



The
Whispering
Vault™

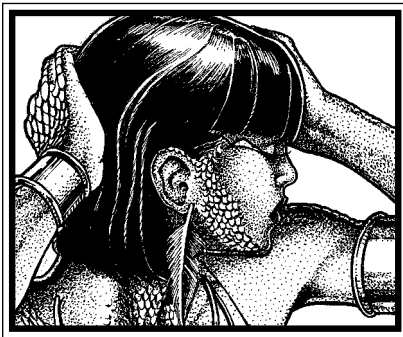
The Whispering Vault



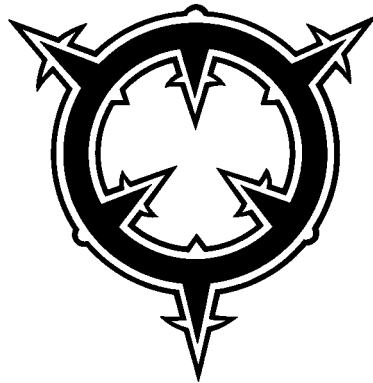
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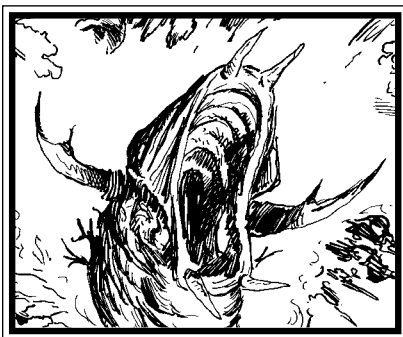
WHISPERING VAULT - ILLUSTRATORS



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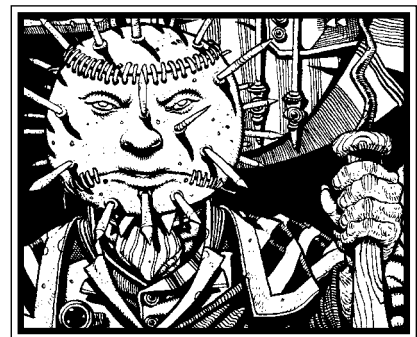
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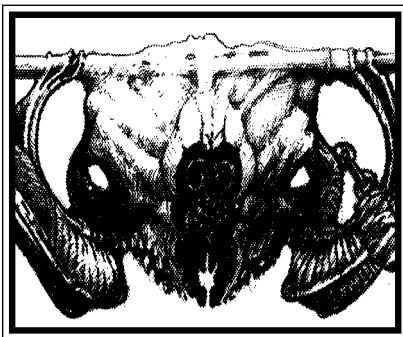
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Dedicated to Lauren's Mom —

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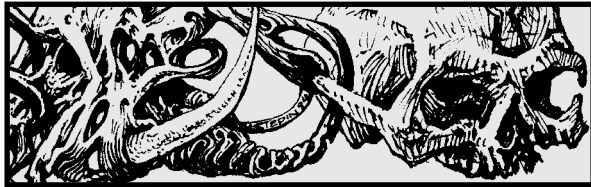
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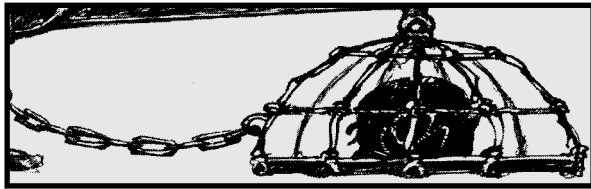
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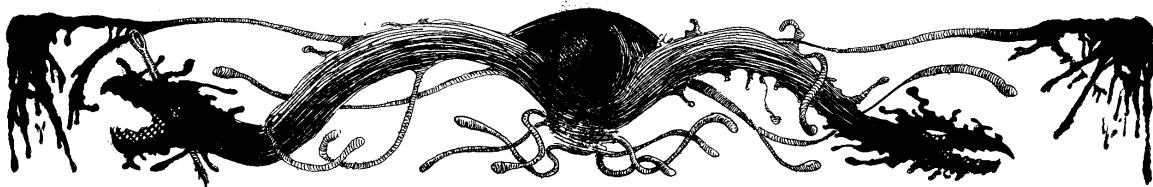
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WELCOME

This book contains everything you need to share a dream with me and with one another. It is a strange dream about immortal beings who travel through time to mend the fabric of reality and the nightmarish creatures who oppose them. Welcome aboard. I hope you enjoy the ride.

AN ASSUMPTION

Most of the people who will buy this game are experienced gamers, so no effort will be made to explain the concept of roleplaying. Let's assume you know the basics. If you have never played a roleplaying game before, you are better off learning from other players than a rulebook anyway.

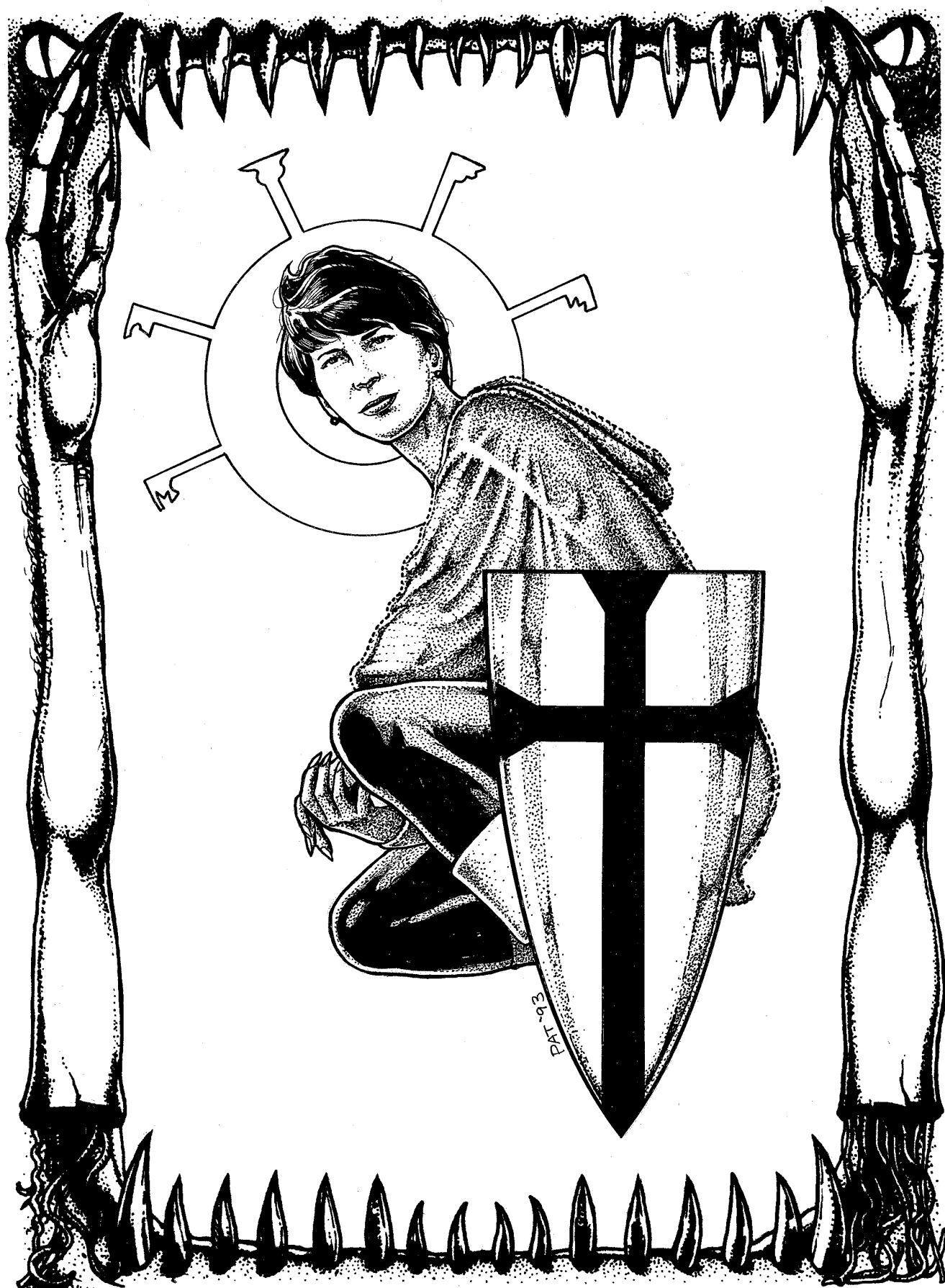
AN INVITATION

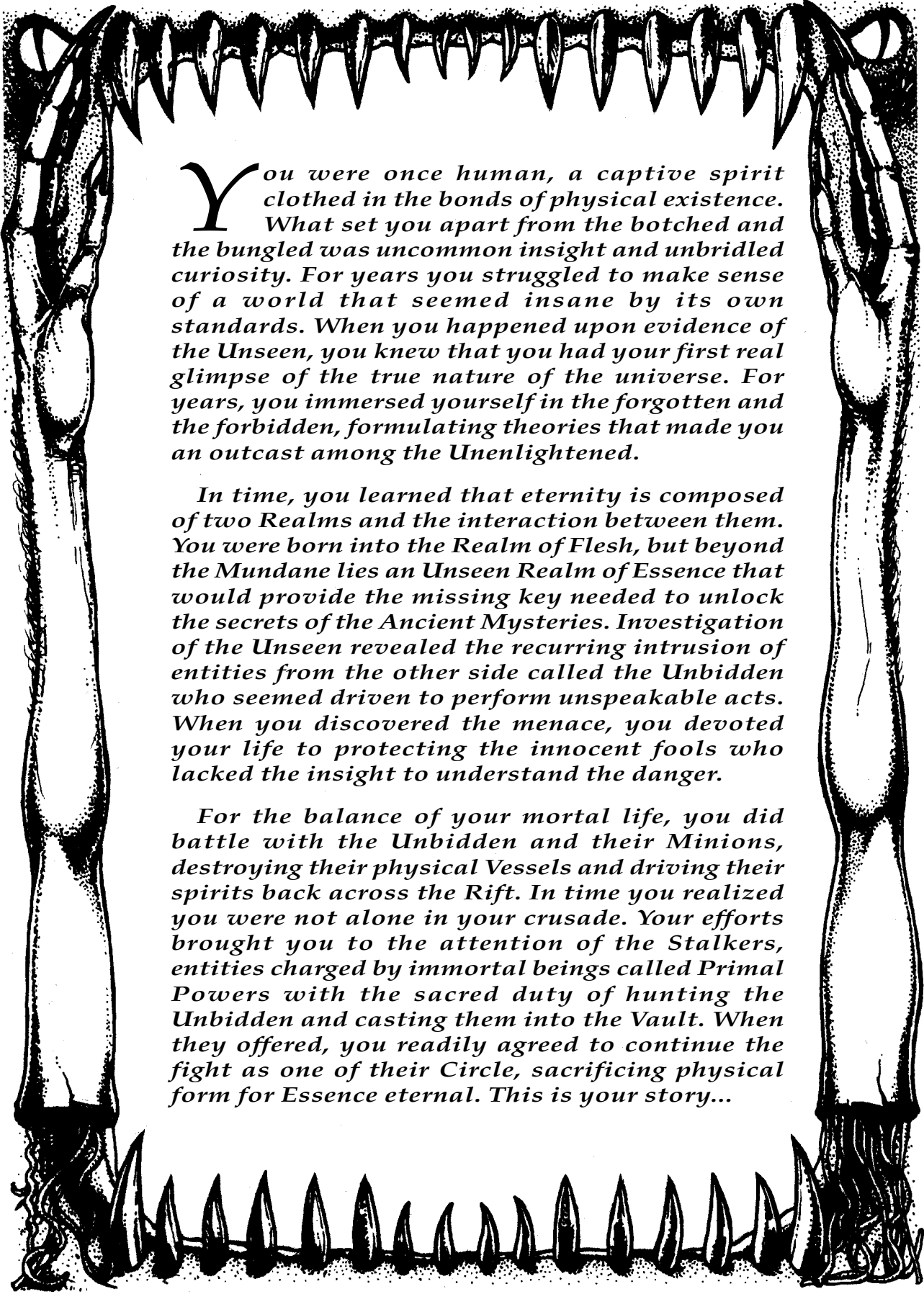
Despite the lack of introductory material, the Whispering Vault works quite well as a first game for horror fans who are new to the hobby. The next time you are gathering a group to play the Vault, consider inviting a couple of friends who have never played before.

GETTING STARTED

All you need to play is this book, a few open-minded friends, and a handful of six-sided dice. The Vault can be played with as few as two players and as many as six, but it seems to work best with three or four. The Gamemaster should familiarize himself with the rules before trying to play, but he can fill the rest of you in as you go along.

DISCLAIMER – The Whispering Vault is an original work of fiction created for the sole purpose of entertainment. Any further significance is the invention of the reader and is not the Author's responsibility.





You were once human, a captive spirit clothed in the bonds of physical existence. What set you apart from the botched and the bungled was uncommon insight and unbridled curiosity. For years you struggled to make sense of a world that seemed insane by its own standards. When you happened upon evidence of the Unseen, you knew that you had your first real glimpse of the true nature of the universe. For years, you immersed yourself in the forgotten and the forbidden, formulating theories that made you an outcast among the Unenlightened.

In time, you learned that eternity is composed of two Realms and the interaction between them. You were born into the Realm of Flesh, but beyond the Mundane lies an Unseen Realm of Essence that would provide the missing key needed to unlock the secrets of the Ancient Mysteries. Investigation of the Unseen revealed the recurring intrusion of entities from the other side called the Unbidden who seemed driven to perform unspeakable acts. When you discovered the menace, you devoted your life to protecting the innocent fools who lacked the insight to understand the danger.

For the balance of your mortal life, you did battle with the Unbidden and their Minions, destroying their physical Vessels and driving their spirits back across the Rift. In time you realized you were not alone in your crusade. Your efforts brought you to the attention of the Stalkers, entities charged by immortal beings called Primal Powers with the sacred duty of hunting the Unbidden and casting them into the Vault. When they offered, you readily agreed to continue the fight as one of their Circle, sacrificing physical form for Essence eternal. This is your story...



UNBEARABLE TRUTH

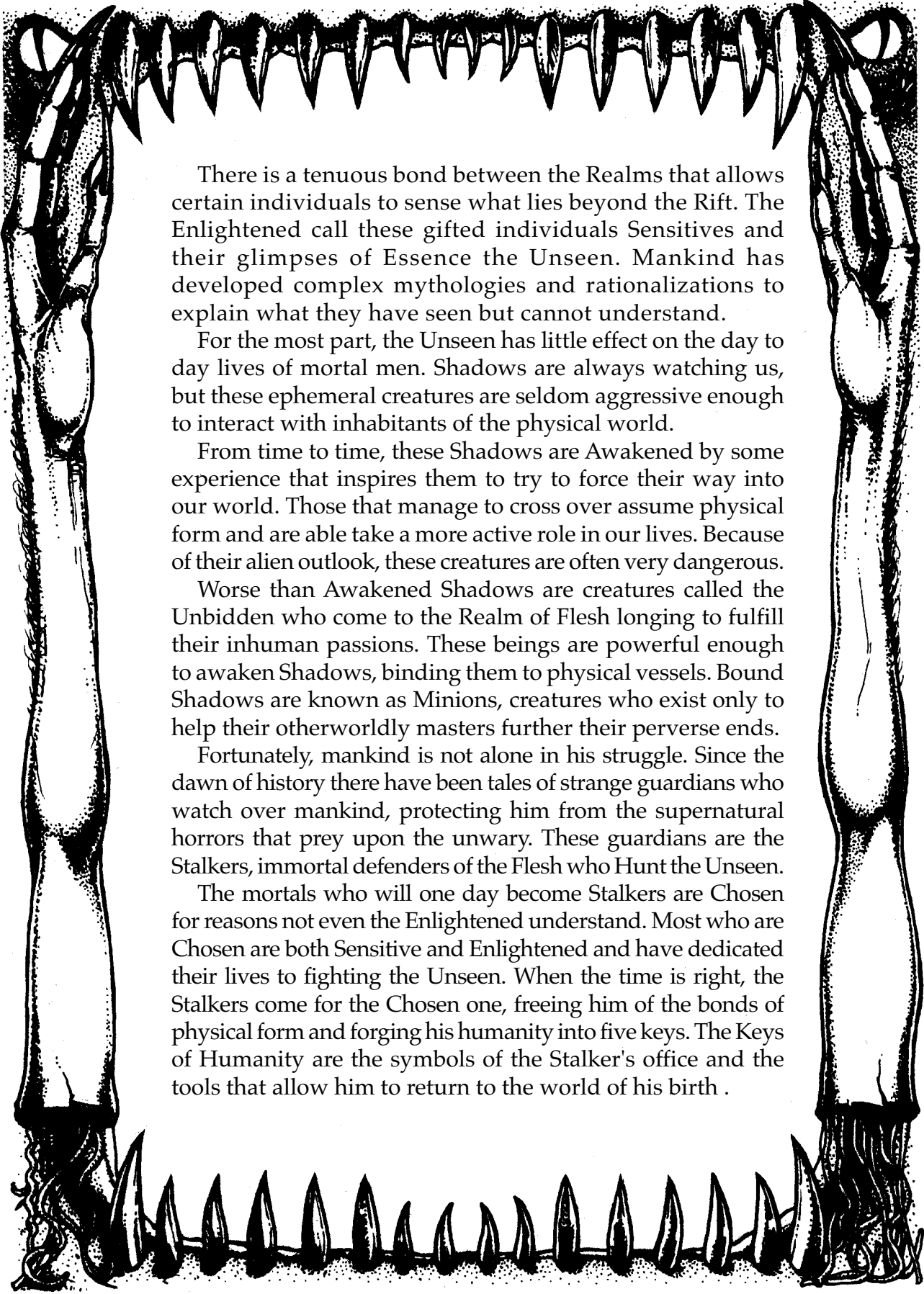
For years, I pursued evidence of what I know I had seen. When the bad days came, I wondered if I was trying to prove my findings to my colleagues or to myself. The last leg of my journey brought me to an opium den in Singapore where several witnesses swore they had seen an "evil spirit." Considering the source, it was hard to be optimistic, but I had run out of good leads so I decided to give it a shot. The nightmare that lurked in the back room of the dismal hospice shattered my preconceived notions of the Unseen and inspired a crusade for which I would one day forsake my humanity.

There is more to the world than what we can perceive with five senses and instincts clouded with preconceptions. Those with the insight to look beyond the comfortable lies we hide behind and the courage to accept that truth refer to one another as the Enlightened.

The Enlightened share a common worldview and over the course of centuries they have developed special terms to describe what they have discovered. This book is written from an Enlightened perspective and makes use of their lexicon to establish a common frame of reference.

The key to understanding the world of the Whispering Vault is learning the secret truths known only to the Enlightened few. First among these truths, and hardest for most to accept, is that we are not alone.

According to Enlightened philosophy, our world exists in the Realm of Flesh, bound by the physical laws necessary for form and substance. There is another plane of existence beyond our own they call the Realm of Essence which is unfettered by conventional physics. The Neitherspace between the Realms is inhabited by hordes of creatures called Shadows who can interact with both Flesh and Essence.



There is a tenuous bond between the Realms that allows certain individuals to sense what lies beyond the Rift. The Enlightened call these gifted individuals Sensitives and their glimpses of Essence the Unseen. Mankind has developed complex mythologies and rationalizations to explain what they have seen but cannot understand.

For the most part, the Unseen has little effect on the day to day lives of mortal men. Shadows are always watching us, but these ephemeral creatures are seldom aggressive enough to interact with inhabitants of the physical world.

From time to time, these Shadows are Awakened by some experience that inspires them to try to force their way into our world. Those that manage to cross over assume physical form and are able take a more active role in our lives. Because of their alien outlook, these creatures are often very dangerous.

Worse than Awakened Shadows are creatures called the Unbidden who come to the Realm of Flesh longing to fulfill their inhuman passions. These beings are powerful enough to awaken Shadows, binding them to physical vessels. Bound Shadows are known as Minions, creatures who exist only to help their otherworldly masters further their perverse ends.

Fortunately, mankind is not alone in his struggle. Since the dawn of history there have been tales of strange guardians who watch over mankind, protecting him from the supernatural horrors that prey upon the unwary. These guardians are the Stalkers, immortal defenders of the Flesh who Hunt the Unseen.

The mortals who will one day become Stalkers are Chosen for reasons not even the Enlightened understand. Most who are Chosen are both Sensitive and Enlightened and have dedicated their lives to fighting the Unseen. When the time is right, the Stalkers come for the Chosen one, freeing him of the bonds of physical form and forging his humanity into five keys. The Keys of Humanity are the symbols of the Stalker's office and the tools that allow him to return to the world of his birth .





IMMORTAL ESSENCE

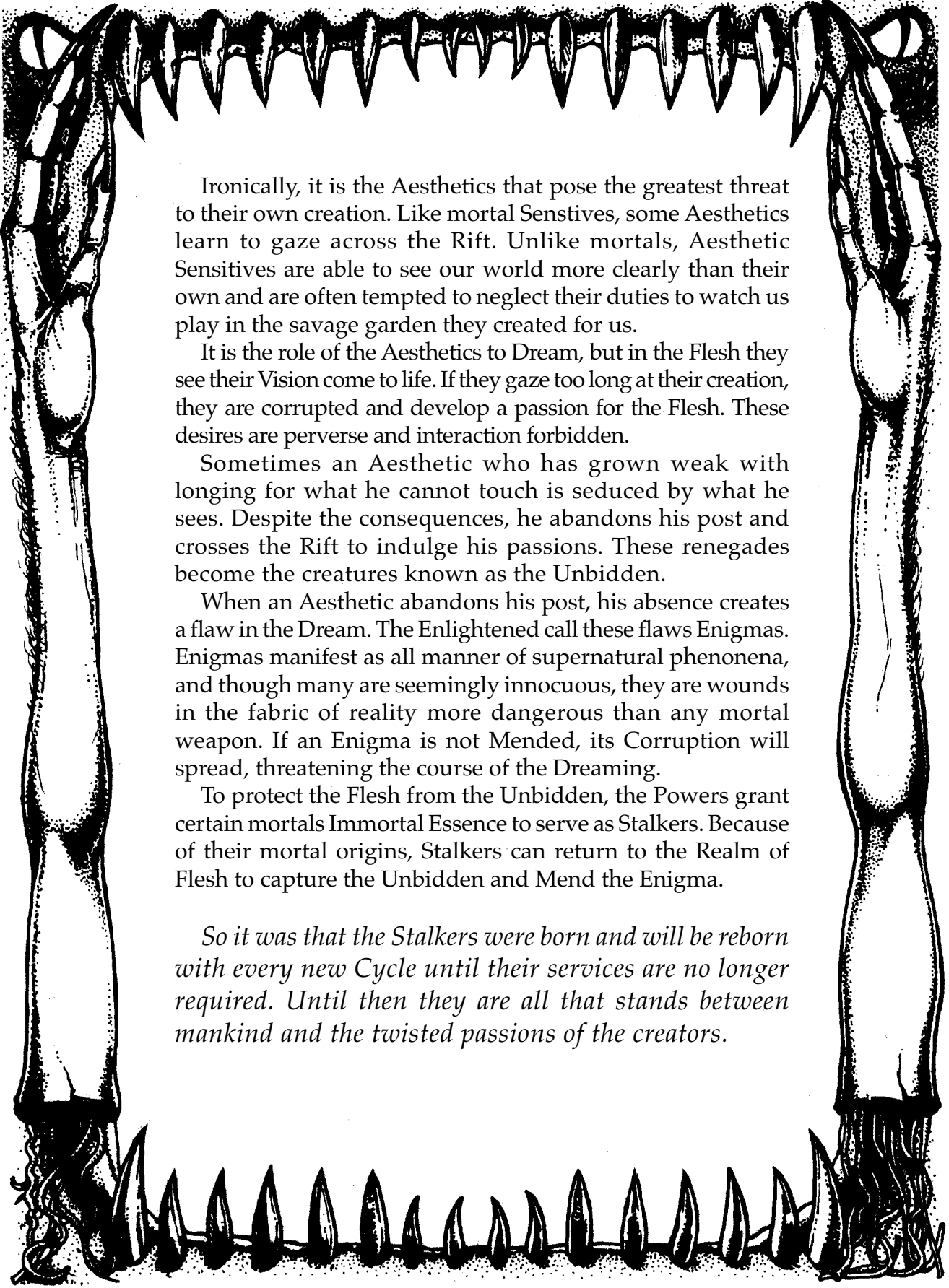
Gone was the crude flesh that had weighed down my spirit for so long. Free of my mortal burden my mind soared, unleashing faculties I had not realized I possessed. Concepts that would once have escaped my feeble grasp were child's play to my awakened insight. Elated, I bathed in the blinding light of truth for the first time and was overwhelmed. To a neophyte Stalker, enlightenment is rebirth, and I was transfigured in an instant that will last an eternity.

When a mortal transcends the Flesh, the true nature of the universe is revealed to him. Even among the Chosen, there are few with the insight to fully comprehend the ancient mysteries, but a typical Stalker's comprehension exceeds that of the most enlightened mortal philosopher.

Creation and Armageddon are aspects of a cosmic Cycle that has always been and will always be. Of the countless entities who inhabit the Realms of Flesh and Essence, few have the Persistent Essence required to survive from one Cycle to the next. The Enlightened call these beings Primal Powers.

In the beginning there is nothing but potential. Alone in the void, the Powers hunger for the wonders remembered from the previous Cycle. Invariably this desire gives birth to the Aesthetics, creatures of pure Essence whose imagination is an act of creation. Through their collective contemplation, the Aesthetic host Dreams the Realm of Flesh.

Having accepted their unlikely origins the Enlightened sometimes refer to the Realm of Flesh as the Dream. The vision of the Aesthetics which inspires their contemplation and shapes our world is called the Dreaming, a term which is also used to describe the process of creation. The Dreaming is an organic process that can be twisted by those who have learned how to influence the Dreamers, reshaping the Flesh. This manipulation of the Dream is what mortals call magic.



Ironically, it is the Aesthetics that pose the greatest threat to their own creation. Like mortal Sensitives, some Aesthetics learn to gaze across the Rift. Unlike mortals, Aesthetic Sensitives are able to see our world more clearly than their own and are often tempted to neglect their duties to watch us play in the savage garden they created for us.

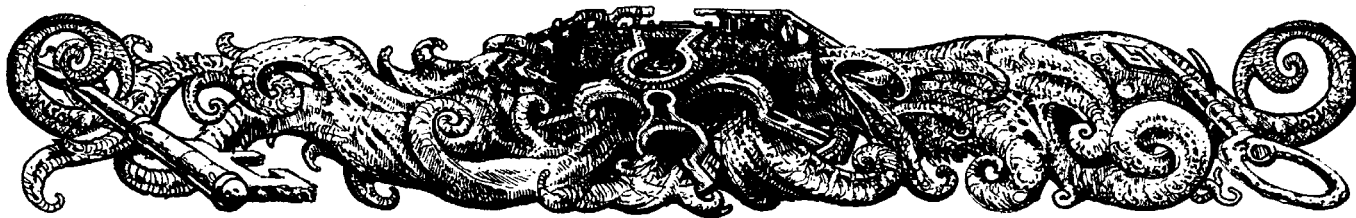
It is the role of the Aesthetics to Dream, but in the Flesh they see their Vision come to life. If they gaze too long at their creation, they are corrupted and develop a passion for the Flesh. These desires are perverse and interaction forbidden.

Sometimes an Aesthetic who has grown weak with longing for what he cannot touch is seduced by what he sees. Despite the consequences, he abandons his post and crosses the Rift to indulge his passions. These renegades become the creatures known as the Unbidden.

When an Aesthetic abandons his post, his absence creates a flaw in the Dream. The Enlightened call these flaws Enigmas. Enigmas manifest as all manner of supernatural phenomena, and though many are seemingly innocuous, they are wounds in the fabric of reality more dangerous than any mortal weapon. If an Enigma is not Mended, its Corruption will spread, threatening the course of the Dreaming.

To protect the Flesh from the Unbidden, the Powers grant certain mortals Immortal Essence to serve as Stalkers. Because of their mortal origins, Stalkers can return to the Realm of Flesh to capture the Unbidden and Mend the Enigma.

So it was that the Stalkers were born and will be reborn with every new Cycle until their services are no longer required. Until then they are all that stands between mankind and the twisted passions of the creators.



I: CHARACTERS

More than human but less than perfect, I am an immortal expression of divine justice, and this is my story. This document is my first attempt to describe what has become of me since I shed my mortal husk, and I fear it may be a less than adequate description of my journey. When next I Hunt I will conceal the text where it may one day be found by someone who will know what it is and what it means.

Your character is a Stalker, immortal guardian of the Dream. Though abandoned long ago, your character's mortal origins provide a foundation that will help you decide how your character looks, acts, and thinks.

The following section outlines a series of questions that will help you establish your character's background. When you have answered all of these questions to your satisfaction, you are ready to generate your character's statistics.

In many ways this is the most important step in the character creation process. The rest of the rules are tools to help you implement the decisions you make here.

The world of the Whispering Vault is a strange place inhabited by bizarre creatures. When creating your Stalker let your imagination run wild. An important element of the setting is the contrast between the character's mundane origins

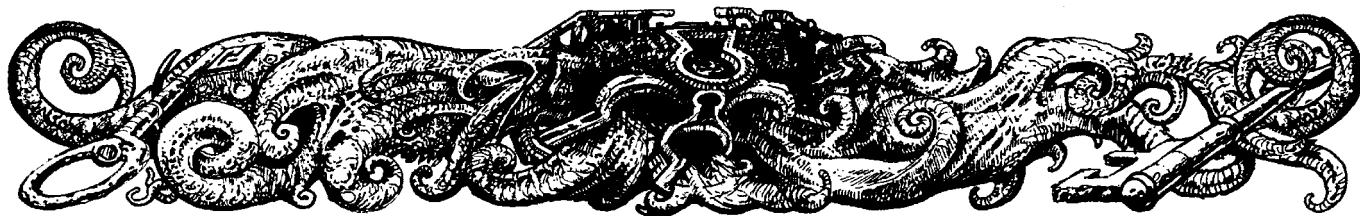
and his immortal incarnation. This works best when the Stalker is obviously otherworldly.

It is important for the players to talk with one another during the character creation process. When so much of the game depends on having a distinctive style it can be disappointing to have to "share the stage" with someone who created a similar character.

If your group decides to do character creation before you get together for the first session everyone should create a "stable" of Stalkers with different backgrounds and abilities. You can put together a balanced group from these stables.

During game play, your concept will come into focus, allowing you to refine your creation between sessions. Over the course of a campaign, characters tend to take on a life of their own, so don't bother trying to figure out everything during character creation.





WHEN AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN ?

I was a product of the late middle ages. For most, it was a time of a change, but many were helpless against the tyranny of inertia. The forces of tradition mired the dawning Renaissance in prejudice and dogma. At the time I was indignant, but from what I have seen, I have come to prefer the ignorant desperation of the Dark Ages to the stark horror of the modern world. Close your eyes while you still can.



Time does not affect creatures of Essence the same way it affects the Flesh so your character could have come from any place or time. Try to choose a period that you are familiar with or one that holds special romance for you.

It is possible to play characters from the future, but it forces the gamemaster to invent a timeline so it is easiest to play characters from the present or from the past.



WHO WERE YOU AND HOW DID YOU LIVE?

Stalkers come from all walks of life, but characters with the strength of conviction to confront the Unseen seldom lead mundane lives. While it is possible for your character to have been a plumber or farmer, he is more likely to have been a priest or a war hero.

Some professions or lifestyles are more likely to encounter the Unseen making it more plausible for them to become entangled in the machinations of the Unbidden. Reporters and archaeologists are two examples of contemporary backgrounds that could lead to paranormal investigation.

The setting allows for all kinds of characters so try to find something that intrigues you. In the long run the best background is one that tells a good story.

Befuddled by innocence, I misunderstood my calling and joined the good brothers of the Order of the White Rose where I dedicated myself to exploring mysteries that the church would rather overlook. It was this persistent curiosity that would lead me out of the shadows of ignorance into the terrible light of truth.





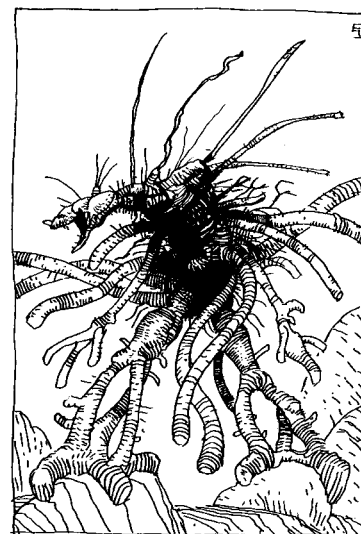
WHY DID YOU HUNT THE UNSEEN ?

Scarborough was far from the nearest church, so they were forced to petition the monestary for help. As I was the only one familiar with the Roman Ritual, it was left to me to confront the abomination lurking in the cobbler's barn.

The creature took my arm and shattered my faith leaving nothing but a twisted obsession that gradually destroyed my mortal life.

It will help you understand your character's motivations if you know how he first came into contact with the Unseen and what drove him to devote his life to the pursuit of the Unbidden.

Take the time to make some notes about your character's career as a mortal Hunter. This will give you a foundation to work from and may provide the gamemaster with seeds for follow-up adventures.

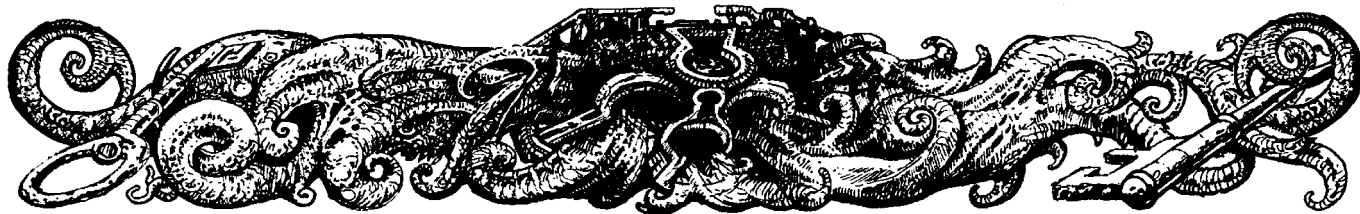


HOW WERE YOU RECRUITED ?

It was your character's devotion that eventually brought him to the attention of the Powers. Once Chosen, he was offered immortality by a representative of the Circle he would join. This is the major turning point in a Stalker's life. Try to figure out how it happened and how he was affected by the experience.

When the strange angels came for me the first time, I was not ready to shed my mortal husk. Ten years later Trisha was dead, and I had avenged my fallen brothers. With nothing to look forward to but the fading of the light, I could scarcely refuse their generous offer. I have conquered death and face eternity unafraid...





WHAT DOES YOUR AVATAR LOOK LIKE?

By the time I was Chosen, my youth was badly tarnished. I buried my smile with my mother, and my rakish goatee gave way to a long grey beard. Never given to vanity, I favored a plain brown cassock tied with a rope belt. As a mortal, I may have been mundane, but from all reports my Avatar is quite striking. The ancient Greeks call me "master night," and the Apache know me as the "burning man." Dawnsteel has described me as a "robed phantom whose eyes burn with enlightened fire." A bit overstated, but it will have to do – I have no mirrors.

When the flesh is stripped from the soul of the Chosen, his spirit is freed to become what it always should have been. This spirit form is called the Avatar.

To determine the Avatar's appearance, try to turn your character inside out. Figure out what he is inside and use it to create a description that is an expression of his spirit. Influenced as they are by their origins, Stalkers are often

clothed in some variation of the trappings of their mortal life.

Avatars usually have a generally humanoid appearance but are obviously supernatural entities. Remember that Whispering Vault is a horror game so the chosen form should be unsettling, but it need not be gruesome.

Bear in mind that that function does not necessarily follow form – it takes more than wings to fly.

WHAT IS YOUR DOMAIN LIKE?

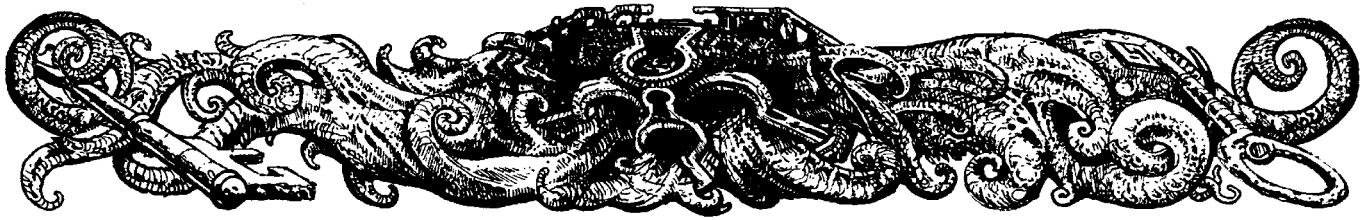
Once you have figured out who and what your character is, try to imagine where he would live. A Stalker's Domain is as distinctive as his Avatar. Unfettered by physical laws, the Architecture of Essence is limited only by the imagination.

When you have a concept, try to take your basic idea one step further, making mountains out of molehills. When your description starts to sound outrageous, you are probably headed in the right direction. There is no place for the mundane on the other side.

Domains are only limited by the character's needs. Most are isolated locations such as a tower, arena or cathedral that could be called "home." Few Stalkers need an entire city but anything is possible.

In many ways my Domain reflects my mortal existence. At the heart of my realm is a tower, infinitely tall and twisted as the course of my life which houses a few meager rooms and a fabulous library. Each of the books in my collection is a memory of what has been or one day will be, but I dare not read them for fear of losing the present.





CHARACTER CREATION

Awareness is a character's ability to perceive and interpret physical and supernatural stimulus. This Attribute also determines the number of Disciplines a novice Stalker will receive.

Insight defines a character's intuitive understanding of the true nature of things. This Attribute also determines a novice Stalker's initial Skill Bonuses.

Presence defines a character's force of personality which will determine the influence he will have over others. This Attribute also determines which Servitors are available to a novice Stalker.

Willpower defines a character's strength of spirit which manifests itself as determination and self-control. This Attribute also determines how powerful the Stalker's Vessel will be.

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

From the moment the Stalker's Essence was liberated from the bonds of Flesh, physical form became a transitory consideration. The Avatar Attributes define aspects of the character's spirit which will determine the rest of his abilities.

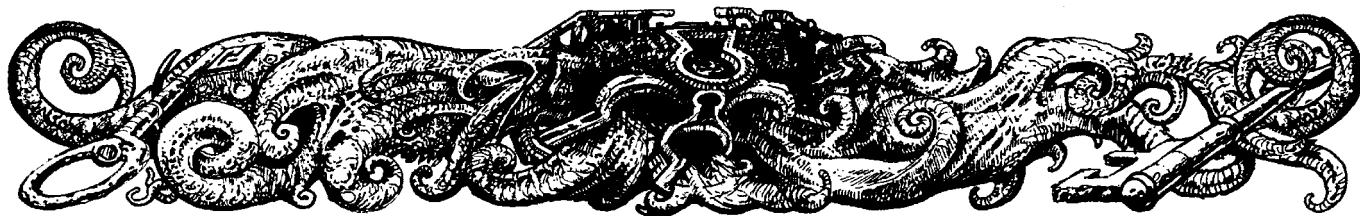
To generate the Avatar's Attributes divide 22 points between Awareness, Insight, Presence, and Willpower

There are no restrictions on how these points may be spent, but it is a good idea to assign Attribute Values in the 3 to 7 range. The choices a player makes during this initial step will determine what kind of abilities his character will have, so every point is important.



How good are you? Most players need a couple of sessions to get a feel for what the various Attribute levels will do for them. As a guideline, assume that mortal characters consider an Attribute Value of 2 or 3 unremarkable, a 4 or a 5 exceptional, and a 6 or higher superhuman. To most Stalkers, an Attribute Value of 2 or a 3 is a liability, a 4 or a 5 is reliable, and a 6 or a 7 is an asset. Stalkers who indulge in an Attribute of 8 or better have to make concessions that make them very one-sided. Until you are used to the system, assign Attribute Values of 4 or better. This won't give you a lot of points to work with, but it is a good place to start.





CHOOSING DISCIPLINES

The Chosen come to the Realm of Essence with enormous potential that may only be realized through the teachings of the Primal Powers. In game terms, this knowledge takes the form of Disciplines, techniques that give the character special powers in the Realm of Flesh.

Newly created characters begin play with a number of Disciplines equal to their Awareness Attribute

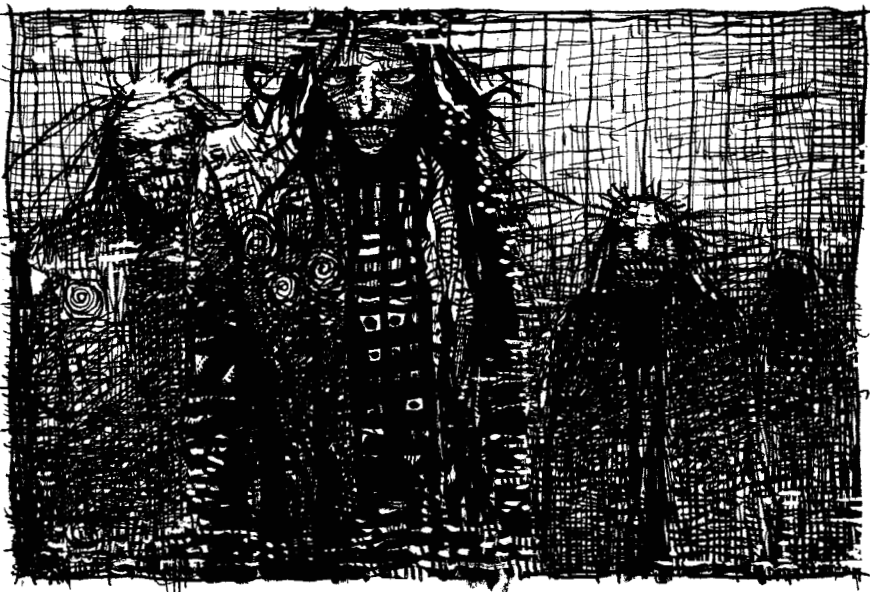
The Discipline Summary on this page may be useful during character creation. Complete descriptions are contained in the section that starts on page 37.

If you have been playing a while, there may be additional Disciplines available in your campaign. Be sure to check with your gamemaster for an updated list.

Buying a Discipline represents a rudimentary grasp of the required techniques, but there is a deeper level of understanding called Mastery. A Master gains access to additional powers and may invent improvised applications of his Mastered Disciplines called Inspirations.

Mastering a Discipline counts as a second Discipline towards the Stalker's limit

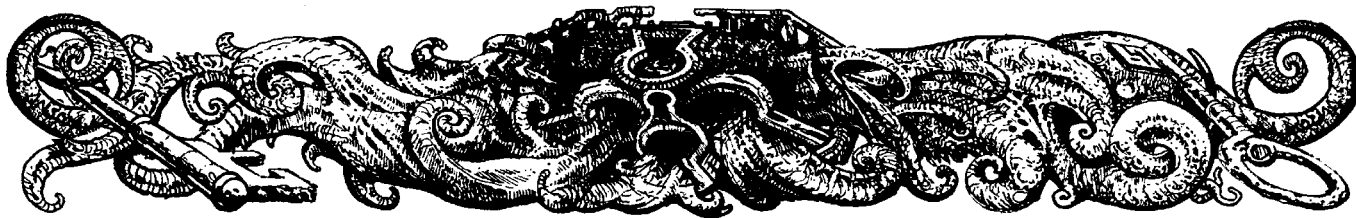
Normally a character with an Awareness of 5 starts his career with 5 Disciplines. If he decides that he wants to master 2 of his Disciplines, he will only have 3: 2 that are Mastered and 1 that is not.



DISCIPLINE SUMMARY

- Conjure** : create small objects
- Delve** : read the minds of mortal characters
- Disintegrate** : destroy unliving matter
- Dissipate** : move through physical obstacles
- Dominate** : mind control
- Foresight** : read the immediate future
- Frenzy** : make multiple attacks in melee combat
- Morph** : change the Vessel's shape
- Rend** : make ranged attacks
- Savage** : cause extra damage in melee combat
- Terrify** : frighten mortal opponents
- Translocate** : teleport the Vessel
- Ward** : protection from physical damage
- Weave** : heal damage to the Vessel
- Whisper** : initiate silent communication





CHOOSING SERVITORS

During the Hunt, Stalkers can call on the powers of the phantoms of Essence known as Servitors. Novitiate Stalkers will only have a few Servitors available to them, but as their favor with the Primal Powers grows, more creatures will present themselves.

Beginning characters receive a number of Servitors equal to their Presence Attribute

The summary on this page may be a useful reminder during character creation. Complete descriptions of the Servitors and their powers are contained in the section that starts on page 45.

If you have been playing a while, there may be additional Servitors available in your campaign. Be sure to check with your gamemaster for an updated list.

Manifesting a Servitor's power in the Realm of Flesh requires the use of the Evocation Skill and is so tiring that it causes damage to the Stalker's Vessel. Stalkers have better control over the Servitors they have Mastered and do not take damage if their Skill use is successful making it possible to call on them more often.

Mastering a Servitor counts as a second Servitor towards the Stalker's limit

The balance of Servitors versus Mastered Servitors is a question of flexibility versus dependability. It is usually a good idea to have at least one Mastered Servitor that can be called upon without damaging the Vessel.

SERVITOR SUMMARY

Chronovores: slow mortals

Cloudlings: absorb moisture to create rain

Devourers: consume unliving matter

Dreadwyrms: frighten groups of mortals

Ferretters: search for an object described by the Evoker

Flits: reduce the damage caused by ranged weapons

Glamours: mesmerize weak willed mortals

Glimmergaunts: make physical objects translucent

Gremlins: impair electrical devices

Marrowdires: weaken the defenses of Shadows

Martyrs: absorb Vitality loss in the Area of Effect

Negators: erase traces of Essence

Nightwings: create a patch of darkness

Rippers: tear the Husks off of Minions

Rotlings: cause debilitating weakness in mortals

Slashers: attack everything in the Area of Effect

Spinners: weave invisible webs that cling to mortals

Trackers: find the nearest creature of Essence

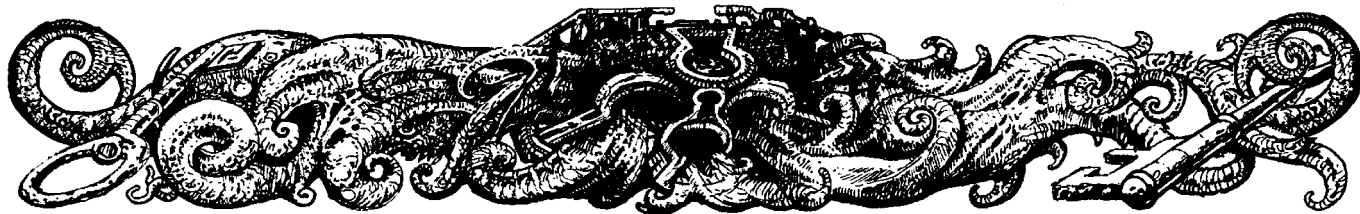
Vampires: increase damage inflicted on mortals

Voidoids: absorb energy

EXAMPLE : CHOOSING DISCIPLINES AND SERVITORS

Tom's Stalker has an Awareness of 7 so he can choose 7 Disciplines. After perusing the list for Disciplines that would be appropriate for his character, he chooses Conjure, Dissipate, Dominate, Frenzy and Translocate. Instead of buying two more Disciplines, he decides that his character has Mastered Dissipation and Translocation. The Stalker has a Presence of 3 so Tom can choose 3 Servitors. After perusing the list for Servitors that would be appropriate for his character, he chooses the Chronovores and Spinners. Instead of buying a third Servitor, he decides that his character has Mastered the Spinners which will allow the Stalker to call them whenever he likes.





