even possible that monsters come together to do something about these dangerous new people who seem to have emerged — the hunters themselves.

For appearances' sake, it seems to outsiders that the conspirators are legion. They all work together toward a common goal. In truth, they may not have the same reasons for wanting to achieve their ends, and those differences can be grounds for disagreements between participants or even for outright fighting. Vampires could work together to throw down their reigning leader, but one might do so to take up power himself while another contributes to raise another bloodsucker to power. In the short term, common goals can keep conspirators united. But as they approach success, their personal agendas undoubtedly clash. It's when creatures still have a common goal that they're most dangerous to hunters, and when they're most likely to attract imbued attention. A rising threat is much more dangerous and in need of attention than a declining one.

Choose Your Conspirators

Who are the people running the show? Why are they working together? Each member of the controlling body has to bring something useful to the table, as well as need help from the others. Every conspirator should be the best at what he does. That's what makes him useful to the whole, but that specialization is also what makes each conspirator vulnerable beyond his realm of expertise. If you were putting together a team of detectives, why would you hire Watson when Sherlock Holmes was available? Don't make your villains settle for second best.

While you decide on the identities of your conspirators, bear in mind that they have to be able to work together to some degree, despite any of their differences. Whatever each member's goal is, it has to be worth risking betrayal and exposure by the rest of the group. Also understand that these people are probably not friends. They might act sociably, but it's

hard to genuinely like someone whom you need and who has a knife to your throat. Even though contributors might have gotten along well before becoming involved in the conspiracy, blackmail fodder tends to strain friendships, and power plays and betrayal make it impossible to perceive relationships as anything more than a polite convenience.

Now consider the power structure of the conspiratorial body. Who's winning the ever-raging struggle between members? Who has more power than whom? Has one of the older members been running the show for a while? Is a young pup getting ready to make a play for his spot? Do a few of the conspirators run the show while the others struggle to keep them happy? Certainly, no single member needs to be in control. Members can ally temporarily or permanently to make sure they hold power or aren't run over roughshod.

Devising internal rivalries and power struggles can grow complicated, fast. Make things easy on yourself by keeping such internal struggle simple. Some members need not know everything that's really going on, so they can be pawns instead of genuine conspirators. Take a newspaper that prints subliminal messages, for example. It has a separate distributor, but that company doesn't need to know the real deal. All it has to do is deliver the papers. Instead of adding the distributor to the conspiracy and making things more intricate, leave that party out. The hunters might still suspect it of being involved, though.

Also bear in mind that a lot of complex creativity is of little use in your game if the hunters and players never get to see it. Your conspiracy might be conducted by 18 people, but if all the imbued encounter is three of them, why bother with the other 15?

Draw a diagram of the relationship between conspirators so you can keep tracks of villains' reactions and decisions in regard to each other during the story. As your chronicle progresses, power can shift because of the characters' actions or due to work or infighting within the conspiracy. Observe of such developments because they change the nature, identity and perhaps specific direction of your conspiracy.

Example: Dorsalis Enterprises is a marketing and distribution company owned and operated by a man named Aaron Durell. He has recently reached an agreement with a vampire whose biotechnology company, Anders Consolidated, has developed a drug with a supernatural component that is moderately addictive yet undetectable by normal means. For the last few years, Anders has been partnered with Bell Frozen Foods, which uses the drug to make addicts out of its customers and forces them to keep buying its product.

Bell's owners, Wendy Lassater and Donald J. Monroe, have been working on this scam with Anders for quite a while. For various reasons, they had to let Durell in on the secret; he has become a member of the conspiracy. Of the three companies involved, Bell is by far the largest. Lassater and Monroe should be running the show because of this. However, Anders, the vampire-owner of Consolidated, has been able to use his supernatural powers to influence them.

Now, when we bring Dorsalis in, one of three things can happen. Durell can work with the others and try to keep his company under his own control, Lassater and Monroe can use their company's size and assets to slowly take over Dorsalis (indirectly making Durell into Anders' pawn), or Anders can take control of Dorsalis directly using his company, supernatural powers or a combination of both.

Note that since Anders' control over the power structure is incomplete (he influences only Lassater and Monroe, he doesn't command them), and could come apart if the others put their minds to it, this is not just an organization with Anders at its head. The company owners have to cooperate for things to work. Furthermore, Bell and Dorsalis could conceivably break away from the arrangement and each could use information on the other corporations to bring them down. So, this is more of a conspiracy than a single organization. No member has absolute control over the others and each part of the conspiracy can split off and cause trouble for at least one of the others.

* * *

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
From: cabbie22
Subject: Re: Unstoppable

Look, I hate to say this, but if you can't kill the damn thing, stop wasting your time. You're not going to do anybody any good if you keep going up against it until you die. We need you, and those kids need you.

Maybe it's better if you leave this one alone and find another target. An idea might come to you later. It's suicide to keep facing it without a way to kill it.

* * *

Place Lackeys

Every conspirator got where he is by establishing a power base before joining the team. That organization is what brought him to the dance; each member already had a power structure in place. Take a moment to sketch out the agents in these organizations. Figure out who each conspirator's key figures are, such as junior partners and investors. The hunters deal with one conspirator's organization at a time in the beginning. That means you

need to have enough detail ready to run each organization by itself for a while.

When the imbued discover that there are connections between organizations, you need to be prepared to portray those connections. How tight do the conspirators need to be to accomplish their goals? How much do their support organizations need to work together? Forcing them together decreases the strength of the already weak members and increases that the strong ones because the more capable organizations call the shots and make more things happen. Indeed, if there's a leader at work in the conspiracy, he might commandeer the resources of all other contributors and start calling the shots. The other participants still have to be involved, though, because they're the ones in charge of their respective organizations. Those owners still have to give orders, even if the orders aren't their own.

The middle management of each organization comprises the most useful lackeys in the larger conspiracy. These people are somewhat different from the ones you'd create for a single mastermind-controlled organization. These lesser players aren't usually directly involved in the machinations of the conspiracy or aren't even aware that some larger plot is at work. Such schemes are usually concocted without the contribution of "middle managers," even while those same folks might be enmeshed in other plans pursued by their separate organizations. Or, such pawns might be acquired by an organization to play a role in a conspiracy without any knowledge of their part. A conspirator might hire an ad agency, for example, to promote a product that is his contribution to the plan. Meanwhile, the agency simply believes the conspirator's company owns the product.

When creating middle managers, think about what personnel conspirators need to make their organizations work together. A software provider and vendor who have merged might hire an efficiency expert to make sure that the two offices work well together. Or if the companies cooperate but haven't merged, they may set up a liaison committee to make sure both

Theme

The most important reason to create an antagonist-driven chronicle is to challenge and entertain your players. You can create the coolest scheme in the world, but if the hunters and players never see the best aspects of it in your game, all your effort is wasted. One way to ensure that your antagonists' efforts impact the players is to convey a theme through the enemies' activities. The theme essentially teaches players a lesson or makes a statement about the World of Darkness or the hunter condition.

If you want to show your players that teamwork is all-important, for example, encourage them to cooperate to accomplish their objectives against your antagonists. They might have to set their differences aside to uncover the truth about an organization. At the same time, show them that antagonists' weakness lies in the individuality of their members.

Here are some sample themes.

Teamwork is key. Any group is greater than the sum of its parts. Force the characters to work as an effective team in order to get anything done. When characters go it alone, don't let them get very far.

Mortality. No matter how slick a hunter thinks he is, he's still human. In the World of Darkness, that knocks him from the top of the food chain. The imbued are injured frequently, and it gets harder and harder to answer admitting nurses' questions. Be careful to keep things serious; recurring injuries without death can turn into a silly shtick. See "Truth and Consequences," p. 138, for tips on handling major and minor injuries.

The power of the individual. Each of us bears a special quality that makes us who we are. We all have a forte or inclination that allows us to succeed where others fail. Give each hunter at least one moment during the chronicle in which his decision alone affects the outcome. You might go so far as to make these "moments of glory" in which other characters are saved or performing hunters sacrifice themselves for the others' good.

The human will. No matter how bad things get you can't keep some people down. They come back when you least expect it. Have normal folks — non-hunters — play important roles in the occasional critical scene. Maybe a non-imbued detective is the one to shoot the human-seeming monster that kidnaps children while the hunters are somehow unable to do the job.

Personal loss. Every time characters get complacent, another monster rears its ugly head. Imbued lose their families, homes and livelihoods to answer the call. Make some of these losses gradual, such as a character who slowly loses touch with his kids, instead of killing the children outright. The loss will be all the more painful when the hunter senses that he could have stopped it at any time but didn't.

groups stay on the same page. And all along, the merging parties contribute toward their leaders' joint goal. Middle managers' efforts might point to a goal of their organization or, looking at the bigger picture, hunters might see how such efforts actually lend themselves to the conspirators' combined effort.

Example: Anders decides to have Bell slowly acquire Dorsalis Enterprises. He also decides to keep his own company separate from the other two just in case he needs to cut them loose in a hurry. He first "persuades" Durell to appoint Lassater to Dorsalis' board of directors. Lassater, at the vampire's bidding, offers to bring Dorsalis under her company's wing. Lassater persuades the smaller company's directors to move their main offices into Bell's building. Lassater then turns Dorsalis' old offices into a computer-processing center for both companies, putting one of her own people in the supervisor's chair. While Dorsalis still has its own contacts and remote offices, it's effectively been taken over by Bell and is now under the Anders' indirect control. Durell, a company director himself and member of the conspiracy, has become a pawn. He stays that way until he finds some way to one-up Lassater and Monroe through corporate political maneuvering.

Under these circumstances, we can fill in a few key middle-management positions in regard to how the separate companies work together. Bell's office manager now runs the Dorsalis home offices and should be detailed. Another important figure is the Bell executive overseeing the joint computer-processing center. To give Durell some kind of a chance, you might decide that Lassater's private secretary has been subverted and now reports directly to Durell, allowing him to intercept Lassater's private communications and grab a little more corporate power for himself. Obviously, the middle managers in this example can make quite an impact on the internal workings of the conspiracy. With them, you have more supporting characters with whom the hunters can interact, and they can be used as individual antagonists or even wildcards.

Finishing Touches

Fill in the cracks. Although you can add more allies and rivals for the conspirators themselves, it's best to keep things simple. You already have a lot of characters and motivations to keep track of.

Go back to the section on building organizations and create minor participants, such as people on the low end of conspirator totem pole or other wildcard characters. Since you're going to run several different groups within the greater antagonist circle, keeping track of participants is going to be tricky. Take as many notes and make as many plans as you can now.

Make sure you've fleshed out enough of the world's workings outside your antagonists' direct control to get by, to give hunters other things to do from time to time than unravel the big conspiracy. Think about what else is going on in your setting that's unrelated to the scheme or its contributors. See "Occam's Razor," above.

Also remember that any sharp group of players will try to use separate parts of your antagonist to help their characters. They could try to turn members against each other or enlist the aid of one or more of an organization's smaller groups. Aside from a good original design, the two best defenses you have against being caught flat-footed are communication within the antagonist group and wildcards. Communication keeps the antagonist from turning on itself. If two company heads meet every day to discuss the details of their business, the hunters may have a hard time convincing one that the other is hiding a secret venture. Wildcards are all-purpose problem solvers. Say the characters have come up with a convincing lie and enough evidence for the police to investigate an antagonist's offices. A wildcard in the police department could delay the investigation long enough for the bad guys to get the building cleared of suspicious material. It's a valiant attempt by the characters, but they've just revealed themselves to the antagonist *and* pissed off the police by sending them on a wild-goose chase.

This isn't to say that having individuals in an organization help the characters is a bad idea. On the contrary, you might want to reward good roleplaying and clever thinking by letting them gain such an ally. Hunters could show Durell evidence of a fictional assassination attempt directed at him by Lassater. Durell might decide that Lassater is the real enemy and give the characters information to humiliate her.

If you're put in this kind of situation but decide that it isn't time for the conspiracy to fall apart just yet, stage a secret meeting or other event so the conspirators can work things out. Alternatively, you can use a wildcard to make the characters' undermining efforts fail. Maybe a supporting cast member betrays the characters. Lassater's subverted secretary could know that the hunters plan to set up her boss and leak the characters' scheme to cover her own ass. Or another character could give the imbued reason to reconsider their plan to pit antagonists against each other. Say someone mentions in passing that Durell keeps a private detective on retainer, and the characters realize that he could learn that their "evidence" is fake. The point is,

Revealing the Conspiracy

As has been alluded to elsewhere, having a complex conspiracy is all well and good, but what's the point if your characters never see it? Granted, your chronicle will run better for all the planning, but you can reveal some of the underlining tension of your scheme by offering up little hints about what's going on behind the scenes.

Have a character see two members of the conspiracy in a quiet meeting over lunch in a public place. Even better, show a meeting of underlings in which one participant is a known villain. This tactic not only establishes the others present as villains, but the hunters start building a link between the villains' organizations. Such connections may also answer a few questions, such as how one group seems to know things about the imbued that it couldn't have found out on its own.

News reports are also a good way to drop hints about conspiracies. Mergers and corporate takeovers often make the morning paper. Any high-profile villain and his organization is likely to get coverage once in a while, and the characters will start looking for articles involving that antagonist. An announcement about a microchip manufacturer buying out a bankrupt exporter might be a good hint at who was involved in all those warehouse torchings at the docks. Make sure you give the characters enough hints about the conspiracy to realize the enormity of the power they're dealing with and they'll understand that they see only the tip of the iceberg.

don't let your players tear your conspirators apart until you're ready for it to happen.

The Climber

Another way to build your antagonist is to determine how the mastermind got where he is. When all is said and done, the villain will look a lot like the organization variety. The actual processes used to create the two are very different, though. Which you use depends upon how important having a really well developed mastermind is to your story (say, if you want the hunters to interact directly with him in the long term).

Building a climber means developing the mastermind like a player does his own character and makes that villain a prominent, realistic figure in your game. In the end, you know exactly how the climber thinks. The process tells you precisely what he wants, whom he works with and what he's capable of doing based on his past. Everyone under him in the chain of command is also made more realistic and easy to portray as a result.

As with the conspiracy, you can get a lot of good story development out of revealing your climber's history to the hunters and their players. (And as with the conspiracy, all that backstory in the climber's life is for naught if it's never revealed in your games.) Leave plenty of little hooks in the climber's history for the characters to discover. Maybe he was a small-time criminal when he was still alive or he might have family elsewhere in the world who don't know that he's alive and well in the setting of your chronicle. The players will enjoy exploring your climber's origins, and defeating a complex, well-crafted monster is a lot more fun than beating another faceless zombie.

Birth of an Evil Genius

The point of creating a climber is starting out small, with a mundane person or comparatively weak supernatural being and telling the story of his change and rise to power. He doesn't spontaneously have a company, cult or group of followers at his disposal and decides to turn them on some imbued. He gains his status and means over time because he has ambition and goals. When the imbued clash with those goals, they clash with the mastermind's company, cult or followers and with the climber himself.

You don't have to go as far back as the climber's childhood unless you want to. Start with a brief description of his early life or unlife. Go quickly through his upbringing and education. Is he supernatural? Was he born that way? Who turned him to the other side and how? Giving him a mentor, the person who made him supernatural or who taught him magic is a great option. It opens up some internal stories within his organization when you arrive at that stage of character creation. Those stories have to do with how the climber gets along with his mentor, what his lackeys think of that being and what he has to do to keep his mentor happy (human sacrifices, perhaps).

If you forego a mentor, consider the first major step in your climber's career. It might be when he first joined the company he will later take over, or when he opened the magical tome from which he learned to cast spells. This is a turning point for the character, the step that takes him from just another person trying to get ahead to a lying, manipulative creature ready to do anything for personal gain. Leave a subtle clue about

this stage of your climber's life for the hunters to discover later, even if it's something as simple as a newspaper article or an old member of the community who remembers when the villain "changed." That way you can show the imbued who their antagonist was "back in the day" when they seek to understand who he is and how to defeat him.

Just how evil to make the climber at this stage, and perhaps in the present day, is for you to decide. Be sure to leave room for more development after this early point in his career, though. Nobody becomes an ultimate fiend overnight. Or maybe you want him to be ostensibly human, with a touch of the supernatural. He's completely sociable and even sympathetic, but it's what he's willing to do that makes him a monster. Hannibal Lecter is positively charming when he wants to be, but his cannibalism makes him extremely horrific.

Example: Michael Sorentino grew up in the heart of Detroit to an impoverished family. Born the son of a tailor and a bookstore clerk, Michael did poorly in school due to "lack of discipline." In fact, he didn't care much about school, goofing around instead. At 14, he got involved with a gang. He had suddenly become acutely aware of his poor upbringing and alienated himself from his family by acting out whenever he could.

Derek Molesky was Michael's idol and best friend in the gang. Three years the elder, Derek schemed and fought with the worst of them. He took Michael under his wing, teaching the boy to be ruthless and to look out for no one but himself. Michael also learned to conceal his true activities. His relationship with his family got a little better because they thought he had shaped up. Eventually, Michael realized that he could avoid trouble by spending a little time focusing in school and passing his classes instead of attracting unwanted attention.

It was under Derek's supervision that Michael killed for the first time. It happened in the heat of a turf war. This was a turning point for Michael. He realized that he could have anything he wanted if he was willing to take risks and make sacrifices. Murder seemed the ultimate risk, and finding himself capable of committing it, Michael felt that nothing could stop him.

* * *

Subject: Re: Unstoppable
From: dzidzat155
To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Cabbie is right, my friend. If the creature is as powerful as you say, there is nothing you can do. You are a soldier and must use your strengths. If I were in your place, I would search out a monster I was better able to handle.

Since this thing pretends to be a businessman, perhaps you will find one of our corporate brethren there to help you. Our ancestors have granted us power according to their needs. Have faith in them and they will provide.

* * *

Growing Up

With your climber's first step and initial motivations in place, move him up the ladder. What does he want to accomplish in the long term? How will he do it? What are his limits and what's his style? Of course, these factors can change based on his experiences; reevaluate his desires as he works his way up in the world. Saying "he wants power" is sometimes enough, but you might want to be a little more specific in time. Perhaps he wants power simply because he never wants to be used or abused again. As he matures and sees more of what's out there, he's going to continue to lose his innocence or at least become more aware of what his options are. Keep track of how his personality evolves over time; many climbers get more ruthless and greedy.

This is the stage at which your climber acquires long-term contacts and allies. When she comes to power later, she may look back to the people who helped her get there. She may always remember the captain who first gave her a shot at detective, or the investor who took a chance on an unknown company and helped fund her rise. Monsters or not, people feel fondness, even debt to helpers and friends. Contacts could become the climber's confidants, assistants or even lackeys or bitches (in a sadistic climber's case). If you decide to put a psychotic bent on your character, she might enjoy torturing the people who helped her up just because she knows their weaknesses.

Confidants and old friends are the people in the climber's organization who know him well. They have witnessed or contributed to his rise, so they're windows to his past or origins if hunters explore the mastermind's identity. Who better to interview (interrogate?) about a monster than an old acquaintance or colleague? If the person is still loyal to your character or is at least self-serving, the hunters may not be able to trust her. Indeed, she may not be forthcoming with information at all. (And once again, we come back to that interrogation or even torture question for determined hunters.) If that longtime ally has since been abandoned, fired or dismissed, she might be resentful of the climber and

reveal everything she can about him. Maybe the climber even acknowledges the risk the jilted friend poses and lets her live only out of *some* element of respect. But should she fraternize with hunters, even that courtesy may be withdrawn.

Finally, you can establish a wildcard person or two who was involved in the climber's early to middle days. Compose a character from that time whom you can call in as a surprise, either to help or betray the antagonist. Maybe a previously uninteresting person who's always worked for the climber's company suddenly betrays the organization and helps the hunters, or he could discover what the imbued are up to and report them to your mastermind to earn some long-deserved benefits. Bear in mind, however, that since these wildcards derive deep from the climber's origins, they have a lot of potential and should be played out in only extreme cases. After all, someone with thorough knowledge of the climber, and perhaps with a position of power in his organization, can do a lot of damage.

Wildcards can be used in a variety of ways. Don't waste them. Revealing that a villain's right-hand rot is a defector by having her help a hunter out of an overnight jail stint is hardly appropriate. That character is much better used, say, when the entire group of hunters is captured by the mastermind's security force. Since the characters are almost certain to die, you can play a potent wildcard to get them out of unforeseen trouble. Also, note that this example of a wildcard in use can be pretty subtle. The hunters may not necessarily know who called security off. All the imbued may know is that the shit was hitting the fan until some call came in to the guards and they all retreated. It could also take your mastermind some time to realize that his ally was responsible for the betrayal, especially if the rot covers her tracks by killing the guards.

Example: More than anything, Michael wanted to be a big shot, to live in luxury rather than squalor. He eventually talked and fought his way to the head of the gang, killing even Derek in his rise to the top. Michael then directed the gang from simple robbery to protection rackets. They staked out turf and began extorting money from shop owners. A little less than a year later, Michael graduated from high school to the surprise of his family and neighbors. He moved out and "got a job" across town, forcing a grocery-store owner to pretend to employ him while he lived off protection money.

Two years later, the gang's membership and stomping grounds had expanded considerably. The punks had eliminated another gang and even the local mobsters started taking them seriously. One member, a boy

named Anthony, caught Michael's attention. He seemed to have the most inordinate luck. Michael didn't believe in luck. He eventually forced Anthony to admit that he was using elementary magic, learned from a book the boy had stolen from an old woman.

Michael took the book from Anthony and, with the help of select gang members, held the boy captive for days while he learned the kid's secrets. One of the spells he discovered raised the dead. Michael killed Anthony, attempted to bring the boy back and failed completely. He almost gave up but did learn that some minor magic was effective. That small start led to more practice and to more difficult spells over the span of a few years. Michael even brought Derek's ghost back and began using it as a spy, as well as a sort of companion to lord his power over gang members.

What Michael didn't know (and never learned) is that he couldn't bring Anthony back because the boy's ghost had already risen. His spirit remains restless to this day. Anthony has finally accepted his existence as a ghost, watching Michael become richer and more powerful through the arts that he himself brought to the man. He waits for a chance to destroy Michael, but can't make his move as long as Derek is around. Anthony assumes that Derek, having been dead longer, is more powerful than he is. Anthony makes for a good wildcard character and story hook. He can also be used to give the hunters a glimpse into Michael's past.

Another gang member who fell during Michael's rise is Larry Hamilton. He repeatedly failed to accomplish the tasks assigned to him and eventually fled before he could be killed. He could come back to give hunters clues, or he could reform and decide that he has a responsibility to shut Michael's operation down. Larry knows a few things about the gang's habits and hangouts. When the characters try to get information from him that you don't want them to acquire, simply make Larry's intelligence out of date. That way you can use Larry as a story hook without having to worry about players abusing his aid.

Coming into Your Own

The last big step you need to take is establishing the climber's first major grab for power. This is the move that solidifies his position and puts him where he is today. It could be the assassination of a rival bishop to become the only leader of a religious sect or the first major acquisition he made to become CEO of his own company. This development is the most telling about the character's later methods since it was successful and the climber probably keeps using the same technique(s) that worked before.

If you haven't introduced a supernatural element into your antagonist yet, it's about time to. Unless you want to keep him completely mundane, with otherworldly supporters, your antagonist should be strongly linked with supernatural forces. Otherwise, he isn't much an opponent for hunters. Injecting the supernatural at this stage is easy. The climber might have made an agreement in exchange for help or called upon unnatural powers to get out of a mess he couldn't handle.

Since this is the point in your mastermind's life at which he becomes what the hunters will later meet, and perhaps the point at which his very mundane existence changes, it's important to devise a means to show this era to hunters. Maybe the antagonist can be linked indirectly to some crimes related to his transformation or elevation, but he can't be convicted of anything. Imbued can look at old police reports, news stories or scandal sheets to get some limited insight into what went on to make the climber what he is today. The idea here is to suggest a chink in the antagonist's armor without making his entire empire vulnerable. Hunters can know that something is wrong about his past, but it doesn't compromise him now. The chosen have to find other means or evidence in combination with what your character did in the past to topple him.

Let's say your climber used to own a small business, and he held underground fighting matches in one of his warehouses. Your clue could come from a security guard named David who knew what was going on but who kept his mouth shut for fear of losing his job. He was fired anyway in a series of layoffs and became a small-time crook. Ten years later, David has a rap sheet and a guilty conscience. Given his record, he's fairly sure that the police would ignore any report he might file about his former boss. Worse, he fears backlash from his boss if word of the betrayal gets back to the climber.

When David finds out that the hunters are investigating the antagonist, perhaps by overhearing a conversation or through rumor on the street, he can confide what he knows. The imbued can't use the information directly against the climber in court, but it tells them that he has a criminal past. They also have ideas of who's involved if they hear rumors about an ongoing underground fighting tournament.

Also be sure to make the secret or evidence of wrongdoing surrounding the climber's achievement something that can be further cleaned up or hidden even in the present. If there was an eyewitness involved back in the day, be certain that her disappearance now won't attract too much attention

(beyond the hunters', of course). Or say your publicly prominent villain was involved in violent criminal activity. Would the police believe that and have kept records of it or have dismissed the whole thing as self-defense?

Don't be afraid to place a few more wildcards at this point, too. These can be people who entered your climber's life right after his change or power grab. They might be middle-management types whom he decided he could rely upon. Or someone else may have been present at the antagonist's rise or change, was involved in the act and has been forced to remain involved ever since. Such wildcards might truly know what the climber really is, or at least suspect and have some proof of shady dealings. You don't have to decide all the facts about these wildcards just yet. Develop the identities of these characters in two parts: what the characters (and rest of the world) see and what the climber knows about them. The latter can emerge when these wildcards are used to trump the climber or the hunters.

Example: Michael's gang controlled a few neighborhoods for several years. Then, while planning to take out his gang's biggest rival, Michael was betrayed to the police by a plant. There was enough evidence to put he and most of his followers in jail. However, one of the "real" mobsters in town, Leo Fucco, stepped in. He promised to get Michael and his boys off if they would work for him. Michael accepted and Fucco used his connections within the police force and judiciary to free them.

Leo was, in fact, a mid-level boss in a mob organization extending across several states. Michael became one of his chief strongmen, eventually rising to a position of power within the Fucco family. Ever ambitious, Michael used magic to kill Fucco's only son Daniel, and spared no personal expense consoling the Fuccos. Leo retired shortly thereafter, putting Michael in place as his only successor.

Michael's father died two years before his son's rise to power, and Michael's mother left town to live with family in Toledo. (It's a good idea to establish such details now because the hunters may decide to look into Michael's real family at some point. The dodge "you don't find anything on his family" can make players think that you're stonewalling them off-handedly or that you simply don't have answers to their inquiries, both of which can annoy them.)

Michael inherited Leo's organization, commanding three local bosses, each with a smaller organization than his own. One of those bosses knows the truth about Daniel's murder but doesn't have enough solid evidence to prove it (although he's working on it and might betray Michael later).

Another wildcard we can introduce is Michael's driver, who could turn out to be either faithful to the death or unfaithful. Maybe he had a sister who was killed in a drive-by ordered by Michael, and he secretly seeks revenge. There could also be a minor flunky in the organization who reports to the police.

A possible lead-in to Michael's story and a chronicle about him involves investigating a spirit that turns out to be Daniel's ghost. It re-enacts its death every night, giving clues about the murder to hunters who encounter the spirit. Residual energy or perhaps even talking with the ghost reveals that Daniel was killed by magical means. A character may also encounter one of Michael's flunkies who displays a purplish aura when

A Conspiracy of Climbers

Every member of a conspiracy has come a long way to get where he is. A conspiracy composed of climbers can therefore be a very involved and powerful institution. Instead of drawing up only one member of the conspiracy in detail, try doing so for everyone. Go through the climber model several times, creating a group of masterminds, each with a complete origin and power structure. Then bring these climbers together with a common goal and form your conspiracy. The result is several groups for the characters to contend with, each with a complex antagonist at its head. Such various and challenging opponents will keep your players motivated by confronting them with different problems and foils, each of which might be dealt with differently and according to different characters' specialties — violence, compassion or ingenuity. The politics among members of the conspiracy get more interesting as well since the agenda of each is much more concrete and convoluted in your mind, and can therefore be peeled back in layers by the imbued.

Don't be afraid to let one or more of these fully developed conspirators be defeated by the hunters. With multiple masterminds working against the chosen, hunters and players may feel that their efforts are futile. When the characters realize that there are several major participants to the conspiracy, let them take out one or turn the others against it. The conspiracy probably has more than enough stability to recover from the loss and your troupe may start to believe that it can win.

observed with an edge, reflecting Michael's magical domination over the pawn.

The State of the Union

You're almost done creating your climber. All that remains is to transition her from her rise to power to where she is today. Although it could last anywhere from five to 50 years, this period is pretty easy to detail. First, decide exactly how long it's been. Then imagine what the climber could have done in that time while focusing on his most recent set of goals and how impatient he is to accomplish them.

A good rule of thumb is to allow for one major event every two to five years, depending upon how ambitious your climber is. Try to include a setback or two for the sake of keeping things realistic. As before, leave hints here and there so the characters can track their enemy's climb. Also, don't forget the nature of a more mundane climber's involvement with the supernatural. If he made a deal with a dark power, his patron will call upon him once in a while to return the favor. This also means that he's more involved with (and reliant upon) the patron than ever before since they've been scratching each other's backs for some time. In some cases, the climber might even have surrendered his free will or pledged himself to his benefactor in some permanent way, becoming its slave.

Remember that if the climber has been using supernatural powers directly or has became a monster herself, she has probably evolved a solid understanding of what she is and what she can do. Be sure to increase her power appropriately. However, avoid the trap of overpowering your climber. If she's too strong, the characters won't be able to do anything about her plans. If you find that she becomes too tough for the hunters to handle, change her initial contact with the supernatural world or decrease the amount of time she's had to gather strength.

Now, finish fleshing out the antagonist as detailed previously in this article. By tracing the climber's rise to power, you should have most of the basic structure of his organization in place already. Throw in minor allies and enemies along with incidental characters. Also set up one or two more wildcards, enough so that you won't have to use the high-powered ones until you need to.

Also be careful to create a hook to attract the hunters' attention to your climber. This event or discovery gets your antagonist-driven chronicle rolling. The mastermind or her minions might make a mistake in the hunters' presence or there might be a weak link in the organization that the

The Magic Addict

Masterminds are people too, and they make mistakes, especially when they're young. At the same time, people who play with magic never really know what they're getting into. A person who tried to use supernatural powers or creatures and wound up dependent upon them is a good basis for a climber.

Either at his first major power grab or way back when he started to go bad, have your climber run into a supernatural power and try to use it. Obviously, this power has to have a source. It doesn't have to be a creature; a book of magic or enchanted object works just as well. The magic has to make the difference between success and failure for the climber, and he recognizes that he needs it.

As time goes on, the climber needs to call upon her unnatural power more and more to maintain control over the empire she builds. That power might even become a part of her, as in the case of a spell book she reads and learns. Its use comes at a great price, however, such as her health, sanity or even sacrifices made to the source. (Imagine a magical knife that gives its wielder the ability to read minds in exchange for fresh human blood.) The climber, though still able to run her organization, becomes a slave to the power. The need for it overwhelms her most basic instincts and forces her to commit unthinkable acts.

Now you have a good reason for supernatural influence in your antagonist and you have a climber who can be confronted. When the hunters and mastermind finally meet, your characters have to make an ethical choice to help this person or destroy him outright. It's up to you whether he's salvageable — regretting all the things he's done — or not. Maybe his will is no longer his own and the knife possesses him. Is it fair to kill him under those circumstances?

Remember that you need to create some means by which the hunters learn that their enemy has a power source, and you need to suggest that the villain can be redeemed. Otherwise, how do the hunters learn that anything is amiss about her? Investigating a string of murders might lead to a character being trapped by the climber and forced to witness a ritual performed for her source. Maybe the villain struggles with the act or seeks to escape but carries it out in an almost zombie-like trance, only to recover afterward and try to cope with what has happened.

imbued detect and investigate. The hook should be a minor participant in the climber's rise; the veritable tip of the iceberg. Otherwise, the imbued and players get to learn too much about your mastermind too quickly.

Finally, leave room for the climber to continue developing. Allowing the villain to evolve alongside your characters is a great plot device. Maybe he's a powerful businessperson and has some supernatural ties, but the goal he truly strives for is outside the natural world, and he still has to undergo some changes to achieve it. By developing along with the antagonist, the players may not feel that their characters are overwhelmed from the beginning of the chronicle, nor may they be horribly outmatched by the climber in the end. All parties have undergone transitions.

Say a master rot creates its first servant — under the pretense of adopting a family — when the characters are imbued. As the chosen become more capable and informed, the creature gets stronger and gathers more followers. The good guys and bad guys grow in parallel and are great foils for each other.

Getting Started

We've mentioned this a few times thus far, but it bears repeating. The best place to get your antagonist-motivated chronicle started is on the largely insignificant, disposable level of his agenda. That is, with the pawns or contributors on the bottom rung of his ladder. These are the small-time participants, lackeys or unwitting puppets who are charged with missions or who perform duties that directly or indirectly support your mastermind's efforts in minor ways. These people or creatures aren't trusted with much or any awareness of the big picture, and they're probably dumb, weak or oblivious. As a result, they're also inclined to laziness, mistakes, carelessness or incompetence — the very qualities that tend to attract hunter attention when the supernatural or simply the morally intolerable makes itself known.

Bruisers fail to make a delivery on time and dispose of their kidnapping victim rather than take her to a boss-bloodsucker. The cops look the other way, but the chosen realize that this is the third person taken from the same area in as many weeks. Hunters investigating an urban shapechanger get a hold of his phone bill and see that he makes repeated after-business-hours calls to a company in another city. Closer inspection proves that all the calls are received specifically after dark in that town, suggesting that is the only time when the recipient is working — or has risen and is able to answer.

Go back to the diagram of your antagonist's power structure and look at the bottom tier. This is where your chronicle and the hunters should start. Encountering a supernaturally controlled organization from the ground floor makes the true force at work mysterious and unknown, virtually challenging the imbued to investigate further and climb higher. And yet, starting characters at the bottom also allows them to sniff out only the barest hint of trouble — not too much that they catch on to what's really going on too soon. They have to work for their discoveries.

Starting at the bottom also affords the imbued some protection from their potential new adversary, whether they know it or not. If hunters discovered conspiracy or secret supernatural agendas among the mid- to high-level participants in a mastermind's scheme, the powers that be would soon catch on to trouble. The hunters would attract attention that dabbling with small-time contributors largely precludes.

Starting at the bottom emphasizes the importance of starting your game out with manageable opponents, too. If the hunters were recently imbued, they don't have the experience or awareness to take on an ancient vampire. If you want to get them there one day, start them out against bruises and perhaps newly changed bloodsuckers who are largely in the hunters' same position. As the characters acquire expertise and knowledge of the real world, they can become aware of the true forces at work and seek to contend with them.

But a mastermind's organization built on all the lackeys and pawns in the world still needs to offer hunters something to latch onto if your chronicle is going to get underway. Underlings' mistakes are one avenue, but there are others. One of the best ways to do this is make one of the characters an employee or member of the organization. Although he may not remain in that position for long after he sees the things he works with, that character gives fellow imbued enough of a leg up to get the story started.

Use the media, especially when you want to give characters hints and information. Everyone with a car listens to the radio. The TV news or newspaper may run a seemingly innocuous story relating to a company or local development, and hunters recognize a creature's presence or involvement. Messenger intervention to change headlines can also point the imbued to what's going on behind the scenes of an article. All that remains is for the characters to follow up.

Striking a personal chord for one or more characters works well to inspire hunters, as well. A Defender

might witness a ghost walking the same pattern over and over again, night after night. The spirit disappears into buildings only to emerge again, still preoccupied with its journey, but seems to be harming no one. The hunter's inclination might be to leave the ghost alone. But if she discovers that the spirit is actually that of a convicted child molester, and she has children of her own, she might take a more personal interest in the being's activities. When the ghost actually proves to be a messenger between participants in a conspiracy, the hunter and her team is drawn into your chronicle.

* * *

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
From: hajirah252
Subject: Re: Unstoppable

I cannot abandon this fight. Allah has placed it before me as yet another trial, and I do not wish to fail as I did before.

There was a report today that the beast we pursue has taken ill and is in hospital. It can be hurt, though I do not know what caused its sickness if it is truly diseased. However, a path has been laid and I must walk it until the end.

Allah loves a servant who asks for His help. I hope that you will all remember us in your prayers as we think of you in ours. May we find humility in the service of His great will and be judged fit to enter His Paradise.

* * *

Foes Who Can Be Beaten

One of the qualities implicit to any antagonist is the "victory condition" that must be met to defeat him. A small group of hunters isn't going to suddenly dismantle a network of supernatural manipulation and influence that been years or even decades in the making. Despite player desires, hunters might never destroy your main group of masterminds, let alone confront them all.

At the same time, where's the fun in knowing that the bad guys are out there and you're not able to do anything about it? You have to strike a balance between placing easily annihilated foes around every corner and failing to give the characters achievable goals so they can consider their efforts successful.

While building your antagonist, keep an eye on his motivations and goals. When you introduce the hunters, think about what they'll want to do about the antagonist. Bringing in an Avenger who's satisfied only by killing an opponent who can't be defeated can go one of two ways. The hunter will mature, accept what she can't do and take what she can as enough, or she'll be frustrated. A frustrated character often means a pissed-off player. You want everyone to have a good time. That means establishing some victory conditions the imbued can meet to stymie or stop your mastermind, and give all your players something to do.

Maybe it's enough for the characters to discredit your antagonist's company. If she's a politician, proof that she's been selling government secrets is probably sufficient to destroy her influence without actually attacking her. It's also a damn sight more believable. And if you still have a player on your hands who needs to wipe out something, you can introduce a defeatable henchman working for the villain. Maybe the Zealot needs to hone his capabilities all chronicle long to defeat the henchman, which in turn allows other imbued to get what they need to discredit the mastermind. Undermining a powerful being's influence can also be established as one part of an ongoing plan for success. Maybe the creature needs to be humiliated before it can be attacked outright because going head to head with a business magnate would attract too much attention to the characters. Get her out of the limelight and down on street level, however, and the hunters get their shot when their foe is all but forgotten. Hopefully everyone is pleased by such contingencies to all-out victory, having achieved their own conditions — and your story remains plausible.

Friends and Enemies

One of the most powerful things you can do to make your players feel like their hunters are a real, integral part of the world is to design a few people meant to interact specifically with them. The friendly ones are those covered by the Contacts Background. The not-so-friendly ones are your recurring villains. At least, that's how things would work in a straightforward game. Being straightforward in **Hunter** is a great disservice to your players.

Start by thinking about what people the hunters are going to interact with regularly: co-workers, family, friends, acquaintances. These, along with the people in your antagonist's structure that you left for later development, are part of your wildcard pool. They are the extra bits and pieces that will save your butt later by letting you change developments to react to what your players do.

Take the above people, the ones the imbued know, and pick a few that you think will be easiest to draw into the game when you need them. Set down what these people do in a normal day, why the hunters know them and any other basics you might

need for simple setting characters. Then take each individually and write at least two origins for her, one in which she's a "good guy" (not necessarily aware of the antagonist's activities, but willing to help out against him) and another that sets her up as a "bad guy" (working for the antagonist, as an independent, or maybe just out to get one of the imbued for personal reasons).

These origins don't have to be terribly complicated. They should just be detailed enough to give you a starting point so that, while planning for your next session or in the middle of a scene, you can take that character out and use him in either role. However, the hunters are going to interact with her, probably long before a critical scene like the one in which she reveals whether she's a good guy or a bad guy, and they're going to want to know some things about her. This is especially true when you make her an important part of the scenario, possibly even involved in how the characters figure out the antagonist's power structure.

The trick, then, is designing the character's exterior so that she can be either a "good guy" or a "bad guy" later. In fact, if your two (or more) origins are realistic enough, it doesn't matter how the character acts. She's a normal person, maybe with a dark secret. As long as she holds that secret deeply enough, it won't surface through normal interaction with the hunters — until you need it to. Remember that paranoia and loneliness are central themes of **Hunter**; one of the best ways to convey them is with completely unexpected betrayal of the characters.

Let's say part of your chronicle has to do with ghosts rising from a cemetery. The mortician is a useful character. His "bad guy" origin involves a deal with a rot to let the monster sneak into the graveyard and raise spirits. He is a "good guy" when he suspects something fishy and is willing to help the characters if they tell him they want to stop a grave robber who hits the cemetery once in a while. On the outside, all the characters see is a slightly nervous, pale, thin man who isn't very sociable. You won't have to decide whether he's "good" or "bad" until the characters actually confront him about the ghosts or the rot gets him to inform on the characters.

Setting up multiple origins for an incidental character like this has another advantage. Sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you can't get your hunters to trust the person you want them to. Maybe it's player instinct or you've just built the personality so that it's too obvious that he will betray the characters. Instead of being stuck with a person you can't use because the imbued don't trust her, don't designate who the betrayer will be until you need her. The hunters can't guard against *everybody* you bring into the chronicle. At least one hunter will start working with at least one of your supporting characters at some point.

Don't spring the trap too soon, though. Once the characters trust your plant, you've hooked the fish. Take your time to reeling it in. Keep running the ally or friend as normal, just another person (unless you *want* your players to figure it out, in which case, drop some hints). Hold onto the decision until you need it. It works just as well the other way, where the hunters dislike a person because she's an asshole or has worked against them in the past. There will be plenty of time to make her "good," but you shouldn't do so until you need to. Here's a motto to live by: "No supporting character is good or evil until you need him to be."

Troubleshooting

Every good chronicle is a story, and all good stories have a beginning, middle and end. The imbuing is your beginning. The middle is decided by a combination of your guidance and the players' choices — the events you setup and the ones the hunters undertake. The end has to do with the victory conditions you decided upon when you create your antagonist, whether the characters accomplish them or not.

The most difficult and variable part of a chronicle, including an antagonist-driven one, is the middle. You have to be able to both predict what your players are going to do and be prepared to react when they outfox you. It happens to all Storytellers at some point; a player decides to do something completely off the wall or finds a hole in the scenario that you overlooked.

Such wrenches aren't a problem with a carefully designed, well-planned chronicle.

The supporting cast members you've created for your antagonist should provide you with the material you need to keep up with innovative players and to get distracted ones back on track. It's not a bad idea to take a few moments before each session to think about what you foresee happening and how it might go astray. Could the hunters mistake one creature for the true aggressor you have planned? Could they turn on the informant you plan to usher their way? What do you do when the players just plain refuse to follow your clues as you hope or won't take your hints and go completely off the map?

Let them.

Always remember that your antagonist doesn't depend upon the characters to pursue his own agenda. The chosen decide to ignore the walking dead planning to poison the city's water supply? Fine. The zombies proceed. People get sick. Some die. A character's sister falls ill. Let things go on, getting

worse and worse. The characters were imbued for a reason. If they don't do something about the problem, nobody will. Sooner or later, the characters probably feel compelled to address the harm or ruin that your mastermind plots.

Getting hunters back on track through tragic repercussions works great in some stories, but what happens if your antagonist has more subtle goals? You can always prepare some catchalls — threats that the characters absolutely, positively cannot ignore. Endangering family works well. Have a character's spouse sustain some kind of injury or insult. Not only does a hunter probably feel motivated to do something about it, she might persuade the other characters to help. Hell, she probably can't do the job without them.

Personal catchall developments tend to distract hunters from courses that you're not prepared to follow up on or that are dead ends in your understanding of the chronicle. Such personal agendas also distract characters from actions that you're not ready to pursue yet. The latter occurs when hunters want to go after your mastermind when you have myriad other layers of personnel for them to deal with first. The imbued may want nothing more than to lash out at their enemy, but endangered family probably takes priority. And in the time lost confronting your mastermind, he takes the opportunity to seal the hole through which the hunters could have struck at him. He has lawyers rewrite that contractual oversight, gets a restraining order, hires more security or arranges to frame the hunters in retaliation.

Another option is to make a distracting event refocus hunters on the goals you do hope they'll pursue. What starts out as an unrelated concern might actually tie into your antagonist or aspects of his organization. A hunter's wife may leave him, for example, distracting the character from a pointless avenue of investigation. In the wife's determination to start a new life for herself, she gets a job — coincidentally at the same company your mastermind runs. Now not only may the hunter want to convince his spouse to come back to him, he could want to convince her to work elsewhere, all the while avoiding the real reasons for his concerns — that monsters exist, even in his wife's office.

Think of possible emergency distractions for hunters shortly after character creation is complete. Choose at least one large-scale and one small-scale threat for each. If a character is a garbage collector, a small-scale threat could be getting laid off, with hints from the boss that the company's new owner is having certain people fired for specific but unknown reasons. That owner could be or have something to do with the vampire the hunter currently stalks. A more significant threat could be a "serial rapist" in the hunter's neighborhood who leaves its victims with neck wounds, and covered in blood. The character feels that he must deal with the creature and perhaps in doing so discovers that it was in fact sent to his neighborhood by some unknown party to find and kill the hunter's wife. Or, if the attacker proves to be a wildcard character from your mastermind's organization, the connections between recent attacks and the antagonist's activities are too close to overlook. Suddenly your waylaid or distracted hunters are back on track again.

* * *

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
From: cabbie22
Subject: Re: Unstoppable

Hajirah, I hope that wasn't a suicide note.

* * *

Conclusions

So there you have it: the trials and tribulations of building an evil empire. Although creating antagonist-driven chronicles isn't the only way to tell **Hunter** stories, they're perhaps the most effective at helping make your monsters and their masters as involved and developed as the players' own characters. When antagonists are challenging and daunting, hunters and players gain all the more respect for the creatures. Sure, mindless zombies may still wander back alleys and can be put down with sufficient force. But a mere handful of encounters with a cunning, connected and conspiratorial entity can quickly teach the imbued that there are more powerful and predatory forces at work in the night. Hunters and players therefore gain a new and well-deserved respect for the beings they seek to oppose, and your games are made all the more rewarding for it.

Building Better Monsters

Hunters don't get their name because they sit around all night philosophizing about the nature of the Messengers, about the duty of the imbued or about the origins of the supernatural. *Some* hunters may very well do that, but most hunters' existence is dedicated to confronting the creatures that lurk in the shadows and that prey upon people. The core of a **Hunter** chronicle is therefore the monsters that you create to confront the characters. The foes the imbued face define the action and set the tone of your game. If you consistently create mindless killing machines, your game can

devolve into mindless killing as hunters respond in kind. If you create compelling, innovative and cunning monsters, you have the joy of running a truly successful chronicle as hunters must become the same to contend with their opponents.

Every great storytelling episode involves a great antagonist. This truism particularly applies to **Hunter**. The game advocates regular, everyday people as protagonists. They're awakened to and confronted by a world populated by monstrosities that lurk everywhere and that seem to influence the very society in which people live. That said, some of the best creature-antagonists to face hunters aren't terrifying for their freakishness, bizarre appearance or inscrutable nature. They're terrifying because they're similar to hunters and regular people — and yet are absolutely inhuman. A bloodsucker *can* be frightening because it has a mutated body and horrendously warped features — it's a veritable abomination. But a being that looks human, sounds human and even thinks like a human — yet drinks the blood of children to survive — can be even more horrifying. Creatures aren't necessarily monstrous for what they are or what they look like, but for what they do. And if hunters can identify with a monster through appearance or attitude, yet the thing is a rampant murderer, the creature is all the more terrifying for the hunters' very empathy with it. How far are the imbued from being monsters themselves? Within such identification lies the true horror of facing monsters. It can mean facing the monsters within one's self.

> **Note:** The creature templates presented later in this chapter are intended to provide you with examples of idealized, identifiable monsters with which hunters can contend. Their profiles are based on the monster-creation rules in the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**. If you don't have that book, feel free to make up your own rules for the powers suggested in the templates.

This chapter offers advice and ideas on creating monsters that are less abominations and more beings with which hunters can identify. It suggests ways of showing the imbued reflections of themselves in the beings they face, raising issues of what makes a monster: appearance or behavior. By introducing such beings into your game as antagonists (and perhaps even as hunters' allies), you heighten the reality of your stories. Now, not only are the imbued normal folks in abnormal situations, so are the creatures they deal with.

Five Steps to Building a Better Monster

The following are some general guidelines that you can follow to create intelligent, frightening and entertaining antagonists for your hunters. Hopefully these pointers help you avoid tentacled horrors and single-minded eating machines in your games, replacing them with beings that seem almost human, but aren't quite given the despicable actions they're capable of.

Monsters Are Not Disposable

In many roleplaying games, players can occasionally expect their characters to run into chumps that they beat into submission or talk their way past easily. For our purposes here, we'll call these guys mooks. They're the same thugs and stooges in action movies who charge the hero one at a time, queuing up for their dose of a heroic smackdown. If used judiciously, mooks can spice up a dull session with a quick combat episode or they can set the scene for an important encounter. Mooks show up in most roleplaying games because they're useful distractions.

Hunter is not like most roleplaying games. Players — or their characters — should never, ever, take an encounter with monsters lightly. Even the most pathetic shambler can pose a danger if it's not paid due respect. It keeps coming until destroyed; knocking it down once doesn't put it out. It may disregard hunters to attack someone else, perhaps the very person whom the chosen seek to protect. And, if the thing isn't put down quickly and quietly, hunters may attract unwanted public or even police attention. A dead body at hunters' feet can still look like murder, no matter how long the body has been dead. The point is if monsters were all stupid or weak or bumbling, they wouldn't influence the world.

If you want to run a tense **Hunter** game, strike a healthy respect for and fear of the supernatural into your players and imbued. This doesn't mean you have to boost every monster's stats by a dot or three. A lot of the effect can be achieved through in-game descriptions. If a character attacks a monster, downplay the effects of the strike (unless it destroys the monster, of course). Describe how a shotgun blast tears a shambler in half, and then reveal that both pieces now claw toward the characters. If a monster soaks all of an attack's damage, don't simply tell the players that. Describe how the monster's head snaps back from a perfect shot between the eyes, the monster shakes the strike off and then springs forward with renewed vigor. A broken arm is a crippling injury to a mortal. It's a mere inconvenience to a monster. Your players should never know how badly hurt or damaged a monster is,

especially if they deal with a low-powered one. The vampire who commands all the forces of the night terrifies everyone. It's the weaker monsters that need to be made frightening. Monsters should never go down with a whimper. They should go down screaming for revenge, spraying the walls with gore and absorbing ungodly amounts of firepower.

Guns also need to be addressed if your monsters are going to be frightening. Ever notice how many **Hunter** characters stock up on the biggest guns they can find? Guns should not be the solution to defeating every monster. This is not to say that monsters have to be bulletproof. Just keep track of how much ammo characters carry and how much is loaded. If a character squeezes off all six rounds from her revolver, don't remind her player that it's time to reload. If the player forgets and announces that her character fires again, the hunter wastes a vital action as she learns her lesson the hard way. Don't be afraid to arm your monsters with guns, too. Sure, creatures might be of supernatural origins, but a mundane bullet is hard to beat when it comes to killing ordinary people, especially at long range. Hunters aren't the only ones who can resort to firearms.

Finally, use monsters' attacks to their greatest advantage. If a creature relies on claws or other hand-to-hand attacks, only a dumb one attacks from a distance. Shamblers might lurk in alleyways, parking garages or other places with restricted lines of sight and lots of cover, waiting to get close and personal with victims. A bloodsucker who has access to a pipe as a weapon probably doesn't defer to fists. Let your creatures be as resourceful as their imbued foes and you have some frightening antagonists with which to confront hunters, even if those monsters are the "weak" members of their kind.

Monsters Were Once Human

Almost every monster in the World of Darkness was human at one time or another. The walking dead and vampires had to live before they could die. Many shapeshifters were raised among humans while goblins and warlocks often led mundane lives before assuming their supernatural states. All this means many monsters, particularly newly created ones, still have ties to humanity. When a person becomes a vampire, his friends, family and co-workers don't simply wither away. Focus on ways to present monsters that heighten their human origin as a contrast to their current nature. Never simply tell players that three shamblers approach their hunters. Describe each zombie's shuddering gait and emphasize the details of its clothing, whether jeans and a T-shirt or a rotted business suit. Give even your "minor" monsters unique qualities and mannerisms. Download and print out random pictures of people off the Internet and use them as visual aids, perhaps doctored with an illustration program. Flash players a portrait and tell them a shambler looks like that person. Give the Merciful in the group a reason to reach out to monsters and remind other characters that many monsters weren't always so. Maybe a staggering shambler looks like a loved one and is enough to stop an Avenger mid-swing. Maybe the human side of the creature can still be salvaged, or perhaps the monstrous side of a hunter is put in check by the humanity of a creature.

An effective way to emphasize a monster's human origins is to introduce normal people who knew the monster before. While the characters may have no compunction about shooting a vampire, they may be at a loss in how to deal with that vampire's mortal wife who only wants to find out the truth behind her husband's disappearance. Does the bloodsucker still love her? Can it even acknowledge her any longer? And can hunters destroy the creature in the woman's presence?

Similarly, hunters' co-workers, friends or loved ones could become monsters, whether at the hands of imbued enemies or simply by happenstance. How do the chosen deal with monsters whom they know were people not long ago? Where do love and loyalty end and the mission begin?

Consider, too, that many monsters can move easily among humans without attracting attention. Second sight might help hunters identify beings as wrong, but if the street or subway platform is crowded, even something human-seeming can disappear in the mob. Regular folks can't identify monsters from other people, either. While hunters might be justified in attacking a possessing ghost, onlookers see a defenseless person assaulted by seeming criminals. Monsters who assume human form can even ingratiate themselves into the society they prey upon. A shapeshifter could live in an apartment complex for years without raising suspicion and might even be known as a good neighbor. When hunters come to confront him, an angry community might confront them, with the local police on the way.

Monsters' seeming humanity is a weapon in their arsenal. They can use it to evade, parry or subdue the imbued. Highlight the futility of pursuing the hunt in the presence of regular people by putting the imbued on a social island. People unwilling or unable to believe that the nice old man down the street is actually a creature in disguise surround such beings.

A monster's past life can also be an important part of your unfolding story. You can bury hints and important information about a creature there. If hunters want to better understand what they're up against, they have to research who he was before. They can learn what was important to him then and what motivates him now. The more intelligent of the walking dead, in particular, demand this sort of treatment. They don't just wander around. They head in a direction that can be indicated by their past.

Construct complete origins for your monsters, detailing their history as humans. Compose a brief biography, complete with a network of mortal friends and contacts. Somewhere in there can be the trigger event that led to a supernatural being. Likewise, the solution to the being's condition might hide in its human past. Maybe it needs to be absolved of guilt for a child's death and then it can let go. "Building an Evil Empire," p. 27, goes a long way toward helping you create full-fledged origins and identities for your creatures.

The key to deciding a human origin and history for your monster is making it available to the imbued. You might write a novel about a shapechanger's past, but if the hunters never learn who raised the manbeast, or why it has a grudge against a particular company, you've wasted your time. If characters are going to appreciate a monster's humanity and identify with it, you need to leave tips and clues about its past — or at least the means to learning more about the being. Wise hunters never attack a monster on first contact, unless the situation is do-or-die. They learn whatever they can about a target, stalking it, performing surveillance, investigating it. Not even monsters necessarily live in a vacuum. They might have drivers' licenses, mortgages or even social security numbers. A series of assumed names could be traced back to a single person born a century ago. Old pictures might reveal places a creature frequented or friends or family with whom he spent time and which might be visited even now. If you present such tips to players or allude to conducting research into a creature's identity, you can reveal the vulnerable person the monster once was. When hunters get to know their target better, they might empathize with what it has endured or seeks to accomplish and further its agenda rather than interfere with it.

Monsters Are Mysterious

While you may want to incorporate some element of humanity into each of your monsters, don't overdo it. Hunters shouldn't understand monsters fully. They might learn why a monster acts the way it does, and they might even be able to predict its actions, but there should be a strong sense of the unknown at the core of the supernatural. A spirit might seek to protect its family home from destruction, which the imbued can understand, but the degree of dedication that is required to exist beyond the grave should be unknowable — and frightening.

One of the biggest temptations of running **Hunter** is introducing "classic" monsters from other Storyteller games set in the World of Darkness. **Vampire: The Masquerade**, for example, is dedicated to a variety of cool undead such as Toreador and Gangrel, which can become **Hunter** villains. If your players own or play **Vampire**, however, you eliminate any mystery that you could hope to create about a hunter opponent. Your players know how blood points work and what Disciplines are available to such bloodsuckers. So why create a villain whom players know before their characters even meet her?

If your troupe knows the other World of Darkness games, don't be afraid to flex your authority as Storyteller to reinterpret, manipulate or utterly change how monsters are presented in **Hunter**. If you want to keep your players in the dark about a creature, simply mix and match the abilities of a few stereotypical monster types. Notice that in the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**, you're invited to pick and choose the powers you want for your antagonists. Those powers derive from the other Storyteller games, but they're not ascribed to any particular type of vampire or spirit. As far as **Hunter** is concerned, there doesn't have to be any particular types of clans or tribes or traditions of monsters. They can all just be monsters. Use that freedom to your advantage to create a mysterious creature that experienced players can't pigeonhole.

To further confuse your players, there's no reason why you can't mix and match capabilities *across* monster types. A spirit might have some powers normally manifested by shapechangers, or nightmares might be capable of wizard spells. Your players (and their characters) will have no idea what kinds of creatures they're up against. The danger here is that your monsters can fail to make sense. Don't capriciously toss a bag of tricks together without any thought. Consider the role the monster plays in your story. Does it oppose the hunters or aid them? Does it prey upon humanity or does it try to avoid contact with people? Based on what you want the monster to do, construct a package of capabilities that serves its goals with perhaps a surprise or two to spring on the characters. A vampire that thrives on enticing humans to its isolated lair needs powers that allow it to cloak its true appearance or mentally overpower hu-

mans. It may have the capability to flee quickly from danger in case it's discovered, but lacks any real toe-to-toe combat skills. On the other hand, a berserk shapeshifter that depends on its brutal physical strength to survive might not appear to have any magical talents beyond its supernatural strength and endurance — until it does something unforeseen such as become incorporeal.

To keep the mystery of your creatures alive, never allow their powers to become routine or monotonous. When a creature uses an effect, don't simply tell the players, "The vampire locks eyes with yours, tries to use his Command power, but fails." That gives away far too much information. Players and hunters should discover a creature's power only through observation — or victimization. That means you need to keep things vague and uncertain. An alternative to the previous example might go: "The creature locks eyes with yours. You try to look away, but can't escape his piercing gaze. For a moment, you feel a mighty weight bearing down on your mind, like it's going to press every secret you ever knew from your mouth... but then, amazingly, the pressure fades and your will feels like your own again." The players have less of an idea what the vampire just tried to accomplish, although they have some sense of the effort from your description. And even if they do divine what really happened, the effect is scary and personal, not transparent and routine.

The most important point is that the creature's power is still mysterious and thus disturbing. The players don't know what could happen if the vampire's power works — or maybe it did and the victim never knew she confessed all her secrets directly to the creature's mind.... All the hunters know is that if the thing merely looks at them, it can do something to them. That scrap of information may inspire far more fear in your players as they imagine what the creature is capable of than they would suffer from any powers that it does possess.

Monsters Have Motives

Construct logical agendas and goals for your monsters. Wandering monsters may be fine for other games, but monsters that were once human have human motives, or something akin to them. They have their own reasons for doing things, whether it's stalking particular victims or wandering the hallway of an old house over and over again.

Of course, *logical* agendas are a somewhat relative concept. What's illogical to a hunter might be completely reasonable to a vampire or spirit that knows something that the imbued doesn't, or that approaches a subject from an alien point of view. The driving force of a monster's action can derive from its past, can run counter to what the characters hope to accomplish (such as salvage a being that seeks to destroy itself) or can involve schemes with or against other supernatural creatures that hunters can't even imagine. Not even your players need to know why a monster does something. It simply needs to have its own reasons, whether they make sense to anyone else or not.

One of the fun parts of running a **Hunter** game is watching as the players slowly learn a monster's motivations by piecing its actions into a coherent whole. Over time, a monster's behavior should assume some semblance of a pattern. If your monsters behave in a chaotic and utterly nonsensical manner all the time, players will be frustrated by your stories. Monsters should be mysterious, and they should never be completely predictable, but they should still work toward some goal that hunters can comprehend if they look hard enough — even if your creatures' goal is something as simple as destroying the hunters in order to save themselves.

A shapeshifter, for example, may want to destroy a local processing plant that dumps raw waste into the environment. The creature might decide to drive away the plant's employees by attacking and killing a few of them. When the imbued first encounter the monster, they may chock it up as a bloodthirsty, murderous beast. But as its actions begin to run counter to that judgment — the thing heals a homeless child struck ill by the plant's toxic run-off, or it destroys a delivery truck carrying parts and supplies to the plant — the real story behind the creature starts to emerge. The players might even argue over how to deal with the monster as their initial impression clashes with the new discovery of a creature trying to destroy a potentially greater (mutual?) threat.

It's important to realize, however, that while monsters have motives, many are also intelligent and seek to compensate for hunters when the imbued are encountered or get in the way. As discussed later on, monsters just don't understand who or what the chosen are. Hunters are just as much a mystery to monsters as monsters are to hunters. But that doesn't mean monsters dismiss the imbued out of hand and continue pursuing a goal in disregard of a clear and obvious threat. The imbued have the advantage of surprise the first few times they act against a target. Over time, a monster develops methods and plans for dealing with the newcomers, though. Let your players witness this transition as an enduring target prepares defenses for hunters' edges and tactics after initial efforts against it. After hunters intrude upon monsters' existence once or twice, the creatures adapt to

New Kids in Town

As seeming new players on the World of Darkness stage, hunters might attract the attention of various supernatural creatures. You'd think that a sudden newcomer would make quite a splash in a world populated for millennia by the same kinds of entities. This has not yet been the case, though. Hunters' emergence on the scene has largely been received more with a whimper than a bang.

The emergence and existence of the imbued has essentially slipped under the radar of most supernatural creatures. Each general type of being has its own reasons why word of hunters has not become widespread. For the most part, however, monsters don't give the human masses a lot of thought. People are an ignorant, oblivious herd. If anything, humans should worry about the existence of monsters, but the "cattle" are too stupid or preoccupied to even know that such beings exist. Furthermore, the ratio of hunters to regular people in the world is infinitesimal. The imbued are the veritable needle in the haystack, but in this case monsters don't even know to look for them. The imbued largely pass by unseen and unrecognized.

You would think that hunters' marked difference from the rest of humanity would make them stand out like a sore thumb. The imbued know monsters exist and take action against them. Hunters arise from the masses, and arguably still fit right in as everyday folks such as farmers, plumbers and mechanics, but the fact that they see and act against the supernatural should make them obtrusive. Hunters' very awareness and inexplicable capabilities should attract the attention of all inhuman beings. And yet they don't. The imbued continue to go largely unnoticed for various subtle reasons.

Vampires: Bloodsuckers were once human—once. They were killed and rose again as the undead, feeding upon humanity to survive. When you die and come back to life, you tend to forget what it means to be human over time. Emotions fade. Ceaseless existence becomes tedious. Ages pass, times change, but you don't. Before long, you're an outsider to the society to which you used to belong. The brief life span of the average person is a pittance to you. Humans no longer matter. They're just food. No more a threat than cows in a field.

So when young vampires — ones who have been embraced relatively recently and who don't have the wisdom of the ages that you do — report about people with strange powers and inexplicable sight, you take it all with a large grain of salt. Those kinds of humans don't exist. They never have. Why would they now? The notion is pathetic, like cows that have learned to swing swords. More likely, your lessers have encountered mages, spirits or skinchangers and misunderstand what they've met. There's nothing to worry about, so no more need be said of the matter.

Of all vampires, the "young" ones, the undead who still interact with and understand people, the ones still on the streets and in the public eye, encounter hunters. These are the "small fry" that the imbued spot and confront. As elders rightly believe, newly created vampires don't understand all the denizens of the world. Mages, spirits, shapechangers, goblins and hunters are all strange and confusing entities. So these "children" don't always understand who or what they encounter and don't know how to identify such beings or raise an alarm about them.

Indeed, the truly cunning vampire who senses the imbued as something apart from humanity says *nothing* of them to other nightcrawlers. The existence of these people is a potential weapon at the vampire's disposal. He can leak information about rivals to these people and let them destroy other leaches without tipping his hand. The wise vampire can use hunters as pawns who may or may not know for whom they work or why. Keeping the existence of the chosen a secret is advantageous, and thus word of the imbued does not spread far.

Spirits: How long have people existed? Millennia? And how long have people been dying? Millennia? So how many spirits can exist in this world or the next when people have been dying for millennia and each restless soul is immortal?

Spirits are innumerable, the products of countless generations of humanity. Even if many have gone to their final rewards, many, many others remain behind to pursue objectives that were important to them in life, and that consume their unliving existence. So now compare to those vast numbers of obsessed ghosts an extremely new phenomenon of very few people who can see spirits in the living world. The math is simple. Most spirits don't even acknowledge the existence of hunters. The imbued are just more people (spirits in the making, really), and they probably have nothing to do with the very personal goals or objects over which ghosts obsess. Hunters just don't matter.

Sure, some spirits encounter ghosts (or more likely the other way around), but that doesn't matter, either. If one ghost meets people who can see him and who might help or hinder him fulfill an agenda in the world, that simply doesn't matter to the rest. That one or even handful of ghosts is also infinitesimal compared to the swarms that exist. Word of hunters' existence simply can't spread from so few spirits to so many. And even if it did, other ghosts wouldn't listen because they're wrapped up in their own causes or their causes don't lend themselves to the involvement of some smattering of living people.

The few other spirits that might listen to word of imbued existence can seek them out for help or to harass the chosen, but news of these strange people just doesn't spread throughout spirit-kind.

Pretty much all the same applies to the walking dead and their greater awareness of hunters. Zombies are the products of spirits, after all. Even if a walking corpse is smart enough to perceive the imbued as something new and noteworthy, what does that have to do with gaining revenge on your own murderer or making sure that your favorite nephew is safe? The walking dead just don't care that hunters exist. The imbued are simply obstacles, like everything and everyone else who gets in a zombie's way.

Shapechangers: Shapechangers are perhaps among the monsters who can best understand people. Werewolves and other shifters can assume human form, so they know what it means to walk like men. So you'd think shapechangers of all creatures would collectively acknowledge the imbued. The problem is, a lot of werebeasts hate humanity. To their minds, people are an abomination that has tarnished the earth. People aren't worth understanding or sympathizing with. They're better off dead. Humans who can wield strange powers therefore merit no more consideration than people who poison water bodies or pave over forests.

More subtly, however, is the fact that many shapechanger cultures such as that of werewolves honor courage, bravery and martial skill. These beings gain renown among their own for deeds and feats. Defeating monstrous opponents gains them honor. What honor is there in killing weak, pitiful human beings?

"But this one could brandish a tire iron as if it were made of silver?"

"Sure, Tells-Tall-Tales, sure."

Skinchanger society simply would not accept stories about hunters and their capabilities. Even if imbued are killed, few shapechangers can tell the tale without bringing shame rather than glory upon themselves. Thus, little or nothing is said of hunters at man-beast gatherings. Individual shapechangers can even feel guilt or shame for fighting what must have in truth been a pitiful opponent.

Wizards: Like shapechangers, sorcerers have the potential to recognize and understand hunters. Mages are ostensibly mortal people, folks who emerge from the masses as different or changed. And yet, wizard society at large overlooks or misunderstands the imbued. Novice mages are like newly embraced vampires. They're learning about the world's other inhabitants, so can confuse hunters with bloodsuckers, werebeasts, nightmares or even other kinds of mages. Masters who influence and direct wizard efforts therefore dismiss stories of such "miraculous" human beings.

Alternatively, wizard encounters with chosen are misinterpreted as meetings with sorcerers or with other wizards in the making. Hunters arise from the human masses. Hunters can do some amazing things. Hunters don't really understand what's happening to them or why the world suddenly seems different. All these conditions apply equally to emerging and inexperienced wizards. If anything, hunters should be taken under experienced wizards' wing because the neonates obviously have twisted interpretations of what they've become and what they're supposed to do in the world. And though the initiation of more wizards is important for the preservation of magic in the world, the confusion of a handful of novices is unimportant to the greater whole. Indeed, it's expected at that early stage, so nothing more need be said about it.

And then there are technological wizards, who use science to perform miracles. They want to squash the existence of the supernatural, much like many hunters do. Their desire for structure, stability and control over the world therefore gives them the potential for a unique take on hunters. It just doesn't bear out. Yes, the imbued are believed to pose a threat when they're recognized at all, but no more so than other supernatural beings that proliferate the shadows. Reports of hunters' activities, marked file number KX34578-1827, are an extreme minority and are lost in the bureaucracy as the activities of "just more vampires or shapechangers" — beings to be eradicated when the System gets around to it.

Low-ranking techno agents who stumble across the imbued and sense that their existence means something more can be frustrated with their superiors' ambivalence. These agents can continue to investigate the imbued, but filing more paperwork does little to make the machine run faster. These agents can instead utilize hunters as pawns of their own to turn against other supernaturals. After all, that seems to be what these "changed people" are inclined to do, anyway. And why report to your bosses that a unique new being eliminated the threat that you were ordered to, when you can arrange to have it done for you and can claim all the prestige for yourself? Better to keep that fact a secret.

Nightmares: Goblin society is heavily divided between the haves and have-nots. The lower classes are the most likely to encounter hunters, yet the upper classes' obsession with politicking and socializing leaves many of the commoners' concerns — such as the imbued — unaddressed. Besides, hunters can seem largely like any other dispirited, uninspired beings that stamp out joy and creativity. How are they really any different from all the other beings that drain the glamour from the world? Whether they're new or old, unique or more of the same isn't really worth talking about. It's too depressing.

such interventions. A vampire may choose its victims carefully in a particular neighborhood, ensuring that it isn't watched. A shapeshifter might be on the lookout for people who can look directly upon its man-beast form and not flee in terror.

Truly wily or intelligent creatures that encounter hunters adapt their motives to involve or counter these humans. These creatures still don't know what the imbued are, but they might know a tool or resource when they see one. If hunters tend to attack monsters or seek to draw out their buried souls, they can do so on cunning monsters' behalf. Creatures that plot against each other may try to bring hunters into the conflict on their side, lying to the chosen or manipulating the humans into doing dirty work for them. Or if a spirit wants revenge against a person, why not frame that person to appear in league with other monsters and then lead hunters right to the subject? The most motivated entity has a plan, but knows how to adjust it to achieve his ends most effectively, sometimes at the expense of the chosen.

Monsters Are Monstrous

This might seem obvious, but it's worth discussing: Monsters are not just humans with fangs, fur or a few funky powers. They are inherently inhuman, regardless of their often human origins and appearance. Monsters may retain some of their human feelings and desires, but these tend to be distorted into an outlook formed from an other-than-human perspective. People might be friends, irrelevant nuisances or enemies to a monster, but they are always something different. Monsters exist within, around and despite human society, but they are never completely a part of it. Don't let your monsters become too mundane. Monsters are more effective if they're integrated into your story as fully as any human character, but don't confine them to human emotions or actions. A shapeshifter who allies with a group of hunters to destroy a vampire may think nothing of using a busload of children as bait to draw the blood drinker into the open. The werewolf looks at the children the same way as a fisherman might look at a worm. They're useful tools that happen to be alive. He might look at the hunters in a similar way, treating them much like a duck hunter would a retriever: They're companions, but not truly equals.

Emphasize the casual manner in which some monsters victimize humans. A vampire might refer to feeding on and inadvertently killing someone in an off-handed way because such occurrences are an annoying but accepted part of her reality. Even monsters that empathize with humanity might look at a human in the same way that a person looks at a helpless endangered species — with pity, sorrow and maybe a hint of contempt. Try to draw out these feelings when roleplaying a monster, especially one with which the characters interact in a peaceable manner. A spirit may offer to lead characters to something they seek, but drops the whole thing when hunters aren't willing to kill criminals to get it.

Imagine trying to explain to someone who has never slept what it feels like to fall asleep. Now, imagine a werewolf trying to explain to a hunter how he can change forms, or a mage trying to explain how reality can be manipulated. Monsters approach life from a fundamentally different point of view than hunters and other humans. This is an important distinction in **Hunter**. The chosen may have edges, but they're still human. They experience the same range of emotions and desires as other people. Monsters can't and don't. Keep that in mind when creating your monsters. That hint of the alien can strongly reinforce the mysterious and unfathomable nature of the *inhuman*, and stands in sharp contrast to their *human* origins.

Spirits and the Walking Dead

Spirits are the most versatile type of monster that hunters can face, manifesting in various forms from disembodied souls to possessing ghosts to shambling zombies to walking corpses that can pass for living beings. They're the most common things hunters might contend with compared to other creatures such as vampires, werewolves and wizards. At least, the imbued seem to encounter zombies and restless souls more often than they do other beings, perhaps due to a connection between hunters' emergence and the proliferation of the dead in the living world.

The defining feature of spirits, at least the intelligent ones, is that almost all have strong personal ties to mortal existence. While other creature types exist within humanity but are not part of it, spirits are (or were) fundamentally human. While the process of death, not surprisingly, changes the beings' outlooks and values, many spirits have full recall of life's details and react to events and people as they would have when they were alive. At least, that's true of the ghosts who died fairly recently, perhaps within the last century. Spirits that have lingered longer have been dead longer than they were alive and have probably forgotten the subtleties of life such as breathing, caring and having a body. These beings are more enigmatic than their "newer" kind, pursuing agendas or carrying out acts that can confuse hunters because they're motivated by events that occurred in other eras or by values that were important at other times.

Regardless of how long spirits have been dead, they should provoke very important questions about the nature of the calling and the afterlife for hunters. Apparently, the only sin a person has to commit to remain beyond the grave is to die. A spirit's nature appears to be determined primarily by its mortal personality, not by any thirst for blood or a staunch distaste for civilization. So is hunting spirits hypocrisy for the imbued? "Here but for the grace of God go I... for now?"

A second common distinguishing characteristic of spirits is their relative ignorance of the supernatural. Other monster types might learn the nature of their state from a mentor, or might come to grips with it as part of their very existence. Spirits, by contrast, often do not understand why they're in their current condition, or have little knowledge of the supernatural beyond their own personal experience. Much like hunters, many spirits find themselves unwittingly and unwillingly thrown into a situation they could not anticipate. They don't know why they still linger in the world and some want nothing more than to leave. Spirits therefore make very effective sympathetic antagonists because their confusion and ignorance mirror those of hunters.

Unlike the other creatures presented in this chapter, who can pursue goals that transcend human comprehension or who fulfill perverse needs such as drinking blood or interfering with society's "progress," most spirits have very intimate aspirations and ties to the world. Spirits are fitting foes for the imbued because their place in the greater World of Darkness is definable, understandable and often amenable to resolution. The struggle to reunite a spirit with his lost love, for example, might not be an epic journey in the grand scheme of things, but it can be a comprehensible task with a conclusive finale.

Motivations

Spirits are inspired by whatever impulse keeps them in the mortal world. Anything that can consume and direct a life passionately has the potential to create and motivate a spirit. The difference between ghosts and most mortals is that the former take their objectives deadly seriously. (Living people who do the same might be candidates for a supernatural existence.) If a passion was strong enough to keep death from engulfing someone fully, then it permeates everything that the resulting spirit does. Imagine a person completely focused on something such as being head over heels in love — but he dies before he can express or share his love. Therein lie the makings of a spirit. A ghost's obsession is always at the forefront of its mind. Every action it performs is meant to fulfill some goal related to its focus, whether there's a reasonable connection between the two or not. A ghost's overriding goal comes up in even casual conversation, assuming the spirit stops to speak with anyone who does not contribute to its objective. Virtually everything a spirit does is somehow connected to resolving its feelings toward the object of its dedication.

A spirit's attitude toward its obsession determines how it behaves in the living world. Spirits have a potent emotional attachment to the object of their desire be it hate, envy, love, fear or regret. The emotion probably reveals a lot about the ghost's true nature. A lingering being that hates his ex-wife might be curmudgeonly in general, and rude and abusive toward hunters. Such driving emotions can quickly be taken too far, too. A soul that has a deep love for her daughter may murder any of the girl's potential boyfriends in a misguided attempt to prevent the daughter from suffering a broken heart. A spirit's actions should be colored by its obsession, and the deeds it performs can often be interpreted from the perspective of the ghost's feelings, even if in distorted, nearly non sequitur ways.

Tactics

Spirits tend to draw upon their life experiences when dealing with the living. A spirit that was shy or withdrawn in life probably avoids humans in death. However, if that spirit once hated bullies and stuck up for himself when pushed, he may react boldly to aggressive hunters. It's very important to decide a spirit's personality while alive. Determine how it probably reacted to people before — whether they were loving, abrasive, demanding, courteous or reserved — and translate that response to its current behavior. The spirit of a stern schoolteacher may lecture hunters as if they were her students, chiding them for being noisy and addressing them in an assertive, authoritarian way. Spirits often have trouble coming to grips with their immortal situation (some don't even know they're dead!), resorting to old habits and worldviews to put their experiences into a context they can comprehend.

Some ghosts come to enjoy and take advantage of their state. Freed of life's consequences for actions, a soul can revel in murder, arson or any number of despicable acts. Indeed, many spirits give in to their base urges. This problem is particularly apparent with restless children. A *living* child probably does not fully understand the repercussions of his actions. In death, he might not realize that his actions inflict trauma, pain and misery — and now no one ever scolds him for anything. Even a spirit that strives to do well by others may give in to temptation, perhaps resorting to vio-

The Pursuer (Walking Dead)

This doesn't involve you. Step aside before it does.

Prelude: Seven faces, each belonging to seven different people. All of whom will be dead within the month if Luis Sanchez has his way. Luis remembers them all, not just the two who smiled as they beat him. Not just the two who leered over his broken body as they watched him die. He remembers the others who came out of the bar to watch the fight, any one of whom could have called the police, stepped in to break it up... anything but stand there. He remembers how they all shuffled back inside as he faded away. With the spectacle of his murder over, they had no reason to stay outside in the cold.

Luis doesn't ponder his current state. He doesn't want to confront his parents, sister or his fiancée, and rarely thinks of them anymore, preferring to focus on the cold rage that keeps him moving toward his goal. Thoughts of the happy times he spent at home spoil his resolve and strike weakness and fear into him, none of which he can accept if he's going to complete his task.

Luis spends his nights staking out the bar, watching for any of the regulars involved in his death. He even goes inside once in a while, though he conceals his identity, to speak directly into the minds of those who wronged him. So far he's claimed the lives of two. Neither put up much of a struggle. Both begged pathetically for their lives. Luis gladly showed them the same mercy he got. He hopes that the two who attacked him will be more satisfying.

For now, Luis enjoys watching fear slowly take hold of his remaining targets. The deaths of the first two resonated through the crowd and the bar is emptier every weekend. While Luis delights in the terror that he creates, he knows that he must act soon and act decisively if he is to complete his vengeance. Then and only then may he rest.

Concept: The Pursuer is called back from the dead to take care of some unfinished business. Quite often, he seeks revenge against someone who wronged him, and may even return to track down and destroy his own murderer. As with everything in life and unlife, however, there are two sides to a story. Someone who comes back from beyond the grave may seek to perpetrate a greater evil rather than simply even the score for a lesser one. Dead doesn't necessarily mean just.

Roleplaying Hints: You are utterly focused on the task at hand. You dismiss any social contact that doesn't involve your goal and are acutely aware that one misspoken word can spell the difference between success and failure if unwanted parties get involved.

Equipment: The clothes on his back and whatever he can manage to beg, borrow or steal. If he needs something to fulfill his goal, he acquires it by whatever means necessary.

