

HUNTER-BOOK

WARTYR



A Character Book for Hunter: The Reckoning™

July 14

Back on the late shift again. The new supervisor is turning out to be a real asshole. With my seniority I ought to be able to pick the shifts I want, but he doesn't give a damn. Couldn't find anyone to trade with, not even Dobbs, and I've done him favors for longer than I can remember. See if I help him out anymore.

I spent half my shift thinking about different routes I could take home. There wasn't any reason to drive by the bus station. I tried telling myself that I'd be getting off at midnight, and if I got to bed by one I could still get up and help Carol get the kids to school. She'd appreciate that. It might even make her feel a little better about us, and that's worth anything, right?

But none of that mattered by the time I clocked out. I headed out to the car and before I knew it I was cruising down Eighth, approaching the Greyhound sign.

It rained earlier. Part of me hoped — really hoped — that the rain would keep people off the streets. I saw a group of homeless men clustered together on the steps of the Baptist Church, passing a bottle. They seemed okay. I think one of them was a regular. None of them looked wrong. That's what mattered.

There were a couple of men standing outside the bus station, holding their bags tight, obviously waiting to be picked up. Another guy stood with his back to a wall, smoking a cigarette and watching them out of the corner of his eye. He was probably looking to rob the men, but at least he looked human. It wasn't any of my business.

I got past the station. Nothing to see. That was when I noticed how much my knuckles hurt. They were white from gripping the wheel. I loosened them and tried to relax. Everything was going to be okay. Nothing much to see. I could go home and nuke my dinner, maybe catch some TV or work on the book, then get some sleep. Thank God.

Then I pulled up to the corner of Eighth and Division and I saw them. She was sitting on a street bench, her backpack between her knees. I could see how thin she was — the sharp lines of her neck and jaw as she looked up at the man standing beside her.

He was smiling, offering her a cigarette. Trying to reassure a lost girl just off the bus in a strange city. Except that I could see the dark veins standing out in his pale skin, and something about his smile made a knot in my stomach. He was one of them.

I drove for two more blocks, telling myself how crazy all this was. I was tired. It was dark. I was seeing things. I was under a lot of stress at home. But I kept seeing that girl's face in my mind and I knew there was no one to help her but me.

I parked the car and got the tire iron out of the trunk. There was still blood on it from the last time. I promised myself this would be the last. I'd throw the tire iron in the river and never go past the bus station again. I had a family to take care of, for God's sake.

By the time I got back to the corner, they were gone.

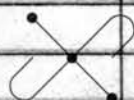
July 15

Didn't get home this morning until after six. I couldn't find any trace of the girl or the thing that was after her. A cop stopped me and asked what I was doing on the streets. God only knows what he'd have done if he'd found the tire iron under my jacket. If a body turns up around the bus station, that cop's going to remember me. I'll be a suspect. But it's too late to turn back now. If that girl is dead, it's my fault. I've got to find her — or at least track down the thing that killed her and make sure it never harms anyone else.

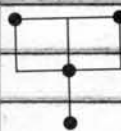
Carol wouldn't speak to me. I tried telling her I hung out at the IHOP, working on the book, but she just pushed past me and went out the door. The kids look worried, but what could I tell them?

I swear this will be the last time. Once I find this creature and kill it, that's it. I've done my part. Someone else can carry the burden for a change.

I'm not the only one out there that can see these things. They leave signs in alleys and on the walls of the buildings downtown. It looks like any other weird graffiti, but the symbols make sense, if you know what you're looking at.



I've only seen this once downtown. It means selflessness, I think. Devotion. Responsibility. Self-sacrifice. It means that there are others out there like me, who see the same things I do and know that they can't just ignore someone in need.



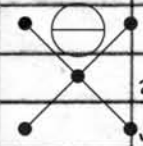
This means victim, sort of. Someone who's suffering because of the monsters. Watch this person and sooner or later you'll run into whatever is tormenting them. It's both a warning and a plea, I guess. I've seen this a couple of times, down near the homeless mission on Tenth.



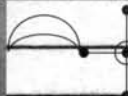
They are watching. An area marked with this symbol is a place where either monsters or the police are on the lookout for us. Unless it's a matter of life or death, don't go there.



A believer. I saw this on a kid's backpack in the mall the other day. Nearly choked on my drink. A normal person who hasn't seen the monsters, but who believes in them and is willing to help fight them? I came this close to going up and talking to him, but he ran into some of his friends and I knew they'd think I was out of my mind.



This means farewell. I don't know how else to explain it. Someone who knew they were about to die, or were getting ready to sacrifice themselves, left this symbol behind. It's a warning, I guess, but also a way to say goodbye. Gives me chills just looking at it.



Forgiven. You're not going to see this symbol anywhere. I just kind of came up with it myself, doodling on my sketch pad. Somehow it means a thing that's worthy of mercy, not hatred. Whoever bears this mark still has some spark of a person left in them and deserves the benefit of the doubt.

There've been times I was tempted to find the people leaving some of these marks. I know there's a web site on the net where people talk about this stuff. Maybe they have less to lose than I do and can afford to look out for other people every night. But if I found someone and told them about that girl, how would I ever be sure that she was found? How could I be sure the monster was stopped?

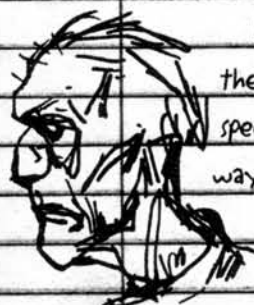
I can't. Simple as that. The only way to be sure is to see this through to the end. I owe her that much.

But this is the last time. I swear to God. Never again.

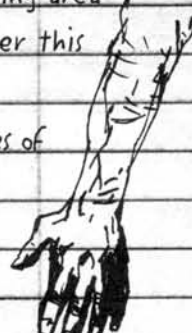
July 16

Called in sick to work last night. If Carol finds out there'll be hell to pay. I wouldn't blame her for taking it out on me. But what choice do I have? Later, when it's over, I'll work a couple of extra shifts and make up for the lost pay.

The extra time on the street paid off. I saw the guy again, not long after midnight. He was cruising through the terminal, looking for more victims. I was sitting in the waiting area and for a minute I thought he was going to try to pick me up, but he went after this young black girl instead. His "master" prefers children, I guess.



I brought my journal with me to make notes, and ended up doing a few sketches of the guy as he stalked around the station. He seems so normal. Even when I use my special sight, the only way he looks different is the color of his skin, and the way his blood vessels look dark blue or black under his skin. You can see it easiest on his hands and neck. There are shadows under his eyes, too, making him look like he hasn't slept in days. Maybe he doesn't sleep at all anymore.



Maybe he picks the young ones because they're the most vulnerable. This latest girl was maybe 13 and 400 miles from home. She was scared out of her mind and trying not to look it. He came up out of the crowd, sat beside her and gave her one of those smiles. Within an hour he'd talked her into leaving with him.

I got up and followed them as they headed outside. My gut was already starting to churn, but I forced myself to keep going. The sooner this was over, the sooner I could put my life back together. With luck, this wouldn't be as bad as the last time.

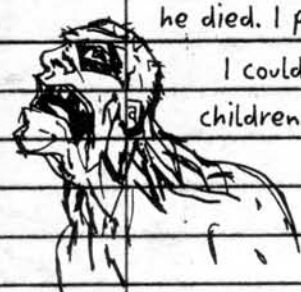
His car was three blocks away. He didn't like witnesses any better than I did. I pulled the ski mask over my head and stepped up behind them as he unlocked the door. She didn't even scream when I hit him with the tire iron. She just ran like a startled animal.



I cut loose one of his seat belts and tied him up. Then I shoved him in his car and drove somewhere quiet. I'd been careful to break both of his arms, so he wasn't in much shape to put up a struggle.

When you've worked on engines as long as I have, you get a real respect for what a car battery can do to someone. He didn't have that same respect at first, but he learned.

He told me where his master was. People will tell you anything if you hurt them long enough. After that, there wasn't anything left to do but hold the wires against his skin until he died. I put him in the car, stuffed a rag in the gas tank and lit it.



I couldn't stop throwing up after. He was one of them, a monster that preyed on children. But I tortured and murdered him. What did that make me?

Could I save this girl without becoming a monster myself? Did it matter? Was it enough that I still loved my family and hated myself for what I had to do?

I don't know.

July 17



Couldn't sleep once I got home. It took three hours to get back to my car and I didn't make it back to the house until after daylight. Everyone had already left. There wasn't any dinner waiting in the microwave.

After a while I pulled out my notes and sketches and tried to work on the book. I haven't written a word since seeing them. I think I wanted to prove that I still could. That I could still go back to my dreams no matter what I'd seen and done.

No words came. I'd last left my heroes in the clutches of the evil witch and that's where they stayed. I couldn't think of any way to save them. I couldn't draw the witch without giving her a charming smile and dark, poisoned veins. There wasn't any way to make-believe now that I'd seen the truth.

Carol and I fought when she got home. I asked her why she hadn't left any dinner out and she started yelling. I guess I did it on purpose. She was hurting and I deserved to feel it.

She said she didn't know me any more. How could I blame her? She was right. I told her I was sorry, that I wouldn't work any more nights, but she said she didn't believe me. She said our marriage was falling apart. The only thing that kept her going was the kids. I begged her to tell me what I could do to make things right. She said she wasn't sure.

I told her I never intended things to turn out the way they did. She started crying and slammed the bedroom door. I tried to think of something else to say, but finally I just got in the car and went downtown.

The only hope I've got is to see this through and then put it all behind me. If I can't get a day job at the plant, I'll quit. We'll leave town if we have to. There can't be monsters everywhere, right?

I called in sick again and went to find the master's lair. It was an abandoned industrial building along the river. No lights, no signs of life. I wondered if maybe that servant hadn't lied after all, but I grabbed the tire iron and took a look anyway.

It was a mistake. I was too damn impatient to get things over with. I should have waited until daylight, but instead I climbed through a tall, broken window and tried to find my way around in the dark.

The place was huge. There was debris everywhere, covering the floors and hanging from the ceiling. Twice I nearly stepped through holes in the floor. No telling how far I would have fallen. Every now and then I stopped and listened. The place was quiet as a tomb.

The thing grabbed me from behind. Its fingers were like steel. It threw me through a thin dividing wall and then jumped on me, hissing. I swung the tire iron blindly and hit an arm or leg. Bones crunched and the thing screamed. It fell back and I half-crawled, half-ran as fast as I could, trying to find a way out.

It didn't follow me. Maybe I'd hurt it worse than I thought, but I wasn't going back to find out. Some things were better done in the daylight. I had a couple cracked of ribs to prove it.

The house was dark when I got home. There was an open bottle of gin in the kitchen. When did Carol start drinking again? Just as I reached for the bottle, the phone rang. I snatched it quick. Who the hell would be calling at four in the morning?

The voice on the line was as dead as the grave.



It said, "You found me. Now I've found you."

How did it know where I lived? Where did it get my number? Could it read minds? Jesus Christ!

It warned me. It told me to leave it alone. Its voice was strained, hoarse, like it was in serious pain. I must have hurt it pretty bad. So I told the thing that it wasn't going to be killing any more children. I would do anything necessary to destroy it. Anything. I think it believed me.

The monster actually tried to argue with me. It said those kids were free now. They were in a better place. After he had them brought to his hiding place and drained of their blood. I told the thing to shut up. It was a monster. A killer. It couldn't be allowed to go on hurting people.

Then it asked me what happened to its servant. I told him and he actually sounded horrified. He said I was the monster.

I told it that I wasn't a dead creature that drank people's blood. I didn't sleep in the ground and hide from the sun. I didn't burn when holy water touched me, or fear garlic or a cross. What I did was stand up for people who couldn't do it for themselves. I never asked to see the things I'd seen, or do the things I'd done. I never wanted to know about monsters. But now that I did, I had a responsibility to do something about it.

The thing said it had been human once, too. That it hadn't asked to become what it was. Neither did a rabid dog, I answered, but the end result was the same. When they turn on people, they have to be destroyed.

It screamed that it didn't have a choice. Neither did I.

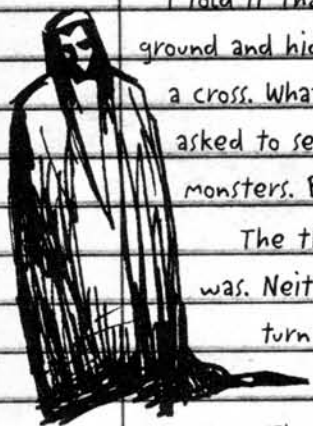
The line went dead. When I hung up, I noticed the lights were on in the next room. Carol was in the doorway. She looked scared. I tried to tell her things were going to be okay. She started to cry.

Eventually, she went back upstairs. I drank the gin, and later I made breakfast. Nobody ate much.

As soon as Carol and the kids were gone I went shopping for gas cans. I bought some laundry soap and made five gallons of napalm. I got the recipe off the internet. You can get recipes for nerve gas if you look long enough.

I didn't have much of a plan. There wasn't much point. I drove out to the lair in broad daylight, went inside and poured the napalm down every hole I could find. I saw on the news later that evening that it took six hours to put the fire out.

It was only later that I realized I'd completely forgotten about the thin girl from the bus station.



July 19



Tommy went out with his friends last night. He hasn't come back. Carol is crying. She says it's my fault. She hates me. I think she's right.

The thing couldn't have survived the fire. But what if it hadn't been in the building in the first place? I never thought of that. I never checked. I just wanted it to be over.

The police say Tommy's friends last saw him around midnight. He was heading home. We've checked the hospitals and there weren't any wrecks in our area. No one has found the car, either. Carol thinks he's run away. God, I hope so.

Maybe the monster killed him. Maybe it wanted revenge for what I did. I can understand that. But what if he did something worse? What if he's made my son a monster, too?

If I drive past the bus station tonight, will I see him? Will he be sitting back in the shadows, looking for some frightened, lonely child? And if he is, what will I do?

I want it to stop. I want it all to be over. There are pills upstairs in the medicine cabinet. I keep thinking about them, how good it would be to close my eyes and go to sleep.

But what if Tommy is out there hurting people? What kind of father would I be if I left him living in hell from night to night? It's my responsibility. My fault. I can't let someone else hunt him down like a dog because of what I did.

But can I kill him? My own son?

It's five more hours until dark. God help me, but I'm afraid the phone will ring tonight and it'll be him.

Please, God. Please let him be dead.







PROLOGUE: WELCOME BACK

That night, like every night, Anna dreamt of the camp.

The one they called The Pig was just outside the shack she and the other women slept in. It was raining, as it always did at that time of year, and the cold of winter wasn't yet gone from the air. Little Zulija — barely 13 — whispered that The Pig had been a butcher on her street before the war, a friendly man, and that Zulija's family had never been very religious. That the man slaughtered pigs was never an issue.

Then the war came. He said the Moslems looted his store. He said the Croats shot his wife. He showed the Serb militias where people hid in the neighborhood. Now he walked the camp looking for Zulija, her sister and her mother. The Pig would rut with them because he could. Just like Goran had with Anna. Goran, now a militiaman and a guard at the camp, who had once dated Anna's cousin.

This was hell. Hated by neighbors. Raped by friends. Hell.

* * *

That morning, like every morning, Anna fought back the pain with a scalding shower followed by coffee and cigarettes. The unfiltered carcinogens plunged into her lungs as she made her way to the Kings Highway transit station before dawn.

She never slept past 5:30, and she was out the door by 6:00. She passed by the same joggers she did every morning and fell in among the pre-rush commuters making their way into Manhattan. It was all so *normal*.

She wondered if anyone else was hiding scars under silk scarves, high collars and leather gloves.

Anna finished her cigarette as the 6:13 Q express train rumbled into the station. She boarded and stood in the corner of the lead car, near the emergency brake. There was

room to sit, but she preferred to stand. Once the crowds got thick, sitting meant a view of nothing but a stranger's chest and she couldn't take that. She needed to see.

Fifteen minutes later, the train headed under the East River and Anna closed her eyes for a second. She felt the familiar pain bloom behind her eyes. The pink blotches that ran up her left shoulder and neck started to sting. Pain was always her companion.

She opened her eyes and looked, really looked, at the commuters. A young woman with a Walkman... nothing... a stocky man in an army jacket... nothing... a stockbroker, maybe, reading the paper... *there*. At the far end of the car, an elderly woman took a seat offered by the stockbroker. Scooping up that morning's *Wall Street Journal*, he didn't seem to notice the cockroaches swarming across the woman's face, into the holes that should have held her eyes. Anna noticed.

The snub-nose .38 in the holster at the small of Anna's back, the baton in her left boot — there were options, ways to deal with the roach woman. Thoughts and strategies scratched at Anna's mind, mingling with thoughts of Goran, The Pig and all the other monsters out there. She thought and stared as the train rumbled under Manhattan.

The doors opened at 42nd Street and Anna walked out along with most of the Brooklyn commuters. The roach woman stayed on the train and Anna sighed in relief.

Then she bit her lip until it bled.

* * *

She should just ignore it. Just keep on going with her day as if she had never seen the note. Just as she had with the roach woman and the other *things*. So what if she was "Dictatrix11," one of the first on hunter-net? She had barely



logged on in months, despite repeated inquiries from Witness1 and others.

She should just ignore it. Like the world had when her home turned into a killing field.

To anyone else, the note would look like nothing. A phone number scrawled on a yellow pad along with a bunch of gibberish. Just one more piece of urban trash. But it wasn't gibberish. It was the code. Whoever wrote this was one of the chosen and was reaching out. Someone had obviously written the message on several pages and posted them on walls or trees or telephone poles, maybe just here near the café or all over the city.

The code wasn't a language exactly, but the meaning was always clear to Anna. *I'm hunting something bad and need help*, she felt the symbols meant. One of them was almost identical to the homemade pendant she wore around her neck. *I have chosen*.

She should just ignore it. Surely this call for help wasn't the only one this person had made. Surely someone else would see a note and make the call. What good could she do?

Anna took another drag on her cigarette and followed it with a last swallow of black, burned coffee. She tossed the butt into the swill at the bottom of her cup and got up. Lunch hour was almost over and it was time to get back to work. Twenty minutes with the sun on her shoulders and the barely present scent of spring blooms under the exhaust and pollution had, as always, failed to rejuvenate her, but the effort was worthwhile. She gathered the detritus of her lunch, her purse and other items and headed back toward the New York Public Library. For a moment, she actually thought she'd go back to work that afternoon.

She knew she should just ignore the note, but she couldn't. She tossed her trash into the container at the corner and headed for the nearest payphone. She'd already committed the number to memory.

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"A rot did this to me back in October in Baltimore." The little man pulled up his black sweatshirt and pointed to white-and-pink scars running down his left side. "Threw me against a chain-link fence. Those damn sharp bits at the top went right through me. Never let anyone tell you rots are slow."

They were in a dirty little hotel room off Seventh Avenue. Times Square, now a crisp, clean shrine to the power of the media, was a few minutes away. But here, poverty and decay were still the norm. Given what Anna knew about the power of the monsters, she wondered where a pair of imbued were safest — under the bright lights and cameras the monsters controlled, or amidst the urban blight they created. She felt a bead of sweat run down her sternum.

"How did you get that?" the man asked, pointing to his own neck to indicate Anna's.

She reached up and adjusted her scarf to better hide her scars. "I do not want to talk about it, Mr. Smith."

"Fine, whatever. Down to business then."

Smith — or whatever his real name was — was two inches shorter than Anna's own 5'9" but had at least 40 pounds on her. Somewhere between stocky and flabby, he looked like nothing other than a bulldog-made-man. His jowls were too big for his face and his nose was too small. He wore black from head to toe, but without any sense of

fashion. Anna felt distinctly overdressed in his company. And under-armed. When he lifted his shirt to show off battle scars, she noted a small holster for a .22 pistol. That, in addition to the .44 visible on his hip, the revolver in an ankle holster and the pump-action shotgun on the table next to him. His only nonlethal accessory was a belt-clipped cell phone, the one through which Anna had reached him only a few hours ago.

Anna knew this armament was actually conservative compared to what some of the imbued carried, but it still made her uncomfortable.

"Your... message said you needed help."

"Yeah, I guess so. I'm a little tight-lipped sometimes, you know? Not everyone understands what has to be done, not even among us."

"Not everyone knows the price that has to be paid, either." She said it with sadness rather than enthusiasm, but he didn't seem to notice the distinction.

"Exactly. This ain't a game you can stop at any time. This is the end game."

"Yes." She took a drag on her cigarette to fire up her courage to ask the next question. "So what can I help you with?"

"You know we all have that sight, right? We can all see when something is wrong?"

"Yes."

"But some of us have a better sight. We can see further into their souls. See where the evil comes from. That make sense to you?"

Anna thought of looking at the roach woman, of seeing the ghosts and blood fiends. "Yes, yes it does."

"Well to the others, there's a type of monster that looks basically harmless. Like the things just stay out of the way and don't bother no one. But I can see what's really going on. How they're using their powers and shit to turn us all against each other. I've heard things about us fighting each other, have you?"

Anna thought about what she had seen on hunter-net when she last logged on: Oracle171 going mad, Bookworm51 off God knows where, Cop90 dead. Chaos gripped the imbued, it seemed.

"Yes...."

"Well, these *skulkers* are behind it. They're making us go after each other's throats. It's like a sort of voodoo or something, I think. Like pushing pins in a doll. They just sit back and make us come apart. So I'm bringing the fight to them."

It was crazy, but so was everything else about her life, Anna realized. "Do you have any allies?"

"That's hard, cause not everyone gets it. I've fought three *skulkers* so far and they fire you up with doubt and pain. I seen it destroy others. You gotta know that pain is part of the deal. You gotta be ready to suffer or you ain't gonna make it against them. Not a lot of people out there are *really* ready for that."

Anna was quiet for a moment before she reached up and removed her silk scarf. "This happened when a camp guard named Goran poured boiling kitchen grease on me. He said it was to show me that the clothes I wore were 'inappropriate.' That was *before* I ever saw the monsters, Mr. Smith."

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Brooklyn's Avenue H station was almost deserted at midnight, when they walked onto the platform. They were altogether too close to her home for Anna's comfort, but there was no way she could confide that. Smith seemed genuine, but trust went only so far.

"We're near the thing's lair. It's gotta be around here somewhere." He scanned the platform up and down as they walked. "There."

Anna looked where he was pointing and saw a figure huddled behind a pile of construction materials left by a work crew. Something tickled at the back of her mind and Anna closed her eyes briefly to call up the sight.

Roaches. Dead roaches.

Anna stepped closer to get a better look. It was definitely a woman, slumped down as if trying to keep warm. All around her were the black shells of large insects, legs up and immobile. The smell of rot wafted up and recognition came right after — the roach woman from that morning.

"Recognize it?"

Anna turned around to face Smith and gazed into the barrel of one of his pistols. "What... what is going on?"

"I asked if you recognized it, bitch. I mean, you let it go this morning, didn't you?"

"But—"

"How do I know? I was *there*, bitch! Standing right next to you and you didn't even know it. I was wearing an army jacket and packing, and you never even noticed. I saw the thing and watched you watch it. I saw you turn away from the cause. You fucking *skulker*."

Anna swallowed. "But how did you know I was—"

"One of us? You wear that around your neck, lady." The pistol dipped to point at the pendant hanging just below her scarf. "That, and your actions showed me that you were a *skulker*."

"What are you talking about?"

"I followed that fucking thing for a *week*! It was bait, waiting for a waste of space *skulker* like you to show up. You walked away. You make us weak, just like those Internet motherfuckers."

Anna noted that as Smith ranted, the gun wavered. But not enough. She tried to keep him talking. "Internet?"

"Yeah, there's a bunch of folks spending their time *talking* instead of *doing*. They send out whiny little messages and hide behind fucking cute code-names. They're all *skulkers*! They think they're safe behind words, but they make mistakes and tell too much. Things that can be pieced together to make a picture of them. I came here looking for some of them. The name 'dictatrix-one-one' mean anything to you?"

Despite herself, Anna swallowed audibly.

"I thought so."

"But why?"

"Because this is the end game! We've got our back up against the wall, and there's no place for freaks who can't give it everything they've got. We're all gonna fight to the last or we're all gonna lose."

"But—"

"Don't fucking interrupt me!" The gun jerked up again. "It's people like you, who fucking *skulk* in the shadows even when they know. You make us weak. You, Oracle and the rest

of the fucking weaklings. You gotta be purged. That's what I'm here to do."

He coughed and the fire danced in his eyes. Just as with The Pig and Goran. "You're either gonna come with me back to the hotel so you can tell me about the other skulkers, or you're gonna die right here. Your choice."

Anna let her shoulders slump and told herself that this was how it would end. She had stopped hunting some time ago, sitting back and watching things happen but rarely ever acting on her own. In his own crazy way, Smith was right. She'd given up the cause. But going with him now meant ending in pain. In another camp run by a man who should be a friend.

"Let's go!" he barked and waved his pistol to show the way.

Anna reacted. Like she did when Goran came for her that last time. Like when the dead appeared on her first night in New York. She swatted the pistol to the left while her right hand went under her jacket. Smith squeezed the trigger. The shot tore through part of her left arm and side.

Anna's right hand appeared with a .38 and fired into Smith's face. He was still smirking when he hit the ground a second after his brain hit the wall.

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It was a week before Anna was back in her brother's house in Brooklyn. Her left arm was in a sling, and she had yet another round of appointments with the NYPD and the INS to discuss the shooting. Her lawyer argued self-defense. Given that her "victim," a Wisconsin man named Samuel Baines, was wanted in connection with at least two murders, the story would probably stand up. It was also the truth, after all.

Immigration might be more complex, but that could wait for now.

Anna powered up her little computer and logged on to the Internet. She closed her eyes and thought of the camps again, but still typed it in: <http://www.hunter-net.org>.

It was barely ten minutes after her first post that a private email arrived.

To: dictatrix11

From: witness1

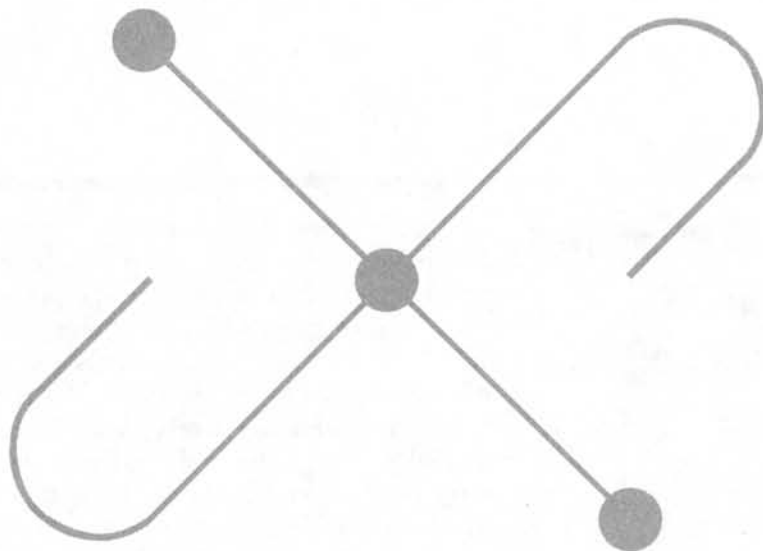
Subject: Welcome back.

Good to have you with us again, D. Keep in touch.

That night, the stitches in her side and arm burning and her body aching, Anna slept like a baby.

HUNTER-BOOK™

WARTYR



By PHILIPPE BOULLE AND MICHAEL LEE

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Brian "Hmm, hockey or beer?" **Glass** (#84, Defense), for bailing on double-header, playoff-bound weekend games for beer and conventions.

Rich "Penalty King" **Thomas** (#13, Defense), for getting more team votes than any player in any category.

Mike "Corporate Endorsement" **Tinney** (#11, Goal), for conning the Powers That Be into funding the summer 2000 season.

Fred "I don't need a stinking number" **Yelk** (#%\$^&, Defense), for losing his jersey and losing track of all those goals and assists.



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HUNTER-BOOK

WARTYR

TABLE OF CONTENT'S

PROLOGUE: WELCOME BACK	8
INTRODUCTION	16
CHAPTER 1: HEED THE CALL	20
CHAPTER 2: CROSS TO BEAR	30
CHAPTER 3: LAMBS ALL	46
CHAPTER 4: COMING SACRIFICES	58
CHAPTER 5: NEW RULES	68
CHAPTER 6: MARTYRS AT LARGE	80



INTRODUCTION

For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

— Hebrews 9:26

GIVE ALL YOU HAVE TO GIVE

Hunter Book: Martyr is a sourcebook that helps you develop a better understanding of the Martyr creed and its emerging role in the world of **Hunter: The Reckoning**. As a Martyr you look at the World of Darkness and see all the trials to come. Humanity is being tested, starting with you. The fate of the world relies on you being willing to lay down your life and face the overwhelming odds. You — and others like you — have to heal the world before it's too late. You are the hero who runs into a burning building, who goes back to get his buddy from behind enemy lines, who takes a bullet for a total stranger. Where others call for pragmatism and "being realistic," you screw up your courage and do what has to be done. You hope others learn from your sacrifices, but you don't count on it.

So what makes you carry on the good fight? How can you keep enough hope in your heart to make all the pain worth it? This book helps you decide, to determine who your Martyr is, before and after the imbuing — and all the creed's new powers and rules don't hurt, either.

But just as you need to better understand your own Martyr, you must understand imbued society as it emerges; the two are inextricably intertwined. As each of the newly imbued struggles to understand her new world, origins and purpose, she inevitably compares experiences, philosophies and fears with those she encounters on the streets or on the

Internet. At first, the recently awakened latch onto anyone who understands them; this new world is just too terrifying to contend with alone. In time, however, as more and more imbued dare meet and make overtures to find each other, individuals with similar attitudes and theories are attracted to one another and form like-minded circles. These founding social groups are the foundations for what ultimately become the creeds.

Yet, in these early days, many varied imbued can seem to have common goals. As the chosen make contact, try to understand their mutual condition and strive to work together, *similar* goals and *comparable* experiences can hide fundamentally different philosophies, whether about imbued purpose, the nature of the Messengers, or the necessary fate of the supernatural. All imbued agree that the "other side's" hold on humanity must be broken, but not everyone agrees on how to accomplish that goal. Mutual experiences and mutual values turn out to be two very different things. Imbued can therefore be taken by surprise when a fellow "Martyr" really proves to be a militant Avenger or fanatical Redeemer. Sometimes, the chosen aren't even sure of their *own* ideals until having become completely immersed in the cause.

Only after the imbued become fully devoted to or even obsessed with the mission do their approaches to it become purposeful and refined. Some become determined to save monsters' souls. Others want to see such creatures utterly destroyed. When this distillation is complete, the creeds as

social classifications finally arise. Martyr recognizes Martyr and Judge recognizes Judge, all through the creeds' codified values, intentions and goals in the hunt.