SCULPTING THE VESSEL

Creatures of Essence require a physical form to operate in the Realm of Flesh, so the Weavers create a Vessel by spinning substance over the Avatar. In game terms, the Vessel is represented by three Attributes that define the character's physical capabilities.

Dexterity defines the Vessel's agility and is the Attribute used for physical Challenges such as Attack and Evade.

Fortitude defines the Vessel's toughness and is used to resist damage to the Vessel.

Strength defines the Vessel's sheer physical power and is the character's base damage in unarmed combat.

A Stalker's Dexterity, Fortitude, and Strength have a Base Value of 3

At the start of each Hunt Stalkers may increase their Physical Attributes by a number of points equal to their Willpower

How strong are you? Strength is often subjected to closer scrutiny than the other Attributes because its effects are obvious. For purposes of comparison assume that most mortals have a Strength of 2 or 3. Individuals with exceptional Strength such as Olympic weightlifters have an Attribute Value of 4. A few mortals have achieved a Strength Value of 5, but they are very rare. The Vessel is clearly superior to mortal flesh, imbuing an average Stalker with a Strength of 4 or 5. Any Stalker who has a Strength Attribute of 6 or better can inflict as much damage as a gun with his bare hands and can perform incredible feats of physical prowess.

Unlike the rest of character creation, this step may be repeated more than once. Every time the Stalker journeys to the Realm of Flesh, the character can give the Weavers different instructions, allowing the player to assign whatever Attribute values he likes.

Dexterity determines the outcome of physical actions so it is a good idea to have at least 4 Dice or your Stalker won't be able to Attack or Defend very well. Combat oriented characters usually have a Dexterity Attribute of 5 or 6.

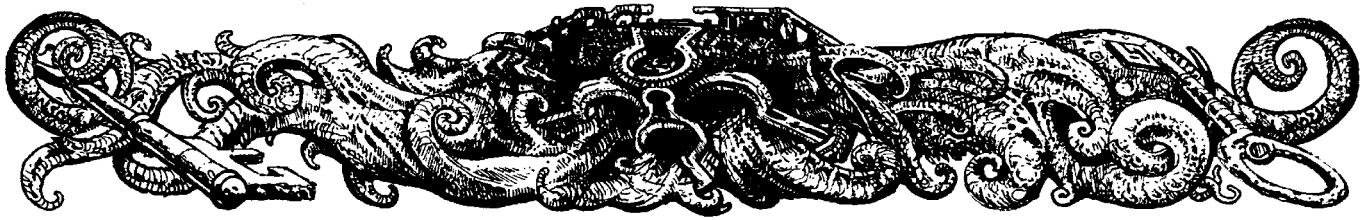
Fortitude determines if an attack is a glancing blow or a mortal wound. Going into combat with the Base Value is risky so it is prudent to improve it by a point or two. Combat oriented characters will need even higher Values.

Strength is only important if your character plans to engage in unarmed combat on a regular basis. In addition, Strength is only the Base Damage and may be increased by certain Disciplines so it is probably the least important of the Physical Attributes.

EXAMPLE : SCULPTING THE VESSEL

Tom's character has a Willpower of 5 which gives him 5 points to divide between the Vessel's three Attributes. He raises the Dexterity by 2, Fortitude by 2, and Strength by 1 giving the Vessel a Dexterity of 5, a Fortitude of 5, and a Strength of 4. These Attributes are adequate but unimpressive for a Stalker.





CHOOSING SKILLS

All Stalkers receive Bonuses in certain Skills that make it easier for them to perform actions associated with those Skills. Assigning the Skill Bonuses is a three-step process that will determine where the Stalker's proficiencies lie.

Step One: Choose three Primary Skills, and assign a bonus of +4 to each

When assigning the Primary Skills, players should choose the three Skills that are most important to their character. These will be the Skills that will be used the most often so they should have a Bonus that will make them reliable.

Step Two : Choose a number of Secondary Skills equal to the Stalker's Insight, assigning a bonus of +2 to each

When choosing the Secondary Skills consider assigning Bonuses to a few of the Skills that are important to all Stalkers such as Banishment, Binding, Mask, Mending, and Sensitivity.

Step Three : Divide an additional pool of points equal to the Stalker's Insight among the skills in any fashion so long as no bonus exceeds +6

These additional points are used to fine tune the character. They may be used to improve Primary and Secondary Skill values or to assign a Bonus to a Skill the Stalker did not choose during the first two Steps.

You will not be able to assign Bonuses to all the Skills you want your character to have. Bear in mind that your character has all the Skills on the sheet whether you assign a Bonus to them or not.

• FOCUS SKILLS

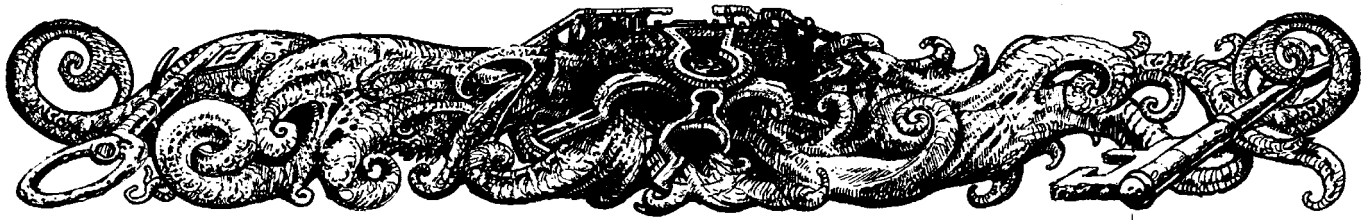
A character's past is mostly forgotten but what remains is often very important to him. At the player's option, the character may have as many as three Focus Skills which reflect the character's past.

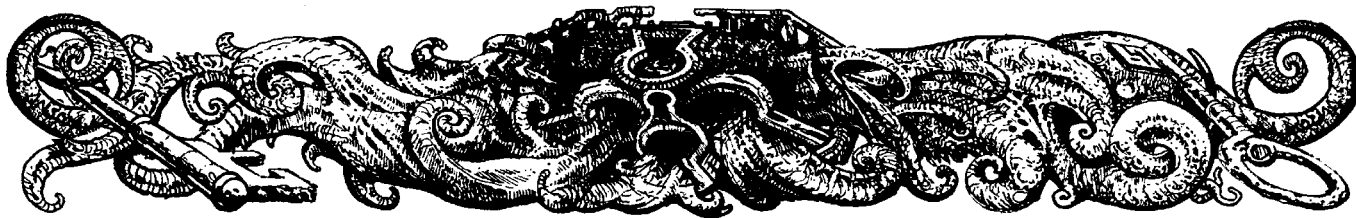
To buy a Focus Skill, all you have to do is decide what it is called, write it on the character sheet and assign a Bonus to it. For more on Focus Skills and what they can do refer to the Skills chapter which begins on page 53.

Some gamemasters will require that each Stalker buy at least 1 Focus Skill. This will force the players to do some thinking about their background and will give the characters more individuality.

Some Focus Skills give the character a bonus with any Discipline that requires a Challenge Roll. These Skills bear the same name as the associated Discipline so a Focus Skill that helps a Stalker use the Dominate Discipline is called Dominate. Novice Stalkers may only have two Discipline related Focus Skills but they can learn more later on.







THE FIVE KEYS

When the Chosen are lifted up, their humanity is forged into five keys. The Five Keys are the symbols of the Stalker's Office and give them many powers, not the least of which is the ability to return to the Realm of Flesh.

Stalkers carry their Keys at all times. Even in the Realm of Essence the Keys are things of the Flesh, material objects which anchor their immortal soul to the mortal world.

Each player will have to decide what form his Stalker's Keys take. Most are keys in the traditional sense of the word, but the Five Keys can also manifest as a similar object that suits the character's idiom.

A character who was once a catburglar could carry lockpicks, a soldier could wear his Keys as dogtags, and a character from a near future could wear five security cards pinned to his jumpsuit.

No matter what form they take, the Keys must be prominently displayed. When the Vessel is Revealed, the Keys will blaze with otherworldly energy as the Stalker's excess Essence bleeds away.

• DEFINING THE KEYS

When a new Stalker is created, the player needs to decide what his Keys represent. A Stalker's Keys are the five things that defined his humanity. All the player has to do is figure out what they are.

There are three kinds of Keys: Virtues, Flaws, and Memories. There are no prerequisites, but most Stalkers have at least one of each

kind. A common combination is two Virtuous Keys, two Flawed Keys, and a Key Memory.

Virtuous Keys are personality traits characterized as desirable in the Stalker's native culture. Courage, Generosity, Loyalty, and Patience are all common examples.

Flawed Keys are personality traits that the character viewed as shortcomings. Anger, Avarice, Cowardice, Lust, Naivete, and Pride are all common examples.

Key Memories are events that changed a character's life so profoundly that they define him such as a love affair or the birth of a child. The visions of the past offered by these Keys are often viewed as burdens or distractions that must be endured for the greater good.

Players must incorporate the chosen traits into the Stalker's personality, using the Keys as guidelines during game play. New players should only be asked to come up with 2 or 3 of the Five Keys. The rest can be defined later as the character takes shape.

THE FIFTH KEY

For many Stalkers, the Virtue of Compassion is the first Key forged and the last to be lost. These Stalkers call Compassion the Fifth Key and believe that it provides a crucial connection to the mortal world. It is suggested that the gamemaster insist that player character Stalkers choose Compassion as one of their Keys. Stalkers who are allowed to Hunt without Compassion are capable of souless violence that can reduce the game to a meaningless bloodbath.

• STOLEN KEYS

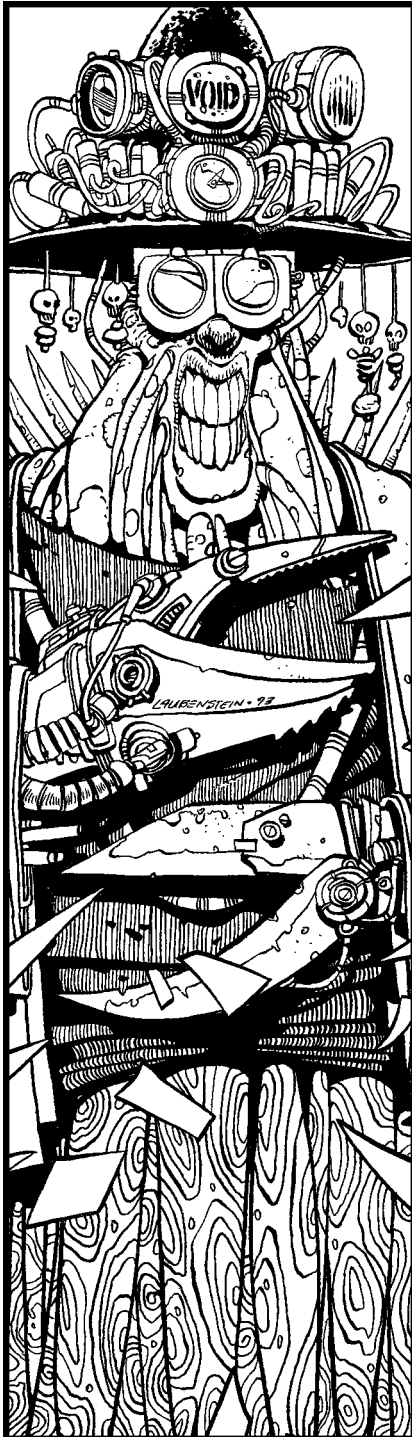
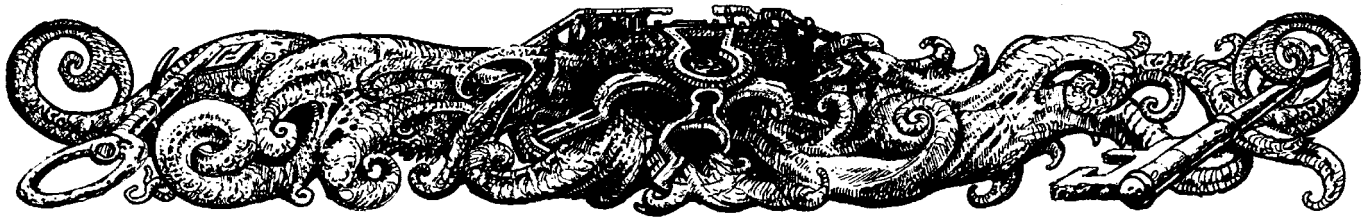
The Keys are physical objects that can be stolen, but their owner can call them back at any time. Unfortunately, there are several obscure rituals known to a few Enlightened mortals which can prevent a Stalker from calling his Keys.

If a Stalker does not have his Keys he cannot spend Karma, use any of his Disciplines, or call on any of his Servitors. In addition, he cannot use Vitality to perform Strenuous Skills such as Banishing, Binding, Mending, or Sensitivity.

A Stalker cannot take direct action against anyone who holds his Keys. He will become apathetic as his Essence slips away and will wither and die if the Keys are not regained in two days' time, his Vessel reduced to a fine powder that will grant mortals longevity if consumed with large quantities of fresh blood.

When a Stalker's Keys are held hostage, the rest of his Circle will do everything in their power to regain them and will usually punish the thief with death or worse.





FINISHING TOUCHES

By this point, the player has made most of the really important decisions, but there are still a few details that must be dealt with before the Stalker is ready for his first Hunt.

• VITALITY

Bound by Substance and the Five Keys, a Stalker's immortal spirit is vulnerable in the Realm of Flesh. Vitality is a measure of a character's life force. Characters with high Vitality scores have a powerful life force and are difficult to kill.

As a Stalker takes damage and uses abilities that drain his Essence, the character's Vitality will suffer. When the character's Vitality is used up, the Vessel will begin to degenerate, which can lead to the Stalker's death.

Novice Stalkers begin each Hunt with Vitality equal to twice their Willpower Attribute

With experience, a Stalker's Vitality will improve substantially, but the Base Value will be enough to get by for a while.

• KARMA

Karma is a special statistic only available to player characters which gives them a pool of points that can be spent to buy certain advantages during game play. Karma can be used to buy a second chance after certain failed rolls, and it can be used to buy new uses for Mastered Disciplines called Inspirations.

Novice Stalkers have an initial pool of 5 Karma

After every successful Hunt the Stalker will earn additional Karma. For more on using Karma refer to page 26 of the following chapter. For more about Karma awards, refer to the Campaigning section which starts on page 77.

• NAMES AND NAMING

This is the hardest part for many players, but it is also very important. A good name will capsulize the Stalker's personality, making it easier for the player to "get into character" and for the gamemaster and the other players to relate to him.

Stalkers tend to have descriptive names such as "The Grey Man" and "Shadowjack," but they can also have more arcane sounding names like "Abrax" or "Calaphon" that are determined by the Powers when the Chosen are Reborn.

A few Stalkers keep their mortal names or adapt them to suit their new life, preferring to be called things like "Mr. Drake" or "Lovely Anna." There is a lot of room for experimentation and nothing is really out of place so try to find something you like the sound of.

When you have chosen a name, your Stalker is ready for his first Hunt





II : THE RULES

During the Crusades, I had seen more than my share of bloodshed, but nothing could have prepared me for the carnage my Vessel was capable of. Crafted of uncommon flesh and driven by immortal essence, my chosen form was a powerful expression of my will. New instincts guided my hands as I tore the life from my enemies, effortlessly ripping their fragile bodies. There was no passion in it - no fear, no anger, no remorse. I simply did what had to be done. The only thing that bothers me is how easy it was...

Whispering Vault uses a simple task resolution process which is summarized below. This chapter contains most of the rules you need to play the game so try to familiarize yourself with the basic concepts before you play for the first time.

• CHALLENGE ROLLS

Whenever a player character attempts an action and the outcome is uncertain, a Challenge Roll is made to determine the result.

All Challenges are based on one of the character's Attributes. The first step in resolving a Challenge is determining which Attribute is most appropriate. If this is not immediately obvious, it is up to the the gamemaster to decide which Attribute the Stalker will use.

Challenges are not created equal. After all, some tasks are harder than others. To reflect this, the gamemaster must choose the Difficulty that best describes the character's intended action.

Difficulty Table

Routine	—	8
Easy	—	10
Average	—	12
Hard	—	15
Very Hard	—	18

Sometimes the Difficulty of a Challenge is determined by a fixed value such as one of a non player character's Attributes. In this case, this value is considered a base value and should be modified by the Difficulty of the circumstances under which the action is performed.





Modifier Table

Routine	—	-4
Easy	—	-2
Hard	—	+3
Very Hard	—	+5

It is important to remember that players only make Challenge Rolls for actions which have a direct effect on their characters.

It is up to the gamemaster to decide what the NPCs do without rolling dice. This may seem a little strange at first, but it allows the gamemaster to tell the story he wants without leaving the actions of his characters to chance.

To resolve a Challenge, the player rolls a number of dice equal to the value of the Attribute chosen by the gamemaster. The result is the highest score on a single die or the highest total of matching dice

If the result equals or exceeds the Difficulty assigned by the gamemaster, the Challenge is successful, and the character performs the intended action.

• SKILL BONUSES

Characters improve their chances of performing certain actions by acquiring Skills that are added to the result of Attribute Challenges. The listing for each Skill specifies which Attribute should be used. Stalkers are assumed to be familiar with all of the Skills printed on the character sheet. There is no penalty for not having a bonus with a given Skill.

• NPC CHALLENGES

Normally the GM determines the outcome of interaction between NPCs, but when the Stalkers are involved, he may choose to submit to the tyranny of the dice. This is fairly common in combat situations where the Stalkers have allies.

Any action attempted by one non player character against another can be resolved by making a 5 Die Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the situation and modified by their relative ability.

The Difficulty Modifier is the difference between the relevant attributes. So if a Minion has an Attack Attribute of 14, and its victim has a Defend Attribute of 12, the creature has a +2 advantage but if it only had an Attack of 11, the roll would be made with a -1 penalty.

• SPENDING KARMA

Stalkers have a special statistic called Karma, which is a pool of points that may be spent to influence the outcome of important Challenges.

Whenever a character makes a Challenge Roll, he may spend a point of Karma to reroll as many of the dice as he likes

There will be a temptation to reroll whenever possible, but players should try to save their character's Karma points for a dramatically appropriate moment.

Karma represents the favor of the Primal Powers so the gamemaster can refuse to allow Stalkers a reroll if the expenditure seems frivolous. When this happens, the point is lost, and there is no effect.

EXAMPLE : MAKING A CHALLENGE

A Stalker is trying to sneak past a night watchman, which calls for a Challenge against the guard's Perception Attribute of 12. Unfortunately, the area is well lit and there is not much cover so the gamemaster decides it is a Hard action, imposing a +3 Modifier for a final Difficulty of 15. Stealth is a Dexterity based skill, and the Stalker has a Dexterity Attribute of 6 so he rolls 6 dice, scoring a 1, 3, 4, 5, 4, and 3. The highest single die is the 5, the two 3s combine for a total of 6, and the two 4s have a combined total of 8 so the result is an 8 to which the Stalker adds a +3 bonus for his Stealth skill for a total of 11. This is less than the Difficulty so the attempt fails. It is important that the Stalker succeed so the player decides to spend a point of Karma to keep the two 4s and the 5 and reroll the rest of the dice. He gets a 6, a 3, and another 6. The two 6s and his Skill Bonus combine for a total result of 15 which is just enough so the Challenge is a success, and the night watchman fails to notice the Stalker.





COMBAT

Conflict is the key to dynamic storytelling, and combat is one of the most direct forms of conflict there is. Other forms of conflict are just as important, but combat requires special attention because it can be difficult to adjudicate and can result in the Stalker's demise.

Experienced gamers will notice that this chapter does not contain a lot of the rules they are probably used to using. There are no hard and fast rules for things like range modifiers, recoil and reload times.

We have chosen to abandon the cumbersome dogma of special case rules in favor of simple axioms that allow the players more latitude for dramatic interpretation. Some will argue that this approach lacks resolution, but we believe that the flexibility it offers will allow the players to improvise more details than rules could ever provide.

The rules are used to adjudicate an action when the outcome is in

doubt, and combat is no exception. When the Stalkers face obviously inferior opponents, don't bother fighting it out. The Whispering Vault is about the primal struggle between Flesh and Essence – not the fights that happen along the way.

• RUNNING COMMENTARY

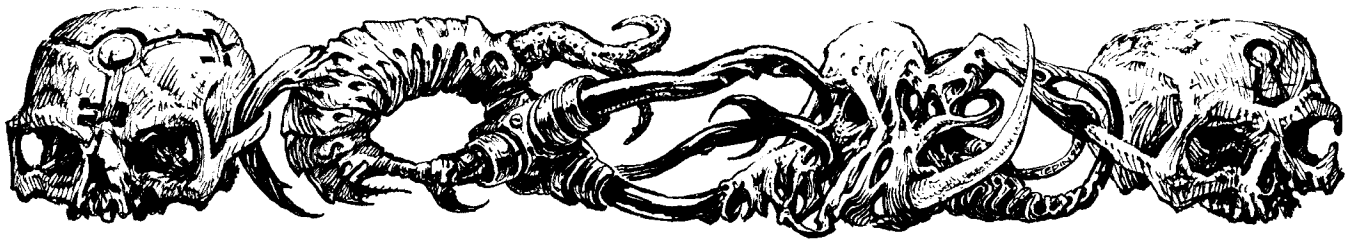
There are two ways to run a combat: the players can resolve the battle tactically as a game within a game, or they can roleplay the situation as they would any other. The horror genre is better suited to the latter. Whenever possible try to look beyond the rules to the story they are helping you create.

When roleplaying combat, allow each player time to describe his character's actions once the dice have shown him the way. The rules do not describe the battle, only its effects. The participants should use the results as cues to set the tempo for their improvisation.

EXAMPLE : RUNNING COMMENTARY

The gamemaster declares an attack for a sword-wielding Thrall against a Stalker whose player makes his Defend roll, avoiding the blow. Instead of an "I attack / I dodge" exchange the gamemaster declares, "Your opponent gathers what remains of his courage and lunges with his sabre in a desperate attempt to fend off the unknown," and the player responds, "Stepping toward him, I raise a warding hand and allow the blade to pass through the palm, protecting my Vessel's more vital areas. I mourn his inevitable demise."





• CREATIVE LICENSE

The gamemaster should allow the players to interpret the dice. They should even be allowed the freedom to dictate specific effects caused by their attacks so long as it is used to create a vivid scene.

From time to time a player will take this principle too far, describing an effect that obviously contradicts the judgement of the dice. When this happens, the gamemaster should try to manipulate the situation so it no longer provides the character with an unfair advantage.

• STALKER ATTACKS

Trying to adjudicate the arsenal of strange abilities available to the Stalkers can be a bit overwhelming until the gamemaster learns to stop worrying about game balance and focus on genre conventions.

Fortunately, most Stalkers are limited to unarmed combat or whatever weapons are included with their Vessel when the Weavers bind Flesh to Essence. Those with the Morph Discipline may change form so they have the power to manifest whatever weapon they desire. This opens the door for some truly gruesome variations.

Part of the fun of the setting is playing supernatural entities with bizarre powers. After all, the opportunity to shoot chains out of your eyes only comes along so often.

If the players get carried away the gamemaster should indulge their enthusiasms but remind them afterward of any limitations they should pay closer attention to next time.

EXAMPLE : CREATIVE LICENSE

A player rolls fairly well, and his Stalker inflicts sufficient damage to cause a flying Minion to lose 2 points of Vitality. Inspired, he declares that his attack rips off one of the creature's wings. As this is the first wound the Minion has taken, the gamemaster decides that 2 points is not enough damage to cause the kind of effect the player is hoping for. The gamemaster could just say no and ask the player to try again, but he decides to let the player's description stand. Feigning sympathy he adds that the wingless Minion is enraged and will attack the Stalker in preference to all other targets and with such viciousness that its attacks will cause an extra die of damage.

Combat should be FAST: most fights should be over before the victim knows what's happening. Try to recall the action sequences from your favorite horror movies - more assault than melee. Pacing is critical. If anyone seems to be losing interest, the gamemaster should wrap it up. There are a couple of ways to do this. Simplest is Arbitrary Resolution where the gamemaster decides what happens without rolling the dice and describes the outcome to the players. A little less manipulative is Double Jeopardy where both sides get a bonus to hit or all damage is doubled (or both). This technique speeds things up and lets everyone keep playing.

Combat should be BRUTAL: in many roleplaying games, combat is a give and take exchange of damage in which the combatants are slowly worn down until one side relents. In the Whispering Vault, Vitality is blood and bone. If a mortal loses two or three points of Vitality, they have sustained wounds serious enough to require hospitalization. Try to envision the relative severity of the wounds when describing an attack. (Never thud when you can splatter.) One warning: try to be sensitive to the feelings of the other players. If you know someone will have trouble with certain imagery, leave it alone. A little blood between friends can be a good time, but there is no reason to offend anyone. Butcher responsibly...





• ROUNDS

Every combat is broken down in a series of rounds, which are arbitrary periods of time about twenty seconds long. The actions taken in a given round determine its length.

Some rounds will be as fast as five seconds while others will represent a minute or more. If it becomes important, the length of a given round is subject to the gamemaster's interpretation.

• INITIATIVE

At the beginning of each round a Dexterity Challenge is made for every Stalker involved in the battle. The result of this roll is the character's Initiative for the round. Non-player characters do not roll. Their Initiative is a fixed value determined by their Initiative Attribute.

During the round all characters act in Initiative order. (The character with the highest Initiative goes

first, and the character with the lowest Initiative goes last.)

In the case of a tie, the player character always goes first. If the tie is between non-player characters the gamemaster decides who goes first. If the tie is between player characters, the Stalker with the highest Insight goes first. If this fails to resolve the tie, both players roll off.

If it is important to a player that his Stalker take his action early in the round, he can always spend a point of Karma to reroll any or all of the Dexterity Challenge. This can get expensive but is often worthwhile.

When a character surprises his opponent he will automatically act first regardless of his Initiative score. Surprise is usually the result of a successful Stealth Challenge but can also be caused by confusion or the use of certain Disciplines.

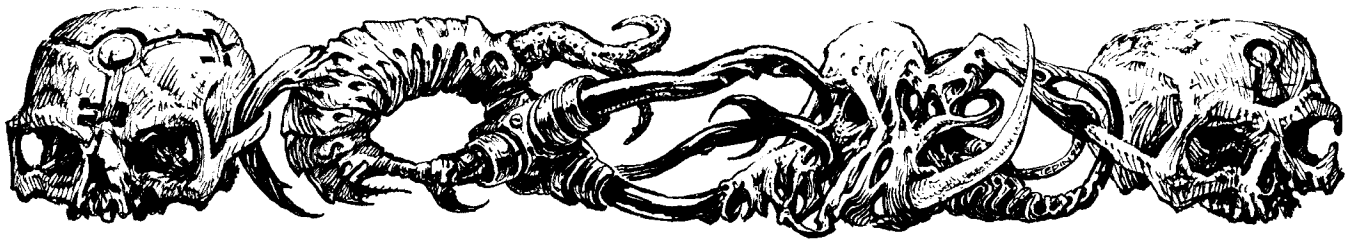
It is up to the gamemaster to determine when a Surprise situation exists and how long it lasts.



EXAMPLE : INITIATIVE

A Circle of three Stalkers is engaged in battle with the Unbidden and four of his Minions. At the start of the round, the first Stalker rolls a 12, the second rolls a 15, and the third rolls a 12. The Unbidden has an Initiative score of 15, and his Minions are all of the same type so they all have an Initiative of 8. The highest Initiative this round is a 15, which is a tie between the second Stalker and the Unbidden. The Stalker is a player character so he goes first, followed by the Unbidden. The next highest Initiative is another tie, this one between the first Stalker and the third. The first Stalker has an Insight of 7 and the third Stalker has an Insight of 5 so the first Stalker goes first, followed by the third. The Minions have the lowest Initiative so they act last, ending the round.





• ACTIONS

There are limits to what a character can do in a given round. Rounds break down combat into individual Actions, creating a blow-by-blow picture of what happens.

During the course of a round every character involved in combat can make one Significant Action and one Insignificant Action

An Action is Significant if it requires the character's full attention. Common examples include making an attack, Evoking a Servitor and using most Disciplines. Any task that takes more than a Round counts as the character's Significant Action every Round until the task is complete.

An Action is Insignificant if it does not require the character's full attention. Examples are Incidental Movement, dropping something, or talking to another character.

Incidental Movement allows the character to maneuver about the battlefield but cannot be used to cover large distances. Disciplines cannot be used to assist Incidental Movement so Incidental Translocation is impossible.

These are only guidelines and there will be cases that do not fit neatly into this framework. For example, defending yourself is not considered an Action, and the Frenzy Discipline allows Stalkers to make more than one attack a round. As always, it is up to the gamemaster to resolve any ambiguities.

• ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

As we discussed earlier in this chapter, players make all Challenge rolls, even in combat. Players roll for both attack and defense.

Normally the gamemaster only rolls to determine the damage caused by successful attacks. Even these tasks can be delegated to the players if the gamemaster favors a "hands free" approach.

To resolve an attack the Stalker makes an Attack Challenge against his opponent's Defend Attribute. If the Challenge is successful, the attack hits, and the player rolls the appropriate damage.

To defend himself, a Stalker makes a Defend Challenge against his opponent's Attack Attribute. If the Challenge is successful the Stalker has successfully dodged and the attack fails. However, if the Challenge is unsuccessful, he has been hit.

Sometimes circumstances will call for a Modifier to the Attack or Defend roll. If the gamemaster decides an attack is unusual in some way, he should adjust the Difficulty to reflect the situation.

Stalkers should be able to try almost anything. If a player wants his Stalker to bounce a knife off a wall so he can hit someone from behind, let him try it, but impose a hefty Modifier. Remember, these are not people; they are supernatural entities who should be able to do things that would be impossible for mere mortals like us.

On the other hand, there is a big difference between the impossible and the ridiculous. Even Stalkers have their limits. If they didn't we wouldn't be able to understand their struggle, and they would no longer be sympathetic characters.

EXAMPLE : ATTACKING AND DEFENDING

A Stalker is fighting a Minon in the woods. During the first round he wins the Initiative so he Attacks first. His opponent is flying so he is forced to Rend. The target has a Defend Attribute of 12, but it is at long range and is partially concealed by some trees. The gamemaster decides it is a Hard action, which raises the Difficulty of the attack by 3 points to 15. The Stalker attacks by making a Dexterity Challenge and adding his Attack Bonus. He rolls and misses. Now it is time for the Minion to counter-attack so it swoops down and tears at the Stalker with its razor-sharp beak. The creature has an Attack Attribute of 13, but the gamemaster lowers it to an 11 because it is Hard for the creature to maneuver through the overhanging branches. The Stalker must defend himself by making a Dexterity Challenge and adding his Defend Bonus.





• DAMAGE ROLLS

The effect of a successful attack is determined by a Damage Roll. The Damage Roll is the only roll in the game that is not resolved as a Challenge. When making a Damage Roll the appropriate dice are rolled and totaled to determine the result.

A Stalker's Base Damage in Melee Combat is equal to his Strength in dice

Stalkers who have the Savage Discipline receive 2 extra dice, and those who have Mastered it receive 3 extra dice. If a Stalker is using the Rend Discipline, his Damage is based on the Willpower Attribute instead. (A Master adds 2 extra dice.)

A Mortal's Unarmed Damage is only 1 or 2 Dice, depending on his strength and skill. Exceptional individuals such as strong men and martial arts experts can have as many as 3 Dice, but they should be rare. For this reason, mortals are often forced to rely on weapons.

The damage inflicted by Minions and Awakened Shadows varies widely and depends on their attack form. Most have a Base Damage which ranges from 3 to 9 Dice, and many can make more than one attack a round with no penalty.

The attacks of the Unbidden vary as widely as those of their Minions. In human guise, the power of the spirit strengthens the Vessel, imbuing incredible Strength which rivals that of the Stalker's. When the Vessel is destroyed and the creature is revealed, its true form will often use different attacks that do even more damage.





• DIE CAPS

Battling the Unseen is difficult for creatures of the Flesh. When fighting creatures of Essence it is the intention behind the attack more than the attack itself that does the damage. This property is reflected in a special Damage Modifier called a Die Cap.

A Die Cap limits the amount of damage that can be generated by each die. Only dice that score less than or equal to the Die Cap count toward the total. Dice that score higher than the Die Cap are ignored.

The Base Die Cap is determined by the nature of the combatants. Die Caps are only used when one or more of the combatants is a creature of Essence.

When a Mortal faces the Unseen or a Minion faces an Unmasked Stalker, his damage rolls have a Base Die Cap of 5-

A Die Cap of 5- means the affected character counts any die which scores a five or less normally, but any sixes he rolls are ignored. This is only the Base Modifier – there are several factors which can affect the outcome.

Demoralized and Terrified characters lack the will to take an effective attack, reducing their Die Cap by 1

EXAMPLE : DIE CAPS

A small party of witch hunters close in on the Stalkers, and one of them gets off a lucky shot with his blunderbuss. The witch Hunter is a mortal character fighting the Unseen so he has a Base Die Cap of 5-. The hunting party is Driven which raises the Die Cap to 6-, but the use of ranged weapons lowers it to 5-. The gamemaster rolls 6 Damage Dice which come up 2, 4, 5, 3, 6, and 4. The 5 and the 6 don't count so the shot does 13 Damage (2+4+3+4) instead of the 24 it would have done if the weapon had been fired at another mortal.

Mortal characters are usually Demoralized if they are wounded, if one of their companions is killed or they don't think they can win.

On the other hand, characters who are Driven or Inspired are more focused, making their attacks more effective against the Unseen.

The Die Cap of Driven or Inspired characters is raised by 1 until their resolve is shaken

Driven characters have a special motivation such as vengeance that strengthens their resolve. Mortals are often Inspired by Enlightend leaders and will lose their Inspiration if the leader falls or shows some sign of weakness.

Mortals are pack animals whose bravado increases in direct proportion to their numbers. Some Stalkers refer to this axiom as the Mob Rule.

When a group of mortals fight together, their Die Cap is raised by 1 until the majority are Demoralized or Terrified

• THE LAW OF PROXIMITY

Ranged attacks are not as effective against the Unseen as hand-to-hand attacks. This is because Melee combat is very direct, but shooting someone tends to be impersonal. This axiom is called the Law of Proximity.

Proximity also affects the ranged attack forms of creatures of Essence. The only time the Law of Proximity is not invoked is when a mortal weapon is used against a mortal character.

Reduce the Die Cap of Ranged Attacks made by or against creatures of Essence by 1

The Law of Proximity also affects Stalkers, reducing the Die Cap of Ranged Attacks made with Disciplines such as Rend.

The only way for a Stalker to get around the Law of Proximity is the use of a mortal weapon, but they are penalized for the use of such tools and will receive a Die Cap modifier anyway (see page 36).





• TAKING DAMAGE

All characters have a Fortitude Attribute which determines how well they resist damage. Those with high Fortitude Attribute values are harder to hurt and kill.

To determine how much Vitality is lost to a given attack, divide the Damage Result by the character's Fortitude and round down

Mortals are frail creatures whose Fortitude Attributes seldom exceed 4. Most humans have a Fortitude of 2 or 3 and are easily crippled or killed by the attacks of the Unseen. Truly exceptional individuals may have a Fortitude of 4 or even 5, but they are few and far between.

Stalkers are much sturdier than the mortals they protect, having Fortitude Attributes in the 3 to 8 range. Those who plan to do a lot of fighting should direct the Weavers to imbue their Vessel with a reasonably high Fortitude (6 or better would be advisable).

The Fortitude Attributes of Awakened Shadows, Minions, and the Unbidden vary but tend to equal or exceed those of the Stalkers. The Unbidden in their true form are extremely tough, having some of the highest Fortitude scores in the game.

The world of the Whispering Vault is inhabited by many different kinds of entities who all react to damage in different ways. Gamemasters should make sure they understand this section before they try to run a combat scene.



EXAMPLE : TAKING DAMAGE

A Stalker is successfully attacked by a Minion. The Stalker's Fortitude is 6 so for every 6 points of damage he loses 1 point of Vitality. The attack does 24 points of damage so he loses 4 points of Vitality. If the Minion had rolled 28 points of damage, the Stalker would still have lost 4 points of Vitality, but if the creature had rolled 30, he would have lost 5 points.

• WOUNDING SHADOWS

Shadows are entities who live between the Realms of Flesh and Essence, able to manifest in both but inhabiting neither. An Awakened Shadow can manifest in the Realm of Flesh by assuming a physical shell similar to the Stalker's Vessel.

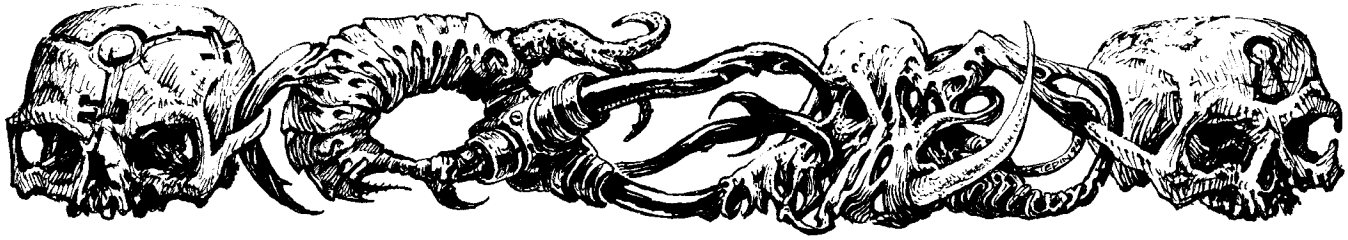
If an Awakened Shadow is defeated in combat, it is forced to abandon the Flesh and return to the Rift between the Realms where it is powerless to affect the physical world.

When an Awakened Shadow loses its last point of Vitality, it must abandon physical form

Minions are Shadows that have been Awakened by the Unbidden and bound to their service. All of the rules that apply to Awakened Shadows also apply to Minions.

The Unbidden sometimes encase their Minions in shells of Flesh called Husks that conceal their true nature by giving them an appearance





sufficiently Human to invoke the protection of the Veil. The first time the creature takes damage the Husk is destroyed, and the Minion is revealed, its true form bursting free of its human skin in a spectacularly gruesome fashion.

Awakened Shadows recover from damage quickly, regaining a point of Vitality for every hour of rest, but Minions lack the power to mend their Vessel unless they have some special form of regeneration.

Normally the characters are only concerned with Awakened Shadows so the battle is over when the creature's Vessel is destroyed.

Formless Shadows can only be attacked by creatures of Essence. Fighting immaterial opponents is difficult, but it is the only way to kill them. Formless Shadows have the same Attributes as their Awakened counterparts, but they do less damage and are harder to hurt.

Attacks made by or against a Formless Shadow receive a -1 Die Cap penalty

Formless Shadows are tenacious creatures who can recover a number of points of Vitality equal to their Fortitude for every hour of rest.

When a Formless Shadow loses its last point of Vitality, it dies

• WOUNDING MORTALS

Mortals are the weakest opponents the Stalkers will face during the Hunt. Mortal Flesh is no match for the weapons of Essence, but well armed Thralls can be a nuisance.

EXAMPLE : WOUNDING SHADOWS

A squad of mercenaries opens fire on a Minion. The creature has a Vitality of 15, but their combined attacks cause enough damage to bring its Vitality to 0. The Minion's Flesh is destroyed so it slips back to the rift between realms leaving a nasty corpse. Sensitive characters can still see the creature, but they can only attack it with weapons of Essence. The Shadow's spirit form is unwounded so if it is attacked it will have another 15 points of Vitality.

EXAMPLE : WOUNDING MORTALS

A Stalker is fighting a wounded Priest of Kuln with a Fortitude of 4 and a current Vitality of 5. The Stalker uses his Rend Discipline to conjure a storm of whirling glass shards that causes sufficient damage to reduce the priest's Vitality by 7 points. His Vitality is reduced to 0, and the remaining 2 points are taken from his current Fortitude which drops to 2. The hapless priest is unconscious and will probably die of blood loss unless someone tends his wounds right away.

When a Mortal loses his last point of Vitality, he loses consciousness

When a mortal runs out of Vitality, additional Vitality is subtracted from the character's Fortitude instead.

A Mortal character dies when he loses his last point of Fortitude

Mortals who have lost one or more points of Fortitude will eventually die if their wounds are not treated. It is up to the gamemaster to decide how long they can hold on, but as a rough estimate, it is safe to assume that they can linger for a number of rounds equal to their current Fortitude plus a D6.

Wounded mortals recover lost Vitality slowly. The recovery rate depends on the character's Fortitude and the medical technology of the time. Without medical attention mortal characters recover a number of points of Vitality equal to their Fortitude every month.

Mortal characters who receive medical attention may recover every week, and those who have access to the advanced techniques available in near future settings may recover every day. The gamemaster should adjust the exact rate to reflect the period and the situation.

Lost Fortitude is more serious than lost Vitality and can incapacitate a character for months. It is up to the gamemaster when they recover.





- **WOUNDING THE UNBIDDEN**

Like Stalkers, the Unbidden are creatures of Essence encased in Flesh, but they are unfettered by the Keys of Humanity, and their life force is far more powerful. Unless they are weakened from transition most are more than a match for a lone Stalker and can usually hold their own against an entire Circle.

The Unbidden steal the bodies of human Hosts to use as their Vessels. The Flesh is strengthened by the spirit within, but it is still basically human.

When the Host loses its last point of Vitality, the Vessel is destroyed, and the Unbidden is forced to manifest its true form

The true form of the Unbidden is far more dangerous than the Host body, but it can be Bound. If the Stalkers seem to have the upper hand and the creature is able to escape, it will try to find a new Host to inhabit. Until it steals a Vessel, it cannot recover Vitality, it is not protected by the Veil, and it is vulnerable to the Forbiddance.

It is up to the gamemaster to decide how quickly the Unbidden can heal the Host Vessel. The pacing of the adventure is often the deciding factor. If it is dramatically appropriate for the enemy to make a full recovery in a single round, that should be what happens.

When the Avatar of the Unbidden loses its last point of Vitality, it is helpless

EXAMPLE : WOUNDING THE UNBIDDEN

A Stalker Rends an Unbidden opponent for enough damage to cause the loss of 6 points of Vitality. It only had 2 points of Vitality left so the attack destroys the Vessel, forcing the renegade spirit to reveal itself. In this form the creature has a Vitality of 20. Rather than risk Binding, it manages to escape and inhabit a new Host. If the Stalkers catch up, they will have to destroy the new Vessel before they can get at the Avatar.

EXAMPLE : WOUNDING STALKERS

A Stalker with a current Vitality of 3 takes enough damage to reduce his Vitality by 5 points so his current Vitality drops to 0 and he has to reduce his physical Attributes by 2 points. He decides to lower his Strength and Dexterity by a point each. The following round he takes enough damage to reduce his Vitality by 4. He is out of Vitality so these points will have to come from his Attributes instead. Wincing, he decides to lower Strength and Dexterity by 2 more points.

Once helpless the Unbidden can be bound with ease but the Stalkers must act quickly lest the creature recover and escape their justice. While it is possible to destroy the Avatar of the Unbidden, killing the renegade will end its rampage but is tantamount to blasphemy.

- **WOUNDING STALKERS**

In the Realm of Essence Stalkers are effectively immortal, but when they command the Weavers to give them physical form, they accept the mantle of mortality.

Stalkers do not lose consciousness like Mortals. When a Stalker runs out of Vitality, additional damage lowers the Vessel's Attributes instead. It is up to the player to decide which Attribute or Attributes will be reduced.

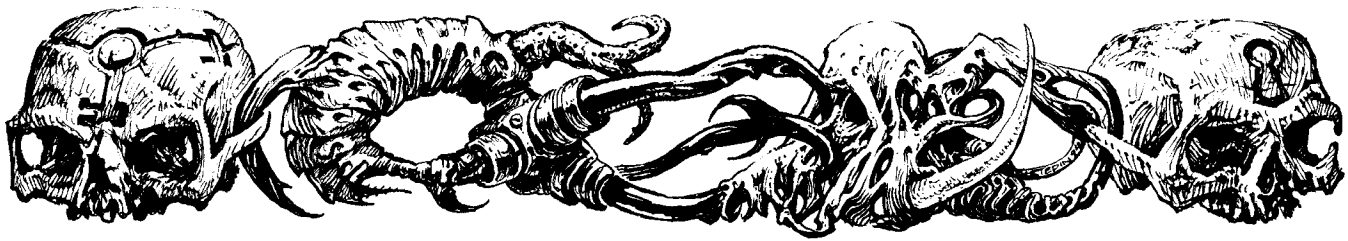
A Stalker whose Dexterity or Strength is reduced to 0 cannot move

A Stalker whose Fortitude is reduced to 0 is killed

Wounded Stalkers cannot recover Vitality in the Realm of Flesh unless they have the Weave Discipline. When next they return to the Realm of Flesh their bodies are rewoven so any damage they sustained during the last Hunt is gone.

The Stalker's Avatar would return to its Domain when the Vessel is destroyed, but the Keys of Humanity bind Flesh and Essence rendering the wearer as mortal as those he protects. This is an unfortunate but unavoidable aspect of the Dreaming.





• WEAPONS

The damage inflicted by most mortal characters depends on the weapons they wield. Because the Hunt can take place in any time or place in mankind's history, there is an infinite variety of weapons that could be encountered by the Stalkers. Whispering Vault uses a simple system that can accommodate every weapon that has ever been or ever will be.

To determine the Damage rating for a weapon, choose the classification that suits it best. These categories are rather coarse but bear in mind that the focus of the game is the characters, not the gear they carry.

The Damage Ratings for the firearms assume a modern frame of reference. If the weapon is from a more primitive setting subtract 1 or 2 dice; if the weapon is from the future, add 1 or 2 dice to reflect the "high tech" edge.

For example, a Blunderbuss is a Heavy Rifle from a primitive setting which would give it a Damage Rating of 8 Dice, and a Slivergun is a Light Pistol from the near future which would give it a Damage Rating of 8 Dice.