Attributes: Strength (Hits Hard) 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Driven) 5, Charisma 1, Manipulation 3, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

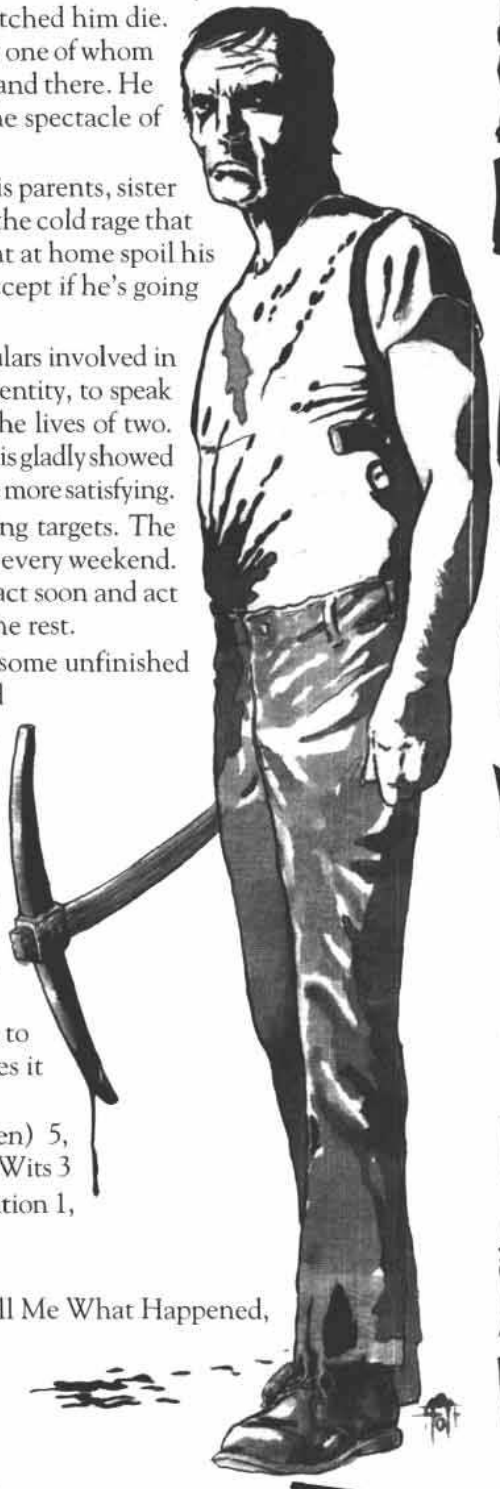
Abilities: Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Intuition 3, Investigation 1, Melee 2, Stealth 3

Backgrounds: None

Powers: Endurance 2, Extra Health Levels (10 total), Power 2, Tell Me What Happened, Twisted Whispers

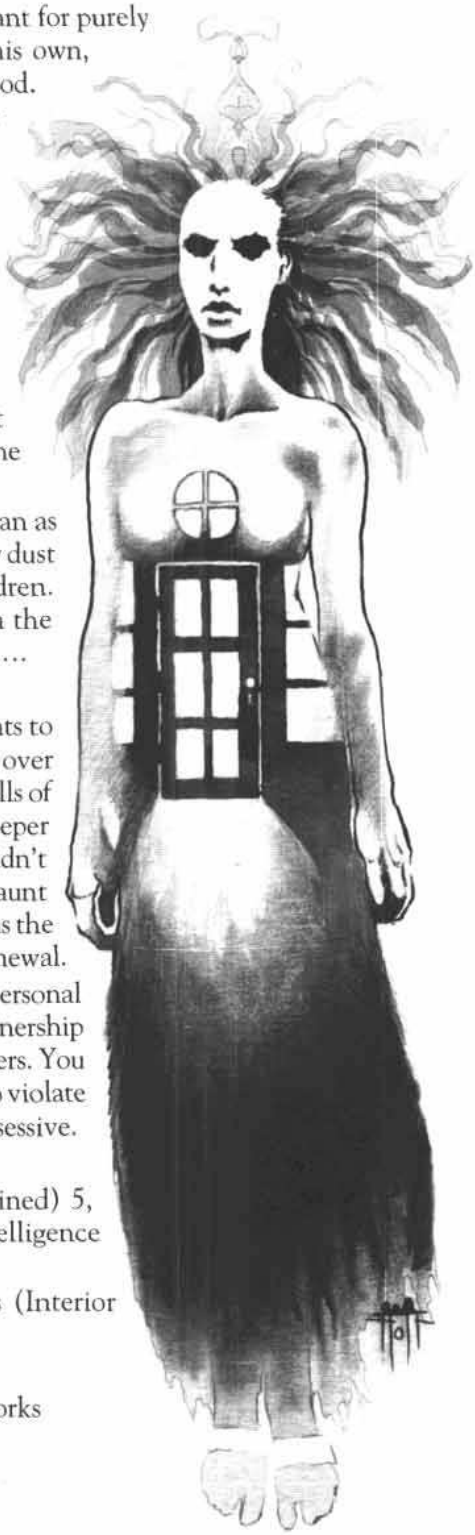
Willpower: 9

Pathos: 6



The Keeper (Poltergeist)

I was here in life. I'll stay here in death. If you want me to go, you're gonna have to make me.



Prelude: Tina Spencer always wanted to own a home. She didn't want for purely selfish reasons, though. Her husband Mark never lived in a house of his own, bouncing from foster to home to foster home over the course of his childhood. Tina was proud of Mark. When they met in college, she had no idea that the Computer Science major with the cute smile and ready wit was a parentless orphan. When they were married, she looked forward to building a place they could call home.

That dream died along with the couple in a car wreck. Or at least Mark no longer followed the dream. Tina pursued it beyond even life. She lingers on, watching over the house that was built to the couple's specifications. A new family moved in, which Tina didn't mind too much. But they soon wanted to change the place and ruin the happy home that she and Mark were going to enjoy. She had to stop them. Part of her felt terrible about terrifying them and turning her home into such an unwelcome place, but she couldn't stand the idea of anyone changing her dream.

The house remained empty for a time and Tina kept the place as clean as she could. She swelled with pride when the real-estate agent noticed how dust hadn't built up at all. Now, a new family has moved in, one with small children. Tina was glad at first. She and Mark planned on having kids. But then the mother said something about installing hardwood floors in the kitchen....

If it's trouble they want, Tina is more than happy to oblige.

Concept: The Keeper built something in life that she desperately wants to see last. This creation can take a wide range of forms. An artist may obsess over preserving her final masterpiece while a skilled architect may haunt the halls of the office building that she designed. The place or object that the Keeper watches almost always had some personal significance in life, though she didn't necessarily play a role in building or maintaining it. The Keeper may even haunt a spot that was the scene of an important emotional event in her life, such as the park where her husband proposed, keeping it free of vandals and safe from renewal.

Roleplaying Hints: You jealously guard what you perceive as your personal space. There's something intrinsically immature about you, as you claim ownership over an often public space, placing your own desires above the good of others. You are often jealous, easily angered and prone to fits of anger against those who violate your territory. You often come off as overly protective and extremely possessive.

Equipment: None

Attributes: Strength (Forceful) 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Determined) 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 3, Perception (Aware) 4, Intelligence (Schemer) 4, Wits (Cunning) 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Crafts (Interior Decorating) 3, Dodge 3, Science (Botany) 1, Technology 2

Backgrounds: None

Powers: Mirror Monster, Scripture, Spirit Grip, Wrench in the Works

Willpower: 6

Pathos: 8

The Manipulator (Possessor)

Hey, what's that on the back of my hand?

Prelude: When Frank Murray finally died of a heart attack, the residents of 122 Old Willow Street breathed a collective sigh of relief. While many of them shed a tear for his widow Beth and her two sons, the tenants next door, above and below the Murray's unit were glad that the screaming, shouting and crying were finally at an end. Frank was known to knock Beth and the boys around when he was angry, but Beth insisted that everything was fine between she and her husband. With his death, everyone hoped that maybe Beth could move on and find someone who would treat her right.

Strangely, within a few months of Frank's death a few families in the apartment complex started to suffer a lot of domestic tension. The sounds of heated arguments culminating in punches and kicks became more and more common.

What the residents of 122 Old Willow don't realize is that Frank Murray is still with them, as a spirit. A bully in life, he's even worse in death. Frank uses his abilities to drive wedges between the couples in the apartment complex. When emotional stress erupts into a fight, he gleefully possesses the dominant spouse and physically abuses the other, reveling in the sensations of power that such actions bring. Frank also keeps careful watch over Beth. He hopes that maybe she'll find someone new, someone who'll move into his old place with her and give him another chance to knock the old lady around. Until then, Frank finds sadistic pleasure in those unfortunate enough to make their homes in the neighborhood.

Concept: The Manipulator is a spirit capable of possessing others, and who does so to fulfill some obsession. He seeks out particular types of hosts or tries to insert himself into social situations in which he can pursue his interests. While some spirits see a possessed body as a mere vehicle with little intrinsic value, the Manipulator is interested primarily in his victim's social and economic position. The Manipulator masquerades as his victim to experience a particular situation or stimulus.

Roleplaying Hints: You tend to be very aware of the benefits and limitations of your existence. Since you are more attached to a host's living situation than the host as an individual, you usually take a very long-term perspective on posthumous existence. You'd rather flee a possession victim when confronted than fight to keep a particular body.

Equipment: The Manipulator has access to his victim's possessions, though not all of them are evenly accessible, and he is not necessarily skilled in their application. Passwords, PIN numbers and other secrets kept by a host are beyond the spirit unless his victim has recorded them somewhere or the would-be possessor studied his prospective subject for some time in advance. The Manipulator could easily pawn any of his host's possessions that the spirit does not know how to use, such as a computer or a musical instrument.

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation (Iron Willed) 4, Appearance 3, Perception (Sharp Eyed) 4, Intelligence 3, Wits (Shrewd) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Computer 2, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 1

Backgrounds: None

Powers: Benign Occupation, Dreamscaping, Full Possession

Willpower: 8

Pathos: 8

lence in emotionally charged situations. A spirit that is hurt, afraid or otherwise emotionally distraught is very likely to lash out reactively. If hunters charge into a haunted house with gas cans and lighters, they're likely to encounter a hostile spirit simply because they elicit an angry response from it.

View on Hunters

The few spirits who recognize hunters as different from other people are likely to consider them an important link to the mortal world. Unlike regular folks, hunters can often see ghosts and are capable of interacting with them socially. How a spirit responds to hunters is likely to be related to why it lingers in the world. If a ghost is driven by negative emotions, it may view hunters as avenging angels or protectors of the living sent to end its existence. A shambler that's jealous of its ex-wife's re-marriage may lash out at intrusive hunters, attempting to drive them away so that it can put its plans for revenge into motion. A more congenial spirit may turn to hunters for aid and support, attempting to enlist them in whatever plans involve its obsession. A spirit determined to track down its killer may appeal to the imbued for aid, asking them to access computer databases, to talk to witnesses or to deal with other tasks that the spirit cannot complete. Spirits that are confused about their condition may react to hunters with fear and wariness. Some may flee, startled by hunters' seeming powers and unknown intent. More rational spirits such as that of a research scientist may approach the imbued in a matter of fact way, inquiring after their capabilities and grilling them for information on its own plight. To this last type of spirit, hunters are another phenomenon that is simply part and parcel of a strange new existence.

Ultimately, hunters' actions often determine how spirits respond to them. Confused by their ongoing existence and largely ignorant of how the world really works and what beings exist in it, ghosts have little more to measure creatures and people by than their behavior. If imbued are forthcoming and seem conversational, open-minded spirits can respond in kind, particularly in hopes of gaining help to resolve lingering issues. Hunters who act aggressively toward ghosts as a knee-jerk reaction can expect abuse in return, especially if violent imbued prove to have little or no means to affect a ghost's incorporeal form. The latter chosen can literally be haunted as long as doing so perpetuates the spirit's personal agenda.

Dealing with Hunters

Once introduced to hunters, an alert, adaptive spirit (as opposed to one blinded by its goals) is liable to keep close tabs on them. As far as many ghosts can tell, only hunters have the power to contact and harm them. It's therefore in spirits' best interests to keep a wary eye on the chosen, especially if antagonistic relationships develop. Spirits are liable to deal with hunters primarily in terms of the souls' obsessions. If a hunter stands between a spirit and his goal, the wraith probably attacks or harasses the hunter. A spirit that wants to destroy the work of a rival living artist may ignore hunters or even talk pleasantly with them, but the being can turn ugly as soon as the hunters attempt to confound its efforts. A soul that desperately wants to deliver a final message to a loved one may believe hunters to be its only hope, currying their favor in any way possible to convince them to help.

A good way to judge a spirit's actions toward hunters is to consider its personality. Essentially, a spirit is someone with very limited ability to deal with the world, but with a few interesting tricks to compensate. Only hunters can deal with it in any meaningful way. If the spirit has a use for the imbued, it probably treats them well and seeks them out. If hunters could hamper its plans, it probably avoids them at all costs or responds aggressively to them if it's forced to.

Interactions

Spirits have little use for one another aside from as a social outlet. Since most ghosts are caught in the same circumstances — insubstantial and trapped between worlds — there may be nothing to gain from turning to each other for aid in dealing with the physical. Even if they could pool their resources to help each other, most spirits are so consumed by their obsessions that dropping everything to help another is inconceivable. Of course, that doesn't stop some spirits from *tricking* other ghosts into helping them. "Old" spirits, in particular, can use their superior experience with and knowledge of the supernatural to threaten other spirits or coerce them with promises of mystic information. Acquiring such otherworldly pawns may offer a potent spirit information about the land of the living, fodder-spirits with which to distract hunters or access to some capabilities that other ghosts simply lack.

More likely, the ghosts whom hunters encounter tend to turn to each other out of some lingering need for community. It can ease the soul (quite literally) to share fears and frustrations, especially when ghosts have similar objectives. This doesn't mean that spirits form a united front against hunters, however. They're still far too splintered by personal concerns and even petty jealousies to unite en masse. Some spirits do have allies that they can call upon, such as human mediums attuned to the spirit world, al-

though these ties are the exception, not the rule. Once again, a spirit's mortal tendencies come to the fore when dealing with other spirits. A person who was a loner in life is likely to be that way in death while a former social butterfly is likely to seek out other spirits if only to gossip.

The walking dead can behave in a much different manner. While they may be able to see disembodied spirits, they have little need for them. Their interactions with living society are sufficient for their needs. However, the strain of being within yet apart from society may drive some of these beings to consort with insubstantial beings. In fact, ghosts that cannot interact with the physical world may badger zombies and possessing spirits. The disembodied may insist that those with skin must help them fulfill agendas, if not through mutual understanding then through threats of what a ghost might do to a zombie's borrowed life. Alternatively, possessors or the walking dead could condescend to spirits that cannot occupy bodies, lording over them or taunting the incorporeal for their perceived shortcomings.

Mortal Society

Spirits' interactions with mortal society are usually defined by their obsessions. A spirit fixated on a particular location might interact with the living only to drive them away or to otherwise ensure that its chosen place is not disturbed. A ghost obsessed with a particular person wants to interact with that person in some manner.

The key to how spirits and the walking dead interact with humanity is in how they respond to the lack of responsibility for their actions. A cranky old coot who once threatened the children who played in his yard may now think nothing of killing them. Again, it's important to understand what a spirit was like in life to understand how it acts in death. Given the natural inclination that most people feel to break the rules when they can escape punishment, many spirits see their new existence as carte blanche to treat the living however they like.

Some spirits, especially those that have mastered the use of their abilities, may feel a sense of power over mortals. People may be little more than puppets, primitive physical beings that can be used as needed. In this case, a spirit's abuse can take emotional or social form. Rather than lash out and hurt others physically, the spirit manipulates them and uses them to fulfill its own ends. A spirit dedicated to achieving personal power may build a cult around itself, demonstrating its power to cow followers and extract services from them with empty promises of a better afterlife. Highly religious mortals may react to spirits with awe, mistaking them for angels and falling heedlessly under their sway. A spirit in this position may exploit a person's religious beliefs ruthlessly, extracting service born from fear or duplicity.

Resources

Disembodied spirits have few means to call upon outside of their own supernatural capabilities. Possessors or the walking dead, however, can sometimes access the goods and services normally available to the bodies they maintain. This assumes, of course, that a host isn't considered dead by mortal society. If a ghost rides a corpse whose worldly possessions have been passed to inheritors, that former wealth is of little avail. Or, achieving possessions and money might be the compulsion that keeps a spirit around, and it knows how to get items stashed away in life. If a riding spirit pursues the resources of its host, it must be able to portray its subject convincingly. A spirit inside the body of a millionaire is effectively a pauper if it can't access its host's bank accounts, doesn't know where safe-deposit keys are kept or it can't forge its victim's signature. If a ghost has the opportunity to survey its intended host before taking control, it can gather information and emulate habits to effectively become that person. Or a spirit is free to control and dispense with living bodies as it pleases, maybe possessing a working-class stiff, blowing the few thousand dollars hidden in his mattress, and then discarding the poor fellow's body and ruined life like yesterday's newspaper. Or a controlling ghost could use its host to rob banks, accumulate some wealth and leave the unwitting dupe to the police. A ruthless spirit is a fearsome opponent indeed.

Vampires

Commonly referred to as bloodsuckers, rots or fangs by many hunters, vampires need humanity. Without access to human blood, leeches slowly weaken. They must therefore remain in contact with humanity (or at least in proximity to warm-blooded animals that can be fed upon), typically existing in urban centers where they can blend in and claim victims without arousing suspicion. Their predation goes unnoticed against the ever-growing ledger of murder and violence that plagues cities. The undead can't afford to ignore human society completely, and many of them find ways to hide within it. Of all the monster types, fangs are perhaps the most likely to maintain constant social contact with mortals.

It's important to stress a vampire's place in society in your game. From many hunters' point of view, bloodsuckers are hidden corrupters. They burrow like ticks and slowly, often unnoticeably, rob humanity of its strength while satiating their own cravings. Of all supernatural creatures, bloodsuckers can least afford to draw attention to themselves. Most other monsters can isolate themselves from humanity rather easily, and for extended periods. Vampires need to feed regularly and cannot afford to stay away from the herd too long. Keep that in mind when running vampires as foes. They may lurk among and prey upon people, but they are also dependent upon those they abuse. They might be predators, but they can't over-hunt their prey or they weaken their own lifeline.

Motivations

Vampiric existence requires two basic things: a secure place to rest during the day and a steady supply of blood that can be obtained without too much risk of discovery. Without a place to hide from the sun or a supply of blood, a vampire cannot survive. How vampires obtain these necessities illustrates the differences among them. Old bloodsuckers (those changed a hundred or more years ago) usually have enough influence in human society to feed without alerting any local hunters — or the authorities. These ancient creatures may maintain stables of mortals or even employ mortal agents or ghouls to procure fresh victims. Generally speaking, a powerful blood drinker doesn't need to skulk around alleyways or nightclubs to find a meal. Such recourses are the province of young bloodsuckers who are the ones hunters are most likely to encounter in the course of a night.

Beyond their necessities of security and sustenance, vampires pursue a broad range of interests and wants that are unique from individual to individual. Some may uphold the same passions they had in life such as art, music or business. Of course, these undead can't usually assume a very public role in their field, but may work behind the scenes, attending an evening gallery opening, playing gigs in dive bars or using online brokers to buy and sell stocks. A fang who isn't afraid to wade into a hail of bullets may think twice if a group of hunters threatens to torch a small art gallery or threatens to reveal the stock-crippling dealings of a corporation to which the vampire is connected.

Unlife may also inspire a whole new set of desires compared to those observed in life. A bloodsucker may turn its back completely on mortal society, pursuing Byzantine goals that appear incomprehensible to hunters. Vampires that are heavily involved in the politics of the night may put plans into motion that work on the scale of decades or even centuries, leaving hunters

to see only the smallest wheels turn in convoluted and intricate games of power. Other leeches may see unlife as a grand game, with humans as toys to be used and cast aside. These vampires have lost whatever attachments they had to humanity and believe themselves something more. They care little for mortal deaths, injuries or losses. If human casualties are avoided, it's only a matter of convenience or an effort to preserve the creatures' secrecy.

Tactics

A vampire's strategies and plans go hand in hand with her motivations. The things that drive her are central to how she reacts to hunters. A vampire who revels in stalking humanity and taking on the strongest of the herd might see hunters as little more than a challenging variety of prey, adopting aggressive tactics against hunters and calling them out for face-to-face encounters. Other vampires react differently to hunter contact, some going into hiding to wait out the storm, some exerting their influence to undermine hunters indirectly.

Young vampires are not yet fully accustomed to their roles in the nightly performance. The trauma of becoming undead can provoke extreme reactions from them. Some attempt to maintain their existence much as they did before their transformation, frequenting bars and other social spots similar to those they enjoyed before, following the same hobbies and interests. Such leeches view feeding with distaste and do so only to preserve their existence. They take little joy in their condition and often agonize over their need to victimize. Sometimes, a vampire who feels this way may intentionally target undesirables in society such as criminals or the homeless in an effort to avoid hurting "real" people. They still have emotional ties to the mortal world and do not want to disturb it, even though they are no longer part of it.

Young vampires who cling to their lost humanity but who survive sometimes make friends among those in positions of mortal power. They insulate themselves from danger and suspicion by subtly exerting influence over the herd. These bloodsuckers tend to respond to hunters' threat with subtle counterattacks. A hunter may find his water shut off or his credit rating destroyed. The police hassle him and the bouncer at his favorite bar no longer lets him in. If he's married, his wife receives a phone call from a hysterical woman who claims she's having an affair with the husband and she can no longer endure the guilt.

A vampire who has found sanctuary and has cultivated contacts in mortal society is not about to throw it all away by risking a direct confrontation with the imbued. The being earned all that influence and those friends to deal with threats like hunters. If cornered, this sort of vampire might even appeal to attackers for mercy, claiming that it has no choice but to feed like every other "living" thing, and it can't understand why it's been targeted for destruction. Of course, a fang who talks his way out of destruction might simply buy time to take the hunters down. Vampires value secrecy and tend to be patient. They are immortal, after all. Hunters who spare a vampire out of compassion might set themselves up for destruction at a *much* later date.

Other young vampires take a radically different view of mortals. Sometimes, a newly created bloodsucker may look upon humans as mere sustenance — powerless weaklings to be used, abused and discarded. Such predators shed their compassion along with their lives, abandoning their past and any emotional ties to the past. A vampire who feels this way may flaunt her superiority by picking fights with apparently superior (though still mortal) foes, stalking victims in supposedly safe suburbs, and casually robbing gas stations and killing the attendants simply because she doesn't feel like paying for gas.

Fangs who abandon their humanity soon after their creation are difficult for hunters to deal with in a straight-up fight. These vampires don't mind taking actions that may spark a police investigation or other human interference. They have much less to lose than their more reserved kin in provoking mortal suspicion because they haven't worked hard to establish safe bases of operation under the authorities' nose. Why seek the protection of creatures that are weaker than one's self? A young and destructive vampire is likely to fire bomb a hunter's house or kick down his front door and start busting heads. As long as the hunter is dead, the bloodsucker doesn't really care if a gaggle of detectives picks over the crime scene and determines that something really odd is afoot. The beast can simply hijack a car and speed on to the next city, leaving the mess it made behind and setting up camp elsewhere.

Once cornered, this truly dangerous sort of monster is likely to go down fighting or simply flee beyond hunters' reach. It usually lacks the subtlety of more social vampires and has trouble dealing with humans with anything other than violence.

Some vampires occupy the middle ground between these two extremes. They care little for humanity but need to maintain a relatively stable base of operations. Perhaps one is an active player in the power struggles between the undead. She doesn't

The Networker (Vampire)

Let me make a few calls and I'll take care of this mess.

Prelude: Karen McClain was accustomed to getting her way with her drop-dead good looks. She never got a speeding ticket unless the officer was a woman, and her modeling career was primed to take off. But that all came to an end when she met Marcello. A few of her model friends had told her about the suave Italian gentleman with the dashing good looks and the artistic flair. Karen was confident that she could handle him, keeping his interests carefully suspended between frustration and consummation, as she did with so many other men that she found useful.

What Karen didn't know was that there was far more to Marcello than she could ever have guessed. He didn't simply want her. He wanted to preserve her, inducting her into the world of the undead. Karen initially found unlife terrifying. She gained eternal youth at the cost of never gaining the fame she looked forward to. For a time, she was little more than a piece of Marcello's wardrobe, a pretty little accessory that he draped across his arm when he went out on the town. But he grew tired of Karen and she soon found herself facing the night alone.

Karen quickly fell back onto the charm and manipulation that served her so well in life. She eventually carved out a cushy existence for herself, carefully selecting powerful men and integrating herself into the local political scene. Most people think of her as little more than a social butterfly who has leveraged her looks and social charm to gain access to exclusive circles. In truth, Karen has gathered protectors, providers and patrons. She is careful not to tread on the territory of vampires far older and more powerful than herself, but has still managed to put together a roster of minor officials bedazzled by her natural and supernatural charms.

And yet, despite the comfort of her unlife, Karen sometimes pages through fashion magazines and wonders what might have been.

Concept: An amoral manipulator, the Networker uses her abilities to establish a safe, comfortable haven in human society. She attends all the right parties and meets all the right people. While mayors and city-council members might not know her personally, those just below them — the life-long bureaucrats and public servants — know who she is all too well. Those whom she does not need might believe her a flirt or hanger-on, the pampered trust-fund child of some millionaire. Those she needs find her charming and delightful, so much so that they're willing to bend the rules in her favor.

Roleplaying Hints: You aren't used to getting your hands dirty. You panic if assaulted directly, but are sure to bring all of your resources to bear against anyone who threatens you. You have worked hard to carve out a niche for yourself and you aren't about to give it up.

Equipment: Fashionable wardrobe; sports car; penthouse apartment in the hippest part of town, with 24-7 security guards and heavy-duty electronic monitoring gear

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation (Convincing) 4, Appearance (Stylish) 4, Perception (Insightful) 4, Intelligence 3, Wits (Quick) 4

Abilities: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Bureaucracy (Bending Laws) 4, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 3, Finance 2, Leadership 3, Performance 2, Politics (Junior Bureaucrats) 4, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Influence 2, Resources 4

Powers: Charm, Endurance 1, Hypnotize, Keen Perceptions, Memory Wipe, Speed 2

Willpower: 8

Blood: 6

The Predator (Vampire)

C'mon, tough guy. Let's see how brave you are without that gun.

Prelude: Cindy Bragg wasn't always a cold, efficient killer. She knows all too well that once, years ago, she was just another weakling, another faceless member of the unending legion of victims. She stoically endured her father's abuse. And when the lady who ran the home to which the judge sent her beat Cindy, she quietly endured once again. Cindy always approached violence like that, stepping outside of herself, carefully and coldly assessing her situation and seeking an escape. When she turned 16, she hit the streets hoping to survive on her own. For a while, she struggled along with a pack of other kids, digging scraps out of dumpsters and begging for cash on corners. But she soon found herself working for a small-time pimp to survive. He insisted that none of his girls use heroin, which Cindy naively interpreted as a sign of paternal concern. As it turned out, most of her clients were members of what Cindy thought was a freakish blood-drinking cult.

She eventually learned that her pimp was under the control of a small group of vampires who used him to maintain a steady and safe supply. The vampires apparently crossed the wrong people, though. From Cindy's vague memories, she knows that she was turned against her will and sent into a rage. She and a few other newly born bloodsuckers were let loose against some target. Cindy still doesn't understand exactly what happened. All she remembers is waking up buried beneath the charred wreckage of warehouse. She dug herself out, picked off the first solitary person she came across in order to feed, grabbed a new set of clothes and took off.

Since that night, Cindy has adjusted to her new existence. She now survives on her own and doesn't have to worry about anyone pushing her around anymore. She revels in her superiority to humans, sometimes walking into a bar and picking a fight with an aggressive lout who reminds her of her father. She's smart enough to keep her true nature a secret and has had some contact with a few local vampires. She doesn't understand the intricate workings of undead interactions, but has managed to keep out of trouble so far. N0w that she's finally strong enough to rely on herself, she refuses to lose her newfound strength.

Concept: A runaway train of anger and violence, the Predator was an outsider or victim before she was embraced. Now that she has capabilities beyond mortal humans, she inflicts violence far more sever than she ever endured.

Roleplaying Hints: You see hunters as a refreshing change of pace. Humans have proved such an easy target that it's about time you have to earn your next meal. You're arrogant and quick to incite a struggle.

Equipment: Pistol, leather jacket, knife, a crude lair in the basement of an overcrowded and crime-ridden tenement

Attributes: Strength (Powerful) 4, Dexterity (Graceful) 4, Stamina (Tough) 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits (Wily) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2

Backgrounds: Arsenal 2

Powers: Claws, Endurance 1, Speed 2, Strength 2, Terrify

Willpower: 6

Blood: 8

The Watcher (Vampire)

Put down the stake and maybe we can answer both our questions.

Prelude: Danny Kimball misses Fritos more than almost anything else. He's also pretty sure that drinking blood is the biggest drawback to being a vampire, putting a double whammy on the entire dietary portion of his undead existence. Still, he's always careful to drink from only people whom no one cares about, usually a drunk stumbling through some alley in the slums.

It's all worth it. He hasn't had to endure a face-to-face conversation in almost two months, and for the first time he doesn't have his mother cutting into the time he can spend cracking security systems or beating the eighth level of *Dungeon Destroyers*. As long as he relays whatever cool files he finds to Whitehead, he can do pretty much whatever he wants. Given his screaming-fast Internet connection and equally impressive computer, Danny's finds unlife better than anything he could possibly dream up. Not even his twisted and deformed face is much of a downer. Girls never talked to him when he was alive, and he never had much use for them, anyway. His hideous looks even helped him last time he had to feed. He didn't have any trouble scaring off those kids who stumbled across him in the act.

Danny isn't stupid. He knows that Whitehead has him sifting through some pretty heavy-duty stuff. Once in a while, he has to track down particular files. From what Danny has pieced together, his patron is tracking a few competing corporations, probably even playing the two sides against each other. Danny doesn't care. As long as the world leaves him in peace to play his games and write his code, he's happy. When he does get lonely, companionship is as close as a link to a chat room.

Still, sometimes questions nag at him when the distant roar of the subway fades away and Danny is left with only the glow of his monitor and the rats that scurry about his hideaway. He's worried that he's involved in something much larger than he can handle, and if Whitehead makes a misstep Danny has a cold feeling that he'll go down, too. But then Danny comes across a report about a hot new video card or a slamming new computer game and his worries are driven away by the comforting glow of his CRT.

Concept: The Watcher moves within unseen vampiric circles, a spy and informant who always seems to have the information that someone needs. He plays a risky game of brinkmanship, always careful to make himself useful to every side in a feud without making himself a target.

Roleplaying Hints: You are an outsider, largely detached from human society. You're distant and calculating, and may use jargon and slang from the era in which you lived as a human because you're not fully party to more recent trends.

Equipment: Filthy trench coat, fedora, work boots, tattered clothes, a lair located somewhere in the sewers, top-of-the-line computer rig patched illegally into several corporate LANs

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation (Tempter) 4, Appearance 0, Perception (Keen) 4, Intelligence (Shrewd) 4, Wits (Cunning) 4

Abilities: Academics (Information Theory) 3, Alertness 2, Animal Ken 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 1, Computer 2, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Occult 3, Politics 3, Research (Online Inquiries) 4, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 2, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Contacts 2, Resources 1

Powers: Beast Speech, Shapeshift, Speed 1, Strength 2, Unseen

Willpower: 9

Blood: 4

often come in contact with humans other than to feed and may live in some rather inaccessible area of the city such as in the sewers or subway access tunnels. She approaches feeding with an eye toward convenience and might not know enough about human society (or simply doesn't care) to avoid feeding on someone whose disappearance will be noticed. This sort of vampire is likely to draw hunters onto her trail, but is a much more dangerous foe than a vampire who feeds recklessly and who abuses mortals. These bloodsuckers often have allies among the supernatural. A group of hunters that tracks an elusive creature may find itself up against an entire pack of the things. These "middle ground" vampires value secrecy as much or more than do social undead. Since they don't deal with humans often, they can afford to turn their lairs into veritable fortresses, complete with lethal traps. A fang doesn't necessarily have any problems walking along the bottom of a 10-foot-deep pool of water to return to its lair.

View on Hunters

Hunters represent a very unsettling development to the very few vampires who notice them. Individually, humans are typically discounted as a direct physical threat. Human society as a whole is a considerable danger, however. One person with a gun is an annoyance. One hundred with guns can inflict final death. Hence the reason why many vampires are so careful to hide their existence. So, when the odd human proves capable of piercing bloodsuckers' illusions, wielding strange powers and resisting undead efforts at mind and emotion control, those people startle the few vampires who become aware of them.

Imagine walking through a herd of cattle. You don't want to cause any major disturbances that could cause a stampede, but you know that if you're careful you can manage the herd easily and safely. Now pretend that a random few of the cattle have become carnivorous. You can't tell which ones pose a threat simply by looking at them. It isn't until one goes for your throat that you have the faintest idea you're in danger. This analogy comes close to describing how vampires who are aware of hunters feel about the imbued. Suddenly, a previously safe and predictable environment is dangerous and unstable.

To make matters worse, hunters understand nothing of vampire society or the true plight of the undead. Hunters thrash around, raising havoc and pursuing leeches relentlessly, upsetting the nocturnal social order and threatening to draw attention to vampire existence. Hunters are dangerous not only as physical threats, but because they are unpredictable and sometimes impossible to respond to with anything other than brute force. Many hunters hate vampires for what they are, though some chosen are enlightened (or foolish) enough to judge the undead solely by what they do. Nonetheless, there's no bargaining with many imbued, which forces vampires into the uncomfortable situation of exerting what influence they have over human society and stirring up activity that could very well drag them into public view. Add to all that more potent vampires' casual dismissal of such threats, and the undead who discover hunters can be trapped between a rock and a hard place.

Given the threat that hunters can pose, bloodsuckers are often too cautious or paranoid to consider allying with the imbued. Hunters can feel likewise, unwilling to risk revealing too much to the enemy for fear of giving up some unforeseen advantage. While Merciful may want to reconcile a monster's supernatural nature with its human roots, bloodsuckers and hunters knowingly work with each other only under the most extraordinary circumstances. A greater common enemy, for example, *might* be enough to make them do so, but not for long. The conflict between the two groups is just too fresh.

And yet, it isn't too hard for vampires to ascertain that the imbued are still human — they have jobs, homes, spouses, children and corporate-expense accounts. As the masters of manipulation, vampires can play these mortal trappings to their advantage, hamstringing hunter efforts by threatening family, burning down houses or ruining good names.

Dealing with Hunters

Hunters catch most vampires off guard. Even vampires that come into contact with mortals regularly can underestimate the chosen. The sort of vampire that would probably attract hunter attention by flaunting its supernatural nature is probably the sort that hunters can most easily surprise. Vampires tend to forget that humans can pose a threat because the herd is usually so docile and blind. The same creature who pours tens of thousands of dollars into constructing a fortified haven might completely neglect the threat hunters pose when it's out cruising for a victim. Vampires who encounter hunters for the first time can experience anything from shock to righteous indignation — "How is this possible?" to "How dare you?" Much of a vampire's reaction derives from how he perceives humans — whether sympathetic or disgusting.

Surviving an experience with hunters can make savvy bloodsuckers recognize another kind of pawn to

play, just like the police or administrators they manipulate. Such influence might be fairly straightforward, with the vampire cautiously leaking information on the "really bad" vampires (i.e., the manipulator's enemies). Or such direction can be conducted covertly, with hunters "discovering" information that the manipulator has planted about dangerous rots. Truly stupid or daring political players seek common ground with hunters, trading tips and warnings. These vampires are careful to never reveal any details about the true condition of the undead and never offer any leads that could be used against themselves. They usually get what they can from the chosen while they can, with plans to betray the hunters at some point. That's just the way the game is played, and they expect the same is plotted against them. It's just a matter of who strikes first.

Resources

Most vampires, even young ones, have access to a variety of resources that can put hunters at a disadvantage. Bloodsuckers usually have no qualms about using their supernatural abilities to steal any weapons and tools they need or about coercing mortals to hand the same over. By no means do vampires shun guns or explosives as weapons. They know well enough that while firearms can't put another of their kind down permanently, weapons are more than effective against mortals, and are particularly useful if one of the undead doesn't want to draw attention to its supernatural nature. Vampires who have integrated themselves into the local human power structure have access to a wide range of weapons and can probably acquire the necessary licenses and permits to equip any mortal puppets with various such tools.

A vampire's most important resource, however, is her lair. Vampires are at their most vulnerable while they rest, and take extensive precautions to ensure their safety. Lairs can have a variety of forms, depending on how paranoid the vampire is, how much trust she can place in any mortal pawns and what other roles her lair must play. A leech who avoids contact with people and other undead might chose to lair in a dangerous or inaccessible location, counting on its remoteness to ensure her security. Of course, a vampire that likes to make the social rounds can't afford to lair like that, unless she doesn't mind showing up for board meetings smelling as if she walked through a sewer.

Vampires who need a socially accessible place to sleep tend to rely on a variety of gadgets to keep their lairs secure. One might install an electronic security system, especially if the vampire has some control over the security company. Hunters probably have to think twice about plugging the rent-a-cops who show up to investigate an intrusion, especially if security guards don't show any signs of supernatural corruption. A vampire can also use a mundane business or office as a front, especially if he has dealings with it. If a vampire sleeps in the sub-basement of a local bank, the hunters can't simply walk into the place, guns blazing, demanding to see the "chief executive vampire" without drawing every cop in town to the scene. Vampires, as creatures with an acute awareness of human society, use the security afforded by mortal culture whenever they can. Power and wealth alone — not necessarily supernatural capabilities — buy substantial protection in the modern world. If a vampire lives in an exclusive gated community, intruding working-class or minority hunters might be tailed by local cops or even brought up on vagrancy charges, not because of any influence on the vampire's part but because that's how class structure and law enforcement often work!

If a vampire expects pawns or other outsiders to visit its lair, it can't afford to booby trap every last square inch of the place. However, that doesn't mean that a few of the doors or hallways leading directly to its sleeping area can't be trapped as a last line of defense. Many vampires install traps that do not effect them but that can kill or incapacitate mortals. Poison gas, even something as simple as a chlorine and ammonia mixture, can cripple mortals while leaving a vampire largely unaffected.

Fire is the chief concern of most vampires, and any vampire with the money to build a secure lair is sure to install a sprinkler system and other features to contain flames. A vampire might even invest in a fireproof coffin or other container, leaving hunters who firebomb a lair to face a surprisingly fresh and enraged foe.

Finally, most vampires have some sort of emergency escape route. Bloodsuckers are usually wise enough to realize that even the most secure lair can become a trap if it's surrounded by enemies, is under constant surveillance or simply has no back door. Most vampires prefer lairs that have at least two separate exits, preferably one that is easily hidden and that opens out into the local sewer, subway system or some other place that allows a leech to escape without attracting attention.

Mortal Society

In addition to material assets, many vampires have influence within mortal society. While a vampire might not be mayor or governor, he might know a trusted advisor. Using blackmail, bribes or merely his own persuasive skills, a bloodsucker can help guide the

course of a government, corporation or other institution. Doing so gives the creature access to a wide variety of resources, allowing him to acquire many tools to use against the imbued. A hunter may find his car towed or his house "accidentally" ransacked by cops due to an incorrectly filed search warrant. This is one area where hunters are at an extreme disadvantage. As regular folks, most hunters just don't have that much clout in the society in which they live. By contrast, theoretically any organization — law enforcement, local government, the military, utility companies, a hunter's employer, a school board — can be used to make life troublesome for a hunter. The only threat a leech faces when using these resources is overstepping his bounds or calling on one too many favors, leaving him without an important playing piece until he can somehow re-exert his influence.

Interactions

Few vampires exist in a social vacuum. When you create a vampire antagonist with which to confront hunters, don't just create one, create an entire vampire culture. While the imbued don't know the ins and outs of the undead social scene (and probably never will), their actions still affect it. Individuals within the society notice the chosen and respond to them, whether directly or indirectly, perhaps using hunters as agents in undead struggles.

Draw up a diagram that charts the relationship between each vampire and the mortal agencies, if any, over which it exerts some control. When the hunters interact with a vampire or its proxies, you can identify which blood drinkers in your setting might take notice and you can gauge what actions they might take. If the hunters destroy a vampire, they're likely to draw attention from other undead. These others may not know who or what did in one of their own, but they're interested in learning, even if they can't identify what the imbued are.

The first young or stupid vampire that hunters destroy might be written off as a fool who crossed the wr0ng party. The second or third isn't as likely to be dismissed so casually. Apart from guiding the imbued to attack other undead, insulated vampires can simply observe hunters' activities without getting involved in them. The mortals are a loose cannon in regard to local vampire society, but are an excellent culling tool for protected undead when the imbued are left to their own devices. It's only when hunters catch wind of an observing vampire's agents and followers that the bloodsucker might try to direct their attention elsewhere or finally deal with them aggressively (probably with more agents and followers).

Ironically, hunters who lock their jaws onto a particular vampire and her proxies can do harm to the very people they seek to protect. If one vampire faction can be identified and attacked, it might be weakened and replaced by a rival power. If that rival is more abusive and predatory than the hunters' target, the imbued might inadvertently unleash a whole new threat upon themselves and their loved ones. Indeed, it would be no coincidence if the newcomer had discovered hunters' existence previous to rising to power and used the imbued to get where she is.

Werewolves

If vampires represent the subtle, manipulative power of the night, werewolves are the diametric opposite: rampaging brutes who use their awesome strength and unearthly endurance to force their way through the world. This isn't to say that werewolves aren't capable of sly maneuvers or subtle planning. Indeed, many shapechangers pride themselves on their cunning. They have to be smart when they face each other and otherworldly foes. But for the most part, their supernatural gifts of power, speed and resilience make them physical aggressors — especially when dealing with less impressive beings such as human beings.

Shapeshifters easily outclass hunters when the two clash directly. Since many of werewolves' capabilities are physical, however, their limitations can be used against them. Clever hunters can overcome a werewolf's physical superiority through planning and judicious use of edges to keep a creature at bay. A werewolf can't tear its opponents limb from limb if it can't reach them. Now, if it has a firearm or some kind of an unexpected power that operates at a range, well....

Werewolves make good opponents for hunters whose knee-jerk reaction to monsters is to wade in with weapons blazing. Hunters can't take shapechangers on in a head-to-head fight and expect to survive. If the imbued in your game are trigger-happy hotheads, a run-in with a fearsome man-beast may be just what you need to jolt them out of their violent streak. And at the very least, they'll have a physically imposing foe to go up against.

Motivations

Many werewolves act as champions of nature, defending what few stretches of natural beauty still remain in the World of Darkness, and sometimes even venturing into urban areas to protect the rare oases of natural beauty that survive amidst the concrete and steel. Shapechangers tend to be territorial. A werewolf who pledges to defend a stretch of

land makes that area her home. Not only does she fight to preserve the wilderness, she fights to maintain a region with which she feels a sense of unity and identity.

Pride is an important part of skinchanger culture. Many werewolves take on tasks and quests in order to increase their status in the eyes of their tribesmen. A werewolf on a mission is a dangerous foe, indeed. Not only is he an imposing enemy, but his culture demands that he must succeed or he risks losing recognition amongst his peers. While many other supernatural creatures tend toward self-preservation, werewolves consider violence and death in combat as just another aspect of life. Obviously, few werewolves are actively suicidal, but a werewolf may charge in with fangs bared and claws gleaming where other supernatural creatures fear to tread.

Few werewolves are afraid to take to the offensive in their struggle to protect what remains of Mother Earth. A nuclear power plant or an oil-drilling operation is a tempting target, especially if either threatens an area earmarked for protection. Perhaps such locales are ancient tribal lands, the sites of historical battles or areas where the spirit world and material world are closely aligned. Werewolves are not above industrial sabotage and outright assault, especially in isolated areas in order to grind civilization's progress to a halt. Shapeshifters fight a holding action against the rise of humanity, clinging to what they have and striking back where they can.

Interactions

Werewolves are divided into a variety of tribes, most of which originated in various places around the world before recorded history. These disparate geographical and cultural origins create a great deal of friction among shapechangers, although they are usually capable of overlooking their differences to band together against particularly alarming threats. Still, werewolves' emphasis on personal glory and status makes it difficult for them to work together in large groups for extended periods of time. Rivalries and simmering hatreds are natural as individuals constantly vie to outdo each other in social arenas and on the battlefield. Werewolves operate much like traditional wolf packs, with a clear social order that starts with the biggest or strongest and ends with the weakest or youngest. Within a pack, this hierarchy often shifts as werewolves prove themselves or suffer defeats. When shapechangers of different packs first meet, they often struggle to establish which group is the strongest, often leading to bad blood and ongoing struggles between the two.

The Monkeywrench (Werewolf)

Mankind survived well enough without electricity. This isn't terrorism, it's salvation.

Prelude: Annie Walker is the kind of woman who makes the typical conservative think "feminazi." She lifts weights, works with the local chapter of a national women's rights organization and teaches children and women's self-defense courses. Given her muscular physique, serious demeanor and perpetual scowl, she doesn't have too many potential suitors — or even friends. That's the way she wants it. When you spend your nights scouting out local construction sites and breaking into the offices of corporations that despoil the environment on a global scale, you don't have much time for a social life.

Annie works in the background, carefully choosing to strike in a way that does the most damage without leaving a trail of evidence to point to her. She'd like to just pack the local sludge-treatment plant with explosives and blast the thing into orbit, but she's savvy enough to know that a strike that noisy would attract attention from powers best left undisturbed. For now, she's content to act where she can, confident that one day the enemy's guard will drop for one crucial moment, allowing her to make a critical strike that will help stop the rising tide of environmental destruction.

Annie tries to maintain a distance between herself and others, but she's a little lonely at heart. She genuinely enjoys watching her students learn how to handle themselves in a fight, and she has a natural maternal instinct toward underdogs, the abused or anyone else who, like her, faces a desperate fight against long odds. She thinks that humans have lost their way and need to be shepherded to a better tomorrow that's more in harmony with Mother Earth. She sees her classes as a means to freeing people from their reliance on others.

Concept: The Monkeywrench fights a covert war against the ever growing urban sprawl, technology and the rest of mankind's abusive creations. She hides among the very things she despises, carefully watching her targets and lashing out at the most opportune times. She knows that her actions seem insignificant on their own. But when combined with the efforts of others like her across the world, she hopes that greater good may be achieved.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a pilgrim in an unholy land. You spurn the safety and familiarity of the wilderness to journey into the belly of the very cancer that threatens to destroy everything you hold dear. You are grim, determined and untrusting. Yet if you find a sympathetic soul, you might reach out to it. You are a fanatic for your cause, though. You believe that only your strength, faith and belief can see your cause through.

Equipment: Jeans, plain shirt, winter coat, sturdy boots, gym bag with sweat pants, sweat shirt, bundle of C-4 plastic explosives, detonator and pistol

Attributes: Strength 3 (5/7/6/4), Dexterity (Agile) 4 (4/5/6/6), Stamina 3 (5/6/6/5), Charisma 3, Manipulation 3 (2/0/0/0), Appearance 3 (2/0/3/3), Perception (Eagle Eyed) 4, Intelligence (Calculating) 4, Wits (Quick) 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl (Boxer) 4, Computer 2, Demolitions 3, Dodge (Fleet Footed) 4, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Melee 2, Security 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Arsenal 2

Powers: Blend, Inflict Malfunction, Throw

Willpower: 8

Rage: 10

The Stalker (Werewolf)

Hooooooowwwwwllll._

Prelude: At first, the police ignored reports of a mad dog stalking the park at night, leaving the problem to Animal Control. But when horribly mutilated corpses were discovered, it quickly became obvious that this was a problem far worse than a dog running loose.

The park and the city blocks surrounding it have become the hunting grounds of the feral werewolf, Howler in the Night. Raised by a wolf pack in the far north before discovering his true heritage, Howler has taken it upon himself to stalk mankind on its urban turf. Lacking knowledge of society's intricacies, he assumed that hunting and killing one human every few days would go unnoticed. The herd of humanity was beyond count. Surely a few could go missing without the rest noticing. His plan worked initially. Stalking the park at night brought him into contact with the homeless, gang members and others whose deaths were overlooked. However, one night Howler ran down and devoured a business executive out for a jog. Suddenly, stories of a monstrous dog roaming the park were front-page news.

Howler is oblivious to all of this. Emboldened by his successes thus far, he has taken to hunting in a nearby slum, avoiding the increased police presence and the attention of the city's supernatural denizens largely by dumb luck. Given that Howler doesn't know enough to distinguish a relatively safe hunting ground such as a housing project from one that will bring the powers that be down upon him, it's only a matter of time before he touches off a bloody conclusion to his crusade. If the city's lucky, he won't take too many hapless people with him.

Concept: The Stalker represents the essence of the beast that is a part of all werewolves. While many people traditionally think of werewolves as humans who can change into wolves, some of them are wolves that can transform into humans. The difference is subtle but very important in defining a creature's point of view. To many werewolves who come from a lupine background, humans are simply animals that have grown too numerous for the good of the world. The herd must be thinned and these man-beasts are more than willing to take an active role.

Roleplaying Hints: You spend much of your time in wolf form, so you seem awkward or uncomfortable when you assume human shape. You are obtuse, rude or erratic in social situations, lacking the skills and context that the average person takes for granted. You often have poor personal hygiene, speak with odd voice inflections and misunderstand the vast majority of pop-culture references or slang terms. You often come across as a country bumpkin who is a bit overwhelmed by the complexities of urban living. You are acutely aware of your social shortcomings and make an effort to draw as little attention to yourself as possible.

Equipment: Fangs, fur and a nasty attitude. The Stalker may have a small cache of clothes, cash and perhaps even a weapon hidden somewhere out of the way in case he needs to resort to human form for a while.

Attributes: Strength (Overpowering) 4 (6/8/7/5), Dexterity (Slick) 4 (4/5/6/6), Stamina (Relentless) 4 (6/7/7/6), Charisma 1, Manipulation 2 (1/0/0/0), Appearance 2 (1/0/2/2), Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits (Mentally Agile) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Animal Ken 2, Athletics 3, Brawl (Berserk) 5, Dodge (Nimble) 4, Intimidation 3, Stealth 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: None

Powers: Burrow, First Blood, Staredown

Willpower: 6

Rage: 12

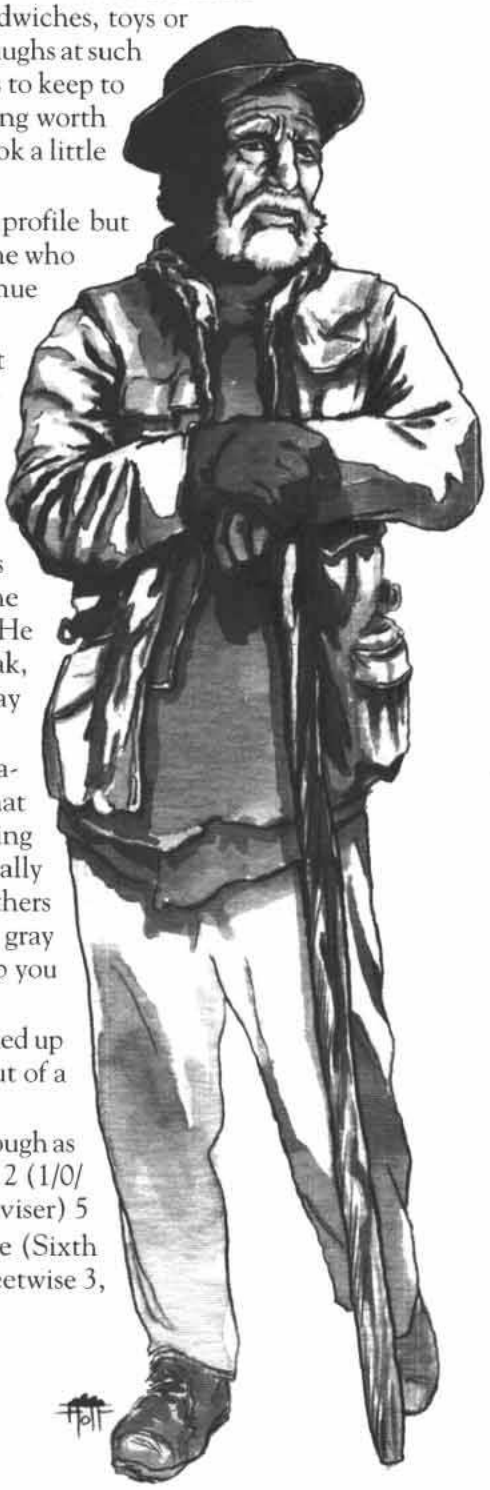
The Shepherd (Werewolf)

Everyday, people like you walk right by people like me without a second glance. I recommend that you do it right now.

Prelude: The street kids over on First Avenue, primarily the youngest ones forced to live with their parents, like to talk about a big friendly dog that plays with them sometimes. Unlike a lot of the mutts that wander the street, he isn't mean and he sometimes sniffs out sandwiches, toys or other treats from dumpsters around the neighborhood. Old Angus just laughs at such stories. He's been around for as long as anyone can remember. He tends to keep to himself, but most of the street people know that if Angus finds anything worth sharing, he makes sure everyone gets some. If food, smokes or clothes look a little too new to have been scavenged, no one mentions it.

Angus considers the neighborhood his territory. He keeps a low profile but always has a handle on what's going on. He doesn't take kindly to anyone who brings violence to the area, and some street people swear that First Avenue is the safest neighborhood in town.

Angus is gruff, sarcastic and results-oriented. He's willing to put someone down as an example to others who would cause trouble. He's a survivor, above all. He knows that the people he looks after will be much worse off if he ever leaves.



Concept: With the growth and development of cities, not every werewolf discounted urban centers as potential homes. The Shepherd is just such a shapechanger. Born and raised in the city, he ekes out his survival on the edge of society, picking at the scraps cast aside by the wealthy and easing the misery of the people who occupy the same niche. He considers himself the champion of the forgotten, unfortunate and weak, and strives to share his strength and survival skills with others. Every day he survives and every lost soul he helps save is a victory.

Roleplaying Hints: You have little use for fancy clothes or ostentatious effects. Survival is everything to you — not just your own, but that of your peers. You tend to look at things with a pragmatic eye, judging people by what they do rather than by what they say. You are essentially kindhearted and generous, often enduring pain and suffering so that others weaker than you do not have to. Your methods can sometimes enter a gray area as you have little use for laws or other artificial restraints that keep you and your fellows down.

Equipment: A ratty old coat, shopping cart full of random junk picked up off sidewalks, knife hidden somewhere on his person, clothes picked out of a dumpster or from a second-hand store.

Attributes: Strength 3 (5/7/6/4), Dexterity 3 (3/4/5/5), Stamina (Tough as Nails) 4 (6/7/7/6), Charisma 2, Manipulation 3 (2/0/0/0), Appearance 2 (1/0/2/2), Perception (Watchful) 4, Intelligence (Rational) 4, Wits (Improviser) 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl (Dirty Fighter) 4, Dodge (Sixth Sense) 4, Firearms 1, Investigation 1, Melee 2, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 1

Powers: Blend, Stench, Trash Magnet

Willpower: 8

Rage: 8

While werewolf tribes are often at odds, all are united against hated tribes and individuals that have turned their backs on nature. Rather than preserve what remains of the pristine world, these warped shapechangers seek to corrupt and destroy everything around them, including their former brethren. These twisted, mutated creatures are the sworn enemies of the tribes and the two groups attack each other on sight with little room for negotiation. Like the uncorrupted tribes, renegade shapeshifters make lairs and guard them jealously, though they tend to choose regions that have been thoroughly wrecked and twisted by pollution or other environmental abuses.

Mortal Society

While werewolves rage against the ever growing dominion of man, they are generally not remorseless murderers. Skinchangers tend to target businesses, governments and even individuals that have particularly loathsome attitudes toward or that commit atrocities against the environment. Werewolves are simply too few in number to mount a general offensive against mankind. Many also realize that, despite their physical prowess, they cannot match up against humanity as a whole. Thus, while werewolves believe themselves the keepers of the natural world, they act more as calculating predators when dealing with people, carefully culling the herd of those who make the most trouble and leaving the rest to go about their lives unmolested.

Some werewolves take a more charitable view of mankind. These shapechangers believe that with the proper care and guidance, humanity might once again live in harmony with nature. These werewolves feel that people, like any other animals, are part of the natural order and must be integrated back into it. Some skinchangers go so far as to help humans in need, especially those people who are themselves victims of a rapacious attitude toward the environment or each other. Shapeshifters also tend to protect and aid those who dwell within similar social circles as the beasts, whether they're other animals, people or man-beasts. A werewolf who, in human form, is a homeless alley dweller may be attached to other destitutes. Another who assumes human form on Wall Street may oppose the vampires and other supernatural creatures that seek to extend their influence into the financial world. All of which is to say that werewolves' territorial nature can extend beyond the physical world into the social one.

Being capable of walking and living as men, many werewolves are fully integrated into human society. Shapeshifters can move about freely in human form, and most have jobs, friends and even lovers. Pure werewolf matings result in twisted, deformed offspring, forcing skinchangers to seek mates among mundane humans or wolves. Werewolves are therefore similar to vampires in that they must maintain ties to humanity in order to survive, even while they revile part or all of human civilization. Unlike vampires, man-beasts have freedom of movement and little fear of exposure in society.

Tactics

Werewolves typically wage guerilla war against their enemies. Too few in number to risk open engagement and unwilling to draw unnecessary attention to their activities, shapechangers prefer to position themselves to do the most damage with the least risk of loss. As long as such prudence suits them, that is. A pack of werewolves that targets a toxic-waste plant for destruction may devise an intricate plan to infiltrate the facility and evade its security measures. Once inside, however, the creatures are likely to dispense with such niceties and launch into a rampage before disappearing again. Shapechangers are not afraid to get their hands dirty. In fact, one of the quickest ways for a werewolf to gain respect and power in her pack is to meet and defeat fearsome foes in physical combat.

Man-beasts must take care when operating in urban areas and other heavily populated zones. If they are too brash, they risk attracting the attention of their twisted and corrupted brethren, many of whom work with and support human corporations and other institutions that promote environmental decay. In the wild, werewolves are more fearsome. They stalk the land in wolf form, destroying any who violate their homes, without fear of the repercussions they face when operating in cities. Shapechangers are the undisputed rulers of the wilds. Even somewhat large groups of humans such as an isolated logging camp or remote oil-drilling outfit is fair game for completely open assaults, which resemble massacres more so than precise commando strikes.

View on Hunters

Hunters represent a somewhat chilling development to the werewolves that recognize these humans. The creatures, much like vampires, are used to believing humanity is relatively harmless when taken as individuals. Corporations and governments are werewolves' main concerns since these institutions have the economic and political power to threaten the unspoiled regions that werewolves protect. Hunters, with their ability to recognize shapechangers in

even human form and endowed with inexplicable powers, are much closer to dealing with werewolves as equals than most other humans. And given many hunters' aversion to *all* things supernatural, regardless of intent, some werewolves count hunters as just another enemy to defeat.

Philosophical shapeshifters speculate on hunters as valuable tools in the war to preserve nature. The imbued, as opponents of the supernatural, clash with the walking dead and vampires, both of which werewolves have sworn to destroy as foul aberrations. While these werewolves don't consider hunters equals, they do see them as potential allies. Perhaps these odd humans are another manifestation of the natural order, created and sent forth to help turn the ever rising tide of corruption and decay. Of course, these werewolf thinkers have no explanation for why hunters seem to lump shapechangers in with vampires and other enemies. Nor do they understand how these people resist the madness that strikes most humans in man-beast presence. Maybe further interaction is required to learn the answers.

Most skinchangers' attitudes toward the imbued fall somewhere between these two camps. As soldiers in a seemingly endless war, many skinchangers judge others by their actions. Werewolves are careful in picking both their friends and their enemies. A pack would prefer to let the chosen make the first move, evaluating the humans by their attitudes, deeds and competence. Werewolves have enough to worry about as it is. The appearance of hunters is simply another battle in an unending war to preserve the natural world. If werewolves can avoid fighting one battle to wage more important ones, they will.

Dealing with Hunters

Werewolves tend to take a very practical view of the imbued once they have been exposed to them. As mentioned previously, werewolves are essentially soldiers in a losing battle, desperately trying to staunch any further losses of their natural holdings. Hunters are just another worry, and a chaotic, fragmented and mysterious one at that.

Shapeshifters tend to react to hunters rather than immediately take an aggressive stance toward them. Hunters who strike out are quickly labeled enemies and dealt with appropriately. Those whose interests seem to coincide with a pack's might be watched carefully. The pack probably doesn't risk exposing itself to hunters, but it may work to indirectly aid ones that seem of like mind and purpose. Overt offers of aid or protection might even be extended to hunters who wittingly or unwittingly help skinchangers in their self-appointed missions. If warlocks harvest the magic of a wilderness locale, for example, and hunters work to undo their efforts, informed shapechangers might help the imbued and become active allies.

Twisted werewolves are a different story. As creatures of corruption, they see hunters as more puny humans who must be killed. And yet, hunters represent something of a menace to these werewolves. If humanity at large learns the truth of the supernatural and grasps the true dangers posed by the destruction of the environment, people may widely turn against the corporations and governments that these fiends aid and rely upon. Hunters could be the initiators of such a movement. So, while corrupt shapechangers do not go on crusades against hunters (the stranger humans must certainly be unique, not a trend), they certainly dispatch the imbued as quickly or as cruelly as suits them at the time. Luckily for hunters, these werewolves often have more important matters to attend to than the occasional freakish biped.

Resources

Werewolves that live in the wilds have little use for human inventions or technology. They live off the land and rely on their predatory tools and skills to deal with enemies. Indeed, many take a strong stance against civilization as a corrupting force and disdain all of its trappings. Some even go so far as to look down upon fellow werewolves who partake of mankind's world. Such outland werewolves spend most of their time in wolf form and their lairs may be little more than simple caves that provide shelter against storms. A few might have isolated, ill-maintained shacks for occasional use, but most are content to live purely as animals.

Werewolves that operate in human society usually make full use of most modern conveniences such as automobiles, cellular phones and computers. These werewolves exist across all economic strata, ranging from homeless panhandlers to high-rolling stockbrokers. That said, most werewolves aren't about to risk their public lives to track down hunters. Sure, a werewolf might be able to acquire and afford an illegally bought Uzi, but that doesn't mean he compromises his social position by using it. If a situation is dire or a werewolf has few ties to the human world, he may be willing to clear out his bank account to stock up on firepower. Such an action is the exception for werewolves, though.

Wizards

Wizards present an interesting problem to a **Hunter** Storyteller. They're potentially the most powerful type of antagonist you can introduce. Even a well-meaning Storyteller can decimate a band of

imbued with one warlock. Their ability to literally perform miracles, whether subtle or overt, can make them devastating. Even as hunters gain strength, experience and skill, an alert and determined warlock can make life a living hell for the imbued. Every form of disaster could befall hunters "coincidentally," from suffering a critical car accident to coming to the attention of the IRS. And then a wizard could choose to confront hunters directly....

The important point to understand about sorcerers is that they are *not* monsters in the sense that zombies, ghosts, vampires, werewolves or nightmares seem to be. Yes, wizards are part of the supernatural, embracing it and using such status as any other capacity they would study and hone. But wizards are still essentially people, at least early on in their existence. They emerge from the human masses as different, perhaps even special. They can manipulate the events that happen around them at will. (For their part, hunters also emerge from humanity at large and seem similarly gifted with bizarre capabilities, but these powers are beyond imbued understanding, design and often even the desire to possess them at all. Therein lies hunters' essential difference from sorcerers.)

Furthermore, wizards may appear t be more human than monster in that they generally aren't interested in the material concerns that motivate other monsters. They can engage in Machiavellian politicking just like vampires, but where a vampire must embroil itself in human society to ensure its existence, a witch sees past many encumbering material needs and approaches issues with a certain sense of detachment. Sorcerers wage a struggle that is several orders of magnitude above the street-level wars of hunters and most monsters. A warlock walks the streets only if he *wants* to — he usually never *has* to. His capabilities provide him what he needs without necessarily taking, stealing or killing for it — at least as hunters might be able to discern. Witches exist partially outside the physical realm. While they do have concerns in the material world, most are driven by some greater need in the magical one.

Motivations

Wizards are enigmatic beings who baffle even Visionaries. More so than almost any other antagonist, warlocks are cloaked in a thick mantle of mystery. They aren't simply concerned with trashing some hated enemy or finding a secure lair to call home. They want to mold the stuff of reality itself like a three-year-old playing with a mound of clay. Witches can think and act on a cosmic scale, one that hunters aren't prepared to handle, much less understand. They have

seen the underlying structure of the universe and seek to master it. Money isn't all that important when you can simply concentrate and find a $100 bill in the gutter. Wizards don't let reality master them with promises of money, sex or other mere physical delights, (unless, perhaps, those attractions help a wizard better understand her art). Rather, they strive to understand and master truth itself.

Sorcerers are likely to seek out hunters, rather than the other way around. As dabblers in reality, wizards consider hunters extraordinarily interesting. After achieving some understanding of the nature of the cosmos, the sudden appearance of seemingly normal humans who are blessed with tools to fight the supernatural comes as a bit of a shock to the wizards who notice. Witches might not see hunters as a direct threat to their physical safety, but they can perceive them as a disturbing anomaly that must be investigated — when the imbued aren't mistaken for other warlocks in the making (see "New Kids in Town"). The imbued can therefore bear some serious study.

A sorcerer's quest for magical perfection is a bit too lofty for hunters to become enmeshed in it fully. Rather, a wizard might want an artifact or item that a hunter has stumbled upon. Or perhaps a curious hunter can accidentally find herself caught between two warring wizards, forced to deal with or escape them in order to survive.

Tactics

Sorcerers specialize in subtlety. Just as their magic works via coincidences and seemingly amazing luck, so do most wizards deal with quests, problems and agendas in hopes of remaining low-key. A wizard isn't likely to just confront a group of hunters, though he is more likely than most supernaturals to survive should he get violent. A witch would rather lure hunters to him, carefully orchestrating a series of seemingly chance meetings to gauge what the chosen are capable of and how they react to his existence. Once the hunters have tipped their hands, the witch can then decide whether they're worth his time and effort. A sorceress' time and energy are too important to be wasted on obvious fools or phenomena that hold little mystery.

If faced with hostile hunters, a wizard is likely to attempt to use as little energy as possible to discourage the attack. A sorcerer may put on a minor but impressive show of force, letting the imbued know that they should look for easier prey. A witch has enough to worry about from other magic-using rivals and enemies on the same playing field.

And yet, wizards are capable of underestimating hunters. It's easy to forget that something as simple as a knife is a deadly weapon if it's used with determination and courage. Since wizards are so used to dealing with matters far loftier than a band of gun-toting vigilantes, they may misunderstand what the hunters want and how to reason with them to eliminate the need for violence.

An attacking witch is a fearful foe indeed, especially if she's angry enough to dismiss any thoughts of subtlety or secrecy. As a master of reality, it isn't beyond a sorcerer to arrange for a speeding tanker truck to slam into a hunter's home and detonate in a fearsome inferno. A hunter who has managed to arouse a witch's ire to the point that she sets aside her normal concerns had better make funeral arrangements.

View on Hunters

Sorcerers tend to look at hunters as just another collection of human flotsam and jetsam. A hunter's edges can arouse some curiosity in a warlock, but more often than not, wizards don't go out of their way to interact with hunters. Hunters rarely have much to offer. Unless a hunter performs a phenomenal feat, such wiping out a nest of magic-using vampires, there isn't much chance that the two ever cross paths.

What *can* get a wizard's attention, however, is a hunter who makes an ongoing, dogged effort to follow, investigate and survey him. Warlocks are used to operating in mortal society without drawing people's attention, so there must be something special about individuals in the know. If a wizard has a chance to study his stalkers before meeting them directly, he is more likely to approach out of curiosity rather than fear. How can the imbued recognize him? What do they think they're doing? How did they get this way?

The likely result of such inquiry is a wizard concluding that hunters are burgeoning warlocks themselves, ones who misunderstand what's happening to them but who still begin to manifest capabilities — and some strange ones at that. These initiates might be worth instructing or at least directing to other potential teachers. The irony, of course, is that a sympathetic wizard actually exposes hunters to even more "monsters" to be dealt with when she's actually trying to help. The imbued also get a tiny glimpse into the larger reality that exists among will workers. Of course, all these realizations can be terrifying for the imbued. Since they can understand very little of it all, wizards' realms remain incomprehensible. Maybe that's all the more reason to come to terms with them and learn more — or to kill them all. Ultimately, hunters mistaken for novice wizards learn next to nothing of witches' existence, plans or inter-

The Sage (Wizard)

Perhaps your questions — rather than my answers — need further refinement.

Prelude: Quinn Randolph has been on campus for as long as anyone can remember. He spends a lot of time in the library and always seems to be in a hurry, his hands dug down into the pockets of this trench coat, his eyes rarely straying from the ground in front of him. Most students assume he's a researcher of some sort, though most don't really notice him as they shuffle between classes, parties and work. In fact, Quinn has lived on campus for the past eight years, in a small, forgotten apartment built into the library by some mistake in the blueprints. The librarians who see him enter the stacks day after to day rarely recognize him as a regular visitor.

Quinn likes things that way. He's far too immersed in his work to pay attention to such pointless matters as socializing with his intellectual inferiors. The few times he's had to interact with others — such as when he stole a few rare books on display at the campus museum — he found himself unwilling to even muster the energy to speak. In the case of the robbery, he reflexively unleashed his magic to kill the guards. It was only later that he realized that they approached him with their guns holstered, asking him if he was lost. What a waste. Had he known the guards' intentions, he could have devised a far more efficient way to kill them.

Concept: The Sage is a mystic researcher and chronicler. He observes the world and strives to understand the patterns, truths and secrets he is sure are tucked away beneath the thin veneer of daily survival. The Sage typically keeps himself cloistered with esoteric volumes of forgotten lore. He is typically more interested in discovering knowledge through philosophical analysis or academic research than through legwork or exploration. Occasionally, a bizarre or fascinating occurrence lures him out into the world to engage in firsthand investigation, but he never strays from his studies for long.

Roleplaying Hints: You approach situations in a calm, levelheaded manner. You try to maintain an air of academic disinterest in the affairs of others. You also tend to slip into the jargon and terminology of your chosen specialty, forgetting that others don't share your passion for a particular subject. You may sometimes seem arrogant and haughty, convinced that your learning sets you a cut above. Alternatively, you may consider yourself a teacher who must impart wisdom and nurture academic thought.

Equipment: The Sage usually surrounds himself with a treasure trove of books, artifacts and other tools useful to his chosen field of study. Most Sages prefer to settle in quiet areas where their studies may go uninterrupted. Others live in cities that host a wide range of libraries, and they use their personal lairs as workshops rather than as archives.

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

Abilities: Academics (Metaphysics) 4, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Intuition 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2, Occult (Myths) 5, Performance 2, Research 3

Backgrounds: Resources 2

Powers: Elements 4, Foundation 2

Willpower: 9

Quintessence: 10

The Neighborhood Witch (Wizard)

You'd best close the door before you let a chill in... or something gets out.

Prelude: The kids in the neighborhood stay away from the alley between Beckman's Grocery and the Livingston's brownstone. They say the black door at the alley's end, the one with the little sign advertising tarot and palm readings, leads to a small apartment where a mean old witch lives. She comes out of her lair at night and eats anyone she finds on the street too late. To hear the kids tell the story, you'd think they were lucky to be alive.

Grace Cunningham finds these stories endlessly amusing, if a bit on the trite side. In her 15 years living in the neighborhood's "haunted" apartment, she's just happy that no one has worked up the nerve to break in and discover the truth. Of course, she has visitors. If local reporters knew how many politicians have come to her seeking advice over the years, she'd have photographers staked outside day and night. She's never run into any bad luck in her business. And if she likes a customer or if he can offer something valuable, she may actually give him a real reading. Still, she'd rather attend to more important matters. If a customer becomes insistent on seeing her, she can always assure that the particularly grim predictions she makes come true.

Concept: The neighborhood witch is the stuff of childhood. Almost every neighborhood has at least one spooky old lady who's reputed to capture kids. No one ever actually sees her, although sometimes there's a car in her driveway or silhouettes appear behind her curtained windows. Most of the time, the stories are complete exaggeration. The occupant is just an elderly recluse spending her declining years in the comfort of her own home. Other times, the stories don't go far enough.

Roleplaying Hints: You usually want to be left alone, but sometimes take comfort in the company of others. You tend to talk to everyone you meet, even hunters toting virtual arsenals, as if they were lost children. You are supremely confident in your abilities and have the wisdom of a long life to back you up. You rarely take a benevolent or malevolent stance on your surroundings. You watch your neighbors with detached amusement. If the spirits you summon accidentally raise havoc, so be it. Your talents are too important and too useful to go to waste.

Equipment: A large house in the suburbs, very big but rarely used sedan, typical suburban décor and knick-knacks, a basement laboratory complete with the entire witch shtick: bizarre substances such as bat wings, arcane symbols scribed on the walls and ritual gear

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4 (Motherly), Appearance 2, Perception (Eagle Eyed) 4, Intelligence (Worldly) 4, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics (Local Folklore) 3, Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Crafts (Knitting) 2, Dodge 2, Intuition 3, Investigation 2, Linguistics 2, Occult (Urban Legends) 4, Performance (Storytelling) 4, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Resources 2

Powers: Fortune 3, Spiritualism 3

Willpower: 8

Quintessence: 10

actions. It takes even genuine wizards years to digest all the permutations. Hunters are lucky to carry out their charade for days or weeks before being recognized — and punished.

Dealing with Hunters

Mages who believe in the supremacy of science as a means to miracles are likely to be alarmed by the appearance of the imbued. A hunter's edges represent an unexpected and quite unscientific phenomenon. Acquiring and studying a hunter might become a priority mission for such a wizard, especially if he comes across hunters who use their edges blatantly in public places. Anything that represents the supernatural must be tightly controlled in the eyes of these wizards. Hunters who are not willing to cooperate are probably disposed of quietly. These agents believe that anyone capable of inexplicable acts undermines their world outlook and scientific efforts and must be "contained." Like other wizards, however, even those who advance science work in circles far above the street-level existence of most hunters. They have a lot of very big fish to fry. The isolated appearance of a few flashy hunters is not likely to draw their attention on a widespread level.

When an individual techno-wizard does encounter hunters, she is very likely to see them as a tool to use against other supernaturals. The imbued are largely indistinguishable from normal humans, making them well suited to lure into conflicts without drawing the masses' — or other wizards' — attention.

Interactions

Wizards are divided into two principle camps: the scientific and mystical. The former believes that reason and the systematic control of magic are critical to ensuring stability and happiness for warlocks and humans. Supporters of arcane traditions hold that those with the talent to do so should practice magic freely and that defining reality with science makes humanity stagnant and dull, diminishing the number of people who can arise, embrace magic and become wizards.

The scientists currently have the upper hand. Thanks in part to this faction's efforts, logic and experimental thought reign supreme in human minds and perceptions. Mythical magic is looked upon as a fanciful, archaic and ultimately fictitious. The truth, as hunters learn all too well when they're imbued, is far from absolute. Magic, though repressed, still has its practitioners. These rebels in the war for reality are the most common sort of witches that hunters might encounter. (The scientists and their agents often seem like little more than mundane authority figures such as FBI agents or security personnel — and occasionally only slightly *off* to second sight.) The mystics study their art and work magic despite the efforts of their rivals, desperately clinging to their abilities yet careful to never push them too far lest they attract too much attention.

While the scientific order is largely monolithic in intent and action, the mystics represent a wide range of beliefs and attitudes. Each faction of arcane magicians focuses on a different path to enlightenment. Some seek knowledge in the absolute limits of human passion while others turn to the wonders of other worlds or the possibilities of the divine. While two sorcerers may exhibit similar powers, they're likely to give very different reasons for how and why their powers function. While seemingly subtle to hunters, these differences are enough to pit mages against each other, even while they have greater common enemies.

Mortal Society

The wizard ability Escaping the Mind's Eye (**Hunter Storytellers Companion**, p. 54) serves as a metaphor for how wizards approach humanity. Many warlocks stay in touch with loved ones. Some even focus their abilities on helping their fellow man. But to most, humanity is simply a distraction, a lumbering beast that defines reality through sheer momentum but does little to manipulate it. Where vampires hide their nature from society but move within it to feed and manipulate, most sorcerers shun social contact. Political and economic power mean little to wizards who have glimpsed what real power is and can accept no substitute. A warlock allied with a mayor is like a pro baseball player signing on with a minor-league team. He might be able to dominate the action, but why settle for a cheap plastic MVP trophy and the love of a small town when you can play in the big leagues for multimillion dollar contracts and worldwide fame?

Warlocks still take pains to hide themselves from mortal eyes, though, even when they wield power far beyond anything society could oppose or control. Since humanity generally doesn't offer anything wizards want, the sorcerer status quo is to avoid as many human entanglements as possible. Each hour spent dealing with mundane matters is time that could be spent mastering reality. Humanity — which includes hunters — isn't usually worth dealing with.

Resources

Since wizards deal in matters beyond most mortals' comprehension, a video-game system or sports car fails to instill the same level of excitement in wizards that such material possessions do in people. A wizard might build up a large personal fortune to

deal with any minor real-world annoyances that arise or might recognize that humans do value such things and can be bought to perform mundane services, but such conventional resources are generally considered banal. Indeed, a witch may choose to sever as many ties to mundane society as possible and own little more than what she can carry, relying on magic for everything else.

Technological wizards are a somewhat different story. They have access to resources afforded by a worldwide conspiracy dedicated to suppressing and controlling magic. Considering the wide gulf in power between the average wizard and the average hunter, techno-wizards' foot soldiers can easily outgun even well funded imbued. Assault rifles, attack helicopters and experimental technology are all at the scientists' fingertips.

Nightmares

Goblins are probably the most bizarre creatures that hunters can face. Spirits were once human, as were vampires and wizards. Werewolves must often spend at least part of their lives within human society or at the very least learn how to hide within it by assuming human form. Nightmares do not seem to be bound by such mundane trappings. As creatures that appear to reside within a person and that manifest periodically in the material world, goblins can seem alien and bizarre. Most hunters are completely confused by the creatures and often mistake them for some sort of possessing spirit.

Nightmares serve best as a change of pace in a **Hunter** chronicle. Their nature and interactions with society are very different than other monsters'. Nightmares that victimize humans usually do so out of malicious or sadistic impulses, not necessarily need. While vampires must prey upon people and are a clear danger, nightmares can have their own inscrutable agendas and their own reasons for harming, avoiding or even helping people. Patently evil and unrepentant villains can do a disservice to **Hunter** when every monster the imbued encounter needs to be put down. Goblins are the antithesis of such unsalvageable opponents because their confusing nature and unclear intentions can make them difficult to identify as enemy or ally. They can seem to possess people, but do no harm to hosts' lives. They can inspire creativity in humans or ravage people for their inspiration and leave victims emotionally drained. The imbued therefore rarely have clear-cut choices when it comes to dealing with these entities.

Interactions

Goblin society, even more so than that of werewolves, is hierarchy-based. While shapechangers' standing is derived from respect and accomplishments, nobles empowered with the inborn right to lead rule goblins. Most nobles have near absolute authority in their domains, requiring nightmares to obey their laws or suffer the consequences. Nobles and their courts operate under a feudal system, with the most powerful bearing bonds of fealty from the lower ranking. Noble titles are often inherited along bloodlines, with a single family claiming control over a particular worldly region. Commoner nightmares are given little voice in government and the gap between rulers and subjects is wide and sometimes unbridgeable. This rift is often a source of friction within nightmare society. Goblins are acutely aware of their place; social rank is a prominent and important part of all nightmare interactions.

Goblins who respect tradition embrace an honorable life that preserves the ways of the past. These creatures tend behave and dress in an anachronistic manner, affecting mannerisms and styles more in keeping with a Middle Ages court than the modern world. Rebellious nightmares are quite the opposite. They see little need for pretense, codes of honor or any other rules when a minority ruling body represses their people. These anarchists live in the present, scorning the weight of history and acting on their own urges and desires.

Not to say that either group is "good" or "evil." Both have their strengths and weaknesses, morals and taboos. A traditional goblin might commit murder if ordered to by his liege while a rebel could respect individual lives and seek his own way. A traditionalist could espouse fairness to all creatures while a rebel lies and betrays.

Motivations

A nightmare's first goal in life is to ensure that it has steady access to glamour, the human creative energies on which it survives. A goblin that lacks these energies quickly fades away and eventually abandons its host altogether. Goblins seek a reliable source of this power, whether it's a highly creative individual who radiates passion, or a normal person from whom the nightmare ruthlessly extracts the essence of its existence.

Nightmare society also presents many goals for which goblins strive. A member of the nobility might try to prove herself worthy of a throne or some other important station. While the highest stations of society are determined by blood, a lord's trusted and most capable allies fill the lesser ones. A noble who proves her worth through acts of daring or loyalty can rise through the ranks quickly. A traditionalist nightmare may track down and bring a defiant rebel to justice, for example, and come into favor.

Even commoners have quite a bit to strive for in courtly nightmare society. While many positions are denied them by birth, commoners who prove themselves useful to rulers can curry favors, rewards or somewhat greater standing in the hierarchy.