When will the imbued achieve such social structure? It could take months or years as they struggle to understand themselves and then one another. The fact that so many edges seem to be shared by the chosen of various perspectives and personalities doesn't help, either. When creeds as institutions are finally acknowledged, however, the mission may finally gain the momentum it needs to save humanity, once and for all. Or perhaps such cumbersome and fractious divisions will be the mission's undoing, as imbued fall to infighting and politics rather than upholding their higher purpose.

Ultimately, the course of your chronicle and your Storyteller's vision decide when the creeds become fully recognized in your game. In the meantime, your Martyr's completely developed identity helps define his own society.

PERSPECTIVES

The opinions, theories, information and outlooks expressed in this book are presented in three distinct "voices." These Martyr narrators typify the spectrum of personalities across the creed as a whole. Each of these people presents his or her own take on the origins, tactics, relations and ultimate fate of Martyrs, and on the imbued in general.

The creed and its members' views evolve constantly as Martyrs try to define themselves in a world they no longer understand. With no other frame of reference, the chosen often resort to the ideas, values and philosophies they possessed before their transformation. No two Martyrs have the same thoughts about their origins. Thus, the *questions* the imbued ask of themselves and their world — not any specific *belief system* — best illustrate their individual and collective identity. After reading this book, you should have a sense of the drives and furies that inspire and motivate various Martyrs. You should sense what allows them to endure the pains of their cause, and what influences their relations with other imbued. We also hope that you're inspired to develop your character's identity and beliefs fully, to make him just as compelling in his work for a better world.

How to Use This Book

Hunter Book: Martyr shows you the World of Darkness through fresh eyes. Each chapter deals with one broad theme. Taken together they give you a new vision of the hunt as a whole.

Chapter 1: Heed the Call examines the origins of Martyrs as Martyrs perceive them. The creed's members pursue personal causes and endure guilt over their actions to extents that few other imbued do, all of which colors their understanding of the calling.

Chapter 2: Cross to Bear looks at the methods and beliefs of Martyrs. It's easy to think that creed members jump into the jaws of death at every opportunity, but that's far from the truth. They suffer for a purpose and this chapter examines how they go about it.

Chapter 3: Lambs All deals with Martyrs' view of and relations with other imbued. Many creed members are so fired with their own causes that they dismiss fellow hunters. Other Martyrs seek to show the imbued the light of a cause, whether by instruction or object lesson.

Chapter 4: Coming Sacrifices reveals Martyrs' perspective on the future. These hunters are convinced that they will

lay down their lives, sooner or later. Instead of make them ignore the future, this fatalism makes them focus on it.

Chapter 5: New Rules provides you with all the game mechanics and advice needed to make your Martyr unique. Various new edges and Traits broaden creed members' capabilities, and detailed guidelines help you build a character who is more than a suicidal freak.

Chapter 6: Martyrs at Large provides you with a selection of Martyrs out there fighting the good fight. Ready-to-play templates can get you going in a flash, while notable Martyrs give you examples to follow or avoid.

LEXICON

The imbued are still very much a new phenomenon. As Martyrs discover each other and exchange ideas, a sort of common parlance develops. The following terms are used by some on hunter-net, in websites, on the street and elsewhere to express ideas associated with the creed.

charity case: A Martyr who slowly but surely burns out all his resources (health, finances) to support other hunters — usually without much recognition — and so goes from being a source of charity to a recipient thereof. A charity case often ends up "in the Chevy Hilton" (i.e., living in his car).

choice, the: The imbuing. Refers to the Martyr belief that creed members (and hunters in general) choose their fate. The imbuing only presents the option of waking up. It's the conscious decision to stand up and fight that really counts. The imbued are often called "the chosen" for this reason.

cross to bear: The personal mission or cause of a Martyr; sometimes used to refer to a monster that has become a hunter's nemesis, motivation or inspiration.

drama queen: Disparaging term for a Martyr (male or female) who draws attention to her sacrifices.

hole: Derived from "asshole" and "a-hole," this term refers to selfish and self-absorbed people. Some Martyrs see this behavior as the first step toward becoming a supernatural monster — at which point one can still change one's fate. Holes can suck others into their own selfishness, an event referred to as "falling into a hole."

preacher: A Martyr who tries to recruit others to his cause, often using religious language; also, "Falwell" or "savior."

slacker: An imbued who doesn't do enough, therefore forcing Martyrs to do more; "slacking off" refers to the actions of such imbued.

tested, the: The imbued generally and Martyrs specifically. Refers to the belief that Martyrs undergo worse tribulations than any other chosen and so are somehow more worthy. Also: "the devoted."

time, the: The moment when a Martyr must lay down her life for the greater good. Also: "bottom of the ninth," "endgame" or "when the fat lady sings."

SOURCE MATERIAL

Martyrdom is certainly nothing new. People have been laying down their lives for things they believe in for as long as humans have existed. Religious texts are full of prophets and believers who sacrifice themselves for their faith. In our time, accounts of firefighters, soldiers and bodyguards jumping into harm's way are, if not pervasive, then common.

Despite this long history of self-sacrifice, it can be difficult to understand the psychology behind it all. What

makes people willing to put aside their own well-being? If the world were full of monsters and even worse off than it actually is, what kind of people would still be willing to step in harm's way? Certainly, **Hunter Book: Martyr** answers those questions, but other looks at the martyr mindset can be helpful. The following sources approach the compulsion for self-sacrifice from various angles.

Bringing Out the Dead: The ultimate Martyr movie. Martin Scorsese directs Nicholas Cage as a sleep-deprived, burnt-out paramedic in New York's Hell's Kitchen who just can't stop caring for others enough to save himself. Watch as the paramedics go madder and madder in a crazy situation. See Cage haunted by the ghost of a woman he couldn't save. See redemption come in small doses. Now go play **Hunter**. (Along the same lines, realistic shows like *Paramedics* or *Trauma: Life in the E.R.* are very useful for capturing the combination of empathy and insanity that characterizes a Martyr. These people give their all.)

Fight Club: A single charismatic leader draws in normal, middle-of-the-road men by teaching them to let go of their fear, to accept their own mortality and to get off on pain. Then, by holding up nothing more than credit-card companies and IKEA as enemies, he turns them into an army. Imagine what could be done against zombies and vampires! Welcome to the world of militant and extremist Martyrs.

Millennium: Chris Carter's abortive, apocalyptic television series about an ex-FBI agent haunted by visions of serial killers has a lot of good **Hunter** elements going for it. It's the end of the world and demons hide in human form. Fellow fighters for light may be more dangerous than the "bad guys." Loved ones and friends pay the ultimate price for your dedication. All that, and the main character's visions are a perfect representation of the Witness edge.

Saving Private Ryan: Good soldiers go on a fool's errand that costs most of them their lives. They grumble, they complain, they come close to outright treason, but they finally make the ultimate sacrifice for someone they've never even met. A good look at the reluctant camp of the Martyr creed.

SAVIORS, NOT SAVAGES

Martyrs are passionate, determined people. They tend to give their all to whatever cause they follow or plans they make, especially if those deeds bear on a purpose or agenda that they believe will save souls. When push comes to shove, however, the tested may not seem very far from Avengers. Both will attack ruthlessly when provoked and will hurt and kill if they believe it's necessary. To the uninformed observer, both creed members can seem to follow actions through till the bitter end, to the death of creature or hunter. Perspective and rationality seem to be optional for both groups.

The difference is that Avengers are often ruthless due to wrath or self-righteousness. They believe they have an ordained moral imperative to fulfill that only they can. The relative needs, wants, identity or personality of a monster doesn't matter. Monsters do as monsters are, so they must be destroyed.

Martyrs don't have it so easy. They might recognize an indisputable "right" that must be upheld — even violently — but pursuing it probably holds no appeal. The tested can go through with the act because no one else *will*, not because no one else *can*.

Martyrs can also sympathize with creatures whereas Avengers typically do not. Monsters might have been human once too, and probably didn't ask to become predators, any more than hunters asked to be imbued. Whereas monsters might have to harm or kill to sustain themselves physically, Martyrs have to harm or kill to sustain themselves morally, despite the personal anguish it causes. It can pain them to inflict harm on creatures, but some creatures' actions against humanity and the world simply cannot be abided. Destroying monsters is a necessary evil, yet the similarities between monsters and Martyrs means the tested virtually destroy themselves by answering the call. Avengers kill and call it justice.



CHAPTER 1: HEED THE CALL

Save thyself, and come down from the cross.
— Mark 15:30

From: rigger111
To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
Subject: Goddam Security!

Okay, who the fuck is faxing this piece of shit called "The Choices I've Made"? He's obviously one of us — it's full of monsters-this, rots-that and blood-puppets-the-other. Whoever it is, get a clue about fucking security!

I mean this thing — all 20+ pages of it! — came out on my fax machine at work. Right next to Jimmy the fucking section manager! Am I the only one who remembers what happened to xxx289? Don't bring the hunt to the office — not my office.

Witness, is there any goddamn security left on this site at all?

Subject: Re: Goddam Security!
From: witness1

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org, rigger111

> Witness, is there any goddamn security left on this site at all?

I'm looking into it. I've gotten reports of several people receiving this fax, but haven't been able to track down the source yet. Keep an eye out, everyone.

THE CHOICES I'VE MADE, PART ONE

FAX TRANSMISSION 00:12:40 July 28

I was arraigned for murder yesterday. They dragged me in front of a judge, a bored old cracker if ever I seen one, and read out the charges. I was in prison orange (still am, actually) with shackles on my wrists and ankles. Like a slave, my daddy would have said.

The whole thing took maybe 15 minutes. The old cracker told me my "rights" and that I was being charged

with first degree murder. He mentioned the death penalty and then asked if I had a lawyer. Nope. That's when this brother with too much caffeine came forward and said he'd defend me — I was expecting a public defender like they show on TV, but this guy said that the Muslim Federation was taking care of my defense. Before I could ask any more questions, the judge coughed a few times and asked for a plea. I said "not guilty" and they hauled me away.

I'm not really proud of saying "not guilty," but that's the price I gotta pay. See, I did kill that thing, but telling the judge wouldn't serve any purpose. So I'm going to tell you. Thanks to the guard in my cell block, who knows the truth, I can speak my mind in these letters while I wait to die.

Yeah, and thanks to the Federation too, I guess. I never really had time for all that Muslim stuff before my arrest — my mother and auntie raised AME and that's what I'm gonna stay — but they tell me this guard and some other Muslim brothers have seen the monsters. Talking with him since my arrest has shown me that I got a few things left to do and writing to you is one of them. I've gone through the shit-storm you're in right now and come out the other side.

CONFESSIONS

Subject: Paying the Price
From: anon52
To: hunter.list@huter-net.org

It's three in the afternoon and my oldest son is still out there somewhere, probably asleep at this time of day. He was out late last night with his friends and he never came home. He's in the ground now, I think, or maybe down in a basement — somewhere

the sun can't reach. When it's dark, he'll wake, and sometime after that I expect the phone to ring.

I've sat here in the kitchen for hours wondering what I'll tell him. Yesterday I told a vampire that I was going to kill it, like I would any rabid animal. But this is no beast. This is my boy.

My wife's still crying. I never knew a human being could hold so many tears. She blames me for Tommy's disappearance. She's right, but the truth is much more terrible than she thinks.

The vampire took my son and violated him to send me a message: I can't destroy him without destroying everything I love.

He also wanted me to see that anyone can become a monster. I see that now. I see it all too clearly.

They aren't our enemies. They're our reflections, a warning of what lurks inside each of us, just underneath the surface.

It's not Us versus Them. God help us, we *are* Them.

A LIGHT TO SHOW THE WAY

Subject: Turning the Tide

From: joan296

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Amelia gave me three long scratches down the side of my face, starting at my right cheek and down my neck to my throat. They don't hurt so much any more, but I think they may leave scars. I hope they do, to be honest. They're the first things I've ever truly earned and I'm proud of them.

I guess I should be scared after all that's happened, but to tell you the truth I've never felt more alive. For the first time, I've got a purpose. Something real that gives my life meaning. It's incredibly humbling to think that I've been chosen by God to save the world, but at the same time it's exhilarating. I can see now how shallow and empty a person I was before the Lord opened my eyes. He's given me the chance to win back my soul and spread his vision to everyone. It's the first time anyone has trusted me with anything and I won't let Him down.

I've been watching on this list for a little while now. It's amazing to see how many different opinions everyone has about why we've been chosen. It's okay to be confused. I was pretty confused at first. If you believe that you've been shown the truth by the government or aliens or whatever, you need to take a step back and be honest with yourself. Do you believe that because of what you were shown, or are you just trying to make your own theories fit what's happened? This isn't about us. It's about God and his plan for the New World. You have to

From: rigger111

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Ignore this loser

Ignore this bleeding-heart psychodrama bullshit. Either this guy is some idiot like Pattern179, trying to mess with our heads, or we've got yet another security failure and it's one of the bad guys trying to stir up some shit. Notice that he doesn't even have the balls to get his own screen name.

Witness, we don't need this defeatist crap. Can you just boot him off the list?

Subject: Brave New World?

From: memphis68

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

So tell, me, Joan, exactly what kind of white-bread paradise is this we're fighting for? Your precious Church has advocated centuries of persecution, murder and discrimination. Is your heaven open to gays or blacks? How about Muslims?

You're not the first person who's come onto this list preaching about Jesus and salvation. Every one of them turned out to be a far-right wacko. Now, I'm willing to give you the benefit of the doubt for the moment, but you better ask yourself some damn hard questions. The world is a hell of a lot more complex than you think.

If your paradise can't find room for *_everybody_*, regardless of creed or color, then you're part of the problem, not the solution.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: dictatrix11

Subject: Re: Brave New World?

Memphis (and Joan),

It is natural for people to turn to religion in difficult times. It is also typical for individuals to use religion to justify all manner of terrible actions. I certainly do not advocate the extreme rhetoric of someone like Crusader17, but at the same time I consider myself a person of faith, much as he does. Do not paint us all with the same brush, nor hold the crimes of our forebears against us. With matters of faith, it is not the letter of the thing as much as its spirit.

Honestly, I think we could all stand to hear the promise of heaven from time to time. Surely there must be something beyond this terrible struggle we wage.

open yourself to what He's shown you and accept His divine message of hope and rebirth. You may have lived a sinful life, an empty existence of material things and selfish ambitions, but God has chosen you anyway, because He believes in you. Trust in Him. Let go of your old life and its worldly ways. You're meant for something better, if you have the courage to earn it.

THE MOMENTS

I know there are more of us out there, people who've seen the underbelly of the world and are fighting to make it right. I've even spent time with some of you. Heroes, my mother would call us. Fools, my daddy would say.

So sitting in this cell, writing on this pad of paper, I ask myself where we come from. I mean, I don't feel like anything special, but I seen things and done things no one I ever known has seen or done. I see goddamn zombies walking the streets. When I get mad enough I can even spit up my anger and make them feel what it's like to hurt. That ain't everyday shit. And I seen folks can do even weirder stuff.

So what the hell am I? Am I a damn monster too? I hope not.

The only thing that makes sense is I'm a man who made the choice he had to. Life is made up of choices, but some of them are bigger than others. Some of them change you forever.

Before I made my choice, I was pretty much like every other slob out there. I had a wife and kid I was too stupid to treat right, a job I didn't care about, too many bar tabs and not enough cash. I even got me a girlfriend just so I could feel like a man. What a crock of shit.

Maria. That was the girl's name. Little Italian thing, a bar fly who'd been used by too many men to know she was worth more than a screw. I was just the latest no-good bastard fucking her, telling her he cared. Looking back, I want to puke.

Then the time came to choose. Maria and I had a fight and I was looking for her — for make-up sex, mostly. I spent the night checking out all our normal haunts — bars, pool halls, piss-holes with Old Style on tap. By about 3 in the morning,

I was getting pretty frustrated. Then I took a chance and went into this biker bar. Black folks tend to get their asses kicked in this place, so I can't say I ever actually hung out there. I figured Maria might go there to avoid me. By that time I really didn't care — the next places I'd have looked were crackhouses and shooting galleries. Turns out, I wish she'd been on smack.

Instead she was on something worse.

She was at the back of the bar, past the Harley signs and the pot smoke, sitting in a big booth with a half-dozen guys. They were all wearing leather and jeans like in some piece-of-shit late night movie. They looked wasted. I was pissed and just started walking toward them, thinking I'd grab the girl up and get the hell out of there. Then I'd get what I wanted from her.

None of that happened, though. I walked past a jukebox and the song started skipping. "Fear the reaper... fear the reaper... fear the reaper..." it was saying. Then Maria's "friends" got up out of the booth and I could see them better. It was like I was seeing them for the first time.

They were sick, wrong, evil. I tasted puke in my throat and stood there as they came close. All the while that stupid song kept skipping.

One of the punks was a kid, maybe sixteen, but his whole body said mean. He looked at me with dead eyes and told me Maria had a new daddy now. He smiled and his teeth looked rotten. His breath smelled of raw meat.

Then his buddy, a tall freak with metal spikes through every part of his face, started talking. He was like a fucking dog. Even had a choke-chain around his neck. He sounded like a pussy, like he was a retard or something, but it was pretty clear he wanted me dead. He mumbled something about fucking my eye, I think.

I thought about it. I was in their bar. I was an old man messing with a bunch of motherfuckers cranked up on some shit. And it was all over a girl who was basically a good lay and not much else. No fucking way it was worth it.

But I couldn't stop staring at them. They were all fucked up — not just junkies, but freaks, like they were dead inside. They had Maria. I don't know how, but I just knew they were going to make her one of them. If I didn't stop them, who the hell would?

That was the choice: Walk away and let the world go even more to shit, or take a stand. I guess there was no choice at all.

When I realized what I had to do, the jukebox stopped skipping. That's when I put my fist in Dead Eyes' face and grabbed Doggy's chain and crushed his throat.

I chose to be a man.

RACING THE NIGHT

The first monster I ever saw was a zombie, I think. That's true for most of us, from what I can tell here. He was standing at the corner of Eighth and Division, arms at his side, just staring into space. I wouldn't have paid any attention to him at all except that it was late, nearly two in the morning, and I was in a bad part of town. My car had died and I was walking back to the Greyhound station to use the phone.

He looked like just another homeless guy or a drifter. Dirty, rumpled suit jacket, dark pants and ratty shoes, his hair wild and tangled. His shoulders were slumped and he stood very still as if he was waiting for something. When I realized that, the hairs went up on the back of my neck. I was suddenly glad I'd bothered to take my life iron with me, hidden under my coat. Then it happened.

The crosswalk sign over his head changed from "WALK" to "CURSED."

I stopped in the middle of Eighth. The guy turned — not a glance, but a kind of shuffling, whole-body turn — and looked at me. His skin was gray and a patch of it was gone over the top of one cheek. There was a kind of green light in his eyes. Grave mold glowed like that, I remember thinking. I'd seen it on TV once.

The man was dead, I realized, and I went cold. Then — I remember like it was yesterday — I suddenly knew this guy was in pain. A constant waking hell, trapped in a rotting corpse. What could make someone go through that?

What would anyone do for love? Or hate? Or fear? Can someone's obsessions twist his body into something that's no longer human? Can his will be so strong that it drives his body to work even after he's dead? The fact is modern science still hasn't got a clue about the limits of the human mind. We can't even say for sure how much of it we use from day to day. We do know that our state of mind can create changes in our bodies. Depression or stress can leave us open to physical illness. Or in a more extreme case, think about people like the Polynesian fire walkers. They can walk over hot coals and not feel a thing. Their skin isn't even burned. So who knows what our minds can do if the desire is strong enough?

That's where monsters come from, I think. They've probably been with us as long as there's been a human race. What's a ghost, after all, but the spirit of a person who refuses to leave the world, or who doesn't even realize he's dead? Maybe a zombie is the same thing taken one step further. The soul refuses to leave. It still feels that it has unfinished business, so it forces its body to go on working. Maybe even bloodsuckers started this way. Ever hear of Elizabeth Bathory? She was an insane medieval noblewoman who thought she could stay young by bathing in the blood of virgins. What if someone, long ago, believed something similar — that they could live forever by drinking the blood of other people? Their obsession twisted their body to the point that they became a living corpse. And what if they believed so strongly that they were able to spread their curse to other people?

The point is, it takes a human being to make a monster.

The seeds are in each and every one of us, just waiting to sprout. Sometimes we surrender our souls out of anger or passion. Other times we sell our souls bit by bit in return for gratification. The end result is the same. Most never understand until it's far, far too late. But once they've crossed the line, there's

no turning back. Past a certain point they don't even have the strength to end their miserable lives, but a small part of them wants the pain to end, whether they realize it or not. So they reach out to anyone with enough compassion to understand. Someone willing to commit the act that they're no longer able to do.

They ask for mercy. They turn to us.

ERRAND OF MERCY

The zombie showed me his true face. A part of him was trying to beg me for help, I think.

Sometimes things are so obvious we just can't see them for what they are. That's why I think there are so many wild theories about "Messengers" on this list. Stop lying to yourselves. Look at the facts.

When your eyes are open, are there angels hovering overhead? Or aliens? No. There's only you and the monster.

The monster gives you the message, though he doesn't realize it. It's an unconscious thing, driven by pain and despair. A street sign changes from WALK to CURSED. It's just the flip side of the same power that lets them hide in plain sight.

Why us? Why not? Who knows how many times each night these creatures try to reach out to other people? It's not that we're anything special. We're just the ones who bothered to listen.

None of this occurred to me at the time, of course. I looked the zombie in his rotted eyes and tried not to scream.

He shuffled toward me. His mouth worked—I saw bits of dirt trapped between its teeth. All he said was "Wallet." He wasn't looking at me any more, but past me, across the street where two winos shared a bottle in an alley. I watched this dead guy head for them. Somehow I was certain that they were about to die. Maybe the monster told me that, too, or maybe it was just instinct. Either way, it left me with a choice, though at the time I didn't realize that, either.

I don't think I was in any immediate danger. I could have just turned my back and walked away. Maybe by morning I could even have convinced myself that I'd been seeing things. But I couldn't do it. That's not the kind of person I am. If I see there's something that needs doing, I do it. My wife used to say I was a stand-up guy. I think I just don't have enough faith in anyone else to get the job done.

I knew no one else was going to help those two bums. So I turned around and went after the dead guy, with no clue what I'd do when I caught up to him.

The monster never slowed down. He grabbed the first wino and dragged him into the alley like the guy didn't weigh an ounce. I saw his buddy pull a knife and shove it into the dead guy's side, but the zombie didn't flinch. That was when I got my first real jolt of fear. I pulled out the tire iron, wondering what good it was going to do me if a knife couldn't stop him. I was going to get hurt, really bad. But I kept on going all the same. I was the only chance those guys had.

By the time I got to the alley, the first wino was a bloody mess. The zombie grabbed the second guy. I looked at the bloody body at the monster's feet and realized that was going to be me, but maybe I would buy the other guy enough time to get away. So I yelled the first thing that came to me: "Hey! I got your wallet right here!"

All my fear just melted like frost from a windowpane. What I was doing wasn't exactly smart,

but it was right. It was the stand-up thing to do. I'd made my choice and there was no turning back.

Only a human being can make a monster. Only another monster can kill one.

I've learned that a dead guy can throw you around like a rag doll. I guess the same twisted desire that keeps it around also makes it strong. When we make the choice to fight back, we do the exact same thing. It's either that or die, and the will to live is one of the strongest we have. So when the zombie grabbed me, I rammed the tire iron *through* his chest! I'd never been so strong in my entire life. I wasn't human any more.

Neither are you.

We all make that choice for different reasons, but the end is the same. When we heed the call and put ourselves in a monster's path, we have to become the very thing we're trying to destroy. Is it fair? No. But what is? It's funny how so many people on this list look down on folks who hear the call but choose not to act. Call them bystanders or duds or whatever. Looking back now, I envy them. Maybe they were frightened or just selfish or maybe they simply had too much to live for. Whatever the reason, I can't blame them for just wanting to stay human.

ANSWERING THE CALL

For everything there is a season, the Bible says. A time to kill, a time to heal, a time to sow. You know what I'm talking about. There's a point and a purpose to everything and everyone. For that reason, God has chosen a collection of people to show the way to the New World. There's a need for warriors and healers, lawmakers and rule-breakers, all united in a common purpose, to set the feet of the human race on the path to the new Canaan. But the road is long and full of peril, and there must be someone who will lead and light the way, to set an example that will inspire the rest. That's the purpose God has set for me, and maybe the course He has set for you as well.

When the Lord calls to each of us, He sets our purpose with a specific test. He knows what each of us is to do, but we have to recognize it as well and realize the world's decay. That's why we're all forced to see the demons for what they truly are, in ways that are terrifying and traumatic. This isn't the time for burning bushes and visions of angels. The world is on the brink of destruction and we have to act now, before it's too late. He has faith in us, but we have to have faith in ourselves. That only comes from enduring a trial of horror, pain and blood.

For those of us destined to light the path to the New World, God gives the greatest test of all. We must be willing to give everything we have, mind, body and soul, for the sake of another. He takes us to a place where we must choose to put the needs of others ahead of our own, no matter the cost. For some of us, the choice is easy, but

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: sleepless71

Subject: Sympathy for the Devil?

Listen, buddy, I'm sorry for what happened to your kid, but I think you're going a little too far here. The minute you start showing sympathy for monsters, they'll turn you inside out. This bloodsucker is wrapping you around his finger. Don't kick yourself about what happened and try to make the fucking monster the victim here. He took your son! Make him pay!

for me, who lived a life of self-indulgence and material things, the moment of truth was earthshaking.

Amelia came from Brazil with her family just two years ago. Her father is a doctor. Her mother is some kind of artist. They're successful, but not enough to afford sending Amelia to the kind of schools that I went to. She came to Livingston Prep on some kind of scholarship, and anyone worth knowing looked down on her. Including me. I wouldn't have been caught dead with her if she hadn't been assigned to tutor me in Latin, and even then I insisted we do it somewhere off-campus, preferably at my house.

She was always very sweet and polite when she came over. The first couple of times she walked around the house just staring at everything. She said I lived in a palace. I remember how I sneered at her when she said it. I thought my family lived in a dump. How little I really knew.

Then, one evening in October, her parents called and said their car had broken down and they would be late. I didn't want her in the house one minute longer than necessary, because I had important things to do, like reading a magazine and calling my stupid friends. I tried to get Rosita, our maid, to drive Amelia home, but she had to go to church. So finally I grabbed the keys to Dad's Land Rover and drove her myself.

Amelia's parents had a nice house in the suburbs. At the time, I thought it was the center of the projects. As we drove, I started to get an inkling of how hard her parents worked to send Amelia to school. I'd never even thought about how much anything cost before that. She sat in the leather passenger seat as if she was afraid she'd leave marks on it. Any other time I might have thought it was funny, but just then it made me feel kind of, well, cheap inside. I'd never felt anything like that before and it took me by surprise. Looking back, I realize it was a message from the Lord, awakening me to the call.

The house was dark when we got there. Amelia didn't move for a moment, staring nervously at the windows. I suddenly felt sorry for her, or maybe I was just feeling guilty for the way I'd been acting. We hopped out of the Land Rover and she smiled gratefully as she walked with me to the porch.

Amelia opened the door. I went in right behind her. I intended to help her turn some lights on. Then maybe, if I got up enough courage, I was going to thank her for all the help she'd given me with Latin. There was a lamp to the right of the door. It filled the entryway, throwing shadows on the plaster walls. The shadows spelled out words, "EVIL WAITS IN THE DARKNESS."

Before I could point it out to Amelia, something moved in the next room.

We were both too scared to speak. I looked through the entrance and could see the shape of a tall man, just beyond the light. The moment we saw him, he spoke in a deep, cold voice. He told Amelia that she was coming with him. He stepped forward and I could see that he wasn't a man at all, but a creature. It was covered in fur and its face looked like some kind of animal's. Only its eyes looked human, but dead.

I was right by the open door. I could have turned and run. The moment the thought occurred to me, I was overwhelmed with shame. Suddenly, that wasn't the kind of person I wanted to be. The next thing I knew, I was walking forward, putting myself between Amelia and the monster. I told the thing in a calm voice that he was going to have to go through me first.

The thing leapt at me, and you know what? All I could feel was joy! I knew the beast was going to kill me, but it

felt as if I'd beaten it. My fear faded away and I could see a radiance, like a bright, golden glow surrounding me. That was when my eyes were opened to God's plan.

Everyone seems to have their own stories of awakening. The details vary from person to person, but a few things are common. For us, the moment of truth comes when we're called to stand in harm's way, offering our own bodies for the sake of someone else. It's when we let go of our worldly desires and surrender ourselves to the cause of mercy and compassion. That's when God fills us with his light and gives us the strength of angels.

What's interesting is that not all of us witness the same radiance that surrounded me. There are some people who have made a lot out of this, suggesting that we "shining ones" are more exalted than the rest, perhaps because our souls are more pure, our motives more Godly. I think God does whatever He feels necessary to get His message across. All I knew about the Bible up to that point was drilled into my head in school. I think He caused me to shine as a way of showing that there was a deeper, holier purpose to my life than I'd known before. Nothing more, nothing less. If other people aren't given reason to shine, maybe it's because they're spiritual enough that they don't need special effects to know God is talking to them. Whatever the case, it shouldn't be a sticking point used to set one person above another. We have to be above such things. If we can't put aside our egos and prejudices for the sake of the greater good, how can we expect anyone else to?

We have to be the example for all the others to follow. We must be the parchment upon which God's plan is written, for all the world to see. Otherwise the demons will surely claim us all.

BURNING BRIGHT

I think my decision opened up something inside me. Back before I was married, I remember there was this story in all the papers about a mother saving her kid at a construction site. The kid was playing around and this big pipe or something rolled on top of him. His mom, who was like 30, lifted the pipe to get her kid out. It weighed like 900 pounds or some shit like that.

Folks talked about it being adrenaline, but looking back I think it's deeper than that. We all live our lives trying to be safe, to keep on living. But sometimes something happens that means we don't care about ourselves anymore — that woman didn't care if her back broke. Saving her kid was all that mattered.

I think that's what happened to me that night. Stopping Dead Eyes and Doggy, getting Maria out of there — it was all more important to me than being hurt. That choice opened something deep down and suddenly I could do things I'd never done before. When I hit Dead Eyes, I hit him harder than I'd ever hit anything before. Because that was what I needed to do.

It's like we all got so much life to live. Most people dribble it out over 70 years or whatever, but a few people, people who decide that something is more important than growing old, can burn it up and do amazing shit. Ever since that night, I've been burning like it's the 4th of July. That's where all these special things I can do come from, from burning through the life I've got left.

Does that mean I'll burn out someday? That I'll die before I grow old? I guess. But that's the choice I've made.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: reaper201

Subject: Who the hell do you think you are?