More dangerous weapons are certainly possible, but 12 Dice is the upper limit of what humans will carry under most circumstances. When a Stalker encounters more powerful weapons such as those mounted on vehicles or in static emplacements, the gamemaster should use the Heavy Weapons table to approximate the Damage.



• MORTAL TOOLS

Creatures of Essence wield fearsome power, but there will be times when they will be tempted to use the tools of the Flesh. Stalkers, Awakened Shadows, Minions, and the Unbidden may use mortal weapons with the following penalties:

When a Creature of Essence uses a mortal weapon, its Die Cap is reduced by 1

This means that a gun toting Minion inflicts normal damage but has a Die Cap of 4- (-1 for Proximity and -1 because the gun is a mortal weapon).

In addition, most Stalkers will have forgotten how to fight with the tools of the Flesh and will be at a disadvantage when using them.

Stalkers receive a -2 penalty when attacking with mortal weapons

Stalkers with appropriate Focus Skills such as Fencing, Small Arms, or Sniper are an exception to this rule. Such characters do not suffer the attack penalty, but their Die Cap is still reduced.

WEAPONS TABLE

Melee Weapons

- 3D Light Melee Weapon
- 4D Heavy Melee Weapon
- 5D Very Heavy (2 Handed)

Small Arms

- 6D Light Pistols
- 7D Heavy Pistols
- 9D Light Rifles
- 10D Heavy Rifles
- 12D Light Assault Weapon

Examples: Ancient

- 3D Club
- 4D Broadsword
- 5D Two Handed Battleaxe
- 6D Heavy Crossbow

Examples: Modern

- 3D Nightstick
- 4D Louisville Slugger
- 6D .38 Special
- 7D .44 Magnum
- 11D .50 Cal Sniper Rifle

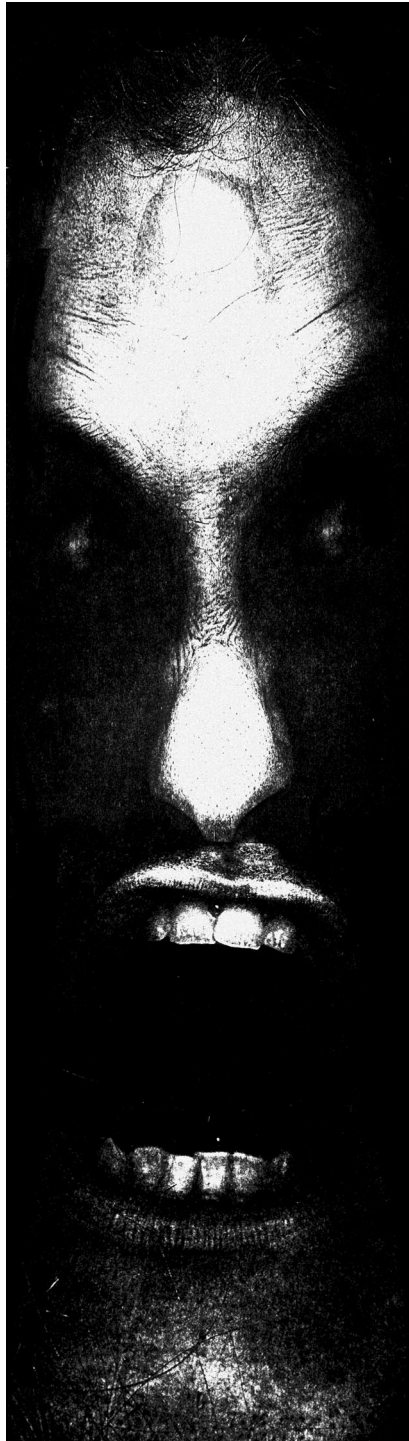
Examples: Future

- 7D Palm Needler
- 8D Gyrojet Pistol
- 14D Manpack Railgun

Heavy Weapons

- 14 to 16D : Heavy
(Assault Weapons)
- 17 to 19D : Very Heavy
(LAW Rocket)
- 22 to 25D : Devastating
(Main Tank Gun)
- 27 to 30D : Absolute
(Tomahawk Missile)





III : DISCIPLINES

For ages unknowable, I listened to the muttered musings of the Powers, and many wondrous secrets were revealed to me, powerful truth that could forge Flesh with Essence, reshaping the very fabric from which the universe was spun. When next I visited the world of my birth, I was able to mold the substance of my Vessel, allowing me to assume a form more appropriate to my purpose.

Disciplines provide insights into the true nature of the universe that allow Stalkers to manipulate the Dream of the Aesthetics, altering reality in subtle ways. This knowledge gives the player characters supernatural abilities that are often their most reliable tools against the Unbidden.

Using a Discipline is surprisingly simple – all it requires is an act of will and the application of the Immortal Essence from which the spirit is forged. Learning the truth is the hard part - using this knowledge is easy. Unless the description states otherwise using a Discipline is a Significant Action.

The descriptions of many of the Disciplines are intentionally vague to allow the gamemaster flexibility in his interpretation of the rules. When adjudicating Disciplines, bear in mind that the Whispering Vault is a horror game. Try to give

players who use their Disciplines in the spirit of the genre as much latitude as they need to create an effective story.

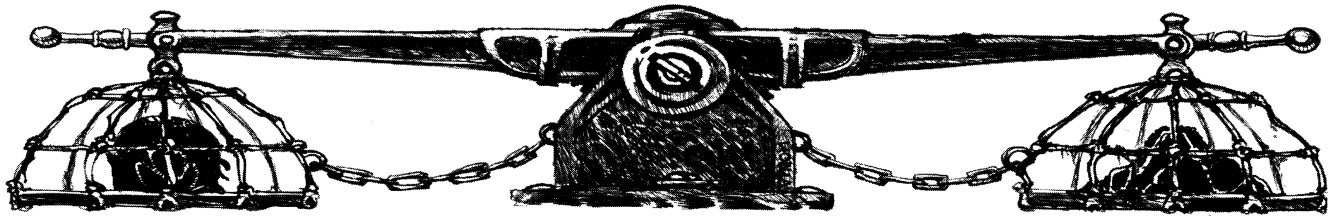
- **STRENUOUS USE**

Some Disciplines require so much Essence that they weaken the Vessel, costing the character a point of Vitality every time they are used. These Disciplines are unusually powerful, and the loss of Vitality is intended to discourage their casual use.

- **MASTERY**

Buying a Discipline represents a rudimentary grasp of the required techniques, but there is a deeper level of understanding called Mastery. A Master gains access to additional abilities and may invent improvised applications of his Mastered Disciplines called Inspirations.





INSPIRATIONS

Normally Stalkers must use their Disciplines exactly as they are written, but Masters have gained greater control over the necessary techniques. These characters have the flexibility to invent new uses for their Mastered Disciplines. The improvised abilities created by a Master are called Inspirations.

When adjudicating Inspirations, the gamemaster should determine if the proposed application is a reasonable use of the Discipline. If the player's rationalization seems to be stretching a point or the effects would be too powerful, the gamemaster should disallow it.

The gamemaster is not required to explain why an Inspiration didn't work. This policy will help some groups avoid rules debates that can only detract from the story. If a disgruntled player presses the issue, tell him that the Dream can only be stretched so far.

The use of Inspirations always costs Karma. Most of the time the cost is 1 point of Karma per use, but the gamemaster can impose a higher cost if an Inspiration seems reasonable but unusually powerful.

A lot of Inspirations will involve using a Discipline as an Attack. When determining the effect, use the character's Willpower Attribute as the Base Damage.

Inspirations call for creativity and cooperation between the player and the gamemaster. If adjudicating special case rules seems to be more trouble than it is worth, the gamemaster can always disallow Inspirations or raise the Karma cost to discourage their use.

In a campaign environment, the gamemaster should keep a written record of the Inspirations he has allowed and any rules he improvised to implement them so he can make consistent adjudications.

• SPECIAL EFFECTS

When a Stalker calls upon the power of his station to manifest supernatural abilities, the resulting miracles are significant events that merit special attention.

The player should describe the visible effects of his Disciplines to the rest of the group. Try to think of it as a special effects sequence from a movie. You don't need to describe a gunshot (we all know what one sounds like) but the powers of the Unseen are more exotic, and it is up to the players to make them more interesting.

Stalkers have a theme defined by their Avatar. Whenever possible their powers should conform to the inferred limitations of this theme. For example, Chosen hacker will probably have computer generated special effects, but an immortal witch hunter will be limited to a dark ages motif (hot pokers galore).

To reinforce the importance of these improvised details, the gamemaster can reward truly horrific descriptions with a "bennie" that gives the Stalker an unexpected edge such as extra damage or a modified Die Cap.

On the other hand, if a lackluster description makes the supernatural seem mundane, the gamemaster can reduce the Discipline's effects accordingly. This technique should only be used as a wake-up call to uninspired players. It must never be used to penalize those who lack the flair of their more outgoing counterparts, or you will only succeed in discouraging people you are trying to entertain.

EXAMPLE : INSPIRATIONS

A Stalker decides to execute a mortal thrall of the Unbidden by using his Terrify Discipline to scare him to death. While this is not one of the Discipline's listed powers, the intended effect is a reasonable application so the gamemaster decides to allow it, but he imposes a cost of 2 Karma. To resolve the attack, the Stalker makes a Presence Challenge against his opponent's Resolve. If successful, the attacker rolls his Willpower in Damage Dice. If this damage is enough to kill the victim, his heart stops, but if the attack is not lethal, it has no effect.





CREATING NEW DISCIPLINES

After they have played a few times and are conversant with all of the existing Disciplines, players are encouraged to invent Disciplines of their own. When deciding to allow a new Discipline, the gamemaster should ask himself three questions:

Is the power already covered by an existing Discipline?

At first there seems to be a lot of room for expansion, but when you consider how flexible Disciplines like Rend, Savage, and Morph really are, you will realize that a lot of proposed Disciplines are variations of these basic powers. For instance, Fire Breathing is just another kind of ranged attack so it is covered by the Rend Discipline. New Disciplines should give the Stalkers new powers.

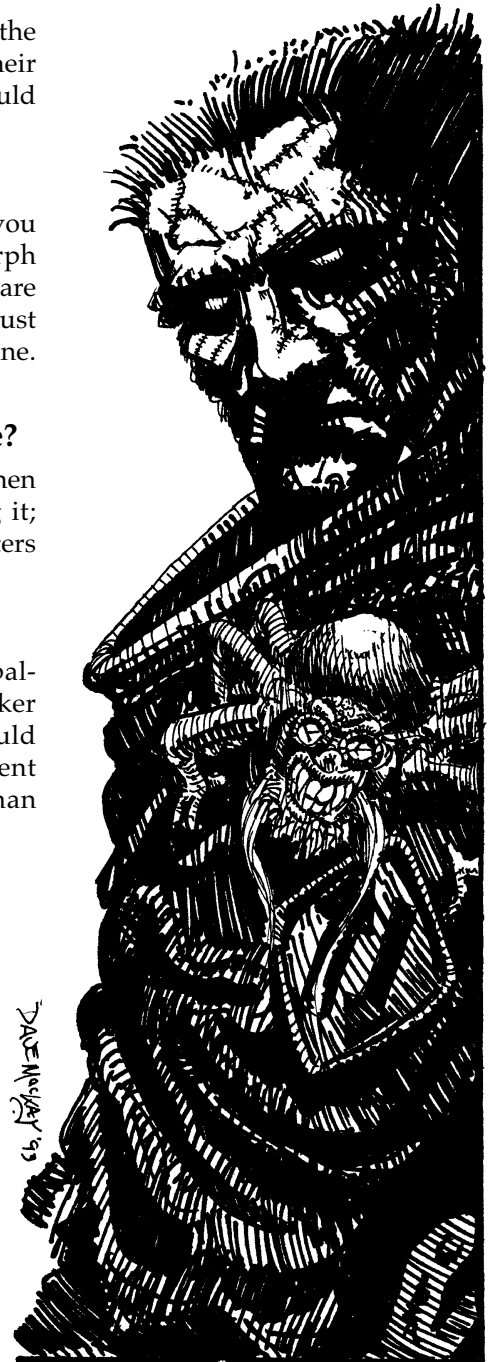
Does the proposed Discipline reinforce the horror genre?

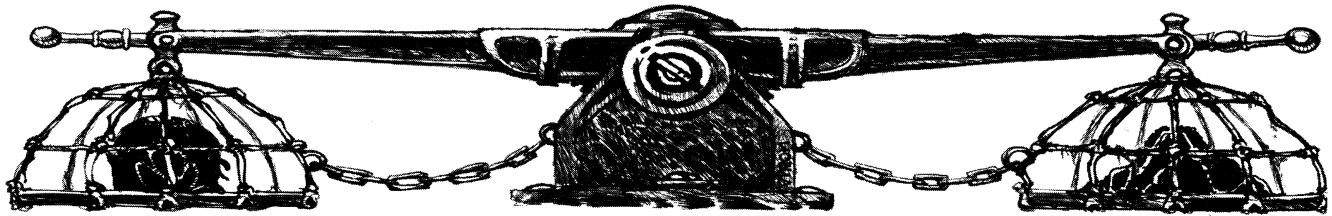
There are a lot of powers that are inappropriate for the setting. When evaluating a proposed Discipline try to picture a Stalker using it; Powers that seem better suited to four-color comic book characters than the denizens of the Unseen should be rejected outright.

Is the proposed Discipline too powerful?

In the Whispering Vault, storytelling is paramount, but game balance is still a consideration. If a new Discipline would give a Stalker powers that would eclipse those of the rest of his Circle, it could cause resentment which will interfere with everyone's enjoyment of the game. New Disciplines should be no more powerful than the basic ones.

If the proposed Discipline passes all three tests, it should be allowed and added to the campaign. New Disciplines should be written up by the players who created them and be made available to everyone.





All around us was the gruesome evidence of the visitation. Making our way through the shattered remains of the creature's victims, we searched for some clue that would lead us to its lair. Lovely Anna was first to hear the sobbing of the little girl who was the sole surviving witness to the hideous spectacle. She was in no condition to answer the Grey Man's questions so it fell to me to retrieve the butcher's identity from what remained of her mind. Preparing myself for her pain, I covered her eyes with the palm of my hand and breathed in her memories. Senses reeling from initial contact, I tried to find what I needed without further violation.

CONJURE

By manipulating the fabric of the physical world, the Stalker can create small objects out of thin air. Conjuration requires an Insight Challenge whose Difficulty is based on the sophistication of the desired object. A relatively simple object like a crowbar is Easy, the patterns on a dollar bill are Hard, and electronics and firearms are Very Hard. Conjured objects are permanent, but a failed Challenge indicates a flawed construct that will not serve its intended function and will vanish in a matter of rounds.

A Master may create several small objects at once or a single large object no bigger than he could carry. Large objects will gradually disintegrate over the course of an hour and a half unless the Stalker spends a point of Vitality to make them permanent.

DELVE

Stalkers with this Discipline can read minds by reliving their subject's experiences. Delving requires physical contact and an Insight Challenge against the subject's Resolve Modified by his instinctive desire to protect the memory. Mind reading is more art than science and often yields ambiguous results. If the Stalker encounters a traumatic memory, he has to make a Willpower Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the severity of the experience or lose 1 or more points of Vitality.

A Master may speak with the recently dead. The Challenge is modified by the condition of the body (particularly the head). If the roll is failed no further attempts may be made. The corpse retains most of its memories, but it is bereft of personality.

DISINTEGRATE

This technique allows the Stalker to destroy small objects with a touch and an act of will. If it must be done quickly, Disintegration requires a Willpower Challenge against a Difficulty based on the mass and durability of the object. Light or fragile objects such as electronics or paper goods are Easy, but sturdier objects like firearms are Hard. This Discipline cannot be used as an attack form under any circumstances, but it can be used to dispose of dead flesh.

A Master has gained sufficient control to use this Discipline at a range so long as he can see his intended target clearly. A Master may also Disintegrate large objects such as doors and cars, but such efforts are Strenuous and cost a point of Vitality.





DISSIPATE

If the Stalker mingles the substance of his Vessel with physical objects that stand in his way, he may pass through them with ease. A roll is only required if the character needs to move quickly, which calls for a Willpower Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the density of the obstacles in his path. Passing through a modern interior wall is considered an Average task. If the Challenge is failed, the character may not Dissipate that round, and the Vessel loses a point of Vitality.

A Master can take one large object or another character with him when he Dissipates, but the extra mass will slow his progress to a crawl. Just passing through a wall can take a minute or more. Moving faster while encumbered is impossible.

DOMINATE

Mortal minds are weak and easily bent to the Stalker's will. A successful Presence Challenge against the intended victim's Resolve will overcome his resistance. Most mortals will obey their new master without question for as long as their service is required, but those who are Driven can shake off control in a matter of rounds. In either case, a failed Challenge means the Stalker may not make any further Domination attempts against that character for the remainder of the Hunt.

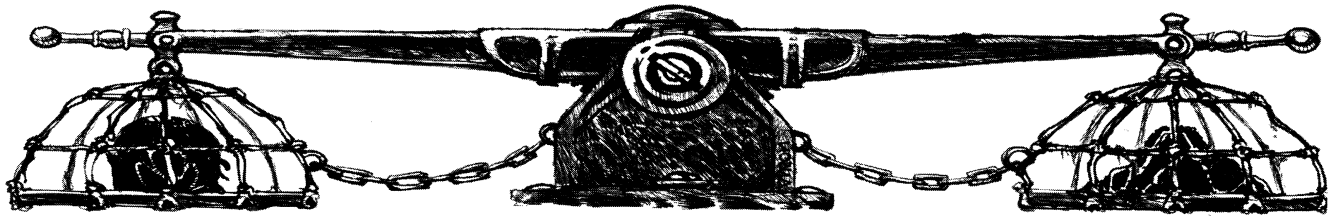
A Master may wrest control of a Minion, but the Challenge is based its master's Resolve, and each attempt is a Strenuous effort that costs a point of Vitality. Maintaining control of a Minion is very tricky and requires a Significant Action every round.

FORESIGHT

Some Stalkers can gain an instinctive understanding of the near future by entering a meditative trance. Foresight is a Strenuous act that costs a point of Vitality and requires an Insight Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the desired Duration (in minutes). During this time, the Stalker receives a +1 bonus to all Challenge rolls. A failed Foresight roll means the Stalker has lost track of "now" and has difficulty coming out of the trance. How long they are "gone" is up to the gamemaster.

A Master is able to recall some of what he sees during his trance, receiving precognitive visions. These visions are usually dreamlike, providing cryptic clues that may help the Stalkers complete their Hunt, but they will never give them a direct answer.





Tearing free of the present I plunged into the timestream, immersing myself in the Dream. At first the immensity of the Chronosphere disoriented me, but I was able to find the now that I needed, sorting through possible futures for a way out of the Pentarch's trap. Finding my way back was more difficult. By the time I came out of my trance the enemy had located the Circle, trapping us in the laboratory. When I regained consciousness, I knew the way out, and I knew that it would result in Lovely Anna's death. Without her brave sacrifice there would be no escape. She will be missed.

FRENZY

This Discipline allows the Stalker to move with inhuman swiftness in melee combat. While using Frenzy a character can take two attacks a round but his Dexterity and Strength are temporarily reduced by 1 Die each. (A Stalker with a Dexterity of 5 and a Strength of 3 would roll 4 Dice to attack, and if he hits, he will inflict 2 Dice of Damage.) This is particularly dangerous in combination with the Savage Discipline; the "Savage Frenzy" is one of the most potent attacks available to the Stalkers.

A Master can move even faster, taking as many as 3 attacks in a single round. When making 3 attacks, the Stalker's Dexterity and Strength are reduced by 2 Dice each. The Stalker can always choose how many attacks he will make and need not use this Discipline.

MORPH

Reweaving takes three minutes and requires an Insight Challenge whose Difficulty depends on the extent of the desired transformation. If this roll is failed, the Vessel is deformed, and the character loses a point of Vitality. Stalkers cannot mimic a specific form, but they can come close enough to invoke the Veil so they could pass as a wolf or a tiger, but their Vessel would be monstrous. Morphing cannot bestow additional abilities so a Stalker could give himself wings, but they would not allow him to fly.

A Master can change shape in a round and has gained sufficient control to assume human form if he so desires, but he cannot mimic a specific person. Inspirations allow the Stalker to temporarily manifest abilities related to form such as venom, armor, and flight.

REND

Stalkers who have learned this technique can manifest a ranged attack whose Base Damage is equal to their Willpower and allows them to attack any target they can see clearly. Bear in mind that the Law of Proximity also applies to the Unseen so the attack has a Die Cap of 5. This attack can take any form the character desires so long as it suits the Avatar's theme. Use of this Discipline is obviously supernatural and will automatically Unmask the character, stripping away the Veil.

A Master adds 2 Dice to his Willpower to determine his Base Damage and may imitate a mundane attack form that will not force him to reveal himself. A Stalker may pretend to fire a gun, but Sensitive characters will have a chance to see the attack for what it is.





SAVAGE Most Stalkers eventually learn to manifest a weapon that allows them to add 2 Dice to their Strength when determining their Base Damage in Unarmed Combat. This Discipline requires a flagrant use of power that Unmasks the character, stripping away the Veil and revealing his Avatar for all to see. The weapon can take any form from enhancements of the Vessel such as fangs or talons to tools such as chains or swords, so long as the chosen weapon suits the Avatar's theme.

A Master adds 3 Dice to his Strength to determine his Base Damage and may imitate a mundane attack form. A Stalker may wield a knife or a baseball bat, but Sensitive characters will always have a chance to recognize that the attack has supernatural origins.

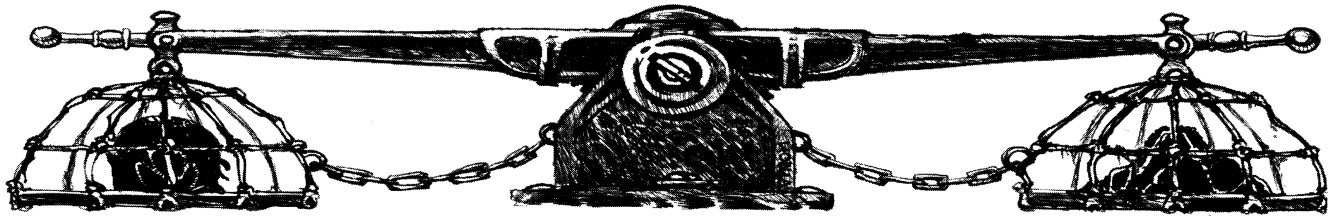
TERRIFY Playing on the fears of the weak willed, the Stalker confronts his opponent with unbearable evidence of the Unseen. The player should describe the phantasms that assault the victim's sanity. A successful Presence Challenge against the intended victim's Resolve indicates that they are overcome. Most mortals will cower in abject horror or flee as fast as they are able but those who are Inspired or Driven are made of sterner stuff and will only hesitate for a few rounds.

A Master can Terrify a group of mortals by making a Challenge against the target with the best Resolve and a modifier equal to the number of characters he is trying to effect. This attack is impossible if the group is led by a character who is Driven or Inspired.

TRANSLOCATE This Discipline allows the Stalker to move instantaneously to any point he can see clearly. A roll need only be made if line of sight is obscured in some way. A Translocation attempt is resolved as an Awareness Challenge against a Difficulty determined by visibility. Distance is often a factor, particularly at night or in adverse conditions such as rain or fog, which will limit the effective range to a few hundred feet. A failed Challenge means the character falls short of his intended mark.

A Master can take a another character or a large object with him if he spends three consecutive rounds preparing for the effort. This always requires a Challenge roll and is Strenuous if the roll is failed. Mortals are often disoriented by the experience.





When first they spoke to me, I heard them in my dreams, muttering disquieting suggestions that aroused a vicious hunger that had lurked within me for some time. In time I learned to listen, fighting back my revulsion and my fear. Their voices became more familiar to me than the faces I saw every day. Each had a flavor all its own, a distinctive bile that I was not permitted to forget. The boldest of my new friends called himself Wireless and grated on my nerves, his every word an open wound that left me raw but aching for more. All he asked was freedom. All I had to do was pick the lock and open the Vault. What a fool I was...

WARD Stalkers use this Discipline to protect the Vessel from the damage caused by mortal weapons. Warding requires a Willpower Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the Damage of the attack the character is trying to resist. If successful, the Vessel is protected and no Vitality is lost, but if the Challenge is failed, the character loses an additional point of Vitality. Each Warding attempt requires an Insignificant Action so the Discipline can only protect the character from one attack a round.

A Master does not lose Vitality from failing a Warding Challenge and may resist the attacks of the Unseen, making the Discipline a potent defense against the Minions of the enemy. Unfortunately this Discipline is useless against the attacks of the Unbidden.

WEAVE The weakness of the Flesh is a constant concern to agents of Essence. Stalkers who have learned the Weavers craft may repair damage to their Vessel. This process requires two minutes of undisturbed concentration for every point of Vitality he intends to recover. (All points are regained at the end of this period.) Every time a Stalker uses this Discipline, his Willpower is reduced by 1 until he can return to his Domain to recuperate. This loss will also weaken one of the Vessel's Attributes by a die.

A Master can work more quickly, healing 3 points of Vitality a minute. Masters may also heal the Vessels of the other Stalkers in their Circle but this is much harder, requiring 3 minutes per point and will reduce the character's Willpower and that of his subject.

WHISPER The "silent scream" is a more effective means of communication than the crude organs of the Vessel. Those who have learned this Discipline may send brief telepathic messages to any character they can see clearly. The bond between Stalkers enables them to communicate with the other members of their Circle at any range without the need for visual contact. Those with the Dominate Discipline may issue commands without speaking which can be very useful when subtlety is required.

A Master may initiate two-way communication with a single subject at any range, but this requires a Presence Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the Stalker's familiarity with the subject (close friends are Easy but strangers are Very Difficult).





IV : SERVITORS



Surrounded by gunmen on all sides, the Circle was trapped, and my Vessel was in jeopardy. Recalling the secret names whispered to me by the Powers, I called across the Rift for aid. There was a flash of light, and suddenly the courtyard was filled with an acrid smoke that caused painful blisters to erupt on the faces and hands of our assailants. As they broke ranks, fatigue washed over me, driving me to my knees. Weakened as I was, the effort of evocation proved to be more dangerous than the weapons of the enemy, but at least the Circle was safe.

Devotion to the Primal Powers is rewarded with the service of entities called Servitors who may prove to be the Stalker's most valuable allies. Novice Stalkers will only be able to call upon a few Servitors, but their experienced brothers will have many Servitors at their disposal.

• EVOCATION

Before a Stalker can command one of his Servitors, it must be called across the Rift between the Realms.

Calling a Servitor to the Realm of Flesh requires an Evocation Challenge and is Strenuous, costing a point of Vitality every time the character tries to make contact

Unless specified in the Servitor's description, the creatures do not fully manifest in the Realm of Flesh so they are effectively invisible as they go about their designated task. Only Sensitive characters will see the Servitors for what they are.

The Difficulty is determined by the conditions under which the Evocation must be performed. If the Stalker has as much time as he needs and there are no distractions, the Challenge is Easy, but conditions are seldom this ideal.

For example, trying to Evoke a Servitor in a single round amidst the chaos of an ongoing melee is Very Hard, but if the Stalker takes two full rounds and is not attacked during this time, the Difficulty can be reduced to Hard.





• MASTERING SERVITORS

When a character first acquires a Servitor, calling on its power is difficult. With experience, making contact with entities on the other side of the Rift becomes easier, and the Servitors answer more readily.

A Master only has to spend a point of Vitality if he fails the Evocation roll

Eventually the Stalker will gain sufficient Mastery over his Servitors to allow him to call upon their powers whenever he feels he needs them.

• AREA AND DURATION

One of the advantages of using Servitors is that there is no limit to the area or duration of most of their powers other than that posed by the Forbiddance.

Most of the time a power's area of effect will be the Stalker's immediate area, and it will last as long as the confrontation for which the Servitors were called.

If the Stalker wants a different area or duration, all he needs to do is specify what he requires during the Evocation process, but he should keep it simple. (Servitors are not particularly intelligent.)

It is up to the gamemaster how far he will let the Stalkers go before reigning them in with the Forbiddance. As a general rule, assume that the area of effect should be no wider than a mile, and the duration of powers that have a lingering effect should be no longer than a day after the character has departed.

CREATING NEW SERVITORS

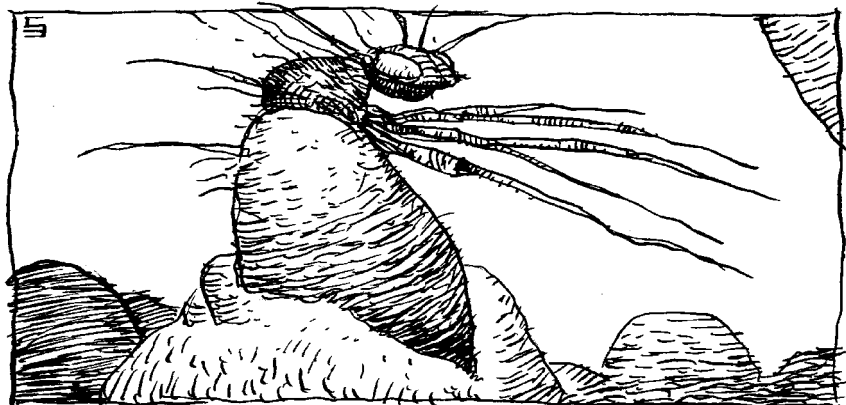
The guidelines for creating new Servitors are similar to those for creating new Disciplines. All of the guidelines that apply to New Disciplines also apply to New Servitors, but there are some additional concerns. New Servitors should be written up by the players who created them and be made available to everyone.

Is the proposed power better suited to a Discipline?

It is important that the powers of the proposed Servitor fit well with those that already exist. When you are trying to decide whether a power would make a better Discipline or Servitor, remember that Disciplines tend to affect the Stalker, and Servitors affect his surroundings. If the proposed power affects the Stalker or a single opponent, it is probably a Discipline, but if it affects the Stalker's environment or small groups of mortals, it is probably better suited to a race of Servitors.

The Powers granted by Servitors must have limitations.

Servitor powers tend to be more comprehensive than those granted by Disciplines, so they must be balanced by some form of limitation that keeps them from becoming too powerful. One common balancing factor is that most Servitors are useless against creatures of Essence. Bear in mind that Servitors are strange creatures with peculiar quirks that can give them limitations that have very little to do with their power, such as an aversion to certain sounds or an inability to function under certain conditions.





CHRONOVORES

These entities can loosen the grip of the Chronosphere on any Mortals and Minions in the Area of Effect, causing time to move more quickly around them. This causes them to move more slowly than Stalkers, Shadows, and the Unbidden, reducing their Attack Attribute by 1, their Defend by 2, and their Initiative by 3. The Evoker must spend his Significant Action, a point of Vitality, or a point of Karma every round or the Chronosphere will reassert its influence, destroying the Servitors in the process.



CLOUDLINGS

From the moment they appear these tiny creatures begin to drink the moisture out of the air, bloating to monstrous proportions as they rise slowly into the air. When the air becomes thin enough they burst, releasing their cargo onto the ground below. This entire process takes ten to twenty minutes and creates a brief but furious rainstorm that can trigger a conventional storm if the conditions are just right. Cloudlings can be Dismissed before they burst if the Stalker desires, leaving the air incredibly dry.

DEVOURERS

The instant the call is sounded a horde of these creatures swarm over any object or ediface the Stalker desires, consuming it in a matter of minutes regardless of size or durability. They are forbidden to feed on living flesh, but their appetite will accommodate several tons of inanimate material. Working invisibly, these termite-like Servitors gnaw tirelessly until nothing is left. They cannot affect the "living magic" used by certain Enlightened Orders, and the taste of fresh blood will drive them back across the Rift.

DREADWYRMS

The telepathic chittering of these bizarre creatures will rouse the primal fears of mortal men. Any mortals in the Area of Effect who have a Resolve of 12 or less will be Terrified by the sound unless they are Driven or Inspired. Fear will lower their Die Cap and prevent them from acting as a group. It can also cause a panic. Panicked mortals will sometimes respond violently, lashing out at anything that threatens them with a +2 Attack and a -3 Defend until they are Wounded, which usually causes them to flee.





The glow spread from his hands, liquid light seeping into every crevice. Wherever it touched, the hard things went soft and faded away leaving phantoms to show us what was gone. We watched as layer after layer was revealed. The process was fascinating as it was beautiful. I could see straight through the house to the garage. Some kids were playing basketball in the next yard while their parents made love behind closed doors three rooms back. Farther and farther, the urban jungle became a barren plane covered by a blanket of amber light that shimmered gently like a burning field. We could see everything, but it was impossible to take it all in.

FERRETTERS

These creatures can be ordered to search for anything. The Evoker will have to describe what they are looking for, where they should look, and how long they have to search. Ferretters can fly and pass through walls, making them very efficient; they can search an area ten times faster than humans could. If they find what they were told to look for in the allotted time, they will return to tell the master. Unfortunately, they are not very bright, so they cannot be given vague instructions such as "find the Unbidden."

FLITS

These mindless creatures hurl themselves at any sudden movement with such force that they reduce the Base Damage of all Ranged Attacks in the Area of Effect by 1 Die. This includes any Rend attacks made by the Stalkers. The Base Damage of high-velocity projectile weapons is reduced by 2 Dice. Melee combat is only affected if a Stalker tries to use the Frenzy Discipline in the Area of Effect, in which case the Base Damage of both Attacks is reduced by 2 Dice. The Flits tend to drift, gradually changing the Area of Effect.

GLAMOURS

The luminous wings of these batlike creatures create a vivid lightshow that can only be seen by creatures of Essence and Sensitive mortals. The strobelike effect of these lights will disorient the weak willed. Any Sensitive character in the Area of Effect with a Perceive Attribute of 12 or higher and a Resolve lower than 13 will be distracted, which reduces their Initiative and Perceive Attributes by 2 points each. This will enrage approximately 1 in 6 Minions, triggering a mindless frenzy that gives them a +1 Attack bonus.

GLIMMERGAUNTS

The bodies of these creatures emit Essence like a firefly, suffusing the Area of Effect with a strange amber glow that is only visible to creatures of Essence and Sensitive mortals with a Perceive of 15 or better. Under the influence of this light physical objects become translucent, allowing the Stalkers to peer through obstacles. This effect can penetrate as far as the Evoker likes, but excessive depth is confusing. The glow irritates other Servitors, driving them away unless a point of Karma is spent to maintain them.







GREMLINS

These tiny critters are drawn to electricity and live to wreak havoc on machines that rely on electrical components, disrupting any "high-tech" equipment in the Area of Effect. Cars won't start, alarm systems will shut down, and computer files will be erased. Unfortunately, the effects of their meddling can be unpredictable. There is always a chance a device that should be affected will work properly. The gamemaster should treat the Gremlin's influence as a curse that turns machines into unreliable tools.

MARROWDIRES

The Weavers have spawned many parasites that feed on the uncommon clay used by creatures of Essence to construct their Vessels of Flesh. Any Stalkers, Awakened Shadows, or Minions in the Area of Effect will be infested, which will temporarily reduce their Fortitude by 1. The Servitors will be removed by any attack that results in the loss of Vitality. The victim will be reinfested if he stays in the Area of Effect but not until the following round, so his Fortitude will only be lowered once a round.

MARTYRS

These creatures are afflicted with suicidal empathy that drives them to sacrifice themselves rather than allow another being to feel pain. Anyone who is Wounded in the Area of Effect loses 1 less point of Vitality; a couple dozen Martyrs die instead. At first they will limit their efforts to the Area of Effect specified by the Evoker, but they will do their best to protect whoever they can. A single Evocation will summon enough Martyrs to absorb a total of 9 points of Vitality before they are all killed off.

NEGATORS

A swarm of these creatures will eagerly devour any lingering traces of Essence in the Area of Effect. This will make it impossible to use Sensitivity to "read" an area and will reduce the effects of mortal magic that rely on these traces. These Servitors will also attempt to devour the Essence of any living creatures they encounter. Negators are not powerful enough to do any damage, but their stinging touch will irritate creatures of Essence and cause nausea in mortal Sensitives.

Of the Thralls only the foreman would know where his master was hiding, but the security system would be inconvenient. Reaching across the Rift, I called upon my Gremlin allies. When the floodlights began to flicker I knew they had answered my call. The electric fence shorted out, and the automated cameras writhed on their mounts, tormented by my invisible servants. Across the compound, the generator started breaking down, sending showers of sparks across the tarmac. The office door opened easily, but the foreman was sprawled across the floor clutching his chest. A pacemaker— wouldn't you know it.





NIGHTWINGS

At the Stalker's command a vast cloud of these batlike creatures will pour into the Realm of Flesh, blotting out the light with their leathery wings. The resulting darkness can be as intense as their master desires, ranging from a twilight shadow to pitch black. Darkness is a useful tool against mortal opponents who are more easily Terrified when they cannot see their opponents. Unfortunately, these Servitors are a bit too eager to serve and may sometimes linger longer than their Master intended.

RIPPERS

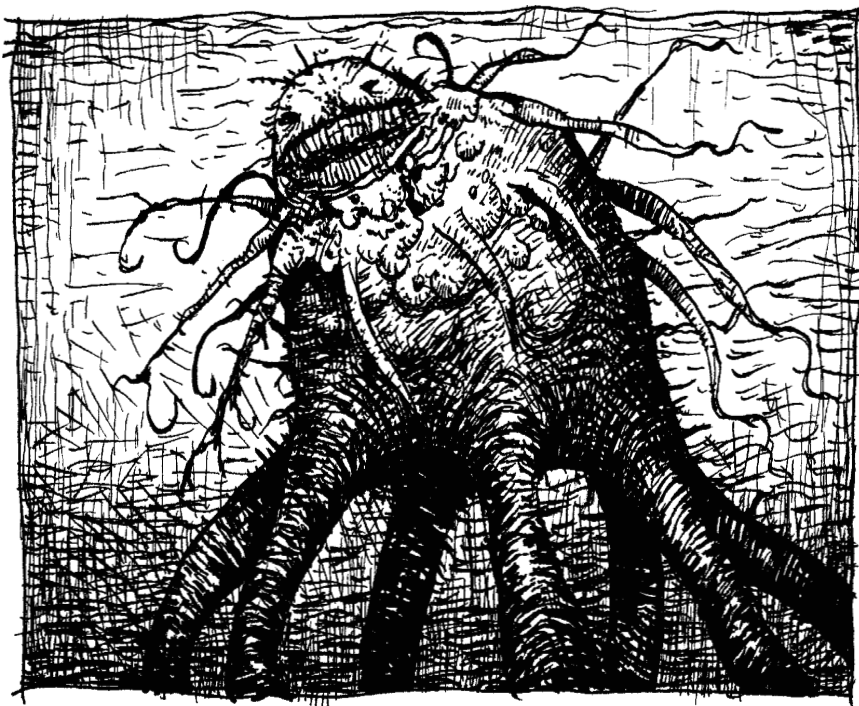
These crawling horrors are no bigger than roaches, but they are insanely violent and will try to claw the flesh off of anything that stands in their way. Their attacks will tear the Husk from any Minions in the Area of Effect, and any mortal with a Fortitude less than 3 will lose a point of Vitality. Victims will be covered with tiny scratches that resemble a serious rash. The Unbidden have the power to wrest control of these Servitors, commanding the creatures to make a single 6 Die Attack against their former master.

ROTLINGS

These pestilent vermin carry strange diseases that prey on human frailties. 1 to 6 rounds after exposure any mortal with a Fortitude less than 4 falls ill, which reduces their Attack, Defend, and Initiative by 1 point each, their Strength by 1 Die, and their movement to half their normal speed. The infection will run its course in an hour or so unless the victim was sick to begin with, in which case exposure can be fatal. The danger is that one of the diseases will spread, causing an unintended plague.

SLASHERS

The moment they appear these creatures begin spinning wildly, slicing anything in the Area of Effect with bony protrusions which do 4 Dice of Damage to every creature. This is not considered a Ranged Attack so it has a Base Die Cap of 6-, which is lowered to 5- against Shadows and 4- against Stalkers and the Unbidden. As soon as this attack is resolved, the Slashers return to the Rift. They will not attack anything that is already Wounded, so they are most useful as a "first strike" weapon.





Having tracked the Beast to the waterfront, we were confronted with a daunting maze of unmarked buildings. A search would have taken too long. The enemy would have Thralls here and would be alerted to our presence before we could find him. Something more efficient was called for. The Grey Man calls them his "hounds," but they are nothing of the sort. In less than a minute we heard their "howl," which was more like the wailing of the damned than any dog I was familiar with. It was Lovely Anna who noticed a drifter searching for the source of the ungodly racket. You find Sensitives in the strangest places...

SPINNERS

These flying mites are the Mindless spawn of the Weavers whose only talent is spinning a network of weblike strands. These webs can only be seen by Sensitive characters and will part easily for creatures of Essence such as Shadows and Stalkers. However, they will cling to those of the Flesh, slowing Mortals and Minions encumbered by Husks to a crawl. The webs will endure for an hour after the Spinners are dismissed but can be cleared by a living knife or the sound of churchbells.

TRACKERS

The most common species are known as Essence Hounds. As soon as they are called, a pack of these invisible beasts will spread out in all directions searching for traces of Essence. Their ability to pass through solid objects allows them to move with preternatural speed. When one of them finds a creature of Essence, it will let out a howl just loud enough for its master to hear, which can also be heard by any Sensitive character who happens to be in the area. This will usually allow the Stalkers to pinpoint the nearest creature of Essence.

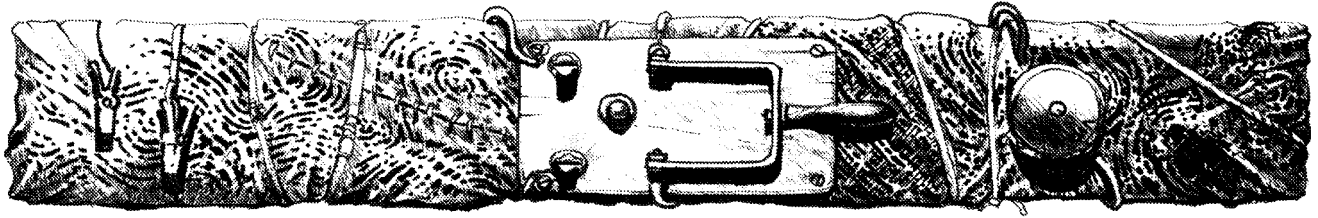
VAMPIRES

Once Evoked a swarm of these creatures lingers in the Area of Effect specified by the Stalker. Whenever a mortal character or the Host of the Unbidden takes damage, the Vampires flock to the wound and drink the victim's blood, which drains an additional point of Vitality. When the swarm has devoured 9 points of Vitality they disperse, their alien hunger sated. If they are not sated in 3 rounds, they are no longer bound by the Area of Effect and will also drain Vitality from the Stalkers until they are Dismissed.

VOIDOIDS

These creatures resemble floating jellyfish whose spiny tentacles end in eyeballs. Only one will answer the Stalker's call. It has the ability to absorb energy of all kinds in copious amounts, but it feeds rather slowly. This ability can be used to create many different effects. The only limitation is that it can mute energy but cannot neutralize it. For example Voidoids have been used to inhibit the spread of fire, dim lights, and reduce the effective range of television and radio transmissions.





V : SKILLS

When you are a prisoner of the timestream, you have no idea how profoundly your mortality colors your perception. Liberated from the Chronosphere by the Primal Powers, the transient spark of my Essence became a blazing torch that illuminated the dark corners of eternity. Transcending life and death I see the Tapestry of Flesh as the Aesthetics intended and am humbled by its beauty. If only I could show you...

While Attributes define what your character is, Skills define what your character knows. In game terms high Attribute values improve a character's chances of rolling a higher number, but a Skill Bonus is a consistent advantage that produces more reliable results.

- **STRENUOUS SKILLS**

Certain Skills allow the character to manipulate Essence. These Skills place so much strain on the Vessel that they require the sacrifice of a point of Vitality every time they are used. Banish, Bind, Evoke, Mend, and Sensitivity are all Strenuous Skills.

- **FOCUS SKILLS**

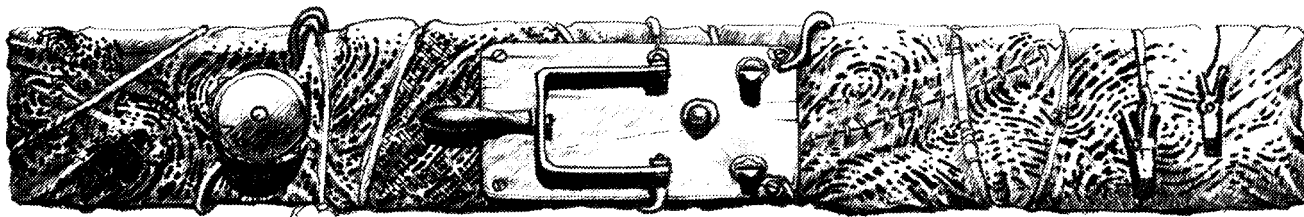
Some characters will remember Skills learned during their tenure on the physical plane. These special talents are called Focus Skills. Focus

Skills are invented by the player, but they must be approved by the gamemaster. Focus Skills that give the character special abilities that should require the use of a Discipline are inappropriate and should be rejected.

Focus Skills tend to be more specialized than the basic Skills available to all Stalkers. Considering the generality of the basic Skills, overlap is hard to avoid. For example, Sniper is a valid Focus Skill but could be considered a subset of the Attack Skill.

The gamemaster should make sure that there is an advantage to having the specialized version of a Skill, even if he has to resort to reducing the Difficulty of Challenges involving the Focus Skill. In the example, a character with Sniper's Skill could be awarded a +3 Modifier when firing small arms from a concealed position.





Scraping on the locked door, it waited for someone to notice it lurking behind the box of abandoned toys. Four families had come and gone, but no one dared empty the attic. There was a gloomy kind of emptiness in the rafters that filled your lungs with dust and sent you scurrying down the stepladder for the imagined safety of your electric lights. Billy heard it and was too curious to be afraid, so he pushed aside the mildewed box and made a new friend. Poor Billy. It only wanted him for his body, but how could he understand? I sent it away, but it was too late for the boy, his dog, and his mother.

ATTACK

Many Stalkers are skilled warriors who hunt their prey with savage efficiency. This is a “catch-all” combat Skill that allows the Stalker to attack with any of the attack forms available to his Vessel. To resolve an Attack, the Stalker makes a Dexterity Challenge against the opponent’s Defend value Modified by the situation (see Combat for details). If the Challenge is successful, the Stalker rolls Damage Dice equal to his Strength unless he has the Rend or Savage Disciplines. Stalkers can use any mortal weapon they acquire during a Hunt but suffer a +2 Penalty and a -1 Die Cap Modifier so they usually don’t bother because their inherent attack forms tend to be more effective.