Outcasts tend to view the world as a chaotic place where only the strong survive. They delight in humiliating pretentious and arrogant traditionalists, and their pranks often have a dangerous or deadly bent. Indeed, a rebel may pull off a grand prank on a stiff traditionalist to gain the respect of his peers. To some rebels, humanity is a vast reservoir of glamour waiting to be reaped, with or without consideration for a subject's consent or well being. In some ways, rebels are like werewolves in that they revel in displays of power, skill and martial prowess, and can gain status among each other out of respect for their capabilities.

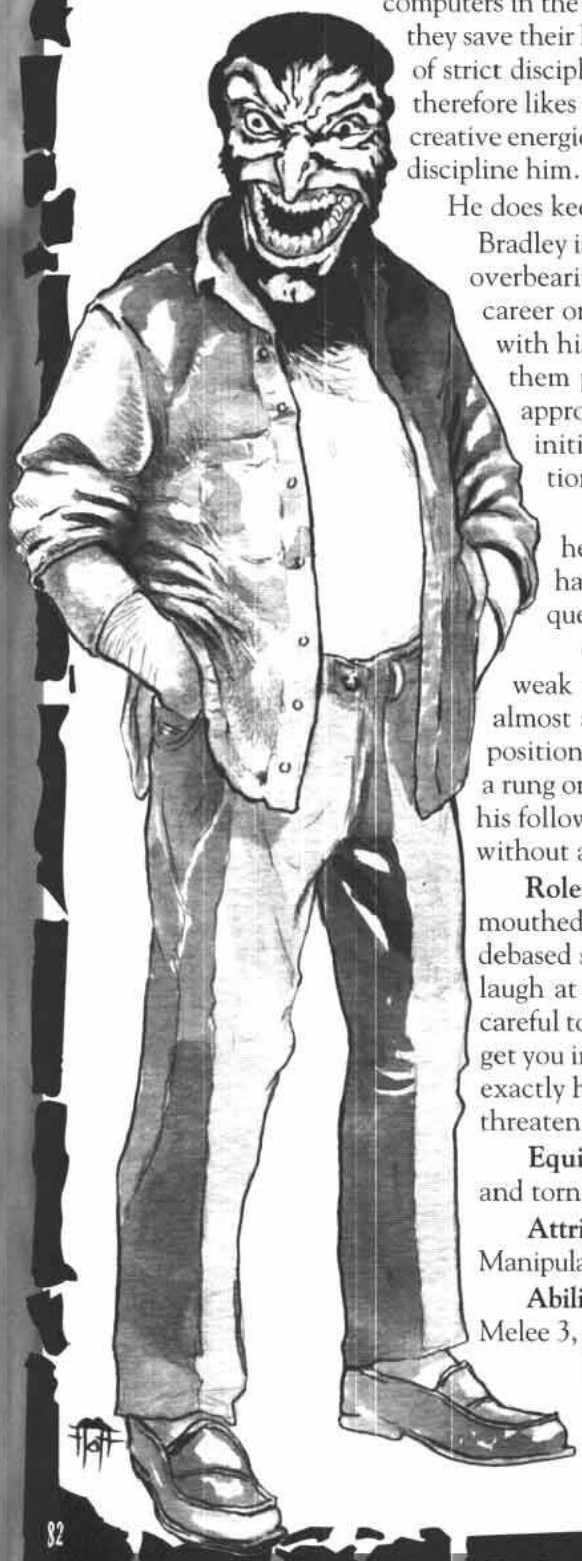
Tactics

Traditional beings tend to deal with threats in a highly organized manner, in keeping with their rigid hierarchies and strictly defined power relationships. When initially confronted with an external danger, nightmares are quick to respond. A noble who cannot defend her vassals often loses the confidence of her underlings. Thus, any threat is taken seriously, no matter how minor it may initially seem. While the upper levels of nightmare leadership may view any threat with caution, lower ranking members of the nobility often greet them as challenges and opportunities to prove their talents. Most reigning goblins prefer to let the lower ranks do the fighting for them rather than risk the prestige they've worked so hard to attain. Thus, nightmares who respond to a threat are not necessarily the most skilled or powerful ones in the region, but they are often highly motivated and relentless in pursuing a goal.

Rebellious nightmares put significant emphasis on personal strength and skill in combat. They typically constitute the internal threats to which nobles respond thanks to their sheer audacity. The more mayhem they can sow among humans and other nightmares — inciting riots, causing accidents, committing crimes — the more respect and power they command among fellow outcasts. Most rebels have a strong sense of self-preservation, however. They may concoct elaborate and brutally destructive plans, but these can quickly disintegrate in the face of determined opposition.

The Bravo

Beat the shit out of him, fellas.



Prelude: The kids at JFK High School might complain about the crappy food in the cafeteria, the broken-down computers in the library and the 1960s vintage science textbooks in their classrooms, but they save their hatred for Mr. Bradley. Stewart Bradley teaches art at JFK, with a history of strict discipline and a record of rigid control over his students. The administration therefore likes him. If it knew that Bradley was actually a goblin who literally sucks the creative energies from his students, leaving them uninspired and listless, they'd probably discipline him... but leave him in his current position.

He does keep the kids quiet, after all.

Bradley is a well-respected member of the faculty. While some teachers find him overbearing, he's always careful to keep anyone with the potential to derail his career on good terms. He's a bully at heart, but he's not stupid. When dealing with his students, he's always careful to keep any disparaging remarks against them purely in terms of their work. He delights in draining them dry, yet approaches the task with the care of a twisted gardener. Promising students initially receive his support and praise, which makes the eventual exhaustion of their creative spark all the more delectable.

Bradley maintains the façade of a stern but effective educator. While he does associate with a small pack of goblins, he tends to bully them into handling most of his grunt work. He can't afford to let even a single questionable incident tarnish his reputation.

Concept: The bully on the block, the Bravo loves to push around the weak while avoiding anyone who can take him on in a fight. The Bravo is almost always at the head of a pack of similar-minded but weak goblins, his position secure until a bigger and meaner goblin comes along to take him down a rung or two. The Bravo is quite aware of that danger and does his best to keep his followers in line with threats, abuse and promises of easy pickings. A Bravo without a pack backing him up is far too exposed for his own comfort.

Roleplaying Hints: You are a social monstrosity. Rude, crude and foul-mouthed to the extreme, you delight in shocking the more refined you're your debased sense of humor and repellent personal habits. You are always ready to laugh at another's misfortune. However, you are also quite cunning. You are careful to watch your words and manners when you know that mouthing off can get you in trouble. An opportunistic coward to the core, you are always aware of exactly how much you can get away with in any situation. You are abusive and threatening to the weak but often a sniveling toad around superiors.

Equipment: In human form: switchblade, battered leather jacket, stained and torn jeans; in goblin form: battleaxe, mouth full of razor-sharp teeth

Attributes: Strength (Brutal) 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Rotund) 4, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits (Cunning) 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation (Bully) 4, Melee 3, Occult 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2

Backgrounds: None

Powers: Leap, Tangle

Willpower: 6

Glamour: 8

The Paladin

I would be honored to die in the name of my cause. Can you say the same?

Prelude: Wendy Sanders has been on the force for only a year, but in that short period she has already earned a reputation as a straight-laced officer. She never shakes down dealers or accepts protection money. The dirty cops avoid her and discussions of corrupt activities are hushed up when she's around. Wendy isn't oblivious to what goes on in the force. In many ways, she accepts it, knowing that even a bad precinct is better than none.

Wendy also has an important secret of her own. Not only does she police mortal society, she has been charged with keeping order among the nightmares of her home city. Wendy is actually a troll commanded to join the police force by her liege in order to deal with any potential problems that may threaten local goblins. Wendy approaches her task with grim determination. She sees herself as the first and possibly last line of defense between her fellow nightmares and mortal society. To Wendy, the world is but a pale shadow of its former glory. She hopes that in some small way she is doing her part to restore it to a more honorable, civilized place. Until then, she contents herself with busting perps and keeping a sharp eye out for trouble.

Concept: The Paladin is a staunch supporter of the status quo. Her sense of duty and unswerving devotion are a result of her fundamental belief that order, stability and loyalty are the glue that holds society together. Without them, everything would devolve into anarchy, leaving the strong free to victimize the weak. She doesn't pretend that she knows everything and often looks to her superiors for guidance. What she lacks in flexibility she more than makes up for in toughness, grit and strength. Unfortunately, that also means she can sometimes fall under the sway of a corrupt leader or commit immoral actions for the greater good of society.

Roleplaying Hints: You tend to approach any situation with a calm, collected manner. Your duty is to the powers that be, regardless of your personal or emotional leanings. You must therefore be very deliberate in all actions. You cannot afford to let your emotions dictate your deeds, nor can you forget your obligations. You tend to follow the general demeanor of whomever you obey. The dominant social order must not only be preserved, it should be championed. Those who deviate from expected behavior should be punished.

Equipment: In human form: immaculate uniform, weapon appropriate to line of work in law enforcement; in nightmare form: archaic armor, broadsword

Attributes: Strength (Powerful) 4/6, Dexterity 3, Stamina (Tough) 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception (Watchful) 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 1, Law 2, Melee 3

Backgrounds: Mentor 2

Powers: None

Willpower: 8

Glamour: 8

Rebels might motivate a peaceful human demonstration to turn violent, for example, but when traditional goblins use the same chaos as a cover to put the rebels down, the resistance's plans may collapse. A clever nightmare always has a foolproof escape plan at the slightest sign of real danger. Many rebels believe that defense and running away are one and the same. To some anarchists, as long as a plan includes enough opportunities for chest beating, grandstanding and ego massaging, it doesn't really matter if any concrete results are achieved.

View on Hunters

Hunters represent a dangerous and unsettling development to those goblins who acknowledge imbued existence. Hunters, as regular people, can't understand what nightmares are beyond alien, intrusive and potentially dangerous. Hunters, like many humans, have a tendency to destroy what they don't understand. The imbued therefore tend to react harshly to goblins, putting the creatures on the defensive.

Hunters pose a potential danger to the few traditional goblins who recognize them because the chosen are far from traditional themselves. They're a new phenomenon. There's little or no context in goblin history that suggests how to respond to hunters, except as unimaginative, closed-minded people. The fact that traditional goblin society is also fossilized and slow to respond to new threats makes reacting to the imbued ponderous at best.

Rebels are quicker to adapt to the emergence of the imbued — if they ever notice them. While some outcasts may be annoyed to discover a new force that curbs their excessive tendencies, hunters represent an important opportunity to gain glory and prestige in the eyes of peers, without risking a head-on confrontation with the nightmare establishment. Given rebels' chaotic nature, their response to hunters varies widely. Some may turn tail and run at the sight of the imbued and their edges. Many rebels may approach hunters on very personal terms, striking up loose alliances if compassion or consideration is demonstrated or nursing hatred toward those that spoil the goblins' fun. Particularly violent nightmares have a tendency to be bullies. They may intensify their efforts against hunters who present determined opposition or fold completely when their bluffs are called.

Dealing with Hunters

Traditionalist nightmares that suspect hunters' existence at all can watch the imbued warily. These few nobles recognize hunters as a danger: people who offer little to gain. As counterpoints to the supernatural, hunters generally have no place in nightmare society and are considered barbarous invaders no matter their true intentions. Elders among the traditionalists tend to avoid hunters at all costs, unwilling to risk their status and power on enemies who fail to recognize the lords' authority. Young traditionalists are a much different story. An unproved nightmare who takes down a threatening hunter can win much acclaim and admiration from her fellows, helping pave the way for advancement among her own kind.

Idealistic goblins may have a completely different take on hunters and may approach them on diplomatic terms. Since hunters perceive supernatural creatures, open-minded nightmares might believe the imbued capable of opening other people's eyes to the creatures that exist in the world, introducing the fantastic to humanity and spurring the hearts and minds of men. Idealistic hunters could even agree to try while jaded ones could react negatively or violently.

Rebels can resent hunters. Most outcasts are accustomed to working without outside interference, taking the creative energy they need from people. Hunters who oppose such efforts, which would be almost any chosen who witnesses such a ravaging, are a real pain in the ass. Many rebels prefer to form packs to take on the imbued. Brave and bold rebels can seek out dangerous hunters to prove their mettle alone.

Mortal Society

The rift between traditionalist and rebel extends to how the camps act toward mortals. Traditionalists tend to take be passive toward humanity. While they harvest the creative energies around them, they do not usually seek to harm their targets. Many traditionalists stay in close contact with naturally creative people such as artists, musicians or writers. They try to live in harmony with the human world and soak up the ambient creative energies that dynamic individuals generate. Rebels take a much more aggressive and destructive attitude. Rather than go to the effort of cultivating bonds with highly imaginative people, many rebels simply force the creative energies out of people, inducing a sort of emotional rape that leaves victims drained of imagination and any love of life. Rebels see humans as a renewable resource that is meant to be used and abused as needed.

Both traditionalists and outcasts tend to be much more involved in dealings with other nightmares than with humans. Still, a nightmare's human host must interact with the mundane world and a vessel's actions and attitudes at least partially reflect a nightmare's tendencies. A violent, pugnacious goblin can have a thrill-seeking gangbanger host

who initiates brawls with other gangs and victimizes the weak and powerless. A calm and just troll, on the other hand, may dwell within the body of a police officer. This matching of vessel and nightmare does not always have to be so clear cut, however. A seemingly aggressive and heartless business executive may be a goblin, perhaps a lowly member of a gang of commoners, while a college professor may be a physically frail but extremely wise troll. Whatever their guises, nightmares assume a variety of roles within human society. Their monstrous nature may influence their hosts' activity, but their true otherworldly identity only comes to the fore when the nightmares manifest.

Resources

Goblins are of meager means compared to other monster types. Many, particularly traditionalists, shun use of modern equipment. The items that they form with the collected essence of creativity — swords, steeds, armor — are far more important and useful to them. The most dangerous thing about these items is that many nightmares can cause them to appear as if from thin air. An apparently unarmed and helpless "possession victim" can suddenly transform into a heavily armed, armored and alien warrior.

Overall, nightmares do not have access to many of the resources that other monster types do. Since nightmares do not exert direct control over their mundane hosts, they do not normally plunder bank accounts or amass arsenals to prepare for hunters or other threats. Nightmares tend to care about items and gear that they can use when dealing with other nightmares, rather than about equipment to use against threats in the mundane world.

Monster versus Monstrous

"Look, I thought we talked about this."

"We did." Claire answered. "You're just wrong."

Jonathan frowned and shouted down the hall after her. "No, you're just not looking at it logically. If you'd—"

"Don't use that 'logic' crap on me again. Don't patronize me."

"Okay, okay." Jonathan conceded. "But I can't help the way I feel. You're about to make a big mistake."

Claire spun around at the end of the hall and walked toward him. "Big mistake? You think going after that monster is a mistake? Do you hear what you're saying?"

"I might ask you the same question. You're starting to sound like Crusader."

"Well, at least Crusader wouldn't waste time droning on about philosophy when there are kids — little children — being murdered. Someone's got to do something."

"Yeah, the police." Jonathan was hurt, but he tried to hide it. "That's their job."

"Well, they aren't doing it very well, are they?"

"That's not the point, Claire, and you know it. It's about whether we have any right to intervene."

"Any right?" She shot back. "Any right? We have every right! We have a responsibility to do something. Why do you think we've been granted these... these powers?"

Jonathan moved closer to her. "I don't know. I really don't. But I'm pretty sure it wasn't to go out into the streets and become a vigilante. I don't think that's what they expect from us."

"I'm sure that's very comforting to the parents who've lost their children to that thing. *Look, I don't expect you to agree with me. I don't expect you to come with me. I do expect you to understand that I can't sit back and let it happen. I have to do this. Don't you understand that?"*

He shook his head. "No. It just seems wrong."

"It's not," Claire sighed. "It's no different than when you, Craig and I took out that bloodsucker or when we put that spirit to rest. Now there's another monster on the loose and it's my job to deal with him. What's so wrong about that?"

"But this 'monster' is human, *Claire."*

She gave him a hug. "All the more reason why I've got to do it."

Who Is a Monster?

It's easy to consider a vampire, werewolf or ghost a monster. They so clearly violate our everyday sense of what's natural that there's no other word to describe them. Consequently, they form the better part of an imbued's enemies — but are they the only monsters?

Common opinion often holds that rapists, murderers and pedophiles are "monsters" as well. Is that simply a metaphor? Some hunters don't think so. They consider such people — although human — every bit as dangerous as goblins or warlocks. Some view these human monsters as even worse since they collaborate — through shared victimization of defenseless people — with the very enemy the imbued have been called on to confront.

But why end the definition of monster there? Malice and lust aren't the only human motivations that serve the enemy and stymie the mission. What about the case of the old busybody who lives next door to a hunter and who reports his late-night activities to overzealous cops who are just itching for a chance to nail him? Are they all monsters, too? If a hunter's not careful, it's easy to see enemies everywhere.

Yet, there's no denying that even curious schoolchildren and mentally unstable vagrants can threaten

the success of the hunt. Sometimes they just get in the way or see something better left unseen. Does that make them the enemy? Where do the imbued draw the line and what is the appropriate response to human antagonists who do not merit the epithet "monster"?

This chapter helps you blur the lines between the enemies that hunters face and the people they choose to protect. It intensifies the already daunting gray area that exists between being monstrous and performing monstrous actions. Inhuman creatures might seek salvation and hope to do good in the world while perfectly human people might be wanton killers or simply abusive to their fellow man. Which is worse? Which is the real monster? There's no truly correct answer. Each hunter must decide what's right for himself, but the vague distinctions and highly personal decisions involved preclude almost any two hunters from agreeing on a clear and obvious answer. The result can be moral and ethical dilemmas for the protagonists of your chronicle and genuine contention between characters about how to carry out the hunt. If facing yet another flesh-rending werewolf would continue to make monsters black to hunters' white, make players and the imbued consider the definition of "monster" by confronting them with the crimes and depredations of regular old people.

Making the Distinction

There are almost as many perspectives on the issue of human monsters and antagonists as there are hunters. The enemy of a Zealot is a lost soul to one of the Merciful. Furthermore, the Messengers seem to do little to clarify the matter. They make people see creatures for what they are, but let the imbued interpret the danger posed by each and decide upon an appropriate response on their own thereafter. That hunters can hear the call while confronting supernaturally controlled drug dealers or mobsters only muddies the waters further. There's no hard-and-fast rule that separates genuine monsters from their more mundane counterparts. Neither is there any clear guidance on whether a child pornographer is a proper subject of the hunt. The imbued must look inward for answers.

Hunters come from all walks of life. They represent almost every conceivable human origin and belief system. This fact alone ensures that consensus on almost any issue — never mind one as contentious as this — remains painfully elusive. The personal history of each hunter takes on greater significance than ever, for it's where she turns for answers when none are forthcoming from the Heralds or fellow chosen.

A fundamentalist Christian may see an abortionist as a monster while an arms manufacturer dealing in land mines is still human. Conversely, an equal-rights activist might consider the Christian hunter as much a monster as any poltergeist. In a similar vein, an executive who blows the whistle on his company for ecological negligence may view corporate polluters as the enemy. Without a clear and universally accepted definition of "monster," the imbued must draw on their own experiences and values for guidance — just like everyone else does.

The confusion surrounding this issue can even be seen in the jargon hunters use. "Puppets" are human pawns of the enemy, whether they're witting or unwitting. The use of a single term to describe both types of pawns reveals an ambiguity or uncertainty about the degree to which humans are culpable for their actions in the service of evil. Even more ambiguous are the "soulless," a blanket term for anyone who venerates or supports the enemy through "questionable behavior." Naturally, "questionable behavior" is a vague and subjective phrase defined by an individual hunter's own moral and ethical beliefs.

This isn't to say there are no widely held perspectives on which human antagonists truly qualify as monstrous and which do not. Almost everyone acknowledges a child molester as a wonton criminal. But these broad perspectives can tend to stem from the Virtues to which the imbued are dedicated, as well. Naturally, there remains a great deal of variation even within each Virtue. For example, a Defender and an Avenger might deal with drug dealers plaguing an inner city differently, even if both agree that the people are worthy subjects of the hunt. The Avenger might hurt them while driving them off might satisfy the Defender. Nevertheless, the Virtues provide a basis on which hunters can begin to grapple with the thorny issue of monster versus monstrous.

Virtue Perspectives

Remember that Virtues are *game mechanics* that represent the three broad philosophies to which the imbued adhere. The chosen don't use them to explain their actions, but both players and Storytellers do.

The Merciful recognize that human beings can — and regularly do — make mistakes, even grave ones. Consequently, they are less inclined to view human wrongdoing as "monstrous" than are the other two Virtues. Indeed, the Merciful are most likely to accept "external" explanations for miscreants' actions: He was a victim of child abuse or she is an alcoholic.

It would be a mistake, however, to equate this acceptance of explanations as equivalent to an

acceptance of excuses. The Merciful seek explanations in order to defeat whatever it is that has turned an opponent down his dark path. They do not seek to exculpate him from his actions. Knowing that a rapist was himself a victim of sexual abuse provides the means by which the Merciful can seek to heal the person of his trauma. It does not exempt him from punishment. Merciful hunters know this distinction well — much to the chagrin of their critics.

Hunters adhering to Vision share an outlook with the Merciful in that they're reluctant to brand human evil as "monstrous" without good cause. Their fundamental interest in understanding their enemies prevents them from leaping to conclusions or making rash decisions. Above all, Vision's chosen seek insight into how and why human beings commit evil acts.

These hunters part company with the Merciful when it comes to accepting the possibility of healing errant people. Although they don't deny that genuinely misguided souls can be rehabilitated, they don't rule out that many evildoers are well and truly lost, with no chance of salvation. In fact, some Vision adherents look to the destruction of such human antagonists as ultimately beneficial, as it prepares the way for the inheritance of the Earth by the "pure." Needless to say, not all hunters of Vision share this position.

The Zealous possess a strong sense of right and wrong, black and white. Whatever their particular belief systems, they're not timid in branding many humans as "monsters." Indeed, it's often their first reaction upon encountering someone whose beliefs or actions do not match their own. Demonization is thus a popular part of the arsenal they use to fight the enemy.

The Zealous differ from those of the other two Virtues in that they may have little interest in understanding their opponents. For them, actions speak louder than words. If a human being sells drugs or beats up minorities, that's usually enough proof of his depravity. The Zealous rarely care why the person does what he does. What matters is that he be stopped before he furthers the enemy's cause any further.

In the end, though, the imbued of every Virtue are ordinary people confronted with extraordinary circumstances. Without easy answers to the realities they face, they seek guidance from whatever moral compasses they possess. Sometimes they find the answers they seek. Sometimes they won't. It's that quest for answers — and the uncertainty that accompanies it — that's at the heart of **Hunter** and that drives its stories.

Antagonist Types

The issue of human antagonists is made more complicated once you look at the various people considered "monsters" by one group of hunters or another. Given the diversity present among even the Virtues, there's hardly a segment of human society that at least one hunter doesn't consider a worthy subject of the hunt. Certain groups draw imbued attention more readily than others. This attention often crosses Virtue groupings; there's something approximating a consensus regarding their merit as enemies.

At the bottom of the "food chain of antagonism" are curious people. This group consists of everyone from the neighborhood snoop to conspiracy theorists to inquisitive children. The curious rarely rank as genuine monsters in the estimation of any hunter. Yet they can prove remarkably frustrating antagonists, whether they realize it or not.

The curious threaten the hunt by the desire to learn more about the imbued's activities. In some instances, this desire may place them in danger, complicating a hunter's activities. In others, this desire may lead to the involvement of additional groups such as the police or a neighborhood watch, members of which may have more sinister motives for learning about and acting against hunters. In both instances, the curious can become serious obstacles to the chosen.

Of slightly more concern are fanatical people. These individuals take their roles (whether real or imagined) more seriously than they should, to the detriment of the imbued. Good examples of fanatics are cops looking to "take back the streets," investigative journalists and social activists. As with the curious, few hunters consider these people "monstrous," but most find them genuinely problematic.

The fanatical are a danger because they believe strongly in whatever cause they support. They are difficult to deter once they become involved, and the degree to which they can interfere with the hunt is significant. Police officers, for example, have the legal authority to bar a hunter from certain locales while journalists can draw public attention to "strange goings-on" in a hunter's area. In each case, the fanatical make the chosen's life difficult.

As more and more governments cut back on social programs, an intermediary class of human antagonist is created: the mentally ill. Formerly confined to institutions and health centers, the insane are now a more common sight on the streets of many cities. Not all of these souls are homeless or even poor, but many are. The latter are the individuals most likely to be encountered by the imbued — and the most likely to interfere with their mission.

The mentally ill present a serious problem to hunters because they are clearly not responsible for their actions. Yet their derangement is often such that they can prove a serious threat. The insane can sometimes serve the enemy through their erratic actions, as well as providing a convenient cover for monsters. This makes deciding how to deal with the mentally ill a genuine moral quandary, even for Zealous hunters. They pose a moral problem because the crimes committed by these people are arguably not their own fault. But there's no denying that they still commit heinous acts. Can a hunter persecute a mentally ill criminal where the courts would provide him with treatment instead? A criminal's mental illness can deny the righteousness that a hunter might use to strike at the person, creating many interesting roleplaying possibilities.

Criminals, whether individuals or organized, prove a much greater threat to the imbued. Criminals act with clear purposes that runs counter to the good of society and the continuation of the hunt. That's why many hunters, especially those adhering to Zeal, consider criminals "monsters." Of course, this estimation depends greatly on the sorts of illegal activities engaged. Petty thieves or muggers are less likely to draw hunter ire than drug dealers or kidnappers.

Criminals are also a threat because they thrive in the same underworld in which many monsters and the chosen do. The hunt often requires the imbued to skirt the law in order to succeed. Run-ins with criminals are likely in the process. If criminals knowingly or unknowingly run with monsters, hunters can assume complicity with some degree of certainty.

Organized criminals prove a particular dilemma for hunters. The vast scale of their operations makes them hard to ignore. Criminals are thus the first type of human antagonist to rise above being mere obstacles and to become potential enemies.

Whereas criminals usually undertake their deeds for personal gain, malicious people do so simply out of hatred. Examples of this varied group range from racists to gay bashers to lowly vandals. Hunters of all Virtues can consider these humans "monsters" as their actions stem from malevolence rather than self-aggrandizement or other misguided motivations.

The malicious do not usually pose a direct threat to the imbued (unless a hunter is one of their targets), but the mere existence of this group challenges hunter resolve. Why struggle to free and protect humanity when some people behave like this?

The intensity with which some malicious offenders commit acts can be a wake-up call to any hunter who does not believe humans can be "monsters." It's

hard to deny the repeated murder of children and to find some worthwhile aspect in the perpetrator. Ironically, the Merciful can spearhead an imbued response to the malicious — a direct rebuke of their usual philosophy. Malicious offenders can prove to even the forgiving that the abusers feel no regret for their actions and forfeit any hope of understanding or penance. The Merciful can recognize that these people must simply be put down.

If there's a class of human antagonist about which few hunters disagree, it's sexual predators. These depraved humans — mostly rapists and child molesters— use power, whether it be physical, psychological or otherwise, to satisfy their basest instincts. Because these antagonists often prey on those they deem weak or defenseless, they merit special hatred from many of the imbued.

There's a reasonable consensus that sexual predators are "monsters," even among the Merciful. The Zealous take particular satisfaction in disposing of these people. Some imbued even see disturbing parallels between the behavior of sexual predators and many supernatural entities, especially vampires, which has led to them to posit a connection between the monsters. While no proof of such a bond exists, it makes it easier for many hunters to consider these human antagonists worthy targets of the hunt.

Serial killers share many similarities with sexual predators, including the gratification they receive from their acts. If possible, serial killers are even more depraved than sexual offenders because their deeds are usually more deliberate and planned. They result less from a surrender to base instinct than from cold calculation according to a twisted scheme. Serial killers thus prove both more elusive and far more dangerous.

Again, there is a broad consensus that serial killers are "monsters." The primary disagreements between the imbued revolve around the extent to which serial killers are direct servants of the enemy. Many repeat offenders are reputed to have occult associations, a fact dismissed by the psychological community. The latter paint them as extreme sexual predators, instead. Is this assessment correct or has the enemy used psychologists' dismissal to evade detection?

Naturally, this list of possible human antagonists is far from exhaustive. Numerous other types exist, either as subsets of the groups mentioned here or as wholly separate from them. What all share is an undefined status on the fringes of the hunt. Because the hunter community is young, fractious and diverse, the extent to which the imbued should and will become involved in dealing with so-called human monsters has yet to be decided.

Many hunters, especially the Merciful, may understand the Heralds' call in the narrowest possible terms, seeing it as a vocation to save humanity specifically from supernatural enemies. Others, like the Zealous, may see the destruction of human monsters as integral to their mission. As more and more hunters arise and gain greater power, the desire to widen the war against the forces of darkness may grow more demanding. In the months and years to come, policing humanity is likely to become an ever more contentious issue among the imbued — much as it already is.

Vigilantism

Without a consensus on the matter of human antagonists, many hunters forego endless debate and decide to act as they see fit, what little of the imbued community there is be damned. These hunters frequently take up the mantle of the vigilante, acting as judge, jury and (if need be) executioner for the human "monsters" they encounter. In rare instances, the chosen form posses of like-minded individuals who mete out their version of justice to puppets and the soulless alike. While Witness1 and other "respectable" hunters frown upon such behavior, it proves an increasingly compelling outlet for those who believe evil triumphs so long as good people do nothing.

Taking the Law into Your Own Hands

Becoming a vigilante is not something a hunter does lightly. It means putting oneself in opposition to the established order, an action that invites both suspicion and intervention by the "legitimate" authorities. Of course, people who become vigilantes — even the imbued — care little for such everyday niceties. Their frustration and feelings of impotence reach such levels that "breaking the law in order to uphold it" seems the only reasonable solution.

What outside observers sometimes fail to realize is that most vigilantes are not insane, blood-crazed loonies who hear voices urging them on their quest for justice. Most are fairly ordinary people who've been pushed too far. Maybe they've been mugged one too many times. Maybe their loved ones have been harmed. Maybe they've just grown tired of reading crime statistics or watching television programs about the ineffectual war on drugs. Whatever their genesis, vigilantes usually come to the reasonable conclusion that there's a problem and that the usual avenues of dealing with it don't work. In some cases, that's enough to turn

an otherwise normal person into a self-proclaimed avenging angel of justice.

Societal Responses

In many societies, taking the law into your own hands has a long and sordid history. This is particularly true in places where distrust of the government runs high, such as in the United States, or where the government is ineffective or corrupt, such as in Central and South America and parts of Africa. Vigilantism is uncommon in places like Europe or Asia where governments are either strong or respected or in which cultural norms frown upon uprisings. Many countries have strong laws against usurping powers reserved for the government alone.

Since vigilantism is usually the result of frustration at the slowness of legitimate authorities to act, it can arise even in otherwise staid and respectful societies. In recent years, for example, concerns about alleged pedophilia have created vigilante gangs in stolid Britain. Similar examples can be cited in even more conservative cultures such as China and Japan.

In the World of Darkness, the emergence of supernatural threats to humanity complicate the matter further because the distribution of hunters knows no societal boundaries. The imbued are just as likely to appear in Thailand as they are in Canada. The willingness of these hunters to resort to vigilantism in their cause similarly transcends societal norms. This speaks volumes about the desperation some chosen feel as they heed the Heralds' call.

Virtue Responses

Just as there is no hunter consensus of what defines human monsters, the imbued have diverse views on vigilantism. While loose groupings like the creeds may have certain pronounced *tendencies*, they rarely have definitive positions on the matter. Even if they did, there'd be no effective way to enforce them upon their "membership," thereby making it a moot point.

The three Virtues offer the best prism through which to view hunter vigilantism. Even then, it's important not to take these generalizations as true of all adherents of a given Virtue. Even Avengers can oppose vigilantism while Martyrs can support it. The Virtues offer a firm basis from which to launch deeper examinations of the issue.

In general, the Zealous are most likely to support acts of vigilantism. These imbued favor decisive action and a no-holds-barred approach to confronting the supernatural. Consequently, they are most likely to chafe under laws and regulations that protect those whom they consider the enemy. Anything that stands in the way of the hunt must be overturned — even if it's the law.

This isn't a universally held position, even among the Zealous. Many Judges, for example, place a high value on obeying the forms as well as the spirit of the law. In other cases, a hunter's upbringing and ethical views carry much more weight than any frustration he may have about the authorities' inability to deal with a problem. An ex-military Avenger may have such an ingrained respect for the chain of command that the idea of vigilantism is abhorrent to him. External factors such as these exert great influence and should never be taken lightly.

Followers of Vision have a reputation as thoughtful and deliberate, interested in following logic through to its rightful conclusion — whatever that may be. While this does mitigate any tendencies toward rashness, it doesn't necessarily mean an outright rejection of vigilantism. These hunters are quick to point out that logic can cut both ways. If analysis of a situation suggests that extra-legal action is the only avenue to achieve a goal, these chosen take up the mantle of vigilante just as the Zealous do.

Hunters of Vision treat vigilantism as making the best of a bad situation. Although they acknowledge its occasional necessity, they also recognize its dangers. Taking the law into one's own hands attracts the attention of the legitimate authorities. Vigilantism can thus be self-defeating. It might not work against an elusive opponent, and it can make an imbued's pursuit of the hunt even more difficult.

The Merciful are in many ways much like followers of Vision. They are naturally skeptical of vigilantism, seeing it as an ultimately futile usurpation of authority to salve one's own sense of impotence. But they also concede that the Heralds' call sometimes requires illegal action. They don't make such a concession easily. Neither do they relish it. The Merciful are usually just humble enough to admit when their vocation requires taking extraordinary means to achieve their goals.

It's also important to remember that many Merciful such as Martyrs are willing to go to great lengths to continue the hunt. Although flamboyant action isn't their first choice, they're not above it. Indeed, when pushed to the limit, many Merciful become dangerous opponents. Their low sense of self-importance and desire to end suffering can feed the logic of vigilantism quite easily — under the right circumstances. The Merciful can be willing to sacrifice their own well being for the good of others; they sometimes overlook

dangers that give even the Zealous pause. In some ways, a Merciful vigilante is perhaps the most dangerous of all.

Crossing the Line

All but the most obsessive of the imbued would admit that vigilantism is an extreme solution to an extreme problem. Not even the most ardent Avenger advocates this path lightly. The nature of the enemy is such that "following the rules" does not always work, however. In fact, it's believed that many of these so-called rules have been created and enforced by the enemy in order to keep humanity in its place. It's only natural that some hunters decide that the best way to beat the enemy is to play by a different set of rules.

The real problem with vigilantism is that its logic is insidious. Once a hunter is willing to forego the law in one instance, why not in others? If it's acceptable to usurp the role of the police this time, why not the next? The effectiveness of vigilantism may also make it seem a viable first choice rather than a last resort. This path can become yet another temptation, yet another way the enemy uses to draw the imbued away from their proper course. In many ways, vigilantism exemplifies the tightrope existence — trapped between fanaticism and impotence — that defines what it is to hear the Heralds' call.

The Imbued as Antagonists

To: firelight.list@hunter-net.org
From: willow12
Subject: Re: More Craziness

Crusader17 wrote:

>I for one applaud the actions of Boca177. It's about time someone realized that bloodsuckers and beast-men aren't our only enemies. God gave us these gifts to

>protect His people. Why should it matter whether we protect them from spirits or child molesters?

Where would we be without another ode to fanaticism? I can't believe you keep posting this crap, Crusader. Don't you see you're encouraging others to follow in your whacked-out footsteps? From what Philosophe has said in his posts on the main list, Boca was young and very impressionable. Hell, she _admired_ you, Crusader. That's got to be a sign of inexperience.

We can't keep doing this. We can't keep encouraging one another to take stupid risks in the name of God or the revolution or whatever. It's a recipe for disaster. We're already losing enough of us as it is. We can't afford to lose more.

Hearing the call does not make us immune to corruption. We're human. We fall prey to the same vices and sins that affect everyone else. And thanks to our gifts, we can be the most dangerous threats another hunter can face. A civil war would destroy us.

Novice hunters don't see the rifts that divide us. They fail to realize that — despite the best of efforts of Witness1 and others — we're not "one big happy family." It's all too obvious that we answer our calling differently. Each one likewise interprets his relationship to his fellow hunters. In most cases, we "play nice" with one another, even with those who disagree. The acrimony on hunter-net and the lists like this one is usually the extent of hunter versus hunter "violence."

That's changing, though. As more and more of us appear and differences grow between the old guard and the newcomers, the rift gets deeper. Whereas flaming someone used to be enough, some have started to work against others or even go up against them head-on, like you did to Oracle, Crusader.

My Ally, My Enemy

Even in cases where there isn't direct violence between hunters, the imbued can make for compelling antagonists. Uncertainty and ambiguity are at the center of **Hunter**'s action. No two imbued share the exact same philosophy, even if they share the same creed or primary Virtue. Antagonism between the chosen is not only common, it's expected. Throwing together people from diverse origins, and giving them strange powers and only the vaguest notion of what they're supposed to do is a recipe for conflict — one you can use to good dramatic effect.

Before that can happen, however, the *reasons* behind this conflict need to be examined. Why would hunters become antagonistic toward one another? How do these reasons manifest? Once you have a sense of that, you can use hunter-versus-hunter conflict as the basis for some memorable and exciting stories.

Obsession

Obsession is one of the most common sources of hunter contention, and understandably so. The imbuing is an intensely personal and life-altering event. No two instances of the Heralds' call are exactly the same. Many hunters walk away from the experience changed in profound — and extreme — ways. These changes can in turn be a source of conflict.

It's not hard to see why obsession is a common result of the imbuing. For many people, especially those in the increasingly secular Western world, religion and spirituality have fallen into disrepute. Science and logic rule. The idea that there could be something more, something beyond the reality that we experience every day is rarely given much thought. When it is, it's usually to scoff at the "simple minded" who still hold to such "outdated notions."

When a person reared in such an environment not only comes face to face with the supernatural, but also hears celestial voices instructing him to fight it

with new powers he's miraculously manifested, the results are often earth shattering. Such people find everything they've believed in is a lie. Matters at which they once laughed are now of paramount importance. Their lives are turned upside down and they find themselves without the anchors or crutches on which most of us rely in our daily lives. Thus, they grasp at whatever answers they can get — and embrace them wholeheartedly.

They say there's no believer more strong than the newly converted and that's frequently true of the chosen. The conversion isn't always to a faith as such, although religion is a common source of answers for the newly imbued. The process of conversion strips away the lukewarm and timidly held beliefs of a hunter's previous life and replaces them with confidence and certainty. These new qualities strengthen the hunter and prepare him for the mission to which he's been called. Most of the imbued go through this process, but most quickly realize that their initial beliefs are no truer than those they abandoned. They find that they have no more privileged a relationship with the truth than anyone else.

Not all hunters come to this realization, however. Many see their imbuing as proof of God's call, of awakening the power within or any of several dozen other explanations. Whatever their perspective, they're unwilling to abandon it. Such hunters don't need to become obsessed, but they are often intractable in their views. They work with other hunters to achieve common goals. They're simply unable to believe that the world — even the new one just revealed to them — isn't exactly as they see it.

These hunters are the most likely to give vent to obsession, whether it be religious, ideological or otherwise. The manifestation of their edges and other abilities only "confirms" their belief in the rightness of their cause. To these chosen, no length is too great in the pursuit of their obligation. The caution and prudence of the larger imbued community is anathema to them. These fanatics push their agendas with a vigor that frightens their colleagues.

Obsessive hunters can be a source of great conflict — and drama. Possessing both the courage of their beliefs and an inability to see their course as possibly wrong, they forge ahead without considering the consequences to themselves, the people they intend to protect or to other imbued. These fanatics can therefore disrupt careful hunter operations, placing lives at risk.

At the same time, fanatics often show a dedication to the hunt that puts their more timid comrades to

shame. Their commitment to the Heralds' call is unmatched. Fanatics can therefore serve as a double-edged sword: both unthinking adherents and unswerving believers. They have goals and they never question them, despite who gets in the way. Their ambiguous identity is precisely what makes them a source of great drama in a **Hunter** chronicle.

Derangement

The hunt takes its toll on the imbued, mentally as well as physically. Many hunters begin to exhibit signs of psychological instability as they grow in capability and experience. The derangements manifested are a side effect of a hunter's extreme dedication to his Virtues. As stated on p. 204 of **Hunter**, the imbued suffer ailments when they attain a score of 7 or more in their Virtues. Hunters can also suffer derangements as a result of intense emotions, fear or trauma.

The information in the rulebook provides little in the way of strict game mechanics regarding derangement. This is intentional as it gives you control over how and when conditions develop in characters and over what form they take. Since no two chosen are alike, this variance in ailments is also in keeping with the diversity of **Hunter**'s story. Nevertheless, this chapter offers some guidelines for assigning derangements. These ideas are meant to heighten the conflict that derives from instability rather than bind your hands creatively.

Derangements arise from intense dedication to one Virtue or another (and thus may be a natural extension of the obsession described above). Certain ailments can lend themselves to certain Virtues, based on the personality of the hunter in question. Megalomania is a more plausible derangement for a hunter with high Vision or Zeal than it is for one with high Mercy because one of the forgiving is less likely to try to enforce her will over another. A Martyr with high Mercy might develop Manic-Depression out of a sense of personal failure for not having accomplished more on the hunt. Meanwhile, an adherent of Zeal or Vision might not manifest the same problem because he finds vigor in his role.

The process of assigning derangements should never be as simple as, "He has a high Mercy rating, so he'll acquire Hysteria." There's no *automatic* correlation between a single high Virtue score and a condition. Take the character's other Virtues into account in order to get a sense of his psychological makeup. A hunter with 8 Vision, 3 Mercy and 3 Zeal might be another fine candidate for Manic-Depression, a result of his strong tendency toward thoughtfulness coupled with lesser but equal tendencies toward action and forgiveness. He considers what do to as a first reaction, but can be torn between choices that seem equally valid. Naturally, this is only an example; other interpretations of the same Virtue ratings are possible. The point is that derangements should flow organically from a hunter's identity. All Virtue ratings are a handy measure of that identity, whether they're rated 7+ or not.

Derangements are an occupational hazard for all the imbued. Leaving aside the trauma of the hunt, derangements spring from a hunter's increased power and dedication. There's no way a hunter can both grow in power and avoid mental strain. As she becomes more powerful, a hunter also loses touch with the reality understood by the bulk of humanity. The true struggle is whether she also loses touch with her own humanity.

Sadly, many hunters forget their origins. Their derangements place barriers between them and the masses. These chosen may even find less and less in common with their fellow hunters — a sure source of conflict. Just consider the damage a powerful hunter with Megalomania or Paranoia might do to his own kind, never mind to humanity at large.

Deranged hunters can be serious threats and may become as dangerous as any monster. Dealing with them is as contentious as dealing with other human antagonists, perhaps more so. For one, many imbued have a strong sense of empathy for their colleagues. The idea of confronting one of their own fills them with dread — "here but for the grace of God go I." Moreover, these hunters are *insane*. Unlike the obsessed, who choose or accept their twisted paths, deranged hunters are sick in some sense. The deranged may need assistance rather than resistance. Finally, extreme hunters are still hunters, even if they've strayed from the path.

But, like obsession, derangement can still trigger conflict between hunters. Sometimes extremists are prepared to perform unthinkable acts (at least to a more conventional hunter's frame of mind) or harm anyone for the "good of the cause." Hunters with high Virtue simply think in terms that other imbued might not understand, and the result can be a struggle. The only way to stop an extremist from detonating a bomb might be with direct conflict.

Tension between hunters and extremists also provides an opportunity for you and your players to wrestle with moral and ethical issues. After all, no hunter chooses to become deranged. It appears to be a consequence of the power bestowed by the Heralds.

Derangement seems to be the ultimate fate of all hunters who survive that long, making it the source of much consternation and soul-searching. The hypocrisy of attacking that which you might one day become makes for excellent inner turmoil.

Chronicles with Human Antagonists

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: crusader17

Subject: *A House Divided*

I realize most of you will find it difficult to accept me as a "voice of reason" on this list, but someone has to step forward and point out the truth. You all know that I approved of Boca177's actions. She did what had to be done and dispatched a monster as surely as if she'd dealt with a bloodsucker or a shapechanger. Monsters come in many forms and it's foolish to think otherwise. Sometimes the Devil hides in plain sight. God didn't grant us these gifts to fight only the obvious minions of the Prince of Lies. It took a lot of courage to do what Boca did. I cannot say I'm sorry she seized the opportunity to send another damned soul screaming to Hell.

But let me tell you this: We can't let this divide us. We can't let this bring us down. That's just what they want. It serves the Devil's ends if we fight amongst ourselves. I'm not saying anyone has to agree with me or with Boca. I just don't understand why this should be any different than any other time we've argued over the actions of one of our colleagues. Judging by the posts made by Willow, Potter and a few others, it is different. I simply don't know why.

The fact is, this Hell War knows no bounds. It's only going to get worse as time passes. It's only going to expand. If we can't accept that and deal with it, we don't have a chance. The Bible says, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." That applies to us as well. We've got to get over this and move on. We have to accept that the road ahead is only going to be more difficult. And sometimes that means accepting that our worst enemies won't be beastmen or demons, but people that look like you and me. If you can't deal with that, we may have already lost.

There are a lot of reasons to use human antagonists in a **Hunter** chronicle. Most simply, human antagonists offer variety from the usual enemies. After a dozen or so stories involving vampires or werewolves, most players look for something different. While it's certainly possible to use the imbued's traditional supernatural enemies in untraditional ways, even that approach wears thin after time. The characters still fight monsters. Human antagonists thus fill a much-needed role: providing spice to a chronicle. They're clearly not monsters in the physical sense, but that doesn't mean they can't be opponents or even enemies. But does that mean hunters have a right or a duty to confront them?

Of course, human antagonists should be more than "filler" between stories about ghosts or goblins. As enemies, humans can fulfill many of the same roles as supernatural beings. They can be every bit as dangerous as any walking dead. People can move about freely without any fear of immediate reprisal. Unlike supernatural beings, humans don't have to fear being discovered. They don't have to operate under the cloak of darkness. Indeed, sometimes they can be more dangerous by working right out in the open.

Suppose, for example, that an investigative journalist is on the trail of a series of unusual murders, in which the damaged corpses of long-dead people are turning up in odd places all over the city. The characters know these so-called murders are the result of their fights against the walking dead, but the journalist doesn't know that. He's just following the leads he finds and publishing his discoveries in lurid detail. In doing so, he unknowingly gives aid to the leader of the shamblers, endangering the lives of the characters.

The journalist is therefore an "enemy" whom the characters cannot simply eliminate as they would a rot. Dealing with this enemy could be every bit as frustrating as confronting a vampire or werewolf. In many ways, it's even more frustrating: Human antagonists raise ethical quandaries that the supernatural may not. The characters can't simply kill the journalist. Well, they *could*, but doing so would create more problems than it would solve. Yet, there's no question that the journalist poses a real threat to the success of the hunt. His activities must be stopped in a way that doesn't further jeopardize the characters' efforts. Finding such a solution could lead to some exciting drama and roleplaying.

Even genuinely sinister human antagonists such as rapists or serial killers can be the focus of moral issues. Many hunters argue that the imbued have been given their powers to protect humanity. It's therefore perfectly acceptable to use those powers to take down murderers and drug dealers since, in a sense, they pose as much a threat to humanity as any shapechanger or ghost. It's a compelling argument, particularly since there's a kernel of truth to it.

On the other hand, many hunters worry that using their powers to fight mundane forms of evil is an abuse of the Messengers' mandate. The chosen were presumably called to defend humanity against *unnatural threats*. They propose arguably that no hunter was imbued as a

result of facing common street punks or Mafiosi. If the Heralds had wished them to use their powers to face child molesters, there'd be examples of someone being imbued while doing so. More importantly, these hunters claim that it's not the place of the chosen to solve all of humanity's problems. To attempt to do so would be to place the imbued above humanity rather than as a part of it.

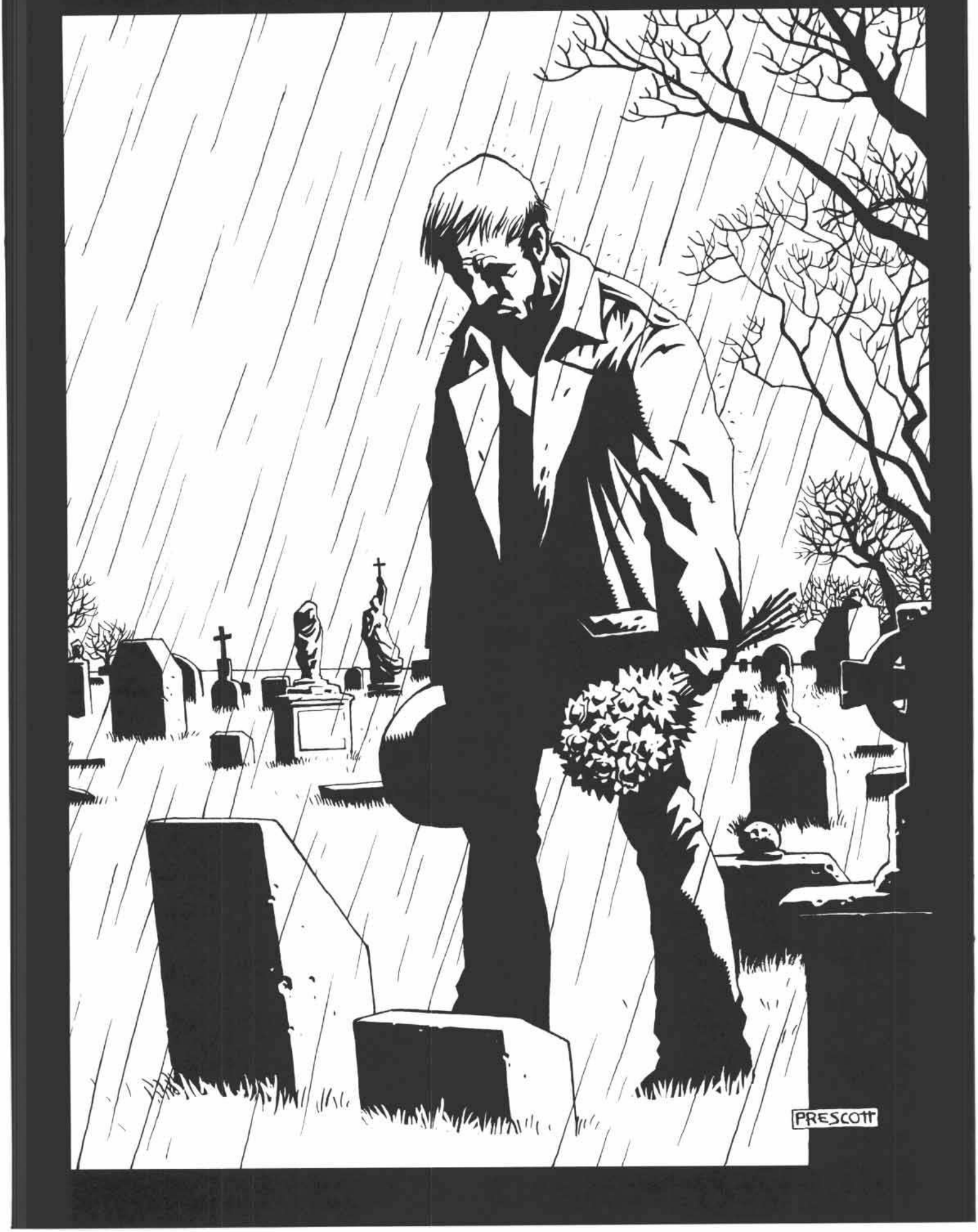
There's no "right" answer to dealing with human threats. The imbued regularly debate the propriety of intervening in ordinary affairs. Human antagonists are wonderful catalysts for these kinds of debates. They're the nexus around which swirl several complex questions, not least of which is whether the imbued themselves are still human. While few hunters deny their own humanity, they still wonder about their proper place in relation to it.

Human antagonists also help ground your chronicle in the real world. At its heart, **Hunter** is a game about ordinary people who discover that the world isn't what they thought. It's easy to lose sight of that fact after a few stories. The characters may become so familiar with their new reality that they forget the one they left behind. If so, the chronicle could cease to be about the themes that make **Hunter** distinctive. By introducing a story about drug dealers or murderers, you can bring the chronicle back down to Earth — if only for a little while.

That return to the mundane can have other benefits as well. The imbued spend most of their time and energy fighting supernatural beings of indescribable evil. Over time, these enemies can inure *players* to the horrors you wish to inspire. However, a look into the world of organized crime or racists might help break this pattern by allowing characters and players to see a different kind of evil. The characters may emerge with a stronger sense of their own mission, as well as an appreciation of the precarious moral state of those they protect — both of which are important to the continued health of an ongoing chronicle.

Of course, using human antagonists demands more from you than using vampires or zombies. Unlike supernatural beings, whose motivations can remain simple without detriment to the story, human enemies require a bit more detail. Players expect humans to be psychologically complex, motivated by reasons other than simplistic moral turpitude. They presume human antagonists are at least as complicated as they are. Thus, it just doesn't do for a serial killer to commit his crimes because "he's evil." Players want to know that he was abused as a child or that he's the victim of some mental deficiency. They demand more than they would of a vampire, whose need for blood is sufficient to provide motivation.

Being human, these antagonists must conform to what players know and experience every day. They cannot be caricatures or stereotypes. They need depth and weight. That means more work, but the ultimate payoff is commensurate with the effort. Not only do the players experience enemies that seem real, with plausible motives, goals and actions, but they also get to encounter dark reflections of themselves. If portrayed effectively, human antagonists reveal the potential for corruption that exists in each human soul. They highlight our flaws and weaknesses, as well as our capacity for evil. In the end, they reveal that, of all the creatures of the night, none is more frightening than humanity. That's a lesson every **Hunter** troupe can afford to learn from time to time.


PRESCOTT

Chapter 2: Creating Human Drama

And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted.
— Matthew 23:12

Pretty much every **Hunter** book screams and wails the merits of playing the game with everyday, common characters. The game was designed with them in mind, versus implausible mercenaries, crocodile wrestlers or porn stars. But who are we to endorse such character types without giving you tips and guidance on how to manage them in your chronicle? How can a game about confronting monsters last or even get off the ground when the people who do the confronting are relatively insignificant and weak by comparison? This entire chapter is dedicated to making the human experience possible in **Hunter**, helping you run games about ordinary folks who can face monsters and maybe survive the experience with body and mind intact — well, for the most part anyway.

In the Beginning

The shrill cry of the alarm clock jolted Jason Marshall awake. He hit the button as quickly as he could and slipped out of bed, doing his best not to disturb his wife. She shifted in her sleep, but didn't wake. Spending time with his wife, kids and friends when he wasn't on the road was one of the great pleasures of his life, and he didn't want to waste the morning in bed.

He pulled on some sweats and a T-shirt and went to wake up Jack and Sophie. They wanted to help to make breakfast for their mother before she went to work. They'd packed their bags for school and laid out their uniforms the night before while his wife thought that Jason was reading to them. He grinned at them as he saw they were both wide awake, already dressed beneath their covers.

* * *

Serena Scott-Walker was not having a good day. The project was a good two months behind schedule, the programmers were making excuses and her secretary was too busy squealing over the flowers she received unexpectedly that morning to get any of the meetings arranged. Apparently, it was Kathy's birthday and the flowers were from her new boyfriend. Serena snorted in disgust and shut her office door. Didn't Kathy have any sense of priorities?

Serena spent the next half-hour sending snotty emails to her staff, reminding them of their overdue work and making implied threats about the likely outcomes of the next round of reviews. Then she wrote groveling emails to her own managers, trying to keep them off her back for the next few weeks. That done, she went over the marketing team's proposal for the software launch.

A quiet knock at the door disturbed her. "Come in," she snapped.

It was Kathy, clutching a day-planner. "Those appointments you wanted?"

Serena relaxed visibly, the tension easing out of her shoulders. "Good. Let's go through them."

Kathy had allocated slots to each meeting so that conclusions from each could be applied to the next, and overseeing managers would believe that decisions had been made for some time. By Serena's judgment, Kathy had done a good job and deserved to be told so. "Nice work," Serena said. "I'll bear it in mind next week."

Kathy positively beamed, well aware that her review was scheduled for the following Wednesday. "Thanks, boss. Oh, one more thing...?"

Serena nodded.

"A bunch of us are going out for my birthday tonight. I wondered if you wanted to come?"

Serena laughed out loud. She knew she could be demanding, but her staff seemed to have become used to it. "Of course. I'd be delighted."

Kathy beamed back, "Good. I'd like your opinion of Patrick."

* * *

Joshua Talbot groaned as awareness crept into his mind. He pulled back the duvet, reached to the nightstand and lit a cigarette. Afternoon already? As the nicotine surged through his system, he pulled himself to his feet and shuffled over to the window. He pulled back the curtains and the dull gray light of a Ilford day filtered reluctantly into the flat. His laptop lay on the floor where he had thrown it in disgust the night before. Time to buy a new one, he thought, and checked his watch. A couple of hours until the shops in town closed. There was still time to pick up the day's paper, digest the news and have a coffee, though.

He flicked open his Filofax. Oh, bloody hell, he had a date with Penny that evening. Time to get moving. Stubbing out his cigarette, he headed toward the shower.

* * *

The pub was quiet, which was one of the reasons why Jason chose it. He hadn't seen Clive for weeks and Jason wanted to catch up before he was on the road again. There was just some poncey bloke and what looked like his girlfriend in a corner, and a large party of suits in another. Jason smiled to himself. The business crowd was trying to enjoy themselves in that uneasy way people do when they barely know each other. The camaraderie was patently false.

Clive was already at one of the tables, sinking a pint. Bastard always seemed to be finishing a pint whenever Jason caught up with him. Clever bugger. "Evenin' Clive."

"Evenin' Jase."

"The usual?"

"Very kind, mate."

Jason dug out his wallet and headed for the bar. He noted to his annoyance that the poncey bloke was already there, taking his time making a decision. The barman looked at him with studied boredom. The guy was making a great show of examining each of the taps in turn before making his decision. "A pint of Stella," he announced at long last. Typical, Jason thought, poncey drink for a poncey bloke.

Jason leaned on the bar, waiting for the barman to finish. He looked around, enjoying the warm glow of being home again. The doors swung open and three guys staggered in. Drunk already, by the look of them. They were certainly walking funny.

"What can I get you, mate?"

Jason turned round and quickly glanced at the bar. "Two pints of bitter, please." The barman was obviously going to take his time over these drinks as well, Jason thought, and turned again to look at the drunk guys. He'd gotten into the bad habit of people watching while on the road.

That was odd. One of the women in the "suit group" was looking at the lead drunk in horror. Another bloke, maybe her boyfriend, was leaning toward her, asking what was wrong. A slightly older woman, quite attractive despite her severe look, was staring at the drunks with wide, staring eyes.

Jason glanced back and suddenly felt his stomach turn. Those weren't drunks. Their skin was falling away from their bodies, like burn victims'! Jason felt dizzy for a second as if he was going to collapse. A tingling sensation ran up his spine. Then there was the voice. "THEY CANNOT RELINQUISH" boomed his in his head. It was as if the voice and the things were all that existed for him. That's when the lead one reached out to hit the boyfriend of the gaping woman.

"Fuck that," Jason thought. He felt something rise within him suddenly, a warmth he'd never known before. It was almost as if he was burning but the heat gave him energy instead of hurting. Then that energy seemed to leap from him, slamming into the creatures, pushing them back.

That's when Jason realized that Poncey Bloke was by his side, looking from him to the things and back again, realization dawning in his eyes. "You see them, too?" he whispered.

The severe woman was on her feet, glaring at the lead creature, and yelled, "What do you want?"

The lead monster continued to focus on Kathy's boyfriend and grunted something that sounded like, "Get away from my wife."

"Look out," Poncey Bloke shouted. Jason turned just in time to see one of the things lunge toward him. Someone

screamed. A bottle smashed. Wood cracked. And a clear, calm voice shouted, "Stop."

As Jason ducked away from the monster attacking him, he saw Poncey Bloke swing at it with the remains of a chair. The chair was smoldering! What the fuck was happening here?

Then Jason realized that one of the "drunks" was after Poncey Bloke. Jason reached for that warmth inside him again and felt that same push outward. He directed it at the creature and steadily pushed it away. Jason risked a glance around. The severe woman was glaring at the lead thing, which seemed unable to move. The other girl was in hysterics. Her boyfriend was on the floor, drawing breath in rasping gulps. Poncey Bloke was staring down at the third monster, shouting "What the fuck are you?" while swinging the splintered pieces of his chair. Wind seemed to be whipping around him. Everyone else in the pub except Clive and Poncey Bloke's girlfriend was scrambling for the door.

Jason turned his attention back to "his" monster. The creature was staring at him, its frustration evident. How could he ever have mistaken this thing for a drunk? The skin hung off its face in sagging folds. Its clothes looked old and soiled. Its lips were missing and its teeth showed through in a rictus grin that wasn't matched by the hatred in it eyes. And the smell... the smell was unbelievable.

A siren wailed in the distance. The monster in front of Jason paused, then pushed its way out of the door. The sound distracted the severe woman. The creature she'd been staring at suddenly sprang into motion, jumping through the pub's main window.

Poncey Bloke was looking down at his feet with a mix of disgust and regret. The thing had stopped moving and Poncey had only the nub of chair leg left in his hands.

They were the only three people left who seemed to have done anything. Clive sat wide-eyed and staring at Jason. The woman with Poncey Bloke seemed to be in shock, too. The few others who remained seemed unconscious or hiding under tables in the fetal position.

Poncey Bloke straightened his coat and turned to face the others. "We have to go," he announced, not even certain of why, and ushered the others toward the back door. Jason began to protest, turning back to Clive, but Poncey Bloke insisted — "Now" — and dragged Jason out with the severe woman following behind.

Starting the Hunt

Getting a new chronicle underway for any roleplaying game is daunting. Even if you've been storytelling for years, each new series brings a new set of themes, rules, challenges, characters and often players. As Storyteller, you have the unenviable task of creating all the supporting characters, antagonists, storylines and settings of your game. The bonus, though, is that the story, while modified by all the players, is still basically yours to tell. When most people are only told stories passively on TV, on a movie screen or through books, that's a creative opportunity you will come to relish.

This article helps you get a **Hunter** chronicle started and glean the most from your initial work. It provides more detailed advice on starting a game where the rulebook leaves off. This section guides you through helping the players create their characters, establishing plotlines and running your first few sessions. You even get some hints on how to make players do a lot of the work for you. From there, the rest of this book offers all sorts of ideas on how to make your ongoing chronicle as interesting as possible.

What Is Hunter?

First of all, let's look quickly at just what **Hunter** is. As the rulebook explains, while the game appears to be about contending with the monsters that stalk in the shadows, there's far more to it. Sure, the excitement of tracking down and dealing with a walking corpse or bloodsucking nightmare is part of the game's appeal. Let's face it: Kicking ass is a lot of fun. However, players and Storytellers find exploring the ways in which characters deal with the knowledge they gain, and the effect it has on hunters' lives, to be just as interesting.

Imagine you saw a walking corpse attack someone you love. Sounds pretty mundane when put like that, doesn't it? Now try again. Imagine someone you know is in danger, being attacked by a thug. You're scared for her and want to act. And then the world changes. Something shifts inside you. It's as if a fog is lifted from your eyes and you suddenly *know* the thug for what he is: a corpse. Your skin crawls as you see the rotting flesh hanging from his bones. The nauseating stench of rancid meat turns your stomach and the desperate hunger in the thing's eyes terrifies you. Something tells you this is all simply *wrong*. This dead person should be rotting away in the ground, not walking the streets and terrifying the ones you love.

You act. Not necessarily thinking. Just doing. You drive it off, strike it down or talk it into leaving. It's gone and the immediate danger is past. Things don't end there, though. Your loved one denies all knowledge of the experience. Sure, she agrees she was attacked, and thanks you for helping, but to her the attacker was nothing more than a drunken idiot who pushed things too far. The more you go on about him being a dead thing, the more she starts to worry about *you*.

But whatever others say, deep down you *know* the attacker was a monster. You become nervous. Was that the only one? Can there be more? Have you gone insane? Then one day you get all the answers. You see another of the things. Then another.

Everything's different now. How can you go on something as simple as a date, to work or spend a day at a ball game when you know they're out there and you're the only one (or one of the few) who can see them? That overwhelming knowledge affects everything about you: your attitude to your family and friends, your work, your sanity.

This is the sense of alienation that hunters experience during and after the imbuing. This is the fear and paranoia that you can instill in your players. Creating horrific monsters helps terrify characters and players (and there's lots of advice about doing so in Chapter 1). But to create genuine fear and alienation, hunters (and players) need to be afraid of losing and of being alienated from something very important to them: ordinary life.

In many **Hunter** games, the actual time characters spend confronting monsters is relatively small. Most of the time they deal with their everyday lives: job, family, friends. The ways in which the "mundane" parts of life are altered by hunters' knowledge are what make roleplaying so interesting in the game. That's why detailed character creation is so important to making your chronicle a success. No character exists in a vacuum. The people around her help define who she is. The family she's stuck with, the friends she chooses, the co-workers she endures. All of these folks shape a character's life as the days turn into months and years.

Your job as Storyteller is to make hunters and their players afraid, not only of the things that go bump in the night but of everything in life that can be compromised or lost when the imbued strive to act against the world's creatures. Since characters' identities are established from the very beginning of your chronicle, some of your most important work is done in those early sessions. They set the tone for the victories and losses to come, whether against the supernatural or in mundane existence.

Character Creation

"I've got a family — a life," Jason snarled. "I don't want anything to do with these things."

Talbot looked Jason in the eye. "I know. We all have lives. But think about it for a second. What if there are more of those things out there? Why were we the only ones who did anything? How could we do some of the things we did? Don't you think maybe we were meant *to do something?*

New Eyes

Throughout this chapter are sidebars like this, entitled "New Eyes." They're meant for Storytellers who have run or played in other World of Darkness games. If you're familiar with **Vampire**, **Werewolf** or **Mage**, for example, you know that **Hunter** is pretty different from those games. These sidebars illustrate the differences between running **Hunter** and those other games, so you can help your players see the World of Darkness from a new perspective — that of ordinary people suddenly made aware that monsters are real. By emphasizing how hunters perceive bloodsuckers, man-beasts and wizards, you help experienced players get into their characters' heads and help those players ignore what they know of the other Storyteller games to get the most out of **Hunter**.

Why else would we have all been there? Why else would we have done what we did?"

Jason didn't answer.

"What does your wife do, Jason?" Talbot asked, refusing to give up.

"She's a secretary, not that it's your business," Jason replied.

"Like Kathy?" Serena said, trying to help Talbot.

Jason paused. Suddenly he had a horrible vision of his wife being the one attacked by a dead thing. He couldn't allow that. He'd have to protect her. They were right. The best way to protect her was to make sure these things were dealt with.

"Okay, I'll help you, but on one condition: My wife and kids never know anything about this. Anything! Do you understand?"

Talbot nodded and pushed Jason's pint toward him. "You've made the right choice."

Ideally, character creation should start before you and the players even gather around the table for the first time. There are two really good reasons for this. First, if players know what you're going to play in advance, and they have or borrow the books, it gives them time to come up with character concepts that appeal to them, without pressure from the others demanding to start the game. Second, talking with the players before the game begins gives you time to tailor your initial plots and monsters to the characters that they create.

You and the players need to make a significant decision before you finish character creation, though, as it determines how your game will proceed. Are you going to assign creeds to the characters based on their reactions at the imbuing or are the players going to create full-fledged hunters from the very beginning?

Creed or Creedo?

What are the creeds? That's not a simple question to answer, but you should bear it in mind as you guide your players through the character-creation process. At their simplest, creeds are nothing more than outlooks. They're loose groups that divide hunters up based on their primary reactions to the creatures. A Defender is simply someone whose first response to the monstrous is to protect people or things. A Redeemer is someone who just wants to help the creature or possibly alleviate its apparent suffering.

So are the creeds merely roleplaying crutches for inexperienced players? Well, no. They also play a role in the setting of the game. When the Heralds choose a person for the imbuing, the beings assign creeds then and there (or the person's personality seems to lend itself to a particular role in the hunt). From that point on, the chosen has an intended part to play in the mission, at least in the Messengers' eyes. The most obvious reflection of that assignment is in the edges that the Heralds bestow — or inflict — upon the imbued. If you look at the edges along a particular path, you see a collection of tools and in many cases a progression of power. These edges help a hunter carry out his calling by giving him useful tools that he'll need as he confronts more numerous and potent supernatural beings over his "career."

The creeds therefore help suggest who a hunter is, but also indicate what he's capable of and lay out a path that he may follow as he pursues his particular mission and personal agenda on the hunt. (For more ideas on the Heralds, creed roles and assigning edges, see "Playing God: The Messengers," p. 177.)

If your troupe is inexperienced at roleplaying or simply with **Hunter**, it's advisable to allow them to choose their characters' creeds before play begins, or you can choose roles for them and inform your players what those paths are before the first session gets underway. Either approach gives players a broad outline on who their characters are and what they might do, and they can build their characters based on those concepts. If players are nervous about creating characters for the first time, the templates presented in the creed books can be a godsend. Let troupe members choose a creed that interests them, and then give them the relevant creed book to page through. If one of the templates catches their eye, they can build a character based on him or her.

If your players are experienced and comfortable with the idea of creating a fully developed, elaborate

personality, then try assigning creeds after play gets underway. The challenge of creating a fully realized, everyday person — and then seeing how she reacts to monsters' existence — can be deeply rewarding for players and for you. While the creeds that players end up with may not be the ones they expected or even had in the back of their minds while they designed their characters, the creeds you assign will hopefully still be true to who they have created because the creeds are based on the characters' instinctual reactions at the imbuing.

When assigning creeds at the imbuing works well, it's very exciting. Players make choices for their characters' actions based on personality, and those identities and choices indicate their roles in the hunt. The creeds assigned are nothing more than extensions of the characters' personalities. And as the characters develop and gain more edges that in turn encourage behavior relevant to creed, they grow more defined in their personality and answer to the call. But that's a discussion for another chapter. Let's look at a few practical details you should consider when allocating creeds.

Predetermined Creeds

If the players want to create fully defined characters, complete with creeds, Virtues and edges pre-assigned, then the hunters' outlooks, beliefs and therefore roles in the hunt should be borne in mind during the character-creation process. The individual creed books offer extensive ideas on the sorts of people who are attracted to a particular role, and it may be worth directing players to the books to help them avoid making obvious stereotypes of the creeds. Avengers don't have to be pissed-off people who beat up monsters "just because," for example. An Avenger may have been someone wronged so heinously by monsters some time in her past that she cannot find it in herself to relinquish her anger now. She therefore throws herself into the hunt with all her being, sacrificing everything about herself except her anger. She is therefore perhaps more a martyr (little "m") than even a Martyr (big "M"), save for her anger, which makes her an Avenger.

Otherwise, suggest to players that creeds' precepts should be *part* of their characters' outlook rather than the core of them. The events the characters endure at their imbuing can fundamentally change their former "regular guy" outlooks on life. Someone who has never shown an ounce of self-sacrifice all their lives might suddenly give his all when confronted with the reality of the supernatural. If he makes those sacrifices out of anger over revelations about the present and supernatural events of the past, then you have a character whose response and outlook is *partly* determined by her creed.

When allowing players to choose creeds before play begins, there still has to be a seed of a creed within each character to start with. The newborn Avenger might have been content with an average life, supported by an easy income. She assumes many people live that well and feels justified in making that assumption. However, the discovery of the truth triggers a realization that the mysterious loss of her parents years before was probably a result of monstrous activity — and she snaps. The wealth that she gained from her inheritance and the comfortable life she's lived since has been a lie, a crime committed against her and her family by inhuman things. She's therefore prepared to throw it all away and start again by legitimate, honest means, and vent her wrath on the beings that have abused and deceived her. Certainly there's room for the Martyr creed in this character's definition, but her player decides that her rage, as inspiration for her sacrifice, actually makes the hunter a more likely Avenger. That anger is the kernel of a creed that exists in the character's identity and it makes her mission clear when she awakens to the truth.

Your players need to justify why their characters become members of their chosen creeds. That may seem a harsh statement. These games are meant to be about fun. Why should anyone have to justify herself? Don't worry, there's good reason for it: to make sure players get maximum enjoyment out of the game. If characters don't fit comfortably within selected creeds, players aren't going to enjoy the game as much as they could on a variety of levels.

For example, the edges associated with particular creeds and Virtues tend to reflect certain styles of encounters with monsters. The level-one Innocence edge Hide allows a hunter to observe the supernatural without being seen. If a player manages to create an "Innocent" whose instinct as the game progresses is to attack first and ask questions later, if at all, he's stuck with a character who is ill-equipped to survive. The player also finds it difficult to gain Conviction because his character isn't in situations to use edges and gamble points, and he doesn't gain Conviction through roleplaying because his character performs actions that are contrary to his creed's typical ideals.

Asking that players justify chosen creeds doesn't have to be an interrogation. Just take a look at the principal qualities of a creed, say, the questioning and long-term agendas of a Visionary. Ask a player why

her character would try to analyze the creatures in front of her rather than immediately try to destroy or communicate with them. Ask the player to provide examples from her character's life before the imbuing that illustrate how such an attitude is part of her character's make-up. What has the character done in the past that gives her the ability to look to the future in times of great stress, rather than to focus on the present? Has she ever proved to be a strategic thinker? Has she ever really studied anything? If the character's past life doesn't seem to support the Visionary creed, what about the character's discovery of the supernatural changes her outlook? How can a creed be justified in terms of differences between the character's past and present?

If a player has his heart set on playing a character of a particular creed, your questions help him recognize where he has taken any wrong turns in the character-creation process. A particular idea he had for the character's personality may not fit the overall picture he tries to paint. If so, it's better that he deal with that issue before the game begins rather than wrestle and be dissatisfied with it later.

Asking players to rationalize creed choices helps ensure that the characters and game will be enjoyed by all. Characters have a way of growing during the creation process into something other than what they were intended to be. If that development suggests a creed other than the one a player hoped for, recommend that the player change it. The important point is that the player creates a character with whom she can identify as a person. If she likes that person and can understand her, then creed assignment is secondary. It's the individual whom the player should roleplay, not any artificial framework that the game may impose.

Assigned Creeds

If the players are happy to have their creeds assigned in the course of play, the guidance you might offer at character creation is reduced considerably. You simply ask everyone to create regular people, folks "in the street" whom players find interesting to portray. It's important that they establish as much information as they can about these characters up front. In the prelude, players are asked to react to their characters' first encounters with monsters. Those initial reactions largely determine the characters' directions for the remainder of the chronicle. To make sure that characters' reactions are as honest and natural as possible, making creeds a genuine reflection of identity, players need to examine as many aspects of their characters' lives as possible before play even begins.

Once again, you can guide this process by questioning and challenging the players. Your aim here is different than if players decide their creeds in advance. You want to explore not only the details of the characters' lives, but also their attitudes to those details. A person is far more a collection of attitudes and memories than he is a list of facts. The difference between a fully realized character and a completed character sheet is the difference between a job interview and a stand-alone résumé. The resume gives you an idea of what the person can do. The interview tells you who that person is.

You can elicit all kinds of details about a character's day-to-day life from his player by asking questions about the creation and who she is. Here are just a few examples.

"So, what does your character do first thing in the morning?"

"Gets up. Gets some breakfast. Turns on the TV."

"What about the kids? Does he help them off to school?"

"Oh, yeah. I hadn't thought of that. Yeah, he helps them get ready, especially if his wife is working that day."

"Where does she work?"

"She's a temp, probably. Maybe a legal secretary."

"Okay, how does your character feel on the days when he makes the kids' breakfast?"

"He loves it. He doesn't get enough time to spend with them because he's always traveling for work. These are special times for him."

The emphasis on defining who a character is before the game starts may seem to run against the grain. Surely that will develop in the course of play? Of course it will. However, the imbuing inflicts a fundamental change on a regular person's life. Once she's seen the truth, she's never the same again. That change has an impact only if there's a clearly defined "before," to which the "after" contrasts. If a player doesn't know who her character was and what her life was like before the imbuing, the player isn't going to enjoy exploring the changes afterward.

As with allowing players to choose creeds before play begins, firmly establishing character identities before the prelude determines who they are. When the reality of monsters rears its ugly head, players who know their mundane characters well respond in character. They deal with the monsters in ways that are appropriate to their identities, whether to reach out a hand, swing a fist or ask questions of the creatures. Once again, personality becomes the barometer for creed, not the other way around, and that leads to convincing and compelling hunters and an enjoyable game for everyone. Your actual assignment of creeds is covered extensively in the storytelling chapter of the **Hunter** rulebook.

Getting Down to Details

Once you've decided how creeds will be chosen in your chronicle, the realities of creating realistic, plausible people as characters is still before you. Character creation doesn't begin and end with creed assignment. You need to get down to the nitty-gritty of actually getting convincing character ideas from players and then fleshing them out into fully rounded people who make active contributions to your setting. Once you've done that, you can plan the events and progress of your chronicle based on the foundation of engaging protagonists. Then your fledgling game can get underway.

Local Heroes

To help players design characters, give them guidelines about where the game will be set. Many people choose to run **Hunter** in their hometowns or in locations that are familiar. These are good choices because they accentuate the contrast between the characters' ordinary world and lives and the supernatural horrors they face. The players *know* the local area. They can *imagine* inhuman beings lurking in it. It's easier to make monsters' intrusion alien and terrifying if the setting itself is familiar.

If you choose to set your game in a location that's distant, foreign or exotic, perhaps in a city on a different continent or within a social group that's far removed from your players' experience, you lose some of the horror that's possible in a local chronicle. Monsters don't look seem so frightening or wrong in a setting that's already alien to the players' experience. In fact, monsters tend to blend in and seem a part of the backdrop. Suddenly, the players and characters make an association between the place and the monsters. This connection undermines any sense of invasion or blasphemy.

If you really want to set your chronicle further afield, you and your players have to do a lot of research into what everyday life is like in your chosen setting. Supplements like the **Hunter Survival Guide** and **Holy War** provide a good basis on which to establish these chronicles.

Practicalities

Once you've informed players about the location of the game, ask them to draw up basic character sketches. It doesn't really matter how you do this. You could meet each player individually or do it through a combination of phone calls and swapped documents. Email is probably the ideal method. It allows you to bounce ideas back and forth quickly, and to ask questions as they occur to you.

This sketch shouldn't address what the character will be as a hunter. It should focus on who and what he is as a person before being imbued. Suggest that a player come up with some basic origin and history for his character, giving a broad outline of the life lived until the fateful day. Remember that you're looking for information that defines a character's life, not his opinions or outlooks — those are the purview of the prelude (see below and **Hunter**, p. 92, for information on that). These basic facts form the frame on which you can help the player hang his character.

Some suggested details a player can provide are:

- A basic outline of life history: where she was born, where she went to school, further education, if any, and present employment
- Family relationships
- Close friends
- Hobbies and ways of spending spare time
- Where she lives now
- Ambitions
- Physical description

Inevitably, some players present you with the basic facts and nothing more while others come back with details that go on for pages. It's worth going back to the former players with more questions, encouraging them to explore their ideas further. Why? Because all the resulting material helps players get a better grasp of what their characters are like and the more details you have at this stage the easier it is for you to portray the characters' lives convincingly.

Preparations

Talbot sat on the park bench, unlit cigarette hanging from his lips, running through the events in his head over and over. There had to be some pattern, something he could make sense of in all this. Buying a drink, seeing the creatures, watching Jason bathed in flames, and feeling the wind around himself. Seeing Serena stop the thing in its tracks. Its desperate struggle to get at her secretary and her boyfriend. He shook his head. He should be questioning his sanity, but all this seemed more real than the haze in which he'd lived his life before. At least he now sensed a purpose for himself.

He shivered and sank deeper into his coat as the wind picked up. It looked like this was going to be a harsh fall. He glanced at the piles of leaves by the bench. Bloody hell. He felt like he was sitting in a gale, yet the leaves were absolutely still.

Feeling his heart rate shoot up, he looked around quickly. There was nothing but an old lady feeding some ducks on the pond. He started to relax. He was just jumpy. One too many cigarettes. And then he felt that same twisting in his gut as he did that first time, and the world shifted. His vision seemed to clear and suddenly there were

New Eyes

There are two significant differences between **Hunter** characters and those of other Storyteller games.