Where the hell do you get off coming onto this list and telling us we're monsters? I've lost everything I had trying to make this city clean of creatures. I've lost my friends, my family, my career. I'm only a step away from homelessness because I used the last of my savings to get a mother and her kid out of town, where a rot wouldn't be able to find them. I've sacrificed for people I don't even know, and I've seen things that still haunt me when I sleep. And you have the nerve to say I'm no better than one of them?

From: descent88

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Re: Who the hell do you think you are?

Reaper,

Like you, I initially took great exception to what this poor man has been saying on the list, but now that I've had time to think things over, I wonder if he might not have a number of valid points. While I firmly believe that we are every bit as human as those we fight to protect, it's important to remember that the very qualities that reaffirm our humanity also carry the potential to wreak great harm. We have power beyond the abilities of normal people, and power, as we all know, corrupts. Violence has a way of tainting the way in which we view the world. Surely you can agree that there are those on this list (and others) who have taken our change as confirmation of their own agendas. We're not monsters, but if we're not brave enough to consider our actions with uncompromising honesty, we run the risk of becoming a reflection of our enemy.

I'm not saying I agree with him, but it doesn't do us any good to dismiss his message out of hand.

HARD CHOICES

You don't feel it at first, but from the moment you give up being human, your soul starts to die.

Four months ago, I would have never dreamed that I could kill someone. When I went home the night after I killed that dead guy, I told myself that I hadn't committed murder. How can you kill something that's already dead? It made sense for a while. I was convinced that, whatever else had happened, I was still essentially the same person I had been before.

I even tried to quit. I told myself that what I'd done that night was never going to happen again. But then three weeks later I saw another creature as I was driving home from work. I didn't know exactly what he was doing, but I somehow *knew* he was going to hurt someone. People from the bus station walked past him totally oblivious to the monster in their midst. That's what clinched it for me. I was the only person who could see it for what it was. Didn't that give me a *responsibility* to do something about it?

The problem was, I was still pretty hurt from the first time. I didn't want that thing to get its hands on me. You know what I did? I found a convenience store, bought a pint of some cheap liquor and put a dollar's worth of gas in my spare can. Ten minutes later I was driving back down Eighth with a bomb between my knees. It took a while to spot the monster again, but when I did it was heading down a narrow street between Eighth and Ninth. There was no time to think things over. I

turned down the street, drove up behind the thing, then got out and lit the molotov. He turned to face me and I threw it square into his chest. The thing went up like a candle. What I didn't expect was that he started screaming. Not out of pain, really, or even fear. It was more like a cry of frustration, of being cheated of something he wanted more than anything else in the world. The monster thrashed around, bouncing off the walls, trying to put out the fire, but it toppled over pretty soon and then stopped crying.

I stood there for a while, I think, watching it burn. I was too horrified to move. Not of the monster, but of what I'd done. How in hell had I gotten to a place where I could set someone of fire, *anyone*, without hesitation?

Sure, I could say it was because the thing was a monster, not a real person. But it screamed. It didn't want to die and I took away its existence without a thought, except to avoid being hurt myself.

How far would *you* go to destroy a monster? Never mind how much the creature might deserve it. What kind of actions are *you* morally prepared to take in order to kill something?

Being human is about compassion, mercy and forgiveness. It's about decency and trust and a hundred other things that define the quality of someone's soul. These qualities are what let us love our kids, to be good husbands, to be people that others can depend on when they need help. Without that, we're just killers, no better than the monsters we hunt. Past a certain point, what's the difference between killing a monster or another person? Not much. If you're willing to torture a monster for information, what's to stop you from doing the same to a human being if the need is great enough? Only you can answer that, but I promise the line is thinner than you think. People can rationalize all manner of evil, given enough time.

I'm not saying we're all supposed to be saints. The fact is we can't protect the people we love and save lives without doing some of the same terrible things that monsters do. Sometimes we have to be as ruthless and violent as they are. Eventually, if we live long enough, we'll lose our souls just like they have. Maybe one day we'll find ourselves reaching out to a stranger to put an end to our own nightmare.

Just two days ago, I kidnapped a man and tortured him with a car battery. When he told me what I wanted to know, I killed him and set fire to his body. I told myself he was the servant of a vampire, a monster that fed on desperate kids. But the fact is, I did something unspeakable to him — and at the time I didn't feel a thing. It was just a means to an end. It was only later that I thought about what I'd done, and now I don't think there's much left of the man I used to be.

We've all made a choice to become what we are. Whether you realized it or not at the time, your old life went away. What you have to do now is make the most of that sacrifice and fight the good fight for as long as you can. Sell your soul dearly and stand in harm's way to protect the defenseless whenever you can. It's your duty. It's your right. It's the stand-up thing to do. Let's leave this world a better place than when we came into it.

DANCING WITH THE DEVIL

The battle between good and evil has been going on since the Garden of Eden. Satan saw Adam and Eve in paradise. How did he damn them? He gave them the knowledge of good and evil. It's that knowledge that has

made us our own worst enemies and given demons a doorway into our souls.

When a person's life becomes consumed with shallow, worldly things like shopping, playing the stock market or doing ecstasy, it starts to suck away at their soul, shrinking it bit by bit until there's nothing left inside. You see people like this every day. You go to school with them, work with them or pass them on the street. They might even be your parents or brothers or sisters.

The demons are always trying to fill the void inside us. When a person's soul is totally gone, they move in and things get really bad. That's when you get people like Charles Manson or Adolf Hitler. The more soulless and poisoned you are, the more the demons can take hold of you. Eventually, they can even start to change the way you look. When you die, they can keep your body and use it like their own. The strongest demons can change into horrible shapes, like the creature that attacked Amelia and I, or turn their victims into bloodsucking monsters. Their whole purpose is to spread corruption, causing other people to give into their dark natures and allow more demons into the world.

Fortunately, God hasn't left us helpless. You and I aren't the first people to hear His call and fight the monsters, not by a long shot. In the past, every time it looked like the demons were getting the upper hand, He would seek out people to spread His message and put the world back on the right track. People like Jesus, who came at a time when the Roman Empire was corrupting everything it touched. His sacrifice started the Christian Church. Or King Arthur, who set an example of bravery and chivalry, and brought all the knights of the land together to battle evil. Later, in the Middle Ages, there was Joan of Arc, who I named myself after, because she was a girl about my age and she heard the message just like me. I hope that when the time comes, I can face my death as bravely as she did.

We're just the latest in a long line of crusaders, struggling to keep the human race free of evil. But things are different this time. There are more monsters than ever before. Our whole society rewards corruption and decadence. It's all about greed and lust and selfishness. The demons are having a field day. That's why there are more of us now than ever before.

The enemy is on the verge of triumph. The end of the world is at hand.

THE CHOICE OF EVIL

That first night at that damn bar, I didn't know shit. I didn't know about monsters out of movies or that Dead Eyes and his crew had been selling their souls to make themselves bad asses. I didn't know that the Man wasn't a man at all. I hadn't seen the rotting corpses working at burger joints. I didn't know Maria was hooked on the same shit as the rest of them and would never get off it.

Now I know the world is full of twisted things. When I let it, the rot inside these things screams out at me. With junkies like Maria and Dead Eyes, I see the black tar they drink running through their veins. I see their souls rotting away. With others I see maggots crawling in and out of them. I've even seen people who are nothing but fire inside. Hungry fire.

A lot of these people, these things, are pure fucking evil. A few weeks ago, I threw Dead Eyes under a truck, watched him turn into a smear and knew I done right. But they're not all like that and most of all I don't think any of them start out like that. We're all our mothers' little boys, once upon a time.

Subject: First Among Equals?

From: enigma143

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Joan, you can't have it both ways. Are we all in this together, everybody equal in the struggle, or are there some of us that are more holy than others? From the sounds of things, most of us are just foot soldiers while people like you tell us what to do and when to do it.

What the hell makes you more fit to lead this fight? You're a teenage mall rat, for God's sake. There are people here who are twice your age and ten times more experienced. More open-minded too, for that matter. Like Memphis said, there's a lot more to this world than MTV and weekends in the Hamptons.

Listen, no offense, but it's only typical for someone your age to think you're the center of the universe. I don't blame you for that. But saying that some of us are more valuable than others, no matter how much you sugar-coat it, just serves to divide us further, not bring us together.

I admire your attitude, kid, but try being a team player instead of the coach before someone actually listens to you and gets themselves killed.

Evil is a choice, just like doing right. Choice is all about sacrifice, about giving something up to get something else. I gave up my marriage and my kid cause I wanted Maria's poon. A junkie gives up control to get high. I gave up having a normal life cause I couldn't just walk out of that bar.

The monsters give up their souls for something else. Power, thrills, something. If what I saw in Maria and the others is any sign, the choice ain't a one-time thing. You give up your soul one piece at a time. Maybe it seems like a good deal at first — all I gotta do is be less human and I can do all kinds of shit. I'll be strong if I drink this black tar. So what if it's made of death? So what if it owns me? Life's shit already, right?

Problem is, that's a sucker's bet. All selfish choices are in the end. You choose to lose part of yourself just to feel good or get off on power or know a secret or whatever. After that, you've got the power or the high, but you're one more step toward being a total shit. Do you feel good? Yeah. But is the world better or worse because of your choice? Is your family better or worse? Take a wild guess.

Enough selfish choices and you're a fucking monster.

STEPS ALONG THE PATH

Course it ain't as simple as all that. No, I take that back. In the end, it is that simple. You choose your fate. But it's also more complicated because you can't divide the world into good and evil. We've all got some of each in us.

Last month, I hooked up with a bunch of folks who saw the monsters too. One of them was this crazy fucker I'll call Billy. He was really good with a gun and even without it. He could find ways to punch holes through the things we were hunting with whatever was lying around, but he had no sense. He saw everything that wasn't like him as pure evil. Good. Evil. That was all there was for him.

I think of "monsters" as coming in three kinds. I ain't talking about what they can do, but what they are — because of the choices they made.



First off is what I call a hole, like asshole. A hole isn't a Hollywood monster or nothing. He's just a guy who's decided he's out for number one. He's the motherfucker who sells out his friends to get a bigger paycheck. He's the cop who takes a kickback to let some pusher son of a bitch do business on your stoop. He's that same pusher who gives crack to your kids. When I was screwing Maria and telling my wife I was looking for a job, I was being a hole.

Being a hole is like the first step toward being a honest-to-God monster. You don't become evil without being selfish. *They're just a hole. Once they take the next step, it's hell-and-a-half to help them short of putting a bullet in their head. God knows I wasn't able to do it.*

The second kind of monster is the user. A user has crossed the line and turned into some sort of nightmare shit. He gets off on it, but that's about all. Maria was a user — she drank in some death, burned away part of her soul, and it made her feel good and strong. She beat the crap out of some people but mostly did things to feel good. Selfish as all get out, but basically like any other kind of junkie.

Users come in a lot of shapes. Some are really fucking dangerous — a spook who gets off on scaring people, or whatever. These ones have to be put down. Others just trip on themselves and you might be able to set them straight. A lot of them are like junkies and in way over their heads. If they want to, they can maybe get out of it, but they'll need help.

The third kind is the pusher. A pusher is a monster who makes other monsters. Dead Eyes and his boss were pushers. They got Maria to lick up their shit and were doing it across

the neighborhood. They were making a little army for themselves (fat lotta good it did them, though). Pushers are evil through and through. They might have been good people one day, but they've got too much to account for by now. The grave is where they belong.

It's all about choice.

THE END OF DAYS

God talks about the end of the world in different parts of the Bible. When it happens, He says, it will be with fire.

Hell is also a place of eternal punishment. It's a coincidence. The whole object of the eternal battle between good and evil is to bring about Hell on Earth.

Look outside. Look at Somalia, Bosnia or Chechnya. Look at New York City. It's happening even as you read this. More and more people are giving in to evil and spreading the demons' influence. We see more and more creatures walking the streets, wearing the guise of normal people. The dead won't stay in their graves. It's all coming to a head, and past a certain point there won't be enough left of the human race to save.

That's why there are so many of us here. We're God's army, the chosen few. It's our hearts, our souls, against the forces of Hell. This is the last battle. This time it's all or nothing. We aren't here to just restore the balance. We're going to start a crusade that cleanses the human race of its evil, so the demons can't touch us again.

We have to come together and fight the beasts wherever they hide. We have to intervene when a human soul lies on the cusp of corruption and lead it back to the light, shedding our own blood if need be. God will reward us for every drop in the New World to come.

From: rigger111

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Now I get it

Now I see what's going on. We've got another fuckup on our hands.

Listen, mister melodrama. Do us all a favor and stop wasting bandwidth on all this pity-me crap. You aren't anything special, buddy, and nobody's going to miss you after you're gone. If you want to go out and die gloriously for the cause, be my guest. Strap a few sticks of dynamite to your ass and run up to the first rot you find. You'll be doing us all a favor.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: dictatrix11

Subject: Perspectives

If any of you had ever witnessed your home become a living hell, you would not doubt for a moment that there are monsters inside us all, waiting to come out. I saw my former neighbors become torturers overnight. The more they indulged their dark sides, the more their appetites grew. I saw the rape camps and the mass graves. I know that what this poor man says is true. Listen to him.

All we need is to have faith and the Lord will make us strong.

When that demon came at me, I thought I was going to die. I yelled for Amelia to run and prepared to hold the thing off as long as I could. Without thinking, I shouted the name of Jesus Christ. I felt my skin grow warm. Light radiated from my body and the monster backed away. I grabbed Amelia's book bag and beat the thing as hard as I could. I didn't even feel it when he clawed open the leg of my jeans. The demon grabbed me by my belt and threw me across the room.

I landed on a table and broke it. I was lying in bits of glass and wood. It felt like my back was broken, but when the thing landed on top of me, I yelled in its face and tried to grab something I could use as a weapon. I flailed through pieces of glass, slicing up my hand and arm, but suddenly I found a shard that was long and slim like a knife. The demon grabbed me by the throat. As its mouth opened I drove the glass into his eye. It howled loud enough to make my ears ring, and leapt across the room. When I looked, it was gone, as if it had never been there at all.

There was a floor-length mirror in the far corner. I looked at my reflection and realized that the glow was gone. The memory of it remained though. The face that looked back at me seemed like a totally different person.

Amelia had run into the kitchen and hidden in the pantry. When I got the door open she went nuts, hitting and clawing at me in sheer terror. I grabbed her and held her and told her everything was going to be okay. After a while, it was.

Mom freaked when she saw all my cuts. I told her I'd fallen through a French door at my friend Tiffany's house. I don't know if she believed me, and I don't care. I stood up to a demon. I saved someone's life. This is only the beginning.

VOICES IN MY HEAD

There's not much to do in stir but think. That and watch out for the reamers.

I been thinking a lot about the things I seen and heard over the last few months. Like I said, I think it all comes down to the choice to do what's right, to believe that something in this piece of shit world is worth more than you are.

For me, that thing was stopping the bastard I called Slick. Slick was the monster who was giving that black tar shit to Dead Eyes and the rest. He was a pusher with a whole fucking army of users and victims lining up to be his junkies and slaves. I never found out what that shit was, but Maria told me he'd give it to Dead Eyes and they'd drink it down like fucking shooters. I think the shit was death itself, cause I could see what it did to Maria's soul. And Dead Eyes'. And Doggy's. It rotted them away. Made them monsters and slaves.

My grandma used to tell stories about her grandma on the plantation back in Alabama. About the "massa" and the slaves, about the whippings, the rapes, the torture. About men sold and shipped away from their women. That's what Slick was doing to the place where I lived. He had to be stopped and I did the stopping.

But the thing I never got until now was the voices. If you have any idea what the hell I've been talking about, you know what I mean. The Voices. The ones that come when the shit really hits it, that say "See? This is what the fuck it's all about!"

Who says those things? Who made that jukebox skip? Who put the red hot poker in my brain and knocked me out of being just another hole?

That's what I been thinking about since they arrested me. And now I know: It's the dead.

My grandma used to say there were places back in Alabama where so many black folks died that you could still hear them screaming. On some nights, she said you'd even see them — all whipped and chained — coming out of the ground. But even on the brightest day, if you listened, you'd hear them moan. She said she'd never go back to Alabama for that very reason.

See, now it all makes sense to me, and so does the church teaching my mother and auntie drilled into us. There must have been monsters since the beginning and they been making victims ever since. The serpent in Eden, Cain and Abel, Moses and the Pharaoh, Jesus and the Romans. People been dying at the hands of these things for a long, long time.

All those victims are calling out to the few people who might give a damn. Their voices are loud and point out the evil that's in the world and all of us. The whole world is like that old plantation in Alabama. A killing field that we can't never forget. We can't just go north to get away from the voices. Either we do something or we ignore the dead and carry on being holes.

I understand it all now because I'm one of them. As far as the Man is concerned, I done murder and the only way I'm getting out of this cell is in a body bag. I've laid down my life. I'm already dead.

But that was the choice I made and I'd make it again.

My auntie said that when Judgment Day came, the dead would come out of the earth. Today is the day.

PRESOTT



CHAPTER 2:

CROSS TO BEAR

The sacrifice of the wicked is abomination: how much more,
when he bringeth it with a wicked mind?

— Proverbs 21:27

THE CHOICES I'VE MADE, PART 2

FAX TRANSMISSION 07:44:19

August 15

I've spent more time in the court room. The last week has been spent on jury selection, they say. Bunch of bored people who either get off on seeing a murder trial or want to get back to work. The brother who's defending me is taking the party line and trying to turn this into a racial deal — Slick looked like a white businessman — but I don't think that's gonna fly. The prosecutor says he's got me cold walking into Slick's building and pouring gas all over him. A whole bunch a cops will testify that it was me.

My lawyer's been whispering conspiracy to see if he can get the press going. Problem is, I did torch Slick. My lawyer doesn't know it, but I'm just buying time until they kill me. I've made my choice. He wants to use me to make a career for himself. Typical shit.

WALKING THE LINE

Subject: Coping with the Truth

From: anon52

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

You know what I did that first night, after I killed that thing downtown? I went home, turned on every light in the house and did three loads of laundry. It was four in the morning, and I went into the den, turned on the TV, and folded clothes while infomercials were on. I had three bruised ribs and cuts across my back, arms and neck. There was a tire iron in the trunk of my car crusted with blood and bits of skin, and I was trying like mad to pretend like nothing had happened.

From: hannibal137

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Re: Those Faxes

Yeah, okay, the second one of these "choices" faxes popped up at my place this morning while I was having coffee. I was expecting an insurance quote and I got this instead.

So I've done some piecing of clues together in the meantime. He's referring to the "Muslim Federation" in these things. Is this the Nation of Islam? I think I've heard that there's a bunch of splinter groups and stuff, so maybe that's what he's referring to.

He's also on trial for murder, although he won't name his victim. I'm trying to find cases that match some of the dates and events. He talks like he's headed for death row, so that means the US and he's referred to lethal injection. According to my source, lethal injection states are Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, Idaho, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Washington State and Wyoming. I think Georgia and New York on there now too. Not much help.

The last thing is he refers to someone I've got to believe is Traveler72. You out there Traveler? You want to share some info?

Anyway, anyone else got some info on this?

I told myself over and over that it was all some weird fluke. I saw some people in trouble and I did what I could to help them. That was it. I wasn't going to see any more monsters. Life could go back to normal. Then, three weeks later, after I'd killed



my second thing, I went home, cleaned out the garage and told myself over and over that it wasn't going to happen again.

We don't want to believe that there are monsters out there. Aren't our lives difficult enough already? It's hard enough making ends meet and keeping the kids' grades up, not to mention the hundred things that need doing around the house. There's always someone or something making demands on us. The idea of facing these *creatures* night after night is just too much. We try to avoid the truth, to isolate ourselves from it and focus on all the petty demands everyday life puts on us. It even works, for a while.

But we *know* they're out there. Deep down, we know. We see them when we sleep, until eventually the fear and anxiety get so bad that we don't sleep at all. It's a wonder we don't lose our minds. Or maybe we do. How can we tell?

Pretty soon, you catch yourself trying to spot them. Scanning faces you pass on the street, sometimes even looking for them on TV. You dread what you're going to find, but you can't look away. Because you know that they're out there hurting people, and if you don't try to do something about it you'll never forgive yourself. It's funny. You'd think the worst shock would be seeing monsters in the first place, but it's not. It's trying to keep from looking for them, night after night, that makes you insane.

We want more than anything to go back to our normal lives, but we can't. Not while the monsters are still out there. The more we fight them, the more we have to deny our humanity to do what we must, the more we end up needing our homes, families and loved

ones. And the more we become like the monsters, the more we slowly poison everything we touch, just like they do. It's like a pendulum, swinging from side to side, each time picking up a little more momentum. Eventually, something's going to break.

From that first night on, you walk a razor's edge. For a while, you're able to stay close to the life you've built, but as time passes you have to be ready to walk away from it before you destroy the people you love. I should have known that I'd gone too far the night I tortured that blood slave. I thought I could hold on just a little longer. Now my son is paying the price.

THE PATH TO HEAVEN

Subject: My first steps

From: joan296

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

There was a special on paint at Home Depot. When I saw that, I got goosebumps. God was sending me a sign that I'm on the right track.

At three this morning, while the security guard slept, I painted the symbol on the brick wall that faces the mall entrance. It was exhilarating, like standing up and shouting a challenge to all the evil in the world. The symbol means "Meet Me Here." It came to me in a dream, and I just know that others like us will see it and know it for what it is. God has shown me the way and the time for His crusade has come.

It was amazing, walking down the promenade later, watching all the shoppers. I'd never actually paid atten-

Subject: Acceptable Losses

From: memphis68

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

>I'd gone too far the night I tortured that blood slave. I thought

> I could hold on just a little longer. Now my son is paying the price.

Your son is paying the price of your goddamn self-centered attitudes. You stuck close to your family to have someone to take pity on you and pat your head after you'd gone and killed a monster. It was only a matter of time before one of them tracked you home. I feel sorry for your poor kid. His life is over because you didn't have the guts to make a clean break of things in the first place. Find him and do him quick. You owe him that much.

tion to the people around me before God touched me with His light. You can see the poison working in their eyes, the pain and stress of slaving in a world tormented by demons. I smiled at anyone who would meet my eyes. It was all I could think to give them at the time, just a quiet signal to let them know that the Lord hasn't forgotten them. Once, outside the food court, I came upon a woman with a small boy. The poor thing was crying his eyes out. He looked so lost and lonely. I bent down and whispered to him, "Don't cry, sweetie. I won't let the demons get you." And he stopped crying, just like that! His little eyes went wide and he watched me the whole way as I walked out of the mall. It's such an incredible feeling to know that the world is about to change, and I'll be one of those chosen few to spread His word.

They're all just sleeping, poor things, like children trapped in a nightmare. But I know how to open their eyes. God has shown me the way.

THE COURAGE OF YOUR CONVICTION

I ain't easy for me to stand in that court room and say I didn't torch Slick. I did. I poured gasoline on his dead ass and dropped a match on him. I watched him twist and burn. I listened to him scream and it sounded like glory to me.

I want to stand up and yell. Yes I did it! I stopped a thing from eating the souls of people in my neighborhood! I made him pay for what he did to Maria and all the rest!

But I don't say anything. It wouldn't serve no purpose except making me feel good. Only those ready to make the choice themselves would benefit from the truth. That's why I write these letters, cause someone's gotta know. The right someone.

My wife was at the courthouse again today and I didn't barely look at her. There are some things that are difficult to bear with this life, and leaving her behind is the worst. But that was the choice I made in the bar that night and I have to live with it.

See, making the choice to burn bright, to let go of your quiet life and fight the things like Dead Eyes and Doggy, that ain't just one choice. Every day, you gotta choose again. You hear the voices and see the things. But there's still a part of you that wants to ignore it all, to go back to driving a truck and drinking beer.

It's easier now that my mission is finally over, that these letters are my last piece of business before I meet my

maker. But back in the day it was hard as hell. After that first fight, when I got Maria out of that bar, I was just shaking. The next morning I wanted to tell myself I'd been drunk and stupid. It had all been nothing.

Fool. I had made my choice and deep down I knew it. I saw the dead things, the smoke-children in the old lot, the blood clots walking down the street. I was burning and I couldn't turn back.

But, Lord did I want to. Every day. Especially for my wife and son. See, once I made my choice I realized what was important to me, what I had been throwing away — my family. It had been years since I treated them right and now that's all I wanted to do. I wanted to ignore this Judgment Day and just be the husband and father I should have been all along.

But being a husband, being a father, being a man, means putting their best interests first. Now I was even more poison to them than before. I had to fight for what was right. To protect them I had to let them go. See, when I finally realized how much I wanted to be with them, I also knew I never could.

So I agreed to the divorce she'd been threatening. I packed a bag, took my truck and moved out. I haven't talked to them since then, but I think of them every minute of every day. Choice is pain, I think.

The guard I told you about, he's a Muslim too and he wants me to read the Koran. But like I said, that ain't my book. I been reading the Bible instead. I think my auntie was right to believe in the Good Book. If you know where to look, there's a lot of truth there. Lot's wife was turned to salt because she looked back at Sodom and Gomorrah. See, God told her not to and she did anyway. Way I figure it, God could have made her not look back, but instead he just told her not to. She looked back anyway. That's a lesson for us all. Turning back toward the life we had will only cause us pain. Not looking back has to be a choice.

FAREWELLS

Some of us are probably loners, the kinds of guys who keep to themselves because they don't know how to reach out to other people except for random acts of awkward kindness. Most, however, have families, because we need to be needed. If we aren't helping other people, we feel guilty or think less of ourselves. Those feelings get even stronger once we've heard the call, because now we see horrible threats that everyone else is blind to. Our love for the people in our lives reminds us of who we once were, and gives us strength to keep going, night after night, but the stress of the hunt takes its toll. We can't sleep, can't eat and we can't talk to anyone about what we're going through. When we get called on it, we get defensive, maybe even violent, or we just try to get away. Some of us turn to booze or drugs. God knows I've been tempted more than once. Killing my brain or liver is a hell of a lot better than killing my wife.

The fact of the matter is, as hard as you fight to keep the monsters away from your family, you let one into your house each and every night — yourself. And if the other monsters don't eventually try to get at your family to stop you, your own deteriorating humanity will make you turn on them. You need to prepare yourself for the day that you pack up a bag and just walk away.

My wife's ready to leave me, the way I've been acting the last few months. Letting them go is going to be the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's the best thing I can possibly do for them. I'll still try to watch out for them as best as I can, because they need me and because I need *them* to keep from losing my mind. I know that if I lose touch with them completely it would only be a matter of weeks before I would be another creature haunting the streets, looking for someone to hurt.

Start saying your goodbyes early. The moment you become a monster, you start to lose your old life. Do the best you can for the people who matter, and work out how you can keep some sort of contact with them after you're gone. It won't be easy and you may have to say and do a lot of hurtful things to people you care about, but you know deep down that it's better that way. If you miss them enough it will help keep you sane. Trust me. Get your will in order. Make any legal arrangements you need, like child support or alimony. Then when the time is right, you can go without leaving anyone in the lurch.

Later on, after I've taken care of Tommy, I'm going to start the divorce proceedings and move into an apartment downtown. With luck, I can have the lawyers take monthly payments out of my salary, so everyone is taken care of without me having to show up at the house and cause a scene. Just knowing that they're okay and that I'm still helping out will have to be enough. One of these days, Carol will find someone else and forget all about me. She deserves better anyway.

A LIGHT FOR THE LOST

We have been touched by God's grace to show the way to the New World, to reach into the hearts and minds of people who've been lured from salvation by the pain and sin of the world. Fighting the demons isn't the only reason we've been chosen. We, the devout, are here to set an example for all to see that the reckoning with Satan is at hand. To ignite the spirit of the faithful to join the crusade.

God has given us a message that needs to be shared not just with others who have been blessed, but with each and every person we meet. Each and every soul is a potential haven for Satan's minions, and must be fortified with signs of hope and forgiveness. My parents, for instance, went wild when they found out about what happened at Amelia's. The police came by, because she'd told her parents how she'd been attacked and that I'd been there. Mom and Dad yelled and screamed and threatened to take away all my privileges for the rest of the year. I could almost see the demons around them, drawn by my parents' rage and looking for a way into their hearts. So I did the only thing I could. I let them yell and agreed with them when they called me thoughtless and stupid. I let them vent all those black feelings at me, even when it hurt, because we're meant to suffer for those we love, just like Jesus did. And it worked. By the time I started to cry, their anger just kind of fizzled out and they changed their minds about punishing me. I'd saved them and could still go out after school to do the Lord's work. Sure, some of what they said hurt, but that's the price we pay to wash away others' sins. By the next morning, Mom was all bright and happy and offered to take me shopping that weekend. It was a miracle!

God has chosen us to show the way to the New World, and so we have to hold ourselves to a high standard. We have to inspire everyone, even the most wayward and confused, to make the Lord's message plain. That means treating everyone we meet with charity and respect, to uphold their spirits and fill them with a desire for Godliness. Most people are selfish and stubborn in their ways, but

that's not their fault. I mean, look at all the crap that's spewed at us every day from every conceivable direction. I never realized how awful talk shows and the news were until I heard the call. Everything we hear is about how awful the world is, how terrible people are to each other, and how there's no hope for anyone. It puts people in a daze, almost like a walking coma. Every time you treat someone with compassion, even if it's just to let them lash out at you while they're angry or scared, weakens Satan's grip on them. People are the way they are because they don't know any other way to be. We have to shock them awake and show them the path to salvation.

I'll never forget how I felt that first night, driving home with blood on my face and arms, my eyes opened to a world I only thought I'd known before. It's a terrible shock to suddenly see how dark it all really is, and how small you feel when everyone seems out to get you. But at the same time, there was this incredible sense of purpose that I'd never felt before, a need to reach out to others and share what I knew. Later, when I saw other demons walking through the mall or hanging out around clubs, my heart ached to see how twisted they were, how tormented. I wanted to spare other people from that fate, no matter what the price.

It's a sign of our divinity that even in the presence of evil, we feel no fear. Only a sense of purpose and a desire to put things right at any price.

TENDING THE FLOCK

Why is it everyone believes we have to desert our friends and loved ones? Aren't those some of the very people we've been called to protect?

If we abandon our families, won't they become upset? Won't they succumb to anger and despair? What if they turn to alcohol or even drugs to cope? Then the demons will find a way into their souls and they'll be lost forever. Wouldn't it be more in keeping with God's plan to be even closer to those we love, sharing the message we've been given and stepping in harm's way when they're threatened?

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: traveler72

Subject: Options

Hey man, you shouldn't destroy your family because of what you are and what you think has happened. Think about your other kids and how they're taking all this. I know things look bleak right now, but don't plan for a future that might not be. Isn't it just possible that something else has happened to your boy?

As for the mission, there are options. I agree you need to get some distance from your wife and kids, for their own safety, but there's plenty of jobs you can take that require travel. You can move around, sniff out monsters in different towns and slip out before anyone catches on. It's worked for me and it's safer to boot.