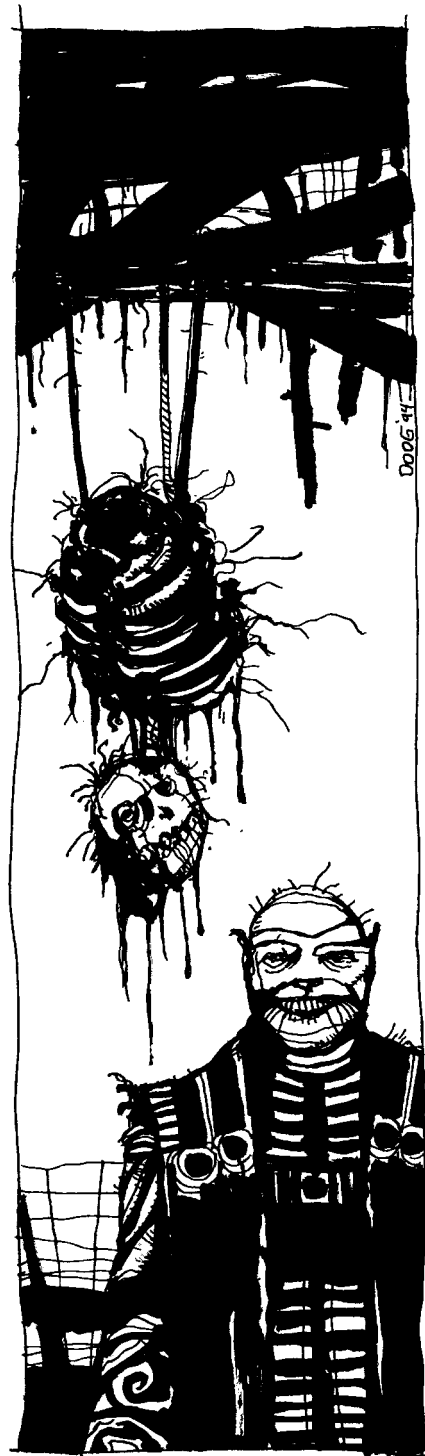
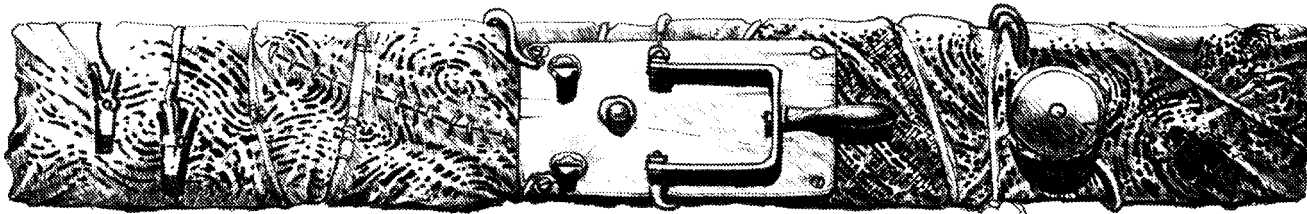
BANISH

Stalkers can call on the power of their office to Banish Awakened Shadows to the Rift between Realms. An attempt to Banish is a Strenuous action that costs a point of Vitality and is resolved as a Presence Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the creature’s Resolve modified by its morale. Banishing a wounded or outnumbered Minion is Easy, but trying to dismiss a healthy creature encountered in its lair is much harder. If this skill is used against a Minion, the Difficulty is determined by the Resolve of the Unbidden modified by the creature’s proximity to its master. The Circle may make only one attempt to Banish any given Shadow or Minion during the course of a Hunt.

BIND

The Unbidden must be Bound before the Stalkers can pass judgement. Before the spirit can be Bound the creature’s Vessel must be destroyed, which forces the Unbidden to reveal its true form. A Binding attempt is resolved as a Presence Challenge against the target’s Resolve Attribute Modified by morale. Using this Skill is Strenuous and requires the sacrifice of a point of Vitality for each attempt. If successful, the Avatar of the Unbidden is bound in a sphere of Essence called the Radiant Orb which may be moved by any Stalker through force of will. This Skill is required to complete the Hunt, so it is important that at least one character in each Circle have a good Binding Bonus.





CHARM

Stalkers prefer to Hunt from the shadows, but they are often forced to interact with mortals. This skill is used for social interaction such as bribery, fast talk, persuasion and seduction. Charm attempts are resolved as a Presence Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the target's Resolve modified by the situation. Trying to convince a mortal to do something they would like to do anyway is Easy, but trying to compel him to do something that goes against his basic convictions is Hard. Bear in mind that this is a Skill, not a Discipline, so the results do not dictate the target's actions. Charm should only be used to influence roleplaying by determining how characters react to the Stalker using the Skill.

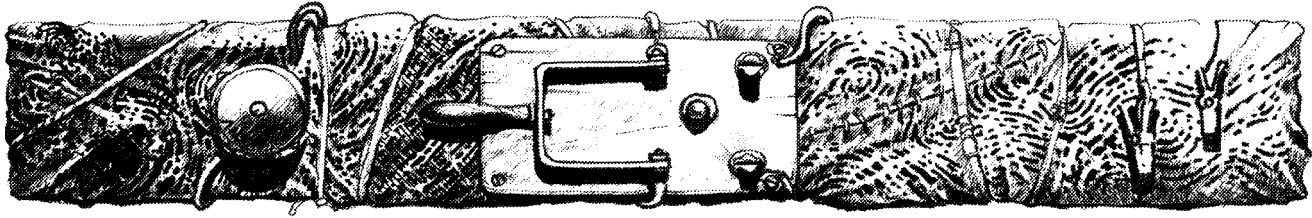
DEDUCTION

The machinations of the Unbidden pose many puzzles that most Stalkers become adept at solving. This Skill allows a character to draw a logical conclusion from the available information. Deduction is resolved as an Insight Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the complexity of the problem. The gamemaster should use this Skill as a tool to give the characters clues when they are stuck, but he should be careful not to give away the entire plot. Whenever possible, let the players figure things out for themselves. Deduction can also be used to solve more traditional puzzles, but these often call for an additional Dexterity and/or Willpower Challenge.

DEFEND

When a Stalker's Avatar is bound in Flesh he becomes mortal, making the preservation of his Vessel an uncomfortable necessity. This rather important Skill is used to evade incoming attacks. Defend attempts are resolved with a Dexterity Challenge against the opponent's Attack rating Modified by the situation. (See the Combat section for details.) If the Challenge is successful, the attack fails. If the Challenge is unsuccessful, the Stalker has been hit, and the gamemaster rolls the appropriate Damage Dice for the attacker's attack form. The Defend Skill can only be used if the Stalker is aware of the attack. If a character is surprised he may only Defend with his Dexterity.





They are always there for us, hovering just out of reach like the imagined horrors that lurk at the edges of your vision very late at night when fatigue begins to gnaw at the fringes of the Veil. To call them, you must acknowledge their existence which is the hardest part for a Novitiate. The Powers taught me their names and the words that compel them. Servitors are not alive, not as you know it. They lack the potential for change that distinguishes true life. They are as they have always been and always will be. Kind of sad when you think about it. Because of this disquieting sympathy, I am always hesitant to call upon them, but most Stalkers use them like any other tool.

EVOKE

The Stalkers' most reliable allies are their Servitors, mindless beings created by the Primal Powers to help them during the Hunt. This Skill is required to call upon a Servitor's power unless the character has achieved Mastery of the desired creature. Evocation attempts are resolved by a Presence Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the situation. Calling up a Servitor in a controlled environment where the Stalker is undisturbed and has as much time as he needs is an Easy task, but trying to summon a Servitor in the midst of combat is Hard. Calling to these creatures across the Rift is a Strenuous action, so each use of this Skill costs a point of Vitality.

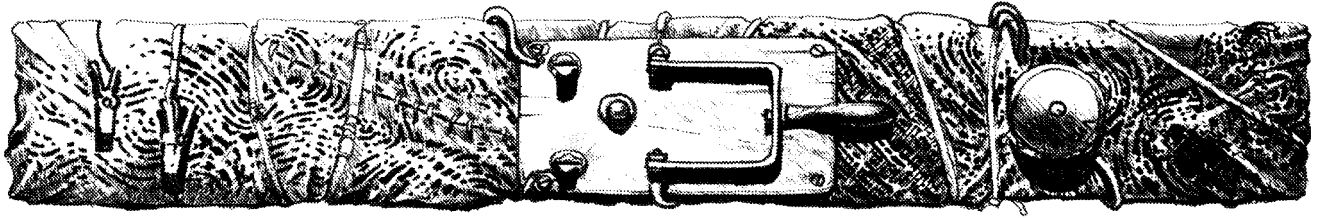
HISTORY

The Hunt can take a Stalker to any point on the Chronosphere, so in-depth knowledge of the Ages of Man is often useful to the hunter in his quest. Use of this Skill requires an Insight Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the relative obscurity of the desired information. Remembering the rough outline of major events such as World War II is an Easy task, trying to recall details such as troop commitment in a specific battle is Hard, and minutia such as the names of platoon leaders is Very Hard or impossible. This skill will only give the character historical perspective; it does not provide sufficient information about "future" events to give the Stalker precognitive abilities.

INTIMIDATE

This Skill is used to frighten or unsettle mortals and is resolved with a Presence Challenge against the opponent's Resolve. Remember that this is not a Discipline, so the results should only be used to influence roleplaying by determining how characters react to the Stalker using the Skill. A mortal's reaction to an Unmasked Stalker will be more profound than his reaction to someone he thinks is human, but revealing the Vessel can be dangerous. It is possible to affect small groups, but two Challenge Rolls must be made with an additional +2 Modifier. If one roll is successful but the other is failed, the skill only works on some of the group.





MASK

This Skill is used to conceal the character's true features and the use of supernatural abilities when the Veil fails to do so. Mask attempts are resolved as a Presence Challenge against the target's Perception modified by the extent of the Stalker's indiscretion. Masking a subtle effect such as the use of the Whisper Discipline is Easy, but concealing the flagrant use of Essence required for the Evocation of most Servitors or obvious Disciplines such as Translocation is Hard. It is possible to affect small groups, but two Challenge Rolls must be made with an additional +2 Modifier. If one roll is successful but the other is failed, the skill only works on some of the group.

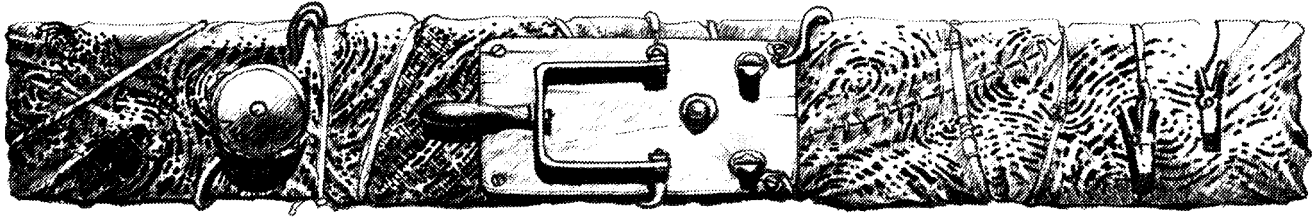
MENDING

When an Aesthetic abandons its post, its absence creates a wound in the world called the Enigma, which can be healed if the Stalkers can find the Focus of the Corruption. Mending requires an Awareness Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the power of the Enigma. (The default is the Resolve of the Unbidden who caused it.) Reweaving the torn fabric of the universe is a Strenuous action that requires absolute concentration and costs a point of Vitality. If this roll is failed, the Stalker can try again, but a second attempt costs two more points of Vitality, and the process will take hours instead of minutes. A third attempt by the same character is impossible.

OCCULTISM

Over the course of human history, Inspired mortals of uncommon insight have learned just enough of the true nature of their world to be dangerous. The accumulated teachings of these magicians form the blasphemous legacy known as the Occult. Some students of the Occult learn forbidden techniques that allow them to manipulate the Dream and give them limited power over the Unseen. This skill determines what the Stalker knows of these rites allowing him to recognize the Occult when he sees it. Identification of rituals, tools, or symbology requires an Insight Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the relative obscurity of the desired information.





The junkyard stank of entropy. Human vultures wandered the vast mounds of garbage, giggling like delighted children when they managed to fish something recognizable out of the dismal heap. We were also looking for something, but we needed more than a stick and a sack to find it. Closing my eyes and clenching my fists over my ears to shut out the pollution, I reached out with my inner senses, probing for evidence that our Prey had been this way. Tasting abundant Essence near a storeroom covered in hubcaps, I signalled the Circle forward, directly into the lair of an Awakened Behemoth.

PERCEPTION

In roleplaying games, the gamemaster serves as the characters' senses, describing their surroundings to the players. This Skill determines what the Stalkers see and is often used to control the pacing of a Hunt by determining which characters receive important information and when. Perception attempts are resolved with an Awareness Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the subtlety of the quality the character is trying to perceive. If a player specifies that his Stalker is actively looking for something, he should receive a bonus to find it, but if the player is rolling to see if his character stumbles across something, he should do so at a significant penalty.

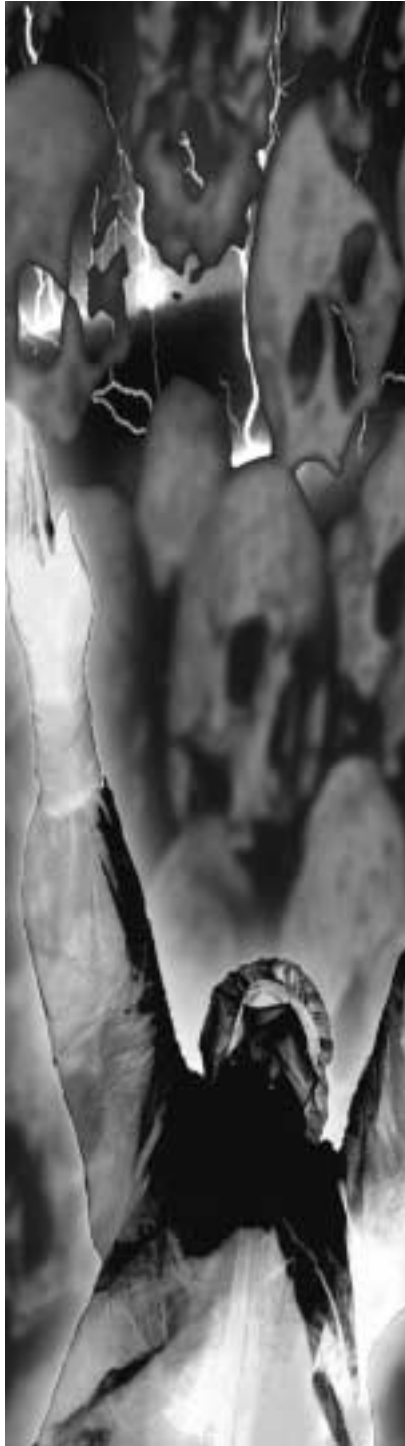
SENSITIVITY

The interaction of Essence and Flesh creates a disturbance that Stalkers and certain gifted mortals can detect. Attempts to sense the lingering influence of the Unseen are Strenuous, requiring a point of Vitality and an Awareness Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the proximity, intensity, and duration of contact with the source of the disturbance. A successful roll will tell the character the relative intensity of any emanations (None, Weak, Moderate, or Powerful) but will not identify the source. While Sensitivity will provide clues that will help the Stalkers catch their prey, it is not a compass that can be used to track the Unbidden directly to its lair.

STEALTH

Faced with the power of the Forbiddance and the mortality of the Vessel, Stalkers must tread the Realm of Flesh with care. This sometimes forces them to Hunt from the shadows. Any use of this Skill is resolved with an Awareness Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the highest Perception Attribute of the characters the Stalker is trying to avoid, modified by the situation. Sneaking past someone with a lot of convenient cover, such as a forest or an unsuspecting crowd, is Easy but crossing an open field or an empty corridor without being seen is Hard. There is an additional Modifier of +1 for every character after the first who is actively watching the same area.





VI : THE HUNT

When you are Chosen you tend to believe that your newfound immortality will be spent in neverending pursuit of otherworldly horrors. The reality is less melodramatic but far more interesting. We are more than hunters, we are troubleshooters. Every Enigma is a new puzzle that requires a different solution. Some Hunts are very straightforward but those that I find most satisfying are those that force us to test the limits of our abilities. Most Stalkers dread an encounter with an Architect but I take a perverse pleasure in outwitting them and long for the challenge.

Every Hunt follows the same basic framework. This framework was established by the Powers to ensure that the Stalkers duty will be clear. Sometimes a Hunt will vary from this pattern but these exceptions are very rare.

The Hunt begins when one of the Stalkers receives a Call for help from a mortal Supplicant who is endangered by an Enigma. Acting quickly the Stalker calls the rest of the Circle to his Domain.

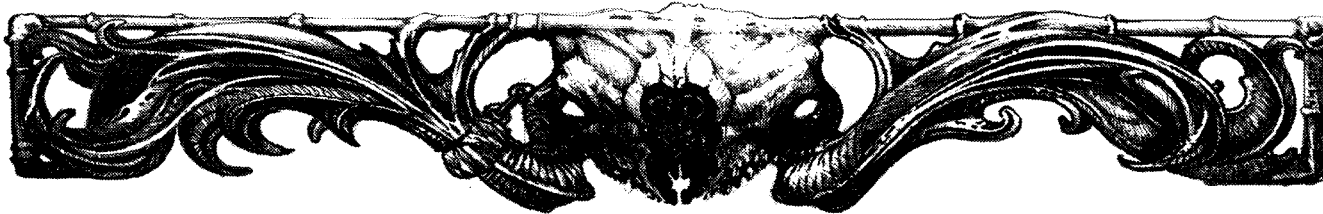
Transport to the Realm of Flesh is facilitated by the Navigators, creatures whose peculiar station allows them temporal freedom. When the Circle stands ready, they call upon a Navigator and are devoured, revealing the Winding Path that lies within.

When the Circle is halfway along the Path a Barrier will bar their way. Each Barrier is maintained by a Guardian. Guardians take many forms but all are powerful spirits that must be Dismissed before the Rift can be crossed.

When the Stalkers near the threshold of the physical the Circle calls upon the Weavers, creatures with the power to spin substance over the Avatar, clothing Essence in Flesh. Their gifts are necessary for interaction on the mortal plane.

Traversing what remains of the Winding Path the Stalkers return to the world of their birth. Time and space are meaningless to creatures of Essence so they may find themselves at any point in earths history, even in our future.





Disguised as mortals, the Circle must find the renegade and bring him to justice. The Veil of ignorance and the Mask of humanity will mute the Stalkers presence, making mortals perceive them as mundane.

Stalkers must be careful not to reveal themselves for the collective unconscious of mortal man has the power to reject that which does not belong. The principle is called the Forbiddance and it will cast out or unmake the unsubtle Stalker.

Upon their arrival the Circle will have to find the Enigma and determine its nature. If the Enigma was caused by the arrival of the Unbidden they must also try to capture the renegade before they return. In either case their first priority is Mending the Enigma.

The Unbidden have not the Weaver's secret of form, so must take refuge in a sentient creature native to the Realm. Though hidden in a human Host the Stalkers will know the enemy by his deeds.

When the Unbidden cross the Rift, they are weakened by the transition and must consume the Essence locked in the soul of man to maintain necessary cohesion, forcing them to become predators until they achieve physical expression.

When the enemy's Minions are defeated and the prey is Bound, the Navigator is summoned once again to return the Circle to the Realm of Essence. When they return the Stalkers consign their captive to the Vault where he may contemplate his blasphemy for the balance of eternity.

Abandoning Structure : Some gamemasters will find the framework of the Hunt restrictive. It is intended to give the game a sense of structure that makes it clear to the players what they are supposed to be doing. With a little work most gamemasters can devise countless variations on the basic themes inherent in the Hunt format but if you feel that your creativity is restrained feel free to abandon as much of the format as you like. One alternative is the Watcher Campaign outlined in the Campaigning Chapter which begins on page 77. It is also possible to expand the definition of Enigma to include any supernatural person, place or thing and allow the Stalkers to travel wherever they like fighting back the forces of the Unseen wherever they find them. Doing this gives you an open field to work with but robs the game of a lot of its character. When all is said and done it is your game so do whatever makes you the most comfortable.





Her inner voice was so soft that I might not have heard it were it not for the dogs. Straining to listen, I realized that she was praying. Not to us, but to her father's god, a nearsighted diety she abandoned when he took his own life. (I too have knelt before a barren altar.) Her need was great, of that I was certain, but I could not tell why her plaintive cries had come to my doorstep. In a case like this, it was up to me to decide whether we would answer the Call. My companions would rather I had ignored her, but something about her struck a sympathetic chord. (Sometimes these Keys are more trouble than they are worth...)

RECEIVING THE CALL

Stalkers are empowered to enforce the will of the Powers in the Realm of Flesh, but they may not cross the Rift unless they are Called by a mortal who needs their help. The mortal who issues the Call is called the Supplicant.

The Call can take many forms. In a way, each Calling is unique. All that is important is that the Supplicant ask for help from a being or beings he believes to be otherworldly and that his need stems from the existence of an Enigma.

The Call has no power over the Stalkers. There are Rituals known to mortal magicians that can summon Stalkers against their will, but once they arrive there is no technique that will compel them to do the magician's bidding.

From time to time the Stalkers will receive a Call that has nothing to do with the Enigma. These Calls are very rare because they require the intervention of the Powers. These special assignments are the exception, not the rule.

The Hunt begins when one of the Stalkers receives the Call in his Domain. The gamemaster has to decide which Stalker receives the call. He can choose a character at random every time, but it is suggested that the characters take turns.

The chosen Stalker will hear the Call as distant voices begging for his help. If he answers the Call, the voices will echo in his mind. The Navigator uses this echo as a beacon to guide the Stalkers across the Rift to the Supplicant's side.





THE SUPPLICANT

The mortal who calls for the Stalkers is called the Supplicant. The Supplicant is usually Sensitive but need not be Enlightened. There are no prerequisites, but Supplicants tend to have high Perception and Resolve Attributes (usually a total of 28 or better between them).

The Supplicant will not always know that they have Called for the Stalkers, but they will always have some awareness of the Enigma or its cause or their Petition would not have been answered.

If the Supplicant is Enlightened and is aware of having made the Call, the Stalkers will usually appear in his presence but if he knows not what he has done the Stalkers will appear nearby. When this happens the Supplicant is usually the first mortal the Stalkers encounter.

The gamemaster should take the time to develop the Supplicant. This character can be used to draw the player characters into the story so it is important to know what he knows and what motivates him.

Supplicants can take many forms from innocent children to savvy magicians. It is this very diversity that makes them interesting. Some will be sympathetic, others will be a nuisance best abandoned early on, and a few will be openly hostile to the Stalkers and their Hunt.

The Stalkers may react however they like to the Supplicant and are not compelled to obey him, but they may not take any direct action against him. Any attempt to so is a violation of the Forbiddance.

FORMAL PETITION

Experienced Stalkers will eventually come to the attention of mortal magicians who will devise rituals to summon them. These rituals are the most reliable form of Calling available to Enlightened Supplicants. It is up to each player to create a Summoning Ritual for his character. These rituals are as distinctive as the Stalkers themselves save for three recurring elements;

The Invocation: Formal Petitions begin with an Invocation to whatever forces the magician believes he serves. Very few have the insight to know the Primal Powers for what they are so they will usually be addressed as spirits, demons, or divine entities of some sort.

Naming of Names: All Stalkers have at least two names: the name given them by their parents and the name given them by the Circle when they are Chosen. Formal Petitions will always Call the character by their Immortal Name and will include the Mortal Name if the magician has been able to figure it out. Many Stalkers have also been given more than one name by various cultures they have come into contact with. Mortal superstition holds that names carry power so the magician will work in as many of these names as he can.

The Offering: Most mortal magicians believe that their supernatural allies will demand tribute in exchange for their intercession so it is customary for the Supplicant to offer some kind of gift. Ideally this gift should suit the character's idiom, but insight is rare among mortals so the tribute may be completely inappropriate. Various forms of sacrifice and self-mutilation performed in the Stalker's name are alarmingly common.

Creative players will add embellishments to make the ritual unique. Flourishes such as diagrams and incantations will add atmosphere to the game. Gamemasters are not required to use the rituals submitted by the players "as is" but should base any Formal Petitions on this model. In most cases these rituals have no more power than any other form of Calling, but there are rare exceptions that can bind the Stalker to the Supplicant's service.





The entity's approach was heralded by a deafening roar and the stench of burning leaves. It manifested slowly, settling over us in a cloud full of tendrils that eagerly probed the sweet textures of our Essence. At first I recoiled from its touch, but I grew accustomed to its monstrous familiarity. Its enormity was overwhelming. This was a creature whose impossible expanse stretched across the Rift, creating a living bridge between the Realms. At my command, it opened wide the abyss of its mouth, and we were consumed...

CALLING THE NAVIGATOR

Navigators are a specialized form of Shadow. Like all Shadows, Navigators are neither Flesh nor Essence, allowing them to exist in either Realm. Navigators are unique because they possess the ability to track the Call and carry passengers to its source.

Calling a Navigator is a simple ritual known to all Stalkers. It is not Strenuous and does not require a Challenge roll. Navigators can be called from either Realm with equal ease. In the Realm of Flesh, the Ritual will take three minutes, and the Navigator will usually arrive within the hour.

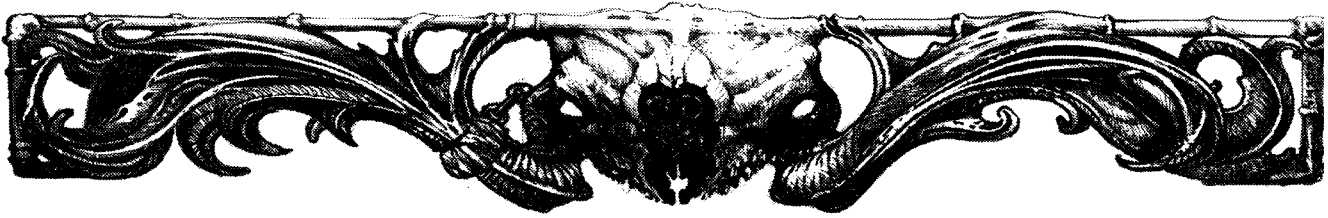
Most Navigators are wormlike creatures of tremendous size. In physical terms, their mouths are 30 yards across, and their bodies seem infinitely long, trailing off into the Neitherspace between Realms.

Fortunately, Navigators never fully manifest in the Flesh so they can only be seen by Sensitive characters. A Vessel large enough to contain one of these creatures would require more mass than 20 elephants placed head to tail.

There are other "species" of Navigator. The descriptions of these creatures are left to the gamemaster's creativity. All are huge and must have the ability to consume their passengers. A flock of winged shapes could descend on the Stalkers or a giant blob could simply ooze over them.

Navigators carry passengers by consuming them, forming a living bridge across the Rift. (An unsettling experience to be sure.) The Stalkers simply travel through their bodies and are disgorged on the other side.





When the Circle is consumed they will find an entire world inside the creature's body. They will be standing on a path that stretches off into the void, twisting and turning inexplicably. This is called the Winding Path, and it always leads to the other side.

All the Stalkers have to do is follow the Path. If a character strays from the path, he will be lost to the Rift and can only be recovered through the direct intervention of the Primal Powers.

When the Enigma has been dealt with, the Circle can call for another Navigator to take them back to the Realm of Essence. They can call for a Navigator before they accomplish their objective, but this will end the Hunt early.

If the Circle leaves without Mending the Enigma they cannot return to finish the job unless they are Called again. Retreat is an admission of failure, but sometimes there is no other choice. There are Stalkers who would rather die than retreat, but most of them are dead...

• THE OLD ONES

When Navigators touch down in the Realm of Flesh they are temporarily affected by the laws which bind the physical world. This vulnerability forces them to undergo a peculiar life cycle. This kind of evolution is very unusual for Shadows and is another thing that sets Navigators apart.

Young Navigators are dull-witted beasts, but they gradually develop manlike intelligence and a distinctive personality. These individuals refer to themselves as



"Old Ones" and view the Stalkers as longtime companions on their journey across time and space.

During the journey Old Ones will manifest a Guide that joins the Stalkers on the Winding Path and will serve as their guide during the journey. This is the creature's "inner voice" and will speak on the Navigator's behalf.

Old Ones have an empathic talent that allows them to manifest a Guide that the Stalkers will be comfortable with. Common examples are railroad conductors, ushers and tour guides.

A few Old Ones have the power to maintain the Guide outside the "Inner World" of its body. These Navigators can actually join the Stalkers on their Hunts. Guides have no substance and can only be seen by Sensitives.

These Guides eventually gain the ability to possess mortals. The Host will lose consciousness while the Navigator's spirit inhabits his body and will forget everything 24 hours prior to the possession.

The Circle tends to use one Navigator in preference to all others, so if they meet an Old One they will probably try to befriend it. Old Ones respect the power inherent in the Stalkers' office, but they are drawn to the humanity that many Stalkers consider a weakness.

The down side to using an Old One is that there are parasitic creatures that tend to take up residence in the Navigator's mammoth body. Some of these parasites are powerful enough to pose a threat to the Stalkers and must be dealt with from time to time.





We continued down the Path, ignoring the phantoms that harried us from the oblivion of Neitherspace.

As we reached the halfway point a sheet of flame rose up before us, obscuring our destination.

Drawn by our approach, a mechanical colossus rose from the depths, its massive frame blocking our path. It peered down from on high, obviously annoyed by our presence.

The Grey Man strode forward with his Keys in hand. Three times he commanded the creature to be gone, and the third time it obeyed. Groaning its displeasure, the creature descended, clearing the path that would take us home.

DISMISSING THE GUARDIAN

The Realms of Flesh and Essence are separated by a kind of "no mans land" where the laws of neither Realm apply. Stalkers call this middle ground Neitherspace, but Enlightened mortals call it the Rift.

Crossing from one Realm to the other is very difficult. To make the journey the traveller must somehow belong to both Realms but be bound to neither. These individuals are very rare. Other than the Shadows, only the Stalkers and their prey have found the path.

Because interaction between the Realms is dangerous, the Powers have forbidden it. The Hunts of the Stalkers are an exception to this rule because the Stalkers enforce their laws.

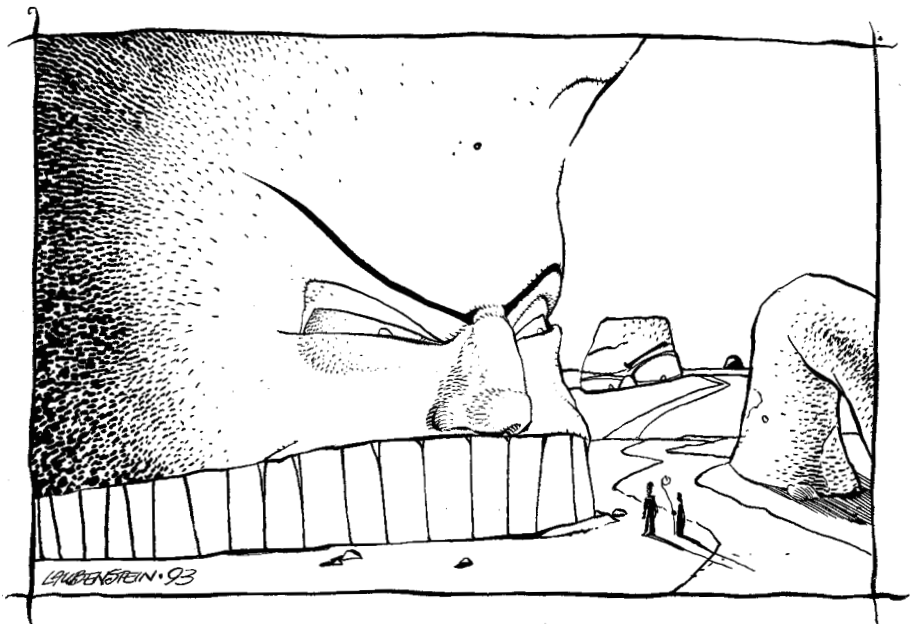
The Powers have taken steps to ensure that only their agents will be

able to cross the Rift unmolested. Anyone else will find the way barred and may even perish in the attempt.

The first of these measures is the Barrier. Midway between Flesh and Essence the traveller will encounter a Barrier that intersects the Winding Path, making progress impossible.

Barriers can take many forms. Some are as simple as they are effective. Walls of stone, steel, or fire are as common as are mazes. No matter what form, the Barrier cannot be overcome. Walls will grow higher as characters try to climb them, flames will grow hotter as the travellers approach and so forth.

The Barrier cannot be crossed because it is maintained by a Guardian. The Guardians are powerful entities whose purpose is to prevent passage across the Rift.





Guardians can also take many forms but are always massive and imposing. If they were not they would not make an effective deterrent. Common forms include giants of all kinds, disembodied heads, and faces. When the gamemaster describes the Guardian, he should try to make the creature sound as impressive as he can.

The Guardians have been instructed to allow the Stalkers to pass, but they are stubborn creatures who will not readily open the Winding Path for anyone.

In order to get the Guardian to part the Barrier, the Stalkers will have to convince the creature that they are who they say they are and that their need is great. Showing it the Keys of Office is a good start.

The gamemasters should refuse to let the Stalkers pass until they act like Stalkers. Simply telling the Guardian that they are Stalkers is not enough. They have to command the lesser creature with confidence and authority, demanding obedience in no uncertain terms.

The function of this encounter is to get the players into the proper mindset to play Stalkers. After a few Hunts it may no longer be necessary to play out this interchange unless it is unusual for some reason.

There is the occasional Guardian who takes his job too literally and refuses to let the Stalkers pass. These creatures need to be taught a lesson. Usually a couple of good shots will be enough to teach it respect, but sometimes the Guardian actually needs to be destroyed.





We followed the stench upriver toward the Black Sea, instructing our crew to row as fast as they could. It was slow going, but my instincts told me that the source of the river was the source of the Enigma. By nightfall, we sighted a monolith looming in the distance. Winged Shadows wheeled overhead like circling vultures, confirming my suspicions. When we reached the east bank, I touched the menhir, projecting my power through my fingertips. The will of the Circle became a tangible presence that blinded me to everything but the task at hand. As I strained against the stone I could see the wound, a bleeding gash in the Dream.

MENDING THE ENIGMA

The Realm of Flesh is plagued by countless flaws called Enigmas. It is the Stalker's duty to track down each Enigma, determine its cause, and Mend the Dream. Without the Stalkers the Enigmas would proliferate, tearing apart the fabric of the Dreaming from within.

Enigmas can be created by a wide variety of stimulus. There are even "naturally occurring" Enigmas (which seems like an Enigma in itself). Some Enlightened philosophers see the existence of Enigmas as proof positive of the fallibility of the Aesthetics.

By far and away the most common source of Enigmas is the arrival of the Unbidden. When an Aesthetic abandons his Station, his absence creates a flaw in the Dream. This flaw manifests as an Enigma.

Enigmas can also be created by the actions of mortal magicians. What mortals believe to be magic is actually manipulation of the Dream. If the fabric of reality is stretched too far, it will rip, creating an Enigma.

Magic creates an Enigma when rituals are performed regularly in one place for a very long time, when a particularly powerful spell is performed, or when something goes wrong causing a sufficiently powerful backlash of Essence.

Scientific experiments can also open holes in the Dream. These dangerous experiments tend to involve principles which define the limits of man's knowledge.

All Stalkers need to familiarize themselves with the principles which govern the Enigma so they can carry out their duty effectively.





• CORRUPTION

The Enigma twists the Dream, subverting the Vision of the Aesthetics. This subversion causes a gradual alteration of reality which manifests as inconsistencies called Anomalies. Most supernatural phenomenon are actually Anomalies.

Exaggeration and Simplification are common Anomalies. Under the influence of Corruption small things become tiny and large things become enormous. Guns get bigger, the night gets darker, and cities become labyrinthine.

Many Anomalies are simply inexplicable. A Corrupted area could be filled with a cloying fog or be haunted by ghostly lights. Strange is good; bizarre is better.

Corruption will worsen over time, causing the afflicted area to become increasingly unearthly. This process is fueled by mortal sorcery and the activities of the Unbidden, but it will advance more slowly in areas with large numbers of unenlightened mortals because their unwitting faith in the Dream will help maintain it.

When the Unbidden are involved, the Corruption will reflect their nature, recasting the Dream in their image. This can result in truly bizarre environments. This is where the gamemaster has the most freedom to experiment with truly horrific settings and situations.

Fortunately the Dream is alive, and the Flesh can recover from any wound. If the Stalkers can Mend the Enigma, the Corruption will gradually fade away over the course of the following year.

SHADOWLANDS

Corruption will not be tolerated indefinitely. Eventually the Dream will reject the Enigma, casting the afflicted area into the Rift between the Realms, creating a microcosm known as a Shadowland. When a Shadowland is formed everything in the affected region simply fades out of existence, and the Veil confounds the memories of those who would miss it. These mysterious disappearances were the inspiration for the legends of Atlantis and Avalon.

Geography: Shadowlands are worlds unto themselves that are no longer bound by the same rules as the Flesh. Save for their mortal origins, these regions resemble the Domains of the Stalkers. When designing Shadowlands, the gamemaster should let his imagination run wild. There is no reason to hold back; none of the old rules apply.

Touchstones: There is a tenuous connection between each Shadowland and the Flesh that spawned it. These connections manifest as physical objects called Touchstones that can be used to move between the Realms. A Touchstone can take any form, but its nature is only apparent to Sensitive characters. Anyone who recognizes a Touchstone for what it is can use it to create a portal to the associated Shadowland. There will always be an identical portal on the other side that serves as the gate back.

Denizens: Initially the Shadowland is populated by anyone who lived their entire life under the influence of the Enigma. Shadowlands are the only landmarks in the featureless void of the Rift so they will draw Shadows who will take up residence and may even become rulers of these otherworldly Realms. If the arrival of an Unbidden spirit was responsible for the Enigma it will be trapped in the Shadowland it inadvertently created. The new Realm becomes both refuge and prison where the prey may hide from the Stalkers for a time.

Mending the Enigma will destroy the Touchstones, severing any remaining ties with the Realm of Flesh. Sometimes this will also destroy the Shadowland, causing it to collapse. Stalkers exist to close the Enigma so they have little choice in the matter.





• TEMPORAL ISOLATION

As the Enigma Corrupts the Dream it creates an area which is neither Flesh nor Essence.

In practical terms this means that events that occur under the Enigma's influence are not part of the Dreaming so they are not protected by the Forbiddance and the Veil will conceal them from anyone free of the associated Corruption.

For instance, the Stalkers could find themselves fighting the Battle of Black Hawk Hill. You won't find a "Battle of Black Hawk Hill" in the history books because the Hill was Corrupted by a nearby Enigma so the Veil erased the battle from the Collective Consciousness.

This axiom makes it easier for the Stalkers to operate without interfering with the Dream, but it also gives the Unbidden more freedom to indulge their passions in the Corrupted area.

Temporal Isolation frees the players from having to dwell on the consequences of their every action during the Hunt's climax because this will usually occur in a Corrupted area where the Forbiddance is less likely to punish them for using their supernatural abilities.

The gamemasters should strive to give Corrupted areas a dreamlike feel that will convey the subtext that the Stalkers are no longer Hunting in the world we know but in a parallel world where anything is possible. This is a cue to the players that their characters can "cut loose" without fear of repercussions.





• FOCUS MANIFESTATION

Corruption will spread from the Enigma in a roughly circular area, but there will always be an epicenter where the Enigma takes physical form. This manifestation is known as the Focus.

The Focus can be just about anything but will usually be a naturally occurring substance or phenomenon that is somehow perverted by the Enigma such as a river that runs backwards or a man who cannot die.

Some Foci manifest as portable objects but the Stalkers are forbidden to carry them beyond the Corrupted area because they would be aiding the spread of the Corruption.

Only the Stalkers have the insight to locate the Focus. They will know the Corruption by the Anomalies. Once inside they can figure out where the epicenter is or they can "home in" by using Sensitivity to measure relative Essence levels. The second method is usually considered a last resort because it requires the repeated use of a Strenuous Skill.

Mortals caught in the Enigma's influence are Corrupted by it - any Anomalies they witness will seem normal to them so they won't know that anything is wrong.

The Unbidden have an innate affinity for the Enigma caused by their arrival, giving them an intuitive understanding of the Focus. They will seldom stray far from the Corruption because the influence of the Dream makes them uncomfortable so they tend to lair near the Focus which allows them to protect it from the Stalkers.

Awakened Shadows will be able to remember the Dream before the Corruption perverted it and will recognize the Enigma for what it is. These individuals can be useful allies unless they harbor sympathy for the plight of the Unbidden.

• SCRYING

There is a link between the Enigma and its cause that can provide the Stalkers with useful clues about its nature.

Examining the Focus is a Strenuous Action that requires a Sensitivity Challenge against a Difficulty determined by the extent of the Corruption.

If successful the information will come in the form of a vision that provides insight into the nature of the Enigma and its cause. If the Enigma was created by the arrival of the Unbidden it shows the enemy's current whereabouts.

The extent of the vision and the amount of information it provides is up to the gamemaster. The clues may be cryptic, but they are always true.

There is a special connection between the Unbidden and the Enigma so if the Stalkers examine the Focus for more than a moment the enemy will know it is being Hunted and will be able to flee or take precautions.

Scrying is often the most efficient way for the Stalkers to figure out how to Mend the Enigma. It is also a good way for the gamemaster to control the pacing of the Hunt. If the players are lost he can use this opportunity to get them back on track.

• MENDING THE ENIGMA

If the Enigma was caused by a unique event such as a laboratory accident or a powerful ritual, the Stalkers' job is simple. As soon as they find the Focus, they can try to shut it down. This is also true of "naturally occurring" Enigmas.

If the Enigma was caused by the arrival of the Unbidden the renegade must be Bound before Mending can be attempted.

If the Enigma was caused by an ongoing condition such as the operation of an experimental reactor or a madman's nightmares the trigger must be neutralized or the Enigma will eventually reopen.

To Mend the Enigma the Stalker has to touch the Focus physically and concentrate for several minutes to begin the process. Mending is a Strenuous Action - each attempt requires the sacrifice of a point of Vitality and a Challenge roll.

If successful, the Stalker will feel the wound begin to close as the Dream reasserts itself. If the Corruption is too serious to heal, the afflicted region will split off from the Dream and become a stable Shadowland with no Touchstone gateways to the Realm of Flesh.

As the Enigma shuts down the Corruption will begin to reverse itself. It takes a full year for the wound in the world to heal and some scars will always remain. Sensitive characters will feel a sharp pain if they stand where an active Focus once stood.

When the Enigma is closed the Hunt is over, and the Circle can call for a Navigator to take them home.





The creature emerged from the ruined Vessel, a tumble of engorged viscera that tore free with a mighty heave, a newborn abomination strewn across the tiled floor. Talon was upon it before most of use knew what was happening, ripping into the twitching mass with that spiked club he carries. Confident in his ability to keep the creature occupied I reached out with tendrils of Essence. Wrapping my desire around it was difficult at first but Talon's blows forced it into my grasp. Calling on the power of my Station I compelled the renegade to submit, forcing its considerable energies into the Orb.

BINDING THE UNBIDDEN

When the Stalkers Hunt a renegade Aesthetic, they have to Bind the creature before they can Mend the Enigma and complete the Hunt. Binding may only be attempted when the Vessel of the Unbidden has been destroyed, forcing the Avatar to manifest.

The act of Binding requires absolute concentration. No mortal effort comes close to the focus required for this feat. If not for the power inherent in the Stalker's Station, Binding an Aesthetic would be an impossible task.

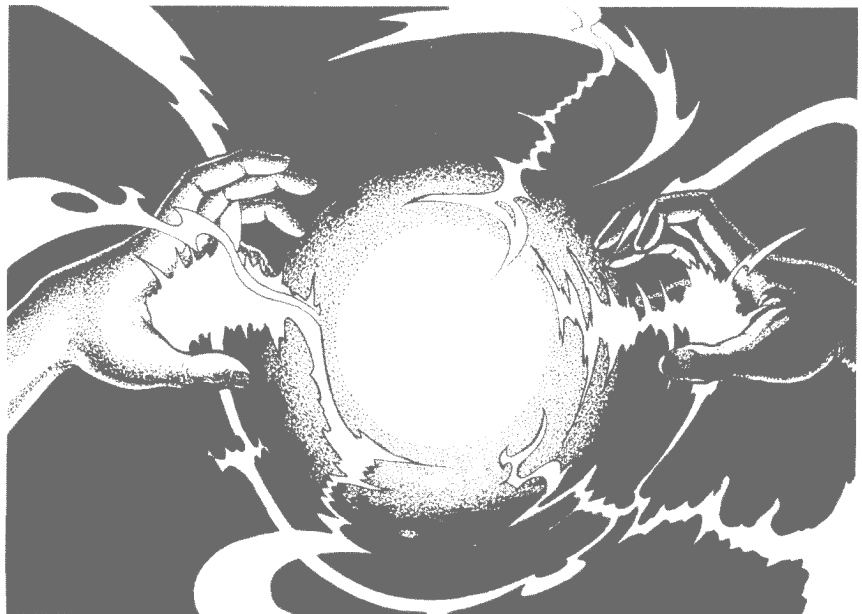
As the Aesthetic is Bound, the Avatar loses shape, collapsing into a glowing sphere whose size depends on the creature's power, ranging from a few inches to nearly a yard in diameter. This sphere is called the Radiant Orb.

The Radiant Orb has no physical mass. It can only be perceived by Sensitive characters and can only be moved through force of will. Any mortal who touches an Orb will be severely burned and risks possession by the spirit trapped within.

Stalkers may communicate with a Bound spirit by touching the Orb and spending a point of Karma. The prisoner is usually repentant, eager to beg its captors for mercy.

It is up to the Inquisitor to determine why the Aesthetic abandoned its post and in so doing betrayed the Primal Powers.

When the renegade Aesthetic has been Bound and questioned, it is up to the Circle to determine its fate. Passing judgement on the creator is no easy task, but it is a cross all Stalkers must bear.





There are several possibilities, but most of the time the Orb is carried with the Circle until the Enigma is Mended and the Navigator can be called to take them across the Rift to the Realm of Essence where the prisoner can be cast into the Vault.

• THE VAULT

All the Stalkers know about the Vault is how to find the entrance but even the most foolhardy dread going there. It is a dead place that reeks of corruption and madness.

When the Stalkers return to the Realm of Essence with a prisoner, they take it to the Black Abbott's Gate. The Gate is adorned with a thousand locks, but the Keys of Humanity will open any of them, revealing a seemingly bottomless pit. The Orb must be cast down, and the gate relocked quickly before any of the prisoners can find their way out.

A few spirits have learned to Whisper across the Veil from their prison. This ability is used to seduce mortal Sensitives, promising power in exchange for their freedom.

Releasing an imprisoned spirit is a task beyond the ability of most mortal magicians to complete in a single lifetime, but there are rituals known to certain Enlightened orders that allow mortals to "pick the lock."