The first is that the imbued have no organization to turn to and no history or venerable old sages from which to learn. The other games all provide a society which characters may take advantage of, whether it's **Vampire**'s clans or **Mage**'s Traditions. Most of the games emphasize how the change that overcomes the character alienates her from the people she used to know. **Werewolf**'s young Garou are kidnapped after their first change. Normal people are uncomfortable in a mage's presence. The characters in these games turn to the company of their unique societies and fall back on centuries of history for guidance on how to live their lives.

Hunters have none of that. With no history to which to resort, and no formal imbued society to help them survive without a paying job in the mundane world, the chosen have to keep on living like regular people. The change that occurs at their imbuing does not automatically distance them from the lives they once knew. Indeed, most hunters choose to stay close to the people they love to remind themselves of exactly what they fight for and for stability in an otherwise insane world. Thus, **Hunter**'s character creation dwells far longer on a character's ordinary life than does that of the other games.

The second difference is that the imbued are ordinary people. Unlike those people who are chosen for the embrace or who undergo their first change, the imbued do not have obviously special qualities that lead to their selection, and they are not born with a destiny to become hunters. The other games emphasize how special characters are, which is inspiration for their transition. **Hunter** emphasizes how *ordinary* hunters are, and it's important to stress that distinction in character creation so that players appreciate the normality of their characters' lives.

Hunters' normality also carries on into the game itself. One could argue that hunters aren't regular people anymore because the edges and other abilities they gain propel them into the realm of the supernatural. That criticism misses the point. Hunters are normal because they have to go on living fairly normal lives, earning a living, dealing with money problems and trying to maintain family and friend relationships. They don't have a supernatural support system waiting for them at the moment of their change. There are no Garou grandparents waiting to introduce them to the tribe, and hunters don't automatically feel strange to their nearest and dearest after the imbuing, as newly awakened mages do. Yes, something bizarre and terrifying has happened to the chosen, but it doesn't necessarily change them as day-to-day people.

The balance of mundane problems and supernatural challenges is what distinguishes **Hunter** from the other World of Darkness games.

two figures by the pond. The new arrival was the semi-transparent shape of an old man. He looked miserable. He was watching the lady with a longing expression that filled Talbot with a terrible sense of sadness.

The lady shuffled off. Talbot got up and followed her at a discreet distance. She entered the cemetery at the edge of the park and made her way to a fairly new grave. She stood before it for a while. The apparition stood behind her, unseen by anyone except Talbot, it seemed.

"Bloody hell," he thought. "This is beginning to make sense."

Through the character-creation process — deciding how creeds are chosen, encouraging players to create realistic people, and eliciting basic details from them on which to make plans — you should be able to gather enough information to start arrnging your chronicle. Take some time to go through the biographies and develop details on a few of the significant people in the characters' lives — bosses, friends, family, lovers and anyone else with whom the hunters are likely to interact regularly. Scribble down a few basic facts about them, their appearance and their personalities if the players haven't already done so. Establish something of the lives they live — their careers, desires, failures. If a player has mentioned a spouse, lover, parent or child without really describing him or her, ask the player if she had any particular sort of person in mind. You now have the beginnings of a supporting cast, one that will develop in play.

Planning the Imbuing

Next on your agenda should be planning the imbuings that take place as part of the prelude or in the first session of the game. That's correct: Right at the beginning of the game, you're asked to run an extended scene that determines much of what's to come in the chronicle and sets the characters' development in motion. Tough, huh? The prelude is one of the trickiest things to address for a new **Hunter** Storyteller. It's worth devoting some time to so your life is as easy as it can be later on.

The prelude's plot, which presumably involves a monster that the characters encounter, doesn't have to be complex. A vampire can be caught feeding, the characters are all in the vicinity and they do something about it. Or the ghost of a murder victim is discovered to haunt a subway platform that the characters use every day, and they have the choice of what do to about the spirit. The prelude can stand alone unto itself and be a singular moment that characters remember forever — when they learned the awful truth. Or the prelude can be the basis for future events in the hunters' lives — a springboard for a larger and more involved story. The episode gives the characters a look at a situation that they only truly come to understand through exploring what created the creature encountered. Maybe characters witness two bloodsuckers fighting and choose to help one by attacking the other. They may have gained an ally for the time being, but they have also been immersed in a secret war between rival undead factions, which may now notice the strange new players in town.

Using the prelude as the beginning of your chronicle, but also as the first installment of a larger plotline, increases the amount of preparation you have to do before that first session. The scene doesn't simply involve an encounter with a random monster.

Kicking off a bigger story right from the prelude is also problematic if the characters' creeds have yet to be decided. You have little idea of what sort of plot is likely to be well received when the hunters have yet to be fully defined. An intended chronicle about helping put a small group of walking dead to rest by tracking down items that are important to them may not be of much interest to a group whose first instinct is to blow walking corpses away.

However, if you have a plot in mind that's open enough that it can work with a group with any balance of Zealots, Merciful or members of the Vision creeds, you can wing it. Just make sure that the imbuing scene offers enough clues to allow the group, once they've recovered from the trauma of their change, to move on and investigate the monsters. Clues in themselves are problematic. A physical one is likely to be missed at the moment of the imbuing. Newly awakened hunters have much more important things on their minds than scouring the scene of their revelation. The same goes for observational hints — clues the imbued see or hear during the encounter. There's so much sensory input at the change, between horrific sights and the Heralds' messages, that minor details are bound to be overlooked. Unless you can insert something into the scene that can be collected or discovered later — graffiti or witnesses (even bystanders) who remember something significant — you might be better off writing a one-shot imbuing story and introducing more complex plots later in the chronicle.

If you're adamant about kicking off an on-going plotline with that first encounter, you do have one considerable option: the Messengers. Just as they draw characters' attention to monsters in the first place, they can do the same again later. A newspaper report or news story can suddenly twist into a Herald message, reminding characters of their original encounter, suggesting that there might be more of the things out there, and hopefully prodding them to investigate further.

As for the imbuing itself, you have two options: group or individual.

Group Imbuing

If you plan to run a group imbuing, you need a way to get what might be a very disparate collection of characters together in the same place at the same time. This mechanism needs to be fairly flexible, as your players' decisions in the prelude will inevitably necessitate some change. The introductory fiction that opens this article gives a narrative example of how this can be done. Hunters with different lives and values all find themselves in a bar for different reasons, when the scales fall from their eyes.

Unless the players have created their own links between characters such as working at the same company or commuting to work on the same train, it's wise to devise an imbuing that could happen in any number of locations. That way, you're poised to trigger the event anywhere the protagonists might reasonably intersect, even if they're not aware of each other.

The events of the imbuing also need to be fairly open. You want characters to have a chance to respond to monstrous presence in ways that are true to their identities, thus enacting or acquiring various creeds. Each character should have some chance to show his or her colors if she is to justify her subsequent role in the hunt, and that means allowing each character the latitude to act. If the first would-be hunter to respond picks up a two-by-four and whacks the head of your one and only shambler, the rest of the players may not have much opportunity to express their characters.

One solution might be to introduce multiple creatures to which characters can react, but that makes for a pretty daunting first encounter — most people would flee numerous enemies, simply by reason of being outnumbered. Ideally, your scene should offer enough time, space and defenseless parties for characters to have a range of options in how to respond. Confusing

circumstances can give characters' different factors to contend with as well. Imagine zombies staggering through a shopping mall. Is it some kind or bizarre promotion? Is that fake blood? These people need to get out of the way (or be taken to safety). Where did the things go? The signs to that store just read "THE DEAD RISE." What did they do in there?

Monsters' motives can also be unclear at first, giving Judges, Visionaries and the Merciful something with which to work. If no harm is done, there might be room for reconciliation or resolution — or evaluation of the possibility of either. The creature should be fairly easily distracted from its purpose, too. That way characters can actually get results from their efforts rather than waste their time and fail to prove to themselves that their efforts were worthwhile. And yet, there should be a definite threat involved so potential Avengers, Defenders and Martyrs have the opportunity to act aggressively. As a result of all these approaches, a whole group of characters undergoes the change in one scene and becomes aware of the nightmare world around them.

Individual Imbuing

If the characters are imbued separately, you multiply your preparation work by the number of players in your game. However, you've also freed yourself of the contrivance of all the characters ending up in the same place at the same time.

You probably need to prepare a brief description of the situation that each character will face. If the players have chosen their creeds, this preparation is fairly easy because the motivation of the monster can reflect the creed mentality of the hunter. For example, an Innocent-to-be may encounter a monster that can be communicated with, and which does not have immediate malicious intent, while a Judge may be presented with a situation in which a quick decision on a monster's fate is required based on the evidence at hand. Create some stats for the monsters and any other significant participants and you're ready to go.

The next major problem you face, however, is gathering the players together after their separate imbuings. Without the bonding experience of a single event, the hunters don't have an immediate way of meeting. You have a number of options for bringing them together. Perhaps the easiest is hunter code. A character might have an irresistible urge to draw a design in public places after his imbuing, barely understanding what it means or why it's significant. Meanwhile, other recently changed (the other characters) who see the sign recognize it to mean "ally" and know that they're not alone, if only

they can find whoever created the graffiti. Sooner or later, the parties who created and read the sign should find each other.

Hunter-net is another option. If all of the characters are likely to have Internet access and think of it as a source of information on their condition, they can be drawn to the website and its lists in various ways (see "Hunters and the Internet," p. 191). While it runs against the "no locations revealed" policy of Hunter-net, a few revealing posts would allow characters to put two and two together and arrange a meeting. It's probably an uncomfortable and slightly wary rendezvous, but it gets those hunters together.

Flesh on the Bones

So the players have completely or largely finished creating their characters (their human sides, anyway), and you have some idea of who those people are. You also have plans in place to run the imbuing, whether group or individual. Before you go and throw monsters at the prospective hunters and expect an emotional and realistic response, you can play a trick on your troupe to get them deeper into character. The **Hunter** rulebook recommends playing the characters through the few hours of their lives *prior* to the imbuing so that the prelude is as much of a learning exercise about the characters for you as it is for the players. This is an excellent idea. Don't be afraid to go through the day in minute detail, asking when the characters get up, what they do first, how they get ready for school, work, college or a life of retirement or unemployment. Ask them what paper they read, what they have for breakfast and how they travel around.

Two-Stage Character Creation

If your players create their characters completely before play begins — creeds, Virtues, edges and all — the design stage of your chronicle is complete and the hunters may begin their new traumatic lives. There's nothing left to do but play the game.

If you choose to assign creeds at the imbuing, there are limits to which players can complete their characters before play begins. They can go far toward defining regular folks, but spaces for creeds, Conviction, Virtues, edges and other Traits are left blank, and that means unused points at character creation. If you forewarn players of this eventuality they shouldn't lose their minds. (And even if players do spend all their, say, freebie points at character creation and want to revise allocations after the prelude, perhaps shifting points to get more starting Conviction, you could choose to allow it, assuming changes aren't drastic.)

Assigning creeds therefore defaults to a two-part creation process for players.

A Man Like Any Other

Initially, character creation proceeds exactly as outlined in **Hunter** (p. 84). The players choose concept, Nature and Demeanor, but not creed. They assign Attributes and Abilities as normal. Beyond that, the process changes slightly.

- **Backgrounds:** Players may choose to spend all five points of Backgrounds now or may reserve some or all for allocation after the imbuing. However, any points kept back now can be spent on only the Bystander, Destiny, Mentor and/or Patron Traits. Any points spent on bystanders before play begins indicate that these people are present during or shortly after the character's change. Bystander points acquired afterward indicate the introduction of such people later, when the Storyteller is prepared to do so and the story lends itself to new arrivals.
- **Virtues and edges:** No points are spent at this stage
- **Conviction and Willpower:** No Conviction is allocated at this stage. Willpower is set at the standard 3.
- **Freebies:** A player may spend as many of his 21 freebies points as he wishes, although he many not spend them on the Bystander, Destiny, Mentor or Patron Backgrounds, or on Conviction.

The Chosen Few

After the imbuing, you and the player assign the character's creed, based on the reasons the character acted the way she did.

- **Virtues and edges:** You and/or the player determine appropriate Virtues and edges, based on the character's creed and actions during the imbuing. The edges allocated here may or may not reflect those manifested during the imbuing itself.
- **Conviction:** Assigned based on the character's creed, as normal.
- **Freebies:** Any freebie points held back can be assigned to reserved Backgrounds, Conviction or even to Willpower. The last Trait is defined as a normal human's resolve and would seemingly belong in the first part of character creation, but witnessing monsters and learning the harsh truth of the world can influence a person's determination.

You may be worried that focusing on this sort of minutiae may bore players. It won't. They know they're playing **Hunter**. They're waiting for their characters to encounter monsters for the first time. The longer you draw out the build up to that first encounter, the more they'll enjoy the suspense. Examining minor details of characters' lives also makes players think intently on who their creations are and they get into their roles more intensely as a result, even if day-to-day events are all that transpire. The deeper players get into character, the more they'll enjoy themselves — and the more natural their reactions will be when the supernatural finally emerges.

And, as suggested earlier, the more players immerse themselves in the mundane lives and identities of their characters, the greater the contrast will be when the supernatural world is revealed. Now players and hunters know what's at stake, and the abominable quality of monsters is emphasized against a human backdrop.

Taking Notes

A quick aside, before we go any further. One of the most important things you can do as you're storytelling is take notes. Abundant notes. As many notes as you possibly can. Even seemingly trivial things such the name of a bar the characters visit or the name of a policeman they chat with briefly can be important later. If you recall those names, people or places, they become institutions in your game and emphasize the reality of your setting — monsters may exist, but mundane things and people still matter.

The importance of record keeping and consistency goes double for any details about the characters' own lives. This time it works to *your* advantage. It's surprising how the smallest detail can support a plot hook on which to build. One of the ongoing challenges of running a **Hunter** chronicle is introducing new antagonists in an interesting way. There's only so many times you can use the "suddenly the Messengers show you a rot in the street/bar/office/shop" approach before it becomes tired, and the last thing you want to do is bore your players.

Seemingly peripheral details of a character's life, preferences and friends can provide you with inspiration for new ways of working in monsters. An interest in literature (when the hunt allows it) might attract the attention of a mutually inclined bloodsucker. Concern for the plight of the homeless in a world of predators might win the favor of a shapechanger who lives among them as a fellow protector. Or a character's simple failure to remember an anniversary brought up sessions beforehand might result in a falling out with a spouse.

You note these details about the characters and their environment, which means you get to use them on the hunters' behalf — or against them.

Running the Imbuing

Take a look at **Hunter**, p. 220, for information on running imbuings. The suggestions there are pretty comprehensive although there are a few other things worth considering.

Initial Edges

Hunters don't get to choose their edges in the setting of the game. There's no menu from which to choose, teacher waiting to instruct the chosen or cultural tradition to be handed down. The Messengers simply allocate edges by whatever means seems suitable to them, whatever that may be. Certainly the imbued have no idea where their powers come from, why they take various forms and how they may be different from those of other chosen.

While many players like to retain control of their characters and therefore choose the edges their characters develop, others enjoy the mystery of gaining new powers without really understanding them, making the gaming experience more "realistic." If running the game in the latter way appeals to you, and your players are up for it, you need to do some extra preparation for your imbuing scenes. If you allocate edges as you go during the scene, you need to know the powers available to the various creeds pretty well. A crib sheet dedicated to them is ideal. Just write down the key points from all the level-one and -two edges. If you have access to the creed books, feel free to cover those as well. Then, when characters take actions that seem to coincide with an edge, such as throwing something at a monster (Impact, **Hunter Book: Avenger**) or trying to drive off a monster to protect someone (Ward, **Hunter**), the characters can manifest the appropriate edges and your game proceeds without a lot of page turning.

Another suggestion here is foregoing the usual die rolls required to activate and use edges. This is the first time they're used, and it should be dramatic. Hunters should get a firsthand and terrifying demonstration of what they can do. When the imbued choose to act, they don't think it through or necessarily ponder the best course of action, they just do it. Edges should therefore work flawlessly. Assume one or more successes are achieved on players' behalf, without the die rolls that edge systems usually call for. You can say the Messengers are responsible for bringing the effects to bear as much (or more so) as the characters are. The result is amazing feats that hunters barely understand, performed in a moment of pure instinct. There'll be

plenty of time to wonder at it all later. Now is the time for drama, not successes, failures or botches.

And if the edges hunters manifest in the imbuing don't match up with characters' final creeds (maybe some deliberation about the intent behind a hunter's action rather than the act itself suggests a different creed is appropriate), don't worry. As explained on p. 230 of the rulebook, sometimes creed is mutable in the immediate aftermath of the imbuing and edges displayed fade to be replaced with ones more appropriate to a settled role in the hunt. Or maybe a character retains that first edge and follows a different primary path thereafter, with points assigned to the appropriate Virtues at the beginning of the game. Maybe one point goes to Zeal to explain use of Discern while the two remaining points go to Vision as appropriate to the players' intended direction for his character.

Finally, without knowledge of how their powers work, hunters probably don't recognize triggers for their effects at the imbuing. The edges simply activate, as if under their own power. Again, the Messengers can be the active agents here. When characters seek to utilize their powers again in the future, they can realize that certain behaviors, efforts or tricks make it possible. These actions may even be the same things performed in that first encounter with monsters, or triggers may develop unto themselves, in keeping with what a hunter later needs to believe to rationalize her capabilities. A hunter may not believe herself capable of miracles, for example, but prayer might invite the intervention of the Powers That Be, which are fully capable of the inexplicable.

Hermits and Waywards

The two lost Vision creeds, Hermits and Waywards (see **Hunter Players Guide**, p. 16), undergo imbuings that are somewhat different from those of more "conventional" hunters. The lost creeds' changes are defined more by Messenger interaction with these people and their environment than they are by the hunters' actions themselves.

Due to the handicapped and challenging nature of both creeds, players should rarely be assigned these creeds as a result of in-game behavior. If a player ends up with a character from either creed, it really should be by her own choice before the game begins or perhaps by agreement after the prelude has been played. Both creeds are significantly more demanding to play that any of the others, for a number of reasons.

They are inherently anti-social, in part because of the nature of the Messengers' interaction with these people. Waywards are ushered toward psychopathic behavior while the Hermits' instinct is to withdraw from contact with monsters and other chosen. It takes a degree of roleplaying skill to make these characters work as part of a group on an ongoing basis. Nor is creed members' contact with the Messengers as general as that of other hunters. Waywards receive instructions that filter through to their brains as little more than "KILL, KILL, KILL" while the Hermits are overloaded with more information than they can hope to process and are virtually driven mad by it.

If these conditions as a hunter are to be demonstrated from the moment of the imbuing, a player should know in advance that his character belongs to one of these small groups. Otherwise, you tie a player's hands at the imbuing, largely denying him a chance to choose an action, which in turn determines creed, and you just hand down a creed as a *fait accompli*. No player enjoys being hamstrung like that unless he invites the challenge.

Style

The imbuing is a profoundly unsettling, deeply disturbing experience. Words cannot capture the betrayal and fear the imbued suffer when they discover that everything they have ever done and experienced in the world has been an illusion created to keep them ignorant and unaware of monsters' existence. Don't be afraid to try to capture that experience in the prelude. In the build up to the moment of revelation, settle the players into a comfortable routine. Move from player to player, letting each roleplay the mundane events of her day, allowing each to get used to having her turn and thinking about the next event. Use a gentle, nonthreatening voice. Be agreeable and jovial. Don't give any indication of when the imbuing is about to happen. The players know that something is coming. Do your best to help them forget and become absorbed by their characters' day-to-day routines.

You can still emphasize the World of Darkness setting in small ways, though. Make the streets a little more crowded than ours, the buildings a little taller and more austere. People on the whole are just a little more stressed, surly or unhelpful. Just don't overdo it at this point — you want the players to feel at home, not threatened.

When the imbuing does occur, shift gears. As you describe the characters' first glimpse of a monster, don't be afraid to get out of your chair and pace around the room. This may disturb the players. When a Herald "speaks" to one of the characters, go right up to the player and whisper or yell the message at him, depending on the kind of impact you want the experience to have. Herald statements are typically printed in capital letters in **Hunter** books for a reason — to differentiate

them from everything else stated in the books, all of which is made less important by contrast.

Remember that contact from the Messengers affects hunters deeply — their senses are effectively commandeered momentarily by another entity, which forces visions and sensations upon them. Describe the phenomenon in detail as it happens, focusing on different senses and reactions to the event: the gruesome sight of a creature. Its stench. A nauseating sense of vertigo. A spontaneous, vomitous taste. A pounding heart. Limbs shaking uncontrollably. Loss of bladder or bowel control. Nearly paralyzing fear. Liken the event to experiences players may have had that terrified them: That moment of recognition that a car accident is about to happen and nothing can stop it. Falling from a dangerous height. Suffering an extreme injury and recoiling in fear, with the knowledge that the pain is about to wash over one's self.

Keep the roleplaying staccato. Leap from one player to another rapidly and unpredictably, demanding to know their feelings and responses. Then, when they decide to act, settle down a little. The imbuing is about suffering incomprehensible fear, but it's also about responding to something that's incomprehensibly wrong. Characters who react under these conditions experience a moment of clarity. Previously unknown instincts compel them to attack or reach out or demand an explanation. The characters become hunters, whether they like it or not — or even know it. Rage around the room, emphasizing the terror and confusion the characters suffer in regard to what they witness, and then stop suddenly to ask each character in turn how she reacts in her moment of clarity. The eye of the storm passes overhead, and when the torrent resumes, the imbued will contribute.

Reward characters and players with a feeling that they have regained some control over their situation. Allow them to dictate what they try to do in regard to the creature and each other. The initiative is now theirs. Describe the amazing feeling as edges manifest for the first time, emphasizing both the rush of power and the terribly alien action. Or perhaps characters barely recognize the feats they perform until after the scene ends; in the heat of the moment, a simple attempt to strike the creature or scream at it or keep it away has miraculous results that can only be digested with time and distance.

As the encounter draws to a close, return to your seat and ease the tempo of the game back to normal. The creature is presumably driven off, defeated or convinced to leave. Let normality reassert itself, more or less. The world as the characters have known it is

proven a lie. They can never return fully to their old ways. It's time for the characters to run away themselves, talk or do whatever the players like that's in character (as far as that can be said under such conditions; who could act "normal" in the wake of such events?). It's also time for you to take the players aside to ask about their characters' motivations during the prelude and finalize creeds.

New Eyes

Hunters don't see the other denizens of the World of Darkness as they truly are. While you may know that vampires look like pale, thin versions of people — with fangs — that's not necessarily what hunters can see.

At certain times such as at the imbuing, when the Messengers actively influence hunter senses, in some cases with second sight or with certain observation-oriented edges such as Witness or Illuminate, the chosen can see symbolic representations of creatures rather than their real-world appearances. These impressions tend to exaggerate everything that is monstrous about an entity, as if to emphasize it as alien and potentially unacceptable, presumably by Messenger standards. Vampires don't simply look pale and thin. They can look bestial, with grotesque elongated fangs and bloody lips. A zombie that normally seems perfectly human and alive can appear as a desiccated corpse. A wolf hiding in human form can seem to have an elongated face and gnashing teeth, with saliva dripping from its jaws. These visions typically last only momentarily — just long enough for a hunter to know that he faces something that isn't human.

And even when a creature's worst features aren't exaggerated or don't appear spontaneously, monsters can still seem *wrong* to hunter senses. Second sight frequently alerts the imbued that a being is *off* even if its worst features don't flash before a hunter's eyes. This isn't necessarily a value judgment on the part of the chosen. It's an awareness presumably imposed by the Messengers as a warning or a mandate to do something about the thing.

So, it's important when running **Hunter** to occasionally abandon your previous ideas of what creatures can look like — sexy, seductive, alluring, majestic, intoxicating, charming, demure — and to concentrate on portraying them as the embodiments of the worst qualities of their monstrous existence. How hunters respond to such spectacles is up to them.

Symbolic Imbuings

Some hunters experience what can best be described as a special effect when they're imbued. The Merciful are bathed in a clear, white light. Those of Vision are whipped by winds. The Zealous are immolated. Meanwhile, other imbued undergo no such effects, simply hearing the call and answering it.

So what's the point of these displays? There are potentially several, most important of which is that a character bathed in light, whipped by winds or set aflame — without suffering harm — emphasizes to player and character that something miraculous is happening. The imbuing can be a strangely subtle event for something that has such a profound effect on a person's life. The character's body doesn't necessarily change in any perceptible way; he doesn't gain any new higher understanding save the ability to see monsters where others can't. Even the new powers he displays may initially work only at the behest of the Messengers rather than the character himself.

The symbolic imbuing is therefore a marker in the character's life. The moment when he feels the wind or the flames is the moment when his existence changes. Such a dramatic show drives home to players that their characters are now different, now imbued. It's a handy narrative tool to help players know when to switch gears in their roleplaying, assuming they need it. (Many players can roleplay the imbuing and a character's life thereafter without a smoke-and-mirrors display, and you may not want to use such a dramatic event in their case.)

To emphasize the change in a hunter's life, try to make the moment when the symbolic force appears coincide as closely as possible with the moment when the character takes the action that defines her creed (or at least primary Virtue). When a promising Defender decides to attack a rot to stop it from hurting a passerby, she may feel the flames of Zeal erupt around her. When a Martyr throws himself in front of that same monster to stop it any price, he may feel the warm light of Mercy vindicating his choice. These symbols also say to the character, "You have done the right thing by acting." Few people would be able to respond so quickly and decisively in the face of monstrosity, so it can be reassuring to characters and players to know they have done well.

As alluded above, if you assign creeds during the prelude, using symbolic imbuings is something of a challenge. Since creeds aren't completely finalized until after the prelude is over, when you and the

players discuss the motivations behind characters' actions, you run the risk if giving a character a symbolic imbuing that's inappropriate to her final primary Virtue.

To counter this, one option is to use the symbolic effect if a hunter's creed is clearly displayed through repeated actions during the imbuing. If not, hold back from committing just yet. The line between a Martyr and a Defender can be thin. Both may try to put themselves in harm's way, one to protect the person a creature attacks, the other to stop the creature at all costs. Another option is to ask players to rationalize their characters' actions as they're taken so you know immediately why a burgeoning hunter acts the way he does (and you know pretty well what creed to assign and what symbolic imbuing is appropriate).

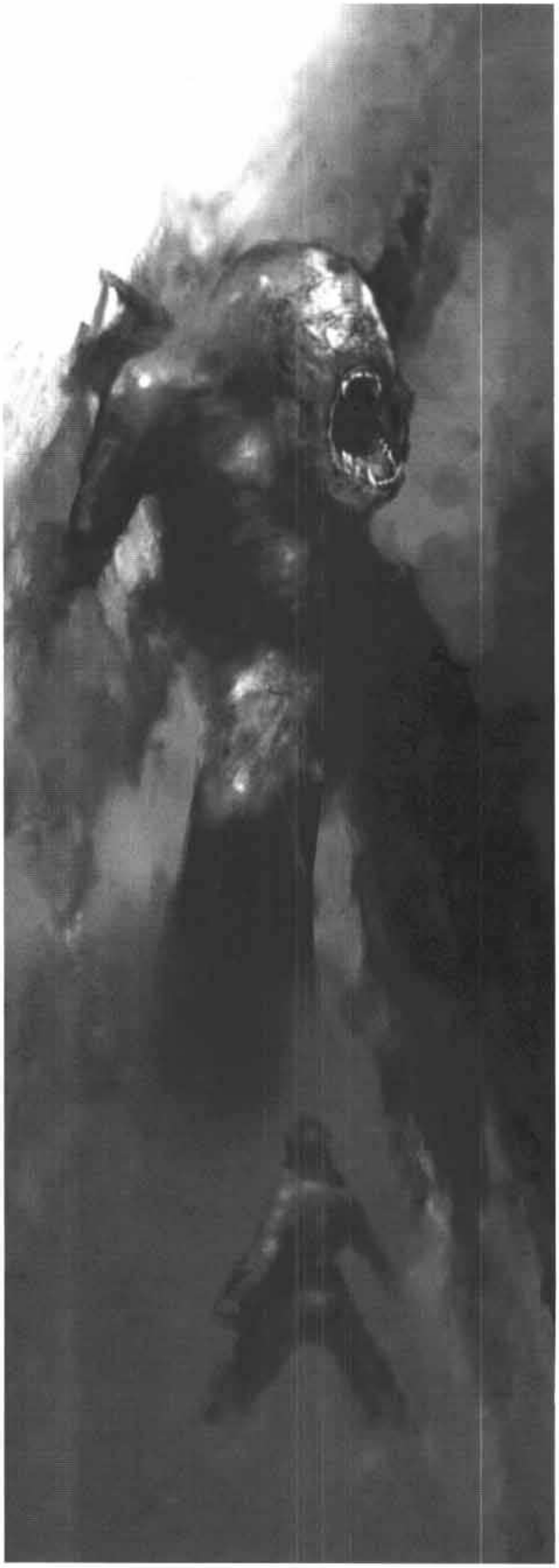
If some characters' primary Virtues still aren't clear in the prelude, you can simply avoid bestowing the symbolic imbuing upon them. This means some hunters experience it and some don't — perhaps even at the same imbuing scene. This tack is certainly consistent with canonical **Hunter**. The various creed books present discussion as to what a symbolic imbuing actually means, and why some experience it and others don't.

Hunter offers no hard-and-fast explanation of what the symbolic imbuing means in the setting although you could decide that for your own game. Perhaps a recipient's creed was clear and defined at the very moment she saw the supernatural for the first time. Her reaction, which defines her creed, was instinctual and there was no doubt in her mind that she was doing the right thing. She is, if you like, a model example of her creed. Other characters whose commitment to a particular calling is less determined don't receive the same mark of affirmation from the Messengers.

Another possibility is that only characters who are "pure" in their Virtue get the wind, light or fire. Those characters who split their initial three dots among different Virtues don't experience the effect. Of course, this approach assumes you know how all of a character's starting Virtue points will be assigned before the prelude ends. At the start of the game, you might even want to allocate each character's Virtue points, just as you can creeds and starting edges. The Messengers bestow them all.

The Risks

There are risks to subjecting some characters and not others to the symbolic imbuing. Some troupe members may suspect that you're playing favorites. You can alleviate this concern by introducing the



symbolism again later in your chronicle. A Judge who didn't "clearly" act according to her creed during the imbuing might later feel herself wreathed in flames as she stands in judgment over a fallen rot, confirming her as one of the representatives of the imbued.

Ideally, if your players aren't likely to play this sort of game of one-upmanship, scattered allocation of symbolic and non-symbolic imbuings can intensify the mystery of the process. Not only do the hunters have no idea who changes them, why it's done or what the long-term results will be, they can't fathom why some among them seem to receive special favor — or potentially disfavor, either way. Ideally, your game is strengthened if the hunters devise and share their own theories about what the symbolic imbuing means and why it occurs to some and not all. It's just further fuel to the fire of confusion that the imbued suffer about their new status.

Later Use

There's no reason why you should be limited to using the symbols of the imbuing during the prelude alone. If you introduce the concept early in the game, it would be a shame not to build on that foundation later in the chronicle. The symbolism is tied explicitly to the Virtues: Each different element reflects a different primary Trait. Any subsequent use of the symbols should continue to be tied to primary Virtues or you risk diluting their meaning.

The question is, on what occasions are the Virtues relevant and could cause a symbol-element to manifest? An increase in primary Virtue rating is an obvious example, with its associated chance to gain a new edge. An increase in a primary Virtue means that the hunter's commitment, measured by his increasing Conviction, has grown. In story terms, he has become more dedicated to his self-chosen mission. It is certainly appropriate that the Messengers would signal approval of this development.

When a character increases her primary Virtue *and* gains a new edge from her creed's path, those flames or that light or wind may appear again as the character uses her new power for the first time, reaffirming her commitment to the hunt. The elements also serve as a useful signal to hunters that they have gained a new edge. (While players know a new edge is gained through making the change on the character sheets, hunters themselves are not necessarily aware of the new gift until it manifests. An inexplicable gust of wind whipping around a hunter is a pretty good sign that something has happened, and if that link to the Messengers has already been established during the imbuing, understanding and use of the new edge may come quickly to the hunter.)

The Messengers are also suspected to both reward and *punish* hunters for to their actions (see "Playing God: The Messengers", p. 177). Certainly, primary-Virtue-related symbolism can be used as a sign of the Messengers' favor when a character acts in a way that suits the role the Heralds have assigned him. Ideally, he gains Conviction in these moments and feels energized. But if he performs an act that possibly runs counter to the general tenets of his creed, he could lose Conviction, feel dispirited and find himself in flames, light or winds again — with the intuitive knowledge that the Powers That Be have witnessed and disfavor his behavior. See the **Hunter** rulebook, pp. 137-139, and Chapter 5 of the various creed books for ideas on how Conviction can be gained or lost through appropriate or inappropriate action.

You can also use the relationships between the different symbolic elements and the Virtues as thematic elements to develop your plots. Imagine a band of hunters stalking a monster through back alleys on a winter night. They finally catch up with the beast after it has driven a group of homeless people away from a burning trash can, around which they huddled. The confrontation between hunters and monster is illuminated by the glow of the fire, which seems to burn brighter and hotter when the aggressive imbued do what they must. The symbolism can be taken by characters and players as confirmation of doing the right thing.

Similarly, the light of a street lamp, unusually clear and bright, shining on a monster slumped against a wall makes the association with Mercy, and can suggest to characters that a talkative approach might be best for approaching the creature. Or a strong wind whipping across a public square, where a Visionary waits to meet with a monster or even another hunter, can suggest that something is about to happen that could deepen the hunter's understanding of the mission.

The symbols can also be used as foreshadowing or as dramatic effect when introducing Storyteller-controlled hunters to the chronicle. Imagine this scene:

The knock on the hotel-room door silenced the discussion at once. Jason reached for his club while Serena edged toward the door. Simon gasped suddenly.

"It's a monster," he said. "I can feel it."

Talbot's heart sank. It had found them, even here. It looked like the time he had long dreaded had arrived. Could he get any of the others out of this alive? He was barely aware of Jason moving into position, of Serena preparing to open the door. He was distracted by... what? A breeze in the room? He glanced to the window and saw that it was shut. Where the hell was the wind coming

from? The others could feel it, too. Simon looking around, puzzled. Jason looked positively jumpy.

Then Serena shouted "Now!" and flung the door open. Jason leapt at the thing only to swing at the air. The black man who stood in the door grabbed Jason's club from his hands and threw it over the walkway railing. He was an imposing figure — and apparently not wrong or off as everyone feared. But Talbot immediately knew that something was different about him. There was an intensity to him that not even Jason could match, and his eyes seemed to reveal a look that defied sanity.

Everyone stared motionless for a moment before the newcomer finally spoke.

"I'm on your side, assholes. You can call me God45."

Such use of the wind while introducing a Wayward character, for example, hints at the greater mysteries of hunter existence — such as what other kinds of people might be candidates for the change and who might the Messengers have meant to help direct the imbued in general — without revealing too much explicitly. Introduction of fire, light or wind in such instances can suggest that someone important among the chosen enters the characters' lives, whether for good or ill. You can give the players narrative forewarning, but you don't have to say what the future actually holds.

Hatching the Plot

Once the cleaner had finished his half-hearted vacuuming of the office, Serena said a curt "thank you" and turned back to her computer. She brought up the human-resources database that she had to hide in a hurry a few minutes before.

She opened a file entitled "Kathy McKensie." Serena scanned quickly. There it was: Kathy's husband died about six months before Serena joined the firm, and Kathy had been given six weeks' leave. Ralph McKensie. Killed in a car crash. Jesus. It looked like Talbot was right. These really were zombies. This was too damn weird for words. If she hadn't seen them with her own eyes, she wouldn't believe any of it. She was half-convinced she was crazy.

She glanced at her watch. Still an hour till she'd agreed to meet the others. Damn, she'd have to bail on meeting her brother. They were supposed to discuss plans for their parents' 40th anniversary over a drink after work. Hopefully she'd be able to come up with some halfway decent excuse.

Now, if only she could pull the McKensies' old address from the pay records before she left....

The imbuing is over and your first game session is done. It's time to sit down and establish the plot for the next few sessions. It's one of the fundamental rules of storytelling that no matter what you antici-

pate, the players will do something else. Before long, you learn the safest way to prepare for a game is to create a loose outline of how events might transpire, prepare stats for important characters that you'll play and then accept that you're going to fly by the seat of your pants for a while.

And yet, **Hunter** chronicles can require some more hands-on treatment in the early stages. The characters are confused and not a little scared. The players may be hard-pressed to come up with convincing reasons why their characters would suddenly drop everything and go out searching for creatures of the night — or even other people who've also seen them. You may have to provide some opportunities or reasons to motivate characters to take up the hunt.

You walk a tightrope here. Give too much guidance and you risk railroading the characters into situations and plots rather than letting players make choices. Give too little help, and the players wonder what the hell their characters should be doing, rapidly losing interest in the game. The best thing to get hunters started and keep players happy is to listen to the players and learn what they expect from the chronicle. By listening to what they want, you not only fulfill their expectations, but they also do a lot of plot writing for you.

Guidance

The key to getting those early sessions right is to give your players an open framework in which to play and be prepared to direct them on how best to move forward. You want players to have their characters step into the hunt in ways and for reasons that seem reasonable to the individuals, but you may also need to coax the characters out of the shell of ordinary life. Fortunately, you're given some pretty darn useful motivational tools in the Messengers. In the days and weeks following the imbuing, the Heralds can prod their reluctant chosen to answer the call.

Whenever the players seem to be flagging or when they run out of ways for their characters to move their new lives forward, the Messengers can intrude. Characters with the Patron or Destiny Backgrounds should get the most attention from these invisible, inscrutable forces, but there's no reason why other characters can't get an occasional push in the right direction by the unexpected activation of second sight or an edge. Characters might see a monster masquerading as a business person on the news or suddenly see a being that no one else seems to notice while on the way to work. The would-be hunters might not know how to deal with creatures yet or even understand how far-reaching their conspiracy is, but certain tips from the Messengers can inspire characters to act in their days of uncertainty.

If any of the characters has a high Mentor rating, that experienced hunter can introduce the recently imbued to their new world — and encourage them to find any others with whom they were exposed to the supernatural. An imbued teacher is extremely important to the characters as they start to come to terms with what they've witnessed and done. He makes a useful way to introduce plots, too. Few lone hunters survive for long, and few imbued can afford to turn down any help. Once a mentor knows of the existence of particular characters, and by extension the rest of the group, he may call on them from time to time to help him resolve situations and to deal with the lost.

It's wise to make a mentor with the same primary Virtue as the character to which she's connected. An Avenger and an Innocent would probably be too far removed in outlook for one to stand much chance of educating the other to any depth. A mentor from within the same primary Virtue, even if of a different creed, is likely to have enough in common with a character that she imparts techniques and information to her adopted student without fundamental philosophical differences getting in the way — whether right away or in time.

And yet, there are some possible exceptions to this Mentor rule of thumb. A Visionary can makes a pretty good teacher for any creed because he may come to the calling and other hunters' situation with an open mind. Even if a Visionary mentor doesn't agree with a character's beliefs or desires, he can probably sympathize with them. A good model for this sort of teacher-student relationship across Virtue lines is that of Fyodor (Visionary) and Bookworm (Innocent), as presented in **Hunter Book: Innocent**.

The Open Framework

So you have some means by which to convince characters to dare emerge from their formal, mundane lives and investigate just what's happening in this horrific world to which they've awakened. You have some ideas for supernatural carrots to dangle before them. But how do you create the open framework of those initial game sessions? How do you continue to allow the characters to approach the hunt on their own terms without dragging them from their sheltered existence and forcing their hand?

You have two primary means of drawing them out: their ordinary lives and the other side.

Ordinary Lives

The characters may be imbued, but people don't spontaneously decide to go out one night and stalk monsters. Even if they know that monsters exist, their previous lives continue. Friends, family and colleagues continue on in ignorance. They don't know — can't know — the truth, and they carry out their lives never realizing how they're jeopardized every day. Friends and family can also do things or make mistakes such as commit crimes, speak up against a perceived injustice or simply walk into the wrong conference room at the wrong time and bring themselves — and perhaps even hunters themselves — to monsters' attention. When the people close to hunters are endangered by creatures, most imbued are compelled to act.

Now is the time you reap the rewards of asking players to create such in-depth characters and supporting cast members. Supporting cast members are yours to manipulate and use against hunters. Maybe a sister doesn't know she works for a bloodsucker, but her hunter-brother soon finds out. Or a buddy just can't seem to escape the gang lifestyle, oblivious to the fact that *things* oversee the streets and keep the punks enthralled. Players don't even have to have established such supernatural facts about the people in their characters' lives. You get to fill in those areas as your plot demands, as long as supporting cast members don't take radical turns or change identities without good explanation.

You can even draw up a list of possible ways in which supporting cast members' lives intersect with the characters'. These meetings, obligations or agreements may seem mundane, but they can be the basis for supernatural developments when friends, family or co-workers are unwittingly connected to or live in the vicinity of monsters. Often times, the mere suggestion of a friend's victimization by creatures is all the framework you need to get an initial **Hunter** story started. Try some of the following connections with:

Friends

- Agreed-upon nights out together
- A friend hits a financial crisis and needs a loan
- Birthday parties for close friends
- A friend gets dumped and turns to the character for a sympathetic ear
- The character's husband or wife has invited another couple to stay with them for a few days
- The character is invited away on vacation with a group of pals
- A friend drops by unexpectedly

Family

- One of the kids gets into serious trouble at school
- A member of the immediate family develops a drug problem
- The usual babysitter quits or goes off to college
- A parent falls ill
- A wife/husband/partner is fired
- A child's sports team needs a leader or driver

Work

- A major new project is started
- A co-worker leaves, increasing the time the character must spend at work. New people must be interviewed.
- A new job is started
- A character is laid off
- Business travel with a co-worker
- The company decides to crack down on non-work related Internet use
- The company relocates within the same city or maybe further abroad
- Promotion with more pay but longer hours

Imagine that a character and his girlfriend agree to attend a friend's 30th birthday party. You can decide that a spirit has possessed the friend and tries to pass itself off as him. The hunter senses something is wrong, based on the weird things he's seen, and intentionally or instinctively activates second sight to look at his buddy. Now he knows his friend is in jeopardy and feels compelled to save him. But how? Suddenly you have the basis for a story. Maybe if the character can find the other people who also *saw* that first night, they can help him now. Your chronicle has begun with a loose framework of possible events and under its own character-motivated momentum.

In time, don't neglect the difficulties that relations with friends, family and co-workers can present on the hunt, as well. Just as supporting cast members can be inspiration for stories, they can be obstacles in them, too. The same hunter in the above example might distractedly agree to attend the party after his life as a hunter is underway. When the party comes and goes and he doesn't attend, his friend may feel abandoned and resentful. So when that buddy unwittingly gets into trouble with the supernatural the very next week, he may not want anything to do with the character, who's there to save the friend. It's hard to do someone good when neither the other person nor the spirit that seeks to possess him wants help.

The Other Side

It would take a rare and possibly very stupid person to decide that she was going to devote her life to dealing with monsters. In those first days after the

imbuing, most characters, if played realistically as everyday folks, do their best to try and convince themselves that it was all a mistake, a nightmare that seemed real.

Even if a newly imbued person is utterly convinced of the reality of the supernatural, she is likely to feel unqualified to hunt down any other creatures out there. The trick to motivating a character to take up the challenge is to present her with a situation that she can't bear, that she can't allow to continue without trying to intervene. Sure, use of the Messengers and spontaneous activation of second sight allows you to introduce new antagonists whenever you want, but in the early stages of the game, it may be best to give characters personal reasons to confront creatures and initiate the hunt. The trick is to keep the hook flexible so that characters may bite whenever they're ready.

In the fiction throughout this article, three hunters progressively get involved with a group of walking dead. The undead aren't generic creatures for the novices to turn their backs on. Each character has a personal reason to address the creatures: Serena's secretary is the widow of the creature that has returned from the grave. Jason's wife has a job similar to the zombie's target, allowing him to understand the threat posed to his family. The relationship between the monster and his widow is enough of a clue to pique Talbot's inherent curiosity and inspire him to investigate the nature of the restless dead. Intimate connections to the monsters faced at the imbuing or thereafter compel tentative hunters to take action

New Eyes

Creating rewarding **Hunter** antagonists is actually more difficult if you and your players are familiar with the other Storyteller games than if you knew nothing about them. The other games invite you to play monsters, so you know far more about them than you probably need to run **Hunter**. More significantly, and perhaps problematically, those games give you a sympathetic understanding of the creatures.

To a large extent, you have to forget most of what you know. **Hunter** focuses on struggles that affect ordinary people in day-to-day life. The grand power plays of the city's primogen or the ongoing struggle against the Wyrm just doesn't matter to the imbued. The other games involve an understanding of monsters that no hunter has. What matters to the chosen is a bloodsucker preying on people. That's something they can understand, relate to and possibly even do something about.

Many experienced World of Darkness Storytellers find it difficult to accept certain supernatural groups as potential bad guys in **Hunter**. Mages are a good example. Yes, in **Mage: The Ascension**, the characters are humans who awaken to greater powers. But step back from the ideas inherent to that game and look at what these mages actually are: people who can warp the world to suit their own whims and, more importantly, who want to force their own vision of reality on the world. You don't like anyone telling you how to live your life, right? Now imagine someone had the power to actually alter it. Pretty scary, huh? There's a reason why witches and wizards are so often painted as the bad guys in myths and stories: They have abilities that really do lift them above the human norm.

To make the most of the supernaturals in **Hunter**, step back from the their interpretations in the other games and return to the monstrous view of them that infuses folklore and mythology. Forget the words "Sabbat" and "Traditions." Discard the concepts of "Fianna" or "Dharma" and pretend that the "Camarilla" and "Progenitors" don't exist. Rather, think about individual members of these supernatural groups and how they interact with humanity — and hunters.

If you really want to run a story about a Sabbat versus Camarilla battle for a city, think about its effects on the ordinary people of that town — how their lives are affected by the nocturnal feud — and involve the hunters in the human fallout of the larger struggle.

Hunter is about terrible, incomprehensible things that happen to perfectly ordinary people. It's not a game about the struggles and difficulties inherent to becoming a monster. Give your antagonists motivations and goals that are within the bounds of human comprehension. As has been mentioned before, there's a reason why the walking dead, for example, are the principal antagonists in **Hunter**. They're dead *people*, with human agendas that hunters have a chance to understanding and deal with.

again rather than bury their heads in the sand. The structure of events in your starting story is general enough to allow players and characters personal freedom, but also inclusive enough to draw the hunters out for their own reasons.

Inspiration to hunt doesn't have to occur through direct confrontations with or connections to monsters, though. They can arise through emotions or mutual experiences. A mother who has lost her son might want to help a ghost whose own child is in danger from drug dealers. Someone who has recently fallen in love may be inclined to help a zombie get a last message to a lost love.

Essentially, getting your **Hunter** chronicle started means remembering that the characters, not your creatures, are the stars. Really good antagonists reflect or play off characters' lives in some way. Once the chronicle has developed a little and the hunters — not to mention their players — become a little more comfortable in their roles, you can introduce opponents whose origins or purpose stand apart from the characters' — and yet must be dealt with all the same.

Don't make your initial plots too complex. They should be relatively simple, self-contained situations that novice hunters can deal with reasonably easily. The sense that they can achieve something and make a difference against the horrors will bolster their confidence to try again and make a life of the hunt.

Planning for the Future

Running early game sessions and telling stories that are intimate to the characters gives you a sense for the kinds of games your players enjoy. If the imbued take an aggressive, combat-orientated approach to every situation, even ones that seem to allow for negotiation, you can tailor subsequent stories to that sort of approach. Or if the characters seek to understand what's behind the imbuing or the true nature of the monsters, you can tell exploratory tales. There's no shame in simply asking players what interests them, either. If it leads to a more enjoyable game for everyone involved, where's the harm? All these efforts help you get a solid, ongoing chronicle underway.

Shades of Darkness

The three of them stood around the grave.

Talbot held a small bunch of flowers and laid them by the headstone. "Well, Ralph McKensie, I don't know what brought you back to this world, but I hope you're at rest now."

Jason shook his head and walked away. The others followed.

They sat in silence for a while in the car. Talbot mentally went through the news stories he'd read this morning. All the attacks, the killings, the trials, the disasters. How many of them hid other, horrific stories behind them, like the one that covered up the fight in the bar? Why didn't any of them mention the things that were truly responsible?

Talbot looked out at the dirty streets around the cemetery with new eyes. What was going on out there, behind all those closed doors? The world was not the place he thought it was. "What now?" he asked the others.

Jason shrugged. "I'm going home. I'm back on the road again the day after tomorrow. This nightmare has already cost me too much time with my family."

Serena pulled a sheaf of printouts from her bag. "I found a mailing list this morning called judgmentday. It's hidden behind a website for a tattoo shop, believe it or not, but it seems to talk about the same sort of things we've experienced. There's another list apparently, one with more people on it. Maybe you should sign on, Talbot."

So far this article has discussed the foremost aspects of your game and how to get a chronicle started. It's focused primarily on the characters, their opponents and what can happen to them all in the early stages of the hunt. But there's another important character in your game that's there from the start and is easily overlooked.

Hunter is set in a world similar to yet very different from our own: the World of Darkness. It is different in some obvious ways: Vampires stalk the night and pull the strings of the people in power. Man-beasts roam the countryside. The dead walk among the living, unseen. But it's also different from our world in little ways. It's a little darker, a little more hopeless and a little less safe.

Think about the worst subway ride you've ever taken. The train is running late, and you know you're never going to make it to your destination on time. What's more, you know that you're going to catch hell at the other end. The train is so crowded that you stand the whole time next to someone who's an absolute stranger to personal hygiene. The odor makes you want to retch. Someone else is wearing a walkman and has the music up so loud that you can hear it clearly. You hate the band. Everyone's edgy and ready to turn angry if someone so much as bumps them by mistake. Now imagine that every journey was like that. Welcome to the World of Darkness.

Hunter doesn't usually explore the corrupt upper reaches of the World of Darkness society — the business or political hierarchies and their players, even though monsters are suspected to lurk there. The game concentrates on the ordinary people of the world, the people on the street and their struggles to survive

against difficult odds. Most players can sympathize because they're regular folks, too, even if their world is a slightly happier place.

You can emphasize the nature of the World of Darkness in any number of ways as you take your players through their first few game sessions. Don't do it before the characters undergo the imbuing, however. Before, the characters are part of the human mass, just getting by and not really looking at the world around them. Afterward, you can emphasize how bad things really are. Extrapolate on all the worst things in our world. There are more beggars on the streets. Alleys are darker and muggings more frequent. Traffic jams are bigger and lead to road rage more quickly. People are more hurried, more desperate and more selfish. Bosses are less fair. Companies less caring. Governments more corrupt. Was the world always like this?

Once the Messengers open the characters' eyes, they see the world's taint with new clarity. Once upon a time, they may have known that some police were on the take, for example. Now they realize that the police are uncaring or are under monsters' direct control. Junior beat cops, frustrated by their inability to bust major-league criminals, resort to taking out their anger on petty criminals, which can include hunters. The characters might see a zombie on TV acting as spokesman for the mayor. A wisp possessing a judge. A man-beast posing as a corporate executive. They all suggest that the things have a tight grip on society and its authorities.

Certainly, some characters should glimpse the good left in the world. Innocents may come across people whose compassion and willingness to help in situations they don't fully understand reaffirms the hunters' faith in humanity. Redeemers can encounter the occasional monster that really doesn't want to be what it is, that hates abusing people to survive. But these flashes should lead to only minor victories or highlight just how bleak the rest of the world truly is. What difference is really made? And yet, small victories are still important. Hunters should see both hope and despair in the early stages of your chronicle. Without hope, there's little reason for their characters to do anything at all. Without despair, the heroism of what they attempt is lost.

The World of Darkness might be gloomy and desperate, perhaps in part because of the machinations of monsters. And hunters may live in that world, but they aspire to another, better world by virtue of pursuing the hunt. They envision one in which monsters are defeated or made peace with and humanity is free of creatures' tyranny. It's therefore important to balance despair and hope in your game. The former might predominate, but the latter can increase as characters win small victories at first and increasingly larger ones over time. Find the right balance early on in your World of Darkness and you lay the groundwork for a great series of stories that will keep your troupe entertained for many nights to come.

Keeping it Real

She left him alone, and this is what happened.

The cold sterility of the hospital room. The smell of disinfectant spray. This wasn't what Ben was about. At one time, he was about warmth, belly laughs and big bear hugs that enveloped her. Hospitals never suited him. When his father got sick, he hated going. Hated seeing it. And now here she was watching him. Comatose, they said. Shot twice. Two bullets perforating his right lung. And sometime after that, maybe while lying there in his own blood, attacked by a wild dog. His lower left leg was mangled. Nothing made sense anymore.

What happened to him? How did he end up here, this way?

Anna pressed her face into her hands.

The change came over him not long after his dad died if she remembered correctly. It was practically overnight. He went to the cemetery to visit the grave. When he came back he was different somehow. His eyes were clear, but hollow. He didn't sleep that night, twitching fitfully and throwing off the blankets. She could feel the heat coming off him. That morning, he was finally asleep, his large frame curled up, a pillow tucked between his knees.

He didn't go to work at the sewer plant that day.

Or the next.

He barely said a word to her. She explained it away as sickness — maybe the flu — and he faintly agreed. He wandered the house, slack jawed, hands shaking. She wanted him to see a doctor. He agreed at first, but decided against it later.

Then, a week after that, he woke her in the middle of the night. "I love you," he said. "I have to go out. I'll be back in the morning."

She called after him, dazed, but he had already left.

She found him in the morning, asleep at the kitchen table. Mud on his jeans. A knife lying in the center of the table. Brown dots on the back of his hands. She didn't ask him about it. She couldn't. What was there to say? She trusted him. She would be there for him, no matter what.

When Ben woke, he seemed invigorated. His eyes wide — almost playful, like he had a revelation or an epiphany. He went to work — albeit late — and things seemed to go back to normal for a time.

Then he bought the computer. And the next day, a security system, blowing that month's mortgage payment in one fell swoop. She railed at him, but he was all nods and smiles, telling her it would be okay, that he was making everything right.

Not quite a month later, he stopped sleeping again. She could hear him in the other room, hunting and pecking on the keyboard. Sometimes she would peek in at him. He would be bathed in the barren white light of the monitor. Screen full of black text. He barely blinked.

Another few weeks went by.

He began missing work again.

Then it happened. He disappeared for four nights. She called the police, worried that he'd had an accident, was lying dead somewhere or bleeding or hurt. She called his sister. His mother. No one knew where he was. His work called the next morning and told her he was fired, that she could "pass the message along."

The fifth night, he returned. He had a bag full of laundry. Dirty clothes, he had told her. He seemed happy. Content, somehow. She sobbed and asked him a thousand questions, but she eventually just lost herself in his arms with no more words.

"I went to see Dad at the cemetery," he said quietly. "He's doing okay."

The next day she saw the news report. Three corpses found across the street from St. Agnes Cemetery — the same graveyard where Ben's father was buried. Each body was mutilated. A gangland killing, the news called it.

Anna could barely breathe. It wasn't him. It couldn't have been.

Still. He needed to see someone. A doctor. She would stay with him. She loved him. He was her husband. But he needed help.

It took a lot of convincing. Two weeks worth of pleading. Of crying. Every night, she had to pry him from the computer. Finally, he relented. He would see a doctor.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'll get help."

And he did. The doctor — a counselor — classified it as a "bipolar disorder" and prescribed a mild anti-depressant. She knew it would help. There was faith. Hope. But then Ben retreated into himself once again. Her feelings of hope faded. She got rid of the computer, and then he just sat in the empty room at nights, mumbling quietly to himself. He would get up, pace the house, check the security system. It became like a ritual, night after night.

Sometimes she could get him back to bed. Sometimes.

Two weeks went by like this. One night, she discovered him in the bathroom, flushing his pills down the toilet, tears caught in his beard. She screamed at him, begged him to stop, but it was too late. She asked him what he was doing, why he was throwing it all away.

He looked at her and said it so simply, so matter-of-factly.

"I've seen... things. The pills don't make them go away. No doctor can make them go away. But I can."

Two days later, she left him. That was four months ago.

The Heart of It All

Why reality?

Why try to make your **Hunter** game as realistic as possible? Why bore your players with "common" experiences? What good comes of immersing the characters in a mundane realm with normal parameters and ordinary situations? Isn't it easier to just have them hunt monsters?

Yes, it is easier. It's definitely the simplest route — possibly even the most traveled — to take in a **Hunter** game. When characters strictly stalk and kill creatures, the complications are low and the boredom factor would appear to be non-existent.

Note the word "appear."

A game about hunting and killing alone does get boring. The sheer repetition of observing, planning and attacking becomes monotonous. Your basic search-and-destroy chronicle foregoes **Hunter**'s most important theme: the common person. While the game may be a fun "bug hunt" at first, there has to be more to ground an ongoing chronicle on to root it firmly in your players' minds. In short, the game must *mean* something to them. Without the mundane reality that we and the imbued know, there's nothing to relate to. No perspective to understand. In the end, nothing is learned, nothing is gained and the only changes anyone experiences are die rolls.

Hunter is about real people tossed into extraordinary situations. Punted into a game they didn't even know they were losing. The odds are stacked against them as they're thrown sidelong into a new world, and the worst part is the *old world doesn't go away*. The characters still have credit-card bills, kids who need to be dropped off at daycare and townhouse associations that demand that they mow their lawn every week. Add to that the bonus of being able to see monsters and the harm they do to humanity and you start to get the idea.

Yet, you may still ask *why*? Why have cool powers if you still have to pencil in quality time with the wife? How is that fun to roleplay? Doesn't such a mundane responsibility defeat the purpose of being able to do amazing, weird things?

Imagine a single snowflake. Pristine and intricate, its icy angles are the pinnacle of rarity. When it falls amidst a panorama of snow — a veritable field of pure white — no one ever sees that single flake. But when it falls delicately onto the hood of a black car, it's there for a moment — able to be seen, to be witnessed, to have just a little bit of meaning before it melts.

Your players may gape at the ability to turn a lamp into a weapon of justice, or thrill at the notion that they can make a skinchanger feel shame from a single-syllable question. But you know what? Those capabilities don't mean anything unless placed against the contrast of reality. A character might be able to stop a creature with a command, but who cares if that's all that matters about him, if that's the width and breadth of his identity. Stark reality and common experience create a backdrop against which to view hunter characters and recognize the true significance of what they've become and what they can do. Sure, they can use weird powers, but who cares if they don't do it for something they understand and care about, such as family, friends or everyday values. Those mundane foundations are what make the hunt important, are what inspire it.

This article helps you establish and maintain a **Hunter** chronicle that's couched in the world of common people and everyday life. It helps you take **Hunter**'s everyman theme and make it a reality in your game.

Inspiration

If you want a few illustrations of the images and moods discussed here, of real people caught up in extreme situations, there are some good **Hunter**-esque examples out there. They're not the only sources that paint such a picture, but they definitely help establish the right mindset.

Fallen: This film stars Denzel Washington as a cop who puts away a serial killer. The criminal just happens to be possessed by a body-jumping fallen angel, and is a pretty good example of how real life intrudes upon the unimaginable. Denzel's character, despite his nightly struggle with this demonic entity, has a job, a bunch of fallible co-workers, and an imperfect brother who lives with him because money's tight. The movie shows how the pressures of real life can be ever present, despite a **Hunter**'s mission.

***Starman*:** This comic book by James Robinson (put out by DC, with no relation to the film of the same name) is a good example of a superhero whose life is anything but super. He has to deal with a marginally failing business, his fiancee's tearful exit, and he has a new child to take care of, to boot. He opts to abandon the whole superhero mold, turning his back on it for a shot at a genuine life. Hell, even his "superhero costume" is realistic — built for practicality, not fashion. He wears a leather jacket because it gets cold when he flies, and goggles so he

doesn't get stuff in his eyes. He's very fallible and very believable.

***Buffy the Vampire Slayer*:** (The show, not the movie.) Yes, this show is pretty goofy and generally doesn't fit the **Hunter** mold — the imbued are not meant to go around having a jocular time and saying witty things for an audience. But when it comes to reality poking its head in, this show has it in spades. Buffy is a slayer with immense power and physical strength — but that doesn't change the fact that she has to graduate high school, go to college, write papers, the whole deal. And the show deals with the consequences of not maintaining or outright abusing friendships and family. Those elements are notable to watch for in a realistic **Hunter** game.

***The Gift*:** This endeavor by Sam Raimi is a film that perhaps best exemplifies how special powers do not allow you to ignore your old life. Life is not a cakewalk just because there's a little magic in you. Annie is a psychic who tells fortunes for many of the folks in her backwater Georgian burb. Her husband died a year ago. As the movie progresses, she must deal with what little money her social-security check allows, her three kids, a house and car that are falling apart, and prejudice from those good-old-boys who call her a "witch" or "devil worshipper." It's a starkly real portrayal of supernatural abilities in an unchanging and unyielding world.

In the Beginning

It had been thirteen days since she left him.

Ben looked over at the stack of bills on top of the microwave. He glanced down at the huge tear in the last good pair of jeans he owned. His stomach growled. The cabinets were empty, save for a half-eaten and totally stale box of shredded wheat. And no milk. He sighed. His wallet was getting thin and he didn't even want to think about the checking account. Their savings — what Anna didn't take — were nothing more than a ghost of what they once were, and any buffer he'd counted on was drained days before.

He walked over to the stack of mail and looked at the top envelope. It was yellow. Official-looking. Stamped across the front in big, black letters were the words "foreclosure notice." A terrible weight pressed down on him.

This was not the life he had chosen, he reminded himself. It was chosen for him. He had no choice but to deal with it, to continue on and find faith that what he was doing was right.

At least he had a few shotgun shells left. Thank God for small miracles.

As a **Hunter** Storyteller, you need to think about things you might not have considered while playing any of the other World of Darkness games. Vampires don't normally have to pay car loans. Wizards probably have little concept of a "poverty line." Ghosts don't have to go to the doctor for six-month check-ups. Monsters don't worry so much about the little things.

But people do, and the imbued in your game are just that — people.

They may have second sight and inexplicable capabilities, but they're still basically normal men and women. They're vulnerable sacks of flesh and blood with responsibilities, frailties, credit card bills and all the other ugly stuff that comes with being "one of the herd." If you want to play a realistic **Hunter** game, it's your job to make the characters and players aware of normality. To tell stories that reflect the common person's life — even if it is ripped wide open.

As your chronicle gets underway, you probably find that the monster part is easy. Getting the hunters and players caught up in the paranormal comes naturally — just watch a few horror movies or read a few novels and you're good to go. But if you keep your mind on it, you'll find all kinds of inventive ways to impress the realities of life on the chosen, along with all the supernatural stuff. As Storyteller, you get to pull back the curtain of our existence to expose the World of Darkness' rictus grin. But at all other times, when the curtain is closed, you have to make the accepted world believable for the characters. Your players have to be convinced that their hunters are part of a reality in which true-to-life things happen.

But how do you impress a mundane world upon characters? Where do you start?

You can present a conventional world to hunters and players right from character creation and the prelude. These early stages of your chronicle are really about character anyway, right? Before the game begins, you have the right to poke and prod your players into making characters with histories that will make your story stand out and scream.

What will it scream?

And how loud?

That's up to you. You're the Storyteller.

Show Me the Dots

As Storyteller, it's your right to slap rules and permutations on the players before and during character creation. If they're willing (and you think a few rules restrictions won't send them packing), you can predetermine certain parameters that help ensure a game founded on everyday people. You can decide what creeds they play, how many edges they're allowed to have, whether they're supposed to play all men or all teenagers. It's not uncommon to steer players one way or another to make a unified game and one that suits

your vision or that of your troupe. If you've plotted out a game of pathos and unfolding drama, you wouldn't want players to create goofy, gun-toting whack-jobs, would you? It's a matter of harmony.

Look at the **Hunter** character sheet. Go over the Ability lists. Plug in dots for friends, yourself or your mother. What kinds of Traits do you come up with? Drive? Computer? Performance? And what are they rated? 1? 2?

Typical **Hunter** characters tend to have a few things in common — high Firearms, high Melee and maybe some Security, Alertness or Athletics. (And when we say "high," we essentially mean three dots or more.) For Attributes, you often see reasonable to commendable Physical stats. One of them is likely rated 3 or more. It allows for greater soak, flexibility or damage delivery.

Do these scores reflect the regular folks you dotted out previously? Do you know anyone with scores like the typical **Hunter** character's? Do you know someone who can flash a sword without cutting his own nose off, or who can blast a tight grouping of seven-millimeter bullets into a target at 500 yards? Or people who can rewire a home-security system to make coffee and cover intruders in a sticky web-like substance? You probably don't know anyone like that. That's not to say they don't exist. It merely says that Traits such as Demolitions, Firearms, Dodge or other high-rated qualities are uncommon for regular people, who make up the vast majority of society.

You're probably thinking, "But hunters are not average humans, so they're likely to have these types of Traits." Maybe that's right, within limits. Perhaps imbued who have been on the hunt for some time and who have survived gain combat-oriented capabilities and acquire high Traits. But here's the thing: Your characters have probably been imbued for a few weeks, maybe a couple months — almost certainly less than a year. That means they *were* absolutely normal people before the imbuing. They probably never had a chance to become Rambo, what with a job and kids and a regular life. So, in essence, the hunters in your game still are real people and should be treated as such.

To help impress the degree of reality you try to create upon your players, consider the following character-creation limitations. (If a player has a good reason to break any of these stipulations and you trust him, feel free to allow it. Just make sure you don't favor one player over another.)

• **No Attributes or Abilities rated over 3.** Sure, it seems harsh. But ratings over 3 are, as per the book, either "exceptional" (four dots) or "superb" (five dots). Of the people you know, how many can honestly be described as exceptional or superb at a capability. And if they can be, is it something bizarre and outlandish such as the occult or something pedestrian such as cooking?

• **Restrict certain Abilities.** The following Abilities should either be off-limits or at least restricted to one or two dots each: Awareness, Brawl, Demolitions, Firearms, Intuition, Melee, Occult and Security. These Traits are simply not ordinary — especially in the two- to five-dot range. You could probably hash together a lame-ass explosive if you looked on the Internet, but you probably don't actually have the knowledge it takes to blow up a house. So these Abilities are hands-off at character creation.

• **Encourage "real" Ability choice.** If the above Abilities are restricted or limited, have players create characters with a plausible capability set. You may not know anyone who can slice an apple in two with a bastard sword, but you've undoubtedly met plenty of doctors in your life. Such a person has dots in Medicine. You may not know anyone who can recite the *Necronomicon* from memory, but your mother may have an above-average Etiquette score. The bottom line is, push players to assign points in Abilities that are often overlooked in action heroes. Try Empathy, Expression, Crafts, Finance or Bureaucracy. Real-people stuff.

• **Restrict/Encourage certain Backgrounds:** Another thing players tend to do is load up on Backgrounds such as Resources that will make life easier for their imbued characters. Maybe those players grew up privileged and take that kind of wealth for granted, but most of us didn't and don't. Not to say they that mundane folks can't have 4 or higher Resources, but a game with such characters might be considered "white-collar" and "upper-class" as opposed to the encouraged blue-collar and lower to middle class. It's possible for a hunter to have a garage full of sport bikes and a mansion outside the city, but such luxury diminishes the terror such a character feels with the discovery of monsters, since he at least has his riches to fall back on. A hunter who owns little has little to turn to when the truth is revealed, and his ordeal is all the more harrowing.

Another Background to be careful of is Fame. Players don't necessarily take it for convenience (it can actually be quite inconvenient on the hunt), but most everyday folks aren't in the newspaper more than once in their lives, and never appear on billboards or TV shows.

Meanwhile, encourage players to take Allies and Contacts. Characters, as normal people, probably have friends and acquaintances. The trick here is to explore plausible allies and contacts, not the "gun dealer on the corner" or "my secret-service buddy." Advocate a brother who works at Wal-Mart. Or an ex-girlfriend with a spare bed in her apartment.

So there you have it. Some ways to direct your players into experiencing a more realistic, true-to-life **Hunter** game, from the beginning. Again, let it be said that these rules are not set in stone and can be changed or ignored at any time. If the players don't like it and you like your players... well, remember there's no game without them, so you'd better find room for compromise.

Everyday People

"No, Ben, you can't have it."

He stood in the kitchen, looking at Sarah. Her voice was low. Her hands tucked inside a ratty pink bathrobe. Her eyes were half-lidded and kept darting to the clock on the microwave. Ben's mouth was dry.

"But, Sarah—"

"It's three o'clock in the morning. I'm not letting you borrow my car."

He pressed his hands against the counter top and looked away from her. "Jesus Christ, I only need it until morning. I'll have it back at dawn."

"Yeah?" She barked a small and tired laugh. "Sorry, but what happens when Danny gets up for work and finds you haven't brought it back yet?"

"But I will—"

"No," she said. "The answer is 'no.'"

This wasn't supposed to happen, Ben realized. People were supposed to be there to help. He wanted to blurt out everything that had been going on, with his visions, with the graveyard, with the monsters. But that would just get him put away. Stuck on Thorazine. Or in a holding cell. It frustrated the hell out of him. She had to trust him! She had to help him! She was... she was....

"You're my sister," he muttered sadly.

She put a hand on his shoulder. "When was the last time you came around to see the kids, or help Danny with the addition?" She sighed. "I talked to Anna. She called a couple nights ago. She's been gone for two weeks! Why didn't you tell me or do anything? Christ, Ben, what's happening to you? Why throw her away?"

"I...." Ben tried to speak but the words didn't come. He clenched his teeth. "I don't know."

"You're in a weird place, Ben. I guess only you understand it." She shook her head and walked over to her purse next to the toaster oven. "You're the only one who

can get yourself out of it. I'm family. I'd love to make it all better, but this is your business."

And then she was next to him again, pressing two fifty-dollar bills into his large hand. He looked into her eyes, bewildered.

"But, I thought—" he began.

"You can't have the car, and I'm not a bank, so this is all you get, understand? Now get out of here, before you wake somebody. And be careful." She squeezed his shoulder, kissed him on the cheek and walked off into the darkness. Ben left through the back door, stuffing the money into his pocket.

Aside from interactions with one another, the chosen in your game have no one else to interact with but you, the Storyteller — and your character is effectively the entire world and all the people and creatures in it. You obviously don't need to create character sheets for every living, breathing peripheral person in the World of Darkness. You don't even need to design every hunter who's alive and active. Hell, you'd never actually get to *play* the game if you tried. You'd be scribbling furiously in your room, day and night, wondering why you haven't eaten for days. Still, a Storyteller must create a number of real, interactive individuals with which the players' characters deal.

There's good news: The responsibility doesn't fall squarely on your shoulders. It may take some prodding, but your players — in the beginning, at least — are just as responsible for the cast of characters they're expected to deal with. The players don't create their imbued in a vacuum. Their hunters are meant to seem real, with intricate lives and networks of associates surrounding them left and right, and each affiliated person is presumably as real as a player's character.

Maybe your players understand this. Maybe they don't. Feel free to ask them. How many other people make a difference in their hunters' lives? Two? Five? Probably more than that. A character may have a bowling team, a marriage counselor or three girlfriends. Each one of these peripheral characters can be firmly imagined during creation and the prelude, establishing different opportunities for or limitations on the character's lifestyle. All of it comes together to build a seamless whole, a "real" game that feels populated by genuine individuals.

But in creating a web of associates lies yet another challenge — players are likely to populate characters' lives with people who benefit, not hinder, them. Who wouldn't want that? We all want the loving spouse with an unending cash flow or the very generous neighbor with the Ferrari in his carport or the good-old-boy cousin with connections to the CIA. Never be afraid to remind players that real life simply isn't like that. A hunter's supporting cast should be rife with flawed individuals — folks who may not be utterly dysfunctional, but who are selfish and needy in their own ways. A spouse may certainly be a loving soul, but she probably doesn't have the time or patience for a hunter's sneaky and suspicious lifestyle. She needs things, too. Like requited love. Support. A sane husband. Every supporting character is a challenge and should be considered nothing less.

Fresh Faces

To create a supporting cast of believable people, imagine the individuals with each player (or by yourself if your game's already in progress). There's obviously an endless supply of possibilities for a supporting cast, from family members to stock brokers to the copier girl with whom a character is having an affair. It's not always easy to decide which cast members are appropriate to a hunter, though, and which ones enhance the game. Listed below are a few basic types of supporting members whom you may suggest to players. None of these are specifically necessary to make a good chronicle, but are potential templates from which you can build. Also included with each are some thoughts on how to use these people — in both positive and negative ways — to keep your game fresh.

Spouses: People get married just about everywhere. Not always for the right reasons, but does it matter? The ring slides onto the finger and next thing you know two people have a house, a picket fence and a joint bank account. But guess what. The Heralds don't care about marriage. A wedding ring does not stop an imbuing from proceeding. A woman may have her eyes opened in the middle of the day, but she still has to go home to her husband at night. The spouse (or significant other) is a very easy and understandable type of character to choose. Most people have been in relationships, and all of us have parents (not all of which are together, but that's a different story). It's a solid, common character type.

Advantages: Husbands and wives are notorious for patience. They have to put up with some very uncommon things, even without monsters meddling in their lives. One good thing about them is their steadfastness in a relationship. Plus, they can provide much-needed moments of sanity, whether from sharing a bagel and a glass of juice or laying next to a warm and loving body at the end of a long night of blood and nightmares.

Disadvantages: Not every life partner is brimming with patience. She may seek a separation — or even stickier, a divorce. If she remains in the marriage, she may keep a hunter from his mission without even

realizing it. And to make matters worse, your average hunter's husband or wife is probably the first set of eyes to witness just how fucked up an imbued's life really gets. A spouse may see a spot of blood on a sleeve, a bag of wooden stakes in the basement or a gaggle of shambling zombies at the front window. If anyone can get a hunter in trouble, it's the "other half."

Children: Just like marriage, kids are a fact of life. Couples can be young or old when they have kids. Some couples have one, others have several. Your players may not relate as easily to this possibility as they might to a spouse or significant other, but children are still a great way to exemplify the pressures and realities that percolate down from the imbuing.

Advantages: Kids in your chronicle can allow for a sense of naivete and wonder in the darkest game. Not only do they give a hunter good reason to keep fighting, but they may provide a small degree of hope in a decidedly desperate calling.

Disadvantages: Kids are curious beings. They can get into trouble, and having them find mommy's collection of pipebombs does not exactly make for good parenting. They're very vulnerable, and if anyone from the outside world sees that children aren't taken care of properly, the law can take them away. And, if you're looking for something to really wring a hunter's mind and gut, you might ask how can he feel good about raising kids in a world in which monsters are real?

Friends: Everyone has friends. More importantly, everyone *needs* friends. Whether it's the guy you grab a beer with after work or the person you've known and trusted for 20 years, friends are a significant part of life. Hunters have them, as well.

Advantages: Ever hear the phrase, "Friends help you move. Real friends help you move the bodies?" Friends are a rare commodity that players shouldn't use and abuse because friends are there in a pinch. If nourished, a friend may help out in the deepest, darkest moments of any character's life.

Disadvantages: Friends are very easy to exploit, mistreat and neglect. Hunters can and will take these relationships for granted, misusing a friend's trust, bank account, car — or any other benefit the relationship has to offer. Friendships must truly be cultivated because if abused, friends can turn their backs on a character at the worst possible moment.

Neighbors: Unless you live in the middle of a field or forest, there's a pretty good chance you have neighbors. Same thing with hunters. Whether they live in a rural setting, in a suburban development or in the heart of the city, they have neighbors. It's up to the players whether they want to include such people in their games (there's nothing stopping *you* from including them), but neighbors are always an interesting way to reflect just how weird a hunter's life must look from the outside.

Advantages: Neighbors are close enough to talk to, but far enough away that they don't always step all over a character's business. They might be a means for conversation or relaxation. It's in these little moments that reason and sanity can be recouped. Whether they're someone to watch the football game with or someone who can baby sit the kids while a character "goes out," neighbors may make life a *bit* easier.

Disadvantages: Neighbors can be dangerously nosy. Plus, they can be notorious for having little patience when it comes to odd or loud sounds coming from your garage, strange sights they may see from their bedroom windows or anything else weird witnessed at a hunter's house. If a character's neighbor has *Rear Window* complex and sees the hunter hosing off a bloody shovel next to a rolled-up carpet, it's only a matter of time before trouble knocks.

Co-workers: If a hunter manages to hold down a job along with his more dangerous lifestyle, he probably works with people every day (or night). Unless the job is some graveyard-shift-guard-duty kind of deal, it's very rare for someone to work entirely alone. The character has to deal with interns, bosses and everyone between in his day-to-day work.

Advantages: Like neighbors, co-workers are comfortably distant from the hunter's own world. They don't see too much of what goes on in his "off" hours, and they rarely see what kind of hell he brings home with him. True, co-workers aren't particularly useful, but they can occasionally be tapped for a coffee break, in which a good few moments of sense and calm can be regained. Co-workers are good for downtime in a story if nothing else.

Disadvantages: If a co-worker — any one — catches wind of a character's extracurricular activities, the hunter may be out of a job. Your average co-worker isn't automatically a friend. If an opportunistic lesser or a grudge-holding boss sees the chance to snitch about a curious absence or erratic behavior, the hunter might kiss that company car goodbye.

Relatives: If there's one group of people you can rarely avoid, it's family. Mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, grandparents. They're a fact of life, whether you see them every day or only on distant holidays. A hunter may have powers that allow her to hide inconspicuously from monsters, but don't let her think she can hide from relatives.

Advantages: Families can be very accepting of their own, whether they like it or not. Often enough, one's family doesn't ask a lot of questions, and even if they do, they're unlikely to share the answers with the police. Plus, a family can be a pool of resources — from financial help to a couch on which a character can sleep. All in all, family members make decent allies for any hunter.

Disadvantages: Family can be a big pain in the ass. Disappear for a few days and Momma might get worried enough to call the police — or worse hire some half-wit private detective. Relatives can be nosy, too. The last thing a hunter wants is his little sister poking around when he's busy trying to bury a bag of zombie parts in the backyard. Finally, family requires maintenance. They may have more patience than a wife or a friend, but they can still reach the end of a rope quickly if mistreated or if relationships aren't maintained.

Doctors: While doctors are seen less frequently than your average friend, neighbor or spouse, some people consider them a key part of life. A player may wish to have the same deal with her hunter. Whether it's a family physician who's been giving check-ups to the character since she was three, or a psychologist/counselor who gives the character regular therapy sessions, doctors can figure prominently in a hunter's life.

Advantages: It never hurts to have a good physician around, especially a trustworthy one. After all, hunters get banged up more often than they'd like (not counting ardent Martyrs who may enjoy the pain). Plus, doctors (whether medical or psychological) can provide an objective point of view and be a sounding board for the terrible stuff a hunter does, witnesses or represses. Of course, if a hunter goes overboard and spills too much information...

Disadvantages: ... he may be in for a world of shit. Sure, he may want to unburden himself and tell the good doctor about bloodsuckers and ghosts, but doing so is ultimately counterproductive. It can lead to mind-muddling medication or time-consuming therapy. It may even lead to a full-blown institutional visit. None of these things are the least bit useful to a hunter's goals — although as the Storyteller, you may consider them as possible side stories.

Religious Figures: Religion is the foundation of many people's lives. Even if it's not central, it may still provide an outlet for a hunter character. The imbued often turn to religion to explain what they see and to find solace for the acts they must commit. With religion comes religious figures, be they priests, rabbis, pagan warlocks or New Age crystal jockeys.

Advantages: Like a doctor, a religious figure may be turned to for consolation, so that a hunter may absolve herself of her thoughts or deeds. Furthermore, religious figures are often versed in such concepts as morality, mortality and "good-versus-evil," making them easy to relate to on a philosophical level. They may be a good outlet through which to express repressed thoughts — perhaps in a confession-style sitting. Or they can partake in an impartial dialogue in which a hunter may reclaim a sense of judgment or clarity. They may even encourage some kind of hope.

Disadvantages: These days, it would seem that religious figures aren't bound by any doctrine of faith to actually listen to anybody, and if they do listen and happen to hear evidence of a crime... well, this is the World of Darkness. There's nothing stopping them from calling 911. Who said the Church doesn't cast its own shadows?

Give Them a Soul

Anna's head was muddled. She hadn't slept in... what? Two days? Ever since the call came from Sarah. She hated to admit it, but thoughts of Ben worried at her mind like chewing on a hangnail. Some part of her hated him, wanted to scream at him and punch him and show him how he'd been treating her. Some other part wanted to pull him close. Gently. Like cradling a small child as if he would break. Ben seemed broken already. That was the problem.

Anna blew her nose. Crying was disgusting. She cursed him for making her this way.