Don't let go of that family, man. The minute you do, that's a win for the other side.

From: rigger111

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Pity Party

You're wasting your breath, Traveler. This guy isn't interested in solutions. He just wants us to feel sorry for him. If we ignore him, maybe he'll go away.

Subject: Out of the mouths of babes

From: memphis68

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Kid, I don't even know where to begin with you. I've never heard so much naive bullshit in my whole life. If you stick around your parents you're going to get them killed or worse. Read what happened to that poor son of a bitch who's using the anon52 handle. And his blood-sucker is one of the less subtle ones.

Picture this: You go off on your grade-school crusade and run across a serious damn monster with more money than God and all the time in the world to watch you suffer. So he just uses all that power and influence to slowly ruin your parents' lives, one bit at a time. Your dad gets caught embezzling funds or the news runs a story about how he likes to fondle young boys. Your mom winds up with a drug habit and gets caught in a police sting. They lose their jobs and their big house, and you get kicked out of your precious school. And no matter where you go, the misfortunes just keep piling up. Your parents divorce. The custody battle goes on for years. Pretty soon, they hate each other's guts and they're fighting over you like a bone. But no one dies. Oh, no, that's too easy. You all get to go on living in your own little hells, and they spend the rest of their miserable lives resenting you and wondering what happened.

Stop being so damn selfish and get as far away from them as you can.

We have to set an example for the rest to follow. How can we expect people, including our fellow chosen, to hold themselves to a higher standard when we don't ask the same thing of the people closest to us? How can we inspire others to take risks and make sacrifices for others when we walk out on our parents and friends? We can't. It's that simple. Godliness starts in the home and that's where our crusade has to start.

My mom is already starting to act differently since that night at Amelia's. She was really upset when she saw all the cuts and scratches I got, but since then she's been really attentive. I think at first she thought I'd tried to kill myself and was covering it up, but now she knows that's not true. She stopped going to her yoga classes and is staying home in evenings. It's great! She even stopped taking those awful diet pills. I haven't had as much luck with dad, but that's because he's hardly ever home. I just have to be patient and have faith. God will show me the way.

I realize that there may come a time when the demons try to hurt my parents in order to get to me. I can't let that dissuade me. Satan has been after them and the rest of the human race since the dawn of time. They're being seduced into damnation day by day, a little at a time. But there's still some bit of righteousness left in them. They still attend church on Sundays and they always give generously when the plate is passed around. If I can keep their devotion to God strong, their souls will be safe with the Lord in Heaven, even if the demons kill them. Their ordeal will only add strength to my message. I'm not saying I won't be sad, but if they were to die it would still mean victory for our cause. So you see, we have nothing to lose by staying close to those we love in these troubled times.

MY BATTLES

According to the judge, I'm on trial for the murder of a respected businessman and humanitarian with a long record of good works. That's what the public story is.

This upstanding citizen is as much a humanitarian as I'm a good husband. He — *it* — wasn't even human. He was what I guess you'd call a demon. Black soul and tough as hell. He was eating people, taking parts of Maria, Dead Eyes, Doggy and all the rest and making them dead inside by feeding them that tar shit. Made them strong, but dead. He hid his evil from the world. That's why I call him Slick. I been told I shouldn't use folks' real names here, and I'm gonna respect that. I think Slick is about as real a name as that thing had, anyway. Every face he showed was just a mask.

My lawyer — thanks to my Muslim brothers — says the prosecutor's got evidence that I had "confrontations" with Slick before. Damn right. I tangled with that demon two different times before I figured out that fire was the key. First time, I felt all full of righteousness and thought I could stop him just like I did Dead Eyes. One good hit and he'd go down and leave Maria alone.

Wrong. Damn near got me killed. He took a shot to the gut like it was a fucking pat on the back. That's when I learned I had to be smart about what I was gonna do.

LINKS IN THE CHAIN

Slick, like the worst of all the monsters, was a pusher. He was taking chunks of souls from a bunch of folks. He was hurting the whole neighborhood, forcing them to become holes or users to survive. He was like a big fucking spider in the middle of his web of bootlickers.

As far as I can tell, that's what all the worst monsters are like. If they just kept to themselves they wouldn't be so bad. But they turn everyone around them into stooges, like links in a chain. What's that old saying about a chain and its weakest link? That's the smart way to find the pushers and take them down. Find the weak link.

See, pushers surround themselves with users, and they ain't all heartless. They're on their way to pure evil, but a lot of them ain't there just yet. You can find ones who deep down want to do what's right. You can get them to tell you about the others, about who answers to who. About what the pusher wants from his slaves. They can tell you where they're vulnerable. You can follow the chain all the way to the top.

For me, the weak link was Maria. She was still a confused girl, mostly, and I told myself I was helping her. Fool. Ended up I did nothing but use her one last time to get the what I needed to know about Slick and Dead Eyes and the rest of the things.

Someday, I'm gonna have to answer for what I done to that girl.

PUNCHING THE CLOCK

Keep your job. If you don't have one, get one.

You need to keep working for a number of reasons. In the first place, you need that source of steady income to take care of yourself and the people you care about. Secondly, it takes money to get what you

need to kill a monster. I had to make napalm a couple of days ago, for instance. But in addition to these needs, the fact is, a job is as much a source of stability and humanity as your family is.

When I get to the plant and start working on the assembly line, I can shut my brain off and just worry about welding parts together. The same goes for flipping burgers or cleaning floors or whatever. Anything that keeps you from thinking about the monsters, or what you might have done to a monster the night before. It doesn't always work, I admit, but it's better therapy than you think and you get a paycheck at the end of the week.

I know it's tempting to clean out your bank account and stock up on guns like it was the end of the world. But let's face it, there are more monsters out there than you'll ever be able to kill in your lifetime. You can't fight and win a one-man war. That kind of extremism only gets you in the end. If you want to hold onto your soul as long as you can, you have to pick your battles carefully. Keep the money coming, save as much as you can and just make it from one day to the next.

Don't even think about trying to support yourself through things like drug deals or robbery. You don't have to be a walking corpse or have supernatural powers to be a monster. Peddling drugs or stealing people's things are just different ways of losing your soul, and nothing justifies hurting other people, no matter how bad your situation is. Now, I've read through the list archives and seen comments about monsters being involved in just about all levels of crime in cities all over. I've never seen any indication of this, but I'm willing to believe it's possible. Even so, stealing from them to make ends meet is a mistake. It's blood money that leaves a mark on your soul. The monsters might actually be able to report the crime to the police, too, and then you'll be on the run from two different threats. It's not worth it.

One last thing you need to think about: employee benefits. Without a job, how are you going to pay for hospital bills and things like antibiotics? I've had to go to the emergency room twice in the last couple of months. That kind of thing gets expensive, fast. Plus there are other benefits like death and dismemberment insurance, which will be a big help to your family when you die. Just keep in mind that most policies don't pay out in the event of something like a suicide. But if the vampire kills me tonight, Carol gets \$100,000, which will be enough to cover my funeral and keep up the bills for a pretty good while. It's the least I can do for her, considering the choices I've made with my life.

THE GOOD FIGHT

I remember reading about the Vietnam War in school and thinking about those monks who set themselves on fire to protest all the death and destruction. I thought they were idiots at the time. I mean, why would anyone do something that horrible to himself just to make a point? Now I know. It's all about having faith in something greater than yourself and taking actions that will leave a mark, not in a dull history book, but in someone else's soul.

We aren't just fighting these creatures, we're sending a message that Judgment Day is at hand. We're telling the demons and anyone else who bears witness that the wicked will not prosper. That they can't hide, no matter how they shield themselves behind high walls or powerful

attorneys. We can get them and we aren't afraid to bleed in order to make it happen. In fact, we expect it.

I'm talking about commitment. About wearing the proof of your ideals on your face and hands. About washing away corruption with pain and sacrifice.

Our commitment to the cause is tested every day, by ourselves, our fellow chosen and, of course, by the enemy. We have to show everyone that we're willing to stand up and do what's needed, that our faith is enough to see us through. That means being the first one through the door and the last one out, each and every time. It means volunteering for every dangerous job and taking the heat for others when we can. As far as I'm concerned, people can bitch about me all they want, but they can't say I'm not carrying my share of the load. And then some. That's how we win respect and get our message across.

When you find a demon, attack it. There's no point wasting time making plans and preparations and rehearsals. I'm not saying commit suicide, but figure out the best way to take a creature out and then go to it. The Lord knows every sparrow's fall. If it's your time to die, then there's nothing you can do about it, no matter how much you plot and plan. Just make sure you take the creature with you. Then you can sit at God's right hand and take a well-deserved rest.

Don't hold back because you're afraid of getting hurt. Think of Jesus on the cross and all the suffering he went through. What's getting shot or stabbed compared to that? Every time you bleed for the cause, you gain respect in the eyes of your comrades and you reaffirm the sanctity of your cause, like a holy communion with God. I'm proud of the scars I have and I hope to get more. That way other chosen won't question my determination and devotion. They'll be able to see it for themselves and know that when the going gets tough, I'll stand beside them no matter what. And they'll listen when I tell them about having faith and believing in God, because they'll be able to see that I've wrestled with the worst Satan can throw at us and prevailed.

Let the wicked see our blood flow, and despair. For we are holy and know that our bodies are no more than clay to be used as the Maker wills.

OUR WEAPONS

Once I chose to put fighting the pushers ahead of my own life, once I started burning brighter, I was able to see and do things I'd never been able to before. All the limits I'd placed on myself to keep me safe, the blinders I wore to keep me sane, they all came off and gifts came to me.

Subject: Delusions of Immortality

From: enigma143

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

I remember when I was 16, Joan, and thought I couldn't die. Boy, what I wouldn't give for some of that insane confidence now.

Truthfully, I'm not that concerned about your wanton disregard for your own life and limb. You'll either get over it or you'll end up in a body bag. No, I'm more worried about the idiots you can into following you into the meatgrinder. Probably other kids just like you who don't know any better.

If you're all gung-ho to shed blood for the "cause," do it on your own time. Let the rest of us get through the night in our own way.

I'm not sure where these things come from. It could just be from inside. It could be from the dead, the same ghosts who speak to me. It could be from the Lord Above, as my auntie would say. Whatever it is, the gifts helped me. If you've made the choice, they'll help you.

VISION AND TRUTH

The most important of all the gifts is vision. The guard who's smuggling these letters out calls it "the sight" and says he had it once. I don't know why he lost it, but I still have it. The two of us have talked a whole lot during the last few weeks, so I can't just keep calling him "the guard." But like I said, he's real touchy about real names — he says the things might read this and could track us down. So I'll call him Job, like in the Bible. My auntie would like that.

So, the way I figure it, there are layers between the truth and us. Most of us go through life with blinders — we look at a monster like Slick and all we see is a suit. We look at Dead Eyes and Doggy and we see punk kids. The sight takes away some of those layers. You get to see that something is wrong, that something is bad. Notice I don't say evil. That's a mistake I made early, thinking that everything — and everyone — that was wrong, that set off the sight, was totally evil. I looked at the people in that bar — Dead Eyes and his bunch — and they all seemed wrong. Evil. I hated them and wanted to hurt them.

It was only later that I really looked at Maria and realized she was wrong too. That was hard. This was a girl I felt something for, I wanted to help. She was off. She was tainted. But I couldn't believe she was evil.

So I looked deeper and more blinders came off. It hurt like hell, like my brain was burning. I felt like I was gonna puke right then and there. It was like looking into the sun or something, like I was going blind but I could see something else, something new.

Hell, it's hard to explain this shit. Have you ever smelled something really bad? When I was a boy, I was playing in an old lot and picked up an old piece of metal siding that was in the sun. I didn't know that a dog had crawled under there to die like a week or two before, I guess. Anyway, I pull off the metal sheet and this smell hits me. My stomach turns upside down. My head starts spinning and I run away. I'd never smelled anything like that before, but I knew right there that it was the smell of death. That's what the vision is like, seeing the smell of death.

So when I had my first vision looking at Maria, it was like taking that metal siding off that dog. Suddenly my eyes were burning and I could taste blood in my mouth. I could see that black shit crawling around in her veins, and caught a glimpse of her drinking it. I could see a hole where her soul should be, like something had taken a chunk of her. Slick was doing it to her, taking her soul and making her a slave. I saw that she was being chained by him. She wasn't evil, she was being used.

I can't say I like the vision, but it is a blessing. With Maria, I saw how sad she was, how much Slick had hurt her when he took part of her. With others, I see how much they like being monsters. With Dead Eyes, I saw that hate ate his heart long before Slick did. It's not about clear visions, but I always



understand the message. Like that dead dog smell — I don't need to think about it to know what it means.

With Slick, I saw dead children and pure fucking evil.

IN HARM'S WAY

It's gotten to the point now that it no longer terrifies me to see a monster walking the streets, but I dread it all the same. I can't kill one of them without destroying a part of me as well. Every one of them that dies hastens my own death, in body if not in soul.

I'm not saying we shouldn't do what we must. We need to make our remaining time as meaningful as possible. But we need to think things through carefully, and do things in such a way as to keep our humanity intact for as long as we can.

T'ELL NO ONE

It takes a monster to kill a monster. Never forget that. I know there are times when you want to tell other people about what you've seen and the things you've gone through, but think about what you ask of them in return. If you manage to convince them, what do you think is going to happen? The monsters will kill them, one way or another, because they don't have the abilities we do. Or worse, they *do* manage to push themselves enough to develop abilities of their own and you've *created* a monster where you'd been trying to destroy one.

The best thing we can do for people is fight this battle quietly and secretly, sparing them from the horrors that it inflicts on our humanity. We've made the choice and given up our lives. How can we force that choice on anyone else? If you've reached the point where you feel like having allies is worth ruining peoples' lives, you need to take a serious look at your own motives.

About the only exception I could see to this would be in the case of someone who was called, but failed to act. From what I've read here on the list, some of these "bystanders" try to hunt monsters later, despite the fact that they don't seem to have the same abilities that we do. Maybe they feel guilty for failing to act before. In their position, I know I would. If they're out looking for monsters on their own, they've made their decision knowing the risks. They ought to be helped.

Subject: We're All in this Together

From: soldier91

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

- > Besides, this isn't some kind of war, with battles and
- > campaigns that can be won or lost.

Yes it is. The sooner we look at this as a war and establish an organized front to deal with it, the sooner we can maximize our strengths and play on our enemies' weaknesses. The aliens created our diverse abilities purposefully to force us to form cohesive units, much like a guerilla army. When we go it alone, we play the monster's game, not ours. I'm really sick of hearing this "lone wolf" attitude from everybody.

You can accomplish more in a team than you can alone, and you'll live longer too. What's so hard to understand about that?

Beyond those isolated cases, we need to accept that we're on our own. As much as I would like to tie up a monster and dump him on the White House lawn, asking someone else to risk his humanity for my sake just isn't right. It's too much like asking a stranger to clean up my mess. I can't do that.

Besides, this isn't some kind of war, with battles and campaigns that can be won or lost. What we have to do is protect humanity from the monsters and more importantly keep them from causing other monsters to be born. If we can kill them and keep from spawning other monsters ourselves, sooner or later we'll be the only ones left, and we can see to it that there are no more after we're gone. It's like we're sucking the poison out of the human race, giving people a chance to grow stronger and healthier. The best we can do for everyone is to pull our weight and let them live free from a world of fear and pain.

GATHERING THE FAITHFUL

God didn't mean for us to fight this war on our own. In the past, with Jesus and Joan of Arc, it was okay to stand alone, but now the stakes are much, much higher. Satan is pulling out all the stops, spreading his poisons with global communications and mass media. For the first time in history, he can assault the faithful everywhere at once, 24 hours a day. The balance has shifted to his favor and it will take all of our efforts to save what's left of the human race. That's why God has given us the signs, a collection of symbols only we can read, and why he has led so many of us to the Internet. The faithful must come together under the banner of Christ the Messiah.

This is our sacred duty. We are the vanguard, the first voices to shout the call to fight. It's up to us to bring the devoted together and set their feet on the path. We have to persuade people to put aside their pride and prejudices and work with each other, to see the face of God in one another, no matter who they are.

There are plenty of sensible reasons to work together, even beyond our higher calling. More people means more resources, other skills and a wider range of experiences. We can all use someone to watch our backs, because the demons are well prepared and treacherous. There are so many things I need to know. How to use a gun. How to set a broken bone. Things that other chosen can teach me. We're here to support each other, to complement our strengths and compensate for our weaknesses, to build up our faith when times are hard. Anyone who insists on following a loner's path is either too prideful to know when he's in over his head or too afraid to put his trust in his fellow man. Either way, such people are to be persuaded to come into the fold whenever possible, for their sake and our own.

No one wants to face these horrors by themselves. The stress of dealing with demons night after night can wear down even the strongest soul. I'm not ashamed to admit that I don't think I could stand it for long. That's why I'm hoping that others will see the signs I've left and talk to me. I plan on meeting each person alone, to get an idea of their views, then bring them together once I've gotten to know them all. That way I can be sure how well everyone will get along and know ahead of time how to present each person so that any friction is minimized. I learned that from my mom. Who would have thought

planning a dinner party could be useful for assembling God's chosen crusaders? You see, everyone has something to contribute, whether they realize it or not.

The only thing that worries me is whether or not I can get them to accept my leadership. Most of them will probably be older than me, and I don't exactly look like a holy warrior. But then, I guess none of us do.

I'm just going to have to inspire them. My dad always told me that people will follow you if you have a plan and show some faith in it. That I can do. No doubt about it.

POWER

Knowing the truth means nothing if you can't act on it. Sitting back and thinking about what has to be done is only the first step. Actually doing it is what's gonna make the difference in the end. Thank God, the gifts help with that. That first time in that bar, I felt the limits come off me and I let loose on the monsters.

I put Dead Eyes through a wall.

You hear that a lot, "let loose." I used to say it a lot too, before I knew what it really meant. It means hurting yourself, not caring about anything except getting the job done. Nothing matters except hitting the monster or lifting the weight or whatever. I felt something tear in my shoulder when I hit Dead Eyes and it felt fucking good. My hands bled when I yanked Doggy's choke chain and it felt great.

When I finally got Slick that last time, another gift came to me. I'll be honest here. It scares the shit out of me, because I know it takes me one step closer to death. But that's the choice I made.

When I was facing Slick, he wasn't alone. I thought he was, but I didn't know he had a bodyguard I'd never seen. I'm still not sure what that thing was. It looked sort of human — two arms, two legs and all — but its skin was like boils or something. Not like the rotting skin of a dead person. More like a leper or something, I guess. Disgusting, outside and in.

Anyway, this thing came out of nowhere at me. It was like it moved out of the corner of my eye, suddenly there and ugly and stinking. One good kick and I was up against the wall and fighting to stay conscious. The thing looked like a junkyard dog — all teeth and scars. Slick said something about leaving him a piece of me. That's when it happened.

He wanted a piece of me and something inside let me give it to him. A piece of all the pain and anger I felt. A piece of my soul, of my flame. It was like the mother of all pukes. I tasted bile. Like my insides came out in a cloud of anger, saying, "Fuck you! You hurt too!"

The cloud hit Pus Skin like battery acid. His boils burst and he screamed like a little girl. He turned tail and ran.

I looked over at Slick and saw fear.

PAIN

I've only ever experienced that soul cloud twice. Both times in that last fight with Slick. I think it was because that was my final battle, the end of my mission. That was when I could give up those parts of my life and soul to make it to the end. It was my moment to die and that was the gift that came to me. That I ain't dead yet is just because the cops who busted down the door decided to knock me down instead of capping my ass right there.

Something you've got to realize is that the gifts don't come free. It's all burning out part of your life. That's where it comes from. You can feel it happening. The soul cloud was the worst. I felt the life ripping out of me. But I told you that the vision ain't a lotta fun either. Even what Job calls the sight makes you light headed after a while.

That pain is good. It tells you there's a price for it all. That you ain't a fool thinking you can do this for free. It's part of the choice.

Choice is pain, remember.

METHODS OF MURDER

Don't do as I have done. When you kill a monster, think it through and plan the murder very, very carefully.

That's right. What we do is murder. I don't care if we're talking about a vampire or even a dead person who's up and walking. This is about singling out an individual and setting out with a plan to end its existence. This isn't about holy retribution or vigilante justice. If we don't respect the value of life, even our victims', then we're no better than the creatures we kill. Once that happens, we're doomed.

There are more practical reasons as well. Some monsters hide in lairs and use servants to bring victims to them. Others hunt in very public places, using their powers to disguise themselves. There are some, from what I've read about here, that even hunt in packs. If at all possible, you need to get as much information as you can about your intended victim, and plan your murder so that you don't have to worry about witnesses or leaving clues behind that might lead the cops (or other monsters) to you.

Study the monster and figure out what its habits are. Find out where it rests and the best time to approach it. Hopefully you can follow it and learn these things. Sometimes, though, you may need to get the information from other sources. Let me tell you something. No matter how much you think you need to know, it isn't worth it to hurt another person for information. The pain you inflict will come back on you in ways you don't expect. Look at what happened to me.

Once you have as much information as you can get, you have to decide what you're willing to do to the creature. A quick, clean bullet to the head is one thing. Setting them on fire or burning them with acid is something else. Each comes with its own cost to your soul. Pay only what you absolutely must.

Above all, don't do something that puts another person at risk. No life is expendable, except maybe our own. I would never dream of killing a monster by blowing up a building with people in it, or shooting in the streets. There's never any excuse that justifies something like that. Never. We need to kill monsters and only monsters. Nothing else is morally acceptable.

The only other piece of advice I can offer is not to leave evidence at the scene of a crime. You might not consider what you've done a crime, but the police will. Depending on how you went about the murder, they may get called in. Both times when I killed things downtown, the cops showed up. The papers carried stories for a couple of days about serial murders of homeless people. I was lucky there were no witnesses, or if there were they weren't the sort to talk to the police. If anyone

got a good look at me or my car, I'd be finished. And if half of what people on this list say about monsters controlling the cops is true, going to jail is the least of your worries.

Wear generic clothes and use items that are readily available at any grocery or hardware store. Don't use your own car or have it anywhere near the murder. Don't use a gun if you can help it, especially if it's registered in your name.

Ideally, you want to set up an ambush ahead of time and get there on foot. Have a carry bag hidden nearby with a change of clothes. You want to get to the site only a few minutes ahead of time, because the longer you're seen lingering around, the more likely someone is going to notice you. Get there with just enough time to size the place up and get hidden. After you kill the monster, walk away. Look as normal as you can. Get to the bag and change clothes, down to your socks and shoes. The old clothes go into the bag to be tossed into a dumpster across town, and you walk back to your car. It took me a few months to work all this out, but I've killed two monsters this way and it seems like it's worked.

In my experience, it isn't the kill itself that's difficult. It's living with the aftermath.

ALL FOR ONE

God said in the Bible that we can't serve both Him and Mammon. That means we can't be spiritual and material at the same time. Material things are gifts from Satan, meant to tempt us and provoke sins of envy and greed. There was a good reason why the knights of Medieval times took vows of poverty, and we should do much the same, devoting our material wealth to the cause.

We must give freely for many reasons. In the first place, charity is a Christian virtue, but beyond that, a simple act of giving can make a difference in a total stranger's life, maybe saving him from a descent into sin, putting him back on the path to God. Closer to home, we have to consider that a number of our fellow chosen are less fortunate than we are, and we should share our blessings with them so everyone benefits. If one of us is wounded in battle, we should all do what we can to make sure he gets the best care possible. If he's killed, we should take it upon ourselves to see that his family is taken care of. There are also things like bail money and legal assistance to think about, and none of that is cheap. We're all working together to bring about a better world, so doesn't it make sense to share what we have so that we all get there that much sooner?

I've already talked to dad's accountant about cashing in my stocks. I've also got access to my savings. I can't touch the CDs for my college money yet, but mom might be able to get them for me if I need them. In the meantime, I ought to have plenty to keep the crusade going for awhile. We can even get a place somewhere and work out of that if we need to, but I'd prefer to use the guest house at home if we can.

Plus, there is a certain poetic justice to using one of Satan's own weapons against him. He came up with money, and money is what we'll use to keep our crusade going. That's why I wouldn't have any problem using money or valuables taken from a monster. Sure it's dirty money, but all money is dirty, isn't it? I'm not saying we should go out and commit crimes to steal what we need, just take advantage of what a demon might have after we've destroyed him.

WHO WE FIGHT FOR

I look at the people around me these days — the guards, the lawyers, the prisoners, the people who just come to watch — and I know what they're thinking. Murderer. Monster. Devil. Killer. Psycho.

Part of me wants to scream the truth at them, like I'm writing it here. I want to stand up in that court room and say that the "poor victim" was a demon, that Dead Eyes and Pus Skin and the rest were monsters who had to die so we could all live. That they had made their choices long ago and that I had to make mine.

But I don't and I don't because of who the audience is. Most of them are blind and defenseless. People like my wife and kid who spend their time just trying to get by, doing right by their neighbors, even if their neighbors are holes or jerks or even monsters. Telling them would just expose them to danger and that's the last thing I want to do. Every choice I've made since that first night has been for their sake, not mine. I know that at the end of this trial I won't be going home. I may not be admitting I'm guilty, but the jury sure ain't going to see it that way.

But that's my choice and as long as the ones I care about survive, I've done what needed to be done and I hope I'm right with God. I've pushed back the darkness and the defenseless folks still have a chance.

LIVE AND LET LIVE

When we kill, no matter how necessary it is, we commit murder. It leaves a stain on our souls that won't go away. Each act builds on the others until we finally become the very creatures that we're trying to stop. Fighting the monster within ourselves is just as important, if not more so, than fighting the beasts we find on the streets.

I've thought about this since early this morning, when we realized that something has happened to Tommy. If I'm right and my son is a vampire now, can I bring myself to kill him? If I can, what will that do to me? If a man can kill his own child, he can kill anyone. I think that doing something like that would be the end of me as a human being.

Could there be another alternative? If my son has only just become a monster, how much humanity is still in him? Can he be saved?

Surely there are some monsters out there just like us, struggling with the memories of who they once were. Instead of damning ourselves a step further by destroying them, wouldn't it be better to spare them instead? Wouldn't an act of compassion benefit everyone?

Think about it. What if that zombie I burned had risen from the grave to right a wrong he'd suffered, or to do something important for his loved ones? I remember how he screamed and I wonder now what might have happened if I'd just tried to talk to him instead, to show a little mercy instead of setting him on fire. Could I have helped him with his unfinished business and then persuaded him to rest? Surely he must have been in agony, existing as a rotting corpse. I have to believe he would have gone back to his grave eagerly once he'd done what he came back to do.

If we can find ways to show mercy to some monsters, we spare part of our souls and maybe save someone else's in the bargain. I'm not saying that

everyone can be spared. Obviously there are many creatures who are too far gone with pain and hate, and they need to be put down. But if we can spare just a few, convince them to seek out others and do the same, what kind of effect might that have on the world? That may be the only way we can turn back the tide in our lifetime.

If my son calls this evening, I'm going to reach out to him. Whatever he's become, he's still an victim in all this. I know he's a good person. If he can see past his anger with me, maybe he can be saved. But I'll do whatever it takes to keep him from hurting another person. He can have my blood if he needs it, or I'll get him rabbits from the pet store or something. There have to be alternatives that we can try.

At the worst, he might decide to kill himself. I'll do whatever I can to make it painless and quick. If that's his decision, I'll respect it, but I want to give him the chance to make that choice.

I know it'll be dangerous. I know there aren't any guarantees. But that's what life is all about, isn't it? We're at our most human when we risk ourselves for something we believe in. I still believe in my son, no matter what.

MAKING THEIR OWN BED

I just looked back on what I've been writing and part of me wants to say bullshit to it all. After months of trying to get to Slick, I know that it's a dirty world out there full of dirty choices. I know that saying things like "you can't" or "I'll never do that" is just a fucking lie. In the end we do what it takes, and we have to make tough choices.

That's the thing. It is that simple. Knowing right from wrong isn't hard. It's the follow through that's a bitch. You can't confuse sympathy for morality.

When you fight a monster like Slick, you face all kinds of shit that will put you through hell. And I don't mean the monster-from-hell stuff. I mean the really tough stuff, like facing a teenaged girl with a taste for *H* and too much pain. A girl you wish you could help, but you can't.

Like I said, when I finally got smart about trying to get to Slick, I followed his group. I found out that it wasn't all demons and monsters like Dead Eyes and Doggy. Slick had his hands in everything and reached out and touched everyone. There was some "legitimate" stuff — all the charity the papers are making a big deal about — but there was also a lot of bad, but human, shit. Like owning crackhouses and shooting galleries. Like making sure the cops stayed away from some gangs and came down hard on others. The fucker used a lot of names and a lot of faces, and he was everywhere.

It was the shooting gallery that was my first break. Maria told me about it before and I finally believed her. I checked it out and saw Dead Eyes and another one of his partners go in there to make a drop, so I started keeping tabs on the place. It wasn't hard to park up the street and watch with binoculars and shit. It was what you'd expect — lots of folks coming and going. Mostly black, mostly junkies dropping in for a few hours or a day, or two. Some white kids would come down in daddy's BMW to pick up some shit, maybe spend a bit of time. Lots of faces, so it took me a while to figure out who ran the place.

It was a little girl, for God's sake. I think she was maybe 15. First time I saw her was that first night. She was talking with Dead Eyes and I thought she was coming on to him — probably was actually. She was all blond hair, perky tits in a tube top, and cut offs. Little miss skank junkie tramp.

Then I saw her coming down off a high. Mussed up and hadn't slept in days. I saw scars on her legs — from a belt or something like it, I think. She looked like a sad little girl, hurt and alone. I think that's when I decided to try to talk to her, but I still waited. I saw her again and again. She greeted people at the door, she took payments and pretty soon it was obvious she was running the place. A teenaged pusher.

I just walked up to her one day and started talking. So many people came through that place that I don't think she even cared that I didn't get any horse from her. She was sitting out on a ratty mattress in the front yard. I just sat down and started blabbing. (That's one of the things about having made your choice. You let go of fear and just do what it takes.) Right off, she bitched about all kinds of shit, just like most kids do. I listened and asked a few questions, and got her to say she just wanted out of this shit hole. I told her she could leave right then and there, but she just laughed. At one point, she warned a junkie named Lamont that he better get straight with her.

Over the next few days, I talked with her a lot. Her name was Julie, but everyone called her Jewel, she said. Julie let slip a lot of stuff, about who she got her shit from, about what happened in that shooting gallery, about missing her grandma and wanting to move back to South Carolina. I think she was walking the line those few days between being the good girl she had been and the hole she was becoming. Then Dead Eyes showed again.

I was watching from my car that night. I saw Dead Eyes and Jewel talking and he wasn't happy. Then she pointed at Lamont who was laying on the mattress. Dead Eyes went over and picked him up and hurt him. He snapped one arm like it was kindling. Then he threw Lamont in the dirt. Jewel joined in — she kicked Lamont in the head while Dead Eyes stomped on his belly.