The symbol of the Vault is the Sanguine Seal, a rune carved in the face of the Gate. (One version of the Seal is depicted on the cover of this book.) Escaped spirits will be repulsed by the Seal, avoiding all contact with it. A Seal carved by an Enlightened mortal Sensitive into a door has the power to reduce the prisoner's Fortitude by a point.

BANISHMENT

When a renegade is captured he is cast into the Vault to await the end of the current Cycle. This is the default sentence - other options should only be considered in extreme circumstances. For a creature that sought independence, imprisonment may be a punishment more cruel than death, but the crimes of the Unbidden warrant the sternest possible measures.

GREAT BINDING

Many forms of Binding are possible. The Radiant Orb is only a Transient Vessel that contains the spirit while another Vessel is prepared. Presumably this Vessel is provided as a component of the Final Binding that shackles the renegade to the Vault, but there are other possibilities. It is possible for the Stalkers to Bind the spirit contained in the Orb to any person, place, or thing, creating a servicable prison in the Realm of Flesh. This form of Binding is Strenuous and Difficult, but it is permanent unless someone with the Bind skill is able to extract the spirit and reverse the process.

BESTOWING MORTALITY

It is theoretically possible to transform a creature of Essence into a creature of the Flesh using a process similar to that used by the Weavers. This process is called Fleshing and is attempted so rarely that some Stalkers believe it to be a myth. The Ritual involves stripping the Aesthetic of most of its Essence and Binding it to a Vessel of Flesh. This is a Strenuous effort that costs a point of Vitality and requires a Binding Challenge against a Difficulty of 18. If the Ritual is successfully completed, the subject will be afflicted with mortality, but the Circle will lose half the Karma awarded for that Hunt. Mortal Aesthetics are always exceptional individuals and will retain their Sensitivity.

EXECUTION

For a creature of Essence there is no death as mortals understand it. An Aesthetic can only be killed if it is made mortal first by means of the Fleshing Ritual. Tradition requires each member of the Circle to strike his victim three times with a mortal weapon, focusing their combined will on its death. Revenge may be tempting but killing a Dreamer is tantamount to blasphemy. Only the most unrepentant foes whose acts have endangered the very fabric of the Dreaming are subjected to the finality of this sentence. This deed amounts to an intentional violation of the Forbiddance that costs each member of the Circle a point of Karma and all of the Karma they would have earned for that Hunt.





Surrounded by the masked dancers it suddenly occurred to me what a peculiar group we made. Fortunately the Veil was always there for us. It protected us as surely as it did those who would rather not see us as we truly are. We maneuvered through the crowd as quickly as we were able, and despite our sudden appearance, no notice was taken of their uninvited guests. Those few who remembered our visit would have difficulty recalling details and would eventually forget we were ever there. When we reached the master of the house, we revealed ourselves and made sure that he would never forget...

THE VEIL

The Dreaming shapes not only the Realm of Flesh but the minds of those who dwell there. The reshaping of mortal minds by the Living Dream is called the Veil.

The Veil warps mortal perception, forcing their thoughts to conform to the Dreaming. Under the Veil's comforting shroud, the supernatural seems mundane. If it were not for the Veil, the intrusion of the Unseen would be a constant threat to the sanctity of the Dream.

Creatures of Essence are not part of the Dream so they are not affected by the Veil and will always recognize one another for what they are. There are mortals who are Sensitive to the Unseen who can part the Veil, but they are rare, and their abilities unreliable.

• INSIGNIFICANCE

The Veil allows creatures of Essence to walk freely among mortals. This power is more like camouflage than true invisibility - those under its protection can be seen, but they will not be noticed.

Veiled creatures are perceived by mortal onlookers as a normal part of their environment so long as they do not draw attention to themselves. No one notices them because they look like they belong.

The influence of the Unseen causes subtle anomalies such as a "hot spots" or a "chill wind" that can only be detected by Sensitive characters. These clues can be used to Unveil creatures of Essence, but this requires considerable insight.





The Veil also confounds the memories of those subject to the Dreaming, obscuring insight with rationalizations. This principle makes it very difficult to alter the Dream. Even if a large number of people somehow realize the truth, they will eventually forget what they have learned.

It is more difficult to confound people who want to believe the unbelievable, but the Veil has found a way. Myths are the last resort of the irrational, creating a harmless explanation for the Unseen. Vampires, werewolves, angels, demons, devils, and ghosts are all creations of mortal minds unable to deal with the truth.

The Stalkers themselves may eventually become part of mortal mythology. If their actions during a Hunt are observed by enough people (and the Circle is spared by the Forbiddance), these actions could be subsumed into the folklore of the region making the characters legendary figures.

• THE MASK

Interacting with mortals forces creatures of Essence to abandon the camouflage of indifference and rely on the Mortal Mask to disguise their true nature.

When the Stalkers don the Mask they should describe how their characters appear to mortal observers. Technically, the Stalker has little or no control over the Mask the Veil gives them, but no one has better insight into a character than the player who created him.

When describing a Mask the players should try to reconcile the

Stalkers Avatar and Environment. They will still look like mortals, but they will no longer blend in.

Think of it this way; the Mask can disguise the Vessel but cannot conceal its nature. It is impossible for a creature of Essence to appear mundane. There will always be something unsettling about them.

A Stalker Hunting in the Dark Ages might appear as a grim swordsman or a leper but would never be a nondescript peasant. The Mask will incorporate as much of the Vessel as possible. (The best lies have some truth to them.)

If the characters do something to challenge the illusion of normalcy, mortal observers will have a chance to see through the Mask. This happens most often when they use their supernatural abilities in public.

Stalkers can avoid exposure by making a Mask Challenge. If this roll is failed, the Veil is pulled aside. In this instance the Veil is not subjective. If the Mask fails, it fails completely, and the character's Vessel is revealed for all to see.

• DROPPING THE VIEL

Stalkers may step through the Veil at will for as long as they like. Unveiling is an Insignificant Action that is not Strenuous and does not require a Challenge Roll.

When a Stalker chooses to Reveal his Vessel, the player should describe his characters sudden appearance which is usually accompanied by disturbances such as a rattle of chains or a gust of wind. In a movie this would be an elaborate special effects sequence. Try to give it the same attention.

Mortal onlookers who were not expecting creatures of Essence to appear will probably be Surprised, losing the initiative for a round or more.

The Veil cannot be restored until the Stalkers have dropped out of sight for several minutes. In any case those who have witnessed the Unveiling will be more resistant to the Veil and it's effects for several days.

• EVIDENCE OF THE UNSEEN

Direct observation is not the only thing the Veil has to contend with. There are many forms of evidence that must be confused and obscured. Fortunately Essence lacks physical substance so it cannot be recorded by mortal instruments such as cameras, making it difficult to document the intrusion of the Unseen.

Creatures of Essence who have wrapped themselves in Vessels of Flesh can be photographed, but the picture will only show the meat so they will not match eyewitness accounts. Film will only record indistinct phantoms which resemble the traditional ghost sighting.

Anyone who examines physical evidence of the Unseen will still be confounded by the Veil so the photographer will have trouble convincing anyone that the ghostly image is anything but a hoax or a flaw in the film. This is why there has never been widely accepted "proof" of the supernatural.

Even those who believe will probably misinterpret what they see, mistaking the blurred blob for a ghost or an extra-terrestrial.





Reason eclipsed by hatred, Eldred chased the creature out of the warehouse and into the street. Deaf to our Whispered warnings, he abandoned the Veil and revealed his Vessel to the Prey. He must have wanted the enemy to know what was coming. We tried to pull him back into the shadows, but it was too late. The Forbiddance was already upon him. Ignoring the Fever, he stumbled into the town square where a crowd had gathered to hear the Senator speak. Judgement struck swiftly with iron claws and fangs of jagged glass. With a stifled shriek, he vanished like a bad dream in the light of day. Eldred was dead, but the Dream was safe.

THE FORBIDDANCE

Everything we have ever been or ever will be is created by the contemplation of the Aesthetics. Those who live within the Dream are defined by it and cannot affect the outcome any more than a doomed character in a story may appeal his fate to the author.

The Unseen is another matter entirely. Creatures of Essence who enter the Realm of Flesh are able to tamper with the Dreaming. Fortunately, the Dream is more durable than the events of which it is composed. It is a living thing that adapts to any attempts to change the Vision of the Aesthetics.

Stalkers are empowered by the Primal Powers to enforce their will in the Realm of Flesh, but there are limits to their authority. These limitations are collectively

known as the Forbiddance. When a Stalker oversteps his bounds, the Forbiddance will ensure the safety of the Dream, punishing the renegade for his transgression.

The Forbiddance is one of the most potent tools available to the gamemaster. The implied threat of Primal Intercession will discourage the indiscriminate abuse of supernatural abilities and will help him keep boisterous players in line.

Every gamemaster will use the Forbiddance differently. If you want an "over the top" game with few restrictions, the Powers will turn a blind eye to all but the most flagrant offense, but if you prefer a more subtle approach, the Forbiddance will be a constant concern. Finding the right balance for your group will require some experimentation.





• **MANIFEST DESTINY**

The Dreaming encompasses the entire Chronosphere. There is no "present" from the Aesthetic point of view. Any attempt to alter the course of history or any action that will cause such a change to occur is strictly Forbidden.

Gamemasters should use this aspect of the Forbiddance to short circuit any time travel problems that may arise during play.

Obviously any interaction with mortal society will alter history in small ways, but the flexibility of the Living Dream can reconcile any minute changes that may occur. Only events that affect large numbers of people are protected.

• **INNOCENT BLOOD**

The Primal Powers will not allow their agents to interfere with the lives of mortals who have nothing to do with the Enigma.

If the Gamemaster feels the player characters are becoming too arbitrary about how they use their powers and who might be affected, the Forbiddance should be used to reign them back in.

Gamemasters can also use this axiom to prevent the Stalkers from doing anything he finds morally objectionable. The Whispering Vault is a horror game but the player characters are not evil and the players should be discouraged from having their characters commit evil acts.

Once the Forbiddance has been roused the extent of its reaction must be determined by the gamemaster. There are four distinct stages.

STAGE ONE : AVERSION

The mildest and most common manifestation of the Forbiddance is a dull ache in the fingertips that quickly spreads to the entire Vessel. Stalkers call this condition "the Fever" and fear its touch for it can lead to more serious intercession. The sensation is uncomfortable, but it causes no damage and has no effect on the character's abilities. At this level, the Forbiddance serves as a warning from the gamemaster to the players that they are about to try something they probably shouldn't.

STAGE TWO : TORMENT

If the Aversion is ignored or the transgression is so serious that no warning is possible, the Forbiddance will manifest as an intense burning sensation that causes the Stalker so much pain that the Difficulty of all Challenge rolls is increased by 2. The afflicted character is temporarily out of favor with the Primal Powers so he may not use any Karma points until the Torment subsides. If the offense was relatively inconsequential and the Stalker is quick to cease and desist, the burning sensation will fade within 1-6 rounds, but in more serious situations, the pain can linger for hours.

STAGE THREE : BACKLASH

In extreme circumstances, the Stalker's actions are so dangerous that they create a Backlash of energy that can injure or even kill him. Backlash will claim a point of Vitality every round until the Stalker relents. The visible effect can vary but is usually a nimbus of green flame that slowly consumes the Vessel causing the Keys to glow white-hot. Gamemasters should invoke Backlash when it is obvious that a Tormented Stalker understands why he is being punished but continues to defy the Forbiddance.

STAGE FOUR : INTERCESSION

When there is no other way to protect the Dreaming from the folly of a renegade Stalker the Powers will Intercede. Any action that would require Intercession is so serious that the character knows what he is doing, and the player should expect a reaction but he should still be given a chance to take it back. The first time a Stalker forces the Powers to Intercede, he will usually be spared. The Vessel will be destroyed in some suitably spectacular fashion, but the character's Avatar will be returned to his Domain. If the Powers have to intervene again, they will destroy the Stalker's Vessel and either consume the Avatar or cast it into the Vault. In either case, the Stalker is as good as dead, and the surviving members of his Circle are forbidden to speak his name.





VII : CAMPAIGNING

We struggled together against the corruption that threatens the world of our birth. Talon, Dawnsteel, the Grey Man, Lovely Anna, and many others have fallen since we began our crusade. Each life was readily sacrificed to the cause, and each sacrifice is a proud memory that burns bright in the memory of those who remain. I have heard of a technique which allows the Circle a collective incarnation where many become one, if only for an instant. To a Stalker, this would be the greatest gift of all.

The Whispering Vault was designed to be a “pick-up” game that can be learned quickly and played to a satisfactory conclusion in a single session, but some players will want to continue playing their Stalkers.

In a campaign environment, characters will gradually become more powerful and versatile as they explore the inner mysteries of the Unseen. There are two mechanisms for measuring this growth: Karma and Experience.

Karma measures the favor of the Primal Powers, and Experience is a gauge of how much the Stalker has learned during his travels. Karma is usually used to buy temporary advantages during game play; Experience is spent between games to buy permanent improvements.

An intriguing element of the campaign environment is customizing. During a one-shot, most players will stick to the material presented in this book, but during a campaign, there is plenty of time to devise special advantages and limitations for your characters.

Campaign characters should try not to think of their abilities as options chosen from a shopping list but as unique gifts that can be defined however they like. Campaigns work best if everybody contributes something, so the gamemaster should encourage the players to be creative.

The gamemaster can maintain consistency by requiring the players to write down how their abilities function. Game balance can be maintained by adding a limitation for every advantage added by the players.





AWARDING KARMA

Karma is a measure of the Stalker's favor with the Primal Powers he serves. If the Hunt is successful, he will be rewarded, but if he interferes with the cosmic laws he is supposed to protect, he will be punished. At the end of each Hunt, the gamemaster awards Karma based on the following criteria:

- **MENDING THE ENIGMA**

Mending the Enigma is worth 1 to 6 Karma depending on the difficulty of the Hunt. If the Circle met with little or no resistance, the Hunt is only worth 1 point; if the opposition was a good match for the Stalker, it is worth 2 or 3 points; if it was a real challenge, it is worth 4 or 5 points; and if the characters faced seemingly hopeless odds, the survivors earn 6 points.

- **FIGHTING THE UNSEEN**

Banishing or Destroying Minions is worth 1 to 3 Karma depending on how many creatures were encountered during the course of the Hunt and how dangerous they were. As a general rule, Minions that were neither numerous or particularly powerful are only worth 1 point, Minions who were either numerous or powerful are worth 2 points, and Minions who were both numerous and powerful are worth 3 points. If the Circle fails to deal with any of the Minions of the Unbidden, no points are awarded for those that were overcome.

- **FOLLOWING THE RULES**

Invoking the Forbiddance is a sign of dangerous incompetence and is considered a betrayal of the office. If a Stalker survives the experience, he receives no Karma for the entire adventure. Stalkers who adhere closely to the forms of their office should receive an extra point or two, but those who play fast and loose with the ritual dogma of the Primal Powers should receive a few points less than they had coming.

An average Hunt is worth 5 Karma, but a good Hunt that results in the capture of a dangerous foe could be worth twice as much. These points are normally spent during the course of the next adventure, but it is a good idea to hang on to a few in case the character gets into a tight spot somewhere down the road.

TRANSCENDING FLESH

It is theoretically possible for Stalkers to rise above their mortal origins and become true Aesthetics, contributing their voice to the chorus that shapes the world.

Ascension is accomplished one Key at a time. The first Key costs 5 Karma, the second costs 10, the third costs 15, the fourth costs 20, and the fifth and final Key costs 25 Karma (a total of 75 Karma).

As the spirit grows strong, the body grows weak. For every Key the Stalker removes, he gains a +1 Bonus to all Skills based on Awareness or Insight but loses a die from one of his Vessel's Physical Attributes.

Characters who set their sights on ascension must struggle to overcome the lingering shadows of mortality represented by their Keys. It is important that the gamemaster make this struggle a difficult one. In most cases the Stalker will come to realize that it is his humanity that makes him what he is and will abandon his quest.

It is possible to backslide and regain a Key that has been lost or to reclaim a Key intentionally. When this happens the Karma that was spent to "buy off" the Key is permanently lost, and if the character wants to rid himself of the Key, he must pay the price all over again.

If a Stalker successfully rids himself of all 5 Keys, he is no longer human and is no longer a player character. The character has achieved his goal, and his story is over.





AWARDING EXPERIENCE

Experience awards are based on roleplaying. To determine the base experience award for a single session, the gamemaster rates each player's performance in three categories on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 is Poor, 2 is Fair, 3 is Average, 4 is Good, and 5 is Excellent. The categories are:

- **PLAYING THE CHARACTER**

Did the player stay faithful to his character? A Stalker's Keys are a handy guide to his personality and should be used to judge the player's performance. Because this award should be based on consistency rather than flamboyance, the gamemaster should assign an average award for a couple of sessions until the character's personality and mannerisms are established.

- **PLAYING THE GENRE**

Did the character act like a Stalker? Players whose portrayal of their characters reinforce the horror genre should be rewarded, but if the character could be mistaken for a mortal, he has missed the point, and his award should reflect his performance. The gamemaster should look for menace in the character's interaction with mortals and authority in the face of the Unseen.

- **PLAYING ALONG**

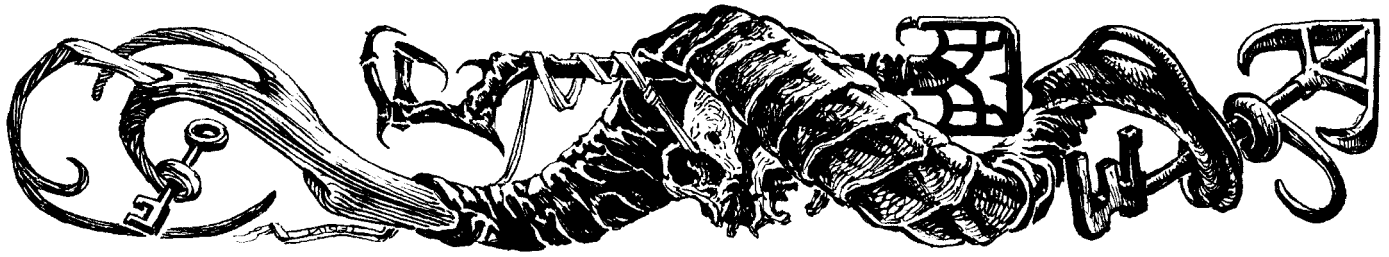
Did the player contribute to the success of the adventure? A roleplaying game is a team effort. If everyone cooperates, the session will go smoothly, and everyone will have a good time, but if the gamemaster is forced to spend most of his time keeping the players focused, the game play will get bogged down, and the story will suffer. Players who are on the ball and encourage others to participate should be rewarded, but those whose minds seem to be on something else should not profit from their indifference.

Most of the time a character will receive somewhere between 9 and 12 Experience Points for an average Hunt, which will allow the character to make minor improvements right away, but a significant change will probably take several adventures.

- **DISCRETIONARY AWARDS**

Additional Experience Points can be awarded by the gamemaster for achievements that deserve special recognition such as devising a clever plan, a particularly effective scene, or saving the day with the timely use of a Skill or Discipline. The gamemaster can make as many of these awards as he feels appropriate, but the total Experience from Discretionary Awards should never exceed a character's Base Award for that adventure.





USING EXPERIENCE

Accumulated Experience is spent to improve the character's abilities. Experience can only be spent while the Stalker is in the Realm of Essence, either before or after a Hunt but never during an adventure.

- Improving a Skill Bonus by a point costs twice as many points as the new value. (A character who wants to improve a bonus of +3 to +4 would have to spend 8 points.) A Skill Bonus may only be improved a point at a time and must be used successfully at least once before it is improved again.
- Learning a New Discipline costs 3 times as many points as the number of Disciplines the character already knows. (A character who knows 5 Disciplines would have to spend 15 points to learn a new one.)
- Mastering a Discipline costs 15 points. To Master a Discipline learned after the character was created, the Stalker needs to use it successfully during two consecutive hunts.
- Acquiring a New Servitor costs 4 times as many points as the number of Servitors the character already has. (A character who has 6 Servitors would have to spend 24 points to acquire a new one.)
- Mastering a Servitor costs 10 points. To Master a Servitor acquired after the character was created, the Stalker needs to successfully summon it at least three times.
- Increasing Vitality by a point costs a number of points equal to the new value. (A character who wants to improve his Vitality of 12 to 13 would have to spend 13 points.) The maximum Vitality for a Stalker is three times the character's Willpower.

It is possible to improve the Avatar Attributes, but this is very difficult and should be very expensive. The exact cost is left to the gamemaster's discretion, but it should be between 5 and 10 times the new value.





As a mortal, I had a family but nothing like the Circle. Your relatives are an accident of Flesh, but Stalkers are bound by common purpose. My relationship with my fellow Stalkers is like friendship, but it transcends the limitations of time and the vagueries of emotion. So powerful is this kinship that there are times when we are actually able to act as one. I have shared the blood of my Vessel with my brothers and sisters, I have crawled inside their flesh to hide from our enemies, and I have seen your world through their eyes. There was a time when I was uncomfortable with the intimate bond, but now I am lost without it.

GROUP POWERS

So far we have only dealt with personal power, but a Circle is much more than the sum of its parts. Experienced Circles will eventually develop special abilities that may be used by all of the Stalkers in the Circle. These abilities are called Group Powers.

If you are playing a one-shot Hunt and you want to give Group Powers a try, let the players pick two or three of the Powers from the following section. Group Powers make a Circle much stronger so they can be a useful tool for keeping beginning players alive.

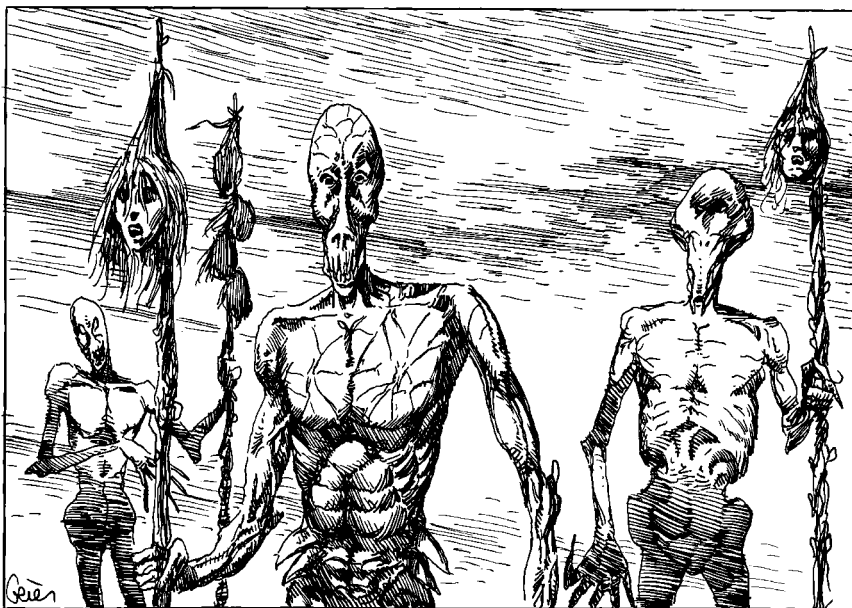
If you are playing a Campaign, there are stringent requirements that must be met. First off, Group Powers may only be purchased after the Circle has gone on at least three successful Hunts together.

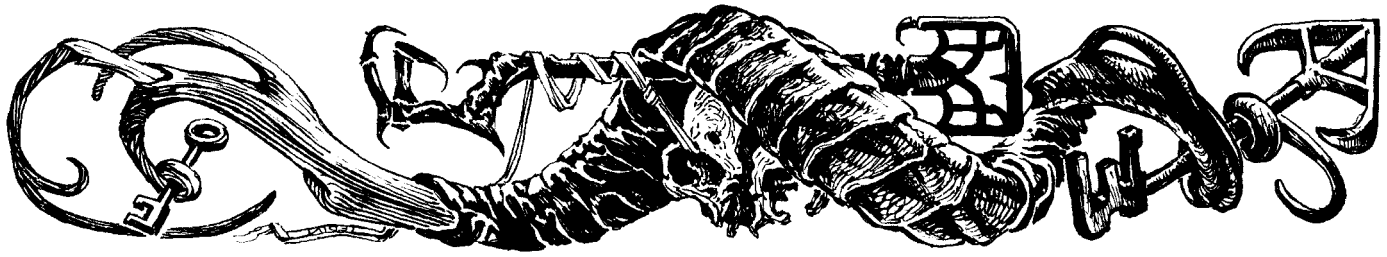
Second, the Circle may only buy one Power at a time and may only do so after a successful Hunt that has earned the favor of the Primal Powers. It is up to the GM to decide if a Hunt qualifies, but any Hunt where most of the Stalkers earn more than 7 Karma should do the trick.

Buying a new Group Power costs each member of the Circle 5 points of Karma

These restrictions are intended to make Group Powers hard to get. This makes them good benchmarks to measure the success of your Circle.

If the Stalkers do spectacularly well on a Hunt, the Primal Powers can reward them with a free Group Power. This should be rare and a clear indication of their favor.





BLOOD BOND

The vulnerability of the Vessel is a constant concern to the Circle during the Hunt. This Power strengthens the Circle by allowing the Stalkers to share their Vitality with one another. Using the Bond requires physical contact and a round for every point of Vitality the donor intends to transfer. Sharing Vitality is a Strenuous action so the donor loses a point of Vitality in addition to the points that were transferred. Unfortunately, the Blood Bond can be a double-edged sword. If one of the Stalkers dies, the rest of the Circle loses a point of Vitality and are stunned for a round. Stunned Stalkers may defend themselves normally but may not initiate any actions.

CALLING CIRCLE

When Stalkers Evoke their Servitors, they call across the Rift. This Power allows the Circle to exploit the fact that several voices can call more loudly than one. If two or more Stalkers in a Circle with this Power have the same Servitor, they can all make an Evocation roll to call it. All of the normal rules and restrictions regarding Evocation apply and all of the Stalkers involved in the attempt must spend a Significant Action to do it, but only one needs to spend Vitality. This Power is particularly useful when one of the Stalkers participating in the Evocation has Mastery over the Servitor they are trying to call because he can use the best roll, and if he is successful, no Vitality is lost.

CLOSED CIRCUIT

This Power allows the Circle to combine their Rend attacks into a single blast. The Stalkers who intend to combine their attacks must all have the Rend Discipline and must be able to see one another (unless they are using the Shared Perception Power). To determine the damage of the combined attack, add the Willpower Attributes of the participants. (The bonuses for Rend and Master level Rend do not add to this total.) The character with the highest Willpower makes the Attack Challenge even if he is not the best choice for the job. The combined attack will emanate from his Vessel and may take any form he likes so long as it is obviously powerful and supernatural.





We locked hands and fell into a mutual trance that closed off our physical senses to enhance our empathic abilities. I could feel the presence of my companions and surrendered to them, losing myself in the desire of the Circle. I could feel my Vessel softening around me as our bodies were drawn together by the force of our combined will. Once the process was underway, I gave into temptation and opened my remaining eye. What I saw was an unlikely juggernaut of Flesh that resembled a jumble of mismatched limbs braided into a vaguely humanoid shape. Grotesque but effective...

FRIGHTFUL UNITY

This Power allows the Stalkers to fuse their Vessels, creating a powerful but irreversible physical gestalt. Achieving Unity requires physical contact for 1-6 rounds. The Attributes of the Fused Vessel are determined by the Attributes of the individual Vessels of which it is composed. Use the best Dexterity, combine the two best Fortitude scores, the three highest Strength scores and total the Vitality scores of all of the Fused Vessels. If the Vitality of the fused Vessel is reduced to 0, it is destroyed, and the Circle is slain. Like the Shared Vessel, only one character can be dominant at any given time and only that character can initiate actions or use his Skill Bonuses.

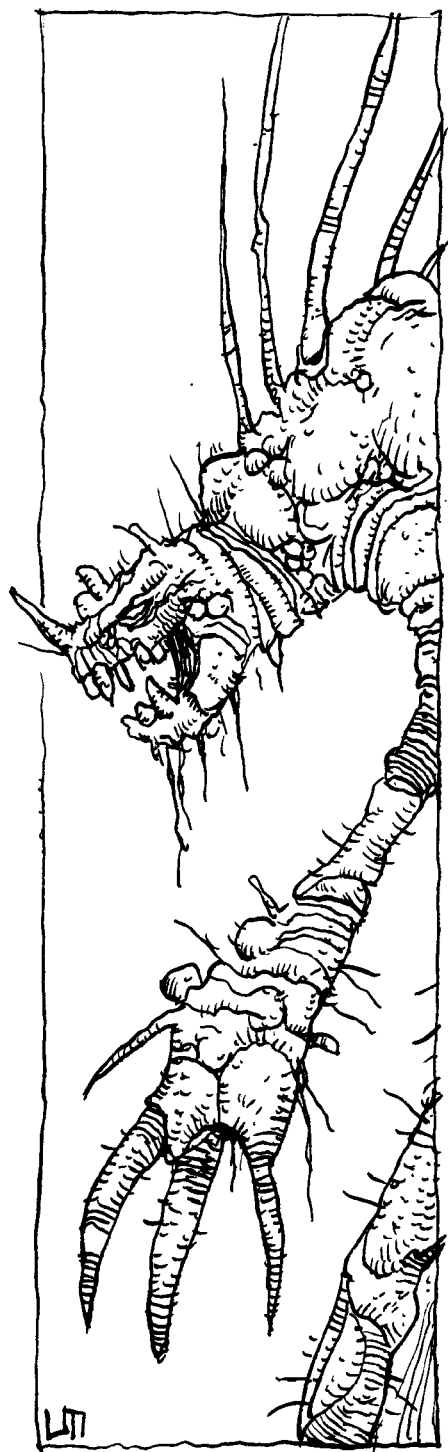
HELPING HAND

In many ways the archetypal Group Power, Helping Hand allows up to four Stalkers to combine their efforts to complete any given task. Any member of the Circle can give any other a +1 bonus to any Challenge by spending a Complex Action to support his effort. Up to three Stalkers can assist a fourth, providing a maximum bonus of +3. The Stalkers using this power must be able to see the character they are trying to assist (unless they are using the Shared Perception power). This power is often used for Banishing, Binding, Evocation, and Mending Challenges. It is particularly effective in combination with Frightful Unity because it allows the Circle to help the dominant Stalker.

KARMA POOL

Karma represents the favor of the Primal Powers. Normally, Stalkers earn favor as individuals, but successful Circles can earn more favor as a group. In game terms, this gives the entire Circle a Karma Attribute that all of its members may use. They still earn Karma individually, but at the end of a Hunt, they may contribute as much of their individual Karma as they like to the Pool. If every member of the Circle who participated in the Hunt contributes at least one point to the Pool, the Powers will award the Pool an additional point. Any member of the Circle may withdraw as much Karma from the Pool as they like at any time so long as no one who contributed to the Pool objects.





SHARED PERCEPTION

This power allows the Stalkers to share their experiences, seeing simultaneously through the senses of every Stalker in the Circle who is also using the power. It is not necessary for every member of the Circle to share their perceptions, but when the power is called upon the players must specify which Stalkers are sharing and with whom. The experience of sharing is very distracting, giving the Stalkers a -2 penalty to all Challenge rolls. This penalty is reduced to -1 during any round a Stalker spends his Insignificant Action adjusting to the sensation. This power is often used as a scouting tool and can come in handy if the group has to split up.

SHARED VESSEL

This Power allows any Stalker in the Circle to abandon a damaged Vessel by transferring his Avatar to the Vessel of one of his comrades. Transference requires physical contact, a point of Karma, and three minutes of intense concentration. When it is over, the abandoned Vessel will shrivel, turning to dust in 1-6 rounds. While two or more Stalkers share a single Vessel, they may initiate telepathic communication with one another whenever they like but only one may be dominant at any given time. It is the dominant Stalker that controls the Vessel's actions; the others cannot even watch unless they also have the Shared Perception Power.

VITAL TRIBUTE

Karma is one of the Stalker's most valuable resources. Unfortunately, it can be rather scarce, particularly if the character is trying to save his points. This power allows the Circle to offer the mortal blood of their Vessels in exchange for the favor of the Primal Powers, trading Vitality for Karma. The first time the Circle offers tribute during a given Hunt, a point of Karma costs 1 point of Vitality. The second time, a point of Karma costs 2 Vitality, the third time, it costs 3 and so on. Offering Tribute does not require an Action, so the power can be used at any time. The Karma earned through the use of this power cannot be saved; it must be used immediately, or it is lost.





WATCHERS

When they cross the Rift, the Unbidden can travel to any time or place they choose, but there are some places and some periods in history which seem to invite the intrusion of the Unseen.

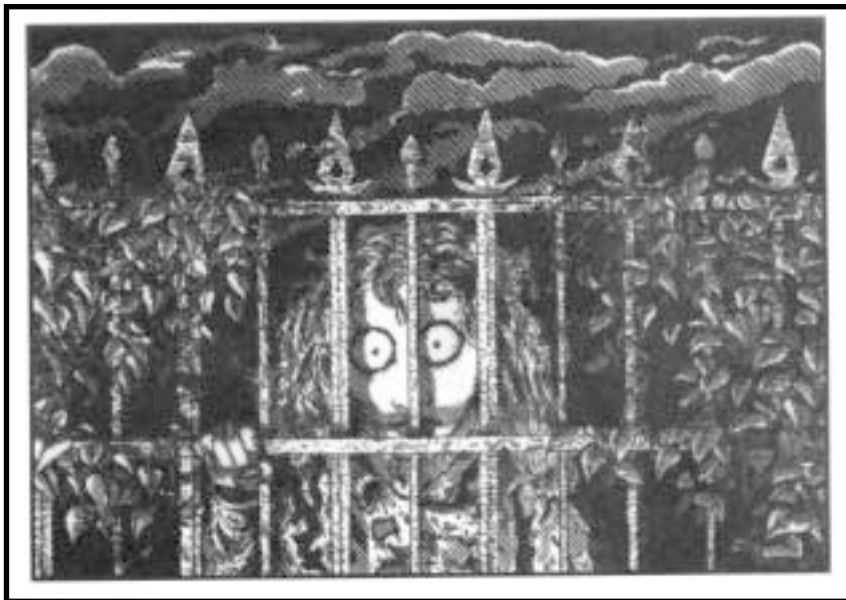
Some of these "hot spots" pose such a threat to the Dreaming that the Powers assign a Circle of Stalkers to return to the Realm of Flesh, living among Mortals as Watchers.

The relative stability of the Watcher Circle makes it an ideal campaign setting. Instead of changing setting every episode, the Watchers establish themselves as a presence in a fixed area and struggle for the well-being of the people who live there.

Watchers can still go on Hunts which span the Chronosphere, but these adventures are the exception rather than the rule, and there is always somewhere familiar to come home to when the Hunt is over.

Setting up a Watcher Campaign requires a little more work than putting together a Circle. Like any campaign environment, it works best if the Gamemaster has done enough preparation to know what is going on no matter where the players go or what their characters try to do.

Try to get your players' input before you start writing. Better yet, get everyone together and spend an evening setting up the campaign. If everyone contributes a few ideas they will have a vested interest in the environment which will make the entire campaign more engaging.



WHERE AND WHEN?

The most important thing is finding an environment that is comfortable for everyone. Try to avoid exotic settings that most of your players know nothing about. When you get a chance, take a trip to the local library and check out some reference books about your selection. Truth is often more interesting than fiction.

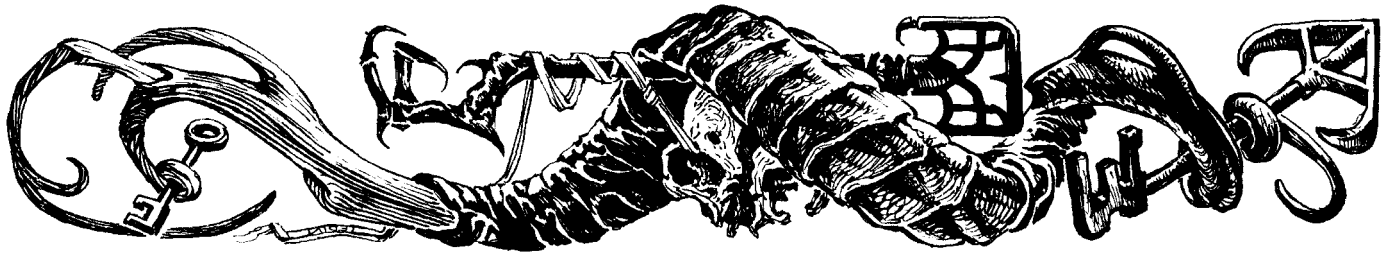
WHO ARE YOUR ALLIES?

Normally the Stalkers drift from Hunt to Hunt taking whatever help presents itself. Watchers have the opportunity to establish a support structure of non-player characters who are sympathetic to their cause. Influential mortals can make the Stalker's job much easier. Not all of them will know what they are dealing with and may turn on the Circle when they discover what they believe to be the truth. There may also be some Awakened Shadows in the area who can do the Stalkers the occasional favor.

WHO ARE YOUR ENEMIES?

Many enemies will be of the one-shot "bad guy of the week" variety but a few will escape or even defeat the Stalkers which means they will be around for a rematch a couple episodes down the line. Not all of the Watchers' enemies have to be supernatural. They can be cultists, misguided witch-hunters, the church, or even the authorities. (Another "unfortunate accident?" Give me a break...)





• DESIGNING THE SANCTUM

Stalkers who are chosen to serve as Watchers in the Realm of Flesh live together in special lairs called Sanctums. It is up to the Circle to decide what the Sanctum is and what it looks like, but this will usually be suggested by the environment. This is another opportunity for the players to work together to create something new, so the gamemaster should milk it for all it is worth. Offer extra Karma for a map with a key describing all the special features such as trophy rooms and the like.

• ADDING ENHANCEMENTS

Sanctums are neither as comfortable or as well defended as the Domains. Some Circles spend a lot of time and effort trying to improve their Sanctum. These improvements are called Enhancements.

To purchase a new Enhancement, every member of the Circle has to spend Karma equal to the number of Enhancements the Sanctum already has, so the first Enhancement costs every member of the Circle 1 point, the second costs 2 points and so on. Karma is the only limit to the number of Enhancements that may be placed on a single Sanctum.

Like everything else in the game, this list only offers some examples to use as defaults. The gamemaster should encourage the players to come up with unique Enhancements to give their Sanctum character.

CLOAKED

It is possible to wrap the Veil more closely around the Sanctum, protecting it from the casual scrutiny of the unworthy.

Mortals who locate the Sanctum will forget they have seen it, and those who venture inside will forget the experience as soon as they leave unless they are Driven to remember.

Memories confounded by the Cloak will sometimes work their way into dreams, but they are usually disregarded by the Unenlightened.

Hypnosis can be used to help recall faded memories but the results are unreliable.

CONSCIOUS

Most Sanctums eventually develop self-awareness and an independent personality called a "Keeper" who can manifest as a ghostly apparition but may never leave the grounds.

The Keeper is "born" with Initiative, Perceive, and Resolve Attributes of 12, but these will improve as he matures.

Destroying the Sanctum is the only way to kill a Keeper.

The Rend Discipline can be purchased as an Enhancement under the Keeper's control allowing him to attack anyone who violates the Sanctum.

(Attack 12, 6D Damage)

ELUSIVE

An Elusive Sanctum is impossible for mortals to find unless they are Driven to do so, and even then, it will require days of searching.

To those confounded by this Enhancement the Sanctum becomes an architectural chameleon, blending easily with its surroundings.

If a mortal is shown the way to the Sanctum three times he is no longer subject to the effects of this Enhancement.

Shadows with a Perceive Attribute of 12 or less are vulnerable to this Enhancement until they are Awakened or Bound.

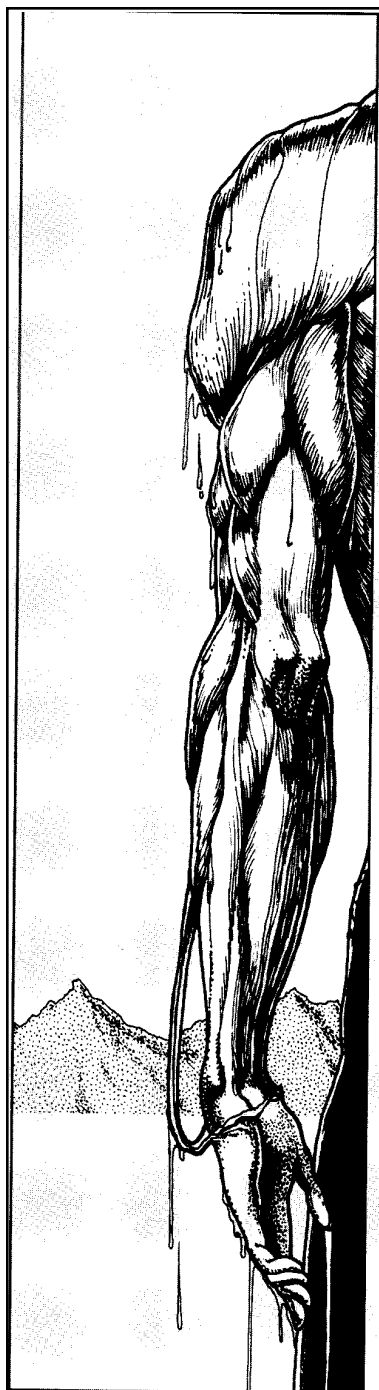
INFESTED

These Sanctums become Hives that generate manlike creatures called Drones who exist to tend to the mundane physical needs of their Masters.

While there is no limit to how many Drones the Sanctum can produce, they can never leave, and there will seldom be more than 2 for each of the Stalkers who lives there.

Drones are as fragile as they are mindless. They can carry out simple instructions but are incapable of independent thought. A single point of damage is enough to burst their empty Husks, killing them.





Despite its humble appearance the Olde Curiosity Shoppe was more secure than any mortal structure.

On several occasions, our enemies tried to gain entry and each time they were forced to abandon the attempt after hours of futile battering. They even tried explosives but to no avail.

Wood and glass may appear fragile but for those who can inspire the dreams of the Aesthetics, they are as strong as steel.

Only once did the Unbidden manage to stave in the door and catch us unawares.

Fortunately, the Keeper saw to it that we were not disturbed. We found the creature's shattered body later that day...

INVASIVE

The Sanctum is connected to the protected area by a series of portals which allow instantaneous transportation.

When the Enhancement is first purchased, the players must decide where the portals are, where they lead, what they look like, and how they are activated.

The Circle may construct a number of portals equal to the Willpower Attribute of the Stalker with the highest Insight.

The physical distance from the Sanctum to the terminus of the portal is unimportant so long as it is in the area under the Watchers' protection.

LINKED

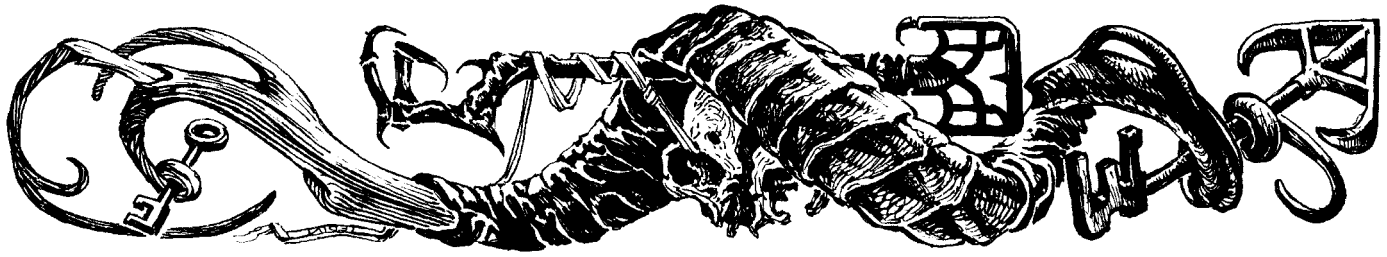
To return to the Realm of Essence, most Circles must summon a Navigator. This Enhancement provides the only known alternative.

Somewhere in the Linked Sanctum is a Gateway that can only be opened by the Keys of Humanity. This Gate leads directly to the Crossroads.

Stalkers with access to a Linked Gateway need not bother with the Barrier or the Guardian, greatly facilitating travel between the Realms.

Be warned: if the enemy finds out the Circle has a Gate he will be looking for a Key.





LABYRINTHINE

The architecture of the Sanctum will confound the senses of Mortal intruders, causing them to become hopelessly lost in its twisted bowels.

Mortals who become lost in the Labyrinth may only find their way out if they are Driven to do so and even then it will take them several hours.

The Circle must decide where the Labyrinth is, what it looks like, and how it may be overcome. It is best if the means to overcome the Labyrinth is something easy to remember so the Circle can provide their allies with a key if they so choose.

NURTURING

Critical for a Circle that intends to remain in the Realm of Flesh for an extended period of time, this Enhancement allows the Stalkers to regenerate.

For every hour spent in the heart of the Sanctum, the Stalker's Vessel will recover a point of Vitality. Damage to the other Attributes can be healed at the rate of one point a day but only when the Stalker has recovered all of his Vitality.

Mortals may also be healed, but the process makes them immune to the Sanctum's other Enhancements so most Stalkers are hesitant to use this power.

PERSISTENT

The presence of the Stalkers will eventually infuse the Sanctum with sufficient Essence to confer architectural immortality.

A Persistent Sanctum can be damaged, but it will always recover, regenerating the wounds like a living creature.

Reconstruction is automatic and seldom takes more than three days. The powers of the Unbidden cause damage which is harder to repair. These wounds can take years to overcome.

A useful side effect of this Enhancement is immunity to the ravages of time. (The affected structure will never deteriorate.)

TRANSCENDENT

Simply put, Transcendent Sanctums are bigger on the inside than they are on the outside. There is no set limit on how much extra room is available to the Circle, but there should be more than enough space for their needs.

The only restriction on layout and design is that the architecture of the additional interior be consistent with that of the actual structure.

For instance, a Victorian mansion can have stables or extra bedrooms, but the Stalkers cannot logically add a computer room or a bowling alley.

TRANSITORY

This Enhancement allows the Circle to move their Sanctum to a new building as often as once a week so long as a suitable structure can be found.

Moving the Sanctum costs every member of the Circle 1 Karma for every Enhancement on the Sanctum when it is moved (including this one).

If an Enhancement is not paid for by all the members of the Circle, it is lost forever.

When a Sanctum is moved none of its Enhancements will work until sunrise of the next day, and new Enhancements cannot be added for 6 months.

VENOMOUS

The Sanctum is hearth and home to the Circle but can be downright hostile to outsiders.

Any creature of Essence who tries to enter a Venomous Sanctum without the consent of the Circle will be afflicted with a blinding pain so intense that it reduces the creature's Initiative, Defend, Perceive, Resolve, and Attack Attributes by 2 points each.

If the intruder stays for more than two rounds the pain will become deadly. Starting the third round, the creature loses 1 point of Vitality a round until they leave the premises.