What was she going to do? She wanted to forget about him. Yet some part of her needed him. They were supposed to have a future. A two-car garage. A vacation in Maine every year. She wasn't supposed to worry about where he was or if he was hurting people. Or hurting himself.

Too many questions, all unresolved. She had to find him.

Suddenly, it occurred to her — the graveyard. He talked about it several times before she left. The place where his father was buried.

She bit her lip and stood up. Grabbing her keys, she headed out the door.

You've helped your players create believable identities for their characters' supporting cast members. Determining a cast member's concept doesn't suddenly deliver a full-fledged person, smiling and ready to hop into your game. Beyond name, age and appearance, there are other ways to lend depth to these shells. Specifically, answering three questions helps you expand supporting characters into three-dimensional beings. Sit down with your players and come up with possible answers. Don't be afraid to ruminate on the questions yourself, away from the players. They can't

know everything about cast members' wants and needs, but you can. Establishing these details about hunters' associates makes your game world, chronicle and the imbued all the more compelling and realistic.

What do they want? Many creative-writing teachers remind you that every character wants something. Whether it's one of the players' hunters or a supporting Storyteller creation, a character has aspirations. Nobody walks through life without desires or motivations. These very things guide their lives. They may want money or love or a good career. Or they may seek simpler things such as someone to cook for them when they come home from work or may even just want to travel. They could even have self-destructive desires — alcohol, drugs or cheap, meaningless sex. Wants make a character.

What do they need? Right next to "wants" are a character's "needs." There are certain things people can't do without. Some are essential such as food, shelter and water. Others are required for psychological reasons. Relationships, for example, become a whole other ballgame when one participant "needs" the other. It's called co-dependency and it happens to a lot of couples. Some individuals simply can't function without contact with other people or certain things or certain lifestyles. These "needs" are just as likely to arise and motivate characters as "wants" do. How do they respond when confronted with the possibility of no food, no shelter — or no drugs if one of their wants is based on an addiction? If they're evicted from their apartment and can't buy groceries that week (or get heroin), their reaction is a key character definition. Which is fulfilled first, a want or a need?

What do they do? Aside from wants and needs, everybody *does* something. What they "do" may sound vague. It essentially means that everybody behaves in certain ways, regardless of how they intend or hope to act. What they *do* may be a job, or they may *do* things after work that are important. The key is, how does what they do define them? Is their job important to who they are? Then consider it and define it. Maybe after-work activities clarify a cast member and cement her in your mind. Or it could be something on a smaller scale — the way he pops his knuckles constantly or his incessant reading habit. The bottom line is, how a character acts and what he does helps delineate him, establishing him in everyone's imagination.

Samples

The following characters demonstrate all the theory discussed so far, showing you how supporting characters can embody **Hunter**'s common-person theme, and encourage players to pursue the same with their imbued. These cast members can also be used to fill a player's supporting cast. They can be incorporated fully into a hunter's history or could be introduced into your game as it proceeds. Either way, they're just a couple examples of what you can do with peripheral characters to make your tales true to life.

Barry Henson

Age: 62

Concept: Retired Police Officer

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

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 1, Computer 1, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Melee 1, Research 2, Security 1, Technology 1

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Image: An African American male. May have once been built like a wall but his muscles have now gone to shit and his gut looks more like an inter-tube than a six-pack. A smile occasionally crosses his old hound-dog face, splitting the salt-and-pepper beard he's been growing the last few months. His eyes always dart back and forth, seeking, searching.

Roleplaying Hints: You've been real bored lately, ever since you left the force. One more bullshit ship-in-a-bottle project and you'll get out the old service revolver and finish it all. Deciding to get out of the house, you've been watching the neighborhood. You didn't pay much attention to the locals at one time, having walked a different beat with different folks, but now you start to notice little things. Like how the paperboy picks Mrs. Anderson's posies every Monday morning. Or how that girl across the street's been throwing up her dinner in the upstairs bathroom. And then there's the guy next door, coming in at all hours of the night, mud spattered on his SUV. Seems like a nice guy, but you never know do you?

Background: Your daddy was in the army. Your granddaddy was in the army. You... well, screw that army business. You became a boy in blue, instead. You had to weather a lot of disappointment for your decision, but it eventually paid off as you worked your way up from a low-level DMV cop to a cushy desk job. In the meantime, you and your wife have had three daughters and shipped all but the youngest off to college. You really love them, but as time's passed and you've been forced to leave the department, you're starting to get mighty sick of hearing the vacuum or your daughter's hip-hop crap cranked upstairs. Time to get a hobby.

Kristy Francine Paxson

Age: 29

Concept: Repressed Housewife

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

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 1, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Etiquette 2, Intuition 2, Medicine 1, Performance 1

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Resources 3

Willpower: 5

Image: She's petite and pretty, and her body is taut from handling children and doing housework all day. Her dirty blonde hair is long, down to the middle of her back, and she has a certain spark to her eyes. But she looks tired. From the crow's feet that crease the edges of her face to the small calluses visible on her hands, it's clear she's worn out.

Roleplaying Hints: You have a family. That's your priority. Nothing can get in the way of your husband or kids. Anything they need, you provide. So what if your husband suddenly has strange hours at work and has been angry and tired a lot. You're his anchor. Without you, where would he be? You won't let him see you cry in the kitchen late at night, washing dishes while the kids are asleep. You won't let him know how you tremble and shake at the thought of him seeing another woman, which is probably what he's doing. (Though that doesn't exactly explain everything, does it?) You have to be strong for him. Even if he's weak right now.

Background: You grew up in your standard upper-middle-class suburb, went through high school and college with accolades on your record and cheerleader pom-poms in your hands. You graduated and six months later you were married to an insurance adjustor with a good house and a good future. Then the kids came. Three of them. There's no time for you to work — there's barely time for you to watch TV. That's okay. But lately, your husband's been acting very strange.

Now What?

Anna knew she shouldn't be there. Graveyards were... scary. It was silly to be scared, she knew. It wasn't like the dead people could get up and walk. Some part of her wanted to laugh at the notion, another wanted to scream to get the hell out. She cursed inwardly. Her feet didn't want to move.

She swallowed hard and waved the flashlight around. The beam cut a swath in front of her, showing new glossy grave plaques amidst rows of crumbling headstones. A few tombs and crypts sat off in the distance, marking the perimeter. Surrounding them was a tall wrought-iron fence topped with spaded spires.

But no people. She was alone.

"Ben?" she whispered to the night.

No answer.

She took a few tentative steps and looked around.

In the distance, on the side of one dilapidated tomb, was an arc of crooked graffiti, sprayed in red paint. The letters were off kilter, "NO ONE GETS OUT ALIVE." She shuddered. A chill filled her, flitting over her skin. What was she looking for? Fingerprints? Bootprints? She suddenly felt utterly alone and ridiculous. Ben wasn't here now. This was stupid. She was looking for a man she once loved (still loved, an inner voice said) in a place he shouldn't be. She'd already been to his father's grave. The site was empty except for an empty bottle of Irish whiskey.

Suddenly she felt sick. A wave of panic seized her. Bile rose in her throat. Before she even realized what was happening, the flashlight beam bounced erratically in front of her as her feet carried her to the front gate of the cemetery. She ran like mad. Screw this, she thought. She was going to get out alive. No one was going to stop her.

When she got back to the Volvo, she jumped in and auto-locked the doors. Panting, sweat dribbling down her brow even in the cold, she popped the latch to the glove compartment. A small, three-quarters empty bottle of Xanax rolled to the floor. She closed her eyes and grabbed for the pills. It had been a long night.

So, you've built some hunters as the primary ingredients to a more realistic game. A similarly mundane supporting cast is in place. So just what the hell do you do with them to contrast the horrors of the supernatural?

There are a lot of ways you can go. The first and sadly the most common course of action is the one in which richly textured supporting cast members are offed by a big bad monsters in the first few sessions, to illustrate the hunters' mortality. It's kind of a lame thing to do after all the work and energy that was put into them in the first place. However....

You don't need to spare supporting cast members entirely to demonstrate the frailty of the common person's life. After all, if your plan is to attack the hunters through their families or friends, you'd better damn well make it count. But that means waiting. Don't blow your wad early. Give the supporting cast time to develop. With the player's creative assistance, you've established a foundation of people who are emblematic of the hunters' very being. They're going to grow and change just like the players' characters. More importantly, their evolution (or de-evolution, depending on the type of game you run) should be centered on the hunters. Let one of the imbued not

only witness but be a crucial part of a supporting character's development. The experience lays hooks in the player. He starts to actually *like* his character's wife. Or his kids. Or his mailman. Slowly, player and character begin to relate, and the player better understands the people in his hunter's life — but only if the character and his associates have time to mature.

Then, if you absolutely must, hurt a hunter through her supporting cast. That way, such a loss is emotionally effective, rather than negligible if a largely misunderstood friend is killed early on. Player and character have feelings invested in the peripheral cast, and hunter and player may have an honest reaction. Whether some monster takes the hunter's family or friends hostage, tortures them, rapes them or just outright murders them, it matters when enough time has passed to give the event meaning. You and your players won't take the tragedy for granted. It's something you'll all talk about, even when the game is over. Remember the film *Seven*, with Gwyneth Paltrow's head in a box? There's a reason they didn't write that into the first 20 minutes of the movie. It has a deep and disturbing resonance at the *end* of the movie. One that's very hard to forget.

Of course, it doesn't have to go this way. Your supporting cast doesn't have to end up in the morgue or a mental institution or with their heads in boxes. There are other ways to handle supporting cast members. Ways to exhibit and stir emotions — anger, regret, jealousy, joy. But how do you find these ways? Many can be discovered just by asking yourself questions and applying the answers to your troupe. Each question has answers, which in turn give you options.

What happens when a sister is confronted with a hunter's increasingly strange behavior? What reaction occurs? Disbelief? Horror? Utter denial? Maybe she calls the police or calls the siblings' "good Christian parents" for some sort of moral intervention. Maybe the sister represses the hunter's decline and slowly goes mad herself. Or finds a convenient addiction in which to drown herself. Maybe she tries to reconcile with her brother and enters "ignorance is bliss" mode, which makes her blind to dangers he poses. Provided the answer suits a cast member's motivations, there are a thousand-and-one answers to just about any question you can ask about how a secondary character copes with a hunter. And rarely does it have to end up in death or dismemberment. In fact, other avenues can be far more potent — when supporting characters are alive, their feelings are ever present. A player may find it eerily convenient when his hunter's whole family is sucked dry by some vengeful rot. However, it's anything *but* convenient

when the family is still alive and the hunter has to come home to them, watching for bloodstains on his corduroys or powder burns on his hands.

So the supporting cast is clearly key. You don't necessarily need to introduce them all during character creation or the prelude. You can introduce new supporting cast members to a game at any given moment. Sure, you have to establish them with a greater narrative *oomph* later on, and come up with new reasons (sometimes out of the blue) for hunters to be personally invested in these new folks, but you can make it happen. You know what the chosen are like and what they want. Tailor new supporting characters to those specifications. All the tips listed above help you create a cast member. Find a niche and exploit it. If a hunter is lonely and looking for love, well, there's your doorway. If a hunter has racist or prejudicial tendencies, challenge him by creating a full-fledged member of the race/sex/creed that he opposes. If these mundane newcomers parallel or contrast hunters' own foibles, they remind hunters of their humanity even as the hunt wears them down and makes them question their place in society.

Don't Forget the Monsters

All this time, you've considered how to create a greater profundity within your games by using reality as a well-honed scalpel or a blunt instrument. So far, you've been guided to examine the "common man" aspects of hunters and their compatriots to build a better and more believable chronicle. But there's another thing to keep in mind: Monsters were human once, too.

Yes, that's right — the serpent that is "real life" can whip around and bite monsters just as easily as it can one of the imbued. This book really isn't meant to concentrate on how to make better beasts and bogeymen, but don't neglect to examine the lives that the monsters once led. The rot that just ducked into the alley may have once had a husband — in fact, maybe she still does. The young magician dressed in rags at the corner diner may not be able to go home because his mother and father disowned him. It could be that the skinchanger on the 30th floor has an outstanding loan at the bank.

The point is, don't let your supernatural antagonists fall by the wayside when it comes to injecting a healthy dose of realism into your games. It creates a connection between hunters and their "prey," raising that relationship to a higher (and more disturbing) level. How different are such "enemies"? Also, making your monsters "once human" gives something for Merciful hunters to connect with, assuming a buried soul can be found at all. Your story unfolds all the more seamlessly when you already know who and what your creatures were before they became the supernatural.

Reality Bites

His back to the crypt, Ben took in a deep breath of cold autumn air.

He heard the scuffling behind him, about twenty feet from the old tomb. He thought there were three of them, but the night before, he could've sworn he saw four. Fuck. They were rots. Had to be. At first, he thought they were burying something. But then he realized — it wasn't something, it was someone. *Struggling in a bag. Muffled voice, choking on something. Maybe his own tongue. Who knows? It didn't matter. He had to do something.*

But this was a bad situation. Freaky bloodsuckers. Dressed in mish-mash clothes. One in a suit. Probably had knives. Or guns. Or something worse. Carefully and quietly, Ben fished a hand into his jacket pocket. Five shells left. Probably plenty — by the time he'd need more, he'd either be dead or they'd be in pieces. His shotgun was good enough. A little old, but some oil would fix it up. Too bad he didn't have any gun oil. Or even the money to buy any.

Still, this had to stop tonight. He had been given a gift. A power to protect this place, to keep his father's bones safe. Along with everyone else's. A cemetery was supposed to be a place of rest. It wasn't a place to be abused. Especially not by these things.

It was time. Everything he had done led up to this.

He loaded the shells into the gun, hefted it up against his shoulder and whirled about. Before he released the safety, they had seen him. There were four of them, not three like he'd hoped. One — a boy who couldn't have been more than thirteen — ran at him so fast, he looked like a flicker on a screen. The gun was knocked from Ben's hand and he was thrown to the ground with a blow to his chest that felt like a hammer.

His mind reeled. It wasn't supposed to happen like this.

Something roared as needles of white pain tore into his leg. He saw what couldn't be — a massive black dog, red eyes, jaws clamped tight around his calf. And then there they were, standing over him. Two more of the bloodsucking bastards, smiling down with fangs curling over their lips.

One, a man of fifty, maybe sixty, rubbed his bald head and chuckled dryly with the sound of dry leaves crumbling. He handed a gun to the tall pale man in the suit, who regarded Ben for a moment and then pulled the trigger.

And again.

Ben felt his body lurch with each impact. His chest exploded. His heart beating dully against his ribcage, frantic and despairing. He couldn't breathe. There was a gurgle somewhere inside. Warm blood trickled from his nose.

Then his eyes turned upward and he found himself alone. Time suddenly didn't mean anything. He was numb. There was no one around and he was left staring up at the clouds that stretched across the stars. He thought of Anna, of her collection of crystal figures, of her French toast in the morning, and most importantly, of the way she held him. Then the darkness was awash in a dizzying whirl of red and blue lights, and his heart slowed in his chest. His eyes closed softly.

What now? Character creation has resulted in understandable, realistic people. Your supporting cast coincides with and confirms the hunters' normality in an abnormal world. The prelude has exploded with emotional depth and clarity rivaled only by *Citizen Kane*. The game is underway. What do you do to maintain its real-world atmosphere and theme?

The suspension of disbelief is essential in **Hunter**. In our minds, vampires don't exist, and we're rarely worried about the bag-boy at the SuperSave turning into some living manbat over a broken bag of celery. But in the World of Darkness, these things (to a degree) are a very real possibility. Yet, you still want to maintain the façade of reality, performing a feat of misdirection for your players such that you convince them that our world and the World of Darkness are layered *very* close together. Indistinguishable from one another. If you don't create a convincing, approachable setting for the players, they, as regular people themselves, will lack the context to understand it and therefore lack the context to be afraid on behalf of their characters.

So, once again, it's good to inject as much realism into your game as possible, creating the contrast that makes the supernatural all the more horrid and malevolent. But how do you do that? How do you maintain the reality when the imbued wield powers and monsters are everywhere?

There are some narrative elements that you can use to emphasize the true-to-life levels of your stories as your chronicle gets underway and progresses. Clearly, the hunters get into some traumatizing business with some truly wretched beings as the nights pass. But there's always quiet time before, during and after the mission that you can capitalize on to remind characters of their mundane roots.

The following are aspects of everyday life and the ordinary world in which hunters used to live that can still bolster and weigh on them as they contend with monsters. Whether you devise encounters as predetermined story events or just keep situations like these handy as "random events," the following can remind hunters and players that the world continues to turn (and usually not in their favor).

Job: Working for a living is undeniably one of the most common elements to every human's life. From approximately age 20 to 70, we work to support ourselves and families. We do what we have to do — presumably what we do best — 40 hours a week or more to get our paycheck at the end of it. But while we may not want to go to work every day, we tend to do it with little interruption or reason not to go. Hunters, on the other hand, have a duplicitous life to consider. Which is more important? When a character's hunter-net buddies call him at the pharmacy where he works to tell him they'll pick him up in a half-hour to go burn down a rot's lair, what does he do? Does he strike one for justice or does he continue to dole out medication to the sick and elderly? On one hand, the opportunity to wax leeches might not come again. On the other hand, one too many sudden disappearances from the job means unemployment. And when he's fired, how does the hunter buy that new lock for his door after the last one was broken? It's a slippery slope, and without a job, a hunter has no way to get...

Money: Yes, the imbued need money. They still abide by the same economic pattern laid before us all. Goods and services cost money, and a favor of "I'll get rid of that ghost in your garage!" just doesn't cut it. This is an area in which hunters are very vulnerable, for they may not anticipate the problem before its too late. They may max out the credit card buying shotguns and baseball bats and a pair of heat-vision binoculars, but that's the end of the line. There's no more room to buy food or hotel rooms — or clothes for the kids. And when a hunter can't meet the minimum payment on the credit card, the money-men come knocking, and they can be just as dangerous as monsters (if they themselves are not puppets of monsters). A collection agency might take a hunter's stuff away, such as that shiny computer that lets him access hunter-net. See where this goes? Hunters need money. For bills, taxes and all the amenities in between. If they're not careful, the funds can hit bottom *real fucking fast*.

The Authorities: Money — or the lack thereof — is just one way to get a hunter in trouble with the nebulous *authorities*. For every breath an imbued takes, there are a dozen groups in the world — ostensibly untainted by monsters — who are watching. The IRS watches to make sure she pays her taxes. Collection agencies watch to make sure she pays her bills. Banks want the mortgage and car loans to be paid. Child services keep its eyes peeled

for domestic abuse or dangerous parental patterns — such as weapons around the house or kids whose lives are in jeopardy. The police watch when domestic problems become bigger problems or when a hunter's extracurricular activities inflict damage or harm. The Feds watch for even bigger stuff, such as crimes across state lines or kidnapping. And finally, doctors observe, looking for crazies. And hunters look crazy. Any of these groups may find reason to knock on a hunter's door at any time. Don't hesitate to use them in your stories.

The Law: A hunter is likely to break any given law during any given week. The crusade does not usually coincide with real-world legislation — especially considering that *they* may be behind the whole system. Hunters commit crimes. The imbued seem guilty most of the time, even to a court judge who isn't manipulated by dark powers. No excuses about "invisibles" make breaking and entering seem justified. And if a character gets involved in a violent altercation — or worse, murder — well, that's that. The law is broken, whether they get away with it or not. Do they remember to clean up every little detail in the heat of the moment? Are they wearing gloves? Could fingerprints remain? Maybe they're cut in the murderous scuffle and leave a drop of blood behind. With today's DNA testing capabilities, there's very little latitude with which to plead not guilty. Suddenly, the very world that hunters may try to protect labels them as criminals. Society doesn't play nice with the chosen merely because their cause is just or holy.

Crime: Just as hunters commit crimes, crimes can be committed against them in turn. In a way, many imbued look like marks in a carnival — people to be taken advantage of. Their world is different and they suddenly venture into territories with which they may not be familiar. Their minds are most likely on other things, as well, such as how to kill something that's already dead. When a Caucasian doctor/hunter from the suburbs enters the lowliest, darkest blocks of the big city, hurt may come from all sides. If he packs hi-tech gear, he may get robbed. If he leaves his car parked somewhere, it may be stolen (or carjacked while he's in it). If his skin color is unacceptable, he may suffer a severe beating or much worse. *And none of it may be motivated by monsters.* Racism and economic stratification can lead people to perform grisly and shameful acts. There's nothing that says a hunter — when paying attention to supernatural problems — can't be the target of *human* behavior. It definitely hypes the paranoia level of your game and demonstrates hunters' mortality as simple people.

Domestic Problems: Domestic issues occur in our world and they may happen even more frequently in the World of Darkness. Children are beaten and sexually assaulted. Women are seen as objects and, like children, are abused sexually and physically. Don't be afraid to confront such issues. It brings reality to what might be an otherwise unreal game. A female Avenger may be able to bring a zombie to its scabrous knees, but she may be a sullen housewife at home — with a husband who takes an iron to her back before bed. A walker might return from the grave to kill his widow's new husband because the man beats his wife. Who's the real monster now?

Institutionalization

Here's a big problem for hunters that you should feel free to use and abuse all up and down their sorry selves: Hunters look crazy. Fucking nuts. Most of the things hunters think, say and do end up looking like nothing more than the whims of a true loon. The common man does not "see dead people," does not worry about bloodsuckers manipulating bank accounts and does not concern himself with big, furry man-beasts in the forests.

Hunters do. But who do they tell? What happens if someone sees them acting against the supernatural?

If a hunter is caught doing something bizarre, or someone even catches a whiff of what he's up to, you can slap all kinds of labels on the chosen. Delusional. Paranoid. Psychotic. The imbued appear to have auditory and visual hallucinations. They behave suspiciously. Their moods can change drastically. Their sociability becomes erratic. Their lives seem dangerously unpredictable.

The diagnosis is easy: schizophrenia.

And imbued "who suffer from it" may be put away for their own good. Ask yourself and your players: If you were locked up in an institution and the world — even your closest family members — thought you were crazy, *how would you ever get out?* Meanwhile, those same family and friends are still out there, living unprotected and vulnerable to any of the depredations of monsters.

If knowledge of monsters can make the imbued look crazy to the uninitiated, life in an institution can definitely drive them crazy as they seek to be freed but can't deny what they know. And then there's the very likely possibility of monsters working within the mental-health industry — taunting or torturing interred hunters or even ensuring that hunters stay locked up.

It may even be enough to bear the *appearance* of domestic issues. Outsiders may think those bruises on a woman's face may be from her imbued husband, even if her wounds were sustained in a surprise brawl with a rot's pawn in their living room. Maybe she can't remember the event and blames the hunter, just like the rest of the world. Divorce can ensue, children can be taken away and a lot of time, effort and money can be put into maintaining even the slightest veneer of innocence in these cases. Such mundane hardships leave few moments for torching the gilded tower of a corporate monster and can cripple the most stalwart hunter.

Injuries: The imbued either find confrontations or confrontations find them. One way or another, injuries are sustained, even if a meeting was intended to be peaceable. A hunter may come away with a few softball-size bruises and a swollen eye. That's hard enough to explain to the wife, to the police and to the boss. Did he get into a fight? Did he fall down? But what if he takes a bullet to the leg — one that shatters his femur? There isn't always some magical healer around to make the pain go away. What then? Does he go to a hospital and risk all the questions that come with a bullet wound? He may want to find some back-alley crime-sponsored doctor who knows how to keep his mouth shut, but guess what? Your average imbued plumber doesn't know where to find one of those doctors. So he can either suffer or suck it up and go to the emergency room.

After all the questions and the lies, medical bills rear their ugly head. Was the procedure covered? How much did it cost? Does the character even have a job with health insurance benefits? Uh oh. Then, after that mess is over, there are other physical issues to contend with. Even simple broken bones can take a very long time to heal properly if they ever can. The hunter may never walk normally again. Or she might lose the feeling in her left hand. Long-term injuries and ailments remind a hunter of her undeniable humanity. Suddenly, getting into a firefight with even the weakest of rots sounds like a very risky prospect.

For a full exploration of injuries on the hunt and their results, see "Truth and Consequences," p. 138.

Time: Aside from all the overriding forces of reality that conspire against the common hunter, there are a lot of other little details that could get him into trouble just as easily. Time is perhaps the peskiest of these "little details," as it's a dear commodity to the imbued. Consider if the hunters get enough sleep. Rest may come sporadically when leading a dual life. Or ask players when their characters last had a full meal? Have they even had time to eat? How do hunters find enough hours in the day to do carry out a day job, make an appearance with family and pursue their greater calling? Have they even had a chance to write a rent check? If you sense that a character immerses himself into the hunt, researching, observing and patrolling, remind him of the necessities of his old life by confronting him with overdue car payments, missed appointments or even neglected medication. The results of such time mismanagement remind the hunter that he's a person, not a machine.

Roads Less Traveled

You've seen some of the potential bricks that can go into building a realistic **Hunter** game. But perhaps you're hungry for a few more tidbits to throw at players. The following are some ideas with which to pepper your chronicle with liberal doses of normality. These ideas can be used on a small scale to enhance stories, or could be the focal points of entire episodes. Combine these with the narrative tools discussed previously to create an immersive and tangible world.

Prison: Send your hunters to prison — or even a holding cell while bail is posted. For extra effect, lay the blame solely on their shoulders. No monsters tugged any strings to have them locked away. No creatures of the night suggested any illegal search and seizure. Make it the hunters' fault. Eventually, most imbued commit a crime (however small or large) during their activities. Anything from breaking and entering to first-degree murder might occur by their hands. Criminals are often caught. Hey, even if they didn't do anything, hunters *act* suspicious. A crime across town may be linked with one of them inadvertently. They go to jail, where a blood-puppet guard may be *nothing* compared to the perfectly mortal gang. It's a cruel story, but it's definitely a cold bucket of reality to throw in players' faces. (The **Hunter Players Guide**, p. 187, has an entire section about being a hunter behind bars.)

Choice: Say one of the principal cast members of a hunter's life learns some part of her mission. It could be a husband, a neighbor or just a friend. Perhaps this person is not so shaken as to run, call the police or disbelieve and go to bed crying. Maybe he's made of sterner stuff. Have him give the character an ultimatum. We're not talking something silly such as "no sex if you keep staking bloodsuckers on our front porch." This has to be important. A permanent decision. Something along the lines of, if the hunter continues to pursue this maddening "mission," the cast member will leave her. Forever. Or maybe he *threatens* to call the cops, her family or a doctor. Put one (or all) of the

hunters in a mundane-versus-supernatural position, in which they must weigh their options. Can the hunt continue at the expense of everything the imbued value from before? Or is reality as they used to know it just too good to give up, even though it's a lie?

Prejudice: One good way to remind players that not all monsters can be seen with second sight is raw, unbridled bigotry. No matter what your skin, sex, salary or sock color, someone can hate you for it. Not just dislike, but *hate*. And it has nothing to do with vampires or werewolves. It's based purely on a very broken and very *human* sentiment. Throw the characters a mean-ass curveball. Maybe an attempted gang rape is made on a female hunter. Or one of the chosen is ambushed by a gang of people that hates him just for the clothes he wears. The clothes don't matter, but the act certainly does. Skinheads, black supremacists, Muslim extremists — these groups can exist based on their hate and rancor for people who simply aren't like them. Your players may want to look for the monstrous leader at first, the bogeyman who controls the mindless humans, but there doesn't have to be one.

Helplessness: Less a story idea and more a story element, this concept is for those players who — often through no fault of their own — find themselves more entranced with their characters' "cool powers" than with their cool characters. The Heralds gave the imbued powers to use against the more unseemly denizens of the World of Darkness — not against other people. Use that "weakness." Whether the attack comes from people who may be controlled (way up the ladder) by a monster or just people with an axe to grind, the purpose is to remind players that real life can intrude in any number of ways unfortunate ways. Someone could subject characters to a lawsuit, make them the patsies for problems at work or simply rob their homes. However the struggle ends, the line between monsters and people is marked pretty clearly. It's also an excellent way to humble players and show them what happens when their characters rely too much on edges.

Normals: If you want a game about absolutely regular people, don't let players have hunters. Don't even let them play bystanders. Encourage your players to portray normal, fallible mortals with not a touch of second sight. The twist is to let the players be the poor bastards who are close to the hunters while the *hunters* comprise the supporting cast. Have your gamers play the wives, mothers or schoolteachers who orbit hunters. This definitely puts players on the other side of the looking glass, allowing them to understand both the struggle of "normal" characters as well as how crazed a hunter can appear. In your next game, when players have hunters again, they'll come to the game with a whole new empathy for who and what their characters are.

Rewards: Reality can be an ugly bitch. However — surprise, surprise — reality can also help hunters just as easily as it can hurt them. There are a lot of small ways to show how real life actually buffers people from the supernatural, how it creates a safe distance. You might want to emphasize the sanity hunters can salvage in doing something simple such as watching TV with their children. The law may be firm and unyielding to a hunter, but if she plays her cards right, it can be just as damaging to a monster's pawn. While you can use taxes as one of those harsh invasions of real life, you can also use it to throw a bone hunters' way in the form of a generous tax return. Perhaps it's even received at a time when funding hits rock bottom.

The point is that reality doesn't always need to be merciless. If your players try hard to lend your story the modicum of sincerity it needs to be a truly rewarding game, it doesn't hurt to give them a hand from time to time, using the very same rules that could fuck them if they're not careful. It's a good way to show that reality is a swinging door.

Death Becomes Us

White light, fuzzy and burning, pried its way under Ben's eyelids. His lashes felt like steel girders, his eyeballs like desert sand. He barely managed to open them.

The hospital room swam into view.

A machine beeped constantly somewhere to his left. An IV dripped into his arm. He felt like shit warmed over. Outside the window, he could see the moon behind cheesecloth clouds.

Earlier, he thought he heard the doctors speaking, but he couldn't open his eyes, couldn't talk. They were remarking, if he remembered correctly, how well he was healing. His leg: No sign of infection. Almost totally healed. His lungs, drained and repairing themselves with the utmost of expedience. This was good, he thought idly. He had to get back out there, to strike back at those who put him in this godawful place, to push them away from those he loved. He was going to punish them all, he was—

The scent of perfume assailed his nose. It smelled like drying flowers. Anna. It was Anna's perfume.

He turned his head, a Herculian effort, and saw an empty chair next to his bed. An afghan was bundled up on the floor several feet away, with dots of something red and wet on the gray tiles. Was it blood? Was this some trick of his mind?

Ben's breath caught in his chest. It felt like there was a brick in his throat. Something was here with him, he just knew it. He drew himself inward and allowed himself to truly see.

And then Ben saw him.

It was the man in the suit, from the cemetery. The one who shot him. He was standing at the foot of the bed, smiling broadly. Ben's eyes darted down. The man held a pearl-handled straight razor. The thing cleared its throat.

"Ben, I take it."

Ben couldn't speak. His voice was a scratchy, gravelly nothing.

"Interesting medical charts. They suggest strange things. They say you're recovering nicely. Abnormally, actually. You're a remarkable man. Your woman — Anna, I think her name was — had some repressed thoughts about you. Harsh notions. She was angry. Seems you've been neglectful. Hurtful."

Terror assailed Ben. Anna? Where was Anna? He tried to thrash in the bed, but could hardly move a muscle. The ECG beeped wildly, spiking the graph.

"Oh, don't worry," the man continued. "I didn't kill her. I hit her once, broke her nose. Asked her a few questions, which she was more than willing to answer. Then I sent her home. I think I did too good a job on her, though. Probably wandering the streets right now, poor girl. She'll forget by morning."

Ben closed his eyes. Squeezed them shut. His chest burned.

"You should really be nicer to that girl, Ben. She's tortured. But what do I care? I'm just a predator. No feelings. No interest in the greater good. You really gave us quite a fright a week ago. I thought I had you dead, but... seems you're built of stronger stuff. I don't know what that stuff is, but I don't like it. I don't like it at all. And, to be honest, I'm a little hungry."

Ben opened his eyes. The man was close. Standing over him. Grinning.

The razor flashed twice. One opened Ben's jugular, the other his carotid. His shoulders felt warm and sticky.

As a **Hunter** Storyteller, you portray a war.

Whether it's fully accurate or not, there is an implied side of good, and an implied side of bad, and both tend to be aggressive when dealing with one another. Each day and night is a battle in and of itself and may be fought tooth and nail by your troupe's hunters and the wicked entities that walk the Earth. As in every war, there are causalities. One way or another, the battlefield becomes littered with bodies.

The question is, what happens when death finds one of the hunters?

When your players create characters, they probably don't design three or four, expecting one or more to be capped within the first few sessions. You could

run your chronicle that way, but players' emotional connections to their characters are minimal when they invest in more than one. So for the sake of argument, let's just say a player has one hunter.

Can you kill that character? Should you kill one of the characters? Do you let them kill themselves inadvertently?

Death is definitely one of the most serious — and the most permanent — fixtures of "realism" you can hammer into your game. Every day in our world, real people die of natural causes, of accidents or are murdered. The same happens in the World of Darkness — except hunters die, too. The imbued are soldiers after a fashion, warriors whose lives are on the line every moment after the scales are ripped from their eyes. They're mortal.

So do you protect them from their own mortality? Or do you just let fate befall them?

The problem is, while death is very real and very serious, it probably shouldn't be used casually in a game, especially where players' creations are concerned. It shouldn't be a simple plot device meant to get a rise out of players. It should mean something — have a purpose.

Imagine a scenario in which hunters are in a firefight with some low-level bruises. The puppets are nothing from your perspective — a confrontation with the real villain's lowly henchmen. Say one of your players botches a roll or merely makes a bad decision and should catch a bullet in the chest. What do you do? You've rolled the dice and seen that the damage is probably enough to end his life, or at least put him in a hospital for a long time, removing him from the game. How do you deal with it?

You essentially have two choices. One is to let the dice lie as they fall and explain what happens. The bullet perforates a lung or pierces the heart and the character is dead. Simple, unfortunate and tragic. The second choice is to fudge the hell out of the roll and give the player a break. Maybe the bullet catches the hunter in the shoulder or maybe someone jumps in the way — whatever it is, you offer a reprieve from death's embrace.

The important thing is to know *why* you make either choice, and to know your purpose. To let a character die right then and there seems cruel, but if want to deliver a message on the harshness of a hunter's life, there you have it. What better way to illustrate such a darkly nihilistic point than to end a life at an utterly non-crucial, non-dramatic moment?

Alternately, why do you spare the hunter? You might consider the fun factor. It's simply no fun to have a character killed for no notably good reason, and the game is largely meant to be fun, right? Or you might show leniency for dramatic reasons: The character gets to live to build the chronicle as opposed to being absent from it. Then, if death knocks, it may be at a more central point in the game or after the character has had a chance to make his contribution. Perhaps it comes in a fight with a serious nemesis and is simply more satisfying. Perhaps it comes as a sacrifice for another character.

The bottom line is, death probably shouldn't be informal, not some dismissive move on your part. For it to make an impact on your players — to teach them that hunters are regular folks — your whole troupe should know why a character dies. Surviving hunters can learn the lesson. So can fellow players, even the one who creates a new, human character to introduce to your chronicle.

Truth and Consequences

Every night, Jason dreams of fire.

Fire is all he has left. Everything else — his job, his wife, his self-respect — has been burned away. Consumed by the fire that fell from Heaven, that opened his eyes and gave him a terrible knowledge.

Jason has come to love the fire. If only because he needs something *to love.*

He and his allies are hunting again tonight, hunting... something. He doesn't really remember what it is. It's so hard for him to focus on plans now, on talk, on the others, with the roar of the flames faint in his ears, the constant hint of smoke in the air. Anyway, it's not important what *they're hunting, just that they find it. Then the others will let him loose on it.*

On good days, Jason realizes that he's losing his mind, that the loss of his family has unhinged him. But the good days are rare. Life is a blur for him — empty time spent wandering the streets, panicked nights fighting.

Someone is speaking. Jason tries to pay attention, to register what's going on.

"Jason! Jason!" Angela screams. "Snap out of it! We're getting killed here!"

The urgency in her voice pierces the static in his head. Jason shakes his head and takes in the situation. Angela is shouting, terrified. Poole lies in a broken heap, ripped to pieces. Duncan is huddled next to a dumpster, trying to aim his gun at the creature. The vampire, the creature they meant to surprise, the thing about to tear Duncan's throat out.

Jason comes alive, just for a moment. The flames leap.

He pushes Angela aside, steps forward and pulls his Zippo from his pocket. "Over here, you bastard!"

The beast hears him, grins and leaps. In mid-flight, its nose wrinkles and panic crosses its face. It must smell the paint thinner Jason has drenched himself with. But it's too late to escape, as it hurtles into his arms.

Jason smiles, clutches the creature to him, and sets himself aflame.

The fire embraces him like a lover.

Introduction

Think what it must be like to be one of the imbued.

The Messengers — a power you know nothing about — have picked you seemingly at random and forced you to be one of their agents. You can see creatures hiding behind human facades. Even walking to the corner store can be a frightening experience. You've seen terrible secrets and learned horrible truths about the way the world *really* works. You're thrust into dangerous situations, often subjected to physical attacks that can break bones and tear flesh. You probably can't tell the people you love about your calling. They wouldn't believe you, and perhaps you can't even trust them anymore. You're a fragile soldier in a war you don't understand, fighting an enemy far more powerful than yourself, with no one to turn to for aid or comfort except (if you're lucky) your fellow hunters.

Doesn't sound like much fun, does it?

And yet, it is fun. While you wouldn't want to actually *be* a hunter, it's definitely fun to *roleplay* one. To play someone struggling against enormous odds, someone who has to truly fight to achieve his goals, but someone who may — with luck — come through in the end, even if he has to pay a terrible price for victory.

One way to inject that feeling of danger and struggle into a **Hunter** chronicle is to emphasize and explore the ramifications, side effects and obstacles of the imbued lifestyle — not just death, but injury, madness and hopelessness. The things that make characters wish they *were* dead — and that keep players coming back for more, for a chance to eventually triumph at all costs.

In this essay, these dangers and side effects are referred to as *consequences*. These are the challenges that characters bring upon themselves — problems of the hunter *lifestyle*, rather than the actual monsters and threats the imbued fight. Consequences are things like long-term injuries, madness, depression, loss of income, loss of friends and family, being arrested — all the *other* lousy things that can happen to a hunter on the mission.

This is the sort of thing that crops up in every chronicle, of course — it's the intrusion of real-life elements into the game. You don't need to be told to do it — you're already using such things on your players. What this essay intends to do, rather, is give you new ideas on what kinds of consequences to lay on your group, some cool ways to implement them and how to keep it fun for you and the troupe.

Why Bother?

There are four main benefits to focusing more on consequence in your chronicle.

Realism. Not realism in mechanics, but realism in setting and character. The imbued are normal people, like us. We know that life is complex, that things get in the way of our objectives, that injuries leave scars. By emphasizing these elements, you remind players that their characters are real people, not battle-hardened-monster-hunters or fearless superheroes.

Genre. At heart, **Hunter** is a horror game. Getting a sense of fear, tension and danger across to the players could be a high priority for you. Killing off characters left and right is one way to achieve it, but hardly the best. Making characters worry that they'll lose limbs or jobs or spouses or minds is a much better was to inspire fear. In horror, characters pay a price for their victories, and consequences enforce that cost.

Roleplaying Opportunities. Initially, players may feel that consequences reduce their roleplaying opportunities. They're wrong. Everything that happens to a character, from a broken leg to a broken marriage, is something that can be roleplayed and explored, adding depth to a character and dimension to your game. And if consequences compound each other — maybe a character is arrested and then imprisoned — they can inspire entire new stories to explore the events that unfold.

Engagement in the Game World. As stated above, **Hunter** characters are ordinary people. In most cases, they have ordinary lives outside of the calling. The temptation is always there to turn one's back on the hunt, wash one's hands of the Messengers and return to the wife and kids. The consequences of hunting make that option harder and harder to achieve, though. You can't go back if your kids are dead, your wife has left you and the police are after you. As more of a hunter's normal life is undone as a side effect of contending with monsters, the character soon has nothing left *but* the hunt. Used this way, consequences are tools for pushing characters further into their ordained roles.

The Basics

There are three basic kinds of consequences that can result from hunting. Most side effects tend to boil down to one of these.

Physical. Long-term injuries, serious wounds, scars, disfiguration or any kind of lingering damage.

Mental. Madness, of course, both long- and short-term.

Personal/Social. Chaos inflicted upon a character's private life — legal hassles, job loss, divorce.

Each of these categories is examined here, presenting ideas, suggestions, dangers and possible rules for handling each in your game. Don't take these categories as hard-and-fast divisions — they're just rough outlines. In play (and life), consequences straddle these categories and maybe even cause a chain of different events and ramifications, such as a monster-inflicted injury leading to loss of job, which in turn leads to mental stress.

A Word of Caution

There are definite drawbacks and pitfalls to focusing on consequences in your chronicle. These travails are discussed later, but it boils down to one thing — many players don't like to "lose control" of their characters or for their characters to go in directions they don't enjoy. It's very easy to cause major changes in a hunter just by exploring consequences — to have a boyfriend leave or to lose a limb. Always be sure that you won't anger or disturb your players by enforcing consequences that radically change their perceptions of their characters.

Physical Injuries

The Storyteller system abstracts health and injuries into eight bashing and lethal levels. It's a simple system and it gives you a general idea of a character's injuries and condition. By abstracting damage and injury, however, we lose a certain degree of detail and realism.

Think about the last time you hurt yourself, even slightly. When you stubbed a toe, cut yourself shaving or hit your head. None of those injuries wouldn't even qualify as a single level of bashing damage — but they still hurt for a while, and the damage manifests as a cut or bruise for several hours (if not days). If you've ever broken an arm, had surgery or been hit by a car, you know that the after-effects of those injuries persist for a long time, even after the wound itself heals. You still limp a little on that ankle. You still bear the scars. These kinds of injuries — trivial and serious — are the consequences of fights and accidents, over and above the simple deduction of health levels.

The focus of this section is not to provide extra combat rules, but to use injuries to enhance your stories and to add drama to fights and physical actions. As the **Hunter** rulebook says, describing fights in purely mechanical terms like "you take three bashing levels, roll for soak" is boring. By using descriptive language such as, "He punches you hard in the chest and you feel a rib snap under the pressure," you bring the fight — and the injury — to life. Making injuries seem real and dangerous doesn't just make combat more interesting, it makes a battle have more effect on subsequent events in your chronicle and can even change a character's methods and personality.

Bringing Blows to Life

The simplest way to make combat more interesting and dangerous is to vary the way you describe injuries and actions. It really helps bring things to life if you think up new and interesting ways to describe wounds.

Assume a monster hits a character. Ask yourself three questions about the injury to help develop its description.

Where does the blow land?

Is it to the head, the chest, the arm? How far can you define the location? Say someone gets hit in the head. That could mean the jaw, the eye (for a major injury), the ear (for a minor one) or the top of the head (possible concussion).

How do you decide where the blow lands? Common sense is helpful. If a character is hit by a simple kick, the target is probably a leg or the low torso. Being head-butted is usually a head hit. If a character is shot at but he's behind cover, he's probably hit in a location that's visible and unprotected.

A more mechanical means of determining hit location is to look at the successes of the attack roll. More successes tend to mean a bigger damage roll. One way to explain that damage bonus is to correlate it to a body part. A marginal roll with no excess successes could be a hit to the arm or leg. An attack with one to three extra successes might be a blow to the stomach. Five extra successes might indicate a hit to the head or heart.

Finally — but perhaps most importantly — decide hit location based on what's interesting and dramatic. Is a character's arm already injured? Having the enemy hit that arm again might aggravate the wound and make the player worried about the possibility of a serious and long-term injury. If you want to emphasize the skill and power of an opponent, have her continuously hit characters in the head or chest, even if attack rolls have minimal successes. Remember that an interesting outcome is often more satisfying than a "sensible" one.

What kind of attack is it?

Different attacks inflict different kinds of wounds. You can define that difference in more ways than just by saying it's bashing or lethal.

Even allowing for the differences between punches and kicks, there are many ways to describe unarmed

attacks. A strike can be a punch, slap, chop or an elbow. A kick can be a knee, a roundhouse, high or low, mild or hard, barefoot or booted. Now throw in clinches, throws, chokes and all the other maneuvers. While a slap in the face is mechanically the same as a chop to the neck, they feel different. A slap inflicts a mild but lingering pain, stinging a whole area. A chop is a sharp concentrated attack that might break bones.

Similarly, there are a lot of differences between various blunt weapons and attacks. A baseball bat inflicts a solid, hard impact, particularly on a limb. A whip causes a stinging pain that raises a nasty welt. A sledgehammer strikes a smaller area than a bat, but with a lot more weight behind it.

As for lethal attacks and weapons — well, you can go to town. A character can be shot, pierced, cut, slashed, punctured, smashed or shredded, depending on the weapon or attack used. There's even more abuse to choose from with other kinds of lethal damage — fire, shock, falls or supernatural powers.

How serious is the injury?

How many damage levels are inflicted? One bashing level is a minor hit — a slap in the face, a push or a scratch. One lethal level is a nick, a graze or a mild scalding. But raise things a few levels and the descriptions change. Four or five bashing levels in one blow is a slap that makes a hunter's head spin, a kick to the jaw that breaks teeth, a baseball bat that cracks ribs. Four or five lethal levels represent a life-threatening injury — a bleeding gunshot wound to the stomach, a cut several inches deep, maybe even a permanent injury such as a severed limb. At four or five health levels, the gloves come off and the way you describe injuries should be very nasty indeed.

While it might seem like extra work to think about these things for each attack, it really isn't. The concepts are already there, based on your own experiences with injuries, accidents and fights. You know how it feels to be hurt, to be bruised, to be cut. You know how a wound to the knee feels compared to a cut on your head. (And if you don't, you're very lucky.) Use that familiarity to help you make the call on various injuries.

It also doesn't hurt to think about what kind of injuries your creatures and cast members might inflict in advance. If a walker wields a club with a nail through it, blows will be heavy and blunt, with the added possibility of a painful and dangerous puncture. Foreknowledge of attack possibilities helps you interpret die rolls and come up with evocative and menacing injuries.

Minor Injuries

Lots of minor, everyday injuries fall outside the scope of the Storyteller damage system. A stubbed toe or grazed knee doesn't count as a single level of bashing damage. No matter how many times you cut yourself shaving, you don't fall unconscious. But such injuries also happen to the players' characters and can impact the hunters' actions in some cases.

One obvious sort of injury is the attack that does no damage. A character may be attacked with a bashing weapon. Enough soak successes are rolled to negate the damage, but does that mean that the attack has *no* effect? Probably not. Most characters still feel the blow, even if it doesn't hurt enough to be significant. Or take the more extreme — but still possible — case of a lethal attack that doesn't get any successes on the damage roll. It's not impossible for a character to take *no* damage from a gunshot to the head. How do you represent such a thing — and make the character be affected somewhat by the attack?

In this sort of situation, you can rule that an attack inflicts cosmetic damage — an injury that has no definite game effect, but that is still visible. The punch leaves a small bruise. A claw traces a nasty looking but minor scratch. A bullet.... Okay, cosmetic bullet wounds (or other highly lethal attacks) are unlikely. Think about what kind of injury might be consistent with the location of such a lethal attack. A bullet to the head does no damage? Maybe it takes off one of the character's earlobes or grazes the side of her head, leaving a shallow gouge. Maybe a sword cuts open a few layers of skin on the character's stomach, but he's fat enough that no organs or muscles are hit.

If these sorts of minor injuries are still cataloged and described, players will never feel like their characters are invulnerable. Nobody wants to have an earlobe shot off. A character (and player) feels lucky that it was such a minor injury, but she's still in pain and horrified by the minor mutilation.

Major Injuries

At the other extreme, we have injuries that inflict severe, permanent effects upon a character — injuries that can't easily be abstracted by the game system, such as broken or severed limbs, brain damage or extensive burns. Because the Storyteller system doesn't generate such injuries mechanically, it's up to you to decide when to inflict a more serious wound on a hunter and what form it should take.

Be logical. Say a character is hit in the arm with a crowbar and suffers five or six health levels. Such injuries leave people with broken bones in the real world. Similarly, people are left with gruesome scars

from fires or with neurological damage from electric shocks. Common sense makes for realistic consequences in your game.

Another timely opportunity to inflict major damage is if a character would normally be killed by an injury. You might want to convert the damage into a more lingering but non-fatal wound. Say a character is hit in the arm with a sword and enough damage is rolled to kill him. You could instead rule that the hunter's arm is severed, but that he's reduced to "only" an Incapacitated (or even Crippled) level. This lets you keep characters alive, but never lets players believe that their characters are invulnerable or that you go easy on them.

Above all, as always, lean toward what works best for your chronicle and troupe, toward what's dramatic and interesting. If a wound should kill a character, kill him. If a living but permanently injured character suits you better, go for it.

Severe wounds demand a little more than simple crossed-out health levels, though. You can introduce some extra tweaks to help represent them. Here are some ideas.

- For serious bashing injuries, try converting the injury to lethal damage. This approach is appropriate for broken limbs or bones. Allow the character to soak the injury as bashing damage, but mark the leftovers down as lethal.
- Permanent loss of health levels (preferably just the Bruised level). This is best for some sort of massive, full-body trauma such as smoke inhalation or burns.
- Permanent increases in difficulty for certain rolls. A character with a damaged eye has less depth perception, so shooting rolls might be at +1 difficulty, for example.
- Reductions in Attributes. This is a pretty harsh penalty because it affects many of a character's rolls. This loss is appropriate for very serious, permanently crippling injuries. Massive burn scars can cause a loss in Appearance. The neural damage from an electric shock could reduce Intelligence or Dexterity.
- Assigning Flaws to a character. Many Flaws such as Old Injury and Crippled Limb (see the **Hunter Players Guide**) are tailor-made to represent the after effects of grievous injuries, and come with their own rules and guidelines. You can decide if a player gets a commensurate number of points to spend on Merits after imposing a Flaw — or you can just lower the boom and offer no compensation at all.

After the Battle

So you've run a fight scene. You've got a group of characters covered in cosmetic bruises and cuts,

and one or two of them come away with major, life-changing injuries. Now you have to ask yourself how to exploit those injuries for added entertainment and roleplaying.

Does a character have a visible injury, even something minor like a black eye? Other people will notice it and react to it. Characters who have families, employers, teachers or any contact with normal people have to explain such injuries, do a convincing job of it and hopefully not lose face. An employer might frown upon an employee who supposedly gets into bar brawls.

If characters walk away with wounds that will take time to heal, they're going to be in pain for some time. That pain interferes with their actions for days, making it harder for them to get around or do their jobs — and again, people are going to notice, comment and ask questions. It gets worse if they're laid up at home or in the hospital — doctors and the police will want to know how they got gunshot wounds or strange claw-like cuts. And then an extended sabbatical from friends or work might strain a character's personal life.

Even once all the healing is done, it still isn't over. Ever had a broken leg or even just a sprained ankle? You probably can't run as fast anymore, you still get aches and pains, and you occasionally fall down stairs or trip when the limb is stressed.

You can exploit these lingering effects to make a character's life more difficult (and more interesting). But don't use them constantly unless a condition is so serious that it rightly challenges a character's every action, such as being confined to a wheelchair. Introduce long-term disabilities when they would make things challenging and would inject tension and realism into your game.

Ongoing side effects to injuries can be a rationale for botches. A botched Dodge roll might mean a character's weak ankle gives way mid-maneuver, leaving her helpless and limping. A botched Research roll is due to a migraine, the legacy of a head wound the character received months before.

Physical injuries provide a rich vein of material for you to mine to remind hunters of their mortality. After a few dangerous incidents or a few difficult-to-explain bruises, characters will become more cautious, more cunning — and much more human.

Psychological Challenges

Madness, insanity, fear and terror are among the most basic and important underpinnings of horror gaming. These kinds of trauma differentiate **Hunter** from a simple stake-and-bake-the-monster slugfest. Dementia and fear are also some of the most interesting aspects of the game to explore — and ones that, if mishandled, can wreck a chronicle. Madness should not be trivialized or it loses its power. But nor should it overpower a character to the point that she becomes nonfunctional or keep a player from having fun.

This section examines sources of madness and emotional trauma, ways to assign temporary derangements to characters and how to manage a game with insane or unstable characters.

Fear

Second sight is one of the most powerful weapons the imbued have. It lets them see some enemies that seek to remain hidden. Its related protection diminishes supernatural influence over a hunter's mind and emotions. Some players take these benefits to mean that second sight makes their characters *immune* to fear and control.

Not at all. Second sight can protect the imbued from supernatural *sources* of fear — a ghost's emotion-control powers or the hysteria that werewolves invoke in normal people. But it has no effect upon the *completely normal* fear hunters experience upon seeing a walking corpse or when confronting a nine-foot-tall hairy monster.

Fear is one of *your* most powerful weapons as a Storyteller. You have the potential to make the characters (and players) afraid every chance you get. The sight of a body burst open from the inside, seeing a child-victim or experiencing a car crash can all inspire terror in a hunter — without even the presence or involvement of the supernatural.

Of course, different people are afraid of different things, so you can't expect all characters to be scared by the same events. Nor should you expect them to act in the same way when they are afraid. A meek Innocent could hide from danger while a belligerent Avenger might attack the things that frighten her. Think about your troupe's characters — and the players — and what might frighten them. Then you can include those things prominently in your game. Maybe a character fears growing old and becoming his parents. A perceptive ghost creates the illusion of the hunter in his advanced years when he looks into a mirror. The illusion itself is not terrifying, thanks to second sight, but the prospects of the image to the character's identity are shocking. If a hunter fears losing her home and family, a vampire that has studied her might say upon their next meeting, "Hello, Julie, how are those 3.1 children and that two-car garage working out for you?" No fear-inducing power is used, but the mere threat of

the creature harming family and home is enough to elicit a terrified response.

In most cases, you don't have to enforce conventional fear or panic on a character. Most players are happy to get into character and react appropriately without prompting from you. In some cases, though, players don't want to play along, and might simply ignore the frightening elements of your game. If you want to enforce panic on characters, here's a simple suggestion. When a character is in a situation that should scare the shit out him based on his identity, you could have the player make a Willpower roll (at a difficulty you feel is appropriate). If it succeeds, the hunter can overcome his fear and act as he wishes. If the roll fails, the character must either spend a Willpower point to retain control or react in an appropriate manner — running away, passing out or attacking the source of the fear. On a botch, the character *must* react — no Willpower can be spent to avoid it.

Just remember, characters in these situations feel *mundane* fear, not supernatural fear. They have second sight to protect them in the latter case. It doesn't have to be fear of a supernatural creature, either; a character with arachnophobia might be *more* terrified by a spider than a werewolf.

By throwing frightening events and confrontations at characters (perhaps no more than once per character per game session), you effectively convey the grim and horrific atmosphere of **Hunter**. You remind the players that their characters are human, despite all the gifts some otherworldly power has bestowed upon them. You can also wear the characters down over time as they become emotionally exhausted or even run low on Willpower. And that leaves them vulnerable to a hunter's potentially biggest problem — depression.

Depression

For many years, depression was dismissed as a problem for "weak-minded" people. Strong, sensible people didn't get depressed. Of course, we now know that's not true. Everyone is vulnerable to depression. It's a completely normal reaction to problems and unpleasant events.

Hunters are extremely prone to depression. As normal people, they have the usual gamut of things to be depressed about — bills, relationships, small failures. But due to the dangers and costs of hunting, much larger concerns consume them, too — lying to cover a secret life, the persistent threat to loved ones, the seeming hopelessness of trying to free humanity. If the characters in your game don't spend some time down in the mouth, you may want to emphasize some of the depressing elements of their lives.

Nerves of Steel

If you use frightening mundane incidents to confront characters with their humanity, players may look for ways to diminish the fear their hunters suffer. In most cases, these efforts are accomplished through roleplaying — a hunter seeks therapy, confronts fears in order to overcome them. On a mechanical level, players can acquire the Steel Nerves Background from **Hunter Book: Judge** (pp. 73-74). The Trait can be used to negate temporary or moderate-term derangements (though not those caused by high Virtues).

If you use a mechanical guideline such as Willpower rolls to help assign temporary derangements or to enforce mundane fears onto characters, Steel Nerves operates in a straightforward manner. If a player fails a Willpower roll, let her roll her character's Steel Nerves rating as usual to avoid the derangement or fear response.

If you seek to invoke fear and impose ailments through narrative, characters with Steel Nerves can present a problem. The player has spent points on the Background or has acquired it during play; she actively seeks to keep her character sane. As the Storyteller, you have to take her desire into consideration if she's going to enjoy the game. But if a situation truly demands that a derangement is imposed — say the character's children are killed — it's frustrating if the player can just roll three dice, check the result and flatly negate your judgment.

Discuss the Trait with the player before the game begins. She may want her character to be *resistant* to fear, but not immune to it. In that case, the player is probably fine with her character developing derangements that are strongly personal, rather than just "generic" stresses or fears.

If the player hotly resists the idea of her character having mental weaknesses, you may not be able to overcome the problem. Maybe the player isn't as suited to horror gaming as he is to fantasy gaming. Treat him fairly and let him use Steel Nerves, but be strict about outlining when the Background is and isn't applicable.

In any case, bear in mind that Steel Nerves is a fairly limited tool. Yes, the Background is a good defense against shock and fear, but it may not help against gradual depression or lethargy. It's a Background. It can't be increased with experience points. *You* decide if its rating increases or decreases based on story events and character development. And remember, a character with Steel Nerves is wrapped pretty tight. Tight controls have a way of busting rather that just bending. That die roll won't succeed every time — and when the character finally falls, she may fall hard.

Despair derived from hardships and ill fate is hard to pin down on a mechanical level — it's usually best expressed through roleplaying. One guideline you can use to measure a character's emotional fortitude, however, is Willpower. Characters who run low on temporary Willpower are perhaps tired or morose. They need to achieve something meaningful, whether on the mission or in their personal lives, before they cheer up again and their Willpower scores rise. Feel free to target low-Willpower characters with depression-causing events.

These are some of the biggest sources of depression for hunters:

Dread. Even a simple ride on the bus can be a nightmare for a hunter, as her second sight shows her the monstrous nature of some of her fellow commuters. Hunters see more evidence of how tainted the world is every day, how the monsters are everywhere — and there just isn't enough time to fight them all. Worse still is when a hunter discovers that someone close to her — whether a co-worker, congregation member or even family member is one of the monsters. Emphasizing this constant, low-level hum of fear and horror can in itself be enough to make characters suicidal.

You may want to manipulate the second sight rules to make your point. Hunters normally receive the ability to detect monsters when Conviction is spent. They also receive relative immunity to supernatural manipulation. If you cling to this system, it's easy for hunters to avoid seeing things when they don't want to. Consider activating the sensory aspect of second sight — but *not* the protection — for free when you think it's appropriate. You could base it on the occasional Awareness roll, but it's better to just activate it when you want to unsettle characters, say, in the presence of a particularly potent creature or one that is particularly emotional (though not necessarily violent) in the moment. Characters and players will soon learn that the Messengers are an ongoing presence and they intend for the hunters to know painfully well how pervasive the monster threat is.

Spontaneous activation of the observation side of second sight is a one-sided deal — players don't get to activate it for free, even if only invoking the sensory aspect.

Hopelessness. This is closely linked to dread, above. Once a hunter senses how extensive monsters are in the world, he may begin to realize that it simply isn't possible for him to deal with them all — or even for *all* the chosen to triumph. The imbued appear to fight a battle that they're almost certain to lose, and it's hard to keep going in the face of that almost inevitable failure.

Drive hopelessness home by confronting characters with dreadful sights, even when they're busy contending with other creatures or problems. It's as if for every monster hunters try to cope with, three more appear. The odds can be overwhelming.

Failure. You can't win them all. Even the most skilled and lucky hunter eventually goes up against something she can't defeat. If she survives the experience, she knows that she just wasn't good enough to beat or absolve the entity. Even if she eventually defeats or reconciles the monster, the memory of her failure may haunt her — especially if the creature continues killing or causing trouble in the interim.

If the hunters in your game have won a string of successes over the supernatural, bring them down a peg by confronting them with a creature that barely acknowledges their existence and on which their efforts have no effect. A particularly potent walking dead might simply brush hunters aside while it achieves its goals and passes from the world. Now, the creature need not be violent toward the characters or anyone else. It might simply carry on its agenda of watching over a house and never hurts a fly. But can the characters live with themselves for allowing the creature to continue its current existence?

Screwing up. More depressing than failure is when characters actually make things *worse* through their actions — when a missed shot hits a defenseless person or when bad advice gets another hunter killed. Guilt is an extremely powerful emotion, and one you can exploit mercilessly to subject characters to serious depression. Keep an eye on botched rolls — they can turn into screw-ups with serious consequences.

Personal loss. Hunters can be imbued when supernatural forces threaten their loved ones — and many of these hunters are initiated to the truth with the loss of family or friends. But the hunt eventually affects the loved ones of all imbued. Family and friends become concerned for a character's erratic behavior, but when it seems to turn chronic, utterly selfish and abusive, they probably distance themselves from and eventually abandon him. And then there's the danger of monsters taking the hunt to the imbued — or more specifically to their loves ones. The harm or death of a close person by monstrous hands can cripple a hunter's spirit, especially when she knows that she's responsible by default.

With all of these pressures to contend with, it's no wonder that hunters are prone to depression. If you want to remind a hunter of his limitations, throw a variety of setbacks and seemingly insurmountable odds at him and watch him collapse under the weight of it all. He'll probably become depressed, but in time he'll realize that his only options are suicide or to carry on. The stable imbued — as far as that phrase goes — carry on.

By contrast, hunters who *don't* become depressed at all are the truly scary ones — the ones so focused and fanatical that they deny or switch off their emotions. Those characters aren't depressed — they're crazy.

Temporary Derangements

Madness is almost inevitable in **Hunter**. It's the price hunters pay for power, for raising their Virtues high enough to gain the most powerful edges to do the greatest good for the world. The irony, of course, lies in where the line is drawn between achieving the most good and losing one sense of self in the effort. But even low-powered hunters are still vulnerable to madness — to gaining temporary derangements and emotional disorders that affect their personality.

Your players may have the power to decide if their characters gain permanent Virtue-related derangements when Virtue ratings rise to 7 or higher. As Storyteller, it's up to *you* to decide if and when to inflict temporary madness on a character, probably as a result of a terrible tragedy or horrible personal loss during play. You also get to decide the kind of derangement incurred.

Here are some ideas on how to go about inflicting such ailments. A mechanical system is definitely *not* the way to go. These decisions are way too important to trust to a handful of dice; you have to choose based on the character, the player, the story and the needs of your chronicle.

Having said that, you can still use a character's statistics to help in the decision-making process. Keep a close eye on her Willpower pool. When it gets dangerously low — two points or less — the character is particularly vulnerable. Her coping mechanisms start to break down. This is particularly true if she has been losing Willpower due to stresses such as fear and depression. Think about what events might cause the

character to lose her grip on sanity. What foreseeable events might break her spirit or what kinds of unexpected phenomena (even to you) would break her? A house foreclosure? The hospitalization of an ally? Or something seemingly as innocuous as a child's missed birthday party?

Characters can descend slowly into madness, without any particular event that "sets them off." This sort of thing usually comes from the player, though, not from you. He decides that his character has subtly slid into mental illness. If a player suggests this for his character, agree immediately and never let that player leave your troupe. He's a rare thoughtful roleplayer and a role model for your group. You can then work together to determine the nature of his character's derangement.

More dramatic, though, and more easily arranged by you is for a character to snap at a particular stressful event — to have a "nervous breakdown." This is usually something particularly confrontational, distressing or overwhelming for a character. Seeing a werewolf probably isn't enough. Coming home to find the werewolf eating your husband is more like it. It could be something more subtle, however, such as finding out that your wife has left you or that a vampire's bite has infected you with HIV. It should be a very *personal* shock for the character in question — not just disturbing or frightening, but linked directly to his identity and soul.

Once you reach a crisis event like this, you have to decide whether to give the character a temporary derangement. Simply imposing it may annoy the player, who doesn't want you making alterations without his permission. It's often useful to ask first or to discuss the idea. This is often best done between sessions, after the shock has been played out. The character considers the event in the downtime and loses control as the dreadful truth sinks in.

If a player simply *won't* go for it, but you think imposing a derangement is vital to the game, make her roll Willpower. If it fails, the character gains an ailment. But this is a last resort and can create a very confrontational mood in your troupe. If you go this route, apply the same rules to all players to keep things fair. Players who like running deranged characters usually play along no matter what the dice say.

Deciding the Derangement

When a character acquires a derangement, no matter how it develops, decide what the ailment is and how it works. There are a number of possible derangements in the **Hunter** rulebook and the various sourcebooks. Choose from those or create your own.

There are a few tools to use for choosing a derangement.

Talk with the player. This is probably the most important step. Cooperate to pick out an appropriate derangement. The player knows her character better than you do; she has a better idea of what conditions are most likely to manifest. You want to avoid choosing a derangement that will make the player personally uncomfortable. It's also a good idea to avoid ailments that will make the character less effective at her chosen goals — such as making an Avenger terrified of confrontations or violence — unless the player *wants* to go in that direction.

Choose something appropriate to the event. Don't make a character agoraphobic if her crisis event is being set on fire. This is common sense. Choose something that's connected to the trigger event. Mind you, there doesn't need to be a direct connection. There are many different ways to react to a single event. Being set on fire doesn't automatically give one a fear of fire. If a character's friend is killed at a gas station, the surviving hunter may fear fire every time she detects the odor of gas.

Make it interesting. A character who reacts to any danger by running away or passing out isn't very interesting for the rest of the group. Neither is someone so belligerent or paranoid that he won't interact with other hunters. Sometimes you'll find that a "realistic" derangement is dull or counterproductive to your game. Don't be afraid to pass it over in favor of one that's a little less appropriate but more dramatic and interesting for the player and the group as a whole. Take a look in the various creed sourcebooks, which list derangements that are particularly appropriate to the given creeds.

Catering to the Crazy

Playing a character with a derangement is hard work and a challenge for players. You should reward a player for her effort by catering to that derangement, by giving the player a little more opportunity to take center stage in the game. After all, if the character is going to be debilitated or hamstrung at times, that deficiency should be offset by the sheer entertainment value of playing or watching the character in action.

Here are some ideas on working with the player of a disturbed character.

Change your language. You are the eyes and ears of the players and characters. They see and hear what you describe. You can therefore change your way of describing things when dealing with a deranged character, to better cater to her ailment.

Say one of the characters suffers from paranoia. The group is having a meeting when the phone rings. You can simply say, "The phone rings," to the group. Then you add to the player of the paranoid character (or take her aside and say), "Who knows you're here? Did one of the others tell someone?" When the characters are hunting, you can embellish scenes a little for deranged characters such as, "You feel eyes on the back of your neck. Was that a flash of movement over there?"

You can use a flat tone when addressing a depressed character. Talk faster when addressing a manic or hysterical hunter. Keep mentioning the object of a character's obsession, even if it isn't present. Don't actually tell the player what her character thinks, though. Don't say, "You know someone's watching you." Suggest rather than dictate.

Even if other players hear your comments or embellishments made for the benefit of a challenged character, they are reminded of her situation and aren't allowed to take her behavior for granted as logical, reasoned or even predictable. That helps everyone roleplay around the suffering hunter.

Focus on them. When the character's derangement flares up in play, spend time dealing with the repercussions. If a paranoid character questions the motives his teammates, spend time in each scene with the player on exploring his suspicions to see what comes up. Don't do this to the extent that the other players get bored, but dedicate enough time illustrating the derangement that the player stays interested in the effect, and the other players have fun seeing what happens to their teammate.

Give them occasional respite. Being crazy is not fun and playing a deranged character can be stressful. Allow the character — and the player — to take a break from the madness when they need to. Not in the sense of waiving the derangement's effects, but allowing the character to find some temporary equilibrium, to spend time relaxing or in a situation in which her problems don't affect her so severely.

Pursuing a haven from insanity is in fact a good way to bring a group of characters close together. Unless a deranged character is so badly damaged that she can't interact with her teammates — which is boring — she will look to other characters as friends who don't judge her, as people she can be safe and almost sane around. The other characters, in turn, may develop a powerful bond with the deranged hunter, returning the trust that she puts in them. This is the kind of relationship that often develops between patient and caregiver, and it's likely to develop in your group without anyone noticing.

Let them find a cure. If a character (or player) wants to get treatment for a derangement, don't put too many obstacles in his path. It's likely to be a long process, requiring therapy and drugs. See **Hunter Book: Redeemer** (p. 69) for rules and advice on treating and curing derangements. Many ailments also offer means to alleviating and even eliminating conditions.

It should be noted, though, that while therapy and drugs are effective, their use isn't very interesting to roleplay. Parts of the process are excellent opportunities for roleplaying, though, so try to make the cure dramatic and engaging. Get the characters involved in "visible" modes of treatment — self-exploration, confronting and resolving internal issues, facing personal fears, undergoing an intervention by peers. Encourage treatments that involve more than just one character so that other players can get involved.

If a character just wants to manage or control his derangement, therapy and drugs alone are fine and can exist in the backdrop of your chronicle, perhaps playing a larger role over time when their use has results or fails. For a real cure, players should go that extra mile in terms of treatment, roleplaying and story potential. (And whether high-Virtue-induced ailments can be treated or eliminated at all is anyone's guess.)

It can't be said often enough — insanity is a key theme of horror. By focusing on madness and its consequences — by making characters' minds just as vulnerable and fragile as their bodies — you increase the emotional power of your games and draw the players further into the hunter lifestyle.

Personal Upheaval

One of the biggest differences between **Hunter** and the other World of Darkness games is how it treats social aspects. In **Vampire**, for example, the primary focus of the game is social — interacting with other vampires. In **Hunter**, the focus is more goal-oriented — stalking and confronting monsters.

But **Hunter** is actually *more* socially focused than **Vampire** when you look at how the characters fit into the real world. Vampires (or mages or werewolves) don't have to worry about where they fit into normal society; they exist outside of it. They don't have to worry about paying their rent, spending time with their families, doing their jobs. They can simply focus on their own little social niches and stay there.

In **Hunter**, the characters' place in society is pivotal to the game. The imbued are normal people first and foremost. They have to keep working so they can pay their rent. They have to choose between hunting monsters and bringing their daughters home

from school. They have normal lives — ones that are altered and deformed by the stresses of hunting.

The social and personal consequences of hunting are one of the best and most interesting areas to explore in a game. While not as daunting as madness, social problems often provide more opportunities for roleplaying and interaction with other cast members.

Social consequences to the hunt can't be determined by mechanics. They're resolved through roleplaying by their very nature, by thinking about what's logical or appropriate for a hunter's life. If he files his taxes inappropriately in hopes of getting a larger refund to apply to the hunt, the IRS may come calling. You can still represent the effects of the consequences mechanically, though, by using Backgrounds and Flaws. A character who loses his job can lose Resources points. One who gains a reputation as a liar could lose Influence, Allies or Contacts. Similarly, Flaws like Abusive Partner or Uninsured can be imposed on characters to reflect their new family, economic, business or religious circumstances. The **Hunter Players Guide** lists a variety of Merits and Flaws from which to choose.

Family and Friends

Most hunters have a family — whether a husband and children, parents and cousins, or just a group of friends they care about. Those people don't just vanish into the backdrop upon the imbuing — they're waiting for a hunter each night she comes home, wanting to know what's going on. And if monsters find out who a hunter is and go in search for her — and they will — her home is the first place they look.

To use a character's family as a game element, look at your own relationships. What would happen if *you* started hunting monsters? How would your spouse/partner react if you stayed out to all hours? Came home injured and smelling of smoke? What would your parents say if you got arrested after a fight at a nightclub? What would happen to your friends if the walking dead followed you to the Friday-night drinking session?

It's impossible to keep normal life and hunting separate. Overflow is inevitable. Look at a character's origins, family and friends and think about the impact hunting has upon those relationships. How will that person react to the character's new secrecy? What would happen if the character actually tried to tell the truth? Could family ever believe her (probably not)? How likely is family to get involved with the hunt, whether accidentally or deliberately? Actually, that last one's easy — a character's family can get caught up in things whenever you want them to. You can put hostile ghosts in a son's school any time you like. That personal connection makes defeating the monsters all the more important to the character — and gives him even more problems when his son finds dad and his allies setting fire to the gym.

The connection can go the other way, too. Family can easily affect a character's hunting. Friends might cope if she blows off a party to stake out a cult — that's pretty minor but still has roleplaying potential. It gets more serious when she has to make major choices between her two lives — when her son is arrested for car theft and she has to choose between bailing him out or accompanying the group on a mission. No matter what choice she makes, she undoubtedly feels guilty, and that guilt can distract her as the hunt continues.

To capitalize on the possibilities of family, ask players to flesh out their characters' relationships. Make sure they give family members names, at the very least. They could also think about the names and personalities of a few close friends. Once you have these details, you can elaborate on them yourself, working out ways to make them significant within the game — as demanding spouses, children, bosses or friends.

Many players try to escape the consequence of loved ones by creating orphans and loners who have no one to worry about. Those characters are cruising for a different kind of trouble — loneliness, depression and solitude brought on by their inability to communicate with others. If your players are like this, revisit the sections on depression and mental illness, above.

As a final note on family and friends, remember that they probably should not become aware of monsters' existence and assume a willing role in the hunt. Normal folks simply can't believe in the existence of monsters, and even when confronted by them, people go catatonic, become hysterical and forget everything they witness. The importance of family and friends on the hunt is how they put demands upon a hunter. How they represent everything he fights for. How they can be endangered and can inspire the hunter to amazing feats of bravery in the face of monstrosity. Family on the hunt has consequences on a hunter's identity and soul, not on any edge he activates or pistol he fires.

Work and Money

What's the most necessary thing in a character's life? Not family. Not skills. Not imbued powers. On a cold, utilitarian, practical level, it's his Resources Background —job, income and savings. Without a job, a character has no money. Without money, he loses his home, his car and the tools he needs to answer the call.

The simple practicality of maintaining an income is another thing that separates **Hunter** from the other World of Darkness games. Vampires don't usually

worry about working. All they need is blood. Everything else is a luxury. Mages can just find a winning lottery ticket if they need it. As a **Hunter** Storyteller, try focusing on the clash between hunting and earning a wage, rather than glossing over a character's career. There's prime roleplaying material in trying to maintain a day job.

Unless a character works alone or from home, she interacts with people every day — co-workers, the public or both. Those people notice if she limps or has a welt on her face. They become alarmed if she starts talking to herself chronically, and about some insane thing. If she can't work because of injuries or skips work to investigate a haunted house, she winds up in trouble with her boss sooner or later. And there's always the danger of monsters showing up at the workplace. A character may even discover that her company is controlled by creatures, making her choose between fighting them and keeping her job and income.

Employment aside, there's also money in the bank and how a character uses it. Does he spend it on guns? His wife wants to know what's going on, and why a shotgun takes precedence over the telephone bill. How long can the character keep getting his car repaired before he goes broke — and before mechanics realize that those dents are human-sized? What happens when a hunter simply can't afford bullets anymore?

Then there's the financial damage the enemy can inflict. A wizard or vampire could easily close down a character's accounts and drive her broke or get her fired from her job if the creature knows the character's identity and can pull the right strings. Some ghosts can cause bank computers to overload or can possess a character's landlord and have the tenant evicted. They don't have to kill a hunter or her family to lash out at her. Hitting her in the wallet can be just as bad.

When characters start thinking about mugging people or robbing convenience stores to finance the hunt, you know you're doing something right.

The Long Arm of the Law

It's inevitable that hunters are going to break the law sooner or later (especially if they decide to rob convenience stores for cash). Breaking into schoolyards, killing demon-possessed businessmen or setting fire to factories gets them in trouble with the police — or with even more powerful law-enforcement agencies.

Let's be clear: If the police really *want* to catch a criminal, they *will*. The police have more money, more training and more equipment than the characters. Whatever tricks hunters use to cover their tracks, the police have seen it before and know how to beat it. It's just a matter of time.

That doesn't mean that the police *will* find the characters, though. It just means they *can*, should they choose to do so. The police are overworked, understaffed and under-financed, not to mention corrupt and lazy. If characters commit a trivial crime such as breaking and entering, and they cover their tracks, the police may not bother to look that hard for them. For something serious like murder, they're likely to try a lot harder. And while you should still give the characters a chance to get away with it, make them *work* for it.

Another serious danger, of course, is that the police and the laws of the World of Darkness are often controlled by the very creatures that hunters face. This could be as minor as a policeman who's in a cult or as major as vampires controlling the judicial system. Look at the example of Jared Shoemaker in the **Hunter** rulebook. He fought the monster-dominated law and lost.

You can use the police as a threat in your game — but you can also use the simple *existence* of the police as a tool. When characters set out to break the law, players usually think long and hard about what they're doing because they want to avoid capture. You can make them work that much harder just by *alluding* to the police, without ever bringing them into the game. Have a patrolman pull a character over and give him a speeding ticket — while the character prays that the cop doesn't find the shotgun and dead body in the trunk. That'll get the paranoia rolling and demonstrate the possible consequences of the hunt.

If the police do find the characters and some of them are arrested, you can explore the effect *that* event has on the hunters' jobs, families and lives. Not to mention the possibilities of running game sessions set behind bars, or of staging a breakout.

Giving up on Society

Some players — and characters — look at all the hassles, problems and dangers of a normal life and decide to give it all up for the hunt. They might not want to be impeded on their mission, as with God45, or it might be because they treasure their family and believe distance is the safest recourse. These characters get up one morning, throw a shotgun and some underwear in a backpack, and take up hunting as a full-time lifestyle.

That's fine. Several hunter-net posters have gone this route, and there's something in common about their emails that have appeared in various sourcebook — desperation, loneliness and a terrible sorrow. They've turned their backs on the world, but unless they're complete sociopaths, they still miss what they've abandoned.

If any character in your chronicle decides to chuck it all for the hunt, you have a whole new world of opportunities and ideas to play with as you and the player explore the bleak world of hardcore hunting. The character may drift, sleep under bridges or stay with allies (fellow characters). She may rob convenience stores or raid dumpsters for food and bullet money. This is perhaps the ultimate consequence of hunting — *the loss of the character's place in society.* Exploring it can be a lot of fun.

The Imbued Understand

The last thing worth noting about social consequences is that they really help bring hunters together. The need to interact, to be with people who understand one's troubles and needs is one of the fundamentals of human psychology. The imbued certainly aren't above this necessity. While "strength in numbers" might be an initial rationale to form a hunter group, it's the need to be in a group of peers and equals that keeps it going.

Just look at the posters on hunter-net as an example. Yes, the list and ones like it are useful resources for information and contacts, but it also provides access to people who *understand*, even if they don't agree with or like an individual hunter. It provides people to talk to. Hunter allies fill the same need, and when characters feel ostracized by their families and friends, they turn to their fellow imbued.

Encourage characters to stay together. Let them forget their mundane troubles when they hang out as a group (but bring those troubles back when they go their own way). Let them swap equipment, tend to each other's wounds or provide alibis to explain why others act strangely ("We were drinking and Steve fell down. That's how he got that cut. Sorry, it's my fault.")

Let this group friendship build and the characters will eventually feel more comfortable with each other than with their own families and spouses. When they start having affairs with each other, you have a whole new array of pressures and guilt with which to torment them.

Mix It Up

The important thing to remember about the three categories of consequences — physical, mental and social — is this: They don't exist. There are no checkboxes next to each incident that occurs in your chronicle so you can determine which category an event falls into. These groupings are just a convenience. In play — and in the real world — things are never so clear-cut. An event rarely has repercussions that affect only one aspect of a character's life. The events can send out ripples all over the place.

Look at something like a minor wound — say, a stinging welt on the back of a character's hand. On a physical level, it has a few ramifications. You rule that the character suffers +1 difficulty when using that hand for fiddly detailed work. But the welt has larger effects on a social level. His wife wants to know how it happened and people at work comment on it. If you decide to explore those social developments, they can easily overwhelm the injury itself, which may fade in a matter of days.

Or say a character gets set on fire by a monster's supernatural powers. It's a nasty, severe injury. While you stop short of imposing permanent Attribute reductions, there's still significant damage that will affect the character for some time. Once again, the social aspect plays a roll. People want to know what happened and react negatively to the burn scars. But the events can also have serious mental effects on the character. She could develop a fear of fire or magic, or an obsession with the creature that almost killed her.

As Storyteller, you can go almost anywhere you like with a particular event's after-effects. You can gloss over the horror aspects of an encounter to go after the social repercussions. Or you can examine all the various aspects of an event at the same time or in their own time.

Change Begets Change

Events never end. They reverberate throughout your game until everyone gets bored with them. The effects of one event are phenomena in and of themselves and can in turn lead to new developments and consequences.