That's when I knew Jewel had crossed the line. She may have still felt some of what being a good girl from South Carolina was, but she was a big time hole. She was out for number one and could kill a man dead to get her way. She'd made her choice and so I had to make mine.

The next night, I blocked the back door and threw a flaming bottle of paint-thinner in a window. Junkies ran out the front, but I heard Jewel pounding on the back door. She never made it out.

I cried for Julie from South Carolina, but Jewel had made her decision.

I KNEW MY CHOICE

I can't say that I never regretted my choice. I guess if I'd been Lot's wife, I might have looked back too. I wanted the normal life I'd left behind, the one I'd never appreciated until it was gone. But that just wasn't possible. I know because once, I let myself try and it nearly cost me everything.



This was barely a month after that first night, and I was pretty fucked up. I had tangled with Slick once already, although I didn't know much about him. I knew he was a monster. I knew he ran Dead Eyes and the rest like a dog runs a herd. But I didn't know he played at being human or a humanitarian. I didn't know he had friends in high places.

By this time I'd made some mistakes with Maria and was hurting. I needed to feel normal, to connect with someone. That was when I thought back to those days in high school. That's when I first met my wife. She was a junior when I was senior and she was the prettiest thing at school, or at least I thought so. Once I got off my ass and asked her out, I found that she was a pretty good listener too. See, with all the bullshit my life had become that night — the crap jobs, the whoring, the drinking — I'd forgotten that we used to talk. I needed that again.

So I went to find her. To hear her voice. To see my boy. Maybe just to tell her I had been an idiot — hell, a hole — all those years. The divorce papers were at her lawyer's waiting for my signature, so I hoped she'd see me. So I went to our little house. Her little house, now.

I was about to walk up to the door when I clued in. I mean, I saw my boy's bike tied up to the little fence that runs along the sidewalk. I saw that the left operation of my wife's Festiva was running low again — piece of shit car if ever there was one. I started to relax and turned around to look at the neighborhood. Maybe see it like a normal man would. But I couldn't. No fucking way.

See, the vision, the voices, the dead, they wouldn't let me be. I barely even thought about it when I looked around, but I peeled some of those layers back. By instinct. And that's when I saw them. The eyes.

Red, glowing eyes in the night. I think I saw them before, but wrote them off. You know, that they were taillights or cigarettes or those little lights for alarms. But now with the sight I saw that they were eyes looking my way. Following me, looking for my weaknesses, ways to hurt me. I looked closer and I saw the woman, the thing, standing across the street. The vision showed me everything was red about her — her hair, her eyes, the hole where her soul should be, the hunger like Maria's.

I just kept walking past my home, past my boy's bike, past my wife's beer-can car, and down the street. I felt the red eyes on me the whole way. I turned left and headed back onto the strip where bars and dives compete with crackhouses. Back to where the monsters are thick. Back to where I could deal with Red before she could tell Slick anything about me.

SPREADING THE WORD

Only the wicked and the unjust have anything to hide. Why then do we act as they do?

Everyone seems to take such great pains to keep this struggle a secret? Why? Aren't we fighting for the sake of each and every person on Earth? Isn't this battle their battle, too? Then why keep it from them? We're here to win their souls for the Lord, not let them continue to wallow in ignorance and sin.

Don't tell me that we're trying to protect them. Why don't we show people the truth about the demons and

let them choose their own path? Would you like someone else dictating the kind of life you lead? Of course not! So why do it to them?

If we try to cover things up, we're wasting precious time and resources doing the enemy's work. We don't have anything to hide, but they do. Every time we drag these creatures out into the open, we stir people up and start them thinking. Thinking about themselves, and the choices they've made. Thinking about what they have to do to turn things around. That's how people will find their way to the New World that awaits. That, ultimately, is what we've been called upon to do.

People need to know. They need to get involved. Will it be dangerous for them? Certainly, but no less dangerous than allowing Satan to create hell on Earth. Will some of them die? Most likely, but we're all going to die, sooner or later. It's better to die free than live as a slave to wickedness.

No major change comes without sacrifice and suffering. That's just the way life is. By trying to insulate people from what's necessary, we're only prolonging their ultimate pain and ensuring their eventual damnation.

Lately, I've been spending a lot of time with Amelia for just that reason. She's the only other person I know so far who's actually seen one of the demons, and I've tried to show her that now she's obligated, like me, to join God's crusade. Whenever I talk to her she's very earnest and polite, but insists that she isn't sure what it was she saw. I can see the truth in her eyes, though. She's afraid, and I can understand that, but our destinies cannot be denied simply because we're afraid. I've heard the call. So will she in time.

I've already talked to some of my other friends and told them what I know. Most of them think I've lost it. That's okay. It's their choice. A couple seem curious. They want to know more. While I was talking to them, I suddenly had an inspiration, like a sign from God. I took one girl's arm, pulled out a pen and drew a symbol on her wrist. She washed it off after class, wanting to keep the bond we formed secret.

The sign means believer, I think, someone who hasn't been called but who knows the truth and wants join the fight. God willing, it will be the insignia of His army on Earth.

LESSONS LEARNED

Even now, with my mission over, as I'm scrawling out the last few things I have to say before I make that walk, I hate myself for how close I came to getting my wife and boy killed. Or worse. I wanted to feel better, so I put them at risk. That's not a mistake I'll ever make again, and I hope you — whoever you are — will never make it either.

You absolutely have to stay fucking focused. Remember your choice and remember your cause. What you're doing, whatever it is, does it serve that cause? Does it get you closer to pushing back that little bit of the darkness that touched you? Does it satisfy the dead who speak to you? If not, what you're doing is selfish and dangerous. So stop right now!

Rule #1: Focus until the end and don't look back.

Rule #2: Fight the good fight and fight smart.

Rule #3: Respect the choice you made and respect yourself.

Those are the laws I've lived by since that day in front of my house. Those are the laws that got me through Red



and Dead Eyes and Slick. Those are what allowed me to do what had to be done.

Now it's almost over. My sacrifice is made and my work for the cause is nearly finished. The rules have guided me and they should guide you.

REACHING THE END

I wonder how many of us try to kill ourselves after we're called? It wouldn't surprise me if more of us die by our own hand than facing monsters or the police. You've got to admit, it's really tempting sometimes.

Just this morning, I thought going upstairs and swallowing a bottle of painkillers. A person can only take so much heartache and fear before they just shut down. I feel like I'm riding that ragged edge nearly all the time. I realize that there's a damn good chance that I'm going to die tonight. My own son might kill me. I don't care anymore. I just feel numb.

That's a dangerous way to be. On one hand, it's liberating, I'll admit. People can do amazing and frightening things when they've got nothing to lose. I bet that most of us look at death as something of a blessing. But while that lets us stare at terrible odds, it also leaves us vulnerable. It makes us willing to throw ourselves away needlessly, and that doesn't do anyone any good. In fact, it might even go so far as get someone we care about killed.

I guess what I'm trying to say is don't throw away your life. Sell it as dearly as you can. Don't think of it as suicide, either. If you think about it, since you answered the call you've probably been more in control of your life than ever before. You have a right to live, and an equal right to die at the time and place of your choosing. Make it count.

The biggest thing you have to guard against is despair, and it's the hardest thing for people like us to handle. We can't talk about our troubles to anyone. Even before we answered the call, most of us

kept our pain to ourselves. There have been times when I was tempted to log onto this list and try talking to people here, but ultimately decided against it. You guys have enough problems of your own without listening to mine, right? Maybe we would be better off trying to find others near us who we can work with, sharing the responsibilities and the stress. But I don't know. It's hard to put that much trust in another person, especially when we're talking about matters of life and death. If I fail, I'm the only one to suffer. There's no one else to blame but me. I don't think I could focus on putting down a monster knowing that someone else's life was riding on my actions.

In the end, I guess the only real way to keep our heads up is to focus outward instead of inward, taking what happiness we can from our friends and family. Never forget that every time you wait in the darkness to confront a monster, you do it for something greater than yourself. I know that it seems like two monsters turn up for every one you kill, but every victory is important. Every monster you put down means that tens or even hundreds of people won't be its victims. It means that the beast isn't going to reach out to someone else later and make him sacrifice himself like we have.

It's funny. I'll bet most of us are the type who never fit in well with other people. I know I didn't have many friends in school. I didn't know how to talk to people. So I looked for chances to do a favor for someone, anything at all, to try and get people to notice me. Now I'm a grown man and I'm still looking for a chance to do someone else a favor. I've sacrificed my heart and soul for people I don't even know, and in the end it's just isolated me even further.

FORGIVE AND BE FORGIVEN

I've gone on at length about confronting demons and destroying them and shedding blood for the cause. But there's something else in God's message that we have to honor. Perhaps it's the hardest duty of all. We have to remember Christ in all things, and forgive our enemies for their acts against us. We can't give ourselves over to the same feelings of hatred and despair that provide fertile ground for Satan and his minions. By forgiving the sins of our brethren in this life, we free ourselves of sin in the world to come.

Why? Because God asks us to. Because mercy and compassion are what exalt us above the wicked, and temper the angry natures of our fellow chosen. As much as He asks of us to be leaders and fighters, He also requires that we be a voice of hope, to encourage the fallen and show them the way to the New World to come.

The reason for mercy is to keep us from losing sight of what we struggle for. As our crusade wears on from one battle to the next, it will be easy to forget the promise of a better world, fighting merely for survival or revenge or killing for its own sake. By showing compassion, we remind others of our Godliness and keep our focus on a higher, better purpose. A demon cannot find compassion in its heart for its brethren, but we can, and that shows our better nature.

This isn't to say that we must show mercy for the demons themselves. They are beyond salvation and fit for nothing except destruction. They forsook the Lord and the promise of Heaven when they rebelled with Satan and were cast into Hell. Trying to redeem one is asking for

From: descent88

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Subject: Lambs to the slaughter

Joan, you're entitled to your opinions, but this careless recruitment of helpless people has to stop immediately. They will die. No matter what you may think about the righteousness of your beliefs, they will die. Horribly. And their blood will be on your hands.

No matter what you may have told them, they are not ready for the world as it is. They cannot handle a monster. Joan, we can't even handle them most of the time. You have had exactly one encounter, judging by what you've written. Believe me when I tell you that you were more lucky than blessed in that exchange. We are rarely lucky when dealing with monsters. The outcome is usually much more decisive and final. Either we kill the bastard or it kills us.

I will agree with you that there is some purpose to why we've been chosen, though I'm not comfortable with sharing my own speculations at this point. Whatever the case, the fact is that we have been equipped to face the monsters, while most of humanity hasn't. We have the tools for the job and they don't. Don't lead them to their deaths. They may seem to understand, but they don't. They can't.

trouble. They're masters of deception and will ultimately twist your gift of compassion into the tool of your destruction. But there are many people who find themselves in service to demons out of ignorance or weakness. We should show these lost souls what compassion we can and try to put their feet back on the road to paradise. We have to take them in and purge the evil from their hearts by whatever means necessary, allowing them to drive the poisons from their bodies and become fit vessels for the Lord. Killing them only leaves them in the hands of Satan. Our victory can't be considered complete until they've been returned to the fold.

Likewise, we have to be a source of forgiveness to our fellow chosen. There are already stories on this list about hunters trying to follow their own course instead of the one God has chosen for them. These prodigal sons and daughters deserve our pity and compassion, not alienation. They've lost their way. It's our responsibility as shepherds to lead them back again. Like the souls who've been seduced by Satan, they only need to be shown the error of their ways and purged of the poison that's been allowed to take root in their hearts. Once we've given them the opportunity to repent, they'll see the error of their ways and we'll have won a great victory for God.

We can't give up on anyone if there's any hope of their salvation. God didn't give up on us, even though he's had more than enough reasons to. He's given us one last chance to fix things and we should give that same opportunity to anyone else who needs it, even if the attempt costs us in the long run. Every soul is precious to God. Those of us who return a lost one to Him will be doubly blessed.

THE DEAD SPEAK

Job tells me he sees scrawls and graffiti in the city. Things he thinks mean something, symbols that seem special to him, but that he can't quite understand. When he first told me about these symbols, I didn't say anything — if he didn't understand, was it my place to show him? But then it occurred to me that maybe it was, that just maybe I had this moment of life-after-death because I needed to pass something on. That's how I came to write this out. That was the trigger. That's when I decided I could trust Job and when we started to really talk.

So I showed him some more symbols, the ones I had drawn and the ones I just knew. The one that means "monster," the one that means "safe." He still didn't understand. He looked at my scribbles like they were some fucked up language or something. He saw that it made sense, that it had meaning, but even when I told him, he

couldn't keep them straight. He got the symbols confused with each other and with just marks on walls and on the ground. He couldn't understand.

I think these symbols are a language. See, I've mostly worked alone on my struggle against Slick, but I know there are others out there. I worked with a traveling salesman (of all things) who knew the truth too. He wandered from place to place, doing what he could and gathering news. He understood what you had to give up, what it meant to burn bright and fast.

That we ended up working together — the second time I fought Slick, it was with him and he helped me put down some of Slick's boys — is thanks to the language. I never would have given him a second glance, this brother driving by in a Buick, if he hadn't had one of the symbols on his car. To everyone else, it looked like nothing — a scrawl or some stupid prank. To me it said I Have Chosen. His car was idling at a stop light. I just walked right up and scrawled what I think means I Am Fighting in the grime on his windshield. He turned on his wipers, unlocked his door and I got in.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

I think the language is the language of the dead. The original language, from before we all fell from grace and the darkness took over. I'll go back to the Bible again and bring up the story of Babel. My auntie used to love that story and now I understand why. See, they were building this tower to compete with God and it was the biggest thing ever. Lots and lots of folks were building it. God said they were too proud and stopped them. But He didn't topple the tower or take away their tools — which He could have done. Instead, He gave them all languages. So suddenly they couldn't understand each other, all these people, and they couldn't work together to build the tower. So it fell apart.

There're so many lessons in that story, for people in general but also for those of us who've made the choice. We have to work together. We can't be too proud. But I think there's also something more true. Before we got all isolated, we all spoke the same language. We all understood it without learning it. We all just knew.

That's what those symbols are. The language of Babel. The dead who speak to us still know it and, deep down, so do we. When we let go of the comforts of life and make that choice, we see the world through the sight and we hear the world through the language.



PRESCOTT

CHAPTER 3: LAMBS ALL

And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after
me, is not worthy of me.
— Matthew 10:38

THE CHOICES I'VE MADE, PART 3

FAX TRANSMISSION 23:01:55 September 9

It's all for shit, in the end. It's a bad joke to think we can stop the darkness. There's just too much evil out there and not enough of us. It's all for shit.

The trial is almost over. The DA has a case that would've convicted Of, and I got nothing but words and lies to defend me. But I knew that going in. I knew this would end the worst way. But I thought it was worth it. I thought there wouldn't be anymore Marias in my neighborhood, that my boy could grow up just a little safer.

What a fucking joke.

See, the vision ain't gone away. I spend the day sitting by my lawyer as a bunch of suits decide my fate, and I watch. I look for the things that are still out there. At first, there wasn't much. I saw a ghost made of black smoke walking through the court room a few times. I think it was probably just soaking up the pain and tears in a place like that. Not friendly, but not a pusher like Slick.

Then, three days ago, I saw the jury start to change. The Latino woman who sits all the way to the left was the first. In the beginning, she was just another bored juror. Then she was wrong. And then I could see the black tar in her heart and the chunk missing in her soul. Just like Maria, Dead Eyes and the rest.

The next day, four other jurors were like her. Four. Then the DA. And the judge.

There's another Slick out there, another demon making junkies and stealing souls at my trial. The verdict was already in the bag, so all it's doing is showing me it can. That it's taken over for Slick and that my life didn't amount to shit.

I don't even know why I'm bothering with this letter, except that I ain't got nothing else to do.

THE SINNER'S COMMUNION

Subject: Agree to Disagree

From: joan296

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Ever notice how the more people talk, the less they actually say? The more people share what they think and feel, and reveal their own experiences about life, the more they pick up on all the little things that they disagree on? With each discovery, a gap grows between them? Pretty soon, they're tuning each other out, or worse they're arguing. People never care how much they agree, only how they disagree. If you don't believe me you haven't spent enough time on the internet.

We aren't any different, of course. Just look at this list. Everyone spends more time attacking one another than finding ways to come together and do the work that the Lord has chosen us to do. Instead of come together, we split into little cliques and personality cults, like the firelight and vigil lists. Everybody points a finger at everybody else and plays favorites. It's just like high school. I see it every day.

It's not entirely everyone's fault, though. By answering the call, we've had to come to accept a lot of things about the world that we never wanted to know. We've had to find ways to deal with really horrible truths and our future. It's hard to see past the rage and terror. We need something to put the pain into perspective, to give it meaning and to help us find strength to carry on. We need inspiration and purpose to make sense of all that we've witnessed.

That's where you and I come in.

Subject: Conduct
 From: witness1
 To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

I have just ejected rigger111 from hunter-net. I've done so because of an email posted to this list earlier today. I've purged it from our servers, but it may still be lurking around. I've attached a censored version below so everyone can see what I'm talking about.

Posting the names of other imbued is absolutely beyond the pale of acceptable behavior on this list. We are anonymous for a very good reason. To break that anonymity is tantamount to betrayal and even outright murder. Those are the stakes here and we should never forget it.

We are all concerned about these faxes and how they're finding their way to some among us. But to retaliate by "outing" the author is no way to go about things.

Inherit the Earth.

begin forwarded message

From: rigger111
 To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
 Subject: The Faxes

Okay, since no one seemed to be able to do it, I went out and found out who's been faxing me and others that "choices" crap.

I'm pretty sure we're dealing with a guy named <DELETED>. He's currently in jail in <DELETED> for the murder of <DELETED>. "Job" is obviously one of the security guards in the jail where he's being held during the trial. That's either <DELETED> or <DELETED>. My money's on number two, because he's obviously one of those Million Man March idiots and we know that's part of the whole game.

Now, how he's been getting the faxes to us, I haven't figured out. But I for one think someone should _ask_ him.

WALKING ALONE, WALKING TOGETHER

Being in that court room drove home to me that going it alone is not an option in this battle. I made it to my end almost entirely by myself, but now I can see it all coming apart. There's another Slick out there and he's rubbing my face in the fact that he's free and that there ain't nothing I can do about it. That I'm just a man before his — its — army.

I realize now I didn't have to go it alone. I could have reached out and found others who would help. Like Job. Like the salesman. There were others, but I couldn't accept them as my equals and now I wonder if I'm paying the price.

I'm not sure. I look back at that week I spent with the others. The salesman introduced me to this bunch of folks he met through his computer. They were chosen too, apparently. They had the vision and heard the dead. My first instinct was that we could do a lot of great things, but that didn't last. They all had their own plans and couldn't recognize what needed to be done. They were like kids caught up in something, no one knowing where the hell they were headed. They wanted to see their families, to hold down their jobs, to be "normal." They were all about second guessing their choices.

Could they really have helped me? Or would they have just dragged me into their own regrets? I almost got my wife

and boy killed when I let my guard down. How much worse would it have been with the rest of them distracting me from what was important?

SPREADING THE WORD

Some of us stand apart from many chosen because we're compelled to put the needs of others before ourselves. Some of us, like me, became this way only through God's grace, but others have been working quietly to help people all their lives. We need to reach out to people and help them however we can, because when we make a difference in their lives it enriches our own in ways this world can't match.

God has looked into our hearts and seen the compassion there, and now He's asked us to make the greatest sacrifice of all. To give ourselves, body and soul, for the sake of the entire human race. We have to awaken them to the truth about themselves and their slavery to Satan's beasts, and start them on the path to a better world. I know that sounds like a huge burden to lay on our shoulders, but we aren't meant to do it alone. That's why we've got warriors and protectors, questioners and healers, lawmakers and prophets, and who knows what else represented on hunter.net. We're just a part of a much bigger plan, but we've got a crucial role to play. We have to be the ones who make the struggle real in people's hearts. We have to keep them focused on what's at stake and who we're doing this for, to keep our fellow crusaders going no matter how bad things get. They have to be able to look to us for inspiration. We have to be the struggle, a living banner to rally the faithful and drive them on to victory.

Like Jesus gathered his disciples, we have to go out and bring our fellow chosen together, either reaching out to them over the net or leaving symbols for them to find on the streets. We have to give them guidance and support, and most importantly we have to remind them of their humanity. It's easy to go to extremes when you're scared and depressed, and we have to balance that out with compassion and common sense.

Basically, our job is more about our fellow crusaders than the crusade itself. We have to be the heart and soul that holds everything together so we can all do what has to be done.

THE TESTED

For every fear that the others would have fucked me up, there's a hope. Maybe, just maybe, I could have shown them the way. That's what these letters are all about, you understand? We have all chosen to sacrifice ourselves for the greater cause out there. I did it to fight Slick and what he did to Maria. But everyone out there with the vision and the gifts has made a choice like that, whether they know it or not. They've said "enough!" and ripped off the blinders and faced the world the way it really is. You've sacrificed your illusions and risked your life on the chance you can make a difference. It's Judgment Day and you won't just walk to the slaughter. You stand up and face the executioners and tell them they'll be judged too. It may get you hurt or killed, but it's worth not being a slave.

That's a bond between us all. Ignoring it makes us all weaker than we need to be. Job tells me there's an internet thing out there that keeps us together, and the salesman said the same. I never had a computer or nothing, but that's a step in the right direction. Still, working together is just that,

work. We can't pretend we're some sort of family or the church fundraising committee. This ain't a Sunday habit. This is the cause and the choice.

Those who see clearly what has to be done have to show others. Not tell, but show. Yeah, I know I'm doing more telling here in these letters, but I'm only talking about what I done. It's up to you to see where my fight took me and see what lessons you can learn. I seen that my battle hasn't made a whole hell of a lot of difference — the junkies and demons are still out there. But maybe you can see where I stopped and keep going. There's a war on and you need to fight it. You've made a choice. Can you live up to it?

From what Job tells me and what I've seen, there's a lot of people with a lot of ideas about the choice they made. I can't know who's reading this, so let me see if I can make sense of it for you. I ain't going to use anyone's real name. I've got enough blood on my hands as it is.

TAKING THE LEAD

My dad says people are sheep. They act like they don't want to be told what to do, but deep down everybody wants someone else to make the hard decisions for them. That's pretty harsh and I don't totally agree, but basically what he says is right. Most people don't have the confidence to answer their own questions, so they look to other people for guidance. The other chosen aren't any different. Don't get me wrong. If they have to, they'll come up with reasons and explanations for what's going on, but no matter how good their intentions may be, they often come to the wrong conclusions. Like that poor guy who thinks we're working for aliens. He's got the right idea, but he's going to make himself nuts trying to make contact with people that don't exist.

That's why we have to take the initiative and set people straight. Instead of leaving people to flounder around trying to make sense of their calling, we have to step in and fill in the blanks as soon as we can. That means taking a leadership role and keeping people focused on the job at hand, saving them from the clutches of demons. Give them something immediate to do so they don't have time to feel doubts or brood about what's happened to them. If you think I'm talking about going off on a power trip, think again. You're going to have to be sensitive to each and every person in the group, and ready to head off any problems or breakdowns. When there are questions, you have to be ready with answers. If you have doubts or worries, you have to keep them to yourself. Remember, you are the crusade. You have to be the standard everyone else looks to.

I realize that not everyone is good with people, and I bet there are some of us who don't relate well socially. I've known people at school who never really fit in but would always step up when they were needed, working long hours on projects that no one else wanted to do or helping with homework and stuff. No one ever really thanked them, and it never changed the fact that they were outsiders, but it never stopped them from helping whenever they could. If you don't feel like you can be a leader, then you can at least be the rock everyone leans on, letting others take charge while you work in the background, keeping everyone else going.

What's important is that you make your voice heard when it counts and that people pay attention to the example you set. Whether that's by leading from the front or working quietly from the back doesn't matter. It's the message itself that means everything.

GOD'S CHOSEN

Everyone who's heard the call has been touched for a reason. Each and every person who's answered is worth our time and effort, because God has found them worthy. We need to look beyond our prejudices, and theirs, and find ways that we can work together to bring about the New World. See them for what they are, not for what you want them to be, and recognize that they are as important to the cause as you are. Since God showed me the way to this list, I've spent many long nights reading each and every post, thinking hard about what each person has said and why. I've studied all the many faces of God's chosen until I know them as well as they do themselves. It's the only way I can do the work the Lord has set for me.

You need them for what lies ahead, and they need you, whether they know it or not.

AVENGERS

There was this boy I'll call Billy in the salesman's group. He was one hardcore motherfucker. He thought he was in some Rambo movie or an OG or something. I ain't never seen more guns on one person, in or out of the movies. He had this sawed-off he especially liked. I think he even had a name for it. That white boy worried me, but he's who I'd want with me in a fight.

I think there's probably a lot of folks like Billy who've made the choice. God knows I saw some of his fury in myself. You look out at the monsters and the darkness and you want to hit it, to kill it. When I finally got that gas on Slick — after I'd puked up some more of my soul on him — I turned

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: traveler72

Subject: Mama Knows Best?

You know, Joan, you sound a lot like a guy I met in Wichita. We'll just call him "Sam," because as far as I know he's still alive, and I won't jeopardize another hunter's identity — no matter how much I think he might deserve it.

Sam was working with a group that was after a pack of shapechangers operating outside the city. Sam was a quiet guy, always keeping to himself, but looking out for his group whenever he could. He was the sort who would make sure you were getting enough sleep and enough to eat, and checking your bandages when you forgot. I thought he was a straight-up guy at first. Until we managed to follow one of the creatures to its house. The leader of the group, a hard-ass who sometimes posted here, decided to take the monster's kid hostage and lure the pack into the open.

Well, Sam didn't think that was kosher. But he didn't call the leader on it. Instead, he whispered in everybody ear about how the kid was a victim, and pretty soon he had everybody in the group taking sides. This leader guy lost it. He told everyone to go to hell and took the kid by himself. No one has seen him since. I told Sam what he could do with his bullshit head games and headed on to Kansas City. Last I heard, the shifters had managed to hunt down half the group and Sam had stepped in to lead the rest.

Is that how it is with you, Joan? Mama knows best, and if you don't do what Mama says she'll throw you to the wolves?

him into a bonfire and it felt good. Hell, it felt great. See, I think Billy feels that way all the time, that need to put the evil down wherever and whenever he sees it. But how long can you just lash out at all the shit? It ain't smart and ultimately it don't get you nowhere. So you kill a monster, two monsters, ten. What difference does it make if more just pop up? I killed Slick and now there's some other thing out there feeding that black shit to kids and the people in my trial. The kill felt great, but was it worth it?

Every crusade needs warriors. God has called the wrathful to be our burning sword against the demons, reaching out to men and women who are prepared to kill to uphold their ideals. Unfortunately, they don't exist for anything besides battle. They're weapons in need of a hand and mind to guide them. They become obsessed with killing a monster to the point where they're blind to the consequences, sometimes losing their own life or the lives of others who follow them. The wrathful also have very strong opinions about the world and how it should be, and they won't hesitate to attack a person or a group that goes against their beliefs. Including us.

The warriors need us to keep them balanced. Their aggressiveness has to be tempered with compassion or they can go out of control. Someone has to be willing to get in their face sometimes and make them think instead of just react. Of all of us, they are the most in need of focus. Give them a target, something to turn their aggression on, and they're fine. It's only when they get time on their hands and start to brood that they can go off the deep end.

Spend some time on the firelight list. These guys have all this anger and passion, and once they get involved in the hunt, they lose all inhibitions about violence. It's scary, but at the same time it shows how much we have to offer them, and what potential there would be if we can work together.

DEFENDERS

The first chosen the salesman introduced me to was this woman I'll call Jenny. Jenny wasn't part of the group or nothing. She had her own thing, focusing on what was left of her family. The salesman told me she made her choice when a monster killed her husband and she was set to keep her son and daughter alive and well. The salesman's a guy people trust — I guess his job has something to do with it. He already knew Jenny, but it still took us an hour to convince her to meet us. She showed me a picture of her family, but never let me know where they were.

In a lot of ways, I thought Jenny was on the money. I left my wife and boy behind for the same reasons she keeps her kids close — to protect them. But is Jenny ever going to accomplish anything by hiding? Everything is about fear for her, not determination, not dedication. She didn't really care about the rest of the world as long as her kids were safe. That's understandable, but is it really right? If we hold on too tight to something, ain't we just being selfish? What if a monster offered to keep Jenny's kids safe in exchange for her betraying some of the others? What would she do?

I really don't know. I don't think Jenny does either.

Protectors are the most like us of any of the chosen, just maybe more militant and focused on what they feel called to do. They're committed to protecting the people they care about at any price, and are willing to sacrifice themselves if necessary for the sake of others, just like we are. The only



problem with these crusaders is that sometimes their passion for keeping people safe gives them tunnel vision, if you know what I mean. Their awareness doesn't extend past the immediate circle of what they try to protect, tucking in like a turtle and letting the rest of the world go to hell.

The vigilant need someone to kick them in the ass from time to time and remind them there's more going on in the struggle than what's happening to their family and friends. They need to stay focused on the crusade as a global cause, not a local one, and sometimes they need to remember that the best defense is a good offense. They won't need to barricade themselves in their apartments if the demons are all dead and gone.

So it's a kind of tug-of-war with the protectors. On one hand, their protective natures remind us to think of ourselves and the people we're fighting for, while at the same time we have to be able to tell them when it's time to go confront the demons in their holes for a change. And since they always put the welfare of others before themselves, the vigilant often need someone to take care of them, so a close partnership is essential.

INNOCENTS

The choice is a hard one. We can never forget that. Fooling ourselves into thinking that everything is going to be all right is worse than keeping our eyes closed. We've seen the darkness. We know things aren't right.

But there are people who just don't get that, I guess. In that group of chosen I met, there was this guy I'll call Joe. In some ways, he was very important to the group, I think. In the time I was there, it was Joe who was always getting people together, talking to them, keeping them from fighting with each other. In that way, he was a good guy. But deep down, he was a fucking kid in way over his head, and he didn't know it. I noticed it the first time when he said something to me about "when all this will be over." Over the next few days, I talked to him more and more and I realized he was living a dream. He thought we would just win back the world from the monsters and go back to our old lives. He talked about having kids and everyone staying friends afterward.

Pretty soon, I couldn't take it anymore. I lost it when he told me he was still saving for his retirement. His retirement! There won't be a retirement for any of us, Joe! We're fighting for the future, but if you think we'll see it, you're just stupid or you aren't strong enough to make the choice. Hope is a wonderful thing, but not to the point of being a damn fool.