VIII : THE UNBIDDEN

Despite a challenging hunt, we finally tracked the prey to its lair. Sensing our approach, it knew judgement was at hand and tried to flee. The techniques I had learned from the Powers were still untried, but the Essence came easily, flowing along my arm like an electrical charge. At my unspoken command, a chain burst from my palm and struck the renegade in the back, lodging deep between the third and fourth vertebrae. A twist, a shriek, and another lost soul was made ready for the Vault...

In the beginning, the Realm of Flesh lacks form or substance. Out of the featureless void come immortal beings called the Primal Powers, who are the sole survivors of the apocalypse that ended the last Cycle. It is the Primal Powers who eventually rebuild the Flesh through intermediaries called Aesthetics.

Aesthetics have the ability to mold the Realm of Flesh with their thoughts allowing them to shape reality by entering a dreamlike trance. The collective contemplation of countless hosts of these creatures created our world and everything in it.

Unfortunately, this power is not without its price. Some Aesthetics develop an unnatural lust for the world they helped create and abandon their sacred duty to indulge their passions. These renegades are the Unbidden.

• LIFE CYCLE

The Unbidden experience a peculiar life cycle during their intrusion into the Realm of Flesh. This gradual evolution provides the Stalkers with valuable insights into the motivations of the enemy.

The Beast

When he first arrives, the renegade is overwhelmed by hunger and must hunt to survive.

The Stranger

When his hunger is sated, the renegade is free to indulge the Passions that brought him to the Realm of Flesh in the first place.

The Architect

When he learns to look beyond his Passions, the renegade begins to develop long-term ambitions.





Each of these three stages is described in further detail in the following section. At each stage, the Unbidden will present a different kind of challenge.

The Attribute block for each stage includes values separated by a slash. The numbers to the left of the slash are the attributes that should be used when the creature is encountered in its Vessel; the numbers after the slash are used when the Vessel is destroyed, and the Avatar within is forced to manifest.

Below the Attribute block are two boxes which contain the creature's combat abilities. The top box lists the Vessels Attack Skill and Strength. The bottom box lists the Avatar's Attack Skill and Base Damage.

When introducing the Unbidden, decide which stage it has reached and use the listed Attributes as a starting point, modifying them as you see fit. For example, add a couple of points of Fortitude to create a tough opponent or a few points of Resolve to make him hard to Banish.

You may also want to give the Avatar multiple attacks. As a guideline lower the creature's Attack Skill by 2 points and Base Damage by 1 Die for 2 attacks, lower the Attack by 4 points and Damage by 2 Dice for 3 attacks and so on.

It is important that the gamemaster recognize this material is only a blueprint that he should use as a framework for his own creations. The Unbidden are more than stock monsters, they are individuals who can be fascinating opponents if they are given the attention they deserve.

AVERSIONS

For some reason, the Unbidden are attracted to most things of Flesh but are repulsed by others. The Enlightened call these irrational fears Aversions. Some Stalkers believe that Aversion has something to do with the post once held by the renegade Aesthetic. It may simply be that they are as flawed as mortals, but their flaws are inexplicable to us.

Aversion can take any form or intensity ranging from discomfort to paralyzing fear. Many renegads have an Aversion for the Keys of Humanity that causes them to recoil if the Stalkers present their symbol of office. Strangely, some of the most dangerous renegades have an Aversion to blood which forces them to satisfy their murderous desires with sterile precision.

FETISHES (LESSER PASSIONS)

The Unbidden are driven by their passions. Most powerful of these is their desire for Flesh itself, but they are also drawn to more esoteric things. The Enlightened call these "lesser passions" Fetishes. The prey will always have at least one Fetish, and by the time they reach the Architect stage, they will have acquired two or more. The first, however, will be the most compelling.

When assigning Fetishes, gamemasters can draw on the Seven Deadly Sins for inspiration. Gluttony is a common foible. Other Fetishes drive the creatures to collect or hoard certain things such as money, clocks, or even garbage. Many Beasts save parts of their victims as grisly trophies, decorating their lairs with bone mosaics, stacks of skulls, or curtains of dried flesh.

IDIOSYNCRACIES (THE FLAWED MASK)

No matter how long the Unbidden spend in the Realm of Flesh, they never fully adapt to our way of life. Even the oldest Architects will evidence the peculiar mannerisms that the Enlightened call Idiosyncracies. This strange behavior makes it difficult for the renegades to blend in with mortal society and will often lead the Stalkers to their prey.

Idiosyncracies often involve communication. Most of these are minor such as a lisp or the tendency to mispronounce certain words or letters, but some are more profound such as speaking in rhyme or refusing to speak at all. Other Idiosyncracies are behavioral. For example, all Beasts and most Strangers eat like animals, tearing at raw flesh with fingers and teeth.





THE BEAST

*From the shed came a noise
most unwholesome and a
flash of light that withered
our remaining resolve.*

*Abandoning mortal guise,
we forced our way into the
slaughterhouse and were
confronted by a creature
more Beast than man...*

This stage begins the moment the Aesthetic crosses the Rift and is defined by an overwhelming hunger that drives the creature to feed on the life force of mortal victims. Transition to the next stage is achieved when the creature learns to sate his hunger by drawing on ambient Essence which usually takes three to ten days but seldom more than a month.

• THE VESSEL

Newborn to the Flesh, the Beast has not the skill to create a Vessel or to choose its Host, so it must seize upon the first suitable victim it encounters. The creature has little time to make its selection but will usually be able to find an adult subject who is in good health.

At this stage, the process of inhabiting a human subject is a terminal violation that kills the victim and destroys his soul.

The Flesh is weak, but the energies of the Unbidden lend the Host body inhuman strength that is an adequate weapon against mortal prey on which it feeds.





• WITHERING

Mortal Flesh cannot bear the intrusion of Immortal Essence for long. The Beast burns bright, and its presence will gradually destroy the Host, causing the permanent loss of a point of Vitality every 1-6 days. This process is called the Withering and is unavoidable.

At first Withering resembles an illness that lends the Host a deathly pallor and a peculiar cast to the eyes. This telltale condition is sometimes called "the Ashen Mask" and is known to all Stalkers and a few Enlightened Mortals.

As the otherworldly energies of the Unbidden consume the Host, this condition will progress to an advanced stage that resembles leprosy. When the Host loses half of its original Vitality, flesh will peel and extremities will wither and die.

If Withering destroys the Host, the renegade will be forced to manifest its Avatar, triggering a brutal rampage that can end with its death. The rampaging Beast suffers the permanent loss of a point of Vitality every 1-6 hours until it literally starves to death.

• VAMPIRIC TOUCH

The Beast can draw the Essence from the Flesh of mortal man. Until it learns more subtle methods, this is the only way the creature can feed.

Physical contact with a mortal victim drains 1 point of Vitality every 3 rounds until the Beast is sated or the victim is killed. Any contact will do but most prefer to bite or kiss their victims. If contact is broken, the feeding is interrupted.

Human victims recover Vitality lost to this attack at the rate of one point for every three full days of uninterrupted bedrest. No trick of medical science can speed their recuperation, but the morale of the patient will have a profound effect. Those who are Driven will recover twice as fast, but those who have lost hope may never recover.

THE BEAST

Fortitude	3	/	8
Vitality	7	/	24
Initiative	10	/	16
Defend	11	/	15
Perceive	12	/	18
Resolve	15	/	23

Attack	11
Strength	4

Attack	17
Damage	7

Those who experience the touch of the Beast and survive the creature's hunger are often afflicted with sympathetic clairvoyance. When they dream, they will dream of the Beast. They can only be freed by the creature's death, but their visions can help the Stalkers track their prey.

• ALLIES

Deranged by the sudden dissipation of Essence, the Aesthetic is reduced to a cunning predator who prefers to hunt alone.

Toward the end of this stage, the hunger recedes, and the creature may decide to enlist others to help it gather food, but this is rare.

• PERSONALITY

The Beast is a desperate, savage creature. Unable to think clearly or communicate effectively, it is forced to rely on instinct alone. During this stage, the Unbidden only has one goal – to feed. Whatever passions drew it to the Flesh are surrendered to its unrelenting hunger.

It is Essence that feeds the Beast, but hunger deranges the senses and confounds reason, causing some to believe that it is the blood of the victim that satisfies. This gruesome behavior is responsible for the various misconceptions about vampirism that have endured through the ages.

After an initial feeding frenzy, the creature will be able to regain some of its faculties, but this respite is temporary. When the hunger comes again its reason slips away.

If the Host was particularly strong willed, the Beast will retain some of the memories of its victim. During these fleeting periods of lucidity, the personality of the deceased will influence the actions of his murderer. Confused by these persistent memories, the renegade may even forget who and what it is.

• AVATAR

The Avatar of the Beast will personify its hunger, resembling some sort of animal or monster. The gamemaster should try to come up with something truly shocking.





THE STRANGER

The desiccated remains of the mayor's body lie sprawled across the bathroom tile in a bloody heap, discarded by the Stranger in favor of a form less familiar to us. It was on the move again and all we had to go on was the desk calendar of the last victim.

When the hunger of the Beast is sated, the renegade regains its senses but is still unfamiliar with the world it has chosen. At this stage, the creature retains the ability to draw Essence from Flesh and gains the ability to transfer its Avatar to a new Vessel whenever it likes.

Transition to the next stage is achieved when the creature learns to interact with the new world with the perspective of an insider. Because of the uniquely alien outlook of the Aesthetics this can take decades. Many renegades never transcend to this stage.

• THE VESSEL

Taming the hunger of the Beast slows the deterioration of the Vessel. The Withering will still consume the flesh, but the Vessel only loses 1 point of Vitality every 1-6 weeks.

This process will force the Stranger to take a new Vessel from time to time, but he will have the luxury of choosing when and where he will do it and whose body he will take, a distinct improvement over the plight of the Beast.





• TRANSFERENCE

When he conquers the Beast, the renegade Aesthetic gains the ability to transfer his Avatar to a new Vessel at will, extending his lifespan indefinitely.

Transference requires extended physical contact during which the victim's Essence is consumed and replaced by the otherworldly consciousness of the Unbidden. This process takes 30 minutes of uninterrupted concentration.

Breaking the contact between the Stranger and his victim before the transfer is complete is usually disastrous for both parties. In most cases the Unbidden reverts to the Beast stage, and if its victim survives he loses his mind.

Once the transfer is complete the victim's spirit is destroyed, and the renegade steals his mortal shell. The abandoned Vessel will begin to decompose immediately, rotting away ten times faster than a mundane corpse.

• PUSHING

The Stranger can use the power inherent in his Essence to exceed the limitations of the Vessel. If he spends a point of Vitality he may use his Avatar's Initiative, Defend and Attack values for one round. In addition, the Vessel's Strength will be raised to 4 for that round.

When the need is great, the Stranger can drive himself even harder. If he spends a second point of Vitality, the Vessel's Strength will be increased to 5, and he will be able to make 2 unarmed attacks that round.

• ALLIES

The Stranger is unlikely to enlist mortal allies until it becomes comfortable with its new environment, but it gains the ability to Bind Shadows to its service as Minions.

Before he can create a Minion, the Stranger must locate a suitable Shadow which can be a tricky and time consuming business.

THE STRANGER

Fortitude	4	/	7
Vitality	11	/	21
Initiative	12	/	14
Defend	13	/	15
Perceive	15	/	16
Resolve	18	/	20

Attack	13
Strength	3

Attack	15
Damage	6

Binding a Shadow is surprisingly simple; all it requires is an act of will and three points of Vitality. One of the only limitations is that a Stranger may not Bind a Shadow that has a higher Resolve than it does.

At this stage, there are limits to how many Minions the Unbidden can maintain at any given time. For every Minion under the Stranger's control, lower the Vitality or Resolve of both the Host and the Avatar by 1 point. The lost point is regained 1-6 hours after the Minion is banished, destroyed, or released.

• PERSONALITY

Having conquered the savage madness of the Beast, the Stranger is free to pursue the Passions that drew him to the Flesh in the first place. In most cases, these passions are abhorrent to mortal society which forces the renegade to act in secret.

It is up to the gamemaster to define the Passions of the Unbidden. This concept has been left rather vague to allow each group to adapt it to suit their tastes. Obviously, an overwhelming desire for the Flesh can involve mature themes and imagery that aren't for everybody.

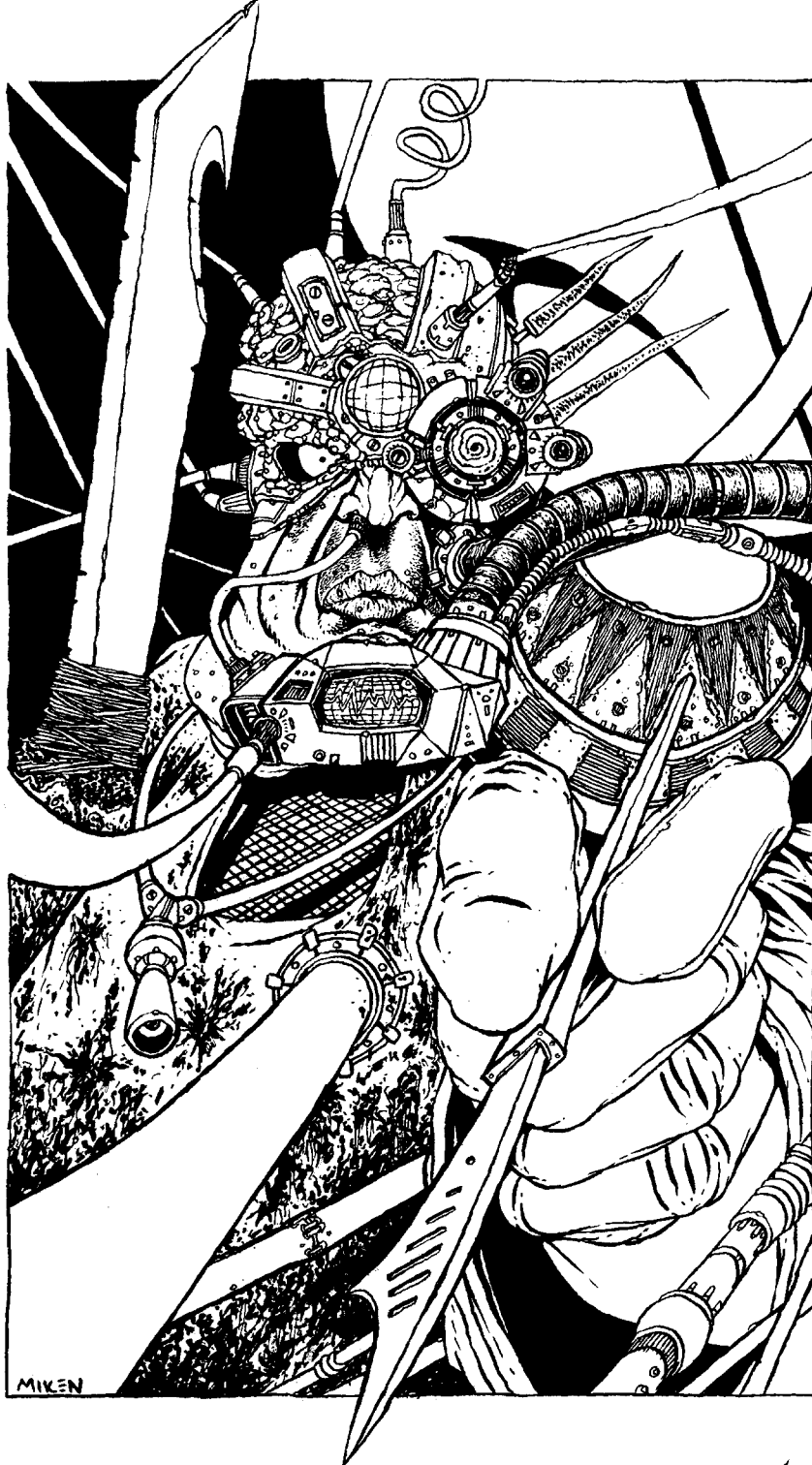
Remember that the Unbidden are inhuman creatures who have no empathy for our values. If the enemy is allowed to become too human, he will become sympathetic, and the duty of the Stalkers will become morally questionable.

Passions often involve violence, but bloodshed is seldom the focus. Having the Unbidden eat human Flesh is gory but uninspired. Having the creature vivisection its victims and reassemble them in strange new shapes is more in keeping with the spirit of the setting. Be creative – your players will thank you for it.

• AVATAR

The Stranger has abandoned the simple savagery of the Beast and has yet to assume the mortal point of reference, so his Avatar is truly bizarre. Gamemasters should struggle for an otherworldly feel by mingling living and unliving elements and incorporating sights, sounds, and smells that have little to do with conventional biology.





THE ARCHITECT

He waited for us like a mechanical spider in the web of glass and steel that had been its lair for more than six hundred years. The renegade knew we would come for him one day and was ready for us, but nothing could save him from the Vault.

The final stage in the evolution of the Unbidden is the transition from Stranger to Architect, which involves a shift in emphasis from single minded devotion to irrational desires to long-term goals.

The Stranger still considers itself a creature of Essence, but the Architect has embraced the Realm of Flesh as its home. It can take decades for the creature to obtain the insight necessary to complete its journey from Essence to Flesh.

• THE VESSEL

The Architect draws all the nourishment it needs from the Ambient Essence of the Realm of Flesh. This process fortifies the Vessel, halting the effects of the Withering and arresting the aging process. At this stage, the renegade is effectively immortal.

Having accepted the limitations inherent in physical existence the Architect can only move to a new Vessel if its current one is destroyed, but it can recover 3 points of Vitality for every ten minutes spent in recuperative meditation.





• THE LAIR

By this time, the creature has regained the Aesthetic's power over time and space allowing him to create a Domain of sorts by twisting the substance of the Dream into any shape he requires.

An Architect's Lair will always reflect the creature's personality. These are strange places devised to appease inhuman tastes. The gamemaster should make each Lair as bizarre as possible.

Initially, the Lair will be fairly small, such as an attic room or a woodland clearing, but over the years, it will grow like the Corruption to encompass much larger areas.

Dealing with an Architect in its lair is as difficult as it is dangerous. The gamemaster should devise unique powers the Architect can use when it is in its Sanctum.

For example, many Architects can manipulate the physical form of the Lair, changing its shape through sheer force of will. Others can Translocate from any room in the Lair to any other making it difficult to confront them.

Any of the powers normally granted by Servitors would be appropriate, but the Architect would be able to perform them at will without their assistance so long as he remained in his Lair.

• THE ENIGMA

The Unbidden have a primal connection to the Enigma created by their blasphemy but they are usually unaware of the bond until the final stage of their development. Once they realize what the Enigma is, they

will exploit it as best they can. For example, their Lairs are often constructed at the heart of the Corruption to take advantage of any Temporal Isolation that may exist.

Some Architects forge a Life Link which reinforces the bond between the Unbidden and the Enigma allowing the renegade to channel its power. Life Links are described in detail later in this chapter.

THE ARCHITECT

Fortitude	5	/	6
Vitality	15	/	18
Initiative	15	/	12
Defend	15	/	15
Perceive	18	/	14
Resolve	20	/	18

Attack	15
Strength	4

Attack	13
Damage	5

• ALLIES

Over the years, the Architect will develop an impressive network of allies, which will include many Minions and human thralls.

By this time, the renegade is able to Bind Minions without any of the penalties suffered as a Stranger. He can Bind as many Minions as he likes and may Bind any Shadow no matter what its Resolve.

Architects are very long lived and often have a lot of history

behind them, which makes them into legendary figures. It is not unusual for cults to evolve from these legends either with the Unbidden as leaders or the focus of various forms of worship.

• PERSONALITY

At the final stage of its development, the renegade has achieved what it set out to do when it abandoned its post. This success tends to make the Architect complaisant and overconfident.

Few Architects are content to simply retire. Most have grand ambitions that involve restructuring the Dream according to their Vision. Immortality allows them to move more slowly than mortals, devising schemes that can take centuries to unfold.

• AVATAR

Despite their considerable power, Architects have more to lose than ever before so they tend to develop an instinct for self-preservation that borders on cowardice. When they are forced to reveal their Avatar, they will often flee the fight, looking for a new Vessel as soon as they are able.

Though they could assume virtually any form, the Avatar of most Architects has a basically humanoid appearance which reflects their acceptance of the Flesh.

Many Architects have spent centuries in human form and are unused to the otherworldly power of the Avatar. For this reason, the Avatar of the Architect is weaker than at any other stage but is still more powerful than its Vessel.





SPECIAL ABILITIES

As Aesthetics, the Unbidden were an integral part of the mechanism of creation, a role that provides them with unparalleled insight into the inner workings of the Dream. With practice, this insight can be used to manipulate the Flesh, warping reality to suit their needs.

In time, the Unbidden will acquire supernatural abilities similar to the Stalkers' Disciplines. It is up to the gamemaster to decide how many special abilities the creature has had time to learn, but there are a few guidelines he can use to help him decide.

The Beast has not had time for anything but his hunger so he usually has none. Toward the end of the stage he may acquire 1, possibly 2, but this is rare.

The Stranger will usually have at least 1 special ability and will probably have 2 or 3. Toward the end of this stage, it can have as many as 4.

The Architect spends most of its time and effort gathering power, so it will have at least 3 special abilities and will eventually have 6 or more.

The six abilities that follow are the most common, but this is by no means a complete list. The GM should create at least 1 unique ability for every Unbidden he introduces. Unlike the new abilities for the Stalkers, the gamemaster is under no obligation to make new power descriptions available to the players.

CHAMELEON

This ability allows the prey to hide in plain sight by clouding the perceptions of those who see its Vessel. Only Sensitive characters with a Perceive Attribute of 15 or better have a chance to spot the concealed renegade. Stalkers are also affected by this ability. They can only see through the illusion if they make a Difficult Sensitivity Challenge. Once a mortal character has overcome this ability, it will not work on him until he has slept. Stalkers will be immune for the rest of the Hunt.

HEALER

The Minions of the Unbidden are often the creature's best defense so they must be carefully maintained. This ability allows the Master to heal the damaged Vessels of his Minions by infusing them with his Essence. Healing normally requires physical contact for one round at the end of which the Minion regains 5 points of Vitality for every 2 points the Master spends. Healing performed at a range is less efficient. The Minion must be within line of sight and will only regain 2 points for every point the Master spends.

PARASITE

This technique allows the Unbidden to heal itself by devouring the life force of its Minions. Normally, this ability requires physical contact for one round at the end of which the Master will regain 2 points of Vitality for every 5 points taken from the Minion. This ability can be used at a range, but it is less efficient. The Master must be able to see the Minion he intends to feed on and will regain 1 point for every 3 points taken. If this ability kills the Minion, its Master recovers an additional point of Vitality.

PUPPETMASTER

This ability allows the Unbidden to project his consciousness into the Vessel of one of his Minions by entering a meditative trance. This trance takes 1-6 rounds to initiate and can last up to 3 hours. While this ability is in effect, the Unbidden can see everything the Minion sees and controls the Minion's actions as if they were his own. The Unbidden loses a point of Vitality every time the Minion serving as host is wounded. If the Minion is killed while under its Master's control, the Unbidden loses 1-6 points of Vitality from the shock.





SHAPESHIFTER

Renegades with this ability can mold the substance of their Vessel. Minor changes such as face shifting or gender change cost a point of Vitality and last up to a day. Major changes such as assuming animal form cost 2 points of Vitality and last up to an hour. Massive changes such as turning into an inanimate object or a cloud of vapor only last a minute for every point of Vitality he spends. It is up to the gamemaster how much he will allow Shapeshifters to get away with but should try to create horrific effects.

SUMMONER

Once the Unbidden learns this ability, he may teleport one of his Minions to his side every round. Distance is not a factor, but the renegade must be able to see the creature or know exactly where it is. Summoning requires a Significant Action and a point of Vitality for each Minion called. Forced translocation will damage the Minion's Vessel, causing the loss of 1-6 points of Vitality. In addition, summoned Minions will be disoriented for 1-6 rounds during which they may defend themselves but may not initiate any actions.

WEAVER

The Minions of the Unbidden can be very useful tools, but the Forbiddance places rather severe limits on what they can do. This ability allows the Unbidden to weave shells of flesh over its Minions that will make them look sufficiently mundane to invoke the protection of the Veil. These shells are called Husks and are usually human but can take just about any form. Insignificance will allow the Minions to move freely among mortals, and the Mask will allow them to interact without attracting too much attention.





LIFE LINK

When an Aesthetic abandons his post, his absence creates a flaw in the Dream, which manifests as an Enigma. The Unbidden has a bond to the Enigma he created that grows stronger with time.

The Beast has no awareness of the Enigma. The Unbidden will usually be "born" near the Enigma it created but will have no idea what it is or what it represents so it will wander away.

The Stranger begins to feel drawn to the Enigma but has no conscious understanding of what it is. He will gravitate towards the area where the Enigma is located but will have no idea why.

The Architect will eventually sense his connection to the Enigma and will figure out what it is. This insight is one of the things that makes the Unbidden more dangerous at this stage than any other.

First off, the Architect will be able to exploit the protection the Corruption provides those normally subject to the Forbiddance. Knowing he will be safe if he can attain Temporal Isolation, he will work to rip the Enigma as wide as possible.

Worse yet the Unbidden can create a Life Link with the Enigma by touching it. If a Life Link exists, the Unbidden must be Bound before the Enigma can be Mended.

Once Linked, the Unbidden can draw on the power of the Enigma, which gives them several advantages. Architects with a Life Link to their Enigma are the most powerful creatures in the game and should only be tackled by experienced Circles.



- **IMPROVED VITALITY**

The Life Link will increase the Vitality of the Unbidden by 2 points for a weak Enigma, 4 points for an average Enigma, and 6 or more points for a particularly powerful Enigma. They gain half as many points if they are more than a mile from the Enigma but twice as many points if they stay within a hundred yards.

- **CUSTOM ANOMOLIES**

Normally, the Enigma rips at reality, twisting it at random. The Life Link allows the Unbidden to harness this phenomenon, creating custom Anomolies that suit his needs. This gives him the ability to alter reality by making subtle changes in various physical laws but is limited to the area protected by Temporal Isolation.

- **UNLIMITED MINIONS**

Once bolstered by the power of the Life Link, the Unbidden may Bind as many Minions as he likes. Not only that, if he stays within a hundred yards of the Enigma, the Link can be used as a barrier that will prevent slain Minions from Reawakening to exact vengeance on him if he spends 1-6 points of Vitality per Minion turned back.

- **REGENERATION**

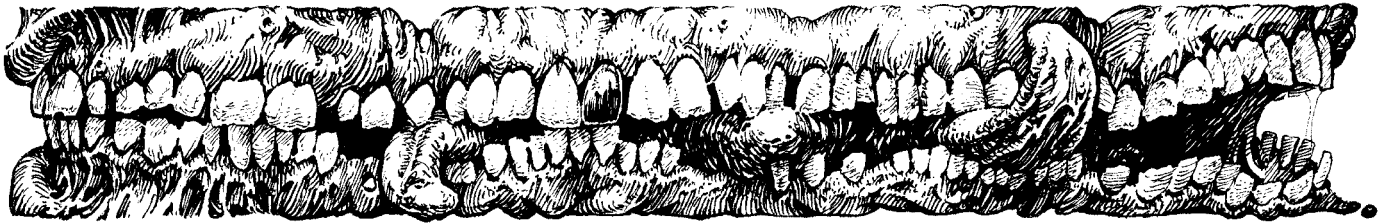
The Link allows the Unbidden to recover 1 point of Vitality every 10 minutes. If the renegade stays within a hundred yards of the Enigma, it can regenerate 1 point a round. If he is in physical contact with the Focus Manifestation, he may recover D6 points of Vitality, but if a 6 is rolled, there is a feedback, and the Unbidden loses 2D6 Vitality instead.





*Look for the
truth where
the dark
things dwell.
Look in the
closet.
Look under
the bed.
Nothing will
hurt you.
There is
nothing to
dread.
Only the light
that comes
from within.
You are alone
in the dark.
Alone with
your sins.*





IX : SHADOWS



Wading through the slime under an unfriendly sky tormented by the staccatto glimmer of tracers we had little choice but to trust our strange new guide. Despite her mundane appearance the Vietnamese girl was not what she pretended to be. Brushing up against her I noticed that her limbs had been sewn to her torso with barbed wire and something dark and wet glistened beneath. As we trudged after her she mused aloud, singing an odd little song that sounded like a lullaby gone horribly wrong...

Shadows are creatures who are not part of the intended Vision of the Aesthetics. Part Essence and part Flesh they exist in neither Realm but can be encountered in both. Only the Powers know for certain where the Shadows came from.

The Stalkers know the Realm of Flesh was created by the contemplation of the Aesthetics and they believe the Shadows are unintentional manifestations of their individual desires. According to this theory the world of men is the Dream and Shadows are Daydreams and Nightmares.

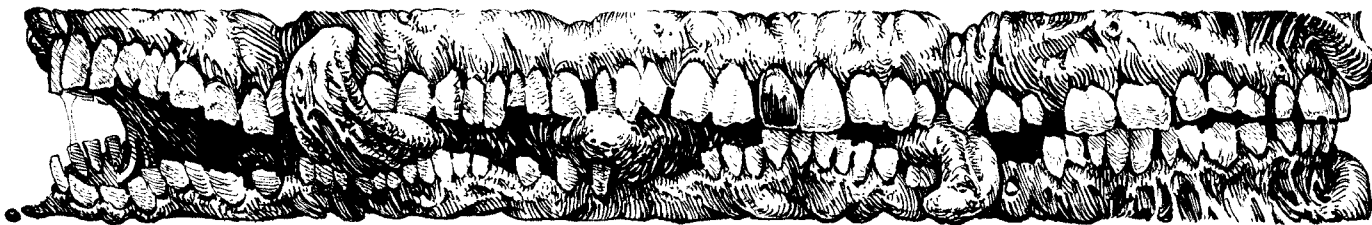
To mortal man Shadows are the stuff of legend. Angels, Demons, Ghosts and Vampires all are attempts to explain the existence of these supernatural creatures.

Shadows live in the featureless Neitherspace of the Rift between the Realms and are drawn to any signs of life. These creatures flock to any Shadowlands they encounter but most can only watch the Realm of Flesh, lurking invisibly at the fringes of the mortal world.

Unaffected by the vise of time that slowly crushes things of the Flesh Shadows are effectively immortal. Regrettably most Shadows have poor long term memory so they will not learn much despite centuries of observation.

Since all Shadows are Sensitive they can interact with one another, and most will recognize the authority of the Stalkers. Most Shadows encountered during the course of a Hunt will be completely neutral but a few will turn out to be useful allies.

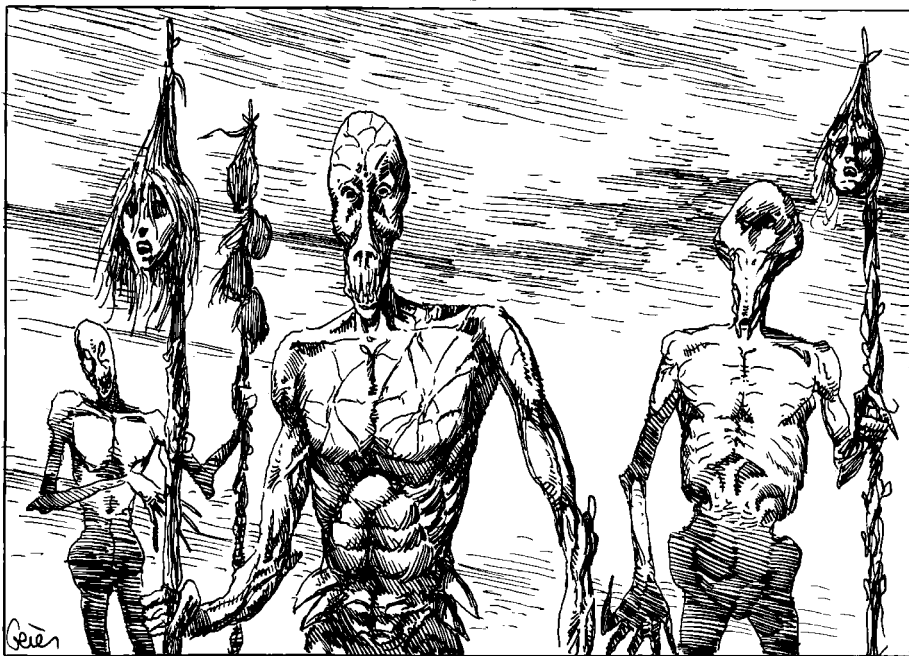




Creatures who spend their entire lives watching would seem to be ideal informants, but Shadows can be unreliable witnesses. Their otherworldly origins will taint their perceptions giving them an alien point of view that makes communication difficult.

It frustrates most Shadows that they can peer into the Realm of Flesh but they cannot interact with it. They tend to think of the Realm of Flesh as a world of wonders that have been denied them.

This frustration usually inspires a resentment of the Aesthetics and their Vision and will sometimes be extended to include the Stalkers, who they see as enforcers of the laws that made them outcasts.



BOUND SHADOWS: MINIONS OF THE UNBIDDEN

• AWAKENING

If a Shadow is given the proper motivation it can force its way into the Realm of Flesh. This process is called the Awakening, and those Shadows who have achieved physical expression are called the Awakened.

Different Shadows are Awakened by different stimuli and will have no idea what Awakening is or how to achieve it. When it happens it is almost always an accident.

Mortal magicians have learned some of these triggers and can Awaken certain breeds of Shadow; a dangerous endeavor to be sure.

Awakened Shadows can be almost as dangerous as the Unbidden; in some ways they are worse. Since they were unforeseen they are not subject to the Laws which empower the Stalkers, therefore they have few limitations.

Unable to reach back across the Rift for allies the Unbidden are forced to use Shadows. When the Unbidden Awaken and Bind Shadows they create the most powerful servants available to them in the Realm of Flesh. These creatures are called Minions.

Minions are another form of Awakened Shadow. The only difference is the nature of their Awakening. Normally, Shadows are Awakened by a desire for something of the Flesh (something they share with the Unbidden). Minions are Awakened by the will of their Unbidden master.

Minions no longer have desires of their own because Binding requires the subjugation of the Shadow's will. In a very real sense they exist to serve their master. When dealing with Minions loyalty is never an issue.

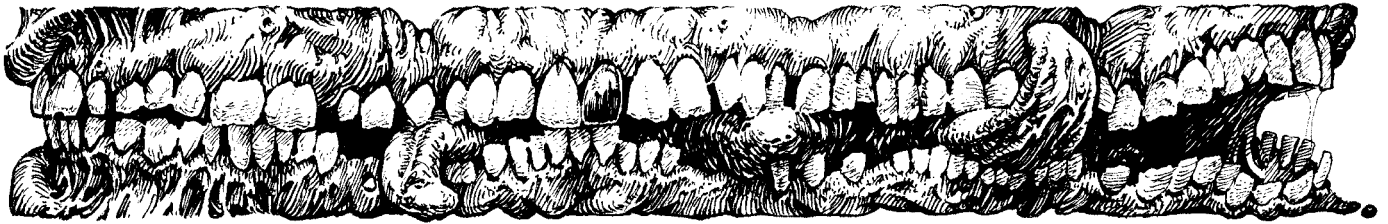
The only way to free a Minion is to destroy its Awakened form. This will force it back to Rift where it will revert to its original state. When freed some Minions will be so enraged by their ordeal that their desire for revenge will Awaken them, turning them against their former Master.

• HUSKS

Minions have monstrous forms that limit their usefulness to their Unbidden masters. The Unbidden can disguise their servants by encasing them in a shell of flesh that will cloak them in the Veil.

If a Minion wrapped in a Husk takes damage the Husk will burst and their true form will be revealed. This is usually a spectacular transformation that will terrify mortal onlookers.





DESIGNING SHADOWS

The basic game includes a few of the more common Shadows exploited by the Unbidden during their time in the Realm of Flesh, but there are countless possibilities.

After a few sessions enterprising gamemasters will probably want to design a few Minions of their own to spring on the players.

In general, the best advice is to look at what we did with the Shadows in the following section and try them out against your players. When you figure out what makes a Shadow tough and why, you will be ready to create your own.

• ASSIGNING ATTRIBUTES

Initiative, Defend, Perceive and Resolve are easy to figure out. These Attributes provide the Difficulty for any action the Stalkers take against them so assign them values based on the Difficulty table.

For example, if you want it to be Hard for the Stalkers to sneak past one of your Shadows give it a Perceive of 15. If you want it to be Easy to Banish, give it a Resolve of 10, and so on.

• FORTITUDE & VITALITY

These Attributes will determine how hard the Shadow is to defeat. When trying to figure out the appropriate value it helps to know the opposition's capabilities.

Characters whose focus is on Disciplines or Servitors will do 4 to 6 dice of Damage, but those

whose focus is combat can usually inflict 7 or 8 dice of Damage with a single attack.

You should base your estimates on these front line fighters. It is safe to assume that there will be at least two characters in any Circle who can inflict 28 points of damage on an average attack (8 Dice times 3.5, the average roll on a single die).

Once you know the damage caused by an average attack it is easy to estimate how much Vitality your creation will lose every time it is hit. For example, a Shadow with a Fortitude of 4 will take 7 points but a Shadow with a Fortitude of 8 will only take 3.

Now that you have an estimate of how much damage the creature will take from each attack, you will be able to determine how much Vitality you want the creature to have. For example, a Shadow with a Fortitude of 4 and a Vitality of 21 will only be able to withstand 3 attacks but a Shadow with a Fortitude of 8 and a Vitality of 21 will last for 7 rounds.

The goal is to assign the combination of Fortitude and Vitality that best suits the creature's intended function. If you are designing a race of Shadows that attack in large packs they should probably go down after taking a couple of solid hits, but a Shadow that usually fights alone should be able to take at least as many hits as there are Stalkers in the Circle.

• COMBAT

The Attack value will determine how hard it will be for the Stalkers to defend themselves from the creature's attacks. For the most part stay in the 10 to 15 range. Use the extremes for special effects, such as an unreliable attack that does truly impressive Damage but has a really low Attack value.

Many Shadows can make more than one attack a round. As a general rule, as you give a Shadow more attacks, reduce their damage. A Shadow that only has one attack should do respectable Damage, but a Shadow that can make 4 or more attacks should only do 2 or 3 dice with each one.

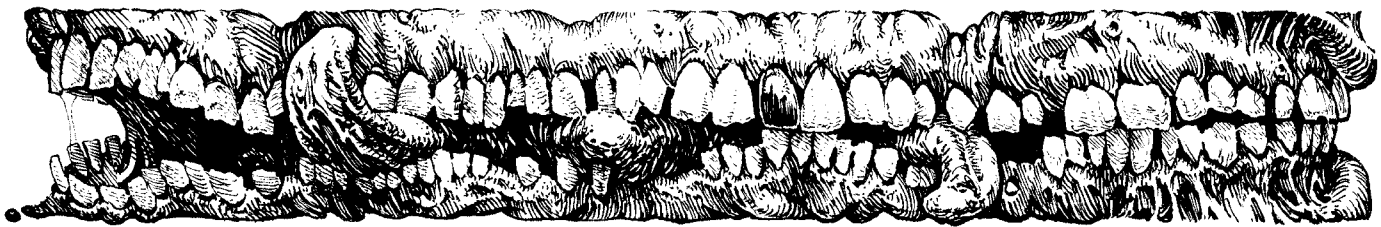
The Whispering Vault combat system was designed to be simple but flexible enough to accomodate any attack form. The down side is that a lot of attacks look and act the same. One way to give your Shadows more character is designing a special attack of some kind.

• SPECIAL ABILITIES

Another way to make a Minion interesting is creating a unique ability for it. The examples in this section have a wide variety of abilities that range from Armor and Camouflage to the ability to turn into water. Be creative, but make sure the Stalkers have a chance.

If you think a Special Ability may be too powerful give it a limitation or assign it a Vitality cost. This will keep the Shadow from using the Ability whenever it wants which will help you maintain game balance.





GAVANDHAR (BEHEMOTH)

Fortitude	30	Rare as an honest man these nightmares are drawn to the works of men but cannot abide their presence, seeking out desolate remains of lost civilizations where they can brood in solitude. They lair in the ruins of Greece and Rome, near the Egyptian
Vitality	12	
Initiative	8	
Defend	11	
Percieve	12	
Resolve	18	

pyramids and the monoliths of Easter Island. The influence of a Gavandhar's Shadow will inspire acute depression in weak-willed mortals that can be dangerous if they are left alone for too long.

Behemoths are seldom Awakened by anything but the direct influence of a mortal magician or one of the Unbidden. Those reborn to the Flesh become enormous creatures with thick grey hides covered in thousands of sickly pink tentacles that twitch like living hair.

If the Unbidden desire a Behemoth as a Minion they must seek one out, which is often more trouble than it is worth. Only Architects have the time and influence to consider such a venture.

Behemoths are best suited to a bear Husk but this is only useful in certain situations. They can be Bound in a human Husk but the process of compressing its considerable mass into such a small shell requires twenty-eight leather straps and the result is an obese figure that will only pass as human from a distance. Close scrutiny will automatically part the Veil, revealing the bulbous horror within.

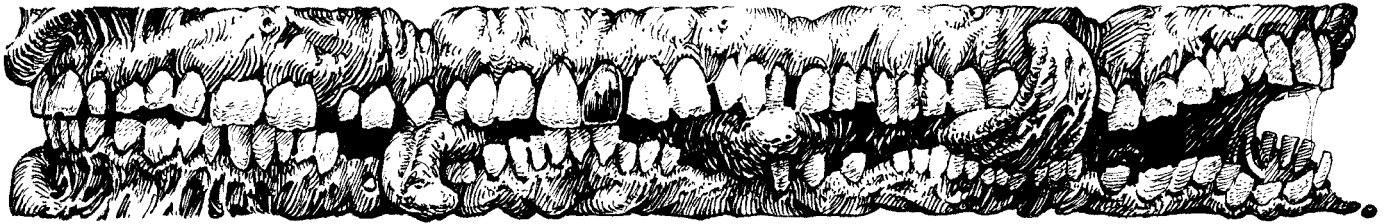
COMBAT: 3 Claws (Attack 15, 6D Damage each) Cannot attack an opponent with more than one claw in a single round, Invulnerable to Firearms (-1 Die Cap).

SPECIAL ABILITIES : Chameleon (May disguise itself as a large structure or menhir if it does not move. A successful Insight Challenge against a Difficulty of 12 by a Sensitive character will penetrate the illusion.)

VULNERABILITIES : Vampire Servitors can drink the Behemoth's blood (they drain an additional point of Vitality every time the creature is wounded).

Gamemasters can work a Behemoth into a Hunt if they want a tough fight, but they should only use more than one if they want the Stalkers to lose. Small Circles or those that lack powerful Warriors may have trouble defeating a single specimen unless they spend a lot of Karma.





ATHKAR (PHANTASM)

Fortitude	6
Vitality	10
Initiative	12
Defend	18
Percieve	14
Resolve	15

These foul creatures prey on the weak-willed, seeking out those with poor mental health. Some claim that they were actually created by the fevered nightmares of Sensitive mortals driven insane by what they have seen. So long as they are in the

area the victim's condition will gradually worsen, becoming incurable unless the Athkar can be driven off or the victim is Inspired to recover. Badly run mental institutions are often infested with these otherworldly predators, especially the "snake pits" of the late nineteenth century. The sterility of modern facilities keeps them in check but there is still the occasional intrusion.

If a Phantasm can actually drive its victim to commit suicide the experience will Awaken it. Having tasted death the creature will do anything to feel the sensation again. Smart enough to realize that they will be stopped if they draw too much attention to themselves they hunt carefully. When an Awakened Phantasm gets loose in an asylum there will be a rash of seemingly accidental deaths that will only end when the creature is killed or heads for greener pastures.

When they take physical form Phantasms resemble massive eels though their oddly segmented bodies are more worm than fish. They prefer aquatic environments such as sewers but can "swim" through the air for short periods of time by undulating their whiplike tails.

The relationship between the Athkar and the Unbidden is a strange one. The Athkar seem to consider the renegades potential prey and the Unbidden keep Awakened Phantasms as pets. It is believed that some of the Unbidden can see the illusions generated by these creatures and enjoy the hallucinations.

Weaving a Husk for one of these creatures is very difficult. It would fit into a large bird such as an eagle or vulture, but the tail will always be too long and the wings will seem too fragile to work properly.

COMBAT

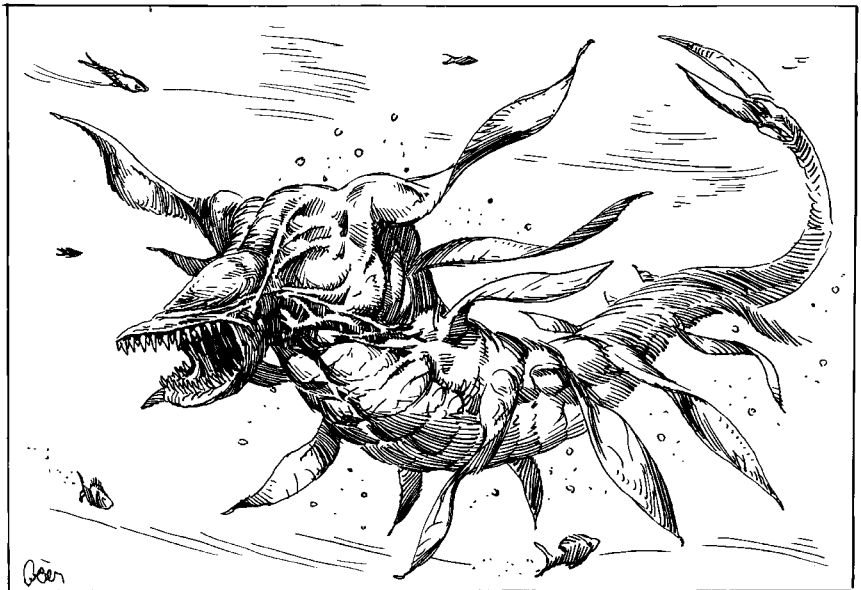
2 Pincers (Attack 14, 2D Damage each), Tail Lash (Attack 16, 4D Damage).

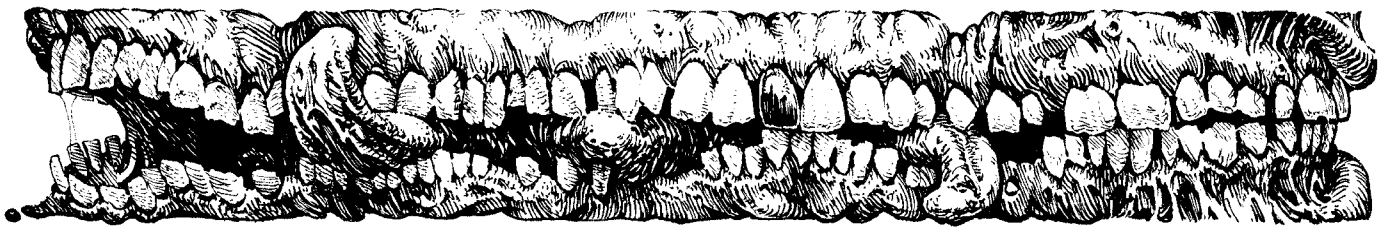
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Intangible and Invisible (Awakened Phantasms can pass through physical obstacles and only be seen by Sensitive characters); Can project illusions that paralyze mortal opponents with Resolves of 11 or less.