Say a character becomes depressed and stops being careful about maintaining her life or looking after herself. That lassitude could make her careless in combat, causing her to be hurt badly. It could affect her relationships with friends and family. She might get fired because she stops doing her job properly. The depression could lead to further, more serious emotional problems, or maybe to a full-blown derangement.

Consequences are like ripples in a pond. They spread outward and affect a character on an ongoing basis. Over a number of sessions — perhaps even as a long-term subplot — you can explore the ramifications of a single event and how it continues to affect a character's life and his role in the group.

Taken even further, you can develop a massive chain of linked repercussions, incidents and side effects that can stay with a character for the duration of the series. While never overshadowing the main storyline or stealing time from other characters, you can keep coming back to the ongoing changes in the character's life. Here's an example:

Noel is an imbued bricklayer, with a wife (Carol) and daughter (Anna). On an encounter with a walking corpse, he falls out of a window and hurts his back — not to the point of paralysis, but it's hard for him to lift things. Carol notices the injury, but Noel won't tell her what happened. She starts to withdraw from him because he won't communicate. Meanwhile, he can't work properly because of his injury. His boss doesn't fire him, but does dock his pay. This just makes things with Carol more difficult.

Noel turns to hunting to keep his mind off his problems. When he and his fellow imbued take on a vampire, Noel suffers a sprained wrist. One of his allies is killed and the monster escapes. His ally's death disturbs Noel and he starts drinking. He can't explain the sprain to Carol, who's also alarmed by his drunkenness.

Noel tries to smooth things over and takes his family out for an evening (despite the strain on their budget). The night goes well — until a mortal minion of the vampire attacks. Noel defeats the man, but Anna is injured and must be taken to the hospital. Noel finally tells Carol about his hunting activities. She doesn't believe him, of course. She sees his "explanation" as a pathetic lie, a childish cop-out. Frankly, she doesn't care any more. Carol leaves Noel because of the lies and the danger to Anna.

Even more depressed, Noel becomes paranoid of another attack on he and his family. He starts skipping work, drinking more often and watching Carol and Anna. After a few weeks, the police pick him up and charge him with stalking. His fingerprints are taken and he's issued a restraining order. He gets home to find that he's been fired due to his absence from work.

Angry at everyone, Noel decides to blow off steam. He goes to a bar, gets drunk and picks a fight with another patron. He wins, but strains his weak wrist in the scuffle. Emboldened by this victory, he decides to find the vampire. He goes to the club that the creature owns and tries to get in, but security calls the police. He's taken into custody, escapes and runs off. He goes back to the club, armed with a Molotov cocktail — but due to his injured wrist, he misses the minion he was aiming at and accidentally kills a club patron. Horrified by his actions, he flees and gets home to find the police waiting for him.

Over the course of perhaps six months of game time, Noel goes from a happy family man to a paranoid drunk, injured and on the run from the law. It's all due to a chain of consequences and repercussions, all because he fell out of a window. Or more precisely, because he's a hunter. And once you become a hunter, you can kiss a normal life goodbye.

Keeping it Fun

So you start enforcing consequences on your players and their characters. After a few sessions, the hunters are all chronically depressed, Prozac-gulping amputees, escaping via wheelchairs from the asylum, on the run from the FBI and being hit with divorce proceedings from their spouses.

Oddly enough, the players decide they aren't having fun anymore.

There's a fine line between making things realistic, confrontational and scary, and making them pointless and hopeless. As Storyteller, you have to be careful how you use consequences. They should make the game more entertaining, not more difficult.

The Golden Rule

Keep this in mind at all times: *Enforcing consequence is not a way to punish or attack players and characters.*

It's very easy to slip into a "me-versus-them" mindset as a Storyteller and start competing with players. It's hardly your fault — it's theirs! They keep changing your storylines, attacking your cast members, ignoring your plot ideas and introducing their own material. Well, now you'll show 'em who's boss! When they get out of line, you'll slap them down with some consequences! If you don't like the way they play their characters, you'll make them go insane! Hack off their limbs in combat! Leave them sniveling and broke in a ditch with their lives ruined!

Wrong.

The aim of exploring consequences is not to give you a weapon to use against the players or to let you enforce your idea of what the characters *should* do in the game. Do any of that and you're asking your players to walk out.

The aim is to make the game more interesting, first, last and always. Consequences let you do that by making the setting more believable, by throwing different sorts of challenges at players and giving them new opportunities for roleplaying. As soon as you start using challenges *against* the players, rather than *for* them, the whole thing turns to shit.

Before focusing on the elements of a consequence in a session, it's worth asking yourself: What benefit will this have on my game? Will it make it more entertaining? Will putting Dave's character in the hospital for a few months create more new plotlines and roleplaying opportunities or will it just write the character out of the game and leave Dave pissed off and bored?

After a while, obeying the Golden Rule becomes second nature. But in the early stages, think about what the benefits of any consequences are and be certain that you enforce such repercussions for the right reasons.

Players Are a Prickly Lot

It's hard to understand, but many players don't *like* it when you change their characters on them.

From your side of the screen, it's easy to look at consequences and changes and think they're worth implementing because they spice up the game, make it realistic and inspire roleplaying. Those are all things that Storytellers should do.

Players, on the other hand, usually focus on just one thing: their characters. That's their property, over which they have control (within some constraints). If you make changes to a character — cut a hand off, make her crazy, make her boyfriend leave — the player may feel that you push the character too far from the concept that made her want to play that person in the first place. In short, the character has changed and the player doesn't like this new one as much.

It's important to try to avoid this kind of conflict because it makes the game less fun for everyone. Here are some tips to avoid pissing players off.

Use common sense. If a player likes combat and has a gung-ho pistol-packing Avenger, cutting the character's hands off removes the player's main source of enjoyment. If the player really likes exploring his character's relationships with others, having all his friends die or leave is going to annoy him. And yet, advancing the possible *threat* of friends being killed (or hands being cut off) and allowing the player to avoid the consequence through hard work creates the same effect and makes everyone happy.

Don't target personal "trouble spots." Many people feel very uncomfortable about mental illness or insanity. Some of them simply don't enjoy playing an insane character, no matter how interesting a roleplaying opportunity it might be. Someone in a wheelchair may not want to play a crippled character. A player with small children may find it unpleasant if you kill off her character's children. If you know a player will react badly to something for personal reasons, do something else to her character.

Warn them early. Before your game or chronicle starts, tell the players that **Hunter** is a horror game and bad things happen to characters in horror games. There are worse things than death in this genre. By agreeing to play the game, the players agree (on some level) to accept the risk of bad things happening to their characters. If you're up front about the risks, players shouldn't feel tricked or ripped off.

Ask permission. Seriously. If a character heads into psychologically dangerous territory, talk to the player between sessions. Say something like, "Dave, I think your character's risking some deep psychological trauma soon, and might end up gaining a derangement. Are you cool with that?" Dave might say yes, a qualified yes ("Yes, but not paranoia or manic-depression, okay?"), a qualified no ("No, but you can do other stuff to him") or a flat no. If the player says no, don't do it. But if a player keeps refusing to have *anything* bad happen to his character, do you really want him in your game?

Tricks of the Trade

Here are some simple but effective ways of keeping consequences fun for players. They're fairly logical and easy to remember — especially since they all rhyme.

Moderation. Don't inflict consequences on characters in every session. That overloads the game, weighs the characters down with problems and makes you work that much harder to keep track of everything. Your central story is the main course — consequences are gravy. Don't deliberately look for places to include consequences. Wait for appropriate events to occur because such incidents won't happen in every session. If side effects and problems crop up only every second or third session, everything will be more manageable.

Differentiation. Don't do the same thing to every character. Don't just focus on madness or injury or being hunted by the police. Characters have different methods, lives and personalities, and they get involved in different incidents. Explore consequences that make sense for a character. Don't *search* for opportunities to hang a derangement on an emotionally stable character. Wait for a natural and obvious chance to explore her marriage breakdown. Keeping things varied makes characters more individual and permits greater roleplaying opportunities (and, incidentally, can make players think, "It's a shame my character lost an eye, but at least he's not a crazy bastard like Dave's character"). If they're gloating, they're enjoying themselves.

Exploration. Never just throw a consequence out and move on. Use it in your story and make it meaningful to the player and the rest of the group. If a character gets arrested, that's a perfect chance for roleplaying the trial and the other characters' rescue attempt. If the hunters winds up in jail, it's time to run a story about confronting the monsters that prey on inmates. Always look for ways to use consequences as hooks for further plots.

Exploitation. Allow characters to actually get some benefits out of their problems if they can find any. Players are smart. They look for opportunities in almost everything that happens in a game, and you should let them use what they find. Say a Defender's wife and children leave him. Now's the chance to outfit the house as a trap-filled HQ for the group! A

paranoid character's wariness may make her more effective as a hunter; she constantly keeps watch for danger that might otherwise surprise the team. As for the hunter in the wheelchair, who's going to search a "helpless cripple" for a cache of weapons? By letting the players *use* problems, they may actually look forward to more consequences.

Reciprocation. Finally, let the characters turn the tables if they get the chance and inflict problems on their enemies. If you've demonstrated the dangers of combat, they may start aiming for head shots and setting fires, looking to inflict the same highly effective injuries on their enemies. If the group hunts a vampire that runs a nightclub and they've been hassled by the police, the characters may hit on the idea of phoning in a fake report about drug dealing to get the police to raid the club for them! When players come up with ideas like this, try to play along rather than shoot them down. When they get the idea that consequences are something that can happen to *anyone*, not just their characters, they won't think you victimize them.

Pulling Back

No one's perfect. There's no guarantee that a player will enjoy a particular change or that the game will be improved by focusing on a specific repercussion. If people stop having fun, you need to think about how to fix things.

The easiest way is to simply to drop the idea. The character's wound heals up, he gets over the bout of depression or his wife returns with the kids. It's not convincing, but it's fast and may be the best way to work with a player who strongly dislikes the way things are going. The biggest downside is that this kind of "take back" makes the game less believable for the players, who may believe you'll bail them out if they don't like story developments. Horror games need to be a bit tougher than that.

A much better solution is to allow characters (and players) to solve problems themselves. A character with a broken leg might receive physiotherapy to get back into fighting shape. A character with mental problems can get treatment. A hunter can track down her husband and ask him to come back.

The best thing about encouraging players to steer your chronicle like this is that you *still* explore the ramifications. You still kick off a subplot about a character dealing with a problem. It's just one that has a definite end, and that probably involves *more* work on the character's part than simply living with the problem.

When characters start trying to fix their problems, don't interfere. Spin stories about their quest for healing instead. There aren't many problems that can't be licked if characters are willing to go far enough. Even severed limbs can be regrown by a Visionary with the Restore edge — as long as the characters can pay the price the extremist demands. That lets you segue straight into a new plotline, one based on the consequences of past events.

Once a problematic change is repealed, try not to go back to it. That player has stated pretty definitely that she doesn't want that sort of thing happening to her character. Respect that while looking for new things to do to the character. Maybe you can even use the *memory* of that prior experience as a possible consequence. She may do everything she can to keep her husband around for fear that he'll leave again, but can she deal with the abusive partner that he becomes?

In Conclusion

Exploring the dangers and consequences of **Hunter** is tricky business — but something that deserves to be explored. It makes the game grittier, darker and scarier for your characters — and, perhaps, a bit more confrontational and discomforting (but in a good way) for your players.

When the characters are at their lowest, when everything seems stacked against them, when they're strained to the limit — that's when they're *really* achieving something, just by doing what they *have* to do. That's heroism, to use a slightly clichéd term — doing what's required, no matter the cost.

And when it's all over, some characters may decide to drop out, to give up or maybe even end it all. If a player kills off his character and says he doesn't want to play anymore, maybe things have gone too far. Maybe you need to pull back, look at the game again and try to make it more fun and less bleak for the players.

But if a player has his character commit suicide because the hunter can't go on anymore — and then the player creates a new character straight away and *demands* to get back into the game — your game is *perfect*.

In This Together

"Jesus Christ, is this place exposed enough for you?"

"Calm down, Jack. Nobody can see." Eilyssa's voice was tired but still strong.

Jack Harmon looked out the fourth-story apartment window, the lights of the town spreading out beneath him. He snorted and turned away. At least there weren't any taller buildings around that offered a sniper-shot at this so-called safe house.

His arm hurt a great deal, and Jack sat down gingerly. "What a bunch of fucking amateurs," he thought. Then he just decided to share his thoughts. "First time I've seen a goddamn rot sprout fur. Goddamn thing nearly wiped its ass with us." He looked defiantly at the others: Eilyssa fiddling with a kettle, Dorsey shaking just as bad as he had in the truck, Sue walking toward him. It was Sue who uncharacteristically broke the silence.

"The air protects us, Mister Hannibal. The earth breeds corruption within it."

"Yeah?" Jack said, with no idea what she was talking about. Sue was damn weird. She'd either spent too much time hunting — or not enough. "Or too much acid or time spent with daddy," he joked to himself. Still, when she leaned over to inspect his arm, Jack didn't mind the view.

"You think it had more kills than you do?" Dorsey piped up hesitantly, referring indirectly to the people Jack was accused of killing by the online community.

"The kid reads the Internet. Sure hope you read better than you fight. These girls got you pussy-whipped, son. You couldn't shoot straight in a whore house." Dorsey wilted. "And what's the deal with that Grant guy? He too good to have a victory drink with us? I mean, we gave that thing a hell of a scare if nothing else. Wonder if it'll still stink of gas when it grows its fur back."

"Grant's busy," Eilyssa said from the fridge. "He's got people to take care of."

Jack nodded. He could understand that.

"You have killed, Mister Hannibal?" It was Sue again, of course, looking up at him with pale skin and wide brown eyes. She, like Dorsey, wasn't talking about monsters.

"They were trying to take something from me. They...." He stopped. He didn't want to talk about it. He didn't really know what happened anymore.

"No, it is good," Sue responded. "Each man you kill is a weapon to destroy the corruption. Each woman you kill is a shield to protect your heart."

Jack blinked at her and she smiled, shyly. He tried to say something sarcastic but was at a loss.

Eilyssa approached at that moment with a beer for Jack and a coffee for Sue. "To victory," she said dryly. After a moment's silence, they all toasted.

Community Action

Humans need company for all sorts of reasons. For physical safety and cooperation. For satisfaction of various emotional needs: understanding, competitiveness, curiosity, sexual gratification. Likewise, there are innumerable reasons why groups — be they couples, families, gangs or companies — fall apart. Jealousy, fear, boredom and misunderstanding (or perhaps worse, understanding) can all take their toll. For the members

of a hunter group, these needs and problems are as real as for anyone else — except their needs and problems are tinged by the terror of the World of Darkness.

This chapter investigates the dynamics of hunter interaction, of how and why the imbued seek each other out, get along and stay together when their mutual differences might otherwise drive them apart. It also discusses ways to encourage players' characters to stay together for their own reasons and helps sidestep inter-character tensions that can drive your troupe itself apart.

Of course, most roleplaying games focus on a small, interconnected body of characters. They're the players' creations who are ultimately brought together because the players themselves are friends who sit at the same table. Small bands of protagonists are common to roleplaying because roleplaying is a social event.

And yet, the nature of **Hunter** tends to defy the conventions that bring characters together and unify them in other games. While the protagonists of many RPGs might find each other and cooperate out of mutual interests such as adventure, profit or a common racial or ethnic bond, the imbued can often lack these unifying objectives or qualities. The Heralds seem to choose people for the imbuing at random, with no bearing on economic, social, religious, political or racial origins. Different people across the world simply awaken to the fact of monsters' existence, receive means with which to respond to the beings and must decide on their own how to cope and survive thereafter. These are regular people with their own values, needs, aspirations, motives and responses to creatures. Hunters, like all people, can have extremely different beliefs and outlooks, and they can clash severely, sometimes violently, in the crucible of fear in which they're forged.

The questions is, then, why do these people get together and work together when they as individuals might not see eye to eye, respect each other or want to be in one another's very presence? What makes them become a team when they would naturally fall apart?

The one thing the imbued do have in common is that they have been imbued. They alone seem to know the truth and are faced by an unbelieving or uncaring society that doesn't seem to want to or be able to know the truth. And then there are the monsters that apparently lurk everywhere and could turn careless hunters' awareness against them. The very reality of the world can therefore override individual hunters' differences and compel them to find and take solace in each other, whether for safety's sake or simply for confirmation that the things they've seen are real and that these changed people aren't insane after all: The world really is as it seems.

When you, as Storyteller, consider ways in which players' characters might seek each other out and remain together, keep an open mind. Safety in numbers is the most obvious motive for resorting to others, even to people with whom a hunter wouldn't normally associate. Survival is instinctive, but there's another basic, more conscious and human reason why the chosen might gather — one that better reflects individual character needs.

The company of fellow hunters can replace the comfort of familiar structures to which the imbued no longer have access or no longer belong. Most people in the modern world are part of numerous hierarchies from the smallest partnership to the biggest business, from a book club to an environmental agency. Having a place in a larger social whole allows us to play a part, make money, preserve our rights, relax, assist others and simply know that we belong to something larger than ourselves. Membership and interaction help us believe that reality isn't actually some abstract, chaotic existence without meaning. Structure gives us some idea of our place in the order of things.

For hunters, all the comforts of structure and society are stripped away. When the world is revealed to be a stalking ground for monsters, the familiar hierarchies can become part of the trap, a way to keep the sleeping populace down, oblivious and enslaved. The imbued find it difficult to remain a part of the social order when other members from top to bottom prove to be bloodsuckers, man-beasts or spirits hiding in human form. The workplace becomes a minefield of abominations and hidden agendas. Church becomes an institution of blatant and monstrous hypocrisy. Even the family can prove to hide skeletons in the closet — literally. The structure in which the chosen previously found meaning is proved to lack meaning. Being imbued makes hunters outcasts.

All the needs are still there, though. All the patterns of social interaction (whether deep-seated tribal instinct or just modern hubris) try to assert themselves. Hunters as humans are still social animals. For peace of mind, they usually need to turn somewhere. Faced with these circumstances and perhaps unaware that anyone else *knows*, some chosen may withdraw into themselves. More likely, hunters who changed together, who witness code symbols or who go online to understand what's happened to them seek out as many of their own kind as they can. In so doing, they become part of a *new* hierarchy, one that replaces

the false role they played before — and that new structure can be more important than any comparatively insignificant differences such as opinion, race or religion held among fellow imbued.

The trick to getting the hunters of your game together, and to encouraging them to work together regardless of any contention, is to help them recognize the part they play in a new order — and to find some comfort in. The effort begins at character creation and proceeds throughout your game as hunters experience relationship highs and lows. If your characters and players can see their differences through, the result is an ongoing, rewarding **Hunter** chronicle.

Character Creation

Group dynamics start before roleplaying does. When players sit down to create their characters, they typically come up with diverse people, whether in terms of upbringing, social status, race, religion or goals. Different players simply have different interests about whom they'd like to play. Sometimes those characters are compatible, sometimes they aren't.

One of your first challenges as Storyteller is evaluating each of these characters — hearing players out about whom their prospective hunters are — to decide how each suits the kinds of stories you plan to tell. But you also want to consider how each character might interact with the others. A hard-working truck driver and a salt-of-the-earth construction worker might have a lot in common because they have a similar lifestyle and strive for the same kinds of goals. But a corporate magnate and a person driven to live on the street after being bankrupt might be very different, having polar-opposite attitudes about priorities, values and each other. Sometimes players even sit down together to create characters who they know will get along or rival one another.

Remember that before characters are imbued, they're regular folks. They live the same kinds of lives that we do. That means they get along well with some people, not so well with others, and horribly with yet others. Your job as Storyteller is to give the characters something collective to do so that a game can be played. That means anticipating characters' similarities and differences and playing them off each other to foster cooperation and teamwork.

The key here is not to tie the players' hands or railroad them into situations or perspectives that their characters would not normally pursue. Contention between characters, whether about musical tastes or whether to kill or spare monsters, is the very stuff of interaction. Some differences are worthwhile for creating social dynamics. Hunters might not get along completely, having opposing views over which they disagree, argue or even throw punches, but that doesn't mean those differences have to be irreconcilable. They can simply create vibrancy for your games, perhaps even inspiring the imbued to develop sympathy or mutual respect for each other. After all, if your characters and players agreed about everything, what would they have to talk about? The imbued could act with a virtual hive-mind because they'd all pursue the same goals and uphold the same values. Boring!

So, when the players create their hunters-to-be, encourage them to share and contrast ideals, interests, goals and origins with the intent of creating a dynamic group. In the end, the individuals' differences create a stronger whole.

There is a variety of ways to foster unity among hunters during character creation. Maybe characters initially seem to have nothing in common or even clash in terms of race, religion or economic standing. A white person from the inner city and a black person from the suburbs would not initially seem to share much. Indeed, there could be underlying social resentment between them. A way to unite these characters is to ensure that they have something in common beyond the superficial. Skin color and income create first impressions, but if the hunters can get past stereotypes they might discover that they have an experience, trade, hobby or dream in common. Maybe the suburbanite started out in the inner city, got out, but still remembers what living there was like and can identify with the other character. Don't be afraid to talk to players of potentially clashing characters, whether separately or together, to learn who their creations are under the surface and how they might see eye to eye. You can then put the characters in situations during play that bring out their unifying purpose, such as hunting a creature that preys upon inner-city children.

The foundation for teamwork can also be laid by ensuring that each character has unique skills or plays a role in your game that no one else does. These niches can apply to mundane life as it's brought to bear on the hunt, or they can arise from the imbuing. When players create their characters as regular people, you might request that one focus on Talents, one on Skills and one on Knowledges when choosing Abilities. Or different characters could focus on the different classes of Attributes — Physical, Social and Mental — as primary Traits. Or you could request that each player choose one Background rated 3 or higher, and no other character can have that Trait beyond 2. The process is a mechanical means by which you steer players to create characters with different fields of expertise in the mundane world, whether in terms of

physical capability, being well educated and informed or having funds on which to draw for the rest of the group's benefit. By having individual strengths, hunters-in-the-making have something to offer their fellows that characters operating on their own would lack and thus leave them vulnerable. Individuals' strengths in the regular world therefore make a hunter collective stronger, even if other differences still exist among the characters.

Unique niches or roles among characters can also be established as hunters are imbued. Each creed has a specialized purpose on the hunt, from kicking ass to resolving differences to deciding purpose. Each mentality brings its own set of edges and offers a set of possibilities on how to handle problems and face creatures. The more diverse you make the characters' creeds, the more unique each hunter is during play and the more the team as a whole needs each member. If players create characters completely before the game even begins, you can simply ask them to choose different primary Virtues or creeds. You can also request that individual players choose edges strictly along their creed paths or that they can diverge only into those paths not occupied by other characters. Perhaps a Visionary acquires divergent powers from the Innocence path if no other character in the group is an Innocent, for example.

If creeds are assigned during or after the imbuing, you can still create variety by making a point of ascribing different roles to different characters. Did a person who reacted aggressively toward a creature do so purely to strike it down or to make sure it didn't hurt anyone? The difference in motive means the difference between a potential Avenger or Defender. Did a person tell others what to do at the scene to create order out of chaos or to clarify what was going on in hopes of seeing the big picture? The difference can result in a Judge or Visionary. By asking players pointed questions about why their characters behaved as they did at the imbuing, you can dispel any vagueness between seemingly similar creeds and hope to classify characters with similar behaviors into different roles. The result can be hunters with different contributions to make on the hunt based on who they are and what they've become. As long as players are satisfied with the creeds they're assigned, your teamwork-inspired chronicle gets underway.

A different take on character specialization that can create cooperation is similarity rather than uniqueness. The hunters are created with a common strong Trait or quality, with a similar (or the same) creed, or with a universal primary Virtue. The result is a group composed of scholars, socialites, Redeemers or simply Merciful. This unifying factor can be enough for characters to find common ground and *want*, as opposed to *need*, to work together. The characters can identify and even empathize with each other because they know what the others have gone through, hope for and work toward. Their common purpose or experience binds them. Sure, characters might still have other differences, say in political affiliation, religion or nationality, but those differences are hopefully minor compared to the larger value that they all uphold. As with asking players to focus on different strengths for their characters, you can ask them what they all might have in common and request that each explore that Ability, creed or Virtue during character creation.

Less mechanical and more esoteric — but still vital to character creation — are philosophical similarities that can unite characters. Traits and stats say only so much about who characters are. Their true identities lie in what they believe in and cherish. The Medicine Ability might help characters see eye to eye based on mutual education, but a common, subjective value system that rejects abortion, vilifies Republicans or that glorifies a local sports team can also draw characters together. On paper, characters might seem diametric opposites, but if they both believe in something they can find common ground. Achieving this unity means sitting players down once again and asking questions about characters' beliefs on religion, politics or sports. When similar notes are chimed, you can ask players to emphasize those values as fundamental to character identity. When roleplaying begins, those common values come out and characters find means to cooperate rather than fight.

A last, heavy-handed option to motivate teamwork among hunters is to invite players to create characters who know each other or who are somehow related before the imbuing. Maybe they're co-workers, siblings, spouses or neighbors. Their established relationship offers a foundation on which the characters can work together in the future and hopefully weather any tensions that might arise between them.

You *can* go this last route, but it's discouraged unless you know some players who need such artificial constructs to work together. The Heralds tend to choose people for the imbuing who are psychologically, physically or emotionally capable of dealing with the truth or with a particular creature, or those people might be good candidates for carrying out some incomprehensible Messenger agenda. The creators can prod their chosen along paths that seem coincidental or natural, but they in fact lead potential imbued to the right (or wrong) times and places. The likelihood of a husband *and* wife, a boss *and*

employee or whole hockey team on tour being imbued at the same time is minimal to nonexistent. The right candidates for the imbuing are simply so rare or widespread that it's very rare for them to already know each other, not to mention be ushered to the same imbuing scene (or even to separate ones). Hopefully there are other less contrived means by which you can encourage hunter cooperation than this one.

Drawing Together

The first days and weeks after the imbuing are trying times for newly awakened hunters. They discover the enormity of the lie they've lived all their lives. They learn how widespread and perhaps how insidiously placed creatures are throughout society. They learn how severely their loved ones and people in general are jeopardized every day, and no one else seems to realize it. Add to that the trials of coming to grips with the knowledge that things-which-should-not-be exist. Is it all real, or is a burgeoning hunter mad? And how can these bizarre capabilities be rationalized or even comprehended?

Most people under these circumstances would throw themselves into denial. None of it can be real. It's all imagined or a delusion. But if you're going to play **Hunter**, you can't allow the characters that kind of luxury. You have to confront them with the dangers of the world and inspire them to get out and do something about the monstrosities. That means motivating players' characters to search each other out and try to work together, even if those other people would normally be intolerable.

Forming a team of recently imbued probably occurs over a matter of time, rather than on the heels of the imbuing scene. Regular folks have just witnessed something horrific, have perhaps heard what seem to be disembodied voices, have performed terrifying acts and might be left with a seeming corpse at their feet — killed by their own hands. What's a genuine, plausible, human reaction to such events? Run? Shit your pants and then run? Hide? Go straight home, lock all the doors and hope no one followed you? These all seem pretty reasonable, right? So is it likely that the recently imbued would really get to know one another right after the event?

"Hey, you swing a mean crowbar. My name is Ted."

Not very convincing, is it?

If you really, really want the newly imbued to learn about each other right away and get group dynamics started immediately, one option is to have the characters flee the scene together. Maybe there's only one escape route and they must all take it. Perhaps a Visionary or Judge has just enough presence of mind to realize that he knows someplace where everyone can hide till the storm blows over — and they can coincidentally get to know each other. Or maybe the cops catch everyone and put them in the same holding cell — to ultimately be released because no evidence can be found to incriminate anyone at the scene. In the meantime, the characters can share what they experienced and disclose who they are.

The group "get to know you" means that all characters have good reason to follow along, and that it's true to personality to follow a "mob mentality" under such confusing circumstances. If that's the course your players take without your prompting, let it ride. Some characters might even flee together and learn who each other is while others escape individually. Let it happen if that's what the players want. There are ways of encouraging single characters to join the whole once again.

In the aftermath of the imbuing, characters probably try to return to their normal lives and pretend that nothing ever happened — it was all a dream. *Those things just could not have happened.* This mentality is a defense mechanism against confronting the truth of the world, whether in an effort to cling to sanity or a mechanism imposed by monsters to hide their existence. A game about disparate people in denial isn't much fun, though. You want to encourage them to come out of their shells to form a team.

There are all kinds of ways to motivate tentative hunters to take action. They can see more monsters on the streets and learn how thoroughly threatened humanity is. They can see defenseless people preyed upon and resolve to respond. They can realize or witness friends or loved ones endangered or attacked. Put pretty much whatever each character holds dear at risk, and he or she will take action to save it, stop the creatures or make a difference. After all, the characters did it once. It's in their spirit. That's why they're the imbued.

But there's a difference between getting the hunt underway and getting hunters together. They might operate on their own at first, but their collective mission — and your game — doesn't really begin until they work as a unit. In all probability, characters don't want to start hunting on their own right away. There's too much about this new world, themselves and the old world they've left behind that's confusing or unknown. Facing all these questions *and* monsters is likely too much to bear. Many hunters therefore go in search of answers and signs that others might understand them. That way the imbued can confirm that everything they've seen and done is real.

The best way to let hunters get started and find each other is to invite players to ask how they respond to everything that's happened. Let players choose what their characters do to answer the questions that haunt them. Now that the imbued know there's a hidden world, trying to understand it means investigating it directly, as opposed to looking for answers about it in the world they knew before. Monsters have existed secretly for ages. Mundane folklore and encyclopedic "information" about creatures may hint at some truths about creatures, but it's all largely misunderstanding, misconception or miscommunication on humans' part, or straight-up misleading on monsters' part — false "knowledge" planted by them to make it easy for people to overlook or dismiss creatures' existence. Conventional research on monsters can therefore have little to no results.

So, hunters have very few resources to draw upon when stepping into the secret world. For the most part, all they probably have is what they've experienced during and since the imbuing. If and when characters come to this realization, there are a few routes they can take.

Hunters can look for the people who they believe were also at the "scene of the crime." Those people may be completely unknown — no names or numbers were taken. And yet, returning to the scene is an effective way of finding those people. They undergo the same trauma and may also be inclined to forego their regular lives in the short term to survey, wander or haunt the area where it all happened. When two or more characters do the same, they're bound to find each other, even if it's simply based on suspicious behavior: "I've seen you hanging around here for three days now. What are you doing here."

The imbued can encounter code symbols that you introduce to the game, and the characters intuitively and inexplicably know what they mean. Maybe one of the players' characters even feels compelled to paint a symbol in a public place, without knowing why, and then feels like waiting for a result (beyond charges of vandalism). The symbol for "meeting place" or "allies" is particularly useful and is likely to draw surveillance, as above, from other hunters who don't know who posted the sign or when they're supposed to meet, but a rendezvous is implied and impending.

The fact that hunters spot other monsters after the imbuing can also lead to contact with fellow chosen. A daring character might take the initiative of trailing a creature she sees, and could even watch it over a matter of days. She may not have the confidence or desire to confront it just yet, but is on its tail. Now enter another character who does the same. Sooner or later, the hunters may run into each other. Maybe one feels motivated to post a sign for "danger" near the creature's lair and is spotted doing so by another spy. Or one character gets up the nerve to face the thing and unwittingly has an ally in the wings.

There's also the option of characters doing research online to understand their condition, thus stumbling across hunter-net or a similar website. This course is great for showing characters that they're not alone and that monsters are real. It does a disservice to your game early on, however, in that it exposes a newly imbued hunter to all kinds of possible truths about his new life that he has not yet discovered under his own power. Some of the promise of terror and anxiety of exploring reality is lost when it's splayed all over a computer screen instead. Learning about the hunt online also doesn't really help your novice imbued find would-be team mates. Sure, characters learn that other hunters exist, but they're scattered all over the world. They're not necessarily down the street or across town. So the Web offers little help in getting a hunter group established beyond perhaps offering advice on how to actually go out and find other hunters. (See all the above possibilities for ideas on doing that.)

Allowing characters to find hunter-net early on is therefore advised only if players are otherwise stumped about how to find their "friends." The site is better reserved as a means to understanding what the world is really about after characters have faced a few horrors on their own and come to realize how vulnerable they really are. It's pretty simple to explain why characters' initial Internet searches don't turn up any freaky web sites. The characters simply don't find them among the thousands of sites that various search terms draw up — the Heralds don't think they are ready to find any sites yet.

Also bear in mind that all these suggestions for characters forming a team can apply equally to finding others from different imbuings or others who have already been hunting for a while. When hunters go in search of someone who understands them, they don't have to encounter the very same people who were present at their own change. In fact, a character could have been imbued all alone and not know that anyone is like her. Putting up or coming across code symbols is an effective means for burgeoning but unfamiliar hunters to find each other, just as it can be used to get the newly imbued in touch with existing hunters. The same can be said for different characters who watch or interact separately with the same monsters. Characters don't have to have been imbued at the same time to join forces. A shared imbuing is simply an easy mechanism for founding a group.

Likewise, novice hunters encountering experienced ones is a good way to introduce new blood to an existing group and chronicle and is a good way to immerse the newcomer into her new reality.

Getting Along

So your hunter gang is together and can answer the call collectively. But is finding fellow imbued enough to keep them together? Meeting people is one thing, but what if alarming differences emerge among them that could drive them apart?

A real-world corollary is being assigned to a group project at work or school and discovering that one of your partners is an absolute ass, whether socially, mentally or in terms of work ethic. The project might be extremely important and is bigger than your problem with that person. But what if your grievance intensifies because this guy becomes worse, harasses you, is completely negligent or claims responsibility for your work? In the real world, you have teachers or bosses to whom to appeal. This is the World of Darkness. You're fighting monsters, not trying to get a raise or make a grade. It's life or death. There are no higher courts to appeal to. And in this case, your group is perhaps the only one you know about. Without it, you're on your own. You're a small fry made aware of predators, pulled from your school and dumped into a shark tank. Without someone — anyone — to help you, no matter how reprehensible or intolerable, you're done for.

Fear is therefore a major tool to help characters realize the importance of ongoing teamwork and cooperation. It's easy to drive the point home; you can shepherd a hunter back into the flock when he tries to go rogue. Once he's on his own, confront him with a mob of zombies that he could take on "if only the guys were here." Or maybe he finds himself in a situation in which he would normally call upon a buddy's skills, say to pick a lock, but now he has to make do without and improvising puts his life in danger.

But there are other subtle ways of showing characters and players what the odds are of surviving alone. The importance of a combination of edges brought to bear by different hunters is hard to ignore, even if one of those hunters is a complete bastard. Where would individual chosen be without that teamwork? Or imagine that monsters learn the identity of a hunter and go after her family. Her kids are at daycare, her husband is at work, and the locations are miles apart. A simple phone call to say "get out of there" doesn't suffice; it just confuses people who can't understand the truth. So whom does a solo hunter choose to save? Fortunately, one with partners can call upon them to save her whole family. Or if a long and exhausting hunt leads a single character to her target, who it turns out is in league with someone in a position of political power, which one does the character pursue when the two part ways: the thing she's stalked all this time or the political puppet she could easily destroy? If the hunter had allies, both targets could be struck down. As it is, she must decide which is allowed to continue wreaking havoc.

Hunters also tend to join their fellows and stick with them in search of answers. At first, the imbued want to know if they're insane. No one believes their stories of monsters, so they suspect they might be going mad. Finding other chosen validates what individual characters have feared most all along: that monsters do exist, that the world really is as it seems and that the vast majority of people are oblivious to it all. Remaining with other hunters therefore offers peers to understand and by whom to be understood.

But accepting that the world is monstrous is just the first step in coming to grips with being awakened. Continuing the hunt leads to deeper questions about where monsters come from, why they exist, who or what creates hunters and why, and what the future hold for the world? Without accumulated cultural knowledge about the truth, all that hunters can learn is what they glean for themselves. If a hunter goes solo and has to devote all his time and energy to surviving, protecting people and acting against a few creatures, he doesn't have much chance to answer the big questions that haunt him. Meanwhile, imbued who pool their time, resources and efforts can investigate or interrogate, read theories posted online or simply contemplate the issues at hand while still attending to their duties as hunters. Remaining a member of a team can therefore allow a character to seek answers to his "why's."

You can teach lone-wolf characters this lesson by having a hunter-net poster announce that he has valuable information about the nature of monsters and that he will post it at an appointed time. Perhaps Witness1 is involved and agrees that it's of such paramount importance that the message will appear only once and will be stricken from the archives and servers within 10 minutes of being disseminated. Witness1 fears that should monsters discover that the imbued know this information, the results would be disastrous, so he accepts the risk of leaving some imbued in the dark while others are informed. A solo hunter intends to be online at the appointed time, but when the moment comes, she's indisposed with a spirit and misses what could have been the opportunity of her lifetime. Had she worked

with allies, they might have collected the information for her or she might have turned to them to learn it after the fact, but as it is, her distance from other chosen leaves her at a loss.

And yet, hunters can work together, fight together and perhaps even live together, but they don't necessarily have to like it. Sooner or later, the differences between them become frustrations, divisions and maybe even rifts. Contrasting objectives, personal disagreements and mounting anxiety can combine for explosive social effects. If you want your chronicle to continue, you probably want to show characters how to close the gaps between them and settle their differences.

Most of the time, tension among characters is good. It makes for realistic people and genuine roleplaying. As said previously, no one gets along all the time, especially when lives hang in the balance. You want some discomfort or some animosity to lurk behind the action. The secret to achieving this tension while preserving unity is to put disputes into perspective when more important issues arise. You can, for example, distract the hunters with the emergence of something suitably hard to ignore such as a marauding zombie or spirit. If characters can work together to deal with the thing, their own conflicts probably aren't that important by comparison.

Distractions only work for so long, however, before they become repetitious. An extended solution to character grievances is to work them into the game — another set of obstacles to be understood and overcome. In **Hunter**, a heated conflict between characters can manifest and be dealt with quite literally. Seductive enemies such as vampires can trick characters into believing misguided ideas. Mages can manipulate events in ways that inspire characters to blame or resent each other. Spirits can take this manipulation further by encouraging and feeding upon contentious emotions. A variety of monster types also can influence hunters' minds and wills directly when the chosen are not alert and on the defensive (when Conviction is not active). When hunters feud, monsters can take advantage of the opportunity for their own ends, and you can demonstrate that danger when creatures profit from the struggle. A bloodsucker might even control a hunter from afar and make her do his bidding against her allies. If the imbued intend to overcome and survive, they have to set their squabbles aside and keep their emotions under control and their wits about them. The hunters may have had a genuine difference at one point, but monstrous intervention has intensified it and made it a genuine threat to be dispatched — along with the creature.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the value of teamwork among hunters is to emphasize the importance of trust. If two quarrelling characters can still find it within themselves to go out of the way to help or save one another, all disagreements lose importance and pale by comparison. Imagine a Redeemer and Avenger who have a history of heated debates about how to deal with monsters. Thus far, their fears of working alone and their need for socialization has kept them as teammates of a larger group. But tensions mount between them and threaten to compromise the group as a whole. When the Redeemer goes to meet with a new monster contact, the Avenger follows along with the intent of proving that the thing is dangerous. It actually is and plans to lead the Redeemer along until it preys upon her. The Avenger barges in just as the creature reveals its true colors. The Zealot saves the pardoner's life, but gets in over his head against the monster, and is in turn rescued by the Redeemer. The two characters have maintained a long-standing feud, both with merit to their arguments, but in the end their common interests and alliance are more important than proving the other wrong. The characters demonstrate sacrifice for each other and prove that they can each be trusted — revelations that make former disagreements seem paltry.

The trick to putting an end to infighting is therefore to dupe contrary characters into putting their differences aside to help each other. Maybe one character grabs a falling partner and they must work together to get to safety. A fire could harm and trap contentious characters and they must lean on each other to see them both through. Basically, lure fighting characters into a situation, set off some kind of emergency or disaster and force them to cooperate to get out of it. They might even continue their struggle for a little while during the experience, but that argument probably fades into the background to be replaced by mutual need, trust and respect.

The Extended Family

In time, as your characters survive encounters with creatures, win some victories and suffer some defeats, their sphere of awareness about the supernatural world might broaden. They could learn some truths about monsters, discover some things about what they have become, arrive at theories about the Messengers, learn about other hunters online or even meet some imbued from other locales. These progressive characters can be considered "seasoned," and may even show the signs of wear under the stresses of the hunt.

Such experience and awareness creates opportunities for characters. Sure, they've gotten this far with the imbued they know, but what's stopping them from moving on to find more compatible partners? What *in the setting of your game* motivates these hunters to stay together rather than range far and wide based on what they've learned, breaking up the established format of your chronicle? What encourages them to stay on the home front when new vistas open up to them?

First and foremost, remember that hunters are still just regular folks in irregular circumstances. They might wage a secret struggle against monsters, but they could still have homes, families, friends and lives to which they cling. Picking up and going elsewhere means abandoning everything the imbued still hold dear from their previous lives. Starting over elsewhere also puts a hunter at a disadvantage on his new turf in that he may not know the mundane lay of the land, let alone the supernatural situation of the place. In a way, initiating the crusade in a new locale is akin to being imbued all over again, only this time a hunter has a *bit* better idea of what to expect.

For your purposes, you want to make the characters' home turf still have value to the players and therefore their characters. If the hunters have a long-standing antagonist whom they've struggled with, picking up and moving elsewhere or joining another group of hunters takes the pressure off that target. It's allowed breathing space or might even be able to strike at remaining hunters or their families while certain characters are absent or preoccupied. You can make the point by taking advantage of any distractions among the characters, especially when they entertain notions of spreading the movement or recruiting abroad. While those imbued are distracted, one or more characters' lives are assaulted. Hunters don't have to be Defenders to want to protect what little they have left in life, even after they've gained so much experience.

Monsters might also come to characters rather than the other way around. The hunters might wipe out a nest of vampires in their town and finally believe their work is done. It's not. Another threat arises or moves in to take advantage of the power vacuum, and the team finds itself up against a whole new threat. Can this one be defeated with the same tricks that worked against the old one? Are these creatures susceptible to the same weaknesses? Can these beings be reasoned with at all? No matter what the answers to these questions are, the seasoned characters find themselves remaining together for the same reasons that united them in the first place.

Meeting other imbued doesn't necessarily occur peacefully, either. An expedition to locate and communicate with other hunters can be downright violent when their agendas conflict with the characters' own. Suddenly any old teammate rivalries back home seem welcoming. At least a hunter knows where she stands with the imbued she's run with for some time.

And then there's the threat of rival hunters, or another similar group, arriving in an existing group's town with the intent to deal with local monsters in their own ways. The imbued camps might find common ground at first, but you can soon trigger "us" versus "them" mindsets when the new arrivals start undoing the established camp's efforts, or perhaps even attacking monsters with whom the seasoned protagonists have established understandings. There's no better way to forge bonds among characters than to assail them from all sides with representations of what they could become if they "went bad."

Finally, bystanders can be used to show even veteran imbued what's important in their lives and the hunt. When experienced hunters gain higher and higher Virtue ratings and start to become unhinged, focusing more and more on the hunt itself than on their former lives, bystanders can stand in stark contrast to such misdirection. Forced to remain in touch with their mundane origins because they are granted no gifts, bystanders represent what hunters were when they were first changed: scared yet resolute to do something about the world. Bystanders don't get to see any more than a glimmer of what's really out there, but they know that things are not as they seem. They therefore tend to do everything they can to ensure the safety of friends and family and can offer their services on the hunt when they don't even have the tools to help fight it. If self-involved or contentious imbued are shown bystanders as selfless, contributing role models, the hunters may re-evaluate their intentions and try to reconcile who they've become with who they used to be. Often times, that means coming back into the fold of an established hunter group and giving it revitalized purpose.

Getting Out

"Hann... uh, Jack."

The man turned, scowling, two heavy cans of paint in his hands. His eyes focused briefly on Dorsey, then scanned the aisles rapidly. "Hey, it's the straight shooter. What do you want?"

"I just, you know, saw you here and thought I'd say 'hey.'"

"Found out how to make napalm from paint thinner or something?"

"No. Just passing by."

Jack turned back to the home-decoration display.

"Grant's acting really weird, you know?" Dorsey continued. "Like he's going to do something stupid. Sue was talking to his kids or something — I don't know. She's really smart, you know, but it's like she's in another world sometimes. Anyway, Sue thinks something bad is gonna happen and I was wondering...."

"Nope."

"You can—"

"Nope."

"Look, this is important. We've gotta stick—"

"Kid, what part of 'fuck off' don't you understand? Sort out your own goddamn problems."

Dorsey fell silent for a moment. When he finally spoke again, his voice broke despite himself. All he said was, "How?"

Jack looked at him intently. "You want to know how I survive on my own? How I keep my shit together?"

Dorsey nodded.

"Fiber."

Jack laughed and made his way to the cashier.

Sometimes it just doesn't work.

Humans may have a deep-seated need for company, but they also have a long and inglorious history of betraying, lying to and beating the crap out of each other. If there's potential for group conflict in your game, there's a chance it can become too much to bear for members and the best solution may be to walk away.

Sometimes it's not such a bad thing when one or more hunters leave the group. In fact, it can lead to new story possibilities. When group cohesion becomes an obviously artificial construct — extremely contentious characters stay together because the players are all still part of the same troupe — realism suffers and all character relations are bound to be strained. A separation, on the other hand, can intensify the verisimilitude and release a little tension. Whether this development occurs to cut losses and make the best of an unexpectedly divisive group or is another configuration in the grand scheme of your chronicle, you need to know how to keep the game running.

Former group members may try to find a new team or may go it alone. Your chronicle might even have started with individually imbued hunters and the remnants of a previous (perhaps violently disbanded) group. Some Storytellers can run chronicles with multiple sub-groups diverging and reforming in all sorts of strange ways. If that's you, you probably won't have any problems doing it again now. Most, however, find the rigors of the game tough enough when keeping track of one team and its orbiting cast.

If a player's character departs and the player doesn't want to roleplay her anymore, you can turn that character into one of your own, keeping her as an occasional ally of the group, turning her into a rival or simply making her ongoing existence known when the hunters hear reports of her exploits elsewhere. The last option reminds players and characters that the hunt occurs all over the world, not just on the team's turf. Events that occur elsewhere and that involve other hunters can impact the characters. Say a distant witch coven is broken up and its scattered members arrive in the characters' town, seeking shelter. Now the band of witches is the characters' problem, and the problem intensifies when the hunters' old ally — a player's former character — was the one to break the witches and now arrives in pursuit of them.

A hunter's life may proceed after she is no longer enacted by one of the players. If you inherit an imbued who leaves the team, she can go elsewhere and still pursue her "career." As occurs with many chosen who become immersed in the mission, she may start to lose touch with what was important in life before and become erratic, obsessed or deranged. When she reappears before her old teammates, say to pursue those same witches, she might have gone off the deep end and have inexplicable motives or even plans that involve her old "friends." How the players' current characters respond is based on their own identities, but the recurring character provides an object lesson of what can happen when the imbued take the hunt too far, or perhaps illustrates what's inevitable for the players' creations in time. The player who created this one-time character is certainly surprised by what has transpired for his former hunter. And what better reason for imbued to want to remain a team than to perform checks and balances in case any single member goes too far?

Another option when hunters break up or members leave the group is to run solo or small-group stories for a while. Not only is this kind of storytelling a change of pace for you and the players, it gives the hunters a chance to see how the other half lives. Games focused on individual imbued can teach them how truly challenging — and deadly — it is to answer the call on one's own. The section "Hunting Alone," **Hunter Players Guide**, p. 179, discusses all kinds of ways in which hunters' personal crusades may unfold and collapse. The hardships of such a mission are bound to teach outcasts that things really weren't so bad back in the team, especially when a solo hunter suffers repeated defeats, incurs injuries and taps all his funds to make it night to night. When characters discover that the grass really isn't greener on the other side of the fence, they might be ready to resume activities with their former teammates and re-join the group, determined to make to work this time.

Although it means more work, running solo characters for a wile can be an entertaining distraction from your usual game. You might even plot out a series of stories for various characters that teaches them the value of teamwork through hard knocks. The plotline resolves with the characters pursuing different leads toward the same creature, or the characters' efforts intersect at some point once they've learned their lesson. The value of cooperation is also enforced when each character has something to share about the common mission that the others could not discover on their own. When the individuals pool their information or capabilities once again, it's their combined might that allows them to accomplish their goals, and the team is reborn.

The Big Picture

Whether hunters know it or not, their ability to work together and face a common foe is a microcosm of their larger mission. They may not be able to put a finger on it, but all imbued answer the call with an ultimate objective to free the world and humanity from the supernatural. They might start with the workplace or their own neighborhoods, but these objectives are essentially baby steps toward a wider liberation. Neighborhoods lead to whole cities, cities lead to countries and countries lead to the world. Hunters actually start to recognize this bigger picture as they get further into the hunt and have allies who support them, freeing them from focusing on saving family or putting down individual creatures. They're allowed some respite to ponder larger issues such as "What are the Messengers?" and "What do monsters really want?"

If hunter teammates can resolve their differences, work together, accomplish their personal objectives and start to resolve group goals, they become role models. The group as a whole becomes more important than any single member and its collective agenda overrides any members' desires. If society itself is to be saved, it also needs to be shown that the needs of the many are more important than any single person's. The only way to free humanity is therefore to free hunters from their own prejudices, inhibitions and selfishness. Imbued who can accomplish these feats and work as an effective team have the promise to rise to greater heights. Imbued who fall to infighting, back-stabbing and one-upmanship are doomed to more of the same. They

will never accomplish greater goals and will always be under monsters' collective thumb — if not made easy prey because of their partisan practices.

If hunters in your group fail to see the rewards of working together and cooperating, they will always live with a siege mentality and will always wage a guerrilla war that wins them little in the end. Hunters' greatest strength is each other, but that strength can be harnessed only if the imbued find the wisdom to realize it. By showing characters the value of teamwork, you show them the path to defeating the supernatural, once and for all. They simply need to be willing to walk it.

Storytelling Tragedy

It takes a bizarre combination of desperation, fatalism and sleep deprivation to be tied up in a chair and still find the strength to laugh. So, when middle aged, overweight Stuart laughed at his bloodsucker captor, the smug grin was wiped from the vampire's face.

"What's so funny?" the creature called Cass demanded.

Stuart wavered slightly from exhaustion. "I'm still amazed how we did it. We barely knew a damn thing about you—"

"Bullshit!" Cass interrupted. "You knew enough to find us. You knew enough to get the whole damn police force after us. You knew enough to do it right before dawn. Do you even know how many of us you got?"

Stuart shook his head. "I don't know anything—"

"Goddamn enough! You know a whole lot more than you let on." Cass paused to collect himself. "But here's what you don't know. You've done me a hell of a favor. You killed my enemies. All that's left of my group now are the loyal ones, the ones I got out of there. It'll be nothing to find new help, — to get more muscle — and then I'm back in business. You know... I went by your house the other day. Saw your son. Good looking kid. Maybe he'll be the first one to join up.

To his own surprise, Stuart laughed again. "Took high-school drama, eh?" Cass didn't flinch, so Stuart kept talking, almost without knowing what he was saying. "It doesn't matter any more. You say I know what's going on. The only thing I know right now is you're holding me prisoner. You'll probably kill me. Your threats can't affect me if I'm already dead. You know there's something different about me and the others, right? We know it, too. But do you know why it happens, why we change?" Stuart paused to see if Cass knew anything, if he showed any sign of recognition. The vampire's expression never wavered. "We don't know why it happens, either. It just does, and it keeps happening. Do you follow where I'm heading here?"

Cass stared, quietly encouraging Stuart to continue spilling his guts.

"There are more of us. Lots more. More than you and your friends. I got to you. When the others get to you, you're done. You can stop me, but the rest will just keep coming."

"Shut up," Cass finally snarled.

"No," Stuart announced defiantly. "You say we knew what we were doing last night. The one thing I knew for sure was that going up against you was going to cost me everything. I could deal with whatever might happen to me, but I wouldn't let you hurt my family. You may know where I live. Maybe you saw my son, but you'll never see him again. Right now, I don't even know where they are. That was the deal I made with the others. I'd go up against you, but they'd see to it that my family was safe, no matter what happened to me. So you can kill me, but you'll never beat me. You'll never beat us!"

Hunters call it the Most Dangerous Game. By playing it, they don't just take chances with their lives. They throw their lives away, guaranteeing their own destruction at the hand of a creature or its pawns at some point down the line. They can't stand up against a world populated and controlled by monsters without knowing it will cost them everything, sooner or later. Believing anything otherwise means living a lie, a different one from that regular folks still lead. And yet, the imbued go up against the creatures of the night, despite the price that they'll eventually pay. They have to because if they don't, who will? The imbued therefore have a gripping, archetypal role: the doomed hero.

But such a narrative image is a bitch to achieve and make fun in a storytelling game. Your players expend time, creativity and energy in your game. They become their characters, even if only for a little while each week, and expect some kind of pay off for their effort. They want to have fun. They want to live lives larger than their own. So how do they feel when their characters are killed randomly after a tortured existence in a war they didn't understand? It worked in *All Quiet on the Western Front*, but it doesn't necessary work in roleplaying or in **Hunter**. Players would, quite understandably, feel cheated. They invest all that energy in creating, developing and playing a fleshed-out character, and he's killed in a random attack or accident? Not fair!

And yet, it's hardly fair to the mood and themes of **Hunter** to have each story end in success, monsters vanquished and heroes victorious once again. It's **Hunter**, not a James Bond movie. Somehow, evil has to be given credit, made competent and be allowed to pose a serious threat. The game should inspire paranoia and desperation. The characters are underdogs, after all.

Somehow, we need to navigate between the Scylla and the Charybdis of this situation, giving your chronicle an appropriately lethal and dangerous edge while making the game rewarding, despite the fact that the players' characters will most likely be brought down at some point.

Dissecting the Story

Let's look at the *All Quiet on the Western Front* example again and try to figure out exactly why it's approach to tragedy doesn't work in a **Hunter** game. The movie is about a young German man who enters the trenches in WWI. His existence on the frontlines is miserable, and the only solace he finds is making sketches when he can. Ironically, it's in trying to get a better look at a subject (a butterfly or bird, depending on the version you watch) in no-man's land that he's killed by a random bullet.

First of all, there's no reward for characters in *All Quiet*. Indeed, that's the very point of the anti-war film as a genre. War is pointless and it achieves no results except suffering for everyone concerned. On it's own, that's a theme very compatible with **Hunter**, and a piece of **Hunter** fiction could make a lot of use of it. But it's a challenging theme to achieve in an actual game because the players don't feel *rewarded* for their efforts. So even in the darkest, most tragic story, we still need some kind of reward for players. Put that down as our first basic story requirement.

Reward holds true for just about any game. But *All Quiet* is a tragic story, and that's what we're aiming for here, right? So something horrible still needs to happen, and it needs to be central to your story — a loved one is harmed or killed, a motivating goal is failed utterly, a home is burned to the ground. Would players object to something horrible happening to their characters, and it being the focus of a game? Let's hope not. That's what the World of Darkness is all about!

What could really get them upset, however, is calamity strikes without a seeming reason. Sure, random nastiness is theoretically part of the World of Darkness, but if a player understands why some horrible fate befalls her character, it's easier to acknowledge it as part of the story, rather than if it seems to occur arbitrarily. In classic Shakespearian tragedy, a horrible end always occurs because of the hero's own actions. She is responsible for the tragedy that occurs. Although they may not consciously realize it, players need the same connection be-

tween personal action and ill fate to digest such an end in a game. They need to know that the worst happened because their character tried and failed or failed to try at all. Otherwise, a random loss seems hollow (which it may well be, but many players still rail against that kind of narrative).

Ideally, players also need to know that while tragedy may befall their hunters, something good still comes of it. The reward may not apply to the characters directly, but it might benefit their friends, allies or the world in general. The classic example is dying for a cause so that others may win or surviving or finding inspiration in the loss. Players ultimately want games to be satisfying. Having a character sacrifice himself for the betterment of the whole is certainly a means to a satisfying end.

So there are our requirements for tragic storytelling. We need a terrible defeat such as a death (whether of one of or all of the characters or of someone close to them), a humiliation or an immeasurable personal loss. But that defeat has to have a reason or logic to it, which is the focus of the story. And finally, we need a reward that makes suffering the tragedy worthwhile, something that lets the characters know, perhaps even as they die, that they did their best in the face of overwhelming odds or that some good can still come of their punishment.

Okay, but why go to all this effort, you might ask. If you play a lot of **Hunter** games, making some of them tragic is one hell of a way to keep your players on their toes. The good guys don't win every time, and they never know when their number will be up. Familiarity breeds contempt, and if the players expect to come out on top every time, the uncertainty and fear on which **Hunter** thrives is absent from your games. Mix it up. Keep your players guessing. Tragedy also has pathos. One of the reasons that tragedies remain so popular in all forms of literature and film is that death and loss bear meaning, as defining points of existence and as facts we're all forced to deal with. Finally, there's the rousing appeal of the underdog in a triumphant tragedy — even dying, the hero fights to do everything she can for her cause. It's the very stuff of **Hunter**.

Beginning of the End

There are two basic ways that a tragic story can be told. You can let the dice fall where they may and subject players' hunters to the cruelty of fate. You pull no punches and inflict whatever harm onto the characters that strict observation of the rules demands. You can go this route and traumatic events can occur this way, but it isn't always very satisfying from a storytelling perspective. Hunters are hurt at random and seemingly without purpose. Your stories get under way, but may not finish because pure numbers dictate how events progress. It should come as no surprise that this book advocates tragic storytelling with a more hands-on, directional approach.

The best way to create epic games with disastrous results is to plan hunters' defeat from the very beginning. We're not saying you should create a railroad plot that forces characters toward a hideous demise (that would fall into the "unrewarding game that's likely to get you lynched" category), but there's nothing wrong with stacking the deck.

Start with the tragedy itself. What is it? What's the nature of the characters' loss? When your players create their characters, ask for convincing, involved origins and identity profiles. Make sure you (and your players) know exactly what's important to the hunters and what would hurt them if they lost it. Physical threats are obvious choices, such as to family, possessions, friends or the characters' lives. But less tangible losses also work. If a character has a strong faith, it can be shaken to the core. A hunter might believe in heaven. So how does he rationalize the irrefutable existence of ghosts, especially if his own friends or family come back from beyond the grave? Does a hunter have a dream like marrying his girlfriend? Shatter it. Make it utterly impossible to ever achieve.

Whatever fate you intend to befall characters, don't be squeamish. It's easy to worry, "If I do this to Dave's character, he's gonna hate me for it. It'll just discourage everyone from giving me character hooks in future games," or even, "He'll think I'm singling him out." Don't undermine your effort before it gets started. As long as you introduce a tragic fate for a character, and you bring it about for the greater good of the story (not out of spite or revenge), that fact should shine through and the players should understand. You can even sound players out in advance to learn how they'd take epic losses. A player may not abide her character being killed for the sake of a story, but she might accept the loss of her character's children and is willing to roleplay *that*.

Example: *Barry, working on his next* **Hunter** *chronicle, decides that while the last one was a lot of fun, it ended entirely too happily for his liking. He wants this one to be dark and nasty. He asks players to make characters who have already been imbued, with creeds and edges already selected, but he doesn't give them any guidance beyond that, hoping to capitalize on the friction such a ramshackle group could create. It works. Valerie*

creates a bitter, vengeance-driven amateur sportswoman named Toni who lost her boyfriend to a leech. Sarah, meanwhile, creates Michelle, a gentle college student and Redeemer, whose former lecturer was turned into a monster and whom she seeks to heal. Seeing an opportunity, Barry decides these two monsters are one and the same, thereby setting Toni and Michelle against each other. To complete the tragedy, he hopes to arrange events so that Toni can have her revenge if she pursues it, but at Michelle's expense. Betrayal, failure and death. Perfect.

Barry asks the players if they don't mind a gritty, hard-edged game this time around. The players agree and are intrigued by the possibilities of what's to come. They're prepared for tragedy.

Method to the Madness

The next step toward creating a tragic story — and one that you make possible from the beginning — is to prepare reasons why the event happens. Remember, the reasons behind events are key to players' acceptance of tragedy in your game. If they can accept that a failed effort or even a bad die roll has terrible results, they can probably accept a dark fate in your chronicle.

The idea here is to let the players provide a disaster for you. Don't forcibly push the characters over the precipice. Stand them on the edge, give them reason to jump and they'll plummet all by themselves. Causes of tragedies are usually very simple but powerful human emotions such as greed, love, laziness or pride. *Romeo and Juliet* barrels toward its fatal end because of the ill-fated love (and blindness) of its protagonists and because of the mutual hatred of its supporting cast. *Macbeth* trades purely in greed for power.

You don't necessarily have to create intricate plots or come up with convoluted reasons for tragedy. You can simply play to characters' vices. When the characters take the bait, they bring about their own end. If they don't have any vices, encourage strengths to be played over the top so that they become weaknesses. If a Defender truly loves his wife and wouldn't ever let a bad thing happen to her, throw some threats at her to flame his protective desire, and then drop a few hints about infidelity to quickly turn protective love into possessive jealousy. It worked for Iago in *Othello*.

Example: *Barry believes that the heart of the tragedy he's trying to create lies in the vampire's betrayal of Michelle and Toni's failure to protect her. He suspects that the differences between the characters' outlooks, as a Redeemer and an Avenger, can be used to divide them and make tragedy possible. He intends to create a rift between the hunters by introducing another monster, one of the walking dead, the fate of which the hunters disagree upon. He hopes the characters' difference will isolate them, setting up the final scene as Toni storms off and Michelle goes to her bloodsucker "friend" for solace. The reasons for Barry's tragedy are in place: Michelle's misplaced compassion, Toni's quick anger, and the inability to resolve their differences.*

As in the example, one great way to cultivate a tragic flaw in your group is to encourage players to make clashing, incompatible characters who are likely to argue rather than work as a team. It's very simple to do. Just don't give the players any direction during character creation. Throw everything that's been said about creating characters as a team out the window, and watch as they all follow their own agendas in the game. The primary reason for the characters' loss is there: They can't work together. But keep an eye out for the crucial moment at which everything starts to fall apart. Are the characters too busy bickering while the monster slowly moves pieces into place? Does the group split up and weaken itself further? Do the hunters literally get in each other's way as they pursue conflicting goals? Any of these events can be used as the trigger for ultimate tragedy. Perhaps the daughter of one character is murdered, and the characters realize that had they worked together they could have saved her. They know the reason for their horrible failure.

Pyrrhic Victory

Finally, a tragedy that's planned from the beginning of the game needs to reward players (and perhaps characters) at the same time that they suffer. That's what makes the game satisfying and fun, even if it involves crippling personal loss or death.

Think about the tragedy you plan. What good could come of the disaster? If you plan to continue the chronicle after the loss, as opposed to ending your chronicle in tragedy, it makes sense to encourage characters to learn from their mistakes. A bitterly learned lesson certainly counts as a reward, especially if combined with a chance to use that knowledge to improve as a hunter or person... or to use it to get revenge. Maybe a character learns that the hunt isn't everything after all and she must still devote time and attention to her family — or what's left of it. Or perhaps the opposite is true: Clinging to family too tightly while answering the call might hamstring an imbued's nocturnal efforts or simply lead monsters right to her front door. The character learns the hard way to separate her two lives.

Now, This Is New

So what happens when you carefully toss caution to the wind, hurl your players' characters against each other like acids and bases, and the players turn around, resolve their hunters' differences and stand proudly, a united front against the darkness?

Well, you could try to engineer a new tragedy — or break up the alliance. Hey, no alliance is worthwhile unless it's tested. What if a Defender kills a monster that an Innocent knows could have been befriended? What if a Judge tells an Avenger to control her anger for the good of the group, but something happens that simply outrages the warrior? What if a group member simply isn't there when someone else needs him? Is the collective goal more powerful than any single hunter's hopes or needs? If it's not, tragedy can lay in waiting.

But if the hunters have formed a truly strong group and refuse to budge, maybe it's time for a different kind of tragedy: a "Charge of the Light Brigade" into certain death. If the imbued are so resolute to work together no matter what challenges arise, then their determination might get them all hurt or killed as they clash with an enemy that's difficult or even impossible to defeat. The loss will come as a blow because the players and characters probably do everything they could to support each other, but even in defeat they find victory because they know they have still done their best — and maybe have taken the enemy out with them.

And if the characters still survive and are victorious despite all your efforts, maybe they deserve to persevere. Maybe they deserve to win regardless of **Hunter**'s tragic theme. You can always teach them by hard knocks in the next game.

If the tragedy is terminal to the hunters, whether in a one-shot game or chronicle, you need to offer up other rewards that probably outlive the events roleplayed. Take the movie *Braveheart*, for example. While the central character William Wallace dies a horrible, brutal death by torture in front of a jeering crowd, his demise is the ultimate show of defiance to the enemy. It is also tinged with the hope that his death may reunite him with his true love, brilliantly tying the reward to the initial tragedy that initiated the story. Finally, Wallace's death inspires the very man who betrayed him to take up and champion the cause of a free Scotland.

Whether you want hunters to eventually free humanity from monstrous oppression is up to you, but the same kind of legacy leading from personal sacrifice can apply just as easily to **Hunter**. Perhaps the characters are able to defeat a major enemy with their own deaths, or the imbued find a way to take the enemy down with them at the last moment. Regardless of how the characters suffer, be sure to show how that suffering leads to a good thing. Family and friends are saved and reunited in a hunter's last moments (or maybe family members even sacrifice themselves for the hunter). A spirit's anchor to the world is destroyed by a bomb that needs to be set off manually. The sun finally emerges from behind clouds that have gathered throughout a creature's reign of terror. Show the hunters the good they've made possible.

Personal rewards are also appropriate. Maybe a character who was selfish, cowardly or greedy before manages to save his allies by being generous, brave or giving now, an act that leads directly to his punishment. A wrathful hunter could realize that the anger he brings to the hunt makes him just as destructive as some of the creatures he faces, and as his last act, he apologizes to a monster before destroying it and himself simultaneously. Any kind of personal, heartfelt reward can make a tragedy a worthwhile storytelling event.

Example: *Wrapping up his chronicle design, Barry considers how to make the betrayal and death of his plot palatable to his players. He thinks Sarah will take it all in stride, but Val has a temper as vicious as her character's and may not understand if the story ends the way it could. To illustrate how the story's tragedy is an appropriate conclusion based on mounting events, Barry decides that the scene with the walking dead has to resonate. It has to drive home the point that the hunters are vulnerable apart from each other. He even ponders having one of the two mugged as she walks away, to hammer home their separation as a bad thing. Perhaps that idea is corny, but he wants to mark the scene as the beginning of the end, and he wants both players to sense it.*

Barry also wants the final scene, in which Michelle dies and Toni discovers what's happened due to her own negligence and arrogance, to be cathartic for Val. He'll let her be as vivid or graphic as she wants in her destruction of the vampire. With a final check to see if his plot isn't too rigid (Barry is convinced that apart from these two key scenes, events could go anywhere), he makes some last notes about other people like Toni's teammates and Michelle's tutor, and gets ready to play.

The Bitter End

You have another option when it comes to offering rewards for characters' loss and sacrifice: Don't do it. Rather than compensate the players at all, find a point in the game at which you can firmly state (ideally in narrative events themselves rather than overtly over the Storyteller screen) that the characters are most definitely doomed, without hope for salvation. If the story is captivating enough, the players will take events as their reward in and of themselves and assist you in telling the story of a group doomed to ignoble defeat.

A good film to watch for inspiration here is *Trainspotting*. The film tips back and forth with its main character Renton debating whether or not he can escape the self-destructive cycle he's in, until one crucial scene involving two bags of stolen heroin. At this point, the film hinges on the character's arm as we see him shoot up, slowly putting every hope the viewer may have to the test before finally showing Renton's face and confirming his doom. The film makes the viewer feel defeated and lost, but the story is so strong that it continues to pull you along.

If you can create a narrative that powerful, don't try to muck it up with a so-called need for a reward. Throw the notion away and just tell the story, letting the players know their course so they don't feel cheated. Maybe hunters have the choice of sparing a deserving creature, but in a pivotal moment decide to destroy it anyway. Everyone simply knows that no salvation is possible now, and everything goes downhill from there. Or a hunter can be confronted with the choice of abandoning the hunt to remain with his family, but closes the door and walks away, severing the best part of his soul. Once a decision like that is made, it's hard to recover.

Trainwrecks

Any experienced Storyteller knows that a game is much like a military battle. Any plans made go out the window within the first five minutes. Players are notoriously good at thinking of options that never even cross your mind, forcing you to improvise. Don't panic when it happens. Simply keep your mind on your vision of the story — a tragic encounter of flawed heroes. Or a tragic tale of scummy antiheroes. Or a tragic saga of naïve people caught up in events too large for them to handle. Whatever you planned for the end, never lose sight of it. Your story may wander back and forth. It may go places you never dreamed (or feared). But as Storyteller, you and you alone control when it ends. Be patient and keep looking for opportunities to guide events back to where you hoped. If, to use a previous example, that Defender refuses to become jealous and tries talking to his wife about the accusations of infidelity, play it out. Have the wife laugh off the ridiculous notion... a little too hard. Use the extra opportunity to reinforce the basis for jealousy. If the hunter leaves her rather than lashes out as you'd hoped, use the moment when he fails to protect her to have monsters pounce, inspiring the Defender to obsess over guarding his wife. Be flexible. Switch around reasons and rewards, but keep the tragedy in sight.

Example: *As the story gets going, Val asks Barry if she can talk to him privately. Barry groans internally. This is never good, but he agrees. Outside the room, Barry is horrified to learn that Val wants Toni to leave Michelle one night and go hunting the vampire already, which would push his story to the limit pretty quickly. It could end up a one-shot instead of a month-long chronicle as he planned. He's tempted to somehow turn her down with a "Do you know where he lives?" but decides against it. Toni is smart enough to probably find the creature. However, she has a mere 1 Manipulation. Barry decides to roll with the punch and find a way to foil Toni's plan that furthers the story.*

When Toni says goodbye to Michelle one evening, Barry asks Val to roll Manipulation + Subterfuge, mentally setting the difficult at 7. Toni fails and Barry passes Sarah a note saying that Toni seems nervous, very nervous. Sarah takes the hint. Michelle follows Toni and confronts the deceitful woman out hunting, stake in hand. The event makes their fury at each other go through the roof. Toni's plan to bring the chronicle to an end is foiled based on who the characters are. Disaster averted, all Barry as to do now is work out how to keep the characters working together a little while longer before they encounter his important walking-dead plot device.

Another danger of tragedies going astray is defeating or demoralizing players and characters too early in the story. If the shit hits the fan from the opening of the game, and gets worse from there, players and hunters will develop a sense of hopelessness. Their despair could undermine their will and even desire to see events through to your intended end. To avoid this trap, offer rewards as an early incentive to keep everyone entertained and involved. Let the imbued defeat minor opponents and attain short-term goals fairly easily. As events lead to confrontations with the powers that be, challenges can

become increasingly difficult, suggesting what's to come. Or you can continue to make successes easy to achieve and trick players and characters into becoming cocky, at which point you pull the rug out from under them and afflict them with a tragedy thanks to their hubris. Imagine a series of bloodsucker confrontations that the hunters win handily, until they meet the one who snaps a character's neck and feeds on her before her allies' eyes. And even if the imbued do survive the fight, maybe they have another one on their hands: The fight to keep friends alive given the injuries they've sustained. Such lessons can be real eye-openers as tragedies go.

Finally, if you want to keep your tragedy online, keep the stakes high. It's a simple equation. When the pressure is on and neither characters nor players have much time to think between attacks, dangers or threats, they don't usually have the time to plot, scheme or derail your intended series of events. If each action they perform has consequences, they might hesitate to make decisions at all (which can be just as deadly as doing the wrong thing), or they could dive headlong into a course of action that may just get them killed. If you can make the characters stress, they'll stop making good decisions. When characters stop making good decisions, progress toward tragedy is more certain. Indeed, the reasons for a tragic end accumulate. Any number of events could be the trigger to a chain reaction toward defeat or loss.

All that said, be careful not to make players feel forced into a no-win situation by chaotic events. As a general rule, use passive threats. *Suggest* what might happen as a consequence of actions, even if such prices are never paid. Running blindly from a monster might almost get a character killed in traffic. Sirens might wail as a hunter considers robbing a pawnshop to get the weapons he needs. Loving couples might seem to be everywhere a hunter looks after she has abandoned her marriage to answer the call. Your goal is to make the characters feel like they're walking on eggshells — until the eggs shatter completely, that is.

Closing the Trap

The story has progressed, the ominous warnings of doom have been heard and the players suspect that this will not be a case of "all's well that ends well." So how do you pull off the ending with a bang that thunders forth instead of whimpering?

First of all, always to look for your opportunity to end it all (or at least to pull the trigger on the tragedy you have in mind). Don't feel the need to run through a set series of events before the end, even if you planned them earlier. If the characters step willingly into the greatest danger or somehow precipitate disaster by their own actions, pounce upon the moment. You may be surprised. If you've done a good enough job with the body of the story and creating an epic, tragic mood, the players may follow along without skipping a beat, whether in heroic or cowardly fashion. If one of the hunters volunteers to cover the team's escape, possibly with her own death, don't interfere. Go soft on the rest, for that matter. You've achieved the story of loss that you hoped to tell, even if it didn't occur in the fashion you expected, and perhaps even if it's not the loss you had in mind.

Alternatively, don't be afraid to coax the events along, now more so than ever. You're reaching the climax of the story. Make their hearts pump a little! If the protagonists have split up, as occurs in so many tragedies, make cuts back and forth between the groups shorter and shorter. Don't give the players time to make complicated plans. Force them to act! Take those ideas you planned from the start, that you've woven into the story throughout the game, and bring them conveniently to a close.

***Example**: After Barry's hunters have had their dramatic split, Michelle's first instinct is to chase after Toni. Barry doesn't like the sound of that. It moves away from the finale he hopes for, and he thinks he can wrap things up tonight. To quickly divert Michelle's attention, he has the vampire tutor walk out from the shadows outside Michelle's home, sidestepping questions with the statement; "I worried about you. You okay? I know it's hard losing a friend." Michelle, a sucker for this kind of manipulation, buys it wholesale. Barry cuts off the scene immediately, not wanting to give Sarah a chance for other options.*

Turning his attention to Val, Barry learns that Toni rushes to her car, a few tears brushed back from the corners of her eyes. Barry, picking up on the hints that Val wants Toni to head back, but guessing that she needs an excuse, tells her that when Toni gets in the car, she sees the copy of the book Michelle had loaned her. A bit cheesy, but it will do, he thinks. Toni decides to return the book as an intended parting, spiteful gesture to Michelle. Barry then switches the scene back to Michelle and the betrayal that Toni will arrive just a few seconds too late to stop.

Kicking the Bucket

By now, it's pretty clear that **Hunter** is a game about threats, danger, loss and sacrifice. The imbued can come to tragic ends and many do. And yet,

tragedy doesn't necessarily end when a hunter's life is snuffed out. The ripples of his loss can extend ever outward, resulting in further suffering across the world in which he lived, even for other characters who might survive him.

It's easy to dismiss a character once he's dead, as if no corpse or family remains when a player can't enact his creation any longer. But that's simply not realistic. The ramifications of the ultimate sacrifice can be felt by the living for some time. Ask yourself and your players what the consequences of a dead hunter are to your game. That character probably had a boss who starts calling and asking why his employee has missed days. His family, who are devastated, are forced to answer the call and reply that they have no idea. Eventually the truth becomes known (assuming any body can be found) and there is a funeral. Perhaps the loss brings scattered and distant family members together. Some good comes of the death as formerly divided family find speaking terms. Meanwhile, the other hunters are brought face to face with the knowledge that they are mortal, that they can die and that the mission will probably kill them, too.

In a game such as **Hunter** that upholds realism, make a hunter's death have meaning to other imbued. Make other characters consciously aware of the loss and witness to the repercussions that result. You don't have to make other imbued afraid of implication in an ally's death to make his demise hit home. They don't have to be afraid of police investigation or accusations from a widow that the strange people in her husband's life were somehow involved in his passing. Other characters can feel the weight of the loss simply for its reality.

A dead character's Traits can also leave a legacy that impacts surviving hunters. Look at the deceased's Backgrounds. Allies, contacts, mentors and bystanders will all wonder what happened to him, and those who know have to deal with the considerable emotional backlash and mourning. Those who aren't in the know can become nightmares for other hunters to deal with; they want to know what happened. Imagine the dilemma faced by an imbued who has to deal with the deceased's family. She has the choice of spilling everything and making matters worse by raising bizarre, confusing allegations, or of choosing to say nothing and letting the death hang there, a mysterious cancer that the family never heals. The other choice, of course, is to lie about events, but lies are found out sooner or later and being caught lying leads to deeper involvement.

What about Resources? Did the character have a will? To whom was it made out? Is there anyone who rightfully believed she should receive an inheritance and was furious when she didn't? This possibility is likely if the deceased willed his belongings to fellow hunters instead of family. If the son of the deceased discovers that all his father's belongings have been willed to four guys he's never even heard of, he's bound to be suspicious. How does he react? Does he try to get even with the characters, report them to the police or suspect them of being the murderers?

How dangerous could it be if an auditor tallied up the deceased's possessions and discovered that little arsenal of his — and the people who had joint ownership?

Fame can make a character's death a nightmare for fellow imbued. Depending on the dead hunter's rating, police, lawyers, the Feds, local reporters or international paparazzi could investigate. Surely it's only a matter of time before these parties learn with whom the deceased has been running around. Media investigation is perhaps worse than police investigation. While neither may be exactly fair, at least the police ostensibly look for an arrest, which requires solid evidence. The media looks for a story and can run with the flimsiest and most sensational evidence available. Other hunters can be slandered, arrested, interrogated or perhaps worst of all identified by the same monsters that killed the famous character.

Getting away from Backgrounds, also look at the deceased's life in itself. What mundane commitments did she have? If that Redeemer worked on a youth rehabilitation project, how do the children for whom she was responsible deal with the loss? How do her coworkers respond? What about friends? Do they want answers of their own?

Hell, did the deceased have a monstrous enemy or ally? Does it come looking for the "others" with whom the hunter worked? Does the monster want answers? Does it blame the other imbued for the death? Does it want their help to attack the hunter's killer?

Most importantly, how do the other players' characters feel about their peer's loss? Dismayed? Afraid? Even a little relieved? ("Better you than me.") How do they show their feelings after the event? Open, unrestrained mourning? Or do they hide their regret through cold calculation? ("She's dead. Take her gun and money.") Do they seek bloody revenge on the perpetrator? Or is revenge simply futile at that point?

Encourage players to answer these questions through roleplaying. Someone dying is a significant, profound moment in any game, even one like **Hunter** that leaves a lot of buckets hanging around, just waiting to be kicked. Take a whole session to let the characters talk through their loss, perhaps basing the game on the funeral. Who performs the eulogy? Are the characters the only ones present or is the chapel packed? How do the surviving characters react to either situation? Do the hunters hold their own symbolic funeral since they can't attend the official one without explaining how they knew the deceased? If any characters keep diaries, make sure that everyone gets a copy of the entry discussing the death. Who reports the death to hunter-net, and how?

No matter what, don't let a hunter's death go unrecognized. Don't cheat a player and state by omission that his character really was just a set of numbers to be discarded and replaced. Treat the character like a person. Commemorate what the character did and who he was. Let the player know that his efforts were appreciated, as was his character.

Life after Death

Which, of course, is all well and good, but now you've got a player hanging around without a character. If there's only one or two sessions left in your planned chronicle, not a problem. But if you intend this chronicle to go on for another six months, your friend probably wants to get back in with a new character whom you have to introduce somehow, and that's hard to do well. Just watch episodic TV shows or sitcoms that bring in new characters as old actors leave or pass away. It rarely works. But why?

New characters come to a chronicle bereft of extensive history or detailed origins, as opposed to the existing characters who's stories have been told for some time. That doesn't mean new characters have to be created from a void. They just don't have the "play time" that the others do. They haven't been in the limelight and haven't developed in ways unexpected by even their players. New characters are more like a narrative stopgap.

One trick you can use to get past this awkward introduction is to "upgrade" an existing "bit" character. TV dramas use the technique all the time and it works even better in storytelling games. Simply take a recurring, friendly minor character whom you might have played as a contact or informant before, and hand her over to the player. If the player likes the idea, you're set. You've got your origins, history and character development already under way. And if the character isn't imbued, you have the opportunity to do something you just can't usually do with a starting group: surprise them with an in-game imbuing. The existing hunters can be on the scene (responsible?) for the formerly small-time character's awakening to the truth. Now they have a protégé of sorts, and your gaming group is whole again.