Everyone has blind spots, myself included. Before God showed me His plan, I had major ones, especially where other people were concerned. The call made me look at things in a whole new way, but I realize that there is still more for me to learn. That's why the Lord touched the souls of the young at heart and the idealistic, so that their constant questions would cause us to think about how and why we do the things we do.

Everyone seems to look down on the thoughtful, but that's only because most of us are jealous of their strength. The stress of the hunt doesn't seem to touch them like it does the rest of us, because they don't take it as seriously as we do. They don't always see the cause as the end-all battle that we do. In fact, some don't even see it as a crusade at all. Of course, I disagree completely with that outlook, but I admit that the idea makes me think, which is the whole point.

The open-minded simplicity of these chosen helps center us when we start to doubt everything we know and believe. At the same time, we have to reach out to them and direct their constant curiosity in directions that have practical application. Never mind about the political motivations of a bloodsucker, I want to know if we can kill one with a sunlamp.

The thoughtful aren't treated with nearly the respect they deserve among the chosen, and we should be their strongest advocates. None of us can afford to be complacent, because we don't have a clue about what's really going on around us. We need to be open to all the suggestions we can get. The fact that these people are ostracized so much might have something to do with all the confusion and uncertainty on this list.

JUDGES

I'm not sure if this group I ran with was organized enough to have real leaders, but there were two women who stood out to me because of their dedication and focus. I'll call them Ruth and Rebecca. Those are old names, from the Bible. I think that's appropriate because there's something biblical about these women. It's like they walked out of olden times, when the choices were clearer and God spoke to the Hebrews.

Ruth didn't strike me as religious right off. When I first met her, she was comparing guns with that boy Billy. Over the week or so I spent with them, I saw her in all kinds of situations and she never lost her sense of right and wrong. Billy would rage against everything. Joe would talk about making peace. Ruth would cut through the bullshit — even my bullshit — and hit the core of a thing. We spent a lot of that week tracking a junkie I'd seen hanging with Dead Eyes. Ruth and the others had supposedly tangled with him a few times before.

Anyway, when we finally confronted him, the others turned into more of a burden than a help. I had to hold Billy back from opening up the first chance he got, and Joe wouldn't stop talking about helping the thing, about it being a victim. I was ready to let Billy loose just to shut everyone up.

Then Ruth told us what was what. She told us we would get it alone and find out. We started working together because she was in charge. We cornered the thing. She looked him right in the eye and he froze in place like a statue. I saw fear in his eyes then. She asked him questions and he answered, like he was afraid of what might happen if he didn't. He admitted his crimes — drinking Slick's death-tar. Ruth determined what his punishment would be. Billy and me held him down. She had a key hanging around her neck on a chain — I never found out what it was for — and she took it off and touched him with it. It was like she was burning him.

There wasn't a mark on him when Billy and me let him go, but it was like he triggered the vision automatically. Somehow, I looked at him and saw a thing to chase off. Ruth told him to run and I knew he'd never stop running so long as her mark was on him.

That woman knew what this was all about. I hope there are others out there like her.

I think that God gave us arbiters to show us that we're not infallible. Even though He has chosen us to fulfill His plan



on Earth, we're still human, still frail and fallible. We need someone who will consider the facts carefully and show us that good can be found in the most unlikely places.

How can these people preside over weighing the actions of demons? They can't, obviously, but they can give us guidance in cases of victims who have only been partially corrupted. When we deal with blood slaves or a warlock's followers, how can we be sure they won't follow in their master's footsteps after he's been killed? This is one of the ways that the counsel of arbiters is crucial. Their sharp minds and strong sense of right and wrong make all the difference between vengeance and justice.

But the arbiters don't stand in judgment of demons alone. They watch over our actions as well, and they aren't afraid to call us out when we cross the line. Let's face it, there are a lot of angry and wounded people who don't have the best perspective on dealing with the enemy, or even on who the enemy is. We need someone to stand for discipline and law in God's army, and the arbiters do that to the best of their ability. We owe it to ourselves and the people we fight for to support the overseers and get their advice whenever possible. We have to be an advocate for justice, to stand for something higher than just an eye for an eye.

Which also means that from time to time we have to argue with an arbiter. The thing with them is that they make the best judgments they can based on their personal ethics. Extenuating circumstances and compassion don't fit into the equation. Sometimes we're compelled to play devil's advocate if justice wouldn't be good for Christian forgiveness. People should be allowed to atone for their mistakes and repent. Arbiters don't always allow for that. We have to respect their decisions, but be prepared to respectfully disagree as well. There has to be law and order among us, but if we can't persuade them to show mercy to an offender, it's our fault not theirs.

REDEEMERS

If Ruth was like a leader, then Rebecca was like a preacher. She was religion from head to toe. She was talking about God and angels and the coming paradise almost the entire time. That put me off at first. She sounded like an old time Baptist. But now, after reading through the Bible a few times between going to trial and all, and after understanding how right my auntie was about some things, I think Rebecca was on the right track. She saw how bad things were and dug deep to find faith in salvation. I admire that now.

Joe was just a fool who assumed everything would be all right in the end. Rebecca faced fear. I remember I told her I knew I'd lay down my life for the cause eventually — it was the first time I said it to anyone, but I knew it was true. She looked at me without saying anything and I thought for a second she was pitying me. Then she said, "We all have a path to the Promised Land. I'm glad you've found yours."

She knew. She knew others would fall around her and that the Judgment would be terrible. But still she saw the glory to come after. That was wonderful.

I wonder, though, now that my mission is over and nothing has changed, whether she wasn't fooling herself too.

I love the healers. They give me hope that all the ugliness I see every day can be turned into something truly beautiful. Their unshakeable faith in others, even

those lost completely to the lies of Satan, remind us all of the glory of the human soul. We fight to give humanity hope of something better. The healers are hope. That takes a kind of courage even the wrathful should envy.

Instead, many tear them down. We flame them when they talk about finding humanity in beasts, of trying to save souls no matter how far gone they may be. It's wrong for us to deny them their chance to spread God's grace. Didn't Jesus ask God to forgive his murderers, even as he hung on the cross? To reach out to one's enemy in understanding and love is the highest ideal of any Christian, and we should encourage our brothers and sisters who want to do that.

And yet, the problem is that these chosen want so much to find the best in people that they can become obsessed. They believe in hope when sometimes there is none. The cruel thing is that it isn't just the healer who suffers, but her allies, so the pardoners are often shunned unfairly.

I don't believe everyone is entitled to a happy ending. But who am I, who are any of us, to prevent someone from trying? If the healers can save even one person from damnation, isn't it worth the price? Think carefully about your answer, because one day the person they're trying to save might just be you. Even Christ was tempted by the Devil. Does anyone truly believe we're free from corruption? There are those who would say some on this list have gone over to the other side already.

VISIONARIES

I split off from the others pretty soon after Ruth marked that junkie. The salesman helped me face Slick, but they were all headed another way and I had my own

battle to fight. I thought that might be the last time I saw another chosen, and I was sort of glad.

I didn't see another until after I offed Slick. The cops took me in and I spent a lot of time in one of those fucking rooms where they ask you questions. Two hard chairs, a metal desk and a mirror so they can look at you while you sweat. Two cops took turns asking me questions and then they left me there. Trying to tire me out, I guess. Not that they'd know it, but after what I'd gone through, needing to piss and my ass falling asleep on a chair wasn't exactly torture.

Anyway, I'd been alone for about an hour when this tall brother walks in. He was wearing one of those caps without a brim that they wear back in Africa, I guess. He had a serious Moses look about him. He sat down and stared at me, but somehow still had a faraway look. Like he was looking into me.

He just started talking. "I know about the voices and the visions," he said. "I know what you see and what you are. I need to know what you have done." No questions, no conversation, just statements.

I thought maybe he was one of Slick's boys out for revenge, so I used the vision on him. He was just a guy. I thought he might be chosen, but I also thought he might just be fucked in the head. He kept muttering about "leading the inbred to the future" and all kinds of other bullshit and finally wanted to know where I did Slick, where I first made my choice. Everything was about where, as if that would tell him something.



When I wouldn't answer his questions — when he finally asked them! — he got up and left. He said he'd read the police report and that someone would be with me.

Big shit, I thought. But then Job showed up and the Muslims picked up my defense. That means that "brother-with-a-cause" is still out there and he may even have something to do with you reading this. I guess that's a good thing, but it seems like too little, too late.

I believe that the world as we know it is coming to an end and that God has chosen us to save mankind from Satan's corruption. I know that a New World awaits, but I don't know how we'll get there or what it will be like. That's the purpose of the prophets, chosen by the Lord to be the architects of the struggle to come.

I know that they can be hard to deal with. Many of them prefer to be left alone, puzzling out the nature of God's plan and the workings of monsters. But they're our teachers and we must show that we want to hear what they have to say. Without them, our cause doesn't have any future. If we don't have a plan for the days when the demons are defeated, then we just invite them to return. We need a vision to guide us, and the prophets are meant to show the way.

The problem is getting them to focus on the matter at hand. They can go off on wild tangents, following an idea just because it's interesting, rather than actually useful. They need someone who can keep them focused on immediate goals, not watching the paint peel, but picturing what we need to be doing a decade from now. Unlike the questioners and their easygoing natures, the prophets don't like being interrupted, and they're a lot harder to handle.

Like the open-minded, the prophets need a voice among the chosen, and we need to be that voice. Someone has to take the message to the masses. The message may not be popular, and it might cause a lot of heartache, but it's the word of God and we have a duty to share it. Sometimes you might not even agree with what a prophet says, but that doesn't change the fact that the truth has to be told. We can't be truly serious about putting the good of everyone ahead of ourselves if we shy away from knowledge we'd rather not know.

The fact is, as hard as the truth is to take sometimes, it's even harder to be driven to seek it no matter what. That's the price the prophets pay, being blessed or cursed with a mind that never rests. The prophets make their own sacrifices for what they learn, often losing the comforts of friends and family in pursuit of things that might or might not even be real. We should honor their sacrifices.

FELLOW DEVOTED (OTHER MARTYRS)

When I first met the salesman, I wasn't sure what to make of him. He sort of just appeared in time to get my ass out of the fire — one of Dead Eyes' enforcers was right on me — so I was grateful, but I was suspicious too. I wasn't really sure other people knew what I knew, that others had made the choice. To find out they did felt good and bad, somehow. I wasn't sure why until the salesman and I had a chance to talk.

See, it feels good not to be alone, so that was great. To know someone else sees the monsters, has chosen the path, and knows the price to pay feels really good. But it also

weighs on me. I thought I was alone, that I was the only one holding the wall. Knowing there are other people makes me less sure. If I'm not the only one, can I let my guard down? Am I really that important? Is my cause that important if there are others?

I even toyed with trying to see my wife again. I let my guard down and thought about what would make me happy instead of what was right. Thank God I came to my senses. I got lucky once. I doubt the Lord above would be so kind a second time.

By the time I did snap out of it, I knew the salesman's dedication was deep and strong. At first, I didn't think he had what it took. He spent a lot of time thinking back to his home and the time before. I thought that was a weakness. But then I realized this guy spent his life going from hell-hole to hell-hole helping to set things right. He had no normal life anymore either. He'd given it up to spread the word and get us all together as best he could. Sure, he still drew a paycheck, but his job was just a tool, not a crutch.

I think if I had met any of the others first, it would have been a disaster. I would have hated Billy or Joe, or felt lost with Ruth or Rebecca. But the salesman showed me that my cause was important even in the big picture, and that I had to be smart about it. Make my life count. That's what I tried to do.

BYSTANDERS

So many people call them names and think of them as failures, but the men and women who hear the call and don't answer may have the hardest struggle of all.

Think about it. Remember how you felt the first time you saw one of the demons. Your terror and outrage forced you to act, and God granted you the strength of angels. But what if you hadn't done anything? What if you faced death and just froze? It only lasted for a second, but by then the moment had passed.

Do you forget about what you've seen? Can you put the knowledge of the demons and the message of God out of your mind? Of course not. You know demons are out there. You know they prey on people. But you can't see them anymore. You can't do anything about it. All you can do is feel afraid, not knowing who to trust or what to believe for the rest of your life.

At least we have the capacity to do something about the demons. Those prodigal souls who turn from the Lord have to live nightmares in absolute helplessness. They don't seem so lucky now, do they?

What amazes me is all the stories about people who still try to come to grips with the demons even after they fail their tests! Can you imagine facing a monster without any of your blessings? No sight, no powers, no protection from their magic? Yet these people are out there doing it all the same, and most of them die trying. Because they know that what they saw was wrong. They know deep in their hearts that the demons must be stopped. So they do what little they can while we bicker with each other.

I think God has a plan for these struggling souls. He knew what they were capable of when He gave them their test. He had to have known what decision they would make, just like He must have known that they couldn't rest once they'd been shown the truth.

Like the prodigal son in the Bible, who learned about himself and his worth when he made his long journey home, our own prodigals have something to learn in their struggle to come to grips with the demons. We may need to learn that lesson, too, and they'll be the ones to teach it. So if you ask me, they deserve our respect and whatever support we can give them.

Job's Story

I've just had a long conversation with Job, the prison guard smuggling these letters out. He's given me a wake-up call.

There's nothing worse than regret. It burns into your heart and makes you question yourself all the time. It doesn't let you sleep and it doesn't let you be awake. It's with you all the time.

I've felt regret. Seeing those junkies in the courtroom made me fear that I wasted myself and my choice. That fighting Slick and Dead Eyes and Red and Maria was all a fool's errand, a sucker's bet.

Fuck that! It isn't.

I look back at what I've written today and realize that I'm giving in to fear. Job has shown me that you can always keep fighting. The cause is never over until you let it end. I still have breath and my battle ain't going to stop!

Job tells me he was just another guy for most of his life. He became a prison guard because of the pension plan and because a buddy was going into it. He found that he was good at it, but not great. Just like the rest of us, he went through life blind and only sort of happy. He had girlfriends and was even engaged once, but never really connected enough to follow through. That's how he put it, that he'd never followed through on anything before.

Then he walked into a cell block and saw the nightmares. He tried to describe what he saw, but it was hard for him. He said something was feeding somehow on prisoners and guards. He found the guards' bodies first, withered and dry like skeletons or mummies or something he said. One was clinging to the bars and when Job looked in there were more bodies. He wanted to run, but heard a sound from another cell. He went to look and that's when he saw this mist. Job says he froze. He wanted to run, he wanted to fight, but instead he just didn't move. The mist came toward him, he thought, and he was sure he was going to die.

Then the sun came through the cell windows. When a ray hit the cloud it faded away. Job was left with the bodies and finally he raised the alarm.

He says it's been months since then. He took a long leave and was real depressed. See, he knows he could have acted. It was right there, he says, a burning need to lash out, but he couldn't do it. All he could do was watch and wait, and through some miracle he survived. A spectator, you might say.

Since then he hasn't seen the monsters, but he knows they're there. He says he sometimes catches just a glimpse or a whiff of them. He'll smell something dead in a crowd and know there's a monster on the street, but he can't find it. He'll see graffiti — the language — and know it means something, but not always what. That's how he knew I was

one of the chosen. He even found that internet group, so he knows a lot about us, about what might have been.

Job's Lesson

I said I call him Job because he was tested. And for a time, he thought he failed. He didn't act when he could have and the blinders came back on. But he didn't accept what happened. He didn't just go back to surviving. He knows there's something more out there and he's been fighting to get back to it. He helps out the chosen however he can, giving advice on the law and the prison system, and smuggling out these letters. He should be hiding from the world, but instead — without the vision, without the gifts — he's fighting for what he believes in. Hell, he even found his faith in all of this.

Job was tested. He may have faltered once but he's triumphed since. If he won't give in to regret, how can I? I dealt with Slick and I'm proud of it. I at least found some justice for Maria and the others, and I protected my family.

So there's another pusher out there, playing with me. Fuck him. That's one less still in hiding.

And maybe, just maybe, the junkies aren't at my trial because the monsters are laughing at me. Maybe, they're afraid of me. And you.

They should be.

KEEPING THE PEACE

The warriors worry about stopping the enemy. The protectors worry about guarding their loved ones. The arbiters worry about punishing the guilty. Everyone has their own driving force that takes up all their energy and keeps them focused

And us? We worry about them.

We're the ones who keep the whole thing going. We have to be the go-betweens that help warriors and healers work together. Or we nag the protector to slow down long enough to take care of himself. Or we put up with the prophet's bitching long enough to hear the important thing he's discovered. We're the blood and skin that hold everything together. For us, the cause and only the cause matters.

God asks us to carry the cross of the world's salvation. We have to make whatever sacrifices are necessary so that the chosen can do their jobs. That's why they need us, even though most don't realize it, and why we can't do anything without them.

That means stopping fights. It means giving up food and rest and safety. It means putting up with abuse and doing terrible things to spare someone else from doing the same. It sometimes means taking the worst risks, because that's the only way you're going to get anyone else to do it, too. You have to be prepared to put yourself on the line and not expect anyone to notice or even care. In fact, the only way to know you're doing your job right is if everyone is way too busy taking care of their own business, working together and getting the job done, to pay the slightest attention to you.

That's all that God asks of us. No one else ever has to know how hard it is or how lonely. No one else ever has to know the pain we endure so someone else won't have to. That's just between us and the Lord.

He knows. That's what matters.

EXPECT NOTHING

Like I said, all chosen have blind spots. I see it each and every day on this list, in the words of experienced crusaders and the recently awakened alike. Most times it's about becoming obsessed with beliefs to the point that everything else is tuned out. That's when the obsessed assume that everyone around them is on the same wavelength, because as far as they're concerned there isn't anything else in the world as important as what they're doing. These chosen expect people to be as devoted to what they're doing as they are, and that's when they end up getting others killed. Look at all the stories of hunts gone wrong in the list archives.

We can't expect people to see things exactly like we do. We can't expect them to approach the struggle the same way. And we certainly can't demand the same commitment as we give. That sort of thing is between each person and God. It isn't our place to insist that someone be just like we are.

Any sacrifices we choose to make are our own. We're willing to do whatever it takes to see God's plan fulfilled, even to the point of giving up our lives, but that's a personal choice we've made. It's not something we can apply to anyone.

No one is expendable. No matter how important the task, no matter how dangerous a demon may be, we don't have the right to sacrifice another. How can we claim to be God's chosen if we knowingly send our allies to their death?

Self-sacrifice, however, is totally different. We're all expected to give entirely of ourselves for the sake of mankind, just as Jesus did. That includes giving up our lives, and there may come a time when one of us decides to lay down his life so the rest can prevail. We must respect that decision and support him, though it may be the hardest thing we ever do. There's nothing greater than giving one's life for another, and we should revere those with the courage and compassion to sacrifice God's gift for the sake of another. I hope I'll be able to do it if the time comes.

KEEPING THE FAITH

The way of the Devil is temptation. Satan doesn't beat you because he's stronger or smarter, but because he can make you doubt yourself. That's when you're weaker than he is. Even Jesus was tempted in his time on Earth. Why should we be any different?

No one but God knows how long this struggle will last. Can we go on, night after night, and not succumb to hatred and despair? Can we face one desperate struggle after the next without losing sight of the higher purpose of our calling?

We're only human. It's too easy to abuse our power for personal reasons. When that happens, when someone flirts with damnation, it's up to the rest of us to bring that lost soul back to God's grace by any means necessary.

This should be a duty shared among all the chosen, but most especially among us. God chose us above all the rest to be the blood and soul of His crusade, and we should work the hardest to keep the tested free from iniquity. Some on this list have recommended that arbiters have the final say in measuring the actions of the chosen. I agree, but only where a crime involves worldly actions such as murder or theft. For crimes against the cause itself, we alone should pass judgment and mete out any punishment. Why? Because such crimes demand compassionate consideration, an eye toward

forgiveness through penance and purification. Spiritual corruption is like a fever. It comes on subtly, rising by degrees until the victim is helpless and mad. With time, effort and love, the fever can be broken and the person healed. Who else among the chosen has the devotion necessary to carry a lost soul through that kind of ordeal? Whoever shepherds these lost children must suffer alongside them, to share in their suffering as a gesture of atonement. That is a cross we must bear.

It isn't enough to spread the word and inspire others to heed it. We must remind the faithful of their obligations and watch for signs of corruption. If you come across a lost soul, show him the error of his ways and return him to the fold. Sometimes this might require extreme measures such as imprisonment or pain. I know it sounds extreme, but sometimes it takes drastic action to shock someone back to his senses.

DIVIDED WE STAND

Since I first got onto the internet and found hunter-net, I've noticed that a number of chosen have tried to form separate groups, like the firelight or vigil sites. It seems to have worked with some, but it fails completely with others. Us, for example. You would think we would want a place to reach out and share our experiences, to commiserate and get help from others who are going through the same things we are.

Nope. Not at all. That bothered me for a while, until I realized that we just aren't the type to waste time worrying about ourselves. We don't open up about how hard things are for us. If we have any free time to spend, we use it helping others. We don't cater to ourselves. It isn't our nature.

That same basic nature makes me wonder if we can get along together as a group. Would two of us work together, complementing each other's overall devotion? Or would we pull in opposite directions, each

Subject: Ideological Purity?

From: memphis68

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

Joan, let's be clear on this. What you're saying is that anyone who strays from our struggle should be taken and "re-educated"? If that means throwing them in a basement for a month or working them over with rubber hoses, that's okay?

Don't get me wrong. Traitors to the revolution deserve what they get, but it should be a bullet in the head, not some sick, drawn-out mind-fuck. For one thing, that kind of treatment is ultimately a waste of time. You either break the person so thoroughly that he's no use to anyone, or you make one serious son-of-a-bitch who'll do whatever you say so long as he can go free and bury you later.

But most importantly this kind of inquisition invites abuse. Look at Germany and all the people who were tortured and killed in the name of ideological purity, when in reality they'd just been set up by someone with an axe to grind.

We don't need a secret police, Joan. Leave that till we've defeated the enemy. Then we'll take care of the bastards who turned on us. We've got enough reasons to watch our backs now without worrying that one of our own will sell us out.

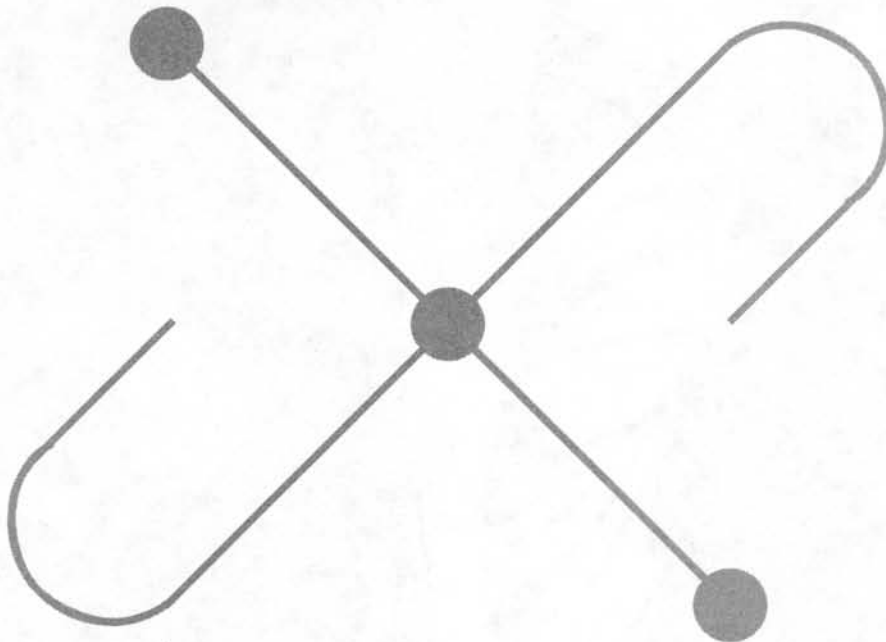
committed to leading according to her beliefs? The more I think about it, the more I believe we're loners, even in a crowd. We only feel comfortable leading from the front lines or working quietly in the back, always alone. Why? Because we have to be the most devoted, most committed member of the group. If anyone sacrifices more than we do, it's a sign that we fail in our commitments. That breeds rivalry and jealousy, and ultimately leads to antagonism. So we isolate ourselves to be secure in our selflessness.

Yeah, that's messed up. But it's the truth. You know it as well as I do.

I'd like to hope that one day we can find a way to come together in our struggles. Imagine what even ten of

us could accomplish, armed with our faith and willing to sacrifice all we had for victory! It's possible for us to work together for short periods, but only to achieve limited ends. Before too long, the one-upmanship rears its ugly head and things go downhill from there.

In the end, I guess we have to remember that we were chosen for the sake of others, not for ourselves. Our cause is to inspire all the deserving to ever-greater heights, and to make the hard choices when no one else will. We have to hold ourselves to a far higher standard, and that's always a lonely place to be. Maybe it'd be better if we just accept that fact and stick to the problems at hand. I've suffered through worse for the sake of everybody else. Haven't you?





CHAPTER 4: COMING SACRIFICES

If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.

— 1 Corinthians 3:15

THE CHOICES I'VE MADE, LAST PART

FAX TRANSMISSION 15:01:53 October 10

Tomorrow I get transferred to the state prison to await execution for killing Slick. My lawyer is talking about appeals and clemency and all kinds of shit, but I know none of that will happen. Inside of a year, I expect to meet my maker.

And I'll be ready. I won't give in to despair again, and I'll use what time I have left to continue my fight. The monsters think they've won.

They're wrong.

END OF DAYS

Subject: The End

From: anon52

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

If your doctor said you were dying of cancer and only had a month to live, what would you do with the time you had left? Would you get your affairs in order, making sure your family's needs were met? Would you take more interest in your children, giving them the love and attention you always wanted to, but couldn't? Would you take the time to help others around you, knowing that you have to act *now* or never?

Would you live your life differently, knowing that your time on Earth is running out?

Because it is.

EPIPHANIES

Subject: The Blood of the Lamb

From: joan296

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

The sins of the world will be washed away by the blood of the lamb. The Bible says that. The answer was there in front of us all along, but we were too blind to see it. It's all so clear to me now, so simple.

John wants to give me painkillers. I won't let him, even when he has to clean the wounds. There's so much clarity in pain. I never knew that. You see things so much more clearly. Parents should never shelter their children so much. It makes them fear the things that hurt, and that's where the blindness begins. That's how Satan pulled the wool over everyone's eyes, by insulating us all from the things that could open them. It's so clear now. I want to shout it from the rooftop, but that would be dangerous. Too risky. Perhaps later, when the search has died down.

I don't even know where I am right now. Somewhere downtown. Belinda found the place. I'm blessed to have found such devoted friends. John used to be a medic, he said, and he's done a great job stitching up my leg and arm. He thinks I'll still have full use my right arm once everything heals. I'm not afraid. God has shown me the way. I know He'll provide me with what I need to fulfill His plan.

So much has happened since I last posted. God has shown me the path that we must all follow, and the truth

Subject: The Faxes and the Battle
 To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org
 From: muezzin318

A salaam alechem, my brothers and sisters. Peace be unto you.

I hope to lay some of your fears to rest with this message. The faxes many of you have received have come from a brother imprisoned for pursuing the cause that unites us all. I visited him in the police station, although it seems I hardly impressed him at the time. My allies and I have helped to defend him and keep him safe from the monsters that would see us all dead.

The guard you know as Job is my friend. He has brought the letters to me and I have passed them on to you through the agency of another ally in our Islamic movement. This person is what some would call a Sufi of sorts — he has heard the call but serves by remaining separate and sending messages forth. Allah, infinite in His Wisdom, has seen fit to bless him with the ability to send messages so that they reach those who must hear them. He does not know your facsimile machine numbers, but the transmissions get to you regardless. Like a message in a bottle upon the waves eventually reaches the shore. The ways of Allah and His messengers are many and mysterious.

So trust, my brothers and sisters, that no one has sacrificed your secrets. Our movement is growing and we have no intention of harming those who have also heard the call.

is more glorious and humbling that I ever dreamed. We are more than merely his chosen crusaders. We're to be the saints of the New World.

We are the Second Coming. Christ has returned and abides in each of us. And like his, our blood will wash away this world of sin.

THE LAST MILE

A judge and jury have condemned me to death, just as I expected. I'm sitting here writing this last letter that Job will (I hope) get to you all out there. When I'm transferred, Job won't be with me anymore. I'll be alone again, waiting. I'm not afraid and I'm not excited. I always knew this day would come, as it will for all of us.

Yes, for all of us. We've all made the choice to fight for the world, for our cause, instead of holding onto our lives. We wear out our eyes by looking directly into the hidden places. We strain our bodies by using the gifts. We fry our brains by listening to the dead. We're strong enough to win only because we aren't afraid to die.

This isn't about our survival. It's about doing what has to be done. If we all fight for what we believe, if we give it everything we have, we can make a better future. But we won't see it. Our children will, but we won't. Joe, if you're still out there, that's what I was talking about. Hope for the future, not for yourself.

A WORLD WITHOUT MONSTERS

When I first heard what I thought was the plea of a creature in pain, I answered it and sacrificed my

humanity for the sake of another. I sentenced myself to death in one moment, because once I understood that there were monsters, I couldn't turn my back on them, no matter how much I wanted to. Yet I can't deal with them and still hold onto who I was. I feel myself fading away, night after night, until I won't be any different than the creatures. I think that some of us will reach that point faster than others. I've lasted four months, but I think I'm nearing the end of the line. You might last longer, maybe a year or more, but the end will still be the same. We are who we are or we never would have heard the call in the first place.

All we can do with the time we have left is put ourselves in the path of the other beasts out there, protect what's left of the human race and spare them from making the awful choices we have to. That means seeking out the *real* monsters, the ones that are too far gone, and putting them down before they can inflict any more pain and suffering. It also means showing mercy where we can and hopefully showing other creatures the reality of their existence, pulling them back from the brink and giving them the chance to save themselves. Finally, we need the courage to look inside ourselves and know when we've reached the end of the line, so we can stop ourselves before we become a burden.

I think we can break the cycle. I think that if we use our remaining time selflessly and fight for people, we can turn the tide. But we have to put aside the selfish goals and agendas that lead us to distrust and disagree with each other. The more we cling to old prejudices, the faster we fall and the more we blind ourselves to what we become. Letting go of our old beliefs and admitting the truth of what we are is probably the single greatest act of courage many of us will ever make, but we owe it to ourselves and everyone. We don't have to be victims anymore. We can take charge of our last days and make a difference for those who come later.

The longer we can endure, the more beasts we destroy and the fewer new monsters will be born. Those monsters we can save will increase our numbers, and sooner or later the balance will shift. We'll be the majority and the true beasts will become extinct. Then maybe humanity will truly be free for the first time.

What will the world be like without monsters? I honestly don't know. Will it be a utopia? I doubt it. As long as humanity exists, there'll be conflict. But struggle isn't entirely a bad thing. It creates opportunity and change. I hope that without monsters feeding on our despair and pain, we can finally get past things like war, greed and prejudice. After all, who else really profits from hate and fear but monsters?