VULNERABILITIES

Illusions cannot affect those Inspired by their faith in science; Aversion to direct sunlight (Attack, Defend and Initiative reduced by 2 each, Percieve and Resolve Reduced by 3).





BAZRETH (BOGEY MEN)

Fortitude	5
Vitality	8
Initiative	15
Defend	15
Percieve	18
Resolve	13

Fairly common in small towns before the advent of television blunted the imagination of the young, the Bazreth are harmless unless provoked. They can be found hovering over sleeping children, fascinated by the dreams of innocence. Unfortunately, children are

often Sensitive, and though the creatures mean them no harm they can be seriously traumatized by the "monster under the bed" that their parents cannot see or understand. Fortunately the presence of an adult with a flashlight usually scares the Bogey Man away.

Some Bazreth become involved in the lives of the children whose dreams they watch. In time those Sensitive to the Unseen will befriend these sympathetic Shadows. When this happens a traumatic change in the child's life can sometimes trigger a response, Awakening the creature. Once roused a Bogey can be very dangerous. There are many stories of abused or murdered children avenged by their "invisible friends."

In the Flesh the Bazreth are little more than a fanged orifice surrounded by a cluster of mismatched eyes mounted on two powerful arms. They move with an awkward grace, making surprisingly agile leaps when necessary. These foul creatures emit a peculiar stench that can be easily recognized by anyone who has smelled it before. Only curdled milk can mask the reek. On the other hand, the disarmingly beautiful voices of the Bogey Men have a musical quality that has been described as angelic.

The Unbidden often use the Bazreth as sentries; they are easy to find in populated areas and tend to submit to Binding more readily than most Shadows.

Bound in a proper Husk the Bazreth can pass for large dogs or cats but there will always be strange lumps around the neck where the creature hides its extra eyes. They prefer a human Husk that allows them to pose as a child. Such children have strange eyes and an unsettling maturity. In Europe these creatures are sometimes mistaken for the changelings of legend.



COMBAT

2 Claws (Attack 10, 2D Damage each) Must attack the same opponent with both attacks; If both hit, automatically Bites for an additional 6D Damage.

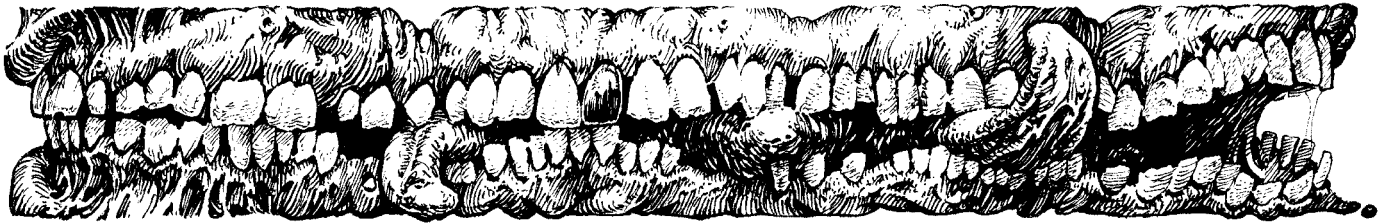
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Invulnerable to Frenzy and Rend (-1 to Die Cap against attacks using either of these Disciplines); Can flee combat by leaping up to 100 yards in any direction.

VULNERABILITIES

Will not attack a child; Enthralled by the laughter of children (will not initiate any action for 1-6 rounds after hearing it but may defend itself.)





RETHRETT (CAMERAMEN)

Fortitude	4
Vitality	16
Initiative	9
Defend	14
Percieve	18
Resolve	14

Aberrations of the communications age, the first of these bizarre entities appeared during the premiere broadcast of "Our Show of Shows," but they did not come into their own until the advent of satellite telecommunications. They can be found in any major market

during the modern era, and by the year 2000 there is one in nearly every home in North America and Japan. For some reason they are repulsed by the BBC and as a result they are very rare in Great Britain.

Sitting inside television sets the Rethrett spend most of their time watching the watchers, recording everything they see for a "report" to some imagined superior. Cameramen are Awakened when a viewer loses the ability to distinguish between reality and the phantoms flickering past on the face of the electronic basilisk.

Once Awakened the Rethrett changes shape continuously as it moves. They can take just about any form but will obviously be made of tubes and wires and will have at least three limbs. This shapeshifting ability is very useful to the Unbidden because they can be forced into nearly any Husk when they are Bound. No matter what shape they choose, their tubes and wires will be a dead giveaway to Sensitive characters, but the Veil will complete the disguise.

Cameramen have excellent perception and nearly perfect recall so they are often used as watchdogs or guardians. When the Hunt brings the Circle to the communications age the Stalkers can expect to encounter one or more of these creatures in the service of the enemy.

Cameramen are very shy until they feel safe with someone and are only dangerous if they feel threatened. Independent Rethrett can be useful informants for the Stalkers, but sometimes confuse the plots of their favorite shows with what they have actually seen. This can be entertaining but is usually annoying.

COMBAT

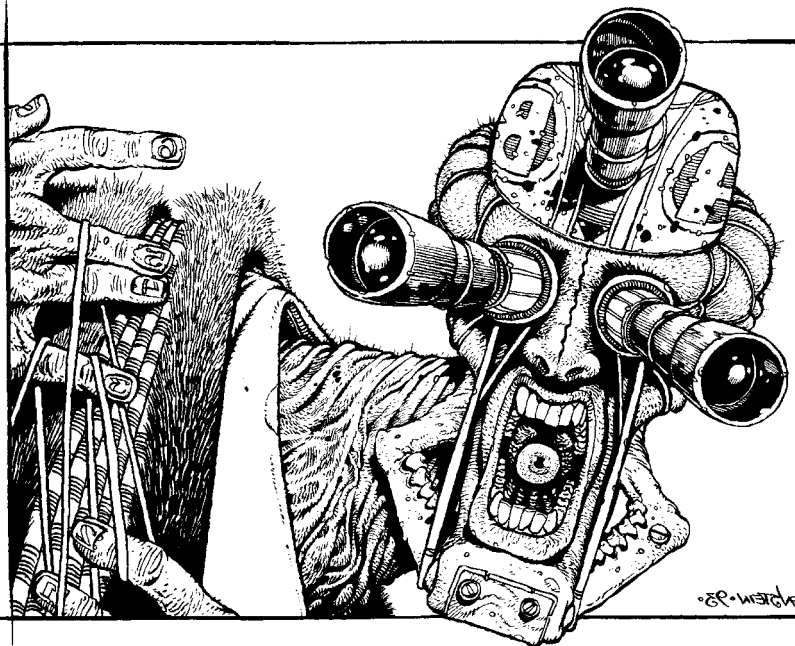
Wire Lash (Attack 15, 3D Damage) As Minions they use whatever attack is most appropriate to their Bound Form (Attack 12, 4D Damage).

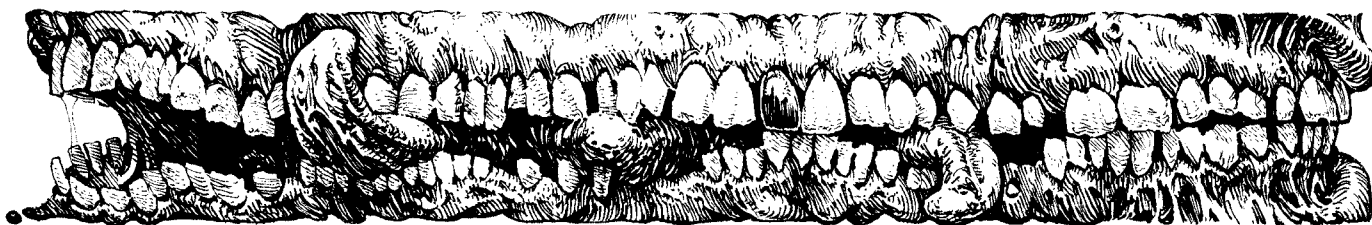
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Constant Shapeshifting (Disorients any mortal opponents with Resolves of 13 or less, reducing their Attack, Defend and Initiative scores by 3 points each.)

VULNERABILITIES

Water shorts them out, causing 2D Damage every round unless encased in an undamaged Husk.





GHANN GALOWEY (HANGMEN)

Fortitude	5
Vitality	15
Initiative	15
Defend	14
Percieve	15
Resolve	16

These creatures can usually be found lurking about graveyards near any large European city. A few "migrated" to the states around the turn of the century and have thrived in the american southwest. Hangmen can be Awakened by an offering of blood and silver. There are

also certain songs of Celtic origin that will draw the spirit of a Hangman into a murdered corpse. This is usually done deliberately as part of a ritual of vengeance, but one of these songs fell into common usage during the late 13th century resulting in a few unpleasant surprises.

When they are first Awakened these creatures have very little substance, making their fragile Vessels very weak. These Hangmen have Fortitude of 3, a Vitality of 9, and may only attack with their hook for 2D Damage. To realize their full potential they must bury themselves in a fresh grave, rising again on the third day with their full powers.

Flesh is repulsed by the foul Hangmen, leaving their Vessels gaunt and twisted. They must consume meat on a daily basis to keep their bodies from withering away. More hideous than the crawling of their skin is the hideous grin that is their only expression. They fight with a short hook in one hand and a length of rope in the other and can conjure either of these weapons at night by using an Insignificant Action.

Hangmen are erratic creatures, even for Shadows. There are two distinct aspects to their personality that vie for control. The dominant persona is usually a moron with a peculiar and often violent sense of humor. The second is always a humorless psychopath who takes control when there is killing to be done.

The Unbidden employ Hangmen as assassins, but know they are no match for Stalkers so they will only send them to eliminate mortal foes. Few Hangmen have been forced into a Husk. Those that have could easily pass as mortals but their strange behavior made the Veil worthless.



COMBAT

Hook (Attack 13, 4D Damage) If Hook hits, may attempt to Noose (Attack 15, 6D Damage) Noose victims are hung from any suitable branch or rafter and suffer 2D Damage a round until they are cut down.

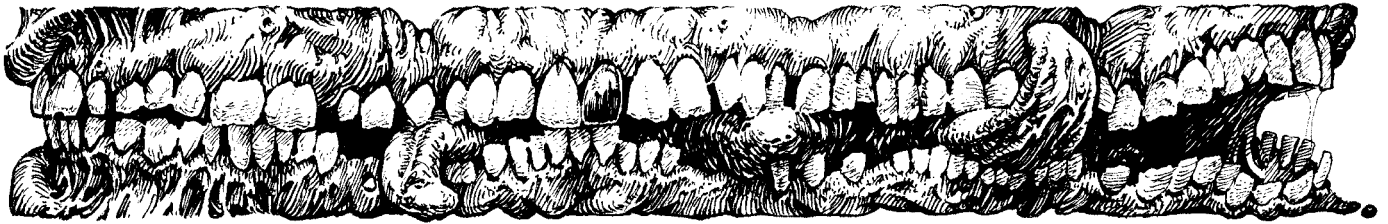
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Invulnerable to the attacks of mortal characters with Resolves of 11 or less (-1 Die Cap Modifier).

VULNERABILITIES

Will celebrate for one round following each hanging, taking no useful action and lowering its Defend Attribute to 12





THRITCH KALVARR (PAIN MOTHERS)

Fortitude	6	Manifesting during a society's decline
Vitality	9	these creatures are carnal predators
Initiative	12	who desire sex and violence in equal
Defend	15	measure. Their ability to affect the Flesh
Percieve	13	is limited to whispered enticements, but
Resolve	19	they can sometimes inhabit weak-willed
		mortals who are under the influence of

certain narcotics. Legions of these creatures haunted the Roman Empire. Most of those living in the modern world can be found in Amsterdam and Shanghi though there will usually be one or two lurking in every major city.

A Pain Mother is sometimes Awakened if she witnesses a crime of passion, drawing her substance from the vital fluids of the victim. Mortal deviants who desire their cruel gifts may seek them out with a mirror of polished gold and may attempt to Awaken them with ritual scarification.

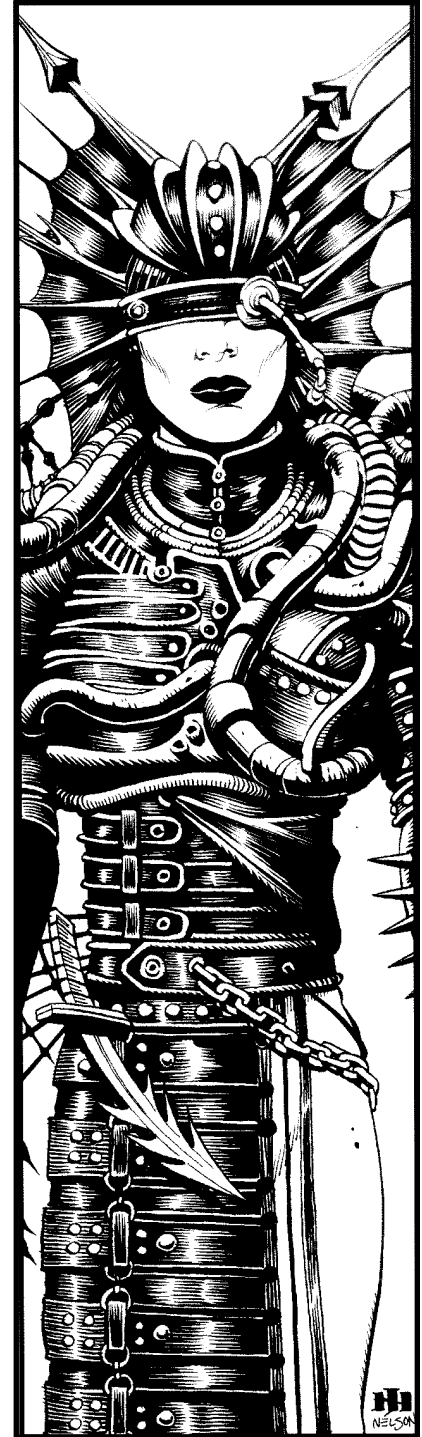
These creatures are nearly human but they have no eyes and translucent bodies. All Pain Mothers have an instinctive knowledge of alchemy and may perform the "Promethean Experiment." This gives them a new Vessel so perfect that no Husk or Veil is required to pass as human. The Experiment requires iron bones, innocent blood, and a murder's skin.

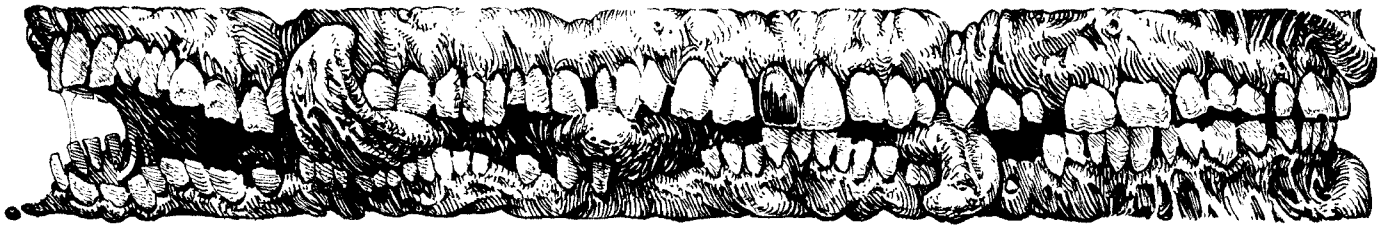
The Unbidden use these creatures as warriors and those with the proper Passions may even take them as lovers. If the Experiment has been performed no Husk is required, but since Pain Mothers lose their alchemical talents when Bound, as Minions they are usually given a human shell. These Husks cannot conceal the creatures' empty eye sockets so they usually wear some kind of mask or pose as blind women.

COMBAT: Armor (subtract 12 from damage before comparing to Fortitude); Fetid Blade (Attack 15, the first attack does 2D Damage, the second and third attacks against the same opponent do 3D Damage, and any attacks after the third do 5D Damage) Mortals who have been wounded by her blade cannot attack her unless they are Driven or have a Resolve of 15 or better; Wounded Stalkers share this reluctance to harm their attacker and suffer a -2 Attack Modifier if they attempt to retaliate.

SPECIAL ABILITIES : May Translocate up to 100 yards in darkness if they spend 1 point of Vitality.

VULNERABILITIES : Every successful hit by a Stalker using the Savage Discipline destroys 4 points of Armor.





SAGUINALIN (LURKERS)

Fortitude	6	First encountered by the builders of
Vitality	20	the pyramids these creatures are
Initiative	15	drawn to subterranean structures.
Defend	12	They prowl the London Underground
Percieve	12	and many North American subways.
Resolve	15	By the year 2012 there are so many of
		them in the deep tunnel project in

Chicago that their very presence invokes the Forbiddance, wiping out the entire nest. A particularly powerful Sanguinalin lived in an abandoned military facility near Seattle where it was worshipped by an odd cult of drug addicts who called it the "red god."

Under normal circumstances the nearly mindless creatures wander aimlessly until some random act of fate Awakens them. There is no pattern to their Awakening; it seems to be a matter of time. Once Awakened the Lurkers become hunters, preying on those who dare to travel alone in the deep dark places that it now considers its territory.

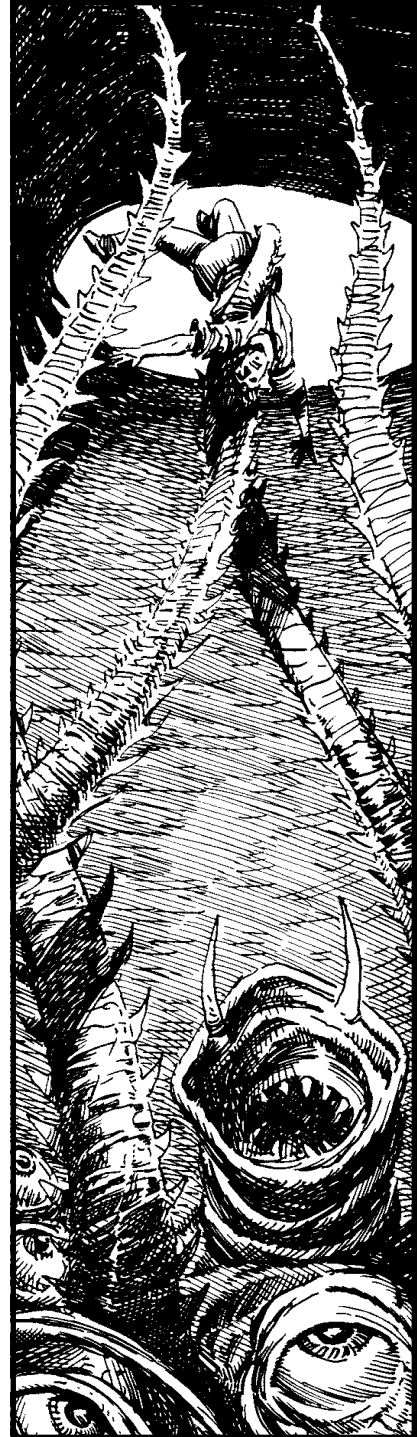
Lurkers are as big as they need to be, shifting from minute to enormous at a moment's notice. This gives them the ability to sneak up on their prey no bigger than a mouse, and when they are close enough, pounce while swelling to the size of a whale. No matter how big they are they remain amazingly agile, keeping their vital organs well protected.

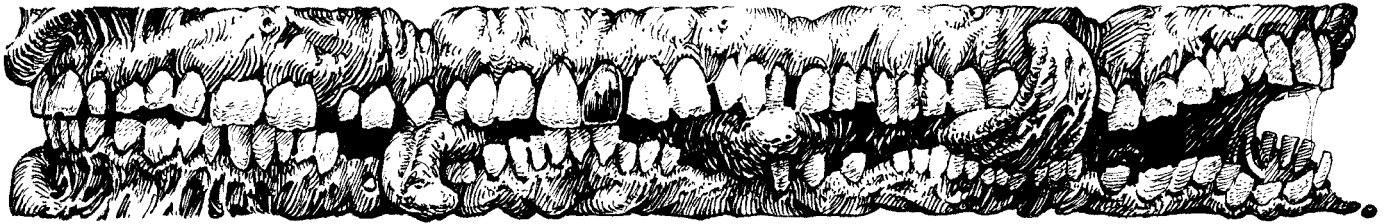
The Unbidden will recruit Lurkers to serve as guardians. They can be compressed into a human Husk but the fingers will always be a little bit too long and the eyes will shine in the dark like those of a cat. The Husk will burst in 2-12 days so it must be rewoven on a regular basis.

COMBAT: 2 Tentacles (Attack 14, 3D Damage each) If a Lurker loses more than 3 Vitality to a single attack it goes berserk for 1-6 rounds. This reduces its Attack to 10 but allows it to make 3 attacks a round for 4 Damage.

SPECIAL ABILITIES : Can turn its body to water at a the cost of 1 point of Vitality a round. In this form it can move very quickly by flowing, pouring, and squirting. The living puddle can only be attacked with Rend Discipline against a Defend of 12 and a Fortitude of 8.

VULNERABILITIES : The lightshow caused by Glamour Servitors causes 2D Damage a round for the first 1-6 rounds the Lurker is exposed to it. Fortitude is reduced to 5 in bright light (4 in direct sunlight).





ZELUN VHORI (OGYRS)

Fortitude	8
Vitality	15
Initiative	10
Defend	11
Percieve	8
Resolve	10

These shy creatures are drawn to mortals, but fear them greatly. They often lair in attics, basements, and fruit cellars so they can be close enough to hear their hosts without having to encounter them. The only evidence of their presence are strange noises that

are often dismissed as "settling" by ignorant homeowners. Ogyrs are basically harmless but believe they will be killed if they are discovered. They will panic if they are confronted, Awakening to defend themselves against those they believe to be their executioners.

In their Awakened form Ogyrs are hulking mounds of Flesh with iron bones and incredible strength. Their Vessels are inherently corrupt and their pores ooze fluids that carry horrid diseases (plagues are often an unfortunate side-effect of their appearance). They rot away rather quickly, losing a point of Vitality every 1-6 days. There are rituals known to certain mortal magicians that can sustain them by feeding them specially prepared meat in alarming quantities. Even these rather extreme measures will only slow their inevitable deterioration.

Once Awakened the Zelun Vhori either flee the world of men, hiding out in a ditch or a cave until everything rots away but their bones, or they decide to strike back. Unfortunately, it is hard to reason with these thick-headed creatures, so the best way to deal with their misguided crusades is to destroy or Banish them. Music will sometimes soothe them but it can also enrage them (lowering their Defend to 10 but increasing their Attack to 13 and their Damage to 6 Dice).

The Unbidden use Ogyrs as muscle, which is all they are good for. They are slow-witted so must be given simple instructions or they will become confused. Husks can be stretched over them but the creatures find them uncomfortable and will scratch them off in 1-6 hours.

These creatures are very tough so the gamemaster should only use two or three at a time unless he wants the Circle to lose.

COMBAT

Pummel (Attack 12, 5D Damage) If victim fails Strength Challenge against a Difficulty equal to the Damage inflicted he is Stunned and may take no action the following round.

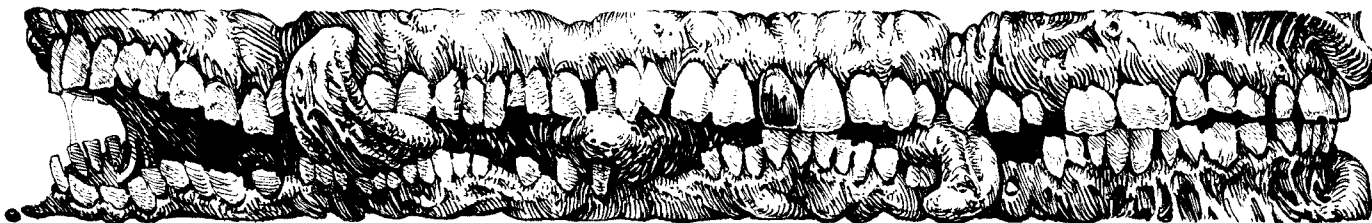
SPECIAL ABILITIES

Invulnerable to the Savage Discipline (Stalkers do not add their bonus dice); Entropy (Their touch causes organic materials to rot and metal to corrode).

VULNERABILITIES

Confused by the use of the Frenzy Discipline (Lowers their Defend to 9 against these attacks); Vitality can never be recovered.





• PERSONALITIES

Not all Shadows will belong to one of the "races" outlined in the preceding section. Many are unique individuals who provide excellent foils for the player characters.

NPC Shadows encountered by the Stalkers during the course of the Hunt can turn out to be allies or enemies. One of the most interesting things about them is that they may have nothing to do with the current plot but may bring new subplots to the adventure.

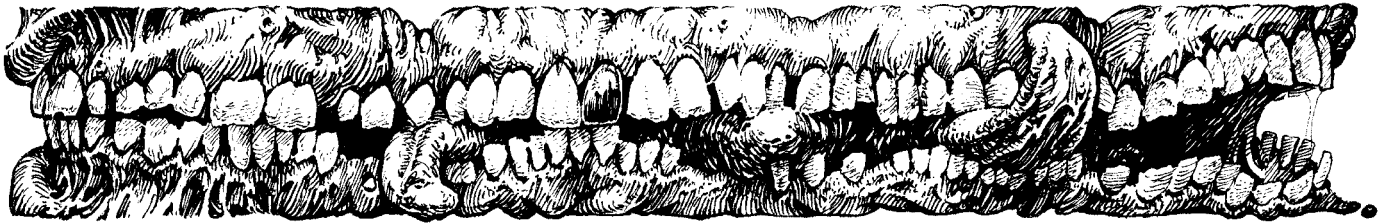
These Shadows are designed like any other but can be even more focused. After all, you only have to worry about one at a time so you won't be setting any dangerous precedents you can't undo.

Most NPC Shadows will have been Awakened before they are encountered by the Stalkers, but some will be Awakened by something that happens during game play, which can be an unexpected plot twist.

A few Awakened Shadows have been around so long that they have achieved legendary status. These powerful beings eventually learn to traverse the Chronosphere so they may be encountered in many times and places. These Shadows may encounter the Stalkers more than once and will help give campaigns a sense of continuity.

For example, there is an ancient Shadow who calls himself the Librarian. He collects books that contain many secrets that he will share with anyone who can find him, but there is always a price...





SHRIEKBLACK AND GUZZ

<i>Shriekblack</i>	Fortitude	7
	Vitality	9
	Initiative	13
	Defend	12
	Percieve	18
	Resolve	20
<i>Guzz</i>	Fortitude	5
	Vitality	18
	Initiative	15
	Defend	16
	Percieve	10
	Resolve	16

These Awakened Shadows have travelled together since the beginning of time. Shriekblack has learned secrets from the Navigators that allows them to travel along to Chronosphere to any time period they desire. They have seen as much of the world as any Circle (maybe more). Since an unfortunate encounter with an Architect in the Dark Ages they have held a grudge against the Unbidden and will do anything they can to help the Stalkers against them short of risking their lives in combat against the renegade or his Minions.

Shriekblack is a dark-skinned creature who stands nearly eight feet tall. His body is a hollow shell that he uses to store the few possessions important enough to carry with him. When he speaks his eyes burn with an amber flame. Guzz is mostly fangs and claws wrapped in a tight bundle of muscle and sheathed in a tough hide. Shriekblack is intelligent and insightful, almost urbane in his bearing. The only language Guzz seems to understand involves ripping flesh and crunching bone.

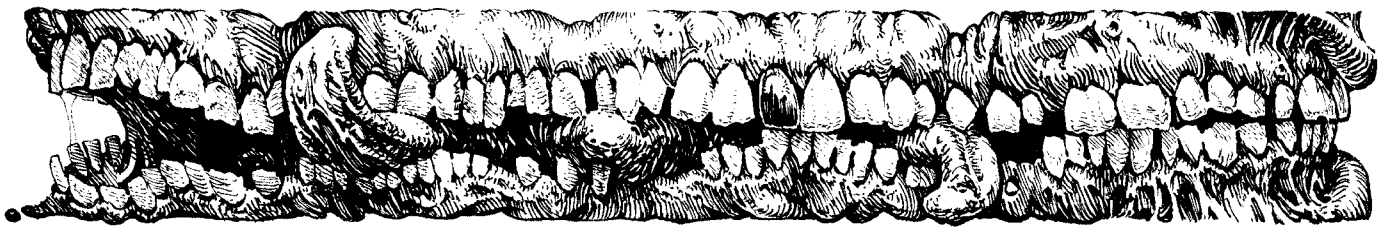
The pair are valuable allies during any Hunt that involves the Unbidden. Shriekblack calls himself a sorcerer and has the power to back it up. He has an Occult Skill of 18 and a History Skill of 20. He can perform many rituals learned from mortal magicians and can formulate counterspells that prevent mortal magic from working.

COMBAT: Shriekblack wields an obsidian knife (Attack 14, 3D Damage); Guzz fights with 2 Claws (Attack 15, 4D Damage each) If Guzz hits one opponent with both claws he can Rip for an additional 4 Dice.

SPECIAL ABILITIES : Shriekblack is a sorcerer. Guzz has a high pain tolerance which means he only loses Vitality from attacks that inflict more Damage than his Resolve.

VULNERABILITIES : Shriekblack turns to stone when exposed to the light of the full moon and will only recover during the dark of the moon. Guzz is blood-thirsty and easily goaded into combat.





ABBALLOR — THE BUTCHER OF BAKER STREET

Fortitude	6	This creature was Awakened by the screams of a dying child and thrives on the sound, eagerly feasting on the agony of innocents. Abballor wanders the Realm of Flesh in human guise, a dark figure that stalks the streets of places like Ancient Rome, Victorian
Vitality	24	
Initiative	13	
Defend	15	
Percieve	18	
Resolve	21	London, and South Central L.A. looking for prey. Like most Shadows Abballor is immortal. If Abballor is defeated he will be driven back to the Rift just long enough to reawaken, reborn in a new time and place. Unlike most Shadows he will be a recurring villain that will cross the Stalkers' path time and time again until they figure out how to destroy him and put an end to his bloody rampage. It is up to the gamemaster to figure out how Abballor can be killed. An obvious answer is the Fleshing Ritual but it should probably be something more esoteric that requires research and experimentation across three or more encounters.

Since his first Awakening, Abballor's various incarnations have been shaped by his desires. Most of his bodies have been those of children. Despite the pretention of innocence he is clearly a wolf in sheep's clothing. Anyone with a Perception of 12 or better will realize that there is something wrong with him, and Sensitive characters will be unsettled by his approach. Remember that many children and pets are Sensitive to some degree, which may provide his victims with some warning.

COMBAT: Abballor is incredibly strong and is a skilled hand-to-hand combatant (Attack 15, 5D Damage), but if he has had time he will manufacture knives imbued with his Essence (Attack 15, 3D Damage, 5 Dice if he spends 1 Vitality, 7 Dice if he spends 2).

SPECIAL ABILITIES : The Butcher can regain 2-12 points of Vitality by reducing his Resolve by 1 for a day. He may do this as many times as he likes, but will seldom allow his Resolve to drop below 18.

VULNERABILITIES : Abballor thinks he is a demon so allows himself to be affected by rituals and traditions that are supposed to have power over such creatures. An exorcism works the same as a Banishment against him.





X : MORTAL MAN

The Hunt affords us little time to form relationships with those we protect, but there are occasional flirtations with mortality. There are even a few humans I am honored to call friend. Of these only Rodger Prentiss is worth mention here. We have crossed paths on several occasions during his one-man crusade against the Unseen during the first world war. When next we meet, I will lift him up so we may fight together forever...

In many ways, the Whispering Vault is about Immortality. During the Hunt, the Stalkers return to the world of their birth where they are confronted with their lingering desire for the world they left behind. Mortal characters embody this conflict, providing an unsettling contrast to what the Stalkers have become.

Most mortals are insignificant background characters who are part of the environment. These "extras" are living obstacles who must be avoided if the Circle hopes to complete the Hunt without invoking the Forbiddance.

Even though they are no match for the Stalkers in a fight, mortals can still be interesting characters who can add a lot to a Hunt. They may be fragile creatures, but that is no reason to short change them when you are developing a plot.

• MORTAL MAGIC

There are several references in this chapter to mortal magic. A few gifted mortals are able to affect the Dream, creating subtle alterations of reality that appear magical.

To perform magic, a mortal must be Sensitive to the Unseen and must have a Resolve of 13 or more.

The techniques required to manipulate the Dream are only known to a few individuals and organizations and are closely guarded secrets. Even if he could be a magician, a man could spend his whole life seeking the truth.

There are no hard and fast rules for spellcasting. It is up to the gamemaster to decide what his characters are capable of. The Enlightened Organizations have some sample spells that should give you a better idea of the kind of feel mortal magic should have.





ASSIGNING ATTRIBUTES

The Values for the Initiative, Defend, Percieve, Resolve and Attack Attributes of mortal characters are based on the standard Difficulty table, ranging from 8 to 18. Mortals seldom pose a threat to the Stalkers, so these Attributes should usually provide Routine, Easy, or Average Challenges. Rare individuals will have an Attribute in the Difficult range, but values will seldom go higher than this.

• FORTITUDE

As discussed in the Combat chapter on page 33, mortals are not as tough as creatures of Essence. As such, their Fortitude values should not be as high. Most have Fortitude values of 2 or 3, but exceptional characters can have a 4 or even a 5.

• INITIATIVE

This is used as the Difficulty when determining the order of actions in the Combat Turn. A character's Initiative is determined by his combat experience and reaction time. Mortals who have no combat experience or training will usually have an Initiative of 8 to 10. Particularly agile and/or experienced opponents will have higher values, but they will seldom be higher than 15.

• DEFEND

Defend provides the Difficulty for most attack challenges made against the mortal character. Values for the Defend Attribute are similar to those for the Initiative Attribute, and for many of the same reasons. Mortal characters often have identical Defend and Initiative values.

• VITALITY

Start with a Base Value equal to twice the character's Fortitude. Decrease this value by a point or two to represent frailties such as sickness or old age. Increase the value for characters with some kind of combat experience.

A gang member or beat cop should get an extra point or two. Veterans such as professional soldiers should get 3 or 4 extra points. Really tough characters and leaders should get 5 or 6, points but these should be rare.

These ranges yield Vitality scores ranging from 4 to 8 for normal characters to 12 or more for truly exceptional individuals.

• PERCEIVE

Stalkers sometimes refer to mortals as "blind," a reference to their lack of Sensitivity that also applies to their lack of awareness.

Most mortals go through life with blinders on. These hopeless mundanes have Perception Attributes in the 8 to 10 range. Those who have learned to really watch the world around them will have values in the 12 to 15 range.

• RESOLVE

Most mortals are weak-willed creatures with Resolve Attributes in the 8 to 10 range. Characters whose lifestyle requires courage or strength of will have higher values, and there are a few extraordinary specimens, such as magicians and the Chosen, who will have Resolve Attributes of 15 or more.

• ATTACK

All characters have a general Attack Attribute that determines how Difficult it is to defend against their attacks. Some characters will have Skills, such as Brawling, that provide higher values when the character uses the attack form described by the Skill.

• STRENGTH

Strength determines how much damage a mortal can inflict in unarmed combat. Most mortals have a Strength of 1 or 2, but it can go as high as 3. See the Damage rules on page 31 for more information.

• SKILLS

Like Stalkers, many Mortals have special Skills that give them knowledge, insight, or abilities that other characters do not have.

To give a mortal character a Skill, simply give it a name that defines the proficiency you want the character to have, and assign a Value to it. There is no standardized list of Skills; if the gamemaster thinks a mortal character should be able to do something well enough that it is worth noting, he should give that character an appropriate Skill.





THE GIFT: SENSITIVE MORTALS

Essence and Flesh are intertwined but do not normally overlap. All creatures of the Flesh have some awareness of the Unseen. This is more prominent in animals as they lack the capacity of the human mind to dismiss what it cannot understand with rationalizations.

All mortals have some degree of sensitivity, but it is not reliable. This ability is stronger in children than adults because of their lack of preconceptions. It is easier for a child to accept the Unseen because they do not yet consider it impossible.

True Sensitive are rare. The potential exists in roughly one out of a thousand individuals. Potential can be affected by a person's bloodline, so it is possible for the "gift" to be passed to the seventh son of a seventh son or to be more common in a particular family than another.

Like Shadows, Sensitive mortals need to be Awakened. Awakening requires three things: the Sensitive character must be able to see the Unseen, he must be prepared to accept it, and he must have the opportunity for revelation.

Awakening is more common in some eras than in others. Particularly Enlightened or Superstitious societies produce more Awakened Sensitive than others. In the modern era, belief in the supernatural is rare and viewed with skepticism, so potential Sensitive dismiss what they experience as an optical illusion, an overactive imagination, or some form of mental illness.

All Sensitive can peer beyond the Veil, giving them the ability to view the Unseen. At first they only see fleeting glimpses, but with training or experience, their "second

sight" becomes more reliable, giving them the ability to part the Veil at will. Many potential Sensitive cannot accept the truth and spend their lives denying what their eyes plainly show them. These unfortunate individuals often go mad.

Sensitivity is a double-edged sword. Sensitive characters can experience the Truth, but their lives will never be the same. Some of the powers of the Unseen will not work against Sensitive, but others are more effective against them.

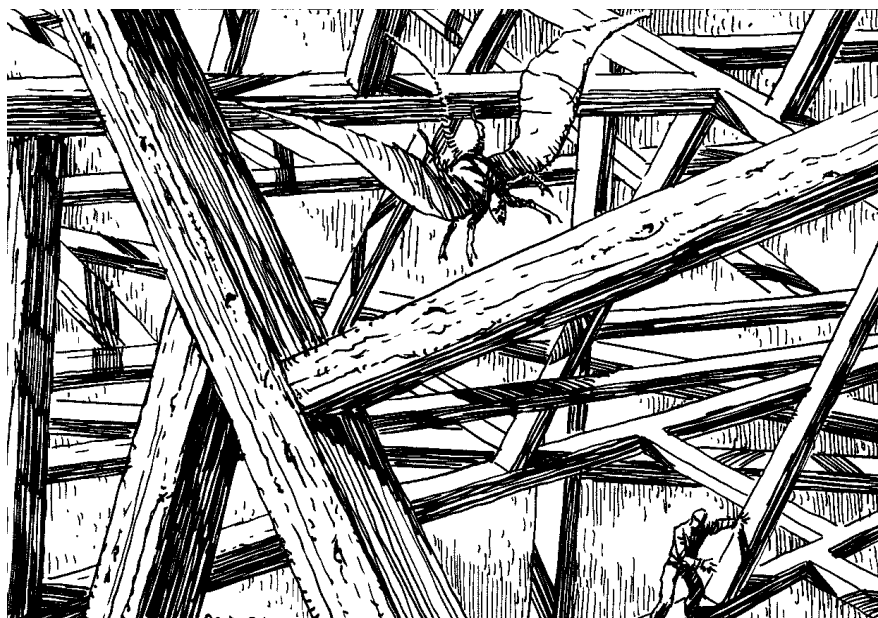
• THE CHOSEN FEW

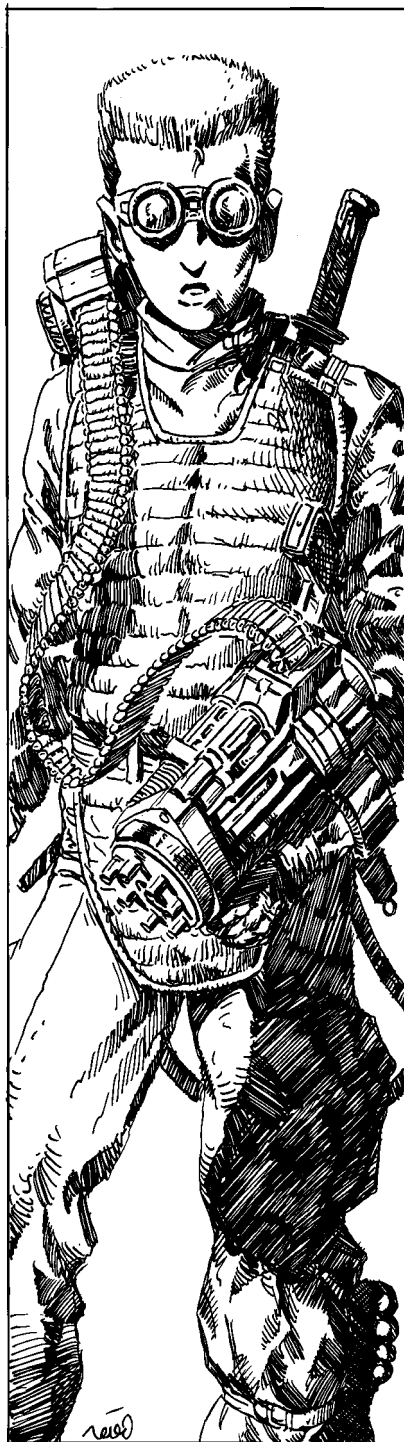
All Stalkers were once mortals whose devotion to fighting the Unseen was recognized by a Circle of Stalkers during a Hunt. Once Chosen they were freed of the flesh, shown the truth, and changed forever. There is no turning back.

During campaign play, the Circle may eventually encounter a mortal worthy of this gift. These individuals are very rare, but when they appear, it should be fairly obvious that they are exceptional.

It is up to the players to decide if a mortal is to be Chosen, but the group should use the following guidelines:

The mortal should be sound of mind. Physical form is irrelevant, but the mind must be strong enough to accept what is to come. Most important, the mortal must be worthy and able. There are many of strong mind whose lives cross with the Unseen, but few deserve immortality.





TEMPLATES There are many different kinds of mortals. Most are of little consequence, content to live their lives in endless cycles, unaware of the Truth. Some, however, have a noticeable spark that sets them apart from the crowd. Ultimately, they themselves are usually of little import as well. Lastly are those mortals who rise above the morass. Those with drive, direction, and strength to confront the Unseen.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Fortitude	2	These are the nameless horde who populate most of the world. They have no special strengths or skills and present little or no threat to the Stalkers. They are only dangerous in large groups or if they are commanded by Driven or Inspired leaders. Alone, they are helpless against the Unseen.
Vitality	4	
Initiative	8	
Defend	10	
Perceive	10	
Resolve	10	
Attack	8	
Strength	1	

SECONDARY CHARACTERS

Fortitude	3	There is more to these characters than to most mortals. There is something brighter about them, a potential missing from nearly all of the rest of humanity but unless fate intervenes, they are destined to remain as the rest of the cattle. These characters usually have one or two Skills of moderate value.
Vitality	7	
Initiative	10	
Defend	12	
Perceive	12	
Resolve	12	
Attack	11	
Strength	2	

PRIMARY CHARACTERS

Fortitude	4	These characters are the proverbial exception to the rule. These are the mortals most likely to interact with the Stalkers. They may have a number of Focus Skills, some with excellent values. A few have the potential for Sensitivity. If they are Awakened they will be able to see the world as it truly is.
Vitality	11	
Initiative	12	
Defend	14	
Perceive	14	
Resolve	14	
Attack	13	
Strength	3	





ENLIGHTENED ORGANIZATIONS

Seperated from the rest of the Circle I dragged my mangled Vessel through the streets of Paris, struggling to maintain the focus I needed to keep moving. For the first time in three centuries I was in pain. Demoralized and exhausted I wanted to give in but I knew that a moments pause would mean my death. Talon tells me I would never have made it to the rallying point were it not for the Sisterhood. I vaguely remember a young girl coming to me as I collapsed. She called me "Terrible Master," and gave me a pendant that I wear to this day.

Confounded by the Veil, mortal man has struggled to make sense of the Unseen since the dawn of time. The countless misconceptions of the mundane are often refered to as the supernatural or the occult.

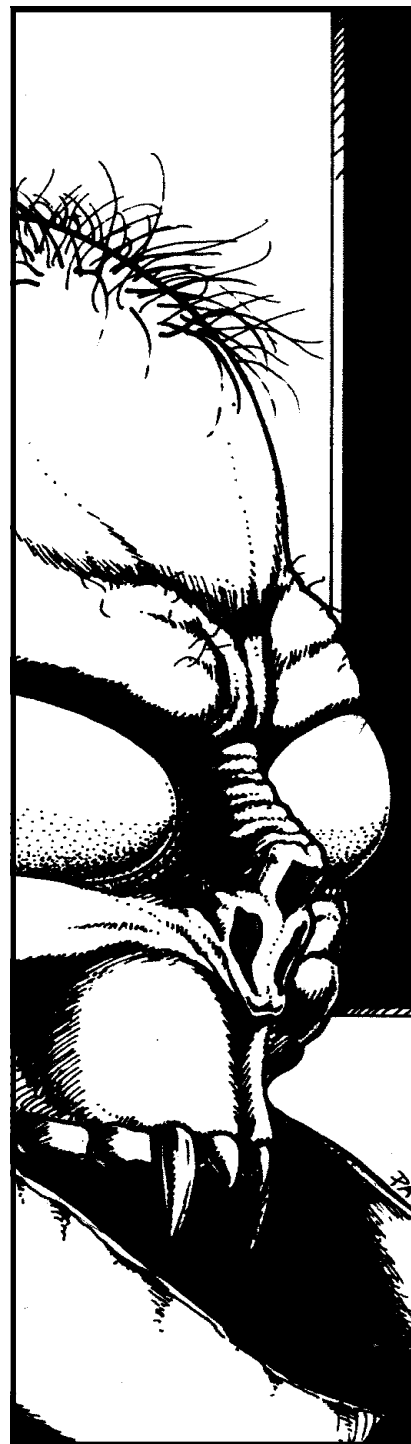
From time to time a particularly gifted investigator or philosopher will achieve a valuable insight into the nature of the universe, and will pass on what he has learned to others. These glimpses of the truth can lead others to Enlightenment.

Stalkers sometimes encounter Enlightened Organizations during the course of the Hunt. Some organizations will be allied with the enemy, but there are a few that know what the Stalkers are and are devoted to helping them.

Often, the motivations of these groups are confused or misguided. Circles wisely avoid these groups and keep them in the dark about what is unfolding around them. Most know just enough to make them dangerous.

Because of the need to operate in secret and their dependence on charismatic leaders, most of these organizations are short-lived. Those that manage to endure can be encountered many times, giving the time-hopping Stalkers a better sense of continuity.

When creating an organization, just answer the questions in the following section as best you can. Three sample groups follow.





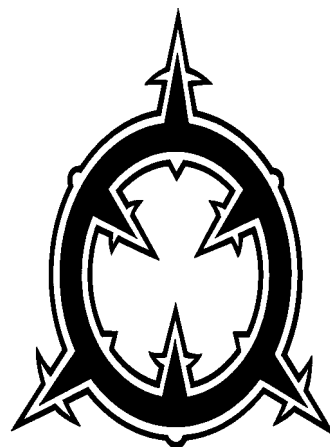
WHEN AND WHERE DID THE ORGANIZATION THRIVE?