But if the player wants a new character of her own, your work is cut out for you. No matter how you try to tie her to the other characters, she'll come across as the "new guy." So once again, do what TV shows do to get past that stage. Play the fact up. Find ways to emphasise how much the new character doesn't fit in. Work with the player to create such an ass of a character that the rest of the group despises her immediately. And yet hunters are so rare that they can't afford to turn down an extra pair of hands. Suggest to the player that her character could be considerably deficient in some Trait such as Wits and likely to get killed if more experienced imbued don't help her. (You can even make a secret deal with the player to withhold points from Traits for her first few sessions, and then leak them to her as play progresses. The result is a character who starts out needy and who becomes capable as she gains acceptance by the group.) Or maybe the new character owns something or has access to materials that the others simply need, and that possession is a bargaining chip into their good graces.

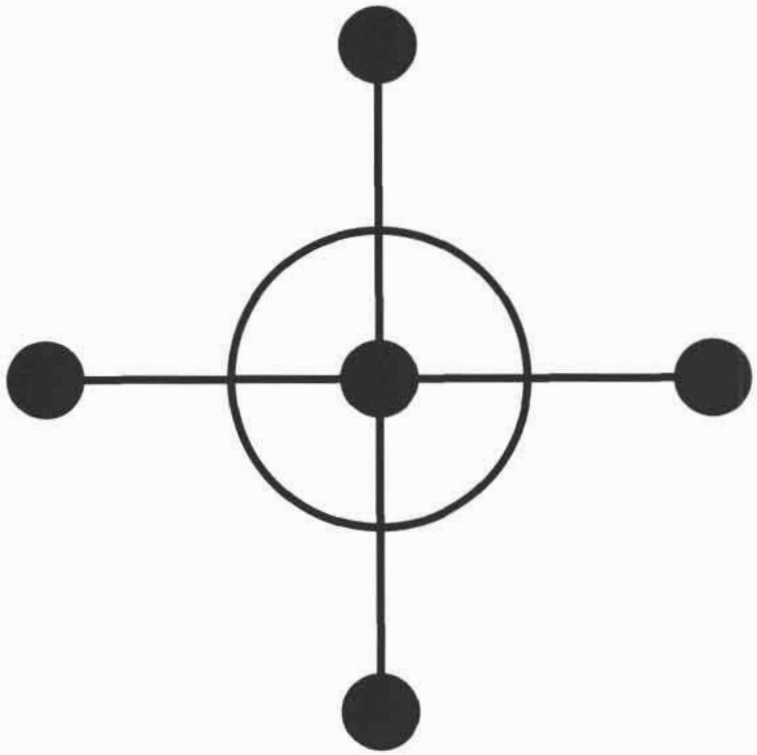
No matter what trick you use to ease a new character into an existing hunter group, be sure to ease off that hook as time passes. Allow the new guy to find his own niche and place rather than supporting him with an artificial crutch. When he proves capable of actions beyond the original quality or flaw that was his leverage into the group, he'll find wider acceptance and become another one of the team. That's when your troupe will be back up to full speed.

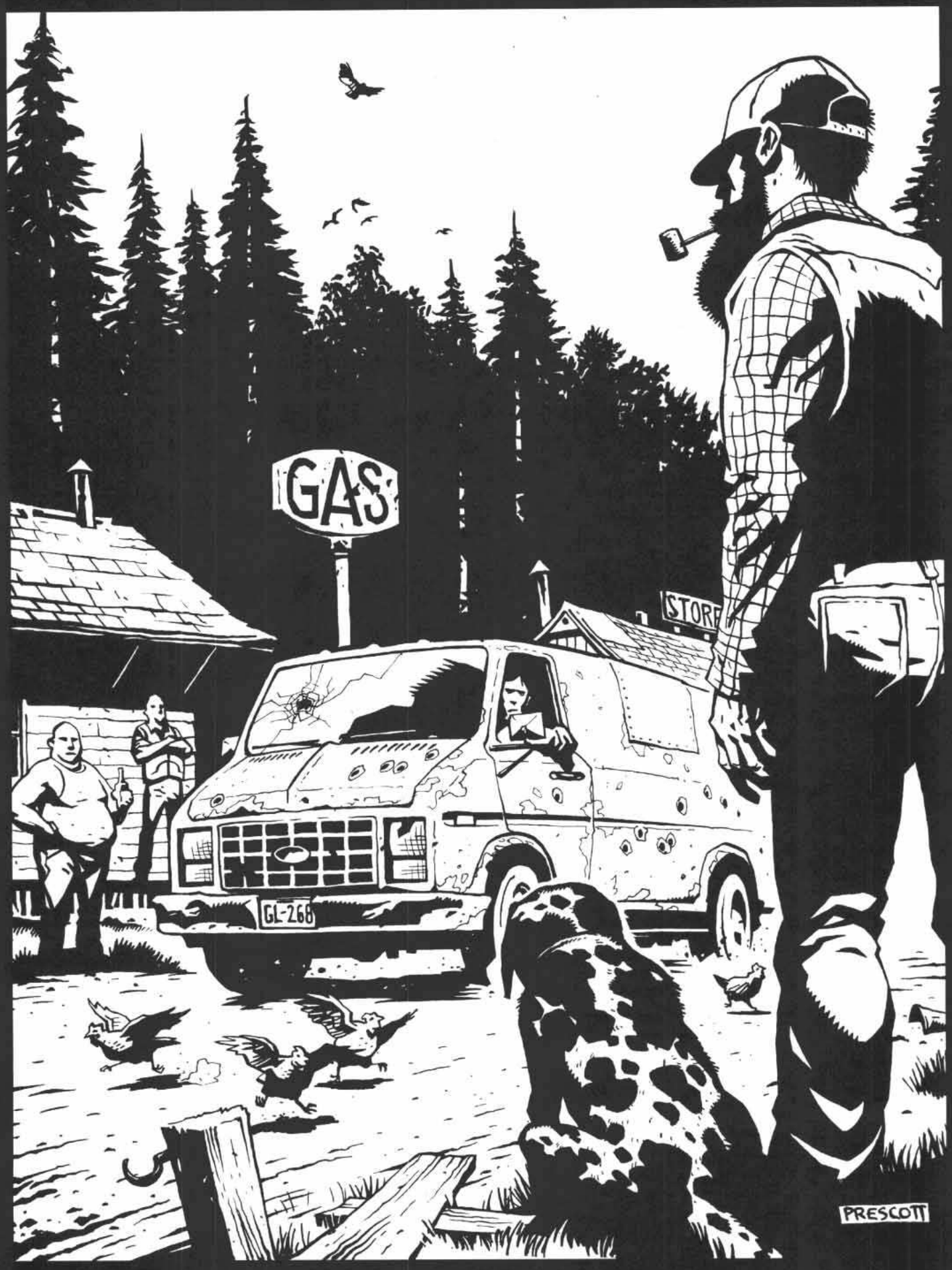
Winners, All

Hunter stories can easily lead to brutal, nasty ends. The game just lends itself to tragic stories thanks to its human heroes facing inhuman odds. The best intentions or plans can come to naught because the imbued are essentially up against way more than they can handle or even understand. Hordes of walking dead. Bloodsuckers lurking in the shadows. Shapechangers hiding within human forms. It can be a lost cause from the word "go."

But those are all reasons why **Hunter** is about triumph, too. Life before the imbuing is relatively easy.

Sure, it isn't perfect, but it's so much simpler to turn one's head to trouble and pretend it never happened than to face it. Trying to do something about trouble is much, much harder, especially when it comes in nightmarish form and is absolutely real. Facing the nightmares makes a hunter a target. It makes those he loves targets. Being a hunter means endangering everything one holds dear. And yet, the imbued do it anyway. When the Messengers speak, hunters hear the call and answer. Although the struggle that follows may and perhaps will end in tragedy, the battles fought along the way result in triumph.

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Chapter 3: Guides on the Hunt

For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

— Zechariah 10:2

Playing God: The Messengers

Paul felt utterly out of place. If he was honest with himself — which he tried to be these days — he looked it as well. The vast majority of the people in the nightclub were bright young twenty-somethings in the sort of tight clothing that Paul wouldn't have dared wear in his youth, let alone now.

He looked down at the clothes Manisha had chosen for him. Thank God his wife couldn't see him. Leather trousers and a black shirt? She'd laugh herself silly and accuse him of having a mid-life crisis.

Still, despite himself, he was rather enjoying the atmosphere. The lasers (if that's were they were) were spectacular, dancing around the walls and lighting up the smoke that drifted above the large, main dance floor in patterns that matched the beat of the music. He'd been rather flattered when two women, probably younger than his daughter, tried to drag him onto the dance floor. If he weren't here for a reason, he'd probably have joined them for a while. Lord knows his confidence could do with a boost these days.

He scanned the crowd and found Manisha distractedly fending off the advances of a drunk who wore the disheveled remains of a suit: crumpled shirt and tie askew. Paul chuckled. "Lover Boy" reminded him of Justin from the office — overweight and under talented, but convinced of his own prowess simply because he had some money in his wallet and a halfway decent job. Manisha, being half his size, slipped away easily. She had bigger things to worry about than a lecherous office boy. Paul guessed that she wasn't just casually checking out the crowd: She was really looking.

Paul had come to trust Manisha's visions in the past few months. He'd had contact with what he supposed were the Heralds on and off since his imbuing, but he never received anything like the messages she seemed to have. It was one of those that brought them to the club this evening. Manisha had been reading a report about a series of fights in clubs when a hallucination struck her. She wasn't able to explain it very well, but she interpreted it to mean that some sort of powerful wisp had possessed someone and was causing the trouble. Why bar fights would be so important as to conjure a premonition eluded Paul. Still, he spent most of the last week club hopping and had learned more about music in the past few days than he had in two decades.

Suddenly, Manisha staggered backward, her eyes rolling up into her head. Paul, seized by fear, pushed his way through the crowd. She'd never had an episode so soon after the last, and never in such a public place.

The drunk was back, trying ineptly to help her, although Paul suspected his interest was more in the tight top she was wearing than in the state of her health.

"Hands off, son," Paul shouted over the music as he grabbed Manisha. "She just needs her pills." The drunk, alcohol-born confusion clouding his features, shambled backward and bumped into into a tall, strong-looking figure. The man stared down at the drunk and smiled.

Manisha mumbled something and Paul strained to hear. "It's him... inside him, offering power." Then Paul felt that coldness steal over him, as it did when the Heralds first touched him. The club suddenly seemed far away, the music quiet and remote. His eyes were drawn to one of the lasers, following it as it traced patterns on the wall opposite, spelling out the words "MISERY IS ITS SOLACE" in trailing light.

And then Paul was in the club again, the music throbbing loud in his ears. The drunk was deeply kissing another young, attractive woman and she was responding in kind. A young man was staring at them in horror. Anger and humiliation warred in his expression. Sure enough, the drunk was wrong, *although Paul couldn't put a finger on quite how.*

Then Paul saw the tall, strong man standing a few feet away, watching the threesome and laughing. Inexplicably, Paul felt more afraid than he had ever been before. Whereas the wrongness *of the drunk was a quiet whisper, the* wrongness *of this man was a cry of despair andanger. It drowned out every other sound in the club.*

Whatever it was they faced, whatever it was the Messengers had drawn them to, it was more powerful than Paul dared consider. He knew he couldn't run away... like before.

Friend or Foe?

They're at the very heart of **Hunter**. The Messengers are the seemingly invisible, intangible beings that grant the imbued their powers and subtly direct the chosen toward their callings. The beings appear to demonstrate their presence at the very moment a hunter leaves his normal perceptions and ideas behind and becomes aware of the real world around him. For some of the imbued, that's all the Messengers do. They awaken a person and then fade into the background, rarely or never heard from again.

Other hunters believe themselves forced into contact with these entities again and again. Without any degree of control over where or when encounters occurs, these chosen suddenly feel the world twist or go askew and a new understanding is granted to them by their unidentifiable benefactors. These hunters can never escape the feeling that their lives are not truly their own. Forces they can't even hope to contact or understand seem to steer their actions and there's next to nothing these abused people can do about it.

In essence, the Messengers are yet another set of Storyteller characters that influence the protagonists in your chronicle. They present you with the opportunity to reinforce some of **Hunter**'s primary themes in a low-key, yet subtly unsettling way, reminding the imbued (and players) that however well the hunt goes, they are still the tools of inexplicable, presumably otherworldly powers.

The Senses Awaken

Imagine suddenly feeling nauseous and dizzy without apparent reason. Imagine the words in this book twist before your eyes. "THE SOUL HUNGERS" momentarily replaces "The Senses Awaken," and then everything looks normal again. Imagine you feel strangely cold and dislocated. You glance up and the ordinary world is distant and almost unreal. Then you realize that the translucent, rotted form of young man stands opposite you, undisguised rage in his face. He seems more real than the very world around you. Your stomach churns from fear and disgust. Yet you react to this invader — whether with curiosity, compassion or outrage. However, some distant part of your mind realizes that *two* forces have invaded your privacy.

It is this sense of violation and intrusion that you should strive to convey to your players during the imbuing and anytime that the Heralds make themselves known in your game. The Messengers are not necessarily benevolent angels who watch over the characters. They're alien, unknowable creatures that inflict themselves upon people for reasons they don't explain, and their victims have no choice in the matter. In effect, the Heralds commit sensory rape.

More prosaically, Messenger contact can be an incredibly useful narrative tool for a clever Storyteller. Through cryptic messages and hallucinations, you can subtly usher players in the direction in which you want them to go in order to advance the plot you have in mind. You can feed hunters information that they might struggle to uncover on their own and advance or even initiate a storyline.

Before we look at some ways of using the Messengers in a game, however — the very purpose of this book — let's look at what the Messengers are or at least could be.

The Nature of the Messengers, Part 1

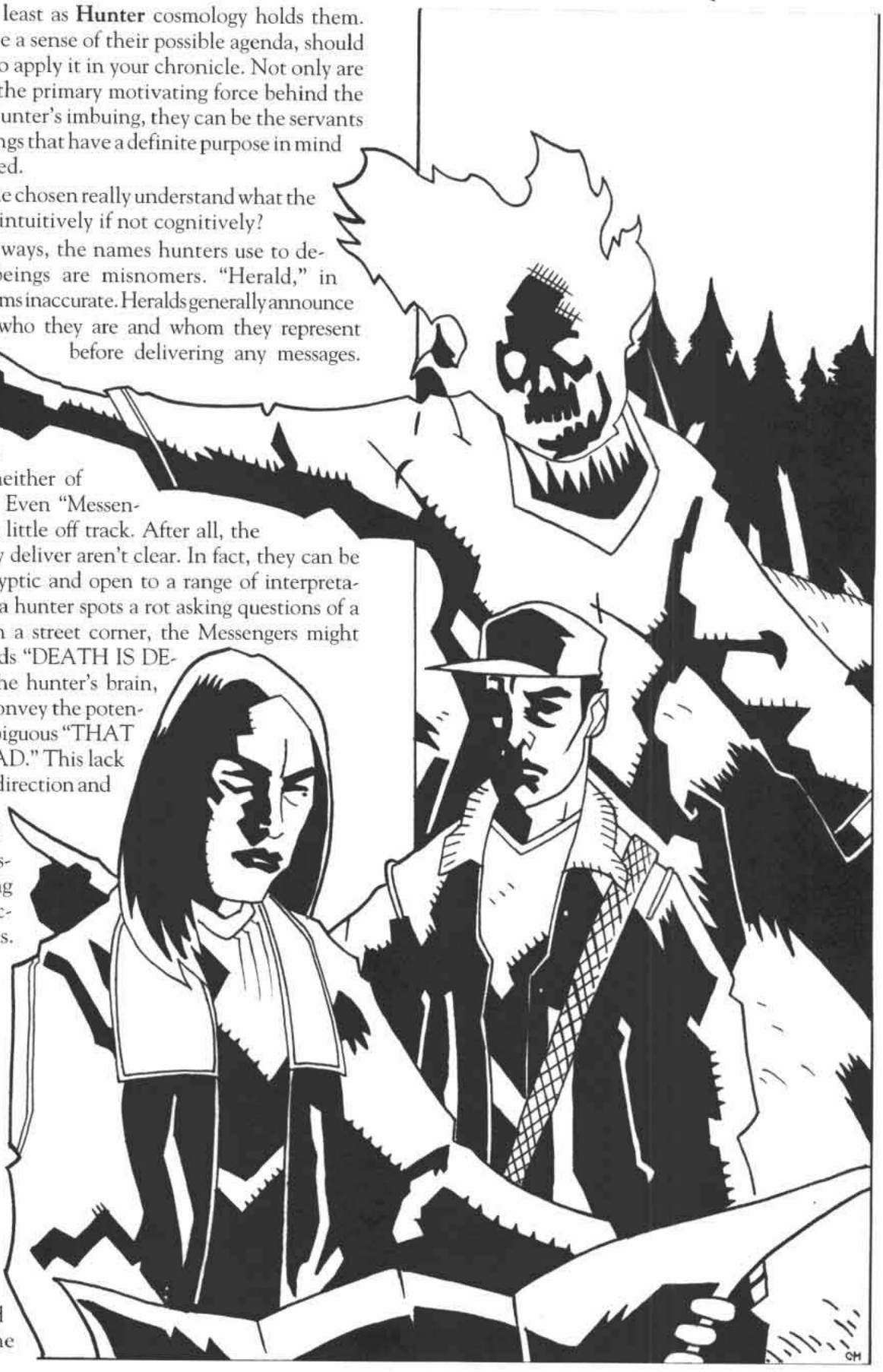
What are the Messengers, really?

If you've already read the Introduction to this book, you basically know who or what the Messengers

could be, at least as **Hunter** cosmology holds them. You also have a sense of their possible agenda, should you choose to apply it in your chronicle. Not only are the Heralds the primary motivating force behind the instant of a hunter's imbuing, they can be the servants of higher beings that have a definite purpose in mind for the imbued.

But do the chosen really understand what the Heralds are, intuitively if not cognitively?

In some ways, the names hunters use to describe the beings are misnomers. "Herald," in particular, seems inaccurate. Heralds generally announce who they are and whom they represent before delivering any messages. **Hunter**'s Heralds do neither of those things. Even "Messengers" seems a little off track. After all, the messages they deliver aren't clear. In fact, they can be downright cryptic and open to a range of interpretations. When a hunter spots a rot asking questions of a policeman on a street corner, the Messengers might flash the words "DEATH IS DEFIED" into the hunter's brain, rather than convey the potentially less ambiguous "THAT MAN IS DEAD." This lack of obvious direction and purpose for the imbued makes the Messengers guiding rather than dictatorial forces. They give the chosen some (often very little) information, and put a spin on it to provoke a reaction from would-be hunters, but they don't make what they want, what the chosen should do or why the



chosen should respond perfectly clear. The reaction is left up to the hunter.

The imbued also tend to think that the second sight the Messengers bestow allows them to see the world as it truly is. They're wrong, to some degree. Second sight actually reveals an *exaggerated* version of what monsters might really be. For example, blood slaves don't actually have visible black gunk running through their veins, as some hunter see. That spectacle is merely a representation of the corruption that a rot's blood spreads through a slave's system. A wizard may seem to have a purple aura, sparking with the unnatural power she can manipulate, but no such phenomenon actually occurs around the person. A werebeast in human form might seem to flash a bestial appearance, but the display does not actually occur in the mundane or supernatural world. The "insight" hunters believe that the Messengers give them is actually somewhat misleading. It's more like advertising than exposing facts. "Look how *wrong* this creature is" versus "Here are the ways in which this being is different from humanity."

There are no real hard-and-fast rules about how a monster might appear to a hunter through second sight. The main thing to remember is that the Messengers distort the reality of the situation to show hunters what they want them to see. So, does the same hold true for the other forms of contact that the Heralds use, whether as elaborations or extensions of second sight? Most likely. A rot may reek of decay to a hunter while no one else smells anything amiss. A shaft of light might seem to beam down from nowhere to isolate a single individual on a street, and neither he nor anyone around him notices the emphasis. Messages received inherently consist of distorted reality. Only the hunters in question perceive them, so it's their awareness that's influenced, not that of the surrounding world or even that of the supernatural.

What does all this manipulation point to? Simply that the Messengers have an agenda, whether the chosen can perceive or intuit it or not. The Heralds may not make their intentions explicit to the chosen, but they have them nonetheless, and the imbued might actually realize it if they knew more about the supernatural world than what little the Messengers show them. Without that greater understanding, however, hunters are at the mercy of the Heralds and any information those beings are "good" enough to share. The Heralds therefore direct and oversee the hunt by virtue of selecting their agents, determining the information agents need to know to do their assigned jobs, and limiting what other information those agents can gather. Were hunters capable of being more aware of these connections, they might realize that they are akin to soldiers in a war, handpicked, trained and briefed by the "generals" who intend to send them against the enemy — and perhaps with just as little compassion.

The Nature of the Messengers, Part 2

The Messengers have more meaning and application in **Hunter** beyond their activities and interpretation by hunters. They have genuine roles in your game as narrative tools.

The Heralds represent the primary themes of **Hunter** from the very beginning of your chronicle. As inscrutable, intangible and invisible forces that dabble in human lives, they reflect the complete mystery that pervades imbued existence. One of hunters' first questions after being changed is "How did I become this way?" or "Who made me this way?" There is no answer. There can be no answer because the Heralds operate on levels beyond human comprehension. Hunters guess at the nature of their creators, but they might as well try to confirm that extraterrestrial life exists.

Indeed, the Heralds represent in microcosm what happens to the World of Darkness as a whole. The world is manipulated by beings (monsters) that its mundane elements (people) can't grasp, and those beings can't be challenged directly and they don't answer to anyone. If players and hunters stopped to consider this thematic similarity between Messengers and monsters as manipulators, they might doubt the legitimacy of ever taking up the hunt. Based on appearances, answering the call might actually mean helping one controlling force destroy another, and perhaps not even for the better. The Messengers' seeming evasiveness and even deception can be enough to make hunters question their very role in saving the world.

The Messengers' intangibility can serve to heighten the paranoia that's inherent to **Hunter**, too. What indication do hunters really have that the Messengers are benevolent rather than malevolent forces? What evidence do they have that their efforts do anything more than aid one group of monsters in a war against another? Perhaps the Messengers are nothing more than monsters, and they exempt themselves from second sight to reveal an apparent enemy and make hunters their pawns. If the chosen reach these conclusions, what role can they play and against what enemy — if any — can they struggle? The enemy could be anywhere, even within the imbued themselves. (The possibility of staging a game in which the Heralds are thoroughly mistrusted by hunters, emphasizing paranoia, is addressed later in this chapter.)

The Heralds' evasiveness also helps blur the line between right and wrong, black and white, in your game. If the seeming creators offer no concrete instruction on how to carry out the mission, and they leave the chosen to their own devices, the imbued are left no more right or justified in their lives than they were before. They might witness events and undergo experiences that lead them to believe that something must be done about monsters, but there's no measuring stick by which to determine if some actions are justified and others are not. Killing this monster and sparing that one comes with no more certainty than

A Third Option

The words "Messenger" and "Herald" are applied to those beings by hunters themselves, particularly by the group that frequents hunter-net. Other imbued can use different words, anything from angel to alien, to identify their perceived creators, but all seek to personify the Heralds somehow. Use of such terms is actually deceiving. Hunters have no idea who or what creates them. It could be a natural phenomenon or an intentional one triggered by intelligent forces. Hunters' tendency to personify the imbuing event and its instigators is more a reflection of the human need to comprehend and classify creatures and events than it's accurate to the phenomena themselves. Certainly, hearing disembodied voices is an indication that the forces at work are cognitive and human-like in comprehension, but it's also possible that such messages are just manifestations from hunters' own minds, the subconscious intruding on the conscious in the face of a horrific sight. So, the "Heralds" or "Messengers" as the imbued define them may be nothing of the sort, just products of hunters' need to identify with whatever has changed their lives. After all, when we think of God we conjure up images of a tall, bearded patriarch in flowing white robes. But what if "He" didn't look or wasn't anything of the sort? How comfortable would we be with notions of a divine Creator then?

While **Hunter** does actually define the Messengers as beings at least similar to humans in their ability to communicate and perhaps even think, that doesn't have to be the case in your chronicle. The imbuing could actually be the product of radioactivity, exposure to supernatural energies, a chemical reaction or a natural disaster. If you go this route, you may want to run the Messengers differently than is portrayed in the published game. Here are some ideas:

- **Warnings:** With no external, personified source generating warning signs of the supernatural, these messages can come from the hunters' own subconscious, as suggested above. Messages can remain vague because hunters have instinctual feelings about danger or a creature about to be faced, all of which reflects the hunters' own attitudes to the situation. If a character shows compassion toward walking dead but loathes bloodsuckers, she may receive messages that warn of the presence of the former, but that highlight the danger of the latter.
- **Second Sight:** Perhaps all people have the capability to see monsters and resist their direct influence, but only people exposed to the phenomenon that creates hunters can activate and control the capability.
- **Edge Development:** With no Messengers to bestow edges upon the characters, the powers derive from hunters' comprehension of their place in the World of Darkness and from an understanding of how they function in the hunt. For example, if attitudes toward monsters evolve, new edges — from further along a creed path or from different paths — might become available as an imbued becomes more receptive to such possibilities.
- **Hermits & Waywards:** With no Heralds to have messed up their imbuing, the two lost creeds need an alternative explanation for their disturbed state. Perhaps they were people who were incapable of reacting "correctly" to the imbuing or their particular wakeup fractures them and leads to broken hunters. Or these hunters might be more powerfully attuned to the energies of the imbuing, making them less comprehensible to other hunters. Both Hermits and Waywards can glimpse possibilities of the hunt because they're so in tune with the source that inspires it, but at the same time, they stray from any beaten path.
- **Hunter-net:** In the default World of Darkness, the Messengers protect hunter-net and its affiliated sites to a certain degree. If you remove them from the equation, you're left with the question of the site's security. There are two ways of addressing it. You could leave the site as open to being compromised as any other well-protected website that has access to only mundane safeguards: firewalls, encryption and password protection. Alternatively, you could give the people who run the sites edges that enable them to protect their creations.

voting for this political party or denouncing that one, supporting abortion or opposing abortion. It all comes down to a matter of personal beliefs and personal morality. The world is as full of grays as ever, supernatural or mundane.

More concretely, the Messengers are narrative tools at your disposal in that they can be used to keep hunters and players in line. A hunter who is roleplayed out of character, who behaves in erratic ways without good reason, can be "guided" back on track when the Heralds take a stern view of him. An Innocent lashing out repeatedly in anger without provocation might find himself at a loss for edges, or his player could suffer reduced Conviction or even Virtue ratings. Or a disturbing vision might show an errant character (and player) what might happen if his current course of action persists.

Finally, and perhaps most heavy-handedly, the Messengers allow you to help shepherd hunters through a plot when they become lost, stuck or they head off in a direction that you're not prepared to handle. By inflicting Messenger contact on the characters, you can point them in the direction of significant plot developments and characters that they might have otherwise missed. The fact that Herald contact — hallucinations, communiqués, waves of nausea — is one-way and vague makes it a useful signpost for misguided players, without leading anyone by the nose. Players and hunters reconsider their options without being told outright that they're on the wrong path or which direction they should take.

The Invisible Face

Okay, you have some ideas about what the Heralds can be in your game, and how they might be used in theory, but how do you present and use them in practice? You have two main choices. They can appear as a homogenous group of entities, all of whom act in a broadly similar way no matter what the situation, or they can be individual entities, each of which has its own way of doing things and approaching hunters.

Each choice has a distinct effect on the tone of your game. A monolithic group of Messengers with no discernible variation in contact conveys the impression of an all-powerful, dictatorial force behind the creation of the imbued. This tack can reassure players that their characters are supported by some larger-than-life entity, but can also suggest that the hunters are just tools, inciting an element of uncertainty and doubt. Conversely, if you choose to give the Heralds discernibly different personalities, players lose the reassurance of a united, monolithic backer, but can gain a sense of identification with their creators — that both hunter and benefactor have an outlook or value in common and that a Messenger has a hunter's best wishes at heart.

The latter option is particularly useful if you plan on using the temptation element of the main **Hunter** plot. When dark forces tempt a character with level-five edges, a player is less likely to immediately recognize that his character walks into a trap if both are accustomed to a kinship with the Messengers. A level of trust is built up that the dark forces take advantage of. Or another interpretation of the same situation is that hunters are resistant to temptation because they are accustomed to contact with the Messengers in certain ways — they simply receive edges rather than being offered them, for example. The change in relationship might warn imbued of a change in partners, and not for the better.

There are a couple of different ways that Messenger identities could be conveyed if you choose that option in your game.

Thematic Personalities

Hunters' first impression of a being as a monster rather than as a person derives from their first glimpse of the creature through second sight or by way of direct contact from the Messengers. The Heralds therefore have a profound impact on the way your stories might develop by coloring hunters' impressions.

If you want to tell a story that focuses on understanding monsters, initial contact should encourage open-mindedness. Monsters may feel *off* or *strange* rather than *wrong*, and appear as only slightly exaggerated versions of regular people. Vampires could have fangs and pale skins, but may seem forlorn rather than predatory. And directions from the Heralds may hint at corresponding ways to approach the creature: "IT IS LOST" or "SURVIVAL IS PAIN."

An ass-kicking, combat-orientated story could require the Messengers to paint monsters in aggressive, alien or offensive terms. A vampire might appear *wrong* to second sight, with blood-covered fangs, putrescent skin and a look of ravenous hunger on its face. Messages could emphasize its corruption: "LIFE IS FLED" or "THE PREDATOR HUNTS."

In essence, the Messengers may communicate in ways designed to emphasize the theme of the story you want to tell. Of course, the examples given above are extremes. Most **Hunter** games fall between those two ranges so that various characters feel their own calling. In fact, you can shift the messages hunters receive as the story progresses to reflect developments within the plot. If the characters encounter a monster that is initially unrepentant and that revels in its new state —

a rot who is glad to be back amongst the living — Messenger contact could focus on the emotional damage it wreaks on its victims and the unnaturalness of its condition. If, later in the story, the characters manage to convince the rot that its place is not amongst the living, subsequent Herald communication can be more sympathetic toward the being.

Of course, this transition presumes the Messengers are able to change their "opinion" based of the evidence they see through the characters' encounters. If you use a monolithic group of like-minded Heralds in your game, they may all be capable of changing their hive-mind. More individualized creators may adapt along with the characters, or different Messengers could guide the characters as situations change.

Creed-Based Personalities

While the creeds are largely motivations rather than strict social groups, evidence suggests that the Messengers have a distinct awareness of them and the role they play in the hunt. The edges an imbued is gifted reflect her own chosen role in the hunt, and those edges tend to unfold along creed paths. Meanwhile, the existence of Waywards and Hermits suggests that different creeds receive different sorts of information from the Heralds. One can easily take these observations a step further and assume that each creed is overseen by a Messenger or group of Messengers. The personalities of these beings might be based on the general tenets that define their creeds. Vengeance Messengers could convey images and impressions that highlight the pain and suffering that monsters cause while Martyrdom Messengers might show hunters how personal sacrifice can cause greater good.

This "Messenger managed" approach to creeds and Herald identity is likely to promote dissention and debate among the imbued. Each character receives a different message which supports that person's instinctive way to deal with a situation. It can also tend to push your game thematically toward the approach favored by any character with a high Patron rating because she receives the most contact from the Heralds. If a team's Defender has the highest Patron rating, frequent contact from the Messenger tailored to her emphasizes ways in which the group can protect people or places.

Assigning particular Heralds to particular creeds can be used to support both unique and committee Messengers. Individual Heralds have their own identities somewhat in line with characters' own, or each creed is overseen by a monolithic group of forces with a common attitude. In the latter case, the differences between Herald groups emerge only when all creeds are observed collectively, and even then the different "personality groups" might just be aspects of a larger mentality guiding the hunt as a whole.

Using the Heralds

Hunter is not an overtly supernatural game. It's not usually inclined toward showy Manga-style special effects or blatant cosmos-shattering spectacles. The game lends itself to understated supernatural influences on a hard, gritty and realistic existence. Encountering monsters is much more frightening when the event occurs on a comprehensible, empathetic, human level rather than on a superficial one. The Heralds' intervention into a character's life can therefore be conveyed through senses that a player can identify with and understand from his own experience.

Take the following account of monster contact through Herald intervention:

You feel a presence behind you. The words "ITS EXISTENCE IS PAIN" thunder through your head. Suddenly, you see that the old woman is little more than a withered corpse.

Now, compare that to:

You suddenly become dizzy as nausea rises in your stomach. You feel as if something presses at your mind — if that were even possible — and the words "ITS EXISTENCE IS PAIN" simply occur rot you. The world before you seems hazy and distant for a second — and then snaps into sharp focus. A shiver of fear runs up your spine as you realize the old woman is nothing more than a withered corpse, her face twisted into a rictus of pain.

The first approach impacts on the surface of the hunter's impressions. Herald intervention occurs as an outward phenomenon that almost bludgeon's the character's awareness. Something terrible is revealed to the hunter, but she isn't made a part of the unfolding. It simply occurs and she happens to be around.

The second approach makes the hunter a participant in the unveiling of the truth by running a gamut of emotional, psychological and physical experiences for him, both external and internal. The player can identify with his character's feelings because he's undoubtedly suffered nausea, knows what a shiver of fear feels like and can therefore empathize with what his character undergoes even though the player has to imagine what his character sees. The revelation of the truth therefore pulls on both the player and the character's range of senses and understanding as opposed to just creating a display to convey information.

Try to make your players intimate to their hunters' experiences when subjected to Messenger activity. The encounter can occur on a variety of levels for hunters and players, allowing both to know the fear

that arises from such invasion. Don't just *tell* players what their characters undergo, *show* them. Hunters' senses are commandeered by otherworldly forces, and the human body and psyche can't cope. The imbued can suffer illness, dehydration, exhaustion, flashbacks to past events, tremors, haunting images, loss of bowel and bladder control, cold sweats or almost any other ailment you can think of (except any that would deny action; otherwise, how would the imbued respond to monsters?). There's a whole range of possibilities.

The Messengers have learned that they can't deal with humans too directly. People simply can't endure contact with such beings. The severe problems that Waywards and Hermits suffer are an object lesson about the consequences of such interaction. The Heralds instead work by affecting the sensory input of hunters in small, contained ways. While the experience is still disconcerting and often unpleasant for the chosen, it's largely bearable. A consequence of this necessity is that the Messengers have developed a wide range of ways of making contact to make up for a lack of sustained, direct communication.

Sound

This is perhaps the most common means of Herald communication shown in **Hunter** books to date. A voice rings out for hunters' ears only, with some CRYPTIC STATEMENT about the monster faced. It's one thing to show that effect on paper. It's another to portray it in your games. Think about how that sound manifests both in the context of hunters' personality and of the personalities you've decided on for the Messengers themselves. Do the characters hear their own voices, that of someone else or that of a completely separate, impartial entity — the Messengers' own voice, if you like? Are the voices always booming or barely audible whispers, or either depending on the circumstances? Maybe the voices are like shouts when warnings are conveyed and whispers when encouragement is offered. It's worth taking time to discuss with your players how their characters interpret the voices. Once you have that information you can tailor statements to suit them as well as to the Messengers' personality.

Also consider whether all characters in a scene hear the same proclamations, if only some hear anything at all or if everyone hears something different. A single imperative suits the continuous Messenger identity proposed earlier, but it may not always have bearing on a character's motives or creed. An announcement of intolerance about a being — "IT CANNOT LIVE" — that sparks violence might fly in the face of a Redeemer or Innocent's goals. Scattered or different messages based on the recipient favor individualized Heralds or ones focused on different creeds and allow for wider individual character representation.

Messages should always be cryptic rather than explicit. They should imply something about a monster or situation without stating it clearly. "IT DRINKS BLOOD" or "IT HAS RETURNED FROM THE GRAVE" is rather obvious. They leave little room for doubt as to what the hunters face and what its intentions are (or what the Heralds' intention is for the characters in the creature's presence). To create mystery and uncertainty, give players room to maneuver in their interpretations of what they face and how they should respond. "HUNGER DRIVES IT" or "DEATH IS RE-

Optional Rule: Patronage

The Patron Background measures the frequency of contact a hunter tends to have with the Messengers, ranging from occasional at one dot to punishingly frequent at five. What the Background doesn't do is indicate the type of contact received.

As an optional rule, you can introduce the following *additional* set of meanings for each dot of the Trait to help you define how often and the way in which the Messengers act. These levels are cumulative, so that a hunter with 3 Patron may endure the types of contact common to levels 1, 2 and 3.

No dots The Messengers contact in times of dire emergency, and with only vague, cryptic messages even then.

• You receive only vague hints that some thing is wrong: odd smells, inexplicable breezes, hints of motion at the periphery of your vision. You get direct messages only when a situation is desperate.

•• The Messengers contact you infrequently, but occasionally give you direct messages.

••• Sometimes the Messengers intrude upon your dreams, offering clues about the situations you currently face and about ones that might be yet to come.

•••• You occasionally get warnings, signs or visions during the day, as well as a mix of all other forms of contact.

••••• You get detailed, intense visions on a regular basis. While their meaning may be cryptic, they guide you toward an understanding of the supernatural and your role in contending with it.

FUSED" allow far a variety of meanings, all decided by the imbued and their inherent inclinations toward monsters.

Furthermore, not all hunters assume that the Heralds or monsters are supernatural in nature. Many choose to believe in scientifically spawned creators and creatures, things that originate from the human subconscious or even from space aliens. If Messenger contact is too specific, you don't leave room for hunters to put their own spin on their origins or purpose.

Written Words

Closely related to audible contact is written contact: words on billboards, newspapers or street signs that suddenly change to assume new meaning. The principles behind audible contact apply here, too. Words alter, state something new and then revert to their normal appearance, as if the observer hallucinated the whole thing.

Written messages are ideal for "nagging" characters who ignore the calling. Imagine a hunter who tries to escape the mission. She's having breakfast one morning and trying not to think about what she now knows. She feels her head swim and the words on the side of the milk carton twist into "THE RITUAL IS BEGUN." The Messengers have informed her that there's no escape from her calling, no matter how she tries, and she receives a hint about a supernatural threat to missing children.

Visual Contact

Seeing monsters is generally associated with second sight, and rightly so. The sight is one of only two ways that hunters have any means of tapping into their benefactors' power — the other being edges. The key thing to remember about second sight, whether it's manifestation is by choice or inflicted on a hunter by the Heralds in a scene, is that the vision is a symbolic representation of the monster rather than the monster itself. Exaggerate what is so wrong about the thing, without being absolutely explicit what the creature is, does or what its weaknesses might be — that sort of information is the province of insight edges such as Discern. Focus on the black veins of a blood slave, the decaying flesh of a hidden or the looming shape and animalistic features of a man-beast. Remember that some monsters are only subtly different from everyday people until they actually do something supernatural. A warlock may just seem *wrong* until she works magic, whereupon second sight increases the degree of that *wrongness*, perhaps by showing energy crackling around the being.

Herald-imposed sighting of monsters bears discussion, too. This kind of sight occurs without hunters' will or expectation. It's as if the Messengers throw the switch to characters' second sight of their own volition to make hunters see what they might otherwise overlook. Such artificial activation of the sight occurs at the imbuing, when hunters see monsters for the first time and wouldn't know to activate any special vision. "Forced" second sight is a useful tool at your disposal to confront characters with creatures and events and to provoke a reaction from them any time after the imbuing, perhaps leading to further events or to entire stories. It's wise not to resort to this option too often, though, or players will feel that their characters' lives are more in your hands than their own, and such story triggers can become cliché or even expected by players, discouraging them from helping to tell stories.

Taste and Smell

Taste and smell are easily overlooked as effective methods of Messenger communication. What has a greater effect on you: seeing a chunk of rotten meat or smelling it? Sure, the sight of maggots worming their way through the flesh is unpleasant, but the sensation of inhaling the odor can induce vomiting. Even worse would be tasting the meat. Of course, such reactions are the body's built-in defense against eating infected or disease-ridden meat.

Now translate that defense mechanism to an encounter with a monster, particularly a zombie or vampire. A rotting monster is visually repulsive. But to a population raised on monster movies with some pretty damn good special effects, perhaps not as disturbing as it should be. Now imagine seeing that same rotting corpse and catching a whiff of it as well, its putrescent stench overpowering all other scents.

And then there's the reaction to rotting flesh actually being in your mouth, your taste buds revolting at the sensation long before anything travels down your gullet. It might be uncommon for undead flesh to get in a hunter's mouth, but smells can sometimes leave tastes, and then there's the particularly gruesome notion of skin flying from a damaged zombie and into a character's mouth, or of him being grappled by such a creature and getting a mouthful while in the embrace.

Now imagine the Messengers conjuring direct experiences or thoughts of such events and you know what kinds of response can be elicited from the imbued.

Visions

The most extreme form of Messenger contact is all-out visions. At their lowest level, these are simple

intrusions into a hunter's dreams, foreshadowing encounters or warning of mistakes made in the past.

Full waking dreams are perhaps the ultimate form of contact between the Messengers and hunters. Such visions should be extremely cryptic, conveying metaphorical representations of the statements the Heralds try to convey. Such experiences can amount to momentary hallucinations in which a hunter thinks she's still conscious and in the present but then snaps back to reality after she's been touched. Or such encounters can involve extensive, prolonged mental journeys that show a hunter a spectrum of events. The former experiences are more common among the "average" hunter upon whom the Heralds need to make an intellectual or emotional impression. The latter are often the purview of hunters with high Virtue ratings, debilitating derangements or high Patron ratings. Fyodor's accounts of his visions in **Hunter Apocrypha** make for good examples of the Heralds' extended contact.

Before introducing visions of any sort to your chronicle, ask players why their characters might be chosen for such attention and how they intend to make it part of the ongoing game. The explanations listed above all apply, although Visionaries might also see things because they're open-minded, they look to the big picture, they tend to be leaders among hunters or they are potentially closer to the Heralds than are members of other creeds.

But there's no reason why almost any hunter can't have visions. These spectacles most likely focus on the hunters' creed roles in the overall plan and might help such imbued guide others to the same outlook or offer inspiration about how to better fulfill personal goals.

Ultimately, full-fledged visions should be rare. They tend to put emphasis on you for the

storytelling event rather than encourage the whole troupe to contribute, even if a hallucination is vague and demands players' interpretation. Dreams should be significant revelations about a character's direction or your ongoing plot, or should at least introduce or offer insights on a significant antagonist.

So much for the theory. How about the practice? The first thing about visions is that they're attempts by inhuman forces to communicate directly with human minds. The images they conjure are surreal, dream-like and difficult to comprehend because their creators don't fully understand the human condition or outlook. That means visions can't usually be created off the cuff. Achieving that delicate balance between meaning and confusion is difficult enough with planning and consideration. Visions are also ideal for advancing your characters' understanding of issues or for reinforcing the importance of a central element of your story. So, sit down and work out a way to imply these messages through a short narrative that hints at the truth in a clouded way, rather than stating it all explicitly.

You can write up visions like short stories that point to some revelation. Alternatively, you can write them as short scenarios told with a player and her character. You could even go as far as to have the other players assume roles in a vision. Brief them on their parts in the episode, the portions of the message that they're meant to convey, and let the scene play out. It almost certainly won't evolve the way you expected, but that may be a good thing, making visions even more cryptic as multiple people's interpretations build a complex picture.

Say you introduce a Hermit as a Storyteller character. Your aim is to use him as a conduit for hints and suggestions to the characters as you increase the danger level of the monsters they face. It's not going well, though. The characters are reluctant to trust someone who's unwilling to spend much time with them and who often communicates through notes and e-mail rather than face to face. To rectify this, you decide to give one of the characters a vision that hints at the reasons for the Hermit's strange behavior. You write a brief outline of the scene in which the Hermit walks through your setting city. Everything seems faded and muted, bar the Hermit. The perspective is from above. The character receiving the vision suddenly realizes that he is not alone in surveying the Hermit. Two other people, one an imperious looking woman dressed in scarlet dress, the other a serious looking man wearing a black suit follow him. As one, they reach down to him and start to speak. He screams in agony and falls to the ground, his hands pressed to his ears. The two look on him with sadness and regret, then turn to the character and say "trust" in the barest whisper. Then the vision ends.

Another example is a hallucination meant to hint about what it's like to be a ghost. The hunter seems to become invisible. No one reacts to her or even acknowledges her. Loved ones seem sad and then carry on as if she weren't there. The character is forced to watch while one of her friends makes advances on her husband and then moves into her house. As her anger grows, a wind seems to blow all around her and she suddenly feels herself become a part of the world again. Yet when she confronts her family, they react with terror and run away. She realizes why when she sees her rotted form in a mirror. Just as the character becomes truly terrified and depressed with this fate, the scene ends.

When composing visions, bear some things in mind. The Messengers are ill suited or badly out of practice in dealing with humanity. It's potentially been ages since they affected mortals directly, if they ever did at all. They tend to deal in imagery that seems archaic or bizarre to most characters, which presents problems in understanding visions. Imagery of demons, warriors and struggles for salvation can be difficult for a postal worker to make sense of.

You can introduce elements to sights that offer some familiarity, though, such as the symbols for Zeal, Mercy or Vision: fire, light or wind, respectively. If characters were exposed to these elements at the imbuing, their sudden reappearance later in the chronicle bears meaning. Something significant is going on. The characters may not know what is special right way, but they'll search for it because such triggers are already cues in their realm of experience.

The Word

Many hunters consider the Word their tool, having nothing to do with the Messengers. The fact that some Visionaries seem able to craft new symbols for the hunter code seems to bear that belief out. However, the fact that the code springs fully formed into the minds of the imbued and is understood universally around the globe shows that it has roots beyond the individual. Just as hunters use the Word to communicate with each other, there is no reason why the Messengers can't use it for the same.

When the imbued encounter a code symbol posted somewhere they have no way of telling who posted it. A warning of a monster's intentions or guidance to-

ward other hunters or monsters could just as easily come from the Messengers as from other hunters. If you want characters to understand that symbols derive directly from the Messengers, have a symbol appear or be created spontaneously in the hunters' presence. A symbol could be drawn in the steam on a bathroom mirror, for example, or emerge on a wall while a character's back is turned. Intuitive understanding and practical use of the code suggests that monsters don't know what the symbols mean. Hunters can also tell when a symbol is imitated by anyone or anything that doesn't understand the code. So the spontaneous appearance of a sign can *reasonably* be construed as the work of the Heralds. It's probably not a good idea to have an image appear right before characters' eyes, though. Such a display is perhaps too overtly supernatural for **Hunter**'s style.

The Heralds tend to send messages that chide or direct. Perhaps a hunter has taken a misstep and needs a push in the right direction. The symbol that appears in the steamy mirror may express urgency or danger, warning the hunter that she doesn't have the time for simple pleasures. A sign glimpsed on the side of a building might point toward a miserable rot that lurks within. The sudden appearance of a "danger" or "trap" sign on a door might warn a tenacious Zealot from making a fatal error by bursting in.

Gaining Edges

As stated previously, edges are one of hunters' capabilities that tap directly into the Heralds' power. These gifts are a manifestation of the Messengers' selection of the imbued and reflect on the creators' role in hunters' lives.

Hunters don't choose their new edges. The Messengers grant new abilities when hunters' commitment to the mission — rated by their Virtues — reaches a certain level. Players can choose their characters' new edges or you have the option as Storyteller to allocate edges, whether at the imbuing or as Virtues increase throughout the game, subjecting players to the same uncertainty and wonder at new capabilities that characters undergo.

If you want go the route of assigning powers, literally assuming the role of the Heralds themselves, consult your players before proceeding. Many gamers enjoy crafting their characters, developing them through personal experiences and experience points. Taking away some of that control may frustrate players. The game is about having fun, after all.

Then again, many players are glad to go through what their characters do. It's easier for them, and in some ways more fulfilling, to roleplay their characters' shock and fear if they know little about what's going on and suddenly manifest new and baffling powers. If a new edge is a surprise to them, it's easier to make it a surprise to their characters.

Allocating Virtues

If you're really into this edge assignment idea, you can even decide which of a character's Virtues should be raised when 10 Conviction is cashed in, also based on how the hunter has behaved of late. If he's been particularly aggressive, compassionate or curious, it's Zeal, Mercy or Vision, respectively. Maybe he's fulfilled some particularly important goals of his creed and should advance his primary Virtue, or has stepped out of the box somewhat and should be rewarded with a point of another Virtue. Or perhaps that 10th Conviction point was gained in a moment of anger, love or investigation, indicating which Virtue to increase.

Allocating Edges

The key to allocating edges is to consider characters' actions in advance of Virtue increases. You get to do a little private roleplaying, acting as the Messengers, watching a character, assessing her commitment to the hunt and deciding which edge would benefit her the most.

You don't have to know all the edges in detail to allocate them. Consider likely edge assignments between sessions, instead. Go through notes and memories of recent games and weigh a character's actions as her Conviction approaches 10. What Virtue is the player likely to increase? Don't be afraid to ask so you have a solid sense of your choices.

The best places to look for new edges to assign are the various creed books. Your players may not have these books, so new powers you introduce will be as revolutionary to players as they are to characters. If you find an edge that matches what the character has been up to lately, or that suits where she's going, go ahead and assign it. The effect can be from the hunter's creed path, from any path ascribed to the same Virtue or even from another Virtue if the right kind of point is acquired.

Few characters are played precisely within the boundaries of a single creed. Most adopt aspects of other hunter mentalities — such as a Martyr thinking somewhat like a Visionary in asking what all these sacrifices are really for — just as we all have varying facets to our personalities. A character's behavior should guide you to an appropriate Virtue and therefore power. Has she been thinking ahead, anticipating

problems, thus acquiring another Vision point? Then Foresee might be an appropriate power to manifest. Has she been taking an even-handed but stern approach to the other side? Look to Zeal and the Judgment edges. Has she been talking to monsters or trying to get in their heads? The Merciful edges are your best bet. Remember that you're being the Messengers. What edge will help the hunter continue to explore the avenues she has been walking? What will make her a more capable proxy?

Alternatively, if a hunter relies on the same old techniques time after time, the Messengers might give her a new edge that challenges those patterns. The new edge might encourage different perspectives or behavior, broadening and deepening the character's range of skills, making it more likely that he will survive and succeed in the Most Dangerous Game. A new and unexpected edge can also breathe new life into a player's interpretation and enjoyment of her character and the game.

If you do assign a character an edge somewhere out of left field, it's probably wise to choose one within the character's existing creed path or one under the same primary Virtue, but that differs considerably from edges used thus far. Most creed selections break down into two or more groups that reflect the different roles a particular hunter can play. The Visionary edges, for example, are broadly split between those that enhance one's role as a leader and organizer of the imbued and those that broaden understanding of the mission as a whole. If the Visionary character in your game has focused largely on knowledge-seeking and hasn't been confronted much by the daily problems of the hunt, assign a leadership edge such as Focus, Summon or Rally (see **Hunter Book: Visionary**) and see how that opens the character's mind and confronts him with new challenges.

Manifesting Edges

If you do assign edges as if you were the Messengers, you should reveal those powers in a way that's a little more exciting and story provoking than saying, "Oh, by the way Natalie, your character now has Champion. Look it up in the rulebook before next week's session, would you?"

Not exactly atmospheric is it?

If you've chosen the edge based on a character's recent or probable future behavior, introducing the effect during the game is easy. Odds are that the hunter will do something related to the edge, and you get to describe the spontaneous results with the edge's enhancements. You probably shouldn't let players invest Conviction in any initial roll with a new power. A character isn't sufficiently aware that something special is going to happen, so she's not likely to put her heart into it.

Taking the above example of Natalie's character:

Storyteller: "OK, the rot closes in on his former boss, who's blissfully unaware that anything is wrong. A huge grin of triumph on its face, the rot raises the knife, ready to plunge down into the fat manager's back. What do you do?"

Natalie: "Shit! Manisha cries out a warning to the fat guy and runs toward the rot."

Storyteller: "As Manisha yells, she feels herself bathed in the fires of righteousness — like the first time all over again. It's almost as if there's extra force behind the words she yells. Her mind reels momentarily, but the words come out clear and strong. Suddenly, the monster's head jerks round as it turns to face Manisha. The fat guy finally realizes that he's in terrible danger. Completely confused, he dives for cover. The rot pulls the remains of its lips into an awful leer and advances, seeming to have eyes only for you now."

And yet, some edges such as Brand or Trail don't automatically coincide with what an unwitting character would do. They require special actions to activate the new gifts, which a hunter might not normally be inclined to perform, such as to get close enough to touch a creature. In these cases, you can tailor events so that a character has an opportunity to discover his new gift. A character who has unknowingly acquired Trail might encounter a rot in a crowded place. He can't attack it there, but he can't fight his way through the crowd to get away, either. The tide of the crowd seems to shift and the hunter finds himself face to face with the thing. Repulsed, all he can do is push it away without otherwise revealing his hunter status. The touch is enough to activate Trail, and the hunter can stalk his new adversary. Deciding on new edges in advance of game sessions gives you the flexibility to engineer the powers' emergence based on what happens naturally.

In most cases when new edges are assigned, no die rolls should be made when the powers manifest for the first time. Think about it: If you asked a player to make a die roll without explanation, and it failed, how could you communicate the effects of the useless edge? Narrate the character's first experience with the edge for him instead, assuming at least one success is achieved to gauge the effects. That way, the new effect comes off, surprises everyone and contributes to rather than interferes with your story. (As stated above, Conviction can't be risked on this initial roll, either; the character didn't know what

was coming. If Conviction must be spent to activate the power, have the player mark off the point after the effect takes place, or maybe the Heralds let the hunter have a "freebie" this time around.)

Once a character demonstrates a new edge, you can fill the player in on what's been gained and how it works. Or you can continue to withhold details until the character gets some practice with her new capability, as suggested in **Hunter**'s storytelling chapter.

The Messengers as Antagonists

So far we've run with **Hunter**'s default assumption that the Messengers are accepted as benefactors or shepherds of the imbued. Players and characters might question some of the assumptions that many hunters make, however. For example, earlier in this article we discussed how many hunters think second sight lets them see the world as it really is. But perhaps some hunters realize the truth — that their perceptions are altered to the designs of entities who refuse to reveal themselves or explain their motivation, that these things intrude in people's lives and subject them to mortal danger. Looked at in that light, it isn't hard to perceive the Heralds as an enemy.

A chronicle plotted on these assumptions is an interesting twist on the conventional **Hunter** model and is perfectly reasonable and probably accurate to human reactions to being imbued. It takes the Messengers, who are usually part of the backdrop of the game and forces them front and center. The true nature of the imbued stops being a side issue, one to be debated when hunters aren't fighting for their lives against the walking dead. It becomes the primary issue of the chronicle as the imbued struggle to understand and possibly escape their condition, acting in opposition to unimaginably powerful entities.

The Problems

There's one big honking problem in running a story with the Messengers as antagonists. Enemies you can't see, touch or influence are bloody difficult to fight. The same mysterious contact that prevents hunters from getting a clear picture of what the Messengers want them to do in a traditional game also deters them from turning on the Heralds now. How can you fight what you can't see, identify or even imagine?

Hunters' edges are likely to be useless against the Messengers. After all, why would the Heralds put weapons in hunters' hands that can be turned against them? And even if the imbued do find ways of making their powers useful in a crusade against the Messengers, they have to question whether using them just fulfills the Messengers' plan. Does use of second sight or an edge draw the Heralds' attention to the character? Does the imbuing itself turn the characters into beacons for the Messengers, from whom the imbued can never hide? Part of the conflict at the heart of the story is the fact that the characters are forced to question every single use of their capabilities, and they're forced to question the value of their own continued existence. If they're living tools of the creators, doesn't living further the creators' cause?

In essence, this type of chronicle takes **Hunter**'s themes of paranoia, mystery, ignorance and vulnerability to the extreme. The imbued usually face monsters that have more power and a greater understanding of the hidden world than they do. Once the Messengers become the foes, the stakes are immeasurable. The enemy is vastly powerful and knows exactly what hunters are and what they can do, as opposed to most monsters who are just as confused by hunters as hunter are by them.

The Solutions

You can go in one of several directions with a Messengers-as- antagonist chronicle. You could rewrite a few of the basic assumptions of the game and create a way for characters to access the Messengers directly. Perhaps rather than being invisible, intangible entities that influence hunters, the Heralds are tangible, visible things that only seem untouchable because they work from vast distances. It's only when they touch material beings that they must come in proximity to their creations. A series of clues could lead the imbued to this realization and initiate an all-new hunt for their so-called benefactors.

Perhaps the Messengers do indeed create the second sight they bestow so it fails to reveal their presence, just as it influences the images hunters have of monsters. Once the characters realize this, they can seek aid from other supernatural creatures to detect and deal with the Messengers.

Or there's the option of keeping the Messengers untouchable and still have hunters work to thwart their plans. This approach is possible within the official **Hunter** backstory. Should a group of imbued ever learn that the Messengers want hunters to mitigate Apocalypse rather than prevent it altogether, the chosen may rebel against the direction they're given. Principal antagonists could be other hunters who still work toward the Messengers' ends. Even then, the characters must wrestle with letting monsters run free to potentially harm defenseless people and loved ones and with trying to convince other imbued of yet another level of truth that they might not be willing to see.

It would be a very challenging game, but a very rewarding one.

Hunters and the Internet

Jake glanced out of the back window of the cab, sweat running down his forehead. Was that car still following him? Damn, it was. He could just make out the driver and stared at him, desperately hoping that nothing seemed wrong. The driver seemed untainted, but bitter experience had taught Jake that didn't guarantee anything.

Digging in his bag to find his mobile phone and the tickets Liz had arranged for him, Jake coughed to attract the driver's attention away from the heavy freeway traffic. "How long before we reach the airport?"

"Twenty minutes if you're lucky, buddy," the driver said disinterestedly. "Who knows with traffic this time of day?"

Long enough, Jake thought. He switched on his phone and quickly punched in his PIN. While the phone searched for a network, Jake pulled out his laptop and turned it on. If the car behind really was following him, this would be his last chance.

He hooked the phone to the laptop and opened his web browser, breathing a sigh of relief as the phone lit up and started dialing. It seemed to take an age for the connection to the Internet to be made. It was hardly fast once it was achieved, but it would do. Jake logged onto hunter-net, waiting impatiently as the data crawled down to his computer. He glanced back again. The car was still there. Turning his attention back to his portable, he opened the mail interface and typed as quickly as he could.

Subject: Rots in Cincinnati
From: bookworm55
To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

To any and all chosen in the Cincinnati area. I've been in close contact with a rot for the last couple weeks. I thought I was getting through to it, but I think I was being used. By the time you read this, I'll be long out of town. I'm in serious trouble. The rot knows my name and I don't want to lose my legs again.

This thing is smart and dangerous. Much as I hate to say it, it needs to be dealt with for the good of everyone in the city. I've done all I can to get through to it. I have no other choice but to share what I know so someone else can step in.

His name is Lawrence....

Writing the email took ten minutes. When the words "Message sent successfully" appeared on screen, Jake realized he'd been holding his breath. He let it out slowly and switched off the laptop. Then he glanced over his shoulder. Damn. The car was still there.

* * *

Barb bound up the stairs and into her apartment. Thank God the day was over. Sometimes she thought her

boss was worse than the monsters out there. She crushed that line of thought. It might have been a few weeks since she last faced one of the things, but she couldn't forget how close her friends had come to dying.

She turned on her computer, grabbed a bag of chips and logged onto the Internet. She typed into the browser almost without thinking and checked her mail for the first time in days.

Her heart sank the second she saw the subject line "Rots in Cincinnati." She read it as quickly as she could. Shit. When was it dated? Two days ago. Nothing from Bookworm since. Abandoning the half-eaten chips, she terminated the Internet connection, grabbed her phone and dialed Craig's number.

"Craig. We've got a problem. That kind...."

The Information Super-Highway

Hunter-net is the closest thing the imbued have to organization on a greater than local scale. As an anonymous forum in which they can exchange information, views and experiences with each other, it's made the difference between survival and death for more than one hunter. Extended debates on the various mailing lists provide a rich vein of information for anyone with the intelligence, skill or luck to separate facts from speculations, wild inaccuracies from intentional deceptions.

That's all well and good for the characters who appear in **Hunter** supplements, but how do you take this fictional resource and make it useful to your players in the context of a regular face-to-face game? It's not nearly as easy as it seems. Producing the results of several hundred posters, many of whom live overseas, is quite a task while you still have the normal business of running a chronicle to address.

Emulating a hunter list is well worth doing because hunter-net and it companions are useful conduits of information between yourself and the players. They can also be springboards for stories. But before we look at how you can use hunter-net, it's important to understand what the list is — and isn't.

What's on There?

The title "hunter-net" actually refers to a number of related sites and mailing lists for the purposes of this article.

The Original Hunter-net

The main site, http://www.hunter-net.org, is moderated by Witness1 and is the one you see used most often in published supplements. This web-based central information site for the imbued contains several sub-sites and other services.

The Easy Method

There's a quick and easy way for your players to access the same kinds of information that their characters do on hunter-net.

Several published **Hunter** books actually exist as web pages on hunter-net within the World of Darkness. The **Hunter Survival Guide, The Walking Dead** and many of the creed books have extensive in-character sections that are set up as pages or links from the hunter-net site. Many sections of the **Hunter** rulebook such as Chapters 2 and 9 can even be used in a similar way. What players read is largely what their characters read.

Chapter 2 of **The Walking Dead** is perfect for players who try to comprehend what motivates rots while Chapter 2 of **Hunter** delves into monsters' theorized control of society. If the chosen in your group are interested in those subjects, have your players read those chapters as if they were online themselves.

If characters want to search hunter-net for information on particular locations or types of monsters, refer them to the most appropriate book and chapter that answers some of their questions. The **Hunter Survival Guide** deals with particular parts of the world, for example while "The Enemy" chapter of the main rulebook has sections on monster types. Of course, the veracity of what's presented there is entirely for you to decide when you determine the true details of *your* locales or creatures.

- The **Survival Guide:** A resource on the situations that hunters face worldwide, generally compiled by residents of those areas. (See the **Hunter Survival Guide** for more details.)
- **Monster Guides:** Collections of posts concerning particular types of monsters, again designed as reference for other hunters and updated intermittently. One example is Walking Dead (see **Hunter: The Walking Dead** for details). Similar archives exist for skinchangers, blood slaves and other creatures.
- **Unity:** A collection of information and journals designed as reference and guidance for hunters. It also provides regional updates and the Danger List, a collection of hunters and monsters who seem to pose a threat to other chosen. (See **Hunter Book: Visionary** for more details.)

The site also hosts a number of chat forums, where users can log on and discuss fears, encounters, plans,

ideas and theories with other imbued in real time. Lastly, the site provides a web-based mail system for accessing hunter-net email. Mail was originally sent directly to users, but in recent months Witness1 has switched to a web-based system for increased security. Users don't even register their email addresses. They simply get a user name (the ubiquitous userXX names) and a password, then log onto the site and read their mail from any computer terminal.

Creed Sites

A number of sites have sprung up based around particular creeds and their outlooks on the hunt. All these sites have information on methods of pursuing the hunt relevant to a creed's outlook — the perspectives, values, agendas and goals that certain like-minded people tend to have in common. These sites have largely arisen in response to the varied and wild opinions expressed on hunter-net itself, with which many posters disagree and are frustrated. Most of these related sites also have associated email lists. These lists are usually based on standard email rather than a web interface. Thus, a user has to risk revealing his email address to register with a site.

Examples include:

- **Firelight:** The Avenger site. (See **Hunter Book: Avenger**.)
- **Judgmentday.list:** The Judge mailing list, concealed behind a front website. (See **Hunter Book: Judge**.)
- **Triage:** The Redeemer site. (See **Hunter Book: Redeemer**.)
- **Vigil:** The Defender site. (See **Hunter Book: Defender**.)
- **Vitalis:** The Innocent site. (See **Hunter Book: Innocent**.)

The Hermit, Martyr, Visionary and Wayward creeds do not have their own unique lists in canonical **Hunter**, but feel free to create them if they serve a purposes in your game. Any of the other lists can serve as a model of why it would be created and how it could run within the setting.

International Sites

Hunter-net is, by and large, an English-speaking list and website. That means there are many imbued in other parts of the world who have no access to the information on it. While the balance is skewed by the fact that levels of Internet access are much higher in the United States than in most countries worldwide, several other lists or websites exist in other languages. If you need or want to introduce a foreign-language list into your game, perhaps using hunter-net as a model, feel free. The level of security, both mundane and Messenger-induced, is entirely up to you.

Getting Them There

So how do you get your troupe's imbued onto hunter-net or any of the other websites? If the players have read the rulebook or any of the supplements, chances are they'll do it for you. At some point, somebody will have her character and do a web search for a selection of terms related to hunters and the mission. She'll look at you hopefully, expecting you to say she has found www.hunter-net.org.

That's a little too easy, though. Unless she specifies a long list of search terms that fairly accurately match what hunter-net does, she gets hundreds of sites that take too long to check out individually. Several of them seem to have bearing on what hunters are and do, yet prove mundane and useless. The player and her character then has to be much more specific and creative in the search for any kind of informed site. You're well within your rights to demand a Computer roll from the player, perhaps even an extended one, to find a worthwhile site.

Why make the process so challenging? The search is more interesting to portray and gives players a sense of accomplishment when their characters finally sign up as Layabout323 or whatever. The challenge also ensures that players feel some sense of security in hunter-net when they do find it. That, and players get some taste of what monsters might also go through to find it — and monsters also have to contend with Messenger interference in their efforts.

If your players haven't read any of the books and don't initiate any searches themselves, there are several ways you could introduce hunter-net to your chronicle.

The Messengers

The Messengers seem to have been interested in guiding the chosen to hunter-net on more than one occasion. In fact, divine intervention or some unseen hand may be *required* to find the site, which could explain why most monsters have not found hunter-net. There's no reason why this intervention can't happen in your game. As with all supernatural events in **Hunter**, being shepherded to the site should be spooky without being overtly ordained. Imagine logging onto the Internet, hoping to read a news site or to shop for CDs. However, whatever you type in, whatever search you do on an engine, whichever bookmark you select, you keep being drawn to the same site again and again. While this method smacks somewhat of leading players by the nose, it has the advantage of suggesting that

greater forces intrude upon a character's life from the imbuing onward.

An even more subtle approach is to use the Word. A character could receive an email from an anonymous source, with nothing but a graphic of a symbol from the hunter code — perhaps one meaning "information" or "assistance." When the curious character clicks on the graphic, he is taken directly to hunter-net.

A more heavy-handed approach to steering the characters would be a computer that activates spontaneously and directs itself to hunter-net. A character plays almost no part in the direction and is clearly intended to go to the site. If this kind of thunder-and-lightning storytelling is required to get through to some players, you can resort to it.

Other Hunters

Another method of getting characters on the hunter list is to have another of the chosen introduce the site. If any of the characters have the Mentor Background and have a hunter as that teacher, you're all set. Unless the Mentor is not likely to use the Internet — she's illiterate or not imbued — she can easily point a protégé in the right direction. Even if a mentor isn't an Internet user, she could be in contact with other hunters who are and pass on the relevant information. The mentor may even do so because she's curious about what the site has to offer and looks to her student for help.

If the characters have intermittent contact with other nearby hunters, those associates could mention the site. If you've decided that the players' hunters are alone in the area, you can introduce a traveling hunter who shares the required information before moving on. Imbued such as Sixofswords29, Traveller72 and Bookworm55 actively seek out other hunters and could run into your group. While they may not stay in town long enough to help the characters physically, they could leave the address of hunter-net or one of its related sites before moving on.

Player-Motivated Use

Okay, the characters are on hunter-net and want to use it as a resource. How do you portray and use it to the benefit your stories?

Sooner or later, the characters are going to turn to a website for support or to get perspective on a situation. They're badly in need of aid, advice or information. Perhaps they encounter a monster that defies everything they think they understand about creatures.

Spontaneous, player-driven access of hunter-net is one of the hardest uses of the site to handle as a Storyteller. Your job is tough enough as it is. You have to keep the plot on the rails, keep track of a half-dozen cast members, deal with totally unexpected actions by the players' characters — and now you need to provide instant replies from different hunter-net posters and data in response to characters' inquiries.

Online Versus Offline

Although the number of people online grows considerably each day, and worldwide, the fact is that a vast number are still not logged on. They may live in countries that are simply incapable of supporting the technology. They may live in remote locales without phone lines. They may be too poor to afford a computer or even a phone bill. Or they may be ardent Luddites who dismiss the Internet as a waste of time.

The fact is that the Heralds don't take Internet access into account when they imbue people. They select individuals who are most likely to respond in a monster's presence, regardless of whether those people are web-heads or if they make their homes on the street.

Although the Internet and hunter-net would seem to be invaluable tools on the hunt, are used extensively by some chosen and appear frequently in many **Hunter** supplements, the Internet is not necessary to answer the call. The number of people who've been imbued and who try to carry out their lives afraid, alone and *offline* is anyone's guess. Given that the majority of people worldwide are not hooked up, it's logical to assume that the imbued on hunter-net are in the minority.

Bear that in mind when running your game. If all hunters the characters meet on the street are wired, you may not represent the true predicament of most imbued. Being connected is actually a huge advantage, not only for sharing information about monsters and stalking tactics but for the comforting knowledge that one is not insane (and for the discomforting knowledge that the world really is as it seems).

So, to put a realistic spin on the hunter condition, keep many of the imbued in your supporting cast offline. You might also want to keep the players' hunters in the dark about hunter-net for a while to make them suffer through the true horrors of facing a monstrous world in utter ignorance. When the characters have hit rock bottom, you can offer some hope with an invaluable tool that answers at least some of their haunting questions (whether accurately or not).

Well, actually, you don't. There are some very good in-character reasons why you shouldn't feel pressured to come up with instant responses. Hunter-net has approximately a few hundred registered posters at any one time. Of those, a good portion are dead, in a hospital or are otherwise prevented from posting or accessing the Internet. They might be trying to live their own lives, have turned their backs on the hunt or are currently preoccupied by a study or strike. Another 100 or so probably check hunter-net only once a week or once every few weeks. That leaves a couple hundred at the most. You can assume that a good 50 or more have never actually posted anything, but just lurk on the list to gather what knowledge they can.

So, we're down to maybe a hundred or so people who check the list with any frequency. Given that those people are spread all over the world, they log on at different times of day and may not be free to reply quickly, we're left with perhaps a few dozen people who might be able to respond to a query in a hurry. How many of them do? And how many of them have something useful to contribute?

The answer is "as many or as few as you want."

Quick Answers

Characters' efforts on hunter-net are likely to be in one of two forms. The first is a search of the archives for information relevant to the particular creature they face. The best way to deal with this kind of request is to prepare in advance. As you draw up the monsters for a particular story, take a few minutes to write up bullet-point descriptions of similar creatures mentioned on hunter-net. These notes don't need to be terribly detailed. Just a few assumptions and beliefs about a similar kind of creature that other hunters have recorded.

Example: *Matt decides to introduce a ghost that has a grudge against the characters because they managed to disband the cult it spent months establishing. The ghost has tricks that revolve around the possession and use of machinery and electronic equipment. It uses phones, cars and other pieces of machinery to track and attack the characters.*

Matt draws up a quick list of likely facts that a hunter-net search might turn up on such a being, some of it accurate, some of it patently false.

- *Some evidence of ghosts possessing and using computers in the past, sometimes for communication.*
- *Theories that it is not really ghosts, but warlocks who can use magic to control equipment.*
- *Claims that a hunter was nearly killed when his car suddenly started to drive itself.*
- *A suggestion that a small machine can be purged of influence by being left on hallowed ground for a few days.*

When Mary decides to search hunter-net for information about the group's antagonist, Matt takes these points and embellishes on them a little for her. Despite the fact that the last "fact" is completely erroneous, the characters decide to try it.

The key to information searches is to keep "data" vague, contradictory and in some cases absolutely wrong. Hunters are still very new to the true World of Darkness and only just glimpse the monsters with which they deal. Many are still confused as to what a "rot" is — a vampire, zombie or something else entirely. They confuse one creature for another and have no clue about variations between different types of the *same* creatures. There's no reason why information should be accurate about anything but the most obvious details. A few genuine insights might be buried in the bullshit, but they're hard to find and even harder to recognize.

Hunters who rely on such information as their only basis for decisions and action get killed sooner or later.

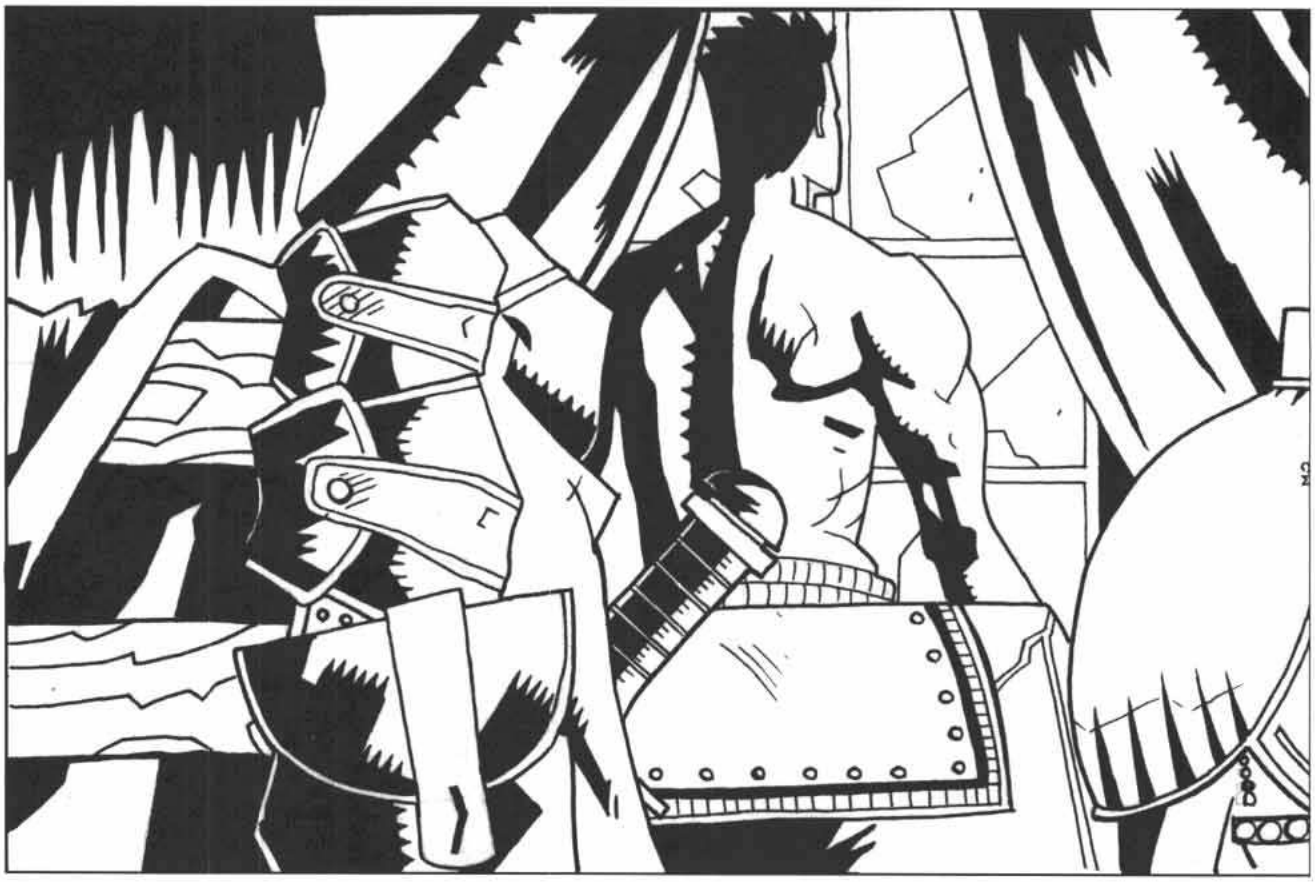
Mailing Lists

Players might also have their characters ask questions on one or more of the imbued mailing lists. This is only likely to be an issue for you if the game session covers more than one or two days. If you know that's going to be the case in advance, prepare a short list of hunters who might be online at that time, with brief character descriptions.

Example: *Matt writes a poster list.*

- *Sixofswords29: Middle-aged British Visionary. Arrogant and bossy. Posts guesses and rumors as if they were fact. Not very knowledgeable about ghosts. Falls silent the moment his information is proved wrong.*
- *Ticket312: Young woman, Innocent. Knows a lot about ghosts and zombies, but tends to assume the best of them at all times. Tells posters that they're attacked due to miscommunication.*
- *Stella142: Thoughtful but rambling Visionary. Is likely to have some good insights into a situation, but they're disguised by the sheer verbosity of his replies and the self-questioning of his own ideas.*

When Mary decides she is dissatisfied with the responses she turns up in the hunter-net archive, she turns to the main list. Her character posts a description of the problem. Twenty-four hours of game time later, once the group is prepared to lay a trap for its stalker, she returns to hunter-net. Matt improvises replies from his chosen posters based on their character sketches.



Having a list of possible posters gives you the flexibility to provide instant responses to queries without getting too bogged down in generating ideas while running the game. Make notes of what your posters state, however, because players undoubtedly reference emails again.

Between Sessions

Using hunter-net between sessions is an excellent way of both moving your story forward and keeping your players' enthusiasm for the game high, especially if weeks pass between games.

This is where using real-world and make-believe email comes into its own. If you and your players have regular Internet access, consider setting up a mailing list, either using your email package or a service such as YahooGroups or eCircle for correspondence between games. Of course, the same can be done with snailmail or even with face-to-face meetings performed in-character, but the latter two provide you with less options and greatly reduce speed of reply among participants.

Downtime email can be used for a number of things, particularly reinforcing the mood of the game or introducing new themes. The players post as their characters and you represent other hunters online. You can write as much or as little as you like and create it all whole-cloth, or simply transcribe posts from published books so that players receive them in the medium in which they're meant to be seen. Some posts might simply be background color — posts unrelated to the main characters' dialogs while other emails address the characters directly.

A character may start to develop a friendship through hunter-net chats. A sudden silence from an online friend and an eventual report of her death in the

Stringing it out

If characters post inquiries online and seek answers, you can buy yourself some time before composing responses. Rule that Witness1 or whoever runs a list moderates every post. The characters' questions have to be read and approved before they're forwarded to the list. (Presumably, Witness1 does so to weed out anything that exposes another poster to any danger or to try to spot a monster lurking on the list.) Such "interference" gives you a chance to create relevant, plausible and interesting answers, especially if you're overwhelmed by other aspects of the game at that time.

field reinforces the dangers of a hunter's life. Or the friendship could develop such that the other correspondent becomes a recurring supporting character during play or might even make arrangements to meet one of the players' characters in the flesh. Acquaintances made online during downtime become sources of plot hooks as they feed information or call upon friends for aid. By contrast, initiating and simulating a flame war between another poster and a player's character can foreshadow a plot that brings hunters into direct conflict, whether ideological or physical.

Players may also seek advice or comments on their characters' plans or research during downtime. This gives you an opportunity to gently steer characters in a direction that coincides with your plans for upcoming events. Advice or guidance from other hunters might nudge characters and players from a course you're not prepared to follow onto one that you are.

Further Research

If a player wants his character to spend extended time researching a particular issue or theme on hunter-net or any of the other sites, it's ideal to handle it between games. Ask what he searches for, then have the player make an Intelligence + Research or Computer roll with a difficulty appropriate to the complexity or depth of the subject (probably 6 to 9), and then provide some written responses or data.

Example: *Mary decides that her character does some intensive research on warlocks, thinking it's the best way forward since those church plans fell through. Matt replies, referring her to the in-character section on warlocks in the* **Hunter** *rulebook, along with information from two posters about related encounters, which Matt composes.*

From the information you supply, the player can decide which particular avenue of research is pursued in greater detail — say, an investigation of the color purple among reported sightings of wizards. Don't let a character explore too many avenues at one time. Hunters only have very limited free time. If a player wants her character to do exhaustive investigation, ask her to provide a breakdown of how the hunter fits the effort in around family, social and work life. If the effort involves giving up part of a normal routine, use that as a plot point in your next game — a spouse wants to know where the character spends nights, or the boss is tired of him ducking out of work early.

Mary decides that a poster's previous encounter with a warlock has a bearing on her situation. Her character Barb enters a direct email correspondence, with Matt writing the replies. Barb also sets out to learn as much as she can about warlocks on hunter-net. Matt tells Mary that the next game session starts 48 hours of game time after the last one ended, and they're both work days. Barb calls in sick to conduct her studies. Matt notes that Barb's boss reaches the snapping point with his employee's erratic behavior. Early in the next game, Barb is called into her boss's office....