I think we'll at last reach the potential for greatness that humanity has been denied so long. We'll finally be able to rise out of this cesspool of commercialism and media-driven ignorance and do the things we've always dreamt of.

I don't have a vision for the future. I don't want one. I want there to be too many possibilities to imagine, the freedom to do anything we want to do.

I wish I could be there to see it, but I know I probably won't. More than likely, none of us will.

ACCEPT, DON'T SURRENDER

Knowing that you're going to die. The priest who came to visit said that's an important thing, and I agree. Accepting that the end will come and that there's nothing you can do to stop it. But that doesn't mean there's nothing you can do.

You can make your life — and your death — mean something. You can beat back the monsters and save the

victims. You can make the world better for having had you in it. How many people can truly say that? I can. We can, if we have the courage not to give up.

I admit, when I saw the soulless junkies infesting my trial I was ready to give up. In some ways, I already had. I thought my cause was over, except for these letters. So I was just waiting to die. I thought I knew what was in store for me.

But you can't. That's not accepting, that's assuming. That's pride and pride goes before a fall, or so the Good Book says. Maybe I've done everything I can and a while from now the state will put me down and that will be all she wrote — but maybe not. I'm still alive now and that means I can still accomplish something. The mission isn't over until I am.

I just have to be ready to act when the time comes. I accept my fate and await it, whatever it is. Do you?

STIGMATA

The world is inching closer to Hell through our ongoing moral corruption. Sex, greed, hatred and fear all spread through mass media and global civilization. Satan tempts each of us in a hundred different ways, offering our heart's desires. Each time we listen, we open our hearts to him. That's how our souls wither and the demons find their way in, spreading the corruption even further. Air pollution, toxic waste, global warming. We see the signs every day. Now things have gone so far that there's no turning back.

God showed us the way to salvation two thousand years ago when He sent Christ to die on the cross for our sins. The world was on the edge of damnation then, but the selflessness of Jesus and the spilling of his blood cleansed the Earth and hurled the demons back into Hell. His example has remained with us since, preserved in the teachings of the New Testament to show you and I what needs to be done. The Lord meant for Christ's death to be a lesson for the future, like a parent teaches a child. Now

we have to show Him what we've learned, to prove that we're worthy of His continued grace.

It's not enough to just fight the demons. I thought that, too, at first. Then a few days ago Amelia told me that maybe I misunderstood what happened at her house as something bad. She acted as though she might even know who the creature was. But no matter how many times I asked her for the creature's name, she refused to tell me unless I promised not to kill it. I was horrified. At one time she didn't even seem to know what had happened, and now the demon had managed to corrupt her. I had never really looked at her before, the way we can. But now I saw how she was wrong, and maybe was all along. I'd been making sure that she was going to church regularly and confessing her sins for a while. If she were living a godly life, how could the demon still be able to reach into her soul so easily?

I agonized and prayed over the problem for days, even staying home when my parents went to Aspen, so I could stay close to Amelia and fight for her soul. Obviously there was some terrible sin in her, and it had to be brought out before she would be truly free.

By this point I had found Belinda and John. They both worked at the mall and had seen my sign before it was cleaned off. Both of them had seen demons before, and were so grateful that I could explain what had happened to them and why. I knew I could count on them, and they gave me the strength I needed to take Amelia's salvation into my own hands. Amelia told me she never locked her bedroom window. I went to her last Thursday and brought her back to the guest house. It was important that her parents didn't know where she'd gone, because I couldn't risk any interruptions until I'd gotten her to confess.

We talked all night long. She got scared, then angry as the hours passed. At around four she tried to leave, but John stopped her. That was when she went crazy. It was plain to everyone that she had given her sympathy to the servants of Satan. John and I managed to force her down and tie her to one of the beds. She begged and pleaded to be let go, even while she was kicking and clawing at us. I tried and tried to get her to admit to her weakness, but she kept insisting she was innocent. Finally I realized that she was telling the truth.

The world is so far gone that people are tainted just from living in it. No matter how devout and righteous they try to be, they can still be infected, like a virus. It shows just how close we all are to damnation. The evil has to be drawn out like a poison, purged and washed away. An act of great suffering can invite God's forgiveness and return the soul to the path of righteousness.

I watched the sun rise and realized what had to be done. Amelia was my friend. There was no telling how much she would have to suffer, but I assured her that I would be by her side the whole time. Once I explained what needed to be done, John and Belinda went to work.

Lord, how Amelia suffered. Thank goodness no one lived close enough to hear her screams. I sat with her, praying and crying. But the more we tried to save her, the more of an animal she became. It was as if we were somehow giving the corruption more strength instead of drawing it out. We worked over her for two days and nothing seemed to work. Amelia was growing weak. We couldn't keep going, but I didn't know what else to do.

Then, that night, the demon came.

There was no warning. One minute we were working and the next it was there, towering over us, howling in rage. Its eye was fully healed. There wasn't even the faintest scar. I knew that it had come for Amelia. With a shout to God, I threw myself in the way, again.

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: roshni231

Subject: Choosing your Karma

Mr. Anon52, you must allow me to correct this mistake that I am perceiving in the way you view this struggle against the creatures that beset us. I understand your conflicting desires with respect to the monsters, but this is only natural owing to the rigid beliefs and judgments of your Christian religion.

Here in India, the Hindu concepts of Karma and reincarnation provide an important insight into our struggle. You see, monsters are no more than the reincarnated souls of very evil men and women, forced to return in hideous forms and exist in torment. The only way that they can be returned to a state of blessedness and allowed to reincarnate further along the wheel of existence is for them to be confronted by their evil and made to repent their ways.

You are quite correctly sensing your own corruption in meeting the monsters' evil with yet more evil. Such acts only pollute your own soul and do nothing to save theirs. Turn away from such violence. Your compassion for your son is the way to true enlightenment, for yourself and him as well.



The demon remembered me. For a moment it forgot all about Amelia. I hit it with all my God-given strength, but its claws ripped into me again and again. There was blood everywhere, my blood. I thought I was going to die. I was ready. I offered my soul up to the Lord, but then there was a loud boom and the demon collapsed. John had shot it.

Then it happened. The glorious moment of revelation. The demon fell dead, covered in my blood, and the body started to change. In moments it turned into a man! He looked a little like Amelia's father, her uncle maybe. It didn't matter. The corruption that had twisted his body into a monster was gone, washed away by my blood.

Amelia was dead, too. She had slipped away. Her face looked so peaceful, as though she were sleeping. There was a single, perfect spot of red on her cheek and I knew that I'd cleansed her too, before she'd gone. I collapsed to the floor and cried. I cried while John carried me out. I wept tears of joy, because God had shown me how to save the world.

We are the new messiahs. Our blood, blessed by the Lord, can wipe away sin and leave a New World, shining and pure. Our sacrifice will give people a new start, free from the temptations of Satan, if we are strong enough and Godly enough to pass the ultimate test of compassion.

That's why we've been chosen from all faiths, races and walks of life. The only way we can pull humanity back from Hell is for all of us to come together and give freely of our lives. We have to take the pain of the world upon ourselves and bleed for the sake of people we don't even know. If we can show the Lord that we're capable of this act, we'll earn the right to a better world.

I'm not saying we all have to kill ourselves to defeat the demons. Not exactly, anyway. We have to fight them,

face to face, and confront them with our righteousness. We have to make them shed our blood in order to show our devotion to the Lord, and our willingness to pay any price to save our fellow man. Our blood makes the demons weak and gives us the power to destroy them. Then not only will the servants of Satan be cast back into the pit, everything they have ever corrupted will fade as well. When the demon was destroyed, Amelia was freed of his hold and went to the Lord with a clean heart. That's the ultimate power that God has given us, and the real message He has sent. We can see into the hidden places and fight with the strength of angels, but that's nothing compared to the power of mercy and compassion given freely by a repentant heart.

With this knowledge, the battle against Satan is all but won. Praise the Lord! We can seek out the demons in their lairs and confront them with the love of the Lord, prying their claws from the world and wiping away their corruption.

First, though, we have to convince our fellow chosen.

PERILS AND PITFALLS

You know, this trial, these letters, seeing my wife (even at a distance), talking with Job and the Muslim brother trying to help me, it's all given me the chance to think. When I was facing Red and Dead Eyes and Slick, I didn't think too much. I went on instinct. I did what I had to do.

But if there's one thing my fight has taught me, it's that thinking about our choices is necessary. If not, we end up burning out, going over the edge like Billy or Jenny. Those are the dangers out there, to go too far, too soon. To not go far enough. It's a hard road we walk, and maybe part of why I'm still around is so I can tell you what I've learned.

Subject: The shedding of blood is not holy!

From: mbele207

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

No, no, Joan, you are right, but you are also wrong. It is true that we must make great sacrifices of ourselves in order to turn back the poisoning of our world, but it is material things, not our bodies, that must be given up!

The whole reason that the world has become so unbalanced is because we have turned away from our spiritual selves and neglected our duties to the world of the dead. There must be balance between the two worlds, or both suffer greatly. In order to return ourselves to balance we must put aside those things that isolate us from the natural world and its rhythms. We must sacrifice our comforts, our material wealth and our unnatural medicines, and live as the gods intended. It is easier for us to understand this here in Africa, because there are so many who live away from the cities who still remember the old ways, and they are willing to teach those who would listen.

Do not follow this path of blood, Joan. It is wrong. You are blinded by white man's wealth. Live naturally, help those around you, and all will be made well.

LEAPING INTO THE JAWS

The first danger I faced was going too far, too early. You feel the burn inside, you see the darkness, you get the gifts, and your gut tells you to run headlong into the night. That first time I reached deep into my soul and hammered Dead Eyes, the rest of the blood-drinkers backed off. That became my model for how to deal with it all. You face a monster, a thing that can't be saved, you lay into it with all your might. And if you die stopping the thing, that's that. We're all going to go some time, right?

It just ain't that simple. Or it is, but not the way you think. Yes, we're all gonna check out eventually, but we have to realize that the gifts we got include a brain and eyes. We see things and can think about them. We can plan and fight smart. Are you a punk or a man? Do you fight for the cause or because you don't know no other way? Fight for the cause.

There'll come a time when even fighting smart means sacrificing it all. When I faced Slick that last time, I had the choice between finishing him off or running before the cops got me. Cops meant dying, I was pretty sure. I looked at that demon and knew I'd never get another shot — so I gave up my life to end his.

If I hadn't fought smart all the other times, if I'd just faced Dead Eyes and the rest on their terms, I never would have survived long enough to make a sacrifice worth making. If you get yourself killed needlessly you're just wasting your gifts.

CHOOSING THE KNIFE

The only thing separating us from the true beasts is what's left of our souls. Just like them, sooner or later we'll lose even that, and be something that no longer remembers what good or evil means. It doesn't happen all at once, of course. Like the rest of life, it comes gradually, growing a shade darker with each passing night, until one day we wake up and

realize that we're blind. How long does it take to realize that? How much corruption do you have to take part in before you understand what you've become? Years? Decades? How bad does it have to get before you start praying for someone to come and put you out of your misery?

I don't want to get to that point. No one is going to have to give up their life for me. Before I go that far, I'm going to take care of things myself. That's an eventuality we all have to consider, because sooner or later all of us are going to succumb. Denying it just means that someone else will have to end your life for you. Do you really want that?

There's a Japanese saying that the samurai must live each day of his life knowing that eventually, he's going to die. That's how we have to live. We have to know it's time to let go. How you choose that end is every bit as important as how you choose to live.

Not all of us are comfortable with suicide. I can't really say that I was, before I crossed over. I mean, sure, everybody seems to flirt with killing themselves when they're teenagers, but that's mostly just adolescent confusion. I'm talking about being ready and willing to stop living, to simply cease to be. That makes a lot of people afraid. What will death be like? Where do we go once we're gone? Plus there are religious issues.

What you have to remember is that, when the time comes, you won't be killing yourself. You'll be making the choice to save others with the last bit of humanity you have left. Think about what you would do if you had a terminal disease. Wouldn't you want to go out with dignity, or be reduced to a shell of what you once were? It's the same thing. Knowing what lies in store for us, it's better to take matters into our own hands.

Of course, the best way to go would be in a blaze of glory, dying in the act of destroying another beast. We can all hope to go out like that, but it's not always possible. If I die tonight, destroying my son's corrupter, who'll take care of him? We can't shirk our responsibilities, even at the end of our lives.

No, I think for most of us death will come quietly, someplace far away from other people, where we won't make problems for anyone when we go. Finding the courage to put the gun to our heads will be the most heroic act we ever have to make. One last battle with the monster inside us, and then we can rest.

I'm not saying you're going to die tomorrow. It may not come for weeks or even months. But the fact

To: hunter.list@hunter-net.org

From: fenian258

Subject: Straight to Hell

Listen, I've had about enough of your nonsense about killing yourself when you think you've got your hands too dirty to go on. I'd guess you're the sort who's never darkened a church since he was a boy, so I'll set you straight, the same as my own boys. Suicide is a mortal sin. If you have any faith in God and the Church, you know that killing yourself is a sure way to Hell.

We've got enough people dying for the "cause" here as it is. The last thing we need is to throw up our arms and kill ourselves when there's still a world of work left to be done.

of the matter is, even if you survive to see the last of the beasts fall, the world still won't be free of monsters as long as you're alive. Maybe you think you can forget what you've become once the battle is over. Maybe you think you can find your way back to being human, like a soldier returning from a war. Maybe you can. Honestly, I hope you do. It would be nice to think that some of us will survive and live to see the world we saved.

If you do make it, will you do something for me? Remember us. Remember those who did the best they could, but fell before the race was won. Because no one else will ever know.

PAIN FOR PAIN'S SAKE

Pain is another danger, another trap. Pain is part of the choice and in some ways it's even a good thing. When I see my scars, I remember Red clawing at me, and that I beat her. The pain I felt, the joints that still ache, they're reminders that I fought the good fight. That others would have suffered if I hadn't.

But it's damn easy to think of pain as a goal. I remember the first time I fought really smart against one of the things. This was after I almost got my family killed. I'd been hiding out, I thought I'd never go out again. But I finally decided to fight smart. My first target was Doggy.

You remember Doggy. He was there that first night in the bar. A big, mean motherfucker, but none too smart. I followed him one night and decided to take him out after I heard him say he was gonna go kill a "little ho" for kicks. No girl was gonna die if I could stop it, so I kept following. Doggy came to a place I knew, so I showed myself and got him to chase me. He was strong but slow and I led him across the roof of an old warehouse. The skylights were blacked out so the women inside the sweatshops wouldn't see the light. When he put his foot on the glass, he went right through. A two story fall and he was one broken badass.

I barely worked up a sweat — couldn't sleep for days. I felt guilty, like a pussy. It was too easy. Where was the pain? The scars? I hadn't given enough, I thought. I put out a cigarette on my palm a few times just to get some of the pain I was missing, for God's sake.

That's no way to do what has to be done. Trust me, there's plenty of pain where we're headed. If you can do something without another scar, so much the better.

But I still burn myself sometimes.

DESPAIR

This was my demon during the trial. Despair. What was the point? I seen the soulless jurors and I wondered if it was all worth it. When you give up your freedom and your life for something, thinking it ain't worth it can kill you faster than the chair.

Even before you get to the point I did, it's easy to see the shit the world serves up and want to give up. When Maria died, I was ready to quit. When the people who'd made themselves slaves smiled in the court, I thought about how I could kill myself in my cell. When I saw Red stalking my family I felt anger, but also a sinking feeling that I couldn't protect anyone or anything. It's so easy to give in and quit.

But don't. Reach out, instead. Job showed me that my despair wasn't worth anything. He's got none of the blessings I do and he still fights. How the fuck can I give up? I'd fought and was still fighting. A monster hadn't gotten away with it because of me. I had the guts to face it and do everything — anything — I could.

To despair was to disrespect myself and my choice. Stand up and be counted, boy! Fight the good fight and don't you dare deny it!

PRIDE

I've been saving pride for last, cause it's the deadliest of sins. Despair tells us we can't do shit. Pride that we can do too much. Despair stops us from righting wrongs. Pride makes us do wrong ourselves. Like I done by Maria.

See, that first night at the bar when I floored Dead Eyes and got Maria out of there, I told myself that I'd saved that girl. Not that I was going to save her, that I already had. I already felt the burning inside, the drive to stop these soulless freaks and whatever was behind them, and it made me feel stronger than I ever felt. I had faced the monster and beaten it. Of course, I could save this girl. Of course.

Yeah, right.

When I look back, I barely paid attention to her. I figured she was already safe and I wanted information from her. She was the weak link for me to use to get to Dead Eyes and Slick. When she started to resist in the next few nights, I just got mad and that put her in her place. When she started jonesing for that tarry shit, I thought she was weak and I told her so. When she couldn't stop herself, I locked her in a basement and told myself I was doing the right thing. She was gonna be okay cause I was there. And I couldn't do wrong by her, right?

Did I stay with her and tell her she'd be okay? Nope. I just locked her up and left her. Was she my priority? Never, a least not until it was way too late. I took her for granted when I was sleeping with her. And I did it again when I had her life and soul in my hands.

It was five days into her detox that she started screaming like she was gonna kill somebody. She tried to bite me the time I went in there, and I beat her down before I even thought about it. I tied her to a bench and watched her act like an animal. She spat up food and screamed for the tar. She had caught a rat and bit its damn head off.

By the time I cared enough to do anything, it was way too late. She was lost, too much of her soul taken out and replaced by that black shit Slick was feeding her. He was dragging her into the dark and I was pushing her out of the light. I did the only thing I could and ended it quick with a gun.

It's been months now, but I still feel it. She's the only one I can still cry for.

Pride. Kill it before it kills you. You ain't God, just a man who can do right. Always remember you have to make that choice.

NO REGRETS

It's dark outside. It seems like the sun rose just an hour ago and we realized that Tommy hadn't come

home. I've been counting the minutes ever since. Now, all of a sudden, my time is up. Funny how the big moments in our lives always seem to sneak up on us. No wonder we're never really ready for them.

When my son calls, I'll go to him. I'll show him how a man owns up to his actions. He can throw his anger and pain at me. I'll take it. He can try to kill me. If he does, both of us will die. But I don't think it'll go that far. He'll hurt me, but when it comes down to it, he needs me, too. Despite what the vampire thinks, I'll be there for my boy.

I'm going to show him that you can be a monster and still strive to be humane. That so long as we give for the sake of others, we're not lost. That we can still choose to make a difference, no matter what we've become.

We'll hunt down the vampire that did this and destroy him. After that, well, we'll have to take it one night at a time. By the time I've reached the end of the line, he'll understand what's expected of him. Beyond that, he has to make his own decisions, just like the rest of us. But I'm not worried. He's a good kid. He'll do the stand-up thing.

I'm sorry things turned out the way they did. I'm sorry that Carol and the boys have had to suffer like they have. But you know what? I've got no real regrets. I've worked hard all my life, married my high school sweetheart, tried my best to be a good father. I worked long hours, picked up other people's shifts and gave to charity when I could. When somebody asked for help, I did what I could.

How does that old saying go? The road to hell is paved with good intentions. I always thought that meant people did evil things for the best of reasons. Now I'm not so sure. I think it really means that sometimes a person has to damn himself for the greater good. Does that make us devils or saints? I don't know. Maybe both.

No one ever said life was fair. No one ever said it was about getting what you want. Life isn't about what we want. It's about what we do.

GATHER THEM TOGETHER IN MY NAME

We were meant to stand apart from the rest because our hearts could best see the answer to the Lord's test. He knew our hearts would understand the need for selflessness and sacrifice. It's a great honor and a terrible burden. We've been given the answer. Now we must teach His wisdom to the unknowing and the unbelieving all over the world. We have to show them the true power that lies inside us. That means proving our belief through action, placing our faith in the Lord and leading the charge against the enemy. If necessary, we must shame our fellow crusaders by bleeding our very lives away while they watch with indecision and fear. Once they have

seen the truth, they will change their ways, though many of us will not live to see it.

I'm afraid that many of us will be called upon to give our lives in the beginning. Nothing else will be enough to get our message across. Even the hardest of hearts cannot ignore another person's ultimate sacrifice. You'll know if and when that time comes. Go to it gladly, with praise for the Lord. Don't think about death. Instead, look ahead to the reward that awaits in Heaven. It's possible that there might be demons so great or so well protected that no one crusader or group can defeat them unless they're ready and willing to die. For those who would come together and pledge their lives, there is nothing and no one that can stand in their way!

Once we have spread the Lord's message, it will become easier. As more and more of the faithful learn the lesson of compassion, the burden on our shoulders will ease. Instead of shedding our own blood to cleanse Satan's stain, there will be hundreds of true believers who will spread the cost out among themselves. Then we can concern ourselves with spurring God's new army on to greater and greater glories, acting as its spiritual heart and insuring that its way remains pure. History shows how many great crusades and revolutions became corrupted by conflicting agendas and goals. It could even be said that God's church suffered the same problem. Not this time, though. This time those of us who survive the first days will remain to keep the minds of the chosen focused on our one and only goal. If necessary, we will examine our ranks for purity and faith and take steps to return any prodigal sons back to the fold. I know this sounds harsh, but the stakes couldn't be any higher. If we fail, mankind is doomed and there won't be anybody to blame but us.

Another thing we must become aware of is the growth of our own faith and commitment to God's struggle. There are already comments on hunter-net about chosen who have lost themselves to their beliefs. I can only assume that the longer our fight continues, the more crusaders who will become this way, surrendering themselves completely as vessels of God's glory. What surprises me is that so many of us try to shun these holy figures. If anything, we should seek them out and uphold

THE ONGOING FIGHT

From wire services

Authorities at the Conyers State Prison near Atlanta, Ga., are considering charges against convicted murderer Tyrone Bellamy in the death of another inmate during last weekend's riot and breakout. Bellamy, who is on death row for the murder last year of philanthropist Steven Manning, was found outside his own cell block by guards, and he has confessed to killing fellow prisoner Hadrian Cross.

Cross, who was serving a 30-year sentence for rape and second-degree murder, was known to be the leader of a prison gang that Conyers spokesman Jay Harvinen characterized as a "ritual cult." Harvinen did not elaborate.

Prison authorities said that the riot grew from protests by African-American inmates who identify themselves as members of the Muslim Federation. The inmates reportedly said that they are victims of religious discrimination on the part of Conyers administrators, an allegation Harvinen denied. None of the inmates who took part in the protest escaped. Of the six prisoners who did, four remain at large.

Subject: Dying for the Glory of God

From: hajirah252

To: hunter.list@hutner-net.org

Here in the Middle East, the true followers of Allah have known all along that to die in the service of God is to find reward in the afterlife. Praise Allah, who has placed swords in our hands to defeat the enemies of the faith! We will die for him and stand at his side in Paradise. There is no greater honor than to give our lives for his glory and spread the faith to all men.

them, asking for their help at every opportunity and hoping to acquire some of their wisdom. Like the prophets of old, we should hold these people as saints and listen carefully to what they have to say.

THE WORLD TO COME

I have one thing left to talk about, something that's hard to discuss cause we ain't gonna be there: the future. The way I figure it, the world has been falling to hell and the great shit-hole for as long as it's been around. Original sin, the flood, all that stuff tells me we've been in trouble for a long, long time.

Right now is the last stop for the train to Armageddon. It's the end of the line and the end of the world, one way or another. One way or another. That's where our choice is. It's up to us to us to decide how it all ends.

Remember that they call this time Judgment Day. Not destruction, judgment. That means that right now, God is up there looking down at us all, at what we do and think and say, deciding what to do with us all. My auntie used to say that sinners would go to Hell and good folks to Heaven. But I ain't sure about that — things are just too connected for that. We're all in this together. What we do affects us all.

The monsters are dragging us all into Hell. If it was just a matter of not sinning, we could hide and wait for the rest of the world to get its reward. But no, we have to stand up and say "We're not all worthless, God! If you give us the choice we can do the right thing! We'll die to save the world if that's what it takes!"

That's exactly what it takes.

What will the new world be like? Better or worse than this one, depending on what we choose. What else do you need to know?

CAN IT BE SAVED?

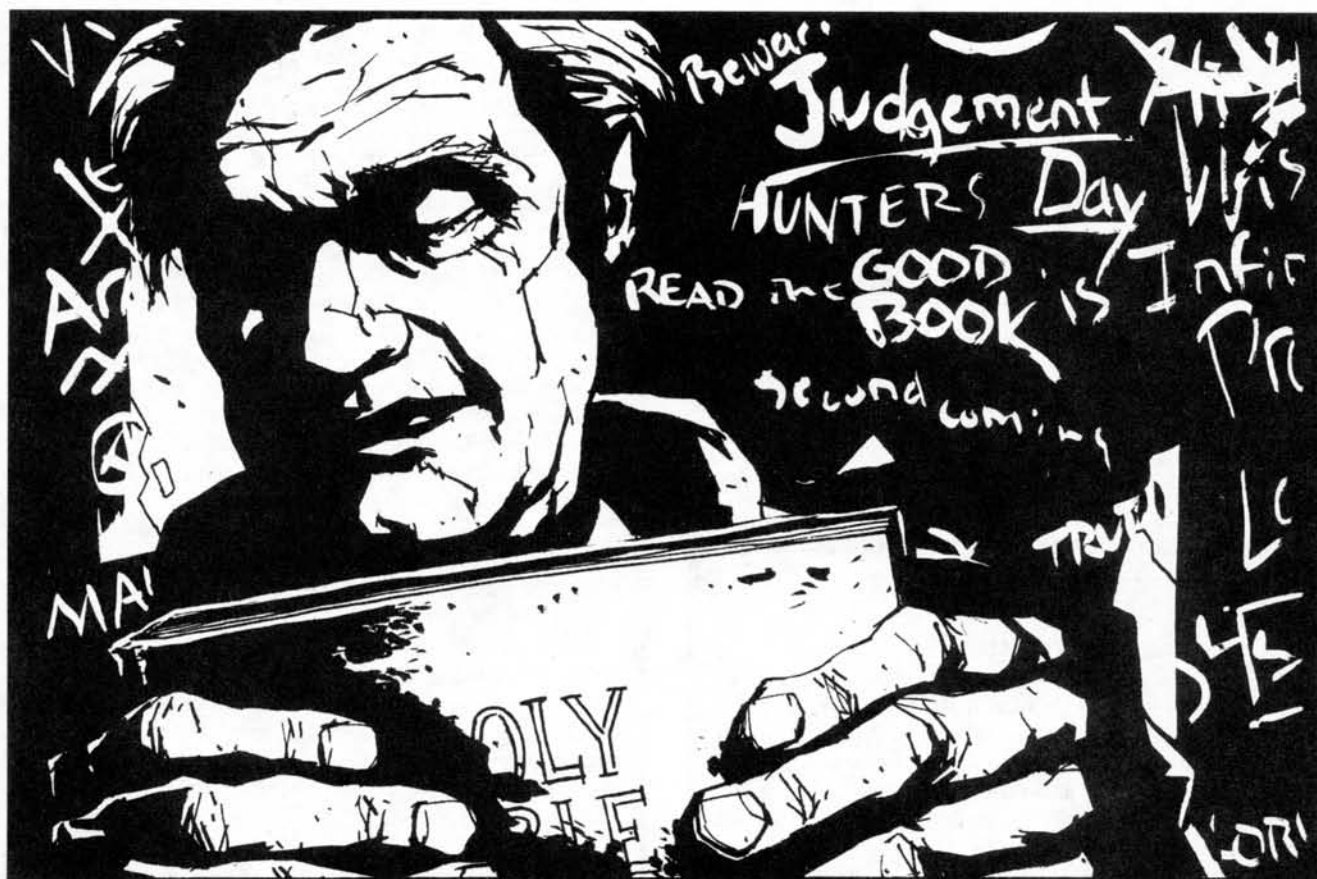
We all have doubts and despair, like I said. But when you read this and ask yourself if we can we save the world, if we can we make the difference between Heaven and Hell for our children, know that the answer is yes.

It's that simple. A choice. Make it. And never give up.

RETURNING TO THE GARDEN

There's no way to know how long our crusade will last. Only God knows the number of demons in hiding. But we must always keep one eye on the future, even as we fight the enemy today. The time will come when we're victorious, and we must be ready to meet new challenges in the world we make.

Once Satan has been beaten, our first task will be to bring people together and preach the truth of the Lord almighty. We must fortify their souls so that no demon can ever find its way there again. We will have to take steps to break down those institutions that the demons have created to spread their taint. Books, videos, rap music, anything that could corrupt the mind must be thrown into the fire, and those who create such things must be taught the error of their ways. As much as I would like to say that we could cast aside our mantle of responsibility once the war is won, the truth is that we will be needed more than ever. There will be multitudes who



will need our spiritual guidance. We must continue to give freely of ourselves so that the New World will be better than the one before.

We will cast aside the pursuit of technology, science and commerce. Those paths lead human minds to secular deities, to arrogance and greed. We must reduce the importance of compassion and respect, to get people to devote their lives to simple Godly pursuits. There must be no room for serpents in the Eden we create.

NOT FOR US, BUT FOR THOU

I just walked across the room to get a drink of water. That doesn't sound like a big deal, unless you had most of your right thigh torn apart by a demon. John didn't think I'd be able to walk for a few more weeks, at least. But anything is possible through faith. Praise the Lord.

John set fire to the guest house after we left. The police are looking for me now, and we can't afford to be caught. In time, they'll know the truth, but we can't stop

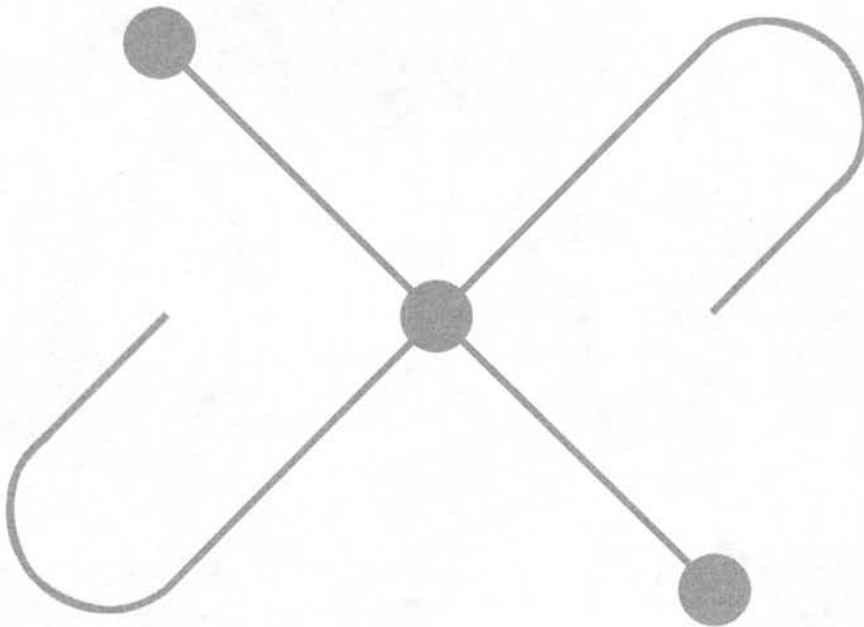
what we're doing to explain. Anyone who has ever followed a higher calling was misunderstood at first. Remember that when times look tough.