My first experience with the Adjen was a brief encounter in Ancient Egypt. This modern incarnation was a misguided shadow of its former self, twisted by corrupt leaders. My duties are very clear, but I made sure that the Hunt took us close enough to silence them forever.

Despite my flagrant use of Essence during the attack the Forbiddance remained quiet. The Neo Adjen must have posed more of a threat than we ever suspected. I will never underestimate my mortal opponents again.

Enlightened Organizations have existed for as long as mortals have had the capacity to pierce the Veil and pass on what they have learned. Most organizations of this kind appeared after the advent of written language but before modern science tried to provide it's own definition of enlightenment.

By their very nature these organizations can only exist in secret, making them more common in remote places or those considered "backwards" for their time.



WHAT IS THE ORGANIZATION'S ETHOS?

What all organizations, regardless of when or where they may be, have in common is a conviction shared by their members that drives them and binds them together.

The most important thing you will have to figure out when creating a new organization is why it exists; what its goals are.

Most of the Enlightened Organizations that Stalkers encounter are either Inspired by revelation or Driven to seek the Truth normally denied mortals.

Other organizations are Driven by fear or hate. They seek to destroy, not learn, afraid of what they can barely understand. The persistence of these misguided organizations is an unfortunate reality.

I lowered my Mask but the Prefect did not recoil. This should not have surprised me - for centuries the Brotherhood has used shards of colored glass to pierce the Veil but I have grown accustomed to inspiring fear in my enemies, and must admit annoyance at this simple act of defiance.





WHO ARE THE ORGANIZATION'S LEADERS ?

During the decade I spent in the Dark Ages as one of the Guardians of the True Cross, I had the opportunity to hear Pious Benedetto speak.

History would ultimately bequeath him a reputation similar to that of the mad monk, but they did not understand. He brandished the light of Truth like a torch, dangerous and beautiful. Were it not for his words, my fear of the unknown would have prevented me from embracing my destiny.

For an organization to be effective against the Unseen its members need to be Driven or Inspired. It is the responsibility of the leaders to provide the necessary motivation. For this reason organizations that lacked strong leadership fail the hard tests of time, but those blessed with true visionaries endure.

Most organizations are born when mortals are drawn to a charismatic leader who provides a focus for their convictions. Some are fortunate enough to attract more than one of these exceptional individuals, but internal strife often results from such groupings.

Even if the Stalkers never encounter these leaders, understanding their backgrounds and motivations can give the gamemaster valuable insight into the organization and how it functions. When the Stalkers actually meet one of these leaders it will lend additional significance to future encounters with the organization.

Try to avoid making Enlightened leaders out of characters with historical significance. It may be tempting to create a spellcasting Edgar Allan Poe, but it is easier to avoid anomalies if you restrict the occasional brush with greatness to the membership at large.



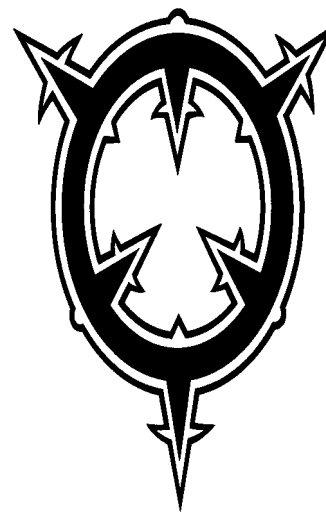


WHAT ARE THE ORGANIZATION'S RESOURCES?

Talon tried to convince us to take action ourselves, but any unnecessary confrontation is a potential violation of the Forbiddance. At my suggestion we made contact with an agent of the Eternal Flame who was able to arrange for the release of our mortal ally. All they asked for was a demonstration of the power of our office, which Talon was more than willing to provide them. Future incarnations of the society adopted Talon as a kind of totem figure. He pretends to be offended by this, but I think he is secretly pleased by their devotion.

An organization is more than the sum of its members. Over its life span, the cause usually acquires more than a reputation. The most obvious resources are financial, but the most useful are often contacts in local government or law enforcement.

Easily overlooked is the value of the most important resource: information. Most mortals have no idea what truly lies beyond the Veil, and any information about those mysteries is to be coveted and protected. Enlightenment is hard to come by.



WHAT IS THEIR HEADQUARTERS LIKE?

Depending on the period in which the organization operates and the social standing of its membership and leaders, meetings can be held almost anywhere.

Not every organization is run like a gentlemen's club out of a Victorian mansion. Explore the possibilities by devising unusual locations that could provide interesting settings for your encounters. The least likely are often the best, and the most surprising. Seekers of truth gather where they can. (Imagine trying to explain to the manager of a hotel just what his main meeting room is going to be *really* used for).

Andre told us the fort was built during the missile crisis but was abandoned during the Nixon administration. Since then it laid dormant. The August Brotherhood closed off the west wing and prepared it for their rituals. It was squalid but safe.





DO MEMBERS HAVE ACCESS TO MAGIC ?

Having overcome the bodyguards stationed outside his lair, I forced my way into the penthouse and allowed myself a smile. They planned to capture me. An Intricate Rune of Domination had been prepared in the space where the rug once was. Cords ran from the rune to the corners of the room, violet flames a vibrant testament to the power they had tried to raise. Despite their false sense of security, they drew back as I approached their clumsy trap. Wise, I thought, as I turned the power of the rune against them...

Many Enlightened Organizations dabble in the occult, but only a few have access to actual magic. Those that can use magic are more of a threat to the Dream, and are therefore of more concern to the Stalkers and their prey.

An organization's use of magic can take any of three forms; Spells available to certain members, Artifacts that they use or protect, and Traditions that give some or all of the members special powers.

Spells are the most common magical element shared by members. It is not necessary to provide a complete list of all the spells known by all members, but the gamemaster should keep notes about what kind of spells they favor. The known spells of the organization are often collected in a tome or grimoire that is only accessible by the leadership and those they allow to see it.

Most organizations gather artifacts for study or use in rituals. They are often very cautious with them because many relics have hidden or secondary powers that they are unaware of. These items are also closely guarded by the leadership, though they are often lent to members with specific missions or tasks.

The most powerful of these organizations have ritual Traditions that imbue certain members with special skills or abilities.



When designing a special ability of this kind, bear in mind that the mortal magicians already have a wide variety of powers. Traditions are often used to give supernatural abilities to members who are not magicians.

Most organizations have some kind of initiation members must complete before the real secrets of the organization are revealed to them. The initiation itself, depending on an organization's Ethos, could be merely symbolic or truly perilous. In all cases the initiation is taken very seriously, as is oath-breaking.





THE SECRET MASTERS

From the beginning Anna realized that something was wrong. Talon and the Grey Man were too anxious to heed her warnings, but I have learned to respect her instincts so I kept an eye out for anything that seemed out of place. The truth eluded me until I heard the preacher speak. It was the same voice that had issued the Call. Outraged that a mortal would have the arrogance to lure us across the Rift, I took him by the throat and demanded to know why he had forced our hand. Eyes wet with tears of joy, he explained that he needed to know that we actually existed. We gave him more proof than he bargained for...

Over the course of history, different misconceptions about the nature of reality have spawned many organizations.

The Secret Masters was founded by a group of Magicians who believed the world to be a Divine Test. Only those who learn and master the Inner Mysteries are truly worthy of immortality. According to this philosophy, life is a struggle to prove one's worth, and lack of insight is damning.

The difference between the Secret Masters and other organizations is their Enlightened understanding of the origins of the World and the Flesh. This knowledge gives them power because they know the rules well enough to break them without getting caught (or so they think).

• LEADERS

The Masters run one of the few Enlightened Organizations large enough to have subgroups on different continents.

England has known two of the organization's most notorious leaders. The first of these was Edgar Murell, a well-placed clergyman who came to power in the late 14th century. He was known for his brutal disregard for "mundane cattle" and ordered thirty-two murders during a twenty year tenure which ended with his assassination.

Murell was physically imposing and totally corrupt. He desired nothing save his own advancement and he had no loyalty to anything. It is generally believed it was the other Masters who had him killed,





though a rival organization was ultimately blamed. The result was five years of near open warfare between the two groups.

Ten years after Murell's death one of his acolytes, a woman known only as "Sharp Beth," rose to power in the English Secret Masters. It turned out she was obsessed with learning the deep secrets of the Flesh, and was eventually committed to an asylum after acquiring the skins of thirteen members of the organization.

The American Secret Masters' most notorious leader was a man named Honorable Delany, who oversaw the organization from 1867 to 1900. He is best known for the Inspired Feast of 1887 which prompted a six-state manhunt by Federal Authorities.

The current international head of the Secret Masters is a man named Johann Bryce, a multi-cultural European who also heads the Continental Secret Masters. Bryce is a bitter, humorless man who believes that physical exertion and the associated prices are one of the keys to Enlightenment.

The Secret Masters can be used either as allies of the Unbidden (doing their work in exchange for some piece of arcane lore) Or as enemies in their own right.

Their attraction to the Mysteries quickly bring them into contact with the Unknown. Unfortunately, the nature of the organization forces many of its members to take ill-conceived chances in the pursuit of Enlightenment.

• RESOURCES

Over the course of centuries, the Masters have accumulated wealth and influence which rivals that of many nations where they operate.

Assume that important members can get as much backing as they need for any operation that promises to benefit the Masters. The only limitation is that the Secret Masters do not approve of flagrant public displays or any acts which might draw attention to the group. This includes members (other than the highest of the Enlightened) enjoying anything other than simple lifestyles.

By the turn of the century, the Masters have worked their way into secular agencies in America, Canada, England, France, Ireland and Scotland. Their influence depends on the area in question. The Secret Masters hold a great deal of power in the finance and trucking industries, but have thus far been stymied in their efforts to gain influence in law enforcement or government.

• HEADQUARTERS

Secret Masters meetings are usually held in the homes or holdings of the sub-organization's leaders. Formal meetings, including those other than the Highest of the Enlightened, are held with the change of each season. Less formal meetings, where the most important decisions are made, are held when needed.

MAGIC USE

Spellcasting is only common among the Most Enlightened, the second highest tier within the Secret Masters, and the Highest themselves. It is a reward used to tease and provoke the lesser members of the group and is offered with the full knowledge that most will impair or corrupt themselves in pursuit of that knowledge.

One area where the secret masters are fairly advanced is in their use of technology. The group uses advanced technologies to record and maintain their secret formulae. It is rumored that the total wisdom of the organization is stored on six CD-ROM disks carried at all times by Johann Bryce.

• RITUALS

They allow all but the lowest of their members to participate in the rituals of Affirmation and Second Hope. The first requires the sacrifice of the blood of every member into the Golden Cauldron. This broth is then used in the Ritual of the Second Hope which renews and revitalizes those of the Highest Enlightenment. It is this ritual which gives those elders their remarkable longevity and vigor.

The most Enlightened of the Secret Masters also know the Ritual of Incarnation which allows them to prepare a vessel into which their souls find refuge upon their death. It is rumored that there is a great vault somewhere holding the vessels of the organization's greatest members.





ARTIFACTS

• THE AEGEAN CODEX

Written in 1305 by an inmate of a rather primitive mental hospital, this book contains many insights into the nature of the Unseen.

Some of the information in the Codex is so dangerous that the Veil will twist the text making it difficult to read and nearly impossible to absorb. If the reader is not already Enlightened to some degree, the book rarely makes any sense and may in fact be dangerous to read.

Deriving truth from the Codex is only possible for Driven characters with a Resolve of 15 or better.

The Masters have destroyed all copies of the book not in their possession save one and have made sure that the copies they possess are carefully watched. They are always on the lookout for any missing copies and will kill to see them destroyed.

• THE RAGING KEY

This Flawed Key was taken from a Stalker by an ambitious Master who saw it as a shortcut to Enlightenment. The Stalker was a bestial creature whose violent heart was used to forge the Key.

Sensitive characters will notice that this simple brass key seems to be stained. On closer examination, there is crusted blood that cannot be cleaned off. When held up to the light it bleeds.

Any mortal with a Resolve less than 15 who comes into contact with the Key will eventually be subverted by its influence.

The Raging Key has been used as a subtle weapon against the organization's political enemies. If the Key is kept near the victim for 15 days, he will become unstable and will eventually be driven to perform violent acts that are usually sufficient to discredit him.

• BLOODY JARS

During the French Revolution the Masters decided to try and find a way to preserve the knowledge of the world's geniuses for later exploitation. They sought out experts in various fields and murdered them, Binding their spirits in glass jars filled with their own blood. These jars were then sealed in ceramic urns bearing complex sigils and signs that kept them fresh and vital.

Though it is generally believed that the captive spirits lost whatever personality survived death within a year of their demise, some of the Masters theorize that some echo of the original life still remains in each of the jars.

Any mortal who drinks from one of these jars will share the knowledge of the captive spirit, temporarily gaining whatever skills the spirit had.

If a bottle is more than half full, and a mortal with a Resolve Attribute lower than 15 drinks all the blood that remains, he will be possessed by the spirit. Most of the time the spirit has become apathetic, causing the victim to fall into a catatonic coma, but it is possible for a dominant spirit to take control of the mortal for 1-6 days.

The Reborn are either grateful to the Masters for their brief taste of immortality, or despise them for centuries of disembodied captivity.

Fortunately, the Masters who knew the Ritual to create these bottles were only in power for eight years, and when their methods fell out of favor the technique was lost.





• MIND THRUST

Some Masters have learned to attack creatures of Essence with no weapon save their minds. This Spell may only be used by Sensitive characters with a Resolve of 15 or better who are Driven or Inspired.

The mage focuses himself on the Stalker and attempts to force his intended target back to the Realm of Essence through sheer force of will. The effort is Strenuous and costs a point of Vitality, which causes the caster to become very pale and may cause rivulets of blood to run from the temples.

The spell has an Attack Value equal to the caster's Resolve. The Stalker uses his Willpower instead of his Dexterity to resist, and he may not add his Defend Bonus.

Mind Thrust has a Base Damage of 4 Dice. If the caster is Driven or Inspired, the spell does 5 Dice of damage. If the caster uses this spell while acting as the focus of a ritual group of five or more members who have been Inspired by him, the damage is increased to 6 Dice. If the Caster has one or more of the victim's Keys the attack automatically hits and causes 7 Dice of damage.

The spell is a ranged attack with a Base Die Cap of 5, lowered to 4 because it is used against the Unseen. However, this is raised to 6 if the caster is Driven or Inspired.

If the intended target is a Stalker who has the Ward and Whisper Disciplines at Master level, he may attempt to turn the attack back at the caster. To do this requires a Willpower Challenge against the spellcaster's Resolve.

• LIVING BARRIER

When the Masters discovered that their headquarters could be infiltrated by creatures of Essence capable of Dissipation, they devised a terrible precaution that would ensure their privacy.

To create the barrier, the mage must flay the skin from three human victims into thin strips with a ceremonial knife or specially prepared scalpel. These victims provide the necessary Essence.

These strips of human skin are then woven into a web that covers the wall to be protected. The wall takes on a reddish tint, but appears normal to most eyes. Sensitive characters can see a thin membrane of living tissue stretched over the protected surface.

So long as the Barrier is maintained, creatures of Essence may not Dissipate or Translocate through it. The Barrier is also proof against Servitors with powers that could affect the wall such as Devourers and Glimmergaunts.

If the characters are able to figure out that a Barrier is in place, they may attack it with powers such as Savage. The Ripper Servitor is particularly effective against Barriers; it may be directed to strip away as much of the Barrier as the Stalker can see.

An unpleasant side effect of the living wall is its hunger. The Barrier must be fed a small quantity of blood every week or it will begin to moan, a hideous sound that can only be heard by Sensitive characters. If the wall is not fed for three weeks it will wither and die, the skin peeling like old paint.

• IMMORTAL EYES

Frustrated with the time consuming and often dangerous task of locating and recruiting Sensitives, the Masters devised a means to pass on this valuable gift from one generation to the next.

When a Sensitive dies, the Order sends a magician to take his eyes. This must be done within six hours of death, or the Ritual of Preservation will not work and the eyes are lost. The harvested eyes are kept in glass jars suspended in a solution of rare herbs, where they keep for decades if tended properly.

The gruesome Ritual used to Gift an Initiate with Immortal Eyes requires a devotional act of self-mutilation that can be fatal. In the modern age, the Gift of Vision is supervised by a surgeon whenever possible to minimize the risk.

Within three days, the Immortal Eyes graft themselves to the subject. Once in place, the eyes function normally and grant Sensitivity. If the subject was already Sensitive he becomes Oversensitive; an overwhelming experience that few mortals can survive with their sanity intact.

Three weeks after receiving the Gift, characters with a Perceive of 13 or better but a Resolve of less than 15 will begin having strange hallucinations. These are phantoms of the past; images seen by previous owners. These glimpses of the past are considered sacred visions.

Immortal Eyes are unusually dark, with dark pupils and whites gone grey. This is a telltale that must be carefully concealed.





THE ORDER

The Order knows the truth. They do not understand all of it, but they can see glimpses of Revelation. They gather the secrets of the Veil and work to see beyond.

Because they understand concepts like the Veil and the Forbiddance, the Order has been very careful to operate within the Laws. They understand the consequences of making a mistake.

Of all the Enlightened Organizations, the Order is the Stalkers' most reliable ally, especially when the Hunt requires an investigation to reveal the Unbidden.

HISTORY

The Order was founded in ancient Greece as a forum for philosophers dedicated to exploring the unanswered questions of the Aethyre. Among them was a Sensitive named Orestes who described an "invisible world" that few men could see. It was his intuitive leap that provided them with the Inspiration necessary for insight.

Examination of the Unseen set them on the road to Understanding. Over the years, the Order gradually matured, learning more of the truth with every passing generation.

The first encounter between the Order and a Circle of Stalkers occurred in London in 1028. The Stalkers saw the potential in these Enlightened allies and allowed them to see beyond the Veil,

answering several questions before leaving them with even more mysteries than they had before.

Stalkers began to rely on the Order for information and mortal assistance. This relationship grew as the Order grew in insight and understanding. By the Renaissance, the eldest of the Order learned to part the Veil and communicate with Stalkers still in their Domains.

The only friction between the Order and the Unseen happened in 1212. The Order decided to abolish restrictions regarding membership and begin a recruitment program to give them enough followers to directly combat the Unbidden and their Minions. They went so far as to open a school in Athens. During a major ritual, the magic triggered the Forbiddance, destroying the school and everyone in it. Since then, membership has been very carefully monitored and any attempts to Enlighten dreamers are punished by death.

In the modern age, faith in the Unknown became a rare virtue, resulting in the near-dissolution of the Order. By 1970, membership dropped to an all-time low, leaving only a small group of Masters to tend their library.

Strangely enough, the long awaited "information highway" revitalized the Order in 1996. The easy exchange of information put Sensitive in contact with one another in an environment where





they are free to discuss their experiences. The Masters monitor the network and quietly observe those who seem to have promise.

By the year 2000, the Order is stronger than ever before, and is actively seeking out the Unbidden and their Minions, and then alerting the Stalkers of their activity. But then, suddenly, in 2004 the Order vanishes. Their libraries and meeting places are empty, their followers disappeared. Their fate is a mystery.

MAGICAL GIFTS

The Order understands the true nature of their world and respects the sanctity of the Dream. The Magic they practice is subtle and quiet, with minimal risk of Forbiddance.

• TALENTS

Knowing as much as they do about the Veil, the Order is able to awaken Sensitivity in any character with a Perceive Attribute of 13 or higher. The process requires mental training and a simple magic ritual involving the birth-water of one of the female members.

The Masters teach their Sensitives how to recognize the scent of the Unseen, and how to look for signs of the Unbidden and the taint of their Minions. They are, however, instructed to watch and observe, not interfere. There are far greater powers capable of that.

Sensitives of the Order with Perceive Attributes greater than 15 are also able to see through the Veil and need no Challenge to do so.

• AFFIRMATION

Any Master may attempt to Banish a Minion by spending a point of Vitality. If the Minion's Resolve is less than the Master's Resolve, it is Banished. If the Minion's Resolve is greater, the Master loses another point of Vitality. If their Resolve values are identical, both lose a point of Vitality.

• RITUAL OF SEEKING

The Order is able to perform a Ritual that allows them to track a particular Unbidden. To do this, they need some form of physical sample from the Unbidden which must be used before the sun rises or sets again. Additionally, they need a map of the world drawn in natural inks (such as squid, etc.) on the hide of a large mammal killed within one day. The completion of the ritual destroys the hide map, but shows the location of the Unbidden upon it just before its immolation. The ritual takes two hours, and if there is enough time and enough samples and hides, it may be attempted multiple times, each time with a map of smaller and smaller scale.

• ROSE COLORED GLASSES

The Order is also able to construct simple wire-frame glasses with rose colored lenses that allows the wearer to look upon a Stalker without revulsion.

Some pairs have been specially enchanted to allow the Unawakened to see beyond the Veil, but they are rare and are rarely used.





Talon told us that he chased the robed man through the bushes while we freed his intended victim. When it was obvious that he could not escape, the man decided to turn and fight. Talon seemed embarrassed and clutched the wound in his shoulder. Without warning, his opponent struck him with a rusty scythe, but the damage it caused was so serious that he felt it necessary to Whisper to the Grey Man for help. As usual the old soldier responded with a blast from that pistol he carries, but the robed man did not falter and then fled. His origins and desires remain a mystery.

THE BLACK HARVEST

The Black Harvest is a cult that achieved limited Enlightenment and notoriety. There have been thousands of such cults throughout history. This is an example of a relatively small organization that will only be encountered in a limited geographic region during certain time periods. The gamemaster might never use this particular group, but it can serve as a model for organizations of his own creation.

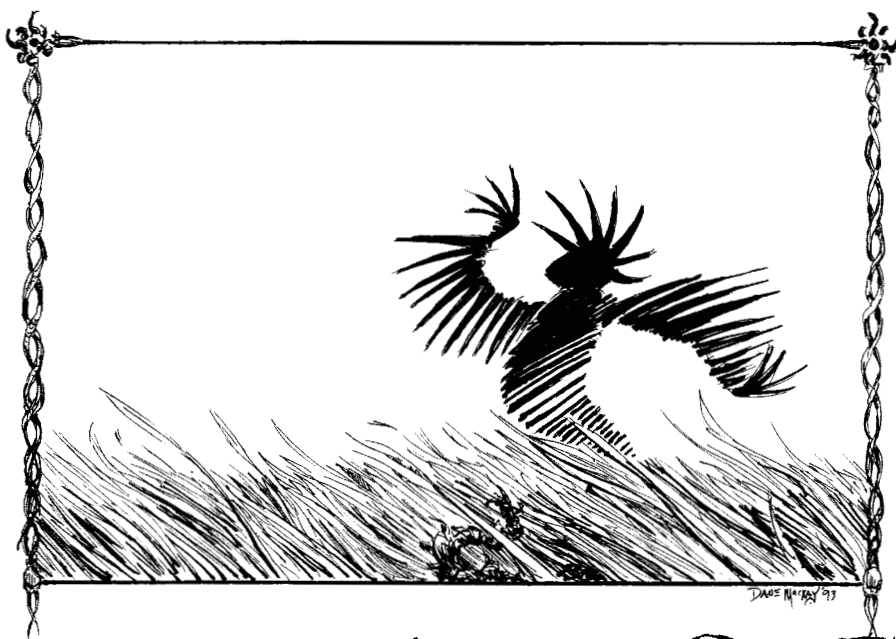
It is worth noting that this cult is not only misguided, the central beliefs of its founders are just plain evil. As they involve the potentially controversial issue of race hatred, we must emphasize that this belief is unacceptable in any form and that the Black Harvest must never be portrayed in a favorable light. They are always the "bad guys."

• ETHOS

The Black Harvest believes that the world is on the brink of Armageddon. They also believe that it is the world that will be judged, rather than the individual. They have taken it upon themselves to rid the world of wickedness so the faithful can achieve a state of grace. They call this crusade the Black Harvest.

The followers of the Black Harvest are fanatics who believe that their actions, and their actions alone, will determine the fate of the world. If they fail the world will be destroyed, and the souls inhabiting it will be cast into the Terrible Fire to burn for all eternity. This makes them very devoted to their cause.

In their eyes, the wicked are beyond redemption.





• HISTORY

The twisted beliefs of the cult that would eventually be known as the Black Harvest were drawn from the Bible and the rantings of Morris Tetch, a protestant minister who believed the world would end on the 4th of October in 1420.

The Black Harvest was formally born during the Civil War. Ethan Price was the eldest son of a wealthy landowner who dabbled in the occult. He was not called upon to fight because of a bad leg and some well placed political muscle. When he received word that he had lost most of his family during the battle of Shiloh, his guilt turned on him and he lost his mind.

Price decided that the Civil War was the Apocalypse predicted by Reverend Tetch and that the black race was descended from Caine and must be eradicated before the judgement day. Driven by misguided hatred, he was able to convince others of his righteousness. With a war going on, it was easy for Price and his followers to slaughter entire families in the name of divine justice.

When the war ended and the Apocalypse did not come, Price lost many of his followers. Those who remained were simply racists looking for some kind of justification for their murderous crusade. Eventually, driven by guilt, Price took his own life.

After the suicide of its founder, the cult dwindled away to nothing. A new Harvest would be called every few years, but these were pale

Judgement is coming and you best be ready or the Lord will find you wanting and the gates of paradise will be locked up tight. You come here tonight to ask forgiveness for your sins and you are chastised for your faith. Look around you – where are your neighbors? The Lord is coming and your neighbors are out on the town looking for a good time. There is wickedness all around us and there must be a reckoning before it is too late...

imitations of the original that died as quickly as they appeared. The cult was effectively dormant for decades.

During the Depression, a con man named Clarence Beddows resurrected the Black Harvest, selling answers to lost souls who were all too eager to buy.

Over a four year period, the "Church of Twilight" evolved from revival meetings into a full movement. The cult was reborn and grew too quickly for Beddows to control.

Among the desperate and the downtrodden was a dangerous man named Simon Clarke. Clarke was a serial rapist who "found himself" while doing hard time for the State of Alabama.

Simon bought the con man's patter and worked as his assistant for four months before he figured out that the boss wasn't a believer. Enraged by the betrayal, Clarke took Beddows' head with a scythe. The Harvest had a new leader.

Under Clarke's guidance, the Black Harvest grew in size and scope. Clarke was not driven solely by racism and actually believed that the wicked should be punished. He directed the Harvest

to kill any who matched his definition of "wicked" or "corrupt." Under close scrutiny, there were few who could not be found worthy of his blade.

Hundreds were killed by robed figures wielding scythes. When federal agents captured Simon Clarke and six members of his "inner circle" in 1936, the cult gradually died out. By 1950, their actions were an unpleasant memory.

Pop culture resurrected the Black Harvest in the late 1980's. Clarke's image adorned the T-shirts of teen idols and quotes from his manifesto crept into the lyrics of garage bands looking for something controversial to give them an "edge."

Fortunately, the renewed interest in Clarke has not sparked a new Harvest, but a few individuals have emulated his methods, committing atrocious crimes inspired by his insanity.

Most infamous of these were a series of beheadings in Cook County, Illinois. Billy Conroy murdered at least 15 women before he was captured. In his confession, he claimed that the words of Simon





Clarke "made sense of an insane world." Amidst the resulting publicity, the Black Harvest went out of vogue.

In 1996, Gordon Keller murdered his wife and a man picked at random using the methodology of the Conroy killings to intentionally inspire a series of copycat killings.

This obscured the details of his crime, which looked like the work of a serial killer and helped him evade capture for twelve years, until his sixty-second year. He died in police custody two days after his arrest.

THE ORGANIZATION

All of Black Harvest's incarnations have been led by a single charismatic leader. Like many cults, this leader's desires are carried out by an "inner circle" of trusted acolytes, some of whom see him as he actually was. Most, however, are blinded by him.

• OPERATIONS

The agents of the Harvest are dedicated to the destruction of the wicked. The leaders dictate who and what is wicked at any given time. Ironically, the cult believes that "black magic" is one of the great evils and devotes much of their efforts to finding and eradicating its practitioners.

• MISCONCEPTIONS

They call Stalkers "Reapers" and believe them to be the agents of the coming Apocalypse. As such, they see the Stalkers as their allies, regardless of how they may view the organization.

MAGIC USE

Only the Depression-era incarnation of the Black Harvest had access to real Magic. Their spells and rituals were kept in a single volume called the "Revealed Catechism," a reference to the Book of Revelations. The Catechism was never copied and was only made available to Clarke's "Inner Circle."

Most of the Catechism is uninspired rhetoric whose only purpose was the reiteration of Clarke's beliefs. The important material is contained in the final five chapters, collectively called the "Mouth of Righteousness."

• SEE THINE OWN TRUTH

The Black Harvest believes that this spell confronts their victim with their "wickedness" forcing them to repent their evil deeds. What it actually does is instill in them a feeling of utter hopelessness and despair, which leaves them weakened and shaking. This is usually all the proof they need.

The spell requires "proof" of the evil deed which is used to confront the accused. An apparent adulterer must be shown a picture of him entering a hotel with his mistress, an alleged embezzler must be shown his doctored books, and so on.

The central irony to this spell is that the Black Harvest uses it as a proof, but its effects never fail, so the victim is always "guilty." Those who have noticed this unfortunate fact have been silenced or convinced they are mistaken. After all, how could a spell provided by the Catechism be wrong?





• RETRIBUTION

This ritual is used to exact vengeance against those who have opposed the Harvest. It is rarely used against those the organization views as wicked, as they must be dealt with directly.

The magician constructs a Scarecrow from clothes stolen from his intended victim. The clothes may be stuffed with anything, but objects with negative emotional resonance work best (such as burial clothes, newspaper clippings of murders or mass deaths, and so on). Clarke himself discovered the potential of using explosives as stuffing.

The Scarecrow's Attack, Defend, Initiative, Perceive, and Resolve Attributes are equal to the Resolve Attribute of the magician who created it. All Scarecrows have a Fortitude of 8 and Vitality of 12 and regain any lost Vitality when the victim sleeps.

When the Scarecrow is invested with Essence, it becomes a creature of Essence like a Shadow. It can travel unseen through the physical world and can only be noticed by Sensitive characters or its victim. It will only manifest when it has finally found the victim.

The Scarecrow has 20 points of armor which is subtracted from damage caused by anyone but the victim. The Scarecrow inflicts damage equal to the victim's Perceive Attribute on every successful hit. It is only killed if the intended victim delivers the killing blow. If not, it will return the next time the victim sleeps.

ARTIFACTS

The Inner Circle have known special rituals of enchanting for many years and have used them to create three Artifacts that are used by certain agents of the Harvest when the wicked must be punished.

• THE NIGHT SHIELD

Most common of the Artifacts used by the Harvest, the Night Shield is a talisman used to ward off "black magic." To create the talisman, a magician must obtain thirteen pennies, a hot flame, and the blood of a guard dog that has torn flesh from a human.

The pennies are heated, beaten into a copper disk about three inches in diameter and then tempered in the animal blood. This disc must be as smooth and featureless as possible. When the disc is ready but before it has completely cooled, the magician recites a brief verse and makes a small cut near his left temple, allowing a single drop of blood to fall onto the metal.

When complete, the Shield must be worn over the heart and must be touching bare skin to function properly. So long as the character is Driven by his beliefs, the Artifact increases his Resolve Attribute by 2 points for purposes of resisting mortal magic and the powers of the Unseen. In addition, it lowers the Die Cap of Rend attacks by 2.

• THE REDEMPTION SCYTHE

Like the Shield, the Scythe is a personal weapon that only functions for the magician who created it. A Sensitive is able to tell

that there is magic present on it, but as far as anyone else is concerned, it seems to be an ordinary, though somewhat intimidating, tool.

When wielding the Redemption Scythe, the character uses his Resolve score in place of his Attack Attribute, doing 3 Dice of Damage if he hits a mortal victim and 5 Dice against creatures of Essence. There is a down side however. If the attack misses, the wielder loses a point of Vitality so it is only used when deemed truly necessary.

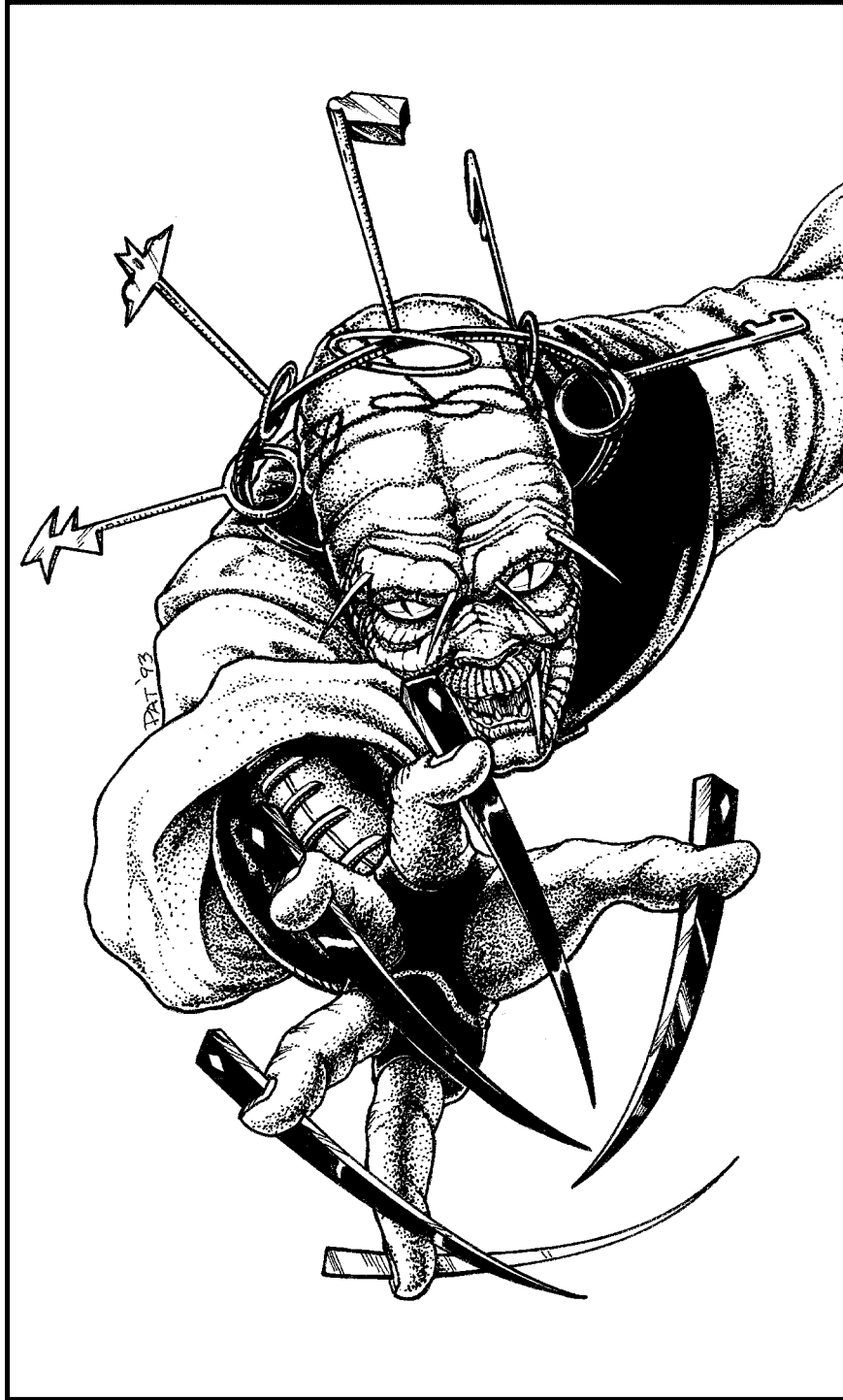
• SEEDS OF SORROW

These are created from a widow's tears and are used to torment the wicked. The seeds must be created in the light of the new full moon. Up to six seeds can be created at any one time.

Each seed, when planted on the property owned by a "wicked" person, gives that individual terrible dreams of being chased by a fearsome beast through fields of wheat. Each night of this nightmare reduces the person's Resolve and Vitality by 1 point each.

The seeds actually produce a black flower that grows and blooms all in one night. It emits a terrible odor that can only be detected by animals. The odor makes them irritable and uncomfortable. If the flower is eaten, the consumer is immediately trapped in the dream and remains there until the intended target dies or regains all of his lost Resolve (at a rate of one per day).





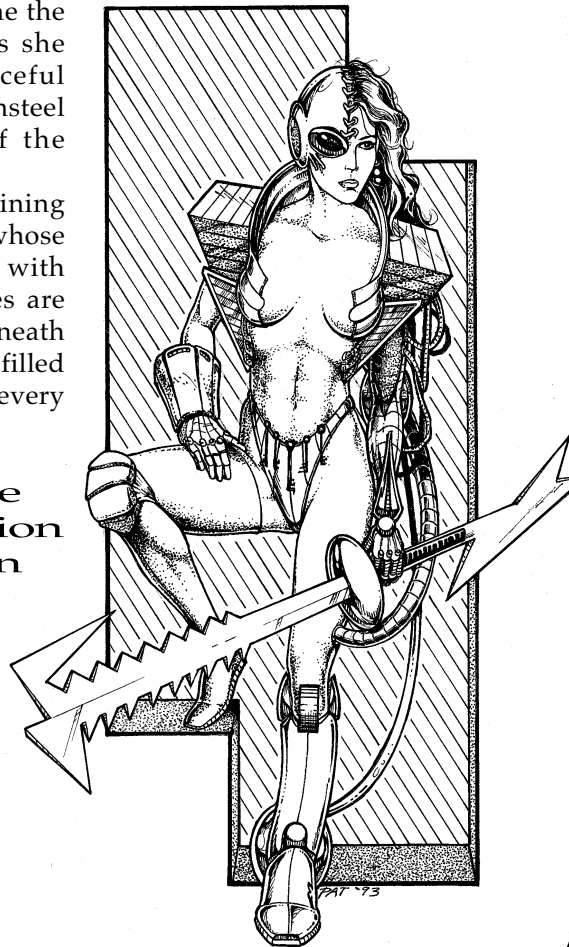
DAWNSTEEL

When Lynn Prentiss met Herbert George Wells in her mother's parlor, she fell madly in love. She was seduced not by the man but by his vision of the future. She and Wells would speak for long hours about man's future hopes for survival. Wells convinced her that man's future depended on his ability to understand science and overcome his base desires. She developed her own theories and soon became a prominent "futurist," founding the Better Dawn Society, an organization dedicated to "improving tomorrow by examining yesterday." Her research led her to an ancient Sanskrit text that parted the Veil and revealed the Unseen menace that threatened the promised Utopia.

As a Stalker, Lynn has become the embodiment of the future as she imagined it would be. A graceful union of flesh and metal, Dawnsteel is the living embodiment of the principles she espoused in life.

Dawnsteel's Domain is a shining metropolis of metal and glass whose multi-leveled streets are filled with worker drones and whose skies are filled with airships. She lives beneath the city in an enormous chamber filled with will dials and levers that control every aspect of her brave new world.

Arrogance
Compassion
Obsession
Naivete
Hope



DAWNSTEEL

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	<u>6</u>
Insight	<u>7</u>
Presence	<u>4</u>
Willpower	<u>5</u>

VITALITY

10

KARMA

5

VESSEL ATTRIBUTES

Dexterity	<u>5</u>
Fortitude	<u>5</u>
Strength	<u>4</u>

DISCIPLINES Mastery?

Delve	y/n
Dissipate	y/n
Foresight	Y/n
Savage	y/n
Whisper	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n

SERVITORS Mastery?

Ferretters	Y/n
Negators	y/n
Trackers	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n

EXPERIENCE

AWARENESS SKILLS

Mending	+ <u>3</u>
Perception	+ <u>3</u>
Sensitivity	+ <u>2</u>

INSIGHT SKILLS

Deduction	+ <u>6</u>
History	+ <u>6</u>
Occultism	+ <u> </u>

PRESENCE SKILLS

Banish	+ <u>1</u>
Bind	+ <u>2</u>
Charm	+ <u> </u>
Evoke	+ <u> </u>
Intimidate	+ <u> </u>
Mask	+ <u>4</u>

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Attack	+ <u>1</u>
Defend	+ <u>2</u>
Stealth	+ <u> </u>

FOCUS SKILLS

Etiquette	+ <u>1</u>
Foresight	+ <u>2</u>
	+ <u> </u>
	+ <u> </u>
	+ <u> </u>
	+ <u> </u>

FATHER FIGURE

Richard Case was a street kid who ran errands for a bookie on New York's Lower East Side in the late 1940s. When he was 16, he left the rackets and set out on his own to make his way on the grift. Richard first encountered the Unseen while traveling with a tent show where he worked his cons. An acquaintance operated a sideshow called the "Carnival of the Bizarre." The feature attraction turned out to be an Awakened Shadow that had been captured in Bangladesh. Watching the creature struggle against its bonds inspired an unhealthy fascination with the Unseen. Living on his wits, the young man travelled the world in search of curiosities like the Shadow. When he realized their true nature, he sought out a Circle of Stalkers and offered them his services.

Richard's Avatar is as twisted as his mortal life. His desire to atone for his sins has manifested in the strange identity of "Father Figure," a warped side-show freak dressed like some sort of priest.

The good father's Domain is a labyrinth of tents filled with side-show attractions. Father Figure lives in the largest of the tents where a revival meeting is always in progress.

Father Figure's Keys have taken the form of a string of prayer beads that he plays with whenever he is nervous or pondering his long-lost mortal life.

Cruelty
Compassion
Curiosity
Sensibility
Regret



FATHER FIGURE

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

Awareness 5
 Insight 6
 Presence 7
 Willpower 4

VITALITY

8

KARMA

5

VESSEL ATTRIBUTES

Dexterity 4
 Fortitude 6
 Strength 3

DISCIPLINES Mastery?

Conjure y/Ⓢ
 Dominate Ⓢ/n
 Rend y/Ⓢ
 Translocate y/Ⓢ
 _____ y/n
 _____ y/n
 _____ y/n
 _____ y/n

SERVITORS Mastery?

Devourers y/Ⓢ
 Flits y/Ⓢ
 Glamours Ⓢ/n
 Gremlins Ⓢ/n
 Rotlings y/Ⓢ
 _____ y/n
 _____ y/n

EXPERIENCE

AWARENESS SKILLS

Mending +2
 Perception +
 Sensitivity +

INSIGHT SKILLS

Deduction +1
 History +
 Occultism +2

PRESENCE SKILLS

Banish +
 Bind +6
 Charm +4
 Evoke +6
 Intimidate +2
 Mask +1

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Attack +
 Defend +2
 Stealth +1

FOCUS SKILLS

Con Games +2
 Dominate +1
 _____ +
 _____ +
 _____ +
 _____ +

TALON

Talon was born into a tribe of nomadic hunters who lived in the Arctic Circle before the dawn of recorded history. During a hunt, Talon found the mutilated corpse of a beast that had been slaughtered by something whose tracks he did not recognize. He tracked this strange predator to its lair and came face to face with an Unbidden spirit in a wounded Vessel newly arrived and starved for Essence. Weakened from its transition, the creature was no match for the primitive and fell quickly to his stone axe. A Circle of Stalkers arrived on the scene almost immediately. Impressed by Talon's purity and strength, and aware of his true potential they readily recruited him into their ranks.

Talon's Avatar reflects his primitive outlook and untamed brutality. He has the body of a powerfully muscled Neanderthal, topped by a oversized lion's head maned in light. Talon serves his Circle as a warrior. Despite his Enlightened consciousness, he chooses to cling to his savage ways, making him a truly dangerous opponent.

Talon's Domain is a lush valley surrounded by glacial peaks. It is populated by countless birds and beasts from Talon's era. The Stalker lives in a small village in the center of the valley where he is both shaman and chief.

Anger
Empathy
Lust
Honesty
Compassion



TALON

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

Awareness	5
Insight	3
Presence	6
Willpower	8

VITALITY

16

KARMA

5

VESSEL ATTRIBUTES

Dexterity	5
Fortitude	6
Strength	6

DISCIPLINES

Mastery?

Frenzy	Y/n
Savage	Y/n
Terrify	y/Y
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n

SERVITORS

Mastery?

Dreadwyrms	y/Y
Rippers	Y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n
	y/n

EXPERIENCE

AWARENESS SKILLS

Mending	+__
Perception	+2
Sensitivity	+__

INSIGHT SKILLS

Deduction	+__
History	+__
Occultism	+__

PRESENCE SKILLS

Banish	+4
Bind	+2
Charm	+__
Evoke	+__
Intimidate	+2
Mask	+__

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Attack	+5
Defend	+4
Stealth	+1

FOCUS SKILLS

Hunting	+1
	+__
	+__
	+__
	+__
	+__

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

Awareness _____
Insight _____
Presence _____
Willpower _____

VITALITY

KARMA

VESSEL ATTRIBUTES

Dexterity _____
Fortitude _____
Strength _____

DISCIPLINES Mastery?

_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n

SERVITORS Mastery?

_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n

EXPERIENCE

AWARENESS SKILLS

Mending +____
Perception +____
Sensitivity +____

INSIGHT SKILLS

Deduction +____
History +____
Occultism +____

PRESENCE SKILLS

Banish +____
Bind +____
Charm +____
Evoke +____
Intimidate +____
Mask +____

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Attack +____
Defend +____
Stealth +____

FOCUS SKILLS

_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____

AVATAR ATTRIBUTES

Awareness _____
Insight _____
Presence _____
Willpower _____

VITALITY

KARMA

VESSEL ATTRIBUTES

Dexterity _____
Fortitude _____
Strength _____

DISCIPLINES Mastery?

_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n

SERVITORS Mastery?

_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n
_____ y/n

EXPERIENCE

AWARENESS SKILLS

Mending +____
Perception +____
Sensitivity +____

INSIGHT SKILLS

Deduction +____
History +____
Occultism +____

PRESENCE SKILLS

Banish +____
Bind +____
Charm +____
Evoke +____
Intimidate +____
Mask +____

DEXTERITY SKILLS

Attack +____
Defend +____
Stealth +____

FOCUS SKILLS

_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____
_____ +____



The Whispering Vault™

BEYOND
THE REALM
OF FLESH IS AN
UNSEEN REALM OF
ESSENCE WHERE THE
DREAMING SPIRITS DWELL. SLIPPING
ACROSS THE RIFT BETWEEN THE REALMS
THE UNBIDDEN INDULGE THEIR BLOODY
PASSIONS IN THE WORLD OF MEN. THE
MOST RESOLUTE OF THOSE WHO OPPOSE
THESE RENEGADES ARE CHOSEN TO SERVE

A HIGHER PURPOSE AS STALKERS—IMMORTAL GUARDIANS OF THE FLESH.

Players explore the nightmare world of *The Whispering Vault* as Stalkers, supernatural entities with strange powers who pursue their otherworldly prey across time and space to the darkest corners of mankind's history. A complete roleplaying game, *The Whispering Vault* combines an original setting with simple mechanics which allow the new player to generate a character and experience a hunt in a single session.



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