As alluded above, if a character researches a subject covered in one of the faux websites of **Hunter**'s sourcebooks, you could have a player read relevant sections of those books if she hasn't already. A study of the walking dead could lead to a page or the entirely of the in-character chapters of **The Walking Dead**, for example. Revealing published text as in-setting material can also be done on the fly when hunters spontaneously turn to hunter-net in the middle of a game. Players may not be familiar with all the books published for the game, so sharing pages is like a revelation to them, whether for good or ill. Or maybe a character has limited computer skills and doesn't know how to use links to sites attached to hunter-net and doesn't know about the www.hunter-net.org/huntersurvivalguide/page until he lucks into it — just when you are ready to share the content of the actual book.

Appeals for Help

One special case of a character-driven use of hunter-net is an appeal for help. If a hunter thinks that she or her group is in way over their heads and can't deal with a threat, she might request that other hunters to come to the rescue.

This possibility can create a number of problems. If you're happy to introduce another hunter or group of them, fine. Create a bunch of imbued who respond to the email.

If your chronicle is built on the premise that the characters are alone in a location and there's no one else to help them, or you just want emphasize the rarity of hunters, you need to come up with some plausible reasons why no one replies. Most the hunter lists have very specific restrictions on posting details of identities or locations, for security reasons and to protect posters. A list administrator might cancel such a post automatically or release it with some of the primary details deleted.

Alternatively, no list members may be nearby or — even if they are —might be too suspicious of the request to meet in person. Paranoia is rampant among hunters, and there's no way of knowing for sure over email that someone is on the level. A potential ally might be so suspicious that reassuring her takes too long, and the characters are forced to carry on without the assistance they seek.

And, if someone does come to the character's aid, the "ally" might not prove to be the assistant they need. Imagine a group of hunters seeking help to deal with a mob of zombies. Suddenly, after recruiting an

ally, they discover that the zombies appear to have a nominal leader who is willing to talk. While the characters are quite open to this, their ally, perhaps a Wayward or a hardcore Avenger, may not want the dialogue open.

Storyteller-Motivated Use

Just as players can use hunter-net as a tool, so can you. If the characters check their e-mail from the lists regularly, you can introduce new elements to your game through it.

Plot Initiation

The players' characters might use hunter-net as a means to finding aid for their characters, but so might other hunters seek the characters' assistance. Similarly, events described online might be so compelling that players' characters can't resist getting involved.

Example: *The plotline with the vengeful ghost now finished, Matt decides to start a new chapter in his chronicle. Mary's character Barb has been fired from her job and splits her time between family and monster hunting. Greg and Phil's characters help support her, but begin to struggle to explain to their families exactly where their cash goes. Barb logs onto hunter-net and finds repeated pleas for help from a hunter based only an hour's drive away. A rot has learned the identity of several of the imbued in that cell and is hunting them down systematically.*

Can Barb really justify involving her group in the problem when their own lives are in such a precarious way? Can she sit back and let other hunters die?

Of course, hunter-net can introduce plot lines in other ways, too. In the story at the beginning of this article, Bookworm55 posts to hunter-net and kicks off a plot for a group of hunters he doesn't even know. Did he escape? Is he in captivity? Just how dangerous is the thing he reports about? Do the newcomers dare face down a monster that has so thoroughly taken in one of the most prominent of the imbued?

Other plot ideas include:

- A monster-lurker has found its way onto hunter-net. By asking a series of cleverly worded questions, it goads one of the characters into revealing enough of her personal information for it to identify and track her down. Suddenly, the character finds her family and friends under threat from an unknown force, and advice from the "friend" on hunter-net just seems to make things worse.
- Doctor119 has come up with a theory on the true nature of rots that seems to make a lot of sense to several people on hunter-net, including one of the characters. The doctor suggests a research program to try out some of his theories in the field. His ideas are in fact dangerously wrong.
- A series of events in the characters' hometown parallels events a hunter-net poster describes in his own city. Can the two groups, communicating solely through e-mail, piece together what's going on and why the same supernatural events happen in two different places simultaneously?

Extra Color

If you follow the events that take places in **Hunter** supplements, you know that ongoing developments occur between various imbued, such as aggression committed by Crusader17 against Oracle171. Although these events don't automatically effect your players' hunters, such relations show that the world is larger than the characters themselves and events transpire without them.

By providing players with posts from hunter-net on a regular basis, even ones that have no direct bearing on the story you're running, you make your world more believable. Whether you transcribe posts from published books or create original material, you remind the characters and players that they're just people — seeming insignificant even on the scale of the hunt. The knowledge that other hunters are out there, living their own lives with problems similar to the characters' own helps bring your World of Darkness to life.

"Color" posts can also serve to introduce players to some of the wider themes of **Hunter**. Portraying an online hunter who slowly goes mad as his Virtues rise foreshadows a theme that might arise later in your chronicle as the characters' own Virtues increase — assuming the characters survive that long. Maybe another hunter publicly disdains working with other imbued, fearing that their weaknesses or mistakes will get him killed. He might be able to go it alone, but more likely he's hurt or devastated by monsters more powerful than a single chosen, and the characters learn the dangers of isolation on the hunt.

The Internet can also be used to challenge a character's beliefs and values. Say one of the players' characters criticizes another hunter online for decisions the other made or actions he performed. A few sessions later, you might put the critic in a similar situation to see how she responds under the same pressure. Other posters, or even other protagonists, may be quick to spot the character's hypocrisy if she responds the same way her target did. Or you can use this virtual clash of personalities to set off a hunter-versus-hunter conflict as the victim of the character's abuse comes looking for her in the real world.

The depth to which you develop plots based on "backdrop" Internet activity depends on your time and

resources. You may have a specific plot in mind and want to see it through, although color posts can still be used to flesh out other areas of characters' lives and can perhaps be the seeds of future stories.

Compromised

It's the nightmare that keeps Witness1 up at nights. Once, in hunter-net's very early days, a monster compromised the site. Months later, a monster apparently allowed onto the site by the Messengers themselves seemed to use the forum to lure Gardener67 to his death.

A compromised hunter list could be the start of a major plot line for your game. What if another monster got access to the site without being detected and started using it to track down the imbued? Dozens of people could die. Maybe your players' characters would be among the first.

The reason hunter-net hasn't been compromised and analyzed by every technologically adept supernatural out there is twofold. First, the amount of traffic on the site is infinitesimal compared to the amount of data that flies around the Internet every day. It would take an extremely dedicated search or a huge slice of luck for someone to spot hunter-net among all the fruitcakes, conspiracy theorists and *X-files* fans out there. Second, as Dole7 and Witness1 suspect, the Messengers actively protect the main hunter-net sites and imbued mailing lists, though exactly how no one knows. This whole issue is discussed in much more detail in the **Hunter Survival Guide** (pp. 13-15).

However, neither of these facts nor the more ordinary security measures used by the techs who administer the sites completely guarantees security. If you want to run a story based on hunter-net being compromised, you have the perfect excuse.

Before you do so, think carefully about the consequences. Once you make the decision to have the lists corrupted, you may rule out hunter-net as a useable part of your game from that point forward. Once hunters know for sure that they're being tracked through the system, and that includes the characters in your game, they're unlikely to ever risk using the service again. If you can live with that, go for it.

The first thing to bear in mind is that compromising the list does not give monsters free and easy access to a whole range of data on the contributors. All of the hunter lists are set up to prevent easy identification of posters. Unless a monster has access to supernatural tricks that allow it to discern private information, it won't be able to act against the characters unless they give (or have given) something away. Does a hunter access one of the sites regularly from the same terminal, such as at work? If so, a tech-savvy monster could track her down. Does she use an account with an Internet service provider that is registered in her name? A monster has enough information to locate the character.

A "corruption" chronicle probably takes places in two stages. The first involves the slow realization that hunter-net has been compromised as people are injured and killed. Panic spreads quickly. Some quit the list immediately in an attempt to save themselves. Others stay, try to re-secure it and co-ordinate efforts against the monsters that have intruded.

Attention then shifts to the real world as characters strive to survive without their communication tool and take the struggle back to the monsters to protect themselves and everyone they care about. Perhaps such a return to the real world, where the imbued are on their own and try to stay alive night to night is the most minimalist chronicle possible, and the closest to **Hunter**'s common-man theme.

Roleplaying Online

There's no reason why you couldn't take the core concept of hunter-net and turn it into an online game, especially if you can't get a group of players together physically on a regular basis.

The players all take on the roles of individual posters, with you playing other contributors and the moderator. Private correspondence among the players and yourself can be used to establish exactly what happens to each hunter offline, day to day, and gives him some monsters to deal with.

Players then post the results to the mailing list, which goes to all of them. You provide other people's reactions. As the characters start to get to know each other through list interactions, they might want to meet "off-list," which you can represent through snailmail (and with a copy of all such "private" interaction sent to you, as well).

If you don't find the idea of running your own online game appealing right away, several virtual and email games already exist. Many people use White Wolf's own **Hunter: The Reckoning** mailing list as an extended in-character game. You can find the address of the White Wolf website at the beginning of this book. Otherwise, time spent with search engines should allow you to track down a game in action.

Hunting Seasons: Styles of Play

We all have different styles when we tell stories. Some of us like to inject humorous moments and over-the-top characters. Others keep things dark and desolate. Still others go for tension and suspense over all else, keeping players on the edge of their seats the whole way through. That's part of the pleasure of storytelling games, the fact that a specific combination of players and Storyteller goes so far toward making each story unique. But style of play can also be a tricky thing. **Hunter** isn't a generic game: It deals with specific themes and events and you might worry that the style you choose is going to undermine those core elements. In the final analysis, all that really matters is that you and your players have fun, but truly memorable games happen when everything — characters, themes, style, setting, plot — works together. When every single element supports the overall game, things go from good to great. That's when your game finds one overriding, consistent style, be it somber, comic, suspenseful or adventurous. The following few pages look at a variety of styles that can work very well with **Hunter**'s themes and setting, and this article gives you plenty of tips on how to implement those approaches to the game.

Core Elements

Before we go into the specific styles, it's worth taking a very quick look at the core elements of **Hunter** itself. These are the things that define any **Hunter** story, regardless of style or plot. Without them, you aren't actually playing **Hunter** (you may still be having fun, of course, which is just fine). The storytelling styles discussed later act as prisms for these core elements and the specifics of a story. The styles allow you to twist and redirect elements and story.

Stripped of everything else, **Hunter** is about everyday people confronting the supernatural. Let's look at the two sides of that equation.

• **Everyday People:** The imbued are regular Joes, people with very human concerns, failings and strengths. They have jobs, families and friends. Many also have pain-in-the-ass bosses who wait to lay them off, ex-husbands who are behind on child-support and friends who take more than they give. At their most basic, these characters just want to live their lives and be happy and maybe see that their kids have a good life. Depending on the style you choose for your game, these normal people have different jobs or outlooks — we could be talking about street criminals, beat cops, government bureaucrats, psychiatrists, truck drivers, single parents or college kids. Regardless of the specifics, they have experiences and outlooks that we can all understand.

Now, a lot of the work here is in the players' hands. They portray the protagonists so it's up to them to design their characters as normal human beings. But, as Storyteller, you need to help them, and the best way you can do that is to make sure other normal folks populate your fictional world. If the characters meet a cop — whether he helps or harasses them — that officer should be as real as you can make him, a boy in blue who thinks about his wife and his pension, who might be on the take or who might be doing his best. The same goes for lawyers, construction workers, business executives and homeless folks.

• **Confronting the Supernatural:** The other side of **Hunter**'s equation is that the supernatural — monsters — is out there and the characters run headlong into it. How you portray creatures depends a lot on style, but they have to be there and be a threat. You can run a brilliant law-enforcement or thriller game with **Hunter**'s rules, but if there isn't a supernatural threat, it isn't actually **Hunter**.

Of course, mixing these two parts of the equation — normal folks in a fundamentally abnormal situation — isn't easy. But hey, that's why the players pay you the big bucks (or at least bring the beer). And this section — hell, this whole book — is meant to help you bring the parts of your game together.

Choosing and Changing Styles

Storytelling style, like mood, isn't something that remains absolutely constant over the life of a chronicle or even a single story. **Hunter** requires active participation from the players so a game has to be fresh and fun. Indulging in a few stories that depart from a chronicle's established style can be a great way to mix things up and keep your game entertaining. A chronicle that normally deals in harrowing, moody experiences can benefit from a little more lighthearted activity once in a while. But changing your style too often can create a messy, confusing game. Players need focus in a chronicle, a direction in which they can guide their characters' identities and development. Radical switches of narrative style — say, from horror to action-adventure to espionage — can undermine players' efforts.

The best solution is to choose a dominant style (any of the following works just fine) and occasionally diverge from that. For example, let's say you use the urban-crime style for your chronicle as a whole. Your players all portray teenagers who have some connection to the gangs in their neighborhood, and

they face a group of warlocks that uses the drug trade and the gangs to acquire sacrifice victims. When it comes time to investigate the death by "overdose" of one of the character's cousins, you can tell a whodunit story, instead. And when the heroes face off against the warlocks, you can go into action-adventure. But the overall chronicle remains about urban-crime.

Action-Adventure

I'm gripping a goddamn cricket paddle, hiding in the resort's boat house and scared out of my wits. This was supposed to be a dream vacation. Ten days in the Caribbean. Sand, sun and surf. Just me and Mary. No one said anything about....

Okay, wait. I gotta get my mind around this before I completely wig out.

We were walking down the beach. It was just like in the brochures — gentle surf, warm wind and the stars above. We ran. We laughed. We kissed. We started doing more than kiss.

Then I caught a whiff of something. Something bad. I nearly vomited right there and had to look around for the source. That's just the way I am — I'm the guy who has to taste the sour milk just to be sure. Anyway, I was looking around, expecting to find a dead dolphin or something when Mary started babbling "omigodomigodomigod." I turned around and she was pointing out into the surf. It took me a second, but then I saw it: a body, floating in like driftwood.

Now, I spent some time as a lifeguard when I was at UC Santa Barbara so the old instincts kicked in. I ran to the guy, flipped him onto his back so he could breathe... and then I screamed. His face was all white and there were little crabs and shit having his eyes for dinner. I came even closer to losing my lunch because the smell hit me again.

That's when the thing moved. *Not just moved, it grabbed my ankle. I freaked and pulled free, backpedaling out of the surf. It stood up and I remember looking past it and seeing three or four more of these bloated things walking out of the ocean. I ran.*

And see, here I am, hiding out with a makeshift weapon and I hope to God they don't find me or....

Oh, shit. Mary. Where's Mary? Oh, God, I hear her. She's screaming. Screaming like she's all alone on a beach with dead things. *Right where I left her.*

I look at the door back toward the beach and the piece of wood in my hand and I know. I'm about to do the bravest — and stupidest — thing of my life.

We all know action and adventure can be lots of fun. We cheer when Chow Yun-fat slides across the screen firing two handguns at once, Bruce Willis jumps out of a skyscraper tied to a fire-hose or Nicolas Cage lands a plane on the Las Vegas strip. That release is great. The challenge is using that blast of adrenaline in the context of **Hunter** without losing track of what the game is all about. If you're playing vampire-hunting Navy SEALs, you're a little far off the man-on-the-street heart of the game. And if the monsters are just place holders for terrorists or convicts or drug dealers, you're not using the game elements at your disposal to their fullest potential.

To achieve the Everyman motif in an action-adventure game, take average people and put them in extraordinary and high-energy situations. A working stiff who ends up stuck on a hijacked plane or whose lover gets kidnapped is a good example. Through play, you always want to give each player the impression that her character has to push herself to her limits and beyond. Success happens by millimeters, not inches.

As for the monsters, instead of slotting them into an action-movie cliché, use the differences between that and **Hunter**'s theme to your advantage. Discovering there's a demon kidnapping babies is enough reason for an average woman to risk her life and do ludicrous things like jump from one building to another or pick up a handgun and go to town. By emphasizing how unusual this all is in the character's experience, you not only maintain the Everyman feel of the game, you justify things going action-movie wild. You raise the stakes but maintain the focus of the game.

High Stakes and High Drama

Nothing is small potatoes in an action-adventure. Hong Kong action cinema goes in for a lot of melodrama while American action tends more toward sarcastic comedy, but in both cases the protagonists feel that they *have* to do what they're doing, that there's just no other choice. Failing doesn't mean fighting again another day. It means game over for the protagonist and probably lots of other folks.

The best way to communicate this intensity to players isn't with dice, but with characters. You can put loved ones in jeopardy, but it can be just as effective to have other pressures come at the characters from their personal lives. If a zombie raises an undead army the same night the hero's husband has a heart attack or her daughter brings home her fiancée, the pressure mounts. Build the pressure in both worlds — the normal and the supernatural — until they collide in one big showdown.

Blowing Shit Up

Okay, action stories have to involve capital-A Action. And that means physical, high-stakes, de-

structive conflict. Car chases, tanker trucks exploding, people jumping off bridges onto speedboats and gun battles in rush-hour gridlock. And you have to adjudicate it all. Joy. Doing so is a balancing act between dice rolling and narration. Players who are into action games tend to like dice rolling because it gives them a physical thing to do when they say their characters jump out of the chopper just before it explodes. It allows them to leave their characters' fate up to, well, fate. But lots and lots of dice rolling takes a long time and tends to chew up whole game sessions without accomplishing much. Still, if you over-narrate scenes, players become spectators without any real sense of urgency. And that's no fun at all. What works best is to use dice to get the players involved in the action — hell, tell them outright that if they do a good job describing their characters' actions they'll get bonuses on their rolls. Make every die roll count, having it represent more than a single action. Don't worry too much about splitting dice pools or precise timing. Just describe what happens around the characters and ask appropriate players what they do. Use initiative if you really need to, but try to just go around the table or force individuals to react. "Okay, the thing lunges at *you*! How do you get out of it? Quick!"

Contrasts of Mood

Action-adventure is a style that works very well with leaps in mood. Action sequences are high-energy, alternating between thrills and terror. But the beats in between these set pieces, the quiet times between gun battles, are ripe for other moods. You can bring in darker, more horrific elements or even tender moments of romance with supporting cast members. If you don't slow things down a bit between action sequences, the story has no pace, no rhythm. It just becomes a freefall instead of a roller-coaster ride.

Now, you can't lose track of the action structure — use the quiet moments to carry the characters toward the next detonation of furious action. If you want to play up the horror, have the hunters find the remains of a monster nest, replete with murder victims and evidence that the things are still on the prowl. If you play it right, the discovery sends shivers down a few spines and sends the hunters out even more determined than before.

Reining Players In

Perhaps more than any other style of play, action-adventure runs the risk of too much of a good thing. Players tend to go with it and overindulge, seeking to jump out every window or blow away every bad guy. If this happens, the action stops being special or important. It becomes as common as talking and the players become way too conscious that the story is just an excuse to carry their characters from one explosive situation to another. So do everything in your power to redirect the players if (or when) they start going too far. Don't put up a brick wall in front of them — daring stunts shouldn't stop working, enemies shouldn't become invulnerable. Instead, redirect players' energy toward other avenues or diffuse the situation with outside influences. Have a character's friend show up at the wrong place and at the wrong time, putting him in harm's way. Slip in a dream sequence that points to another clue.

Espionage

It had been three weeks since the funeral and Alison still woke up expecting Harry to be there beside her. It was 7 AM, a light rain was falling and she was alone. Once upon a time, before she really knew what the words "pulmonary embolism" meant, before a little clot of blood took her husband away, she used to relish those days he was away on a consulting job. She'd sleep in the middle of their big bed and love the feeling of space. She could wiggle across the cold sheets with abandon. Now she had all the space she could ever want, and she never strayed from the left side.

She stumbled down the stairs to the kitchen. She'd been up until two scrubbing away nonexistent dirt so every surface sparkled with an antiseptic sheen. Mr. Coffee was percolating and she slipped a bagel into the toaster. Not that she was hungry.

Alison moved to the front door to retrieve the morning paper and the mail. She found the Washington Post *in a clear plastic bag, a phone bill and the first installment of her government benefits as a widow — Harry had the good taste to die on the State Department's paycheck — and a small UPS box. The last was about the size of a hardcover book. She wondered at first if she had ordered some trite volume on grief and then forgot all about it. There was no return address.*

Alison ripped the "pull-to-open" tab and found a black video tape inside. Unmarked. No letter.

She walked back in, dropping the newspaper and bills on the table by the door. She moved to the family room — God, she hated that name now — and slipped the tape into the VCR. She grabbed the remote, turned on the TV, pressed play and moved back to the kitchen to pour a cup of coffee. She glanced back to the screen over the kitchen counter but there was only snow.

When the sound finally cut in, she dropped her mug to the floor: "Alison, I've been lying to you for too long." It

was Harry's voice. She ran to the family room, oblivious to the coffee staining the linoleum.

"And now it's too late. Oh, God. I... I'm not a LAN administrator over at State. I'm a signals analyst. You know? Cryptography? Spying. They gave me a cover before I even met you and never let me drop it. I thought it was for national security and all that bullshit."

Harry never swore. Only when he was scared.

"I found out something I shouldn't have. It knows. It knows everything."

What did he mean "it"?

"They were drinking its blood, Alison. Do you understand? It didn't have a heart, but it had blood." Harry started to sob. "They made me drink, too. I'm... I'm so sorry..."

Then the door burst off its hinges and Alison ran.

Espionage stories give you the opportunity to use a strong metaphor for hunters' mission and situation. Even devoid of monstrous influence, espionage is all about secrets: What it takes to keep or expose them and just what needs to be kept secret. The spy is an inherently alienated figure, a person who must hide the truth of her work — who knows that others routinely lie to her just as she lies to them and ultimately that her life is less important than the secrets she keeps. Sound like any imbued you know?

By layering the two levels of secrecy — the mundane world of human intelligence and the inhuman world of hidden monsters — you can build doubly strong stories. Focus on the importance of controlling information and how the two levels of knowledge intersect. What happens when a veteran intelligence analyst notices the feeding habits of an undead thing? Does he see it for what it is? Does he see foreign agents instead? And what of the Messengers? What kind of secrets do *they* protect?

Of course, secrecy is only part of the equation. The other part is the price of that secrecy. Intelligence agencies are built on the assumption that national security is worth killing and dying for. How does the appearance of the supernatural change that? Does it highlight the futile nature of petty national concerns or does it make patriotic interest even more important? What sacrifices are the characters willing to make?

Out in the Cold

One of the most powerful archetypes of the espionage genre is the lone agent cut off from the support of her fellows. This is a powerful image that's very useful in **Hunter** stories. Imagine an agent who uncovers *things* among her fellow agents. Who can she trust? Where can she turn? She must suddenly go out into the cold, turn her back on the cause she has built her life around and find a new way back in.

This archetype can be a bit of problem since **Hunter** is a cooperative game. One lone agent is cool, but six or seven? The solution is to use the archetype on two levels. Cut the players' group off from the rest of the intelligence world so that they have a reason to cooperate and then try to erode their trust in each other. Give them the opportunity to betray one another and watch themselves become loners among loners. Those who can get past that alienation might have a chance.

Blood-Red Tape

One of the great humanizing factors of good espionage fiction is the contrast that an unfeeling, inhuman, bureaucratic system creates. The government cuts a budget item and agents are abandoned. Vital reports get lost in the system and people die without anyone ever noticing. Faceless leaders sign assassination orders for fathers, mothers and children. The system eats people up. **Hunter** gives you a chance to push that element further by making the system actually *be* inhuman. A monster of some sort (or more likely a whole bunch of them) pulls the strings and a few abandoned people are the only ones who know anything. A huge conspiracy with inhuman puppeteers at its heart is a perfect antagonist for this type of story. You can, however, also have very good results by having the "inhuman" system be devoid of monstrous influence. The callous and vile decisions all come from the desks of real and human people. The monsters simply encourage such activity. When the characters see the contrasts and similarities between their heartless bosses and soulless enemies, they may understand how desperate things really are.

Secret Monsters

The choice of monstrous antagonists is critical in an espionage story. Always remember that information is the bread and butter of these stories. It's not only the objective, but the main weapon in any battle. Wars are fought through lies and revelations, covering up or exposing dangerous truths. So, you need a monstrous opponent that has secrets and ways to keep them. Notice the plural: the main secret that the monster is in fact a monster should be just the first thing that sets events off. Once the creature is after the hunters because they know too much, they have to struggle to figure things out before it's too late. This can mean learning what the *thing* is, what it wants, where it came from, who's helping it and if

there are any more of it. Use conspiracy to its fullest: Choose slick and subtle creatures that masquerade as humans and recruit people to their cause. Vampires are a good choice, but so are ghosts (possessing people) and demons.

Old Timers

Not all spy stories feature these, but the archetype of the older agent who remembers better days is a powerful one. The person who has been left disconnected from the everyday world, whose bones ache too much and who is forgotten makes for a good figure in **Hunter** stories. As a Storyteller character, this individual makes an ideal mentor and highlights alienation and the cost of the battle against the supernatural threat. As a player's character, an old timer works well as a real, rumpled model to follow — someone who has seen too much and gone too far to stop, even though he should.

Personal Survival

Just keep running. One foot after the other. Move, move, move!

The wolf or bear or whateverthefuckitis is right back there, but don't think about that. Oh, God. What did it do to Anna? What happened to her hand, for fuck's sake? Oh, Jesus!

Go, go, go! You can hear it back there. Is that it making that huffing sound? Or is that you? Are you breathing that hard? Fuck, you never should have stopped running after college. Move!

Shit, shit, shit. Where the fuck are you? Was the road back that way or.... Damn. No time to look at the map! Move!

"FLIGHT IS FUTILE."

Oh, fuck. What was that? Who said that?

"FACE THE TRUTH."

No way! Why the hell are you stopping? Just go. Move. No! Don't turn around!

Fuck. There it is. It's a wolf. But there aren't any wolves left in Pennsylvania for Christ's sake. Maybe it's a dog or a coyote or— Shit, just run!

I said run! Why are you getting closer? Oh, fuck. It's moving. It's... it's standing up!

That's it! Run!

Of all storytelling styles discussed in this article, this is the most intimate and the most direct. Like the section header says, these are *personal* stories about *survival*. The first part means that, unlike espionage or police stories, the characters don't start off removed from the threat. They aren't curious cops or agents who get more than they bargained for. They're ordinary people who are immediately and horrifying

at risk. The monsters aren't hidden far away. They're right around the corner and they're not going away.

The survival half of the equations plays to that immediate and visceral threat. The monster is a rapacious, dangerous thing that intends a hunter harm. She can't ignore the danger because it's breathing down her neck. Physical danger is the name of the game.

This combination of concepts makes for minimalistic but intense stories. There are no grand missions or save-the-world scenarios. These are stories about people faced with truly terrible danger and the only victory is to get out alive. This is traditional bogeyman horror, which means you need to build tension and pressure. Start off with hints — strange sounds, disappearances, sigils or bloodstains in the sand — and go from there. One quick encounter early on, in which the characters barely comprehend what happens, works wonders to get the tension started. The "hunters" are prey here and that shouldn't change until the very end. Even then, they should turn the tables by the thinnest of margins.

Average Joes

It's even more important that players be transported into their characters' shoes in this style of play than in a "regular" **Hunter** game. That means the chosen need to be as normal as possible and that's why this style of story works very, very well for imbuings. Without any exposure to the monsters in the night, the characters are very much akin to the players, so the terror of the situation comes through loud and clear. The Messengers and the imbuing become alien horror that confronts normal people — hearing voices, seeing strange thing. If the characters are already imbued, you still need to emphasize their human aspects and put them in human situations. One good way to do so is to put defenseless people in harm's way and hit the hunters where they feel safe. If you've thus far told stories featuring a sophisticated a hidden who runs things on the city streets, a contrasting story about personal survival works well if the hunters go on a canoe trip with their kids. A wolfman-killing-machine stalking them like sheep makes for a new and visceral threat that turns even seasoned hunters into average folks again.

No Time to Think

Personal survival stories are all about tension. Imagine it as a run — starting as a leisurely jog, accelerating slowly as a pursuer closes in, and ending in a panicked sprint. Increase that pressure, beat after beat. Push the characters further and further and give the players less and less time to react. Every once in a while, hit the breaks for a second — give a clear few minutes of daylight before the thunderstorm hits. Let the players relax for just a second, or maybe enough time to vent, and then hit them again.

Bad Things

Survival stories also depend on the reality of the threat. That means your antaganists have to be truly monstrous. There can be some moral gray areas (we'll get to those later), but for the most part the *thing* should be a terrifying, murderous beast. The characters (and the players) have to rightly fear this thing and you should demonstrate the danger it represents at least once early on. Flight should be the primary response at first. Only as the hunters start figuring out a few things about the beast should confronting it become viable — and even then it needs to be a choice of last resort.

Secrets and Lies

Stories of survival are, on the surface, straightforward. Evil thing kills teenagers. End of story. Sorry, but nothing is that simple. These are still stories of personal horror and that means the truly horrific elements are those that connect with the protagonists and the audience — the hunters and the players. The absolute horror of the monster has to stem from something human — from some wrong that someone is paying for or (preferably and) trying to cover up. Use the monster's absolute supernatural state to highlight the human evils that are at the core of the story. A raging wolfman tears into hikers because one of the hikers is a rapist. Or a ghost haunts an office building because he was murdered by a jealous co-worker. The horror is made truly personal if the protagonists or the people close to them are somehow complicit in the crime or secret. Direct collaboration in a horrible crime is obviously hard to pull off when the heroes are played and created by the story's audience (i.e., the players), but there are other ways. What if all the hunters' parents are guilty of something and now the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons? Imagine an Asian spirit of vengeance stalking the children or grandchildren of the Army officers who put certain Japanese-Americans in detention camps. The key is to get the players to explore their own characters at the same time as the hunters fight for survival.

Psychological Horror

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Water fell from one of the pipes in the ceiling, like the nagging of a spoiled child. Timothy did his best to ignore it.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

He took a drag on his last cigarette and felt the nicotine hit his bloodstream. His frayed nerves calmed thanks to the familiar drug and his lungs accepted the carcinogens like old friends. Tobacco turned to ash and smoke and Timothy closed his eyes.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

He tapped the cigarette's filter with his thumb, sending accumulated ash tumbling to the ground. It hit the pool of water on the ground and turned into a black brine.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Timothy took one last drag and flame licked the filter, burning his lip and sending a jolt of sour taste down his throat. He spat the offending thing out and it sizzled when it hit the water. He stood up and his boots made little splashes in the expanding puddle. The house was a mess, but it would be worse soon.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

It was almost 3 AM. That was the killing time.

Psychological horror stories play out in large part in the minds of the protagonists, and that makes them extremely effective but somewhat challenging for **Hunter**. Of course, all horror stories are fundamentally psychological because they revolve around fear, but these stories focus on the mental and social cost of the hunt over the physical threat. The ultimate danger is not being killed by a lumbering beast, but going completely mad and alienating all those around you.

Hunter has that subtext to it over the long haul and some game mechanics (Virtues and derangements, specifically) to back it up, but to tell stories like this you have to refine that current. The players have to feel that their characters become unhinged by the experience of confronting the supernatural, and hunters should even come to doubt whether or not they face inhuman monsters or their own inner demons. In a storytelling game, you are the characters' senses, so you can play up that opportunity. Slip small hallucinations and quick dreams into everyday life to make the players doubt what they see and feel. Don't go overboard, but make subtle changes to normalcy that take on significance as the story progresses. A character might hear a familiar voice whisper in several different places if the story has to do with a long-buried secret. Or if the ultimate monster is an insect spirit of some sort, a hunter might see roaches or flies in her food.

You'll note that these examples of hallucinations give the players some clues as to what the hunters face. That's good because in tales of psychological horror, victory is achieved because of madness. The protagonists don't shake off their insanity. They learn to listen to it and triumph despite the cost they pay. Reward players who run with madness, who play the paranoia or depression gripping their hunters. Those who suppress things should ultimately crack, perhaps even seeing monsters where there are none or where there are only defenseless people — and with predictably violent results. Of course, once the threat is put to bed, the overt madness that hunters suffer should decrease (the hallucinations or blackouts may fade), but there has to be a permanent psychological cost. The memory of the events never goes away.

Loss of Normalcy

Even small hallucinations or episodes are pretty heavy-handed storytelling tools. They are clear signs to the players that their characters have some screws loose. That is effective, but only if it plays into a subconscious sense you've already created. Before taking that step, subtly erode the normal world in which the hunters live. The best way to do that is with interpersonal relationships. Players get into their roles the most — thinking and reacting as their characters — when interacting with others. So roleplay a fight with one hunter's wife and then with another's boss. Have these cast members point out that the hunters aren't taking care of themselves, that they're obsessing or jumping at shadows. Have lovers break off romances, friends become scarce and the hunters generally become alienated. That way, when you introduce truly abnormal elements the players feel that these latest developments fit into a pattern others have seen all along.

One corollary to all this: Put effort into the normalcy you're going to shatter. In psychological horror, alienation is the ultimate monster, so the players need to feel like their characters really are losing something when their lives go to shit. Make sure the hunters' spouses are flawed but loving, their children are not perfect but are still good kids — that the characters' lives are worth living. Then take those lives apart, one piece at a time.

Maddening Beasts

The choice of a monster "species" for a psychological horror story isn't as critical as it might seem. Sure, creatures such as ghosts, which inherently tap into emotions, are easy choices, as are other things that can affect perceptions. But that's not key. In fact, it can be more effective to use monsters that have no (or almost no) abilities that affect the human mind. The madness, the fear, the untrustworthy sights and sounds all comes from the hunter, from the human

mind recoiling from something inhuman. (If you really need outright altered perceptions, playing with second sight and the Messengers can provide you with more than enough.)

Much more than species, *size* matters. You don't want to use a huge monster that threatens all of Creation. The point is to introduce something very small that affects the hunters themselves more than anyone else. This small danger threatens to take over the characters' world, becoming bigger than anything else only because it is so close to them. It's best if the hunters themselves (or perhaps someone close to them) inadvertently does something to attract this evil such as break a talisman or be cursed by a madman. The point is to use a device that keeps the hunters front and center.

Derangements

Hunter's derangement and Virtue rules can be very useful for psychological horror stories. Virtues are especially good tools with which to use the characters' own drives against them because Virtues are selected by the players. A player who puts lots of Conviction into raising her character's Mercy rating may cringe as you describe a murder in excruciating detail from the victim's perspective. Empathy has its price. A character with high Zeal may get flashes of killing his own loved ones when they annoy him. Those with Vision may see through their lovers' white lies even when they don't want to. Feel free to impose derangements on the characters without telling the players. Some creed books detail minor afflictions that plague various creeds at 5 or 6 Virtue (before full-blown derangements manifest) and those can be very useful as well.

Smaller Is Better

A psychological horror story is like a noose tightening around characters' necks. At first it encompasses their normal lives, full of people and distractions, but then it shrinks and only a few key elements can fit in. As madness and alienation increase, the number of other people, locations and events decreases. To emphasize all this, look for ways to reduce the number of setting elements over the course of the story. Take characters who spend much of their time zipping across a city and force them to stay in a single building (because of a breakdown or because they're being tailed). Have various supporting characters leave the protagonists' lives. Jobs vanish, appointments are missed, phones are disconnected.

Along this same lines, psychological horror stories work best with small groups of players. Any more than three characters in the grip of creeping madness and things tend to degenerate because you have to dedicate so much time to so many different psychoses. The players get too much time off between episodes and it becomes too clear which perceptions are real and which are illusions. That doesn't mean you can't tell this kind of story if you have six players. It just means you have to be creative. Decide which player or players you want to put at the center of the psychological noose and then recruit the rest of your troupe to help pull the knot tight. As long as you let the other players in on your plans, they'll gladly become assistant Storytellers. They can have their characters perform actions and behave in manners that emphasize the issues with which the target character wrestles. Maybe they lie to her and then deny it or tell false stories about the target in the presence of others and then claim to have done nothing of the sort in private. The paranoia mounts before long and even the target character begins to wonder why everyone is ganging up on her.

Urban-Crime

Little Sol Wiseman had been at it for two days. Two days of knocking on tenement doors and knocking out junkies' teeth. And still no sign of Eddie Vasquez or the rabbi's money. This was the last damn flophouse on the list. If the putz wasn't here, Sol was gonna have to take his aggression out on whoever was. The rabbi wasn't known to forgive debts from the likes of Eddie — or failure from the likes of Sol.

The rotting door was almost off its hinges by the time Eddie opened up. His eyes were swimming in smack, and he smelled like rotting cabbage. Sol had never been happier to see such a sack of pig-shit. He reeled back his left fist. "Mazel tov, motherfucker."

The cross connected with Eddie's face, made a sickening wet sound and sent the junkie back on his ass. A second, wetter smack followed when Eddie's head hit the corner of the coffee table.

"Ah, fuck." Sol picked up the junkie and felt his cracked skull. "Fuck! Don't be dead you piece of shit!"

That's when Eddie opened his mouth and a cloud of flies came out with his breath. "Too late," it said.

Urban-crime stories are about average folks who just happen to live at least part of their lives outside the law. They aren't master criminals stealing the crown jewels or running the East Coast heroine trade. They aren't seductive cat burglars leaving roses on pillows. No, urban-crime stories are about people lower down on the criminal totem pole who end up in a gang, on a mob crew or dealing on a corner because that's the card life has dealt them. Maybe it's the best

shot they have at making some real money. Maybe their friends were in it first. Or maybe they just get off on a job that lets them beat the shit out of people. And they have lives — they have a little brother in school, a boyfriend on smack, a mother who won't talk to them any more.

In fact, this storytelling style is often a metaphor for a type of class warfare. The protagonists are basically blue collar, street thugs or other low-level criminals, and the nemeses are often much higher class. They might be cops — representing authority, society, The Man — but big city Mafia dons or other slick crooks are good candidates, too. In **Hunter**, this role works really well for the monster that is inherently of a different "class" than the imbued. Slick-as-shit vampires — beautiful, intelligent and stylish — are great candidates.

Shades of Gray

There are no moral absolutes in urban-crime stories. Certain characters may believe in absolutes — a father who'd never hurt his child, a mobster who'd never break the code of silence — but the world around them and the stories you tell shouldn't back up those beliefs. That father's brother beats his kids. The mobster gets arrested because a buddy rats him out. Don't just screw the players, but use events to challenge their moral standards. And remember that there aren't any absolute evils, either: The rat who betrays the mobster is just trying to get a better life for his kid. Not even the monsters represent absolutes. They may be utterly dangerous, but their situations should be sympathetic.

Violence

Urban-crime stories are violent. Guns and fights aren't spectacular plot twists like they are in action-adventures. A single punch hurts and a gun can translate into a meaningless death. Make sure the players know this about the style: Violence begets violence, and violence *hurts*. You might illustrate this point with a supporting cast member being hurt (or killed) early on, and then use the threat of violence more than actual violence thereafter. In the real world, when someone pulls a gun on you or punches you in the gut, you don't cross off a damage box and carry on as if nothing happened; work to translate harm into play. One good way to do so is to emphasize the lingering symptoms of injury. If a character suffers bashing damage from a hit over the head, she might have lingering headaches or a ringing in her ears. Bruises, scars and scratches all garner attention, as do swollen and scrapped knuckles and blood splattered on clothes.

Setting Is Everything

Urban-crime stories are about place almost as much as they are about people. The street, the neighborhood, the beat — these are all central elements of this style. Give some very serious thought to *where* your stories take place. Is the neighborhood falling apart? Are there any historical buildings? Street people? Do the characters see hookers and junkies regularly? What about the normal working stiffs in the area? Make sure the place works as part of the theme of the story, either to underline or contrast it. If you're telling a story about a few people fighting to remain on the straight and narrow (more or less) in a world gone to pot, then use dirty streets full of shattered lives and easy violence as a reminder of what awaits a character who slips up. If you tell a story about people who've sold their souls for power or glory, use shining corporate offices and the aseptic streets between them — all hiding the dirt underneath — to emphasize the value of what little characters still have.

Small Victories

These aren't stories about saving the world, at least not all at once. Just as the characters and setting are small time and local, so should the ultimate victory be a relatively small step. The end of a story (or even a chronicle) might involve pushing back a single monster from a housing project. The challenge is making that victory seem worthwhile. The success might impact the lives of only a handful of people, but their lives are the better for it, whether they know to thank the hunters or not.

Whodunit

The uniforms had both Courtland and International blocked off for two full blocks, the cruisers' flashing blue lights lighting up half of downtown Atlanta. It was 6:30 and rush hour traffic was now backed up all the way into Buckhead and the West Perimeter, but that was life. Detective Tamra Jones had a crime scene to check out and the commute was the last thing on her mind.

She was walking the intersection in a grid pattern for a second time. A silver Jetta was on the southeast corner, up on the sidewalk and half into the parking lot of the Weston Hotel. Its left side was a wreck and the windshield was in pieces. Body fluids and what appeared to be 9 mm rounds had ruined the interior.

Jones focussed her mag-lite on a red glint about twenty feet diagonally from the Jetta. She'd already seen that its tail lights were just fine. This inch of plastic came from another car. Maybe the shooter's.

Now, that didn't explain the two victims in the Jetta. Jones had been working Homicide for three years, and Vice

for six before that. She'd seen her share of corpses, and these two were ripe. She shined her light in and made a mental survey. Passenger: male, somewhere around six feet, race impossible to tell; skin distended and pulled back over his bones, mummified. Driver: also male, 5'10" or so, probably white, blond; flesh bloated and in advanced state of decomposition, eye-sockets swarming with maggots, mouth open revealing blackened teeth. Just how they had rotted this much in the hour since the shooting was beyond her. Each had multiple GSWs in the chest, bullets travelling through the seats and sending stuffing into the back of the car. No blood, though.

Jones could feel a bitch of a headache coming on. She hated goddamn whodunit bullshit.

Whodunit stories are about a mystery that needs to be solved, and the price to pay to do it. Part of the fun is structural: the players deal with a puzzle that they need to unravel using their wits and their characters' capabilities. This structure has its own energy. A question implies that there is an answer, something that will resolve everything in a tidy package. That same synergy can be a trap, though, so you need to know how to handle it and how to both satisfy and cheat expectations successfully.

The center of any whodunit is a crime. Traditionally this is a murder, with the body popping up early in the story, but that's only one possibility. People can disappear or be assaulted and objects can be stolen or damaged. Regardless of what crime you choose you need to know how it intersects with the supernatural and the hunters. After all, murder happens every day without the need for the walking dead or avenging spirits. What makes this murder special? Did the victim get in the way of a monstrous thing? You need a reason for the hunters to investigate. If they're cops or professional investigators, it's easy, but that's not going to be the case very often. A more viable solution is to give at least one character a personal stake in the case. She could have known the victim. Or maybe she knows someone accused of the crime. If the hunters have been answering the call for a while, the slightest whiff of monstrous involvement may be enough to attract their attention.

One thing to keep in mind when determining the details of the crime is a balance between simplicity and complexity. At it's core, the mystery should be very simple — the zombie killed Bill — but you need to add complications to muddy the waters sufficiently to make the mystery challenging. There's no need to go overboard. Just think of how people would perceive the murder. If Bill was connected to the local mob, people might assume that his death was a gangland killing. Could there be a history of domestic disputes in his house, possibly implicating his wife? Ultimately, some of these mundane possibilities should play a role in the supernatural answer to the mystery. If the zombie attacked while Bill and his wife were fighting, the hunters have to delve into the domestic situation to get to the truth.

A Body First

The first thing to consider when creating a whodunit story is who the victim is. Although this person is already dead (in most cases), she's still one of the most important elements of your tale. The hunters are going to pick her life apart as best they can, trying to find out how and why she died. You need to know the answers to their questions. There's no need to assign traits to the victim, but give some thought to her personality, appearance, occupation and lifestyle. If she was a fat slob, witnesses may remember that. If she was a businessperson, she'll have an upscale wardrobe and possibly a high-end car. Most importantly, think what the person leaves behind — friends, lovers, possessions, debts, enemies. These are the things the hunters interact with and that make the dead character come to "life." If you plan a whodunit story ahead of time, you can even have the hunters interact with the victim before the crime.

Then a Killer

The next critical person to think about is the killer. Since this is **Hunter,** you need to think of both *who* and *what* the killer is. Your emphasis should be on the former, though. If you think of the monster just as a thing, you end up with a very simple crime. The vampire drank the victim's blood. End of story. Think of the killer as an individual (a monstrous one) with its own motivations and reactions. Why would this creature kill? How? Keep in mind that an important fact about the World of Darkness is that monsters are very good at hiding their tracks. Vampires don't leave bodies with twin puncture marks lying around. In all likelihood, a monster kills the same way a human does: with its fists, a gun or another weapon. Flesh-eating werewolves, zombies or fear-projecting ghosts may do some funky things, but their victims end up looking like they were mauled by wild animals or had sudden heart attacks. Ideally, the killer should be integrated into the victim's life somehow so that the investigation has to involve both the supernatural and the mundane. If the killer is a ghost, it might be the ghost of the victim's baby brother — so the hunters have to uncover the baby's death 10 years earlier and piece together that their victim suffocated the kid in his crib.

Clues and Witnesses

Once you know who the killer is, you can build the trail of clues that the hunters follow. The secret here is not to think of it in such plain terms, though. Instead of trying to create a trail from the hunters to the killer, recreate the crime in as much detail as you can and see where things might have gone wrong. If the crime was perfect, the hunters have no chance, so see where things might have broken down. Did neighbors hear a scream? Did a car drive by at the wrong time? Also think of physical evidence. A zombie could leave fingerprints that crop up on another person's death certificate, for example. Along the same lines, keep your eyes open for clues that hint at the presence of the supernatural without giving it away right out of the gate. Bodies that leave no blood at a crime scene ask questions without providing obvious answers.

It's a good idea to write out a timetable of events leading up to, during and right after the crime. That way you can refer to it in play to make sure you keep witnesses' stories and physical evidence straight. You can adjust a few things on the fly to take the hunters' actions into account, but you have to keep things consistent. Players are on the lookout for parts of the story that don't make sense, so make sure they actually lead somewhere when they do crop up.

Loose Ends

Mystery stories hold the promise of resolving every last detail in the end. But nothing works that way in real life and the Everyman theme of **Hunter** means you can emulate reality. Exactly why the monster chose its victim never needs to be answered fully, and you can leave lots of other loose ends, too, such as a relative who never knows that an ungodly thing killed her mother and still pushes for an investigation (or for prosecution of a person framed by the monster). You do owe the players some satisfaction, though, so you must answer some of their questions. The hunters should uncover the killer at the very least, but whether they extract any justice is another matter. Loose ends are especially important in a chronicle because they create hooks for subsequent stories. So, whenever you provide an answer, raise a few more questions at the same time.

Inspiration

There's nothing quite like concrete examples to drive a point home. Take this chapter's advice to put new and different spins on your **Hunter** games, but go ahead and read or watch some material in the genre you want, too. You'll learn much more that way. Here are some suggestions to get you started.

Action-Adventure: Probably the best example of the everyday hero in a contemporary action-adventure film is the first *Die Hard*. John Mclain is just a cop with a failing marriage. In keeping with the style, he triumphs in a spectacular way, but he's a sarcastic SOB the whole way through, improvising and getting the shit beat out of him. Most other movies in the genre have superhuman figures as heroes, but there are often human folks in there, too. Think of Nicolas Cage in *The Rock* (a geeky scientist in over his head) or Sandra Bullock in *Speed* (an everyday girl in the wrong place at the wrong time).

Espionage: Graham Greene and John LeCarré are good choices if you're looking for authors who show the human side of the espionage game. The British television production of Len Deighton's *Game, Set, and Match* (and the original novels) are also very good. *The X-Files* is an obvious source for a supernatural conspiracy chronicle, but is still a good one. For the story of an everyday man caught up in a spy game, try Roman Polanski's film *Frantic* or even Tony Scott's *Enemy of the State* (although the latter leans heavily toward action-adventure). Avoid James Bond flicks at all costs, at least as inspiration for **Hunter**.

Personal Survival: *The Blair Witch Project* is the best recent iteration of this genre, replete with supernatural elements and people out of their depth. Many of the horror films from the '70s and '80s that went on to launch franchises — *Halloween*, *Nightmare on Elm Street*, *Friday the 13th* — are prime examples of this type of story. They all take defenseless people and confront them with horrific monsters that stem from a human crime. Wes Craven's *Nightmare* is especially good because of Freddy's overtly supernatural nature. Another post-modern spin on survival shows up in *Falling Down*, in which Michael Douglas' character fights his own collapse and a world he sees as ultimately hostile.

Psychological Horror: The grandmaster of this style is H.P. Lovecraft, whose influence on horror stories just can't be overstated. Read and enjoy. For more contemporary examples try *Dark City* (at least up until the special effects battle at the end) or *The Sixth Sense*. The idea of the eroding mental state of the protagonist is also the center of Martin Scorsese's *Bringing out the Dead*. The film that best captures **Hunter**'s combination of supernatural elements, blue-collar protagonists and eroding sanity, however, is *Stir of Echoes*. Do yourself a favor and see it.

Urban Crime: David Chase's series *The Sopranos* does a very good job of showing the human side and human cost of crime, and injects a fair amount of dark comedy, too. The other HBO series *Oz* and *The Corner* show the human horror of life in prison or on the streets. Contemporary Noir fiction such as the work of James Ellroy and Andrew Vachs are excellent choices.

Whodunit: Although a lot of the classics are too sterile for **Hunter**, the best of contemporary police and mystery fiction is worthwhile. Michael Connelly and Denis Lehane are good starting points in a very big genre. On television, several police dramas hit some of the personal horror of investigation. *Law & Order* and *Homicide: Life on the Street* are probably the best of the bunch. In film, *Seven* is an excellent template for a **Hunter** whodunit (just add a supernatural monster).

Location-Based Chronicles

This is my first time writing to this list thing. It'll probably be the last. Frankly, I'm not sure if reading all this stuff makes me feel better or worse about what I've seen. But I do know that writing about it is just weird.

The only reason I'm doing this at all is because I noticed from the comments you make that lots of you seem to be from big cities. To you, the weird shit I've seen might not be all that unusual. But let me tell you, it happens in small towns, too. Places where a cat stuck in a tree makes the evening news. Try to stand up to a thing here and keep it out of the paper. Or worse, stand up to it without being seen by anyone who knows you — and that's everyone. Before long, it's the regular folks you've got to watch out for, not the dead things. Near as I can tell, the things have nothing to lose because they're dead. They don't mind being seen. I've got the rest of my life to lead and I'd still like to do it here, without getting run out of town by a lynch mob.

Introduction

Most **Hunter** chronicles — in fact, chronicles in most storytelling and roleplaying games — are what might be considered character-based. That is, the main focus of the chronicle and of the individual stories that make it up is on the players' characters. A typical **Hunter** chronicle, for example, follows a group of imbued in their struggles against the monsters that threaten their world. There's an entire chapter in the rulebook dedicated to running this sort of game. Do all series have to be played that way, though? Can they be based on something other than a specific gang of hunters? Absolutely.

An alternative **Hunter** chronicle can be thought of as location-based. The main focus is on the setting. Whereas in traditional character-focused chronicles the emphasis is on the often-traumatic experiences of a group of chosen, the emphasis of a location-based chronicle is on the locale itself and the events that take place there.

Another way to define the two types of games is to consider how you might describe each. A character-focused game might be "about a group of hunters working together to battle the supernatural forces of evil and darkness embodied by the walking dead." In contrast, a location-based series might be "about the conflicts between hunters and the creatures of the night in the small town of West Oxborough, Massachusetts, and the impact of those struggles on the town and its environs." The former description places most of the emphasis on the characters and their actions while the latter emphasizes the place where the action occurs. Whereas **Hunter** is generally "about characters and how they develop — or collapse — in the face of horror and obsession" (p. 217 of the rulebook), location-based chronicles are about changes wrought upon specific places due to confrontations between the imbued and supernatural.

This kind of play may be a change of pace from the other kinds of ongoing games you run, or it can be a diversion within a conventional character-focused chronicle, allowing the setting to become more important than any single hunter for a session or two. A location-based game also allows you and your players to view the World Darkness from a new perspective. It reveals a microcosm of imbued experiences and efforts worldwide. Your stories become a metaphor for the wider clash between hunters and monsters. The new perspective allowed by the game creates a broader understanding of the changes that hunters' efforts can make, whether locally or afar. This article explores the unique elements of location-based chronicles and offers guidelines and suggestions for how to set up and run them.

References

The following are some examples from movies, comics and TV shows that might be considered "location-based" in that the emphasis tends to be more on the setting/location than on characters.

***The Shining*:** This movie, based on the novel of the same name by Stephen King, stars Jack Nicholson and is an example of where past events in a locale can lead to terrifying circumstances in the present. Over a period of several weeks as a winter-caretaker of a summer-resort hotel, Jack (Nicholson's character) learns of gruesome murders that occurred in the place.

Knowledge of these murders, as well as the evil that permeates the hotel, eventually corrupts Jack and transforms him into a monster intent on killing his wife and son.

Astro City: This is a superhero comic, but its emphasis isn't on the heroes. It's on the everyday people who live in the city and how they cope and interact with super-powered beings.

Twin Peaks: Perhaps the best example of a location-based TV show, this series first appears to be about the various twisted and weird characters that inhabit the namesake town. But as the series progresses, you learn that nearly all the characters are merely products of an evil that pervades the town and its environs and that the citizens are different manifestations of the setting itself.

What It All Means

Before you can run a *location-based* chronicle, it's important to understand what that term means. It's not about creating extremely detailed settings for traditional character-focused stories. Nor does it simply mean using a single location for an entire chronicle. Both of these interpretations are *part* of a location-based chronicle, but there's more to it.

The distinguishing characteristic of a location-based chronicle is that the locale is the single most important element of the game. No particular person or event is as important as how each affects the location. As each character, whether imbued or creature of the night, comes into the contact with the setting, the location evolves and changes based on the character's actions.

Players have to understand from the outset that their characters are not as important as the location. Ultimately, their creations are expendable. Note, the *players*, not the characters have to understand. The characters in a location-based chronicle probably don't consider the location more important than themselves. They want to defeat the enemy and live a long healthy life just like anyone would. The players, however, know that the ongoing story told about the setting is more important than any single inhabitant.

Understanding this style of storytelling allows for a much more collaborative type of game than is possible in most chronicles. Players realize that their creations are merely the "supporting cast" to the star of the show, and can be quick to accept a tragic fate or the death of a character when it's dramatic or a significant contribution is made to the location that has impact on the rest of the chronicle. Say the development of a forest, which is critically important to local supernatural creatures, is delayed while authorities investigate the seeming murder of a character on that land.

A setting-based game also allows players to portray their characters in a much more "realistic" manner in terms of how ordinary people who confront the supernatural might react. Many players are so conditioned to playing confident and competent characters in other games that they forget how to play folks who are in way over their heads. Even with the fantastic (and often terrifying) powers granted them by the Heralds, most hunters aren't (and shouldn't be) as competent or as confident as other games' protagonists. Shifting the focus of the chronicle away from characters to location frees players to look at the game from a different point of view — what happens to the place is more important than what happens to the chosen. This shift takes the "embarrassment" out of portraying a person who's frightened, confused or even cowardly. And of course, those are just the kinds of qualities that regular people exhibit.

Just as they're encouraged to play genuine people, players of a location-based chronicle can be liberated from "gamer logic." Most experienced players can tell with a reasonable amount of certainty how a given action is going to work. If a character has a 5 Strength and his player knows the average person's is 1 or 2, he's quick to pit his character's Trait against another's in a resisted roll because he's statistically likely to get more successes. Players therefore tend to declare actions based on their knowledge of the rules, the type of story being told or based on the Storyteller's generosity rather than on characters' actual motivations. If, in a location-based chronicle, individual characters matter less than the setting, players are less concerned about their creations' survival and can portray them as genuine people rather than as extensions of the gaming event.

A player in a setting-focused game can honestly ask himself, "What *would* a stock boy do if he found himself face to face with a zombie feasting on a recent kill?" The player doesn't have to do quick math about the likelihood of his soak roll absorbing a claw attack. He doesn't have to worry if the Storyteller wants to make an example of human mortality out of the scene. He can truly get into character and let his stock boy stare frozen and piss himself, even if it gets the character killed because larger events will develop in the setting as a result of the stock boy's fate. The alley where events occur might become known as the scene of a gruesome act of cannibalism. Now what can word of events like *that* have on an unfolding setting?

Creating the Location

One of your first steps in running a location-based chronicle is to decide on or create the place where everything happens. You want to treat the location like you would an important character. Before you can portray a character, you have to know her identity: origins, personality, motivations, likes, dislikes, fears and desires. The same holds true for a well-developed setting.

You can establish all these details by asking questions of the game you want to play. Will it occur in a small rural town in Midwestern America or in a neighborhood in a large city such as New York or Chicago? Is there something unique or special about the location that causes the enemy to congregate there? Do the characters have some sort of connection with or relationship to the location, beyond just living there? Answers to these questions give you a broad outline of what the place is like, just as initial concept ideas create the skeleton of a good character. The remainder of this article helps you answer such questions.

But how much detail should you work out in advance about your location? You probably want to strike a balance between establishing enough to set convincing stories there and leaving enough details unspecified to develop them based on character actions and story progression. A good rule of thumb is to define only as much as is necessary, and as little as possible. For example, if a local fire station plays a part in an upcoming story you need detail only the basic facts about the station and the firemen who will be met. There's no need to create names and backstories for each and every one at the station, at least not until that level of detail is demanded by the imbued.

Type of Location

"Type" is simply a short-term way of describing the location you intend to use in your chronicle. Do you want to use a small town that rolls up its sidewalks by six o'clock each evening or a city neighborhood that never sleeps? Another related factor is the size of the site. Is it an entire town or city or just a few floors of an office building?

The type of location determines the overall tone and atmosphere of the chronicle. A game set in a small rural town in the American Southwest might create feelings of isolation or abandonment; the characters have no one else to turn to for aid. Meanwhile, a chronicle set in a busy city neighborhood might lead to frantic sensations of paranoia; the characters look over their shoulder constantly to make sure the enemy hasn't found them. Make sure to choose a setting that allows you to create the tone and atmosphere you want for your chronicle. Refer to **Hunter,** pp. 244-248, for more about tone and atmosphere.

The type and size of a location can also determine the overall scope of your chronicle and the types of stories you can tell there. If your game has a relatively small setting (a 10-block neighborhood on the south side of Chicago), its scope restricts the types of stories you can tell. The area is home to only so many people who can be preyed upon by the supernatural without attracting too much attention, and significant events such as a building collapsing wreak havoc on the environment. If you plan a limited chronicle of only a handful of stories, you can get away with a small location. If you intend to run an extended location-based chronicle that will allow for a range of minor and major events, give yourself plenty of room to play with.

Why Is the Location Important?

Just like an important character, the location of your chronicle needs to be special in some way. What attracts the supernatural to it? Why is the locale significant to the characters? The answers to these questions are the hooks that make your chronicle unique, and they can take many forms.

Perhaps the place, whether an urban neighborhood or a small rural town is valued highly by its residents, including the players' characters. The survival and well being of the location is therefore more important than that of the people who live there. There might be any number of reasons for this. Perhaps the characters lived there their whole lives and have witnessed recent changes at the hands of the enemy. It could simply be that the characters' families live in the location and the hunters want to make the place safe for their loved ones. A location of this sort works well with the "Protect the Home Front" chronicle described later.

Maybe a nest of undead operates somewhere in the setting and is so entrenched that only a concerted effort on the part of many hunters over an extended period of time can hope to root it out. The enemy's presence makes the setting more important than any characters who come and go. This sort of location works well in a "Search for the Secret" chronicle.

It could be that the forces of darkness are more likely to manifest in your locale than in others, calling for imbued willing to contain the evil spewed forth from this "hell pit." This type of location works equally

well in "Protect the Home Front" and "Search for the Secret" chronicles. Not only must the characters protect the location from the endless hordes of "home-grown" monsters, but the undead will forever have a doorway into the world unless the chosen can unlock the secret of the hell hole.

The history of your location can also make it unique or compelling. Some past event may have weakened the wall between this world and next. To use a real-life example, imagine the possible effects of events such as the Salem Witch Trials on modern developments in Massachusetts. Salem is cursed or haunted, all manner of creepy, spooky and otherwise unearthly events happen there, and only hunters are able and willing to set things right again.

The type of location you choose can also help determine the significance and importance of your setting. The walking dead might find small-town corruption to be the perfect cover behind which to pursue their goals. A busy city neighborhood offers countless locales from which undead can prey upon unwitting citizens. A remote forest or mountain region might have been the sight of untold spiritual tragedy that now makes it home to an endless number of creatures.

The Hunters' Connection

Another factor to consider is whether the hunters have any sort of connection to the setting. Are they residents who band together to protect their own from an unnatural threat or have the hunters come to this place because of creatures' presence? Hunters who have lived their whole lives in your location are ideal for a "Protect the Home Front" chronicle. Perhaps the feature that makes the location important draws the characters to it to learn its secrets.

Local Personality

Though locations don't have personalities in the same sense that people do, adopting a personality of sorts for your location can go a long way toward establishing and maintaining the tone, mood and atmosphere of your chronicle. Is it a friendly little town where the locals help strangers out or is it a mean city street where strangers are met with caution and fear? Are the local residents the type to keep quiet about odd happenings or are they oblivious to the truth and quick to make noise about any strange goings-on? A chronicle set in a location in which the characters are feared and ostracized by the very people they hope to protect feels very different from one in which the characters are known members of a com-

munity and can delicately turn to their neighbors for help when necessary.

Example Locations

Below are some possible setting based on the ideas proposed thus far.

Small Town: A small rural town in northern Vermont offers a remote, almost desolate setting for a chronicle in which the undead hope to quietly gather and build their forces. Unfortunately for the monsters, a group of local hunters isn't about to let the forces of darkness take over its home. Can the town survive the clash of monsters and imbued?

City Neighborhood: A crime-ridden city neighborhood in south Boston sits on the spot where a series of gruesome murders took place 200 years ago, drawing the walking dead like moths to a flame. The characters find themselves on a journey to the northeast when they realize that more than one of their prey has made a pilgrimage to Boston in recent months.

Natural Region: Imagine a modern-day Walton's Mountain that hides a deep, dark secret. Can the characters uncover the truth behind a series of grisly murders and disappearances in the remote Virginia mountains?

Office Building: Floors 23 to 25 of the Sears Tower in Chicago house the offices of a small but highly successful law firm. While visiting the building, the characters notice several zombies and walking dead boarding an elevator to the 24th floor. Is the law firm somehow connected to the monsters or is it a target?

Types of Location-Based Chronicles

Though setting-focused chronicles don't fall into neat categories, there are a few general types that bear discussion.

Protect the Home Front

This type of chronicle is probably the most obvious type of location-based chronicle. It primarily involves hunters working to preserve the place from the enemy. This type of game often features local inhabitants: imbued who use their newly acquired capabilities to save their home. This sort of chronicle is well suited to a small-town locale, where the forces of darkness threaten lives. Characters with Zeal as their primary Virtue work well in "Protect the Home Front" chronicles.

"Protection" chronicles don't demand many important aspects of their locations, focusing on the conflicts between hunters and the enemy and the impact of those conflicts, instead. What are the ramifications of opposing the town matron, who's actually existed there for 200 years and secretly manipulates the townsfolk to her will? The characters probably react to monsters' actions in an episodic fashion until an overriding theme emerges in events, such as the matron repeatedly escaping harm, profiting subtly or being alleviated of public opponents. That's when observant imbued can notice the trend and act against the creature, being proactive to win their town's freedom.

Search for the Secret

In this type of chronicle, hunters seek to solve the mysteries and unlock the secrets of their setting. This can mean discovering the true nature of the enemy's involvement in the location or perhaps unearthing the real nature of the place itself. This type of game does put emphasis on that which makes the location important.

A "Search for the Secret" chronicle works equally well with homegrown characters as well as with visitors. Locals might want to uncover the secret as a means of making their home safe while visitors might be motivated by the quest for knowledge about the enemy or themselves. (In the latter case, the characters might have reason to believe that information about the imbuing or the Heralds can be found in the locale.) Characters with Vision as their primary Virtue are well suited for "Search for the Secret" chronicles, given their focus on discovery and understanding.

Investigation stories often involve characters actively pursuing their goal rather than reacting to the actions of monsters in their midst. This type of chronicle calls for proactive players (and characters) who aren't willing sit and wait for the enemy to make trouble.

Stories in "Search for the Secret" chronicles tend to be part of a larger story arc and often share common themes and other story elements. The entire chronicle could consist of stories in which the characters learn of, look into and ultimately solve the mysteries of a place. This sort of storytelling is suited to running a mini-series of sorts, which has a clear beginning, middle and end.

The Road Movie

Another type of location-based chronicle is named after the "Road Movie." The characters journey toward a given location for a specific reason, say to rescue an ally, confront the enemy along the way and ultimately face the greatest foe in a climax at the destination. The forces faced along

the way may even be connected directly to the final foe, having been sent by her to stop the characters. Or enemies faced along the way could relate to the final foe thematically; in dealing with creatures on the road, hunters learn about themselves or the supernatural and use what they discover to win the final confrontation.

The characters in a road chronicle might originally be from their intended destination (which explains why they're going back), or they could be vagabonds of sorts, traveling the country in search of monster activity. The characters might undertake their journey in order to prevent some catastrophe from occurring at their destination or they might simply be following a monster's trail.

This type of chronicle works equally well with characters of all three primary Virtues. Zealots might focus on ridding the location of the undead that plague it. The Merciful might focus on salvaging a monster before it does harm at a destination. And Visionaries might seek to understand the nature of the enemy that resides at the destination.

You can even combine "Road Movie" with "Search for the Secret" chronicles by arranging for the hunters' goal to harbor a secret or mystery which they resolve to uncover.

"Road Movie" chronicles are actually as much about the journey itself as they are about the destination. The journey often changes characters to the point that the reasons they originally set out might not be so compelling once they arrive. A hanging Judge bent on destroying the creature that killed his wife may not be so determined once he learns the monster lost its wife in life, too.

Things to Consider

While this article praises the virtues of location-based chronicles, the simple truth is they aren't for everyone. Many players would be dumbfounded or outright angered by some of the suggestions made here. Few players like to be told how to play their characters. Even fewer like to be told that they should let their characters die for the good of the story. With that in mind, here are some suggestions to consider before starting a location-based chronicle.

Talk with the Players

It's important that your players fully understand the type of chronicle they're getting into. That way no one is disillusioned. Let the players read this section. In fact, *make* the players read this section. Yes, this book is intended for Storytellers, but since this piece contains no secret information, it does more educating

than it does spoiling rules or plot developments. You might want to photocopy the pages, though....

Let the Players Contribute

Being a player in a location-based chronicle can mean forgoing some of the more commonly sought-after aspects of storytelling games. The players agree to honor a creation not entirely of their own making more so than the very characters they do create. To compensate players for their willingness to participate, let them contribute to the chronicle in other ways.

Allow players to create elements of the location such as people or places that will appear. You might allow a player whose character lives in a "rent-a-room" hotel in a low-income neighborhood to detail the hotel and some of the other people who live there. As the places and/or people the players create appear in your stories, the players can help and watch their creations develop, just like they do with their characters. If these player-created cast members and places become common elements of your stories, the creators' reactions will be strong when the enemy affects these elements. A vampire might move in and surreptitiously begin feeding on the rooming-house tenants, for example.

The supporting cast members players create can also be a resource from which future hunters are drawn. As alluded to earlier, the mortality rate among the imbued has the potential to be high in a location-based chronicle. Rather than create new characters cold and introduce them to the game, players can draw new imbued from cast members already established in the game and possibly familiar to the surviving hunters. Players also have some connection to such "recruits" when they must be resorted to because players devised them in the first place.

Similarly, let players contribute story ideas based on their hunters and their personal worlds. A Storyteller's best friend is a player who offers ideas for stories concerning his hunter, home, family, friends and co-workers. Maybe a boss is actually a pawn of the supernatural in a larger mystery that enshrouds a neighborhood.

Of course, when dealing with player contributions, whether they're people or places or story ideas, keep in mind that you are ultimately the one to decide what happens. The players trust that you won't to do anything bad to their creations without good reason, but you decide when a loved one is the next victim in a zombie's murder spree. Just be sure that the loss has purpose in the story, perhaps as motivation for a hunter to finally act against the creature, rather than to make the death painful or gratuitous for its own sake.

Be Alternative

While location-based chronicles can run just as long as traditional ones, they also work well when used in a more limited fashion, as a change of pace from the standard. The short-term approach is particularly appropriate for location-based chronicles for a few of reasons. Players ultimately like to create and portray single people who hopefully have extended hunting careers and are the focus of the game. Playing an independent chronicle about a place first, or taking existing characters into a foray in which they're secondary to setting is fun for a while, but players may eventually want their characters to return to the limelight. Ultimately, characters and location can't share the stage for too long.

Setting-focused games also lend themselves to the short term because they let you create a complete story or story arc. Once you and the players have told events that focus on one place, you can move on to other places or stories (yes, even traditional character-based ones). There's no reason why a story can't have a distinct beginning, middle and end. A "Search for the Secret" chronicle can, for example, end if/when the characters uncover the mystery or secret they seek.

Let the Location Develop

Remember: The location is your main "character" and portraying it as you would a character is part of the challenge of and ultimately the reward of running a location-based chronicle. Would you play a character who never changes? Of course not. So make sure your location changes over time based on the events of your stories. The nature of the change should depend on the type of chronicle you play. An extended "Protect the Home Front" series might feature minor changes that occur slowly while a short-term "Search for the Secret" chronicle might call for rapid and sweeping changes. The predation of a bloodsucker nest might be slow and innocuous among mundane deaths in an urban neighborhood, but change is underway: A supernatural threat has moved in. Or discovering that a local teacher has manipulated children's minds for years might reveal why townsfolk act the way they do — and suggests that homegrown hunters have also been affected in their lives.

But just as it's important that your setting develops over the course of the chronicle, it's imperative that the players (and their characters) are able to

notice the change. Just as players would recognize development in their characters in a traditional-style chronicle, they should notice "character evolution" in the setting. This progress can occur in relationships between local residents and the characters, such as the hunters becoming moderately well known (or suspected and feared) among certain segments of the local population. Supernatural activities certainly change in response to hunters' activities, whether flourishing to understand the new threat or dropping off to avoid attracting more attention. These developments create a sense that the setting is a dynamic, real-world place, and it allows the players and characters to see some results of their actions.

One challenge of creating change in a location is that much of the contest between hunters and the supernatural should remain hidden, out of the public eye. Battles between imbued and monsters don't often make the evening news or the front page of the local paper (and certainly aren't reported for what they actually are when they do appear). That means changes to the location are likely to be low key, not obvious to the average Joe on the street. Try to introduce subtle changes that players and characters can notice, however. Since the characters are among the "lucky" few who know the truth about the other side, they'll be more likely to notice even minor differences. There are fewer blood pawns on the streets. Normal police and utility service resumes to a street after years of seeming neglect. The dead rest peacefully.

Meanwhile, regular folks are likely to perceive any changes in unrelated or inexplicable terms. Crime may seem to go down. The shadows may subconsciously be less oppressive and intimidating, making the neighborhood seem safer at night. Just because the local paper doesn't report each zombie or ghoul the hunters reconcile doesn't mean the characters' efforts are any less real or appreciated.

Of course, this isn't to say that hunters' actions or efforts must affect the setting for the better. In fact, an interesting twist in a location-based chronicle is to deal with how characters' deeds might result in unexpected or undesirable circumstances. If a nest of undead is destroyed, what happens to their other supernatural enemies? Are they free to make even more trouble than the undead? Perhaps the undead and their enemies kept each other in check. Destroying one supernatural threat might disrupt the balance of power and result in even worse conditions than before. Whereas the undead were somewhat selective in choosing their victims, their enemies might not be so choosy and could initiate a rash of murders of higher profile victims such as college students or business people.

If the imbued learn that their efforts ultimately lead to more killings, how do they react? Do they hold themselves responsible, even for being involved indirectly? Had they better investigated the repercussions of their plans, would they have performed differently? How will they change their strategies in the future?

Or for a slightly different twist, what if members of the media or local police were controlled by recently destroyed undead? Having newspaper or TV reporters or cops looking for the hunters adds a new twist to the chronicle. Keeping activities hidden from the public and staying out of jail becomes that much more difficult.

Using Tone and Atmosphere

Hunter's Chapter 8 devotes a number of pages to describing how use of tone and atmosphere can bring your setting to life. This is especially true in location-based chronicles.

The example tones and atmospheres discussed in the rulebook are all applicable to setting-focused games. The only differences lie in adjusting the presentation of tone and atmosphere so that emphasis is on the location instead of characters. The tone style entitled "It's Almost Within Reach" is particularly appropriate for a "Search for the Secret" chronicle, for example. The characters face a never-ending stream of setbacks in their pursuit of the secret. Each time they think they've made strides toward unlocking the location's mysteries, they discover the truth they seek is much larger than they imagined.

Likewise, the "The Beautiful People" atmosphere works well in almost any type of location-based chronicle. The setting itself appears almost perfect: Lawns and landscaping are meticulously cared for, streets and sidewalks are clean and litter-free, and people are friendly and cheerful, even to strangers. As the characters dig a little deeper, however, they learn that the façade hides a dark truth of undead living among the local inhabitants.

The sample tones and atmospheres presented in **Hunter** represent only a small number of different approaches to highlighting different elements of your setting. The following is another sample tone that's particularly appropriate for location-based games.

Stepping into the Unknown

One of the reasons the World of Darkness has such appeal as a setting for stories and chronicles is it represents a world just beyond our understanding. More simply put, it represents the unknown. The dichotomy of the known and unknown is a common theme in fiction and can range from the simplest example of a character discovering that her lover isn't who she thought to more complex situations such as those found in science-fiction stories in which a character discovers the truth about the destiny of mankind and its role in the universe.

The idea of moving from the safe world of the known into the mysterious world of the unknown is especially fitting for **Hunter**'s themes. Movement from known to unknown can be presented in a number of ways. If the characters encounter monsters in the prelude, their imbuing is a metaphor for their movement from known to unknown. The characters themselves represent a sort of boundary between the known world that they come from and the unknown world to which they're exposed. They now straddle the line between the two, living among people who don't understand yet not fully understanding what monsters are, either.

Just as hunters represent a boundary between known and unknown, so too does the location of your chronicle. As home to both forces of darkness and the imbued, your location serves as the barrier between the two. You can emphasize this by placing barriers and borders of various sorts between the characters and monsters.

Some details appropriate for "Stepping into the Unknown" include:

- The unknown monster in the darkness. The walking dead tend to keep to the shadows. When the characters pursue a pack of zombies, they move from well-lit streets to back alleys awash in darkness. As the characters pass from one realm to the other they enter the world of the undead.
- The inexplicable sound beyond the door. The characters look for monsters in an old abandoned farmhouse when they hear unearthly sounds coming from the other side of a door. Stepping through the door takes the characters directly into the World of Darkness that is home to the enemy.
- The undead nest that sits in the basement of an abandoned, condemned building. The characters have tracked the activities of the undead to a condemned factory on the outskirts of town. Each step down into the basement takes them closer to the unknown world that spawns monsters.

Multiple Characters per Player

One of the unique qualities of a location-based chronicle is that characters can suffer horrific fates more frequently than they tend to in character-based games. The hunters are less important than the setting, so players prepared to get into this type of game can portray their creations like genuine people. That can mean failing to be heroic, doing the wrong things for the wrong reasons, and getting hurt or killed "because that's what would reasonably happen under the circumstances."

So how do you get around this problem, keeping the game going and ensuring that all players still make a contribution? Rather than create and play one character each, players can create a few. Three or so is an ideal number to start. Each has her own life in the setting and reasons for being attached to or interested in it. As each succumbs to the supernatural (or a more mundane fate), or perhaps can't deal with the pressures of the hunt and abandons it — a very plausible and realistic decision — another of the prepared characters can enter, with a backstory and life already in place. Indeed, players could simply opt to play different characters with each different story, establishing a few in the setting who are all active hunters. You'd simply need to know (or decide) which character is played this time and your game would get underway. Multiple characters also allow each player to explore a variety of hunter types in the same chronicle. Maybe a player has an Avenger, Innocent and Visionary from which to choose, each with her own ideals, outlooks and ways of dealing with the supernatural. Some of your storylines might very well be suggested by the players themselves (see "Let the Players Contribute," above).

A related approach is for your troupe to create a "character pool" from which all players select characters to play in each story. With this approach, a given character might be played by one player during one story and by another player the next. While this roleplaying style might rub some players the wrong way, it forces them to be less attached to the characters they play and to focus more on the setting and how hunters' actions affect it.

Different Types of Characters

Another possible solution to hunter mortality in a location-focused game is to allow the players to have different types of characters. While most should be genuine hunters, a remote, sparsely populated or intimate setting might demand that non-hunters be played, too. Bystanders are an option (see the **Hunter**

Players Guide for rules on creating them), but can pose the same problem as hunters: Bystanders are exposed to the supernatural. If your setting is a small town, not everyone can be exposed to the otherworldly. That would be ridiculous and would deny your setting an unknowing human backdrop against which to play. Sooner of later, your option is to play completely mundane characters. In terms of creation, these people get the same points that hunters do, but they can't have any Virtues, creeds, Conviction, edges or Backgrounds such as Patron or certain levels of Mentor that assume the bearer is imbued. Introduction of mundane characters helps increase the emphasis on the location by exploring characters who are essentially part of the setting. These people can be part of the "unknowing human backdrop" against which other hunters and bystanders operate.

These regular folks can be foils against hunters' actions, seeing strange events, trying to understand events they're not meant to and never actually can. But therein lies their danger as players' characters. Normal people can't cope with the presence of most monsters. They can't deal with exposure to flagrant use of supernatural powers. And the latter point applies to hunters' use of dynamic edges, too. People run from, hide from or ignore such displays as if nothing happened. Now, such reactions can be fun to roleplay, as can the misunderstanding or complete memory loss that occurs afterward, but regular people should not usually be made aware of the supernatural or indoctrinated into the hunt. Millennia of monstrous conditioning and an inherent inability to understand makes ordinary people outsiders to the hunters' world. At best, these characters can consider the imbued dangerous or deranged and seek to do something about them. And that's where more fun can be had in playing the normal Joe. He might blunder into hunters' efforts and try to get the imbued institutionalized or imprisoned. An entertaining rivalry can therefore develop among players' characters. As long as such contention improves rather than distracts from your game and everyone has fun with the option — and it helps your troupe explore the identity of your setting — roll with it.

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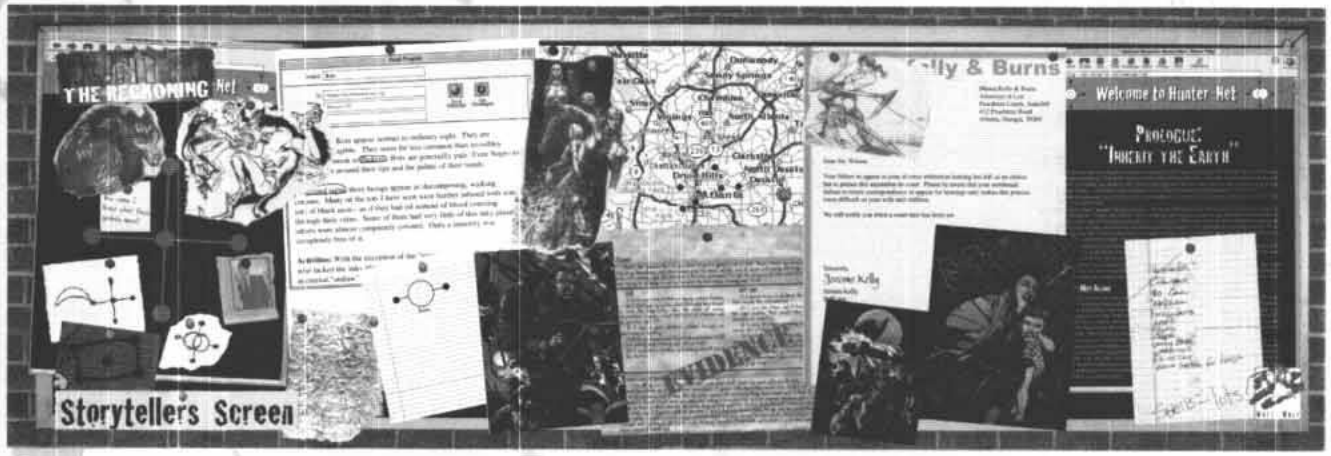

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