Belinda brought by her two nephews earlier. They listened so well when I preached to them of the struggle and our part in it. They were clearly frightened of the future, but we tried not to form their hands. When I took them, I pledged my blood to theirs. My belief is their belief now. I scrawled the Sign of the Believer on their foreheads in our blood and they stood still in awe. It gave me such faith to see them. They eventually agreed to bring some of their friends by. Our army is growing a little bit every day.

I can hear sirens pass on the street. They sound like the pain of the world, echoing on and on. The red light flashes through the windows like pulses of bright blood, reminding me of my destiny.

The suffering of the Earth calls to me, and through my ordeals will it be given new life.

Amen.





CHAPTER 5: NEW RULES

*Woe is me for my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said,
Truly this is a grief, and I must bear it.*
— Jeremiah 10:19

A monstrous killer pulls a gun on a crowd. You're right there, and you watch everyone scatter. They run for cover and even make it before the killer begins shooting. You not only don't seek cover, you move into the path of the bullet that's sure to come.

*This is the greatest day of your life.
You are a Martyr.*

The drive to risk life and limb, to give up comfort and safety, to put it all on the line for others and for the greater good, is not as common as we might like to think. Most of us hunker down and survive when it comes down to it. Training and the support of our peers can show us how to be heroes — to save people from burning buildings, to negotiate with killers, to rescue a hostage — but how many can actually do such things on instinct? How many, without anyone backing them up, without anyone watching, can still be heroes?

Martyrs can. Every time.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

To portray a Martyr, it's critical to understand the heroic instinct. You need to know what it does — and doesn't — make your character do. The cause your character pursues and the actions that it inspires her to perform are far more important toward defining her as a Martyr than are any Traits or experience points. Although every character is different, the following inspirations for heroism help establish your Martyr's identity.

- **Empathy Leads to Action:** Martyrs act because they don't have a choice. Their eyes have been opened to the troubles and suffering of the world, and they can't just sit back and do nothing. Some become charged with holy vigor and jump at the opportunity. Others gripe and wish they could let someone else do it, but they all feel the pain around them and act to end it. The pain they see and feel is typically that of the victims of monstrous

attention — people haunted by mad spirits, fed upon by vampires and stalked by the walking dead. Martyrs do feel sympathy for some of the "other side," but mostly in the abstract. It's sad that a young girl has become a killer. It's sadder that her friends had to die by her hand. The Martyr may shed a tear for her when he puts her down, but put her down he does.

- **Sacrifice, not Suicide:** The willingness to sacrifice is the keystone to Martyr psychology, but it can be tricky. It's too easy to think of these hunters as suicidal freaks leaping into the jaws of death at the first opportunity. Except for a few deranged extremists, that is not what martyrdom is about. Martyrs sacrifice willingly, but for a purpose. They are prepared to lay down their lives if necessary, but only if necessary. When playing a Martyr, act with purpose. Jump in harm's way to save another, but to stop a tragedy, not just for kicks. Getting yourself killed for nothing just leaves the world to those unwilling to do what needs to be done.

- **Pain Is a Symbol, Not a Goal:** The flip side of the previous point is that many Martyrs do have a masochistic tendency. In extreme cases, it can be disturbing and dangerous, but for most it's much more akin to an athletic experience. After a tough workout or a good game, people feel aches and pains (or have bumps and bruises) and can look on them as badges of honor. These injuries are proof that they "played hard." Martyrs see their wounds and suffering in a similar light, as evidence that they're doing what's needed. They look at their scars, at the trials they've left behind, and feel joy at the evidence of their commitment to the cause.

- **Recognition... or Not:** Martyrs generally don't expect thanks for what they do, but that doesn't mean they don't welcome such expressions. Appreciation or even simple acknowledgement of the sacrifices they make can be a tremendous reward precisely because it's unexpected. The most well

adjusted Martyrs associate with other hunters who do appreciate them (without deifying them), and thus remain grounded. Other Martyrs can dip into total cynicism (ultimately deciding that lack of recognition means no one is worth saving) or megalomania (as recognition becomes addictive and the hunter seeks out worshipers instead of allies).

- **There's Hope, Stupid:** To extrapolate from that last point, Martyrs hope for recognition not so much for how it makes them feel, but for how it can inspire others. Martyrs realize just how screwed up the world is, but also know that a better tomorrow is possible *if people will do what it takes today*. Martyrs go to extremes to show — not just tell — that to others.

CHARACTER CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT

People willing to sacrifice for what they think is important aren't new to the world. Nor are they unique to the imbued. The devoted have always given of themselves in life; it's their nature and they can't stop it now that the scales have fallen from their eyes. Perhaps the only question of how the imbuing changes a Martyr is how far is he willing to go for a cause now, compared to how far he was willing to go before. There may not be that much difference.

NEW ARCHETYPE

The following Trait can be added to your game as a Nature or Demeanor. It's particularly appropriate to Martyrs.

MASOCHIST

The Masochist feels that he needs to suffer, either as punishment for his failings or as a symbol of his own dedication. This belief is so central to his character that pain is tied to pleasure and satisfaction. Something accomplished without suffering feels hollow, while even pointless self-mutilation has an associated rush. Masochism often has sexual overtones and can lead a Martyr into a sadomasochistic, bondage-and-discipline scene. But that isn't always the case. In fact, pain need not be physical — a person who constantly does anything unpleasant because he craves it flirts with masochism.

— **Regain Willpower** whenever you suffer grievous harm while accomplishing a goal important to your cause. The Storyteller can reward you with Willpower for suffering emotional trauma, as well.

PRELUDES

The imbuing changes everything. Or does it? For most devoted, the seeds of their battle against the monsters of the world lie in the average, normal lives they led before having their eyes opened. Certainly, the shock of seeing a zombie and realizing that these *things* are everywhere might transform a raging egomaniac into a self-sacrificing Martyr idealist, but generally the imbuing is only the culmination of a trend that's been going on for years in your character's life.

BEFORE YOU WERE TESTED

Each hunter is different, but the following elements are particularly appropriate to the normal lives of Martyrs. You or the Storyteller may want to introduce some into your prelude, or at least think about these things as means of defining your character's identity.

- **Examples, Good and Bad:** People don't develop moral codes in a vacuum. Martyrs, who have so deep a sense of right and wrong that they're ready to die for it, typically learned from

CAUSE AND EFFECT

One of the key elements that distinguishes Martyrs — or most of them — from the bulk of other imbued is their dedication to a personal cause or crusade of some sort. The psychological key to a Martyr is the willingness to suffer, even die, for something. A personal cause is that something.

For some, this cause is very specific and even small-scale — defeating the monster faced at the imbuing, uncovering the person who killed a loved one, freeing a blood-slave from a vampire. For others, the cause is larger and more nebulous — laying all ghosts to rest, freeing a city from the monsters within. Regardless of the scale of the crusade, it's always an arduous task that will take years of struggle, at best. A few hunts do not end a crusade.

When creating a Martyr character, choose a cause for her. If you want to play a militant or idealist, fired with a holy mission, make that cause grandiose. If you want to play an Average Joe who just can't let suffering continue unchallenged — the typical reluctant Martyr — choose a small, personal cause. Militants and idealists wear a cause like a uniform, talking about it all the time and seeing everything through its filter. Reluctants are more guarded about their drives, pursuing their crusades quietly without drawing a lot of attention. It's personal, after all.

other notably moral — or immoral — people. An inspiring teacher or preacher, a mother who raised her kids right on mean city streets, a friend who was willing to do the right thing when the time came — they're all likely candidates. Conversely, a corrupt sibling, an abusive father or a betraying "friend" may have taught your character what *not* to be (which may mean he assumes that no one else is as moral as he is). Either way, your Martyr is the inheritor of morality from those who shaped him.

- **Hints of a Cause:** Just as a Martyr's overall morality should derive from her origins, so should any specific cause to which she commits herself. Although the exact nature of the cause might not become obvious until the imbuing or even later (see the Cause and Effect sidebar), you should plant the seed in the prelude. One of the tested who has focused on uncovering the monstrous manipulators of a city might have fought corruption (or been a victim of it) before being chosen. One hunting an insane warlock may have worked in mental health care prior to her imbuing.

- **Sins to Atone for:** "Good enough" is not part of Martyrs' vocabulary. They drive themselves past the point of human endurance, sacrifice everything and jump in harm's way time and time again. Dedication, fanaticism and morality all help explain this reckless disregard for personal safety, but for many devoted the overriding emotion is guilt. If they don't go all out, terrible things will happen... *again*. The sins a Martyr feels guilty about can be terrible (say, killing a loved one in anger or when drunk) or might be imaginary (like not having paid enough attention to a now-deceased relative), but your character must feel that they are real. The rest of his life becomes a crusade to make up for them.

- **Lonely in a Crowd:** Martyrs have a nebulous relationship with others. On one hand, they empathize with everyone's pain and are always willing to help out. On the other hand, they never think to ask others for assistance, because Martyrs ultimately don't trust people to make the sacrifices needed. This dichotomy is most evident in the extreme circumstances of the hunt, but it is often a theme to a Martyr's previous life.

She may have been the one at the office who always worked late to get a project out on time, telling others to go ahead and get a beer; she'd take care of the last-minute details. She may have put aside her dreams to raise her kids, never expecting or getting their thanks. The hunt is just one more cross to bear.

THE IMBUING

Depending on your style of play, you or your Storyteller may determine the specifics of your character's imbuings. Either way, you should both give some thought to how those events shape your hunter's outlook. This event is his first contact with the monstrous world, and first impressions are very important. Your character will always look back on his imbuings as the event that changed his life, regardless of what triumphs or tragedies may follow it. Consider the following elements of a typical Martyr imbuings to make your character's as compelling as it is haunting.

- **Life and Limb:** The imbuings is never easy, but a Martyr's is often downright terrifying. The tested learn quickly that this new world is very dangerous and requires total dedication. Martyr imbuings often feature overwhelming odds — a whole pack of beasts, for example — and the new hunter often triumphs (or escapes) by the thinnest of margins. Typically, he suffers grievous injury and others nearby die.

- **Close to Home:** Not only are Martyr imbuings terrifying, they usually affect the new hunter very personally. The monsters reach out and harm something very close to your character — killing or enslaving his family, or destroying his home. This attack is often as much psychological as physical. A hunter whose wife is torn limb from limb by a beast is likely to become an Avenger or Defender. One who unwittingly watches his wife become a vampire's blood slave, and is then betrayed by her while trying to save her, is ready to be a Martyr.

- **A Choice of Pains:** Sacrifice is not suffering itself, it's the choice to suffer. Martyr imbuings always feature such a choice. The awakening hunter gets a chance to escape, to turn and run, but puts himself in harm's way instead. Ultimately, the guilt of running would be worse than the physical pain of facing some otherworldly monstrosity.

- **Lighting the Flame:** Just as a Martyr's personal cause should have seeds in his mundane life, it should come alive during his imbuings. The imbuings is the seminal event in his new life and it should fire him with a passion that can carry him through the nights to come. Typically, the Martyr becomes aware of the problem that will be his life's work. He may see the mission clearly right away (tangling with a powerful rot who will be his nemesis) or catch only the first glimpse of his cause (facing a homicidal ghost who ultimately leads him to uncover the slaughter of various defenseless victims).

- **Inspiration:** Most of the devoted don't like to talk about it, but they don't consider themselves to act alone. By doing what's right, they hope to inspire others to do the same. This idea is often born during the imbuings, when the Martyr is able to inspire others around him to act in the face of overwhelming odds. By putting his own life on the line, he gets others to either help or get themselves to safety. They may or may not acknowledge his heroism in the aftermath, but he never forgets that others do respond to someone willing to do what it takes.

CAMPS

Hunter: The Reckoning uses creeds as a handy shortcut of general character identifiers and preferences. They exist primarily to allow you — the player — to get a handle on your character quickly. In the fictional World of Darkness, the

creeds are only rough trends of association and common thought. Martyrs, Avengers and Visionaries only begin to recognize each other as such because of common beliefs.

Camps among Martyrs are even more nebulous than the creed itself. They comprise trends and stereotypes among the devoted defined as aids for you. They're not recognizable factions for characters. Individual tested might clearly be within one camp or another — Joan296 is clearly an idealist, for example — but they may also straddle divisions. In fact, most Martyrs evolve throughout their careers and move from camp to camp as their outlooks change. Use these identity types and their descriptions as tools to help you understand your character, not as exclusive options from which you must choose.

MILITANT

The "purest" of all Martyrs, militants identify with a cause and give it their all. Just what that mission is varies from militant to militant, but they are all convinced of its primacy. Doubts about the path they have chosen are few and far between. As a hunter gets more and more caught up in the cause, extreme behavior becomes very likely. Sacrifices must be made and the militant is ready to make them.

Views on the Hunt: The hunt writ large means relatively little to militant Martyrs. They do not spend a lot of time thinking about saving the world as a whole. Instead, they experience a type of tunnel vision and see only their own crusade. Most are aware of larger issues on a theoretical level — by reading hunter-net or simply by deducing that all of humanity is as fucked up as the part they see. But in practice, they judge everything against their cause. Appeals for help that distract from the mission aggravate them, even though they often can't ignore these requests — at least, not until a chosen crusade creeps into sheer obsession. Ultimately, militants wish to inspire others through their own dedication — thus showing both the importance of their cause and the power of their determination.

Sacrifices: Militants make ample sacrifices, both knowingly and unwittingly. To advance their cause, militants willingly risk their lives, suffer grave injury, drain their bank accounts and see almost anything they care about destroyed. In fact, militants typically have to struggle against the tendency to over-sacrifice; often with the help of other hunters, they learn to pick their battles and save the greatest sacrifices for the greatest contests. Most militants are aware (sometimes dimly, sometimes overtly) that they will ultimately lay down their lives for the cause. In the process, militants also sacrifice most of the normal parts of their lives — they cut ties to family, leave their jobs and forego simple pleasures, which they seem to feel they do not deserve. Sometimes, the hunter's sanity is not far behind.

Appropriate Archetypes: Militants often have Natures that reflect their absolute dedication to their personal causes. Fanatic is the most appropriate, but others like Architect, Director, Masochist, Penitent and Perfectionist are also good choices. Militants tend not to hide their true selves very well, and so have Demeanors largely in line with their Natures. Those who put a joyous spin on their martyrdom may have the Celebrant Demeanor.

Possible Traits: Drive characterizes militants. Although Attributes such as Stamina and Charisma can be useful for them (as they can for other Martyrs), all members of the camp have Willpower in ample supply. Mercy and Zeal usually stay neck and neck as a character's main Virtues, with Vision a distant third. Popular edges (beyond those from Martyrdom) include Ward (Defense), Bluster (Redemption) and Cleave (Vengeance).

Possible Future: Barring a true catharsis, a militant Martyr never relinquishes her causes until she feels they have been resolved (a very unlikely occurrence). Militants are thus the most likely devoted to lay down their lives early in their hunter careers. Those who survive long enough often become alienated from people and imbued alike, bear multiple derangements and seek their fate alone. Those militants who survive and remain sane make inroads with other hunters early on, often reluctant or idealist Martyrs who understand their drives but who bring much-needed perspective.

RELUCTANT

Reluctant Martyrs are hunters despite themselves, who go into the night because they believe no one else will. They don't really think in terms of specific causes, but instead react to a situation they can't just stand by and watch. Their fondest wish is to be able to put aside the hunt and lead a normal life, but it's just too obvious that they need to get involved. Reluctant Martyrs won't — or can't — trust others to get the job done; they've been disappointed too often in normal life.

Views on the Hunt: Reluctant Martyrs tell themselves that the hunt is something they do because they *have* to. They don't hold up the banner of a specific cause like a militant or try to build bridges like an idealist. They just do what they have to do, because no one else seems able to. And yet, deep inside they get off on being the "only one good enough for the job." They wear their suffering like a quiet badge of honor, taking on task after task and never complaining about their lot — at least not directly. They happily go on about how others can't seem to do what any rational person should see needs to be done.

Sacrifices: Reluctant Martyrs are conscious — perhaps over-conscious — of every sacrifice they make. Not as extreme as militants, they nonetheless invest effort after effort in a cause they feel is ultimately doomed — and are constantly frustrated that others do not. As they get more frustrated, reluctant Martyrs may enumerate their sacrifices, counting each one as a point in their favor — and against the rest of the world.

Appropriate Archetypes: Reluctant Martyrs are the most likely to have conflicting Natures and Demeanors. Many appear bitter and angry — with Demeanors like Autocrat, Bravo or Curmudgeon — but hide proverbial hearts of gold (or at least a strong moral core) — that is, Natures such as Caregiver or Director. On the other hand, the reverse dichotomy is possible: a bitter core seething under a pleasant façade.

Possible Traits: No Attributes or Abilities are especially appropriate for reluctant Martyrs, although they tend to have been accomplished in their chosen fields before the imbuing. After all, someone needed to be. Hence their belief that they are the most qualified now. Mercy remains the leading Virtue, tempered by Zeal and Vision in roughly equal measures. Apart from Martyrdom, Judgment edges are popular.

Possible Future: Under normal circumstances, a reluctant Martyr could spend her whole life being pessimistic about others and taking on more than her fair share of whatever she's involved in. Indeed, she has probably been doing so for years. The hunt, however, is far from a normal circumstance. In it, a reluctant position is not tenable in the long term. Two paths are open to these Martyrs. They either learn to trust others, or they become so cynical as to self-destruct. Trust is the hardest thing for a reluctant Martyr to find, and it takes a true catharsis — a painful and spectacular personal failure due to not having trusted another hunter, for example — to make the lesson stick. Your character is

unfortunately likely to become more and more bitter until she abandons the cause altogether — what's the point, right? — or she destroys herself in a final, futile sacrifice.

IDEALIST

Idealist Martyrs don't think of themselves as more self-sacrificing than anyone else involved in the hunt. They believe that all imbued are martyrs (small "m"), because of the choices all have had to make to join the cause. If no one was willing to lay down her life, no one would be chosen. Idealists wish the rest of the imbued community understood this. Perhaps then they could work together.

Views on the Hunt: Idealists believe that all hunters are heroes already — they've sacrificed their old lives, their blissful ignorance, to the cause of making the world right. Because of this belief, conflicts and rivalries among the imbued are anathema to idealist Martyrs. They do everything they can to help hunters get along and cooperate toward common goals. They cultivate friendships with hunters following other creeds, although they always see matters in light of the sacrifices an imbued is willing to make — whether by a Martyr, Defender, Avenger or whomever.

Sacrifices: Idealists sacrifice largely in silence, hoping to show the way by stoic example. Because many of their efforts concentrate on building bridges between the imbued, that's the venue in which their martyrdom expresses itself. The idealist constantly takes on more and more in the interest of others getting along. He takes the blame for a rowdy Avenger's

CAMP TO CAMP

An individual Martyr may or may not stay in the same camp throughout her imbued career. Most start out, to one degree or another, as reluctant. The imbuing makes clear they have to do *something* about the state of the world, but they still cling to the lives they knew before. They'd rather be home working on the car or going out with friends. As hunt succeeds hunt, as they encounter a variety of monsters — some truly evil, others almost pitiable — as they meet other hunters, the mission becomes more and more important. Slowly, the reluctant switch to other camps.

Those who embrace their own cause above all others, who find evidence in the hidden world that theirs is the right way, become militants. Those who discover a wider struggle, one with larger implications, become idealists. Which path an individual Martyr takes depends on a wide variety of factors, of course — your character's own inclinations, the types of monsters she faces, the legitimacy of her own beliefs. The most important factor, however, is her dealings with other imbued. Individuals who can build solid relationships with fellow hunters are much more likely to see the mission as a large cause that includes all participants, and thus become idealists. Ones who remain alienated from others or who deal only with hard-cases likely conclude that they can depend only on themselves or must show others the "way" and so become militants.

The path from reluctant to either idealist or militant is perhaps the most common path among the devoted. A significant minority starts off in one of the other camps, or even stays in the same camp for life. Trauma, the help of fellow imbued or any number of other factors can create a shift of outlook that goes against the majority. When making decisions for your Martyr, go with what makes sense for her as an individual.

outburst, does the killing for a squeamish Innocent and indulges a delusional Visionary — anything to preserve unity, even at the cost of his own well-being (and ultimately his life).

Appropriate Archetypes: Idealists, like militants, typically have little to hide. Natures and Demeanors are often in relative harmony, although the public shell is usually softer than the moral core. Common Demeanors include Caregiver and Dreamer, while Natures tend toward Architect, Director or Perfectionist.

Possible Traits: Social Attributes and socially useful Abilities such as Empathy, Etiquette, Expression and Leadership are very common. Vision comes second only to Mercy in terms of Virtues, with Visionary and Redemption edges popular.

Possible Future: The idealist position among the imbued is critical, but difficult to maintain. Only if other hunters take a moment to realize what a Martyr does for them can this stance offer enough reward — such as peer recognition — to remain psychologically tenable. More likely, the hunter destroys herself in the interests of cooperation, or she reaches a breaking point and focuses on herself and her own beliefs over those of others — and joins the militants in their righteous determination.

THE HIGH PRICE OF COMMITMENT

The Martyr's lot is not an easy one. They throw themselves in harm's way as a matter of course, armed only with the determination that they have to do so — that if they don't, no one else will. This drive is very much a double-edged sword, both highly heroic and ultimately self-destructive. All tested walk a fine line between these two extremes. Those who can't usually burn out quickly, inspir-

ing another story of a suicidal masochist. Those who carry on are the true core of the creed.

SPENDING CONVICTION

Martyrs are the imbued most willing to give the hunt their all — they regularly emerge wounded, battered and bruised from forays into the night. Risking their lives is not unusual — it's expected. When playing a Martyr, you need not hesitate to risk her Conviction. As long as the action is part of her cause (even loosely), she can put her all into every act. As she fails and succeeds at various edge-related tasks, her Conviction fluctuates, reflecting her own personal struggle to remain true to the cause.

The question of whether to “cash in” 10 Conviction for a Virtue increase is a little more delicate. Conviction points grant the ability to face the horrors of the mission in the short term. Virtues represent the dedication to do so over the long haul. Generally, you should cash in for a Virtue increase — and a possible new edge — but keep in mind that this means your Martyr becomes more deeply entrenched in his cause. If things are not going well, you may want to hold onto Conviction as your character clings to short-term courage over long-term dedication. Or you might want to raise a Virtue other than Mercy to reflect the difficulties your character faces — such as the Zeal that comes from seeing friends killed by monsters.

REGAINING CONVICTION

Martyrs regain most of their Conviction by risking it on edge-related rolls, but there are other circumstances that can raise Conviction (or even lower it). For Martyrs, the key is that they must believe that the hunt is worth the sacrifice. Unlike some other creed members, Martyrs regain Conviction when



confronted by truly horrific odds and hopeless situations, because these prove that laying down their lives is necessary. The following actions apply specifically to Martyrs. Each act should confer only one point of Conviction per session; multiple acts in the same chapter might still convey only a single point.

- Gain a point of Conviction if your Martyr suffers grievous injury (three levels of bashing or one level of lethal damage) while preventing a monster from accomplishing something that conflicts directly with your character's cause.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Martyr inspires another — imbued or not — to champion her personal cause as a priority.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Martyr narrowly survives an encounter against truly overwhelming odds.
- Gain a point of Conviction if your Martyr reaches a major milestone in his personal cause — such as defeating the vampire who killed his wife.
- (Optional) Lose a point of Conviction if your Martyr suffers grievous injury and fails to prevent a monster from accomplishing something detrimental to your character's cause.
- (Optional) Lose a point of Conviction if another person turns away from your Martyr's cause.

THE PRICE OF EXTRAORDINARY VIRTUE

Like all other hunters, as Martyrs become more experienced and dedicated, they become more and more alienated from their everyday lives before the imbuing. As your character's Virtues rise, her priorities shift and the concerns that once seemed so paramount fall by the wayside. Relating to others who aren't as dedicated can therefore become increasingly difficult.

Once a Virtue rises to 7 or higher, your character displays marked psychological problems. In game terms, these manifest as derangements (see below and *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 203). Even before then, however, some Martyrs experience symptoms of their increased "dedication." These lesser ailments are optional and should be introduced only as appropriate.

- **Damaged Goods:** By the time they reach 5 Mercy, most Martyrs have had numerous brushes with death, and they bear the physical and psychological scars of these encounters. Beyond various bruises and reset bones, they also bear the aura of one who has suffered. They may mutter about aches and discomfort, get a faraway look at odd times or react irritably to casual references to pain. Whatever the specific symptoms, others gradually pick up on them and become ill at ease. The difficulties of your Intimidation rolls are reduced by one, but you suffer a +1 difficulty on Social rolls when your character tries to put others at ease.

- **Reckless Abandon:** By the time they reach 6 Mercy, most of the devoted have survived enough dangers that their sense of what is and isn't a serious threat is skewed. A mugger with a gun, although deadly, just isn't worth worrying about. When faced with such a "lesser" danger, your character seems preternaturally calm, even detached or bored. The difficulties of all rolls to resist Intimidation or panic in such circumstances are reduced by one, but you suffer a +1 difficulty on all rolls when your character tries to warn or help others against a danger he doesn't take seriously. People around your Martyr may also become nervous, including the mugger with the gun.

DERANGEMENTS

The following derangements are particularly appropriate to high-Virtue Martyrs. Many of those in *Hunter: The Reckoning* are also good choices, especially Paranoia and Obsessive/Compulsive.

Treatment of derangements, whether Virtue- or trauma-induced, might be possible. For Martyrs, it typically means recognizing that a hunter isn't alone and that others can support a cause, too. Such realization might occur when other imbued succeed at an effort where a Martyr herself fails. Ailments can also be alleviated when support or love from others actually improves a Martyr's estimation of her own worth, convincing her that she doesn't deserve harm or abuse. Fulfilling causes — or at least achieving significant victories along the way — can also undo the damage that the rigors of the hunt inflict. Of course, lots of Willpower could be spent over the course of the chronicle to actively overcome dementia, too. There are no hard-and-fast rules for alleviating derangements. Only roleplaying, character development and Storyteller discretion can tell. Even then, high-Virtue-induced derangements might not be cured at all.

SADISM

After suffering so much for the cause and for others, your character decides to return some of that pain in kind. Whenever the opportunity comes up, he makes a victim suffer a variety of agonies for as long as he can get away with it. The sadist's first victim is usually a monster — it's easy to justify torturing a vampire who has been abusing street people for years. Slowly but surely, however, sadistic behavior spreads to dealings with other hunters and even defenseless people. In social situations, your Martyr points out flaws and attacks weak spots for the sheer fun of it. Any intimate relations he may still have become less and less loving and increasingly more torturous.

You can spend a point of Willpower for your character to suppress sadistic urges for a scene, but the need to cause pain builds up until released. The Storyteller can also allow you to make a Mercy roll (difficulty 8) to resist inflicting pain on someone your character truly cares for, such as a close friend or lover. When you're ready to increase a Virtue, the Storyteller may also rule that you must cash in 10 Conviction on Zeal if that Trait is significantly lower than your character's Mercy.

SELF-MUTILATION

A Martyr who indulges in self-mutilation has become so dependent on her own suffering that she must inflict it herself to keep going. She may empathize with the suffering of monsters' victims so strongly that she feels she too must suffer at all times. Or she may feel that she has to punish herself for not doing enough, not giving enough to the cause. Whenever she's alone, your character inflicts pain upon herself. Generally, this is relatively mild, such as snapping elastics against her skin or biting her nails past the quick. But when something hits especially close to home, your hunter starts to burn herself with cigarettes, cut herself with knives or razors, or do any number of other things. The Storyteller should determine if wound penalties are in order.

When choosing this derangement, you and Storyteller should agree on what type of events motivate extreme mutilations. Common triggers include reversals in a cause, defenseless people suffering and fellow imbued getting hurt.

You can spend Willpower for your character to suppress the urge for self-mutilation for a scene, but the craving returns all the more powerful later. Those around your hunter eventually notice self-mutilation, although the Storyteller may allow you to roll Wits + Subterfuge for your character to hide the most obvious signs of her behavior.

YOUR TIME HAS COME

For Martyrs, the ultimate price of commitment is their lives. They all believe, to one extent or another, that they

live on borrowed time — the Grim Reaper will collect soon enough. It's therefore important that you and your Storyteller give some serious thought to your character's death. Other players (with characters from other creeds) don't really need to look that far ahead, but you do.

There are essentially three possibilities for your character's death, and each has its own implications. These aren't *choices* — you don't know how your character will die — just possibilities you can think about.

OUT OF THE BLUE

The most “natural” way for a character to be retired to various chronicle notes and old war-stories is through a roll of the dice. A werewolf rears back and swipes at your character, the Storyteller rolls to hit, you botch your dodge roll and mark off all your remaining damage levels — and then some. *Ker-splat!* That's it.

It may not seem dramatic, but there's nothing wrong with a character dying when least expected. In fact, that's the most “realistic” option — in life, few people anticipate the moment of their death. If you're ready for it, it can be very interesting, dramatically.

There's obviously no buildup to a sudden death (or else it wouldn't be sudden), but you and the Storyteller should cooperate on the aftermath. Obviously, the other players' characters react and may seek justice for their fallen comrade, but what about the various Storyteller characters you've built up? Do you have dots in Allies, Bystanders, Contacts or Mentor? How do *those people* react? What about the wife or sister your character leaves behind? How do they learn about his death? What cover story is dressed up around his demise? Are there loose ends that need to be tied up? You could even use these loose ends to introduce and develop a new character to play. Maybe a minor character gets upgraded, or a new person enters the picture at the funeral.

AN APPROPRIATE END

You and the Storyteller can also put some work into planing your character's death, allowing you both to use narrative tricks to build toward it. First, decide what the circumstances of the death will be. The most obvious choice is for your character to die fulfilling his cause: in a final battle with the vampire he's been hunting, for example. This method allows your hunter to die victorious and go to his final reward, whatever that may be. You can also be more cynical and agree to have your Martyr die with the cause still ongoing. This may be a heroic end in which your character dies to achieve a small victory, or (for players looking for dark storytelling) a pointless death in which the cause isn't served at all.

Whatever circumstances you choose, knowing what's coming means the Storyteller can foreshadow it all. She may have your character experience premonitions of his death or introduce the killer early so you recognize him, but your character doesn't. When the time of death approaches, the Storyteller may say that your character feels his time has come and gains a stoic courage — a classic bit of fatalism from heroic fiction.

Traditionalist Storytellers may fear that your knowledge of the circumstances of your character's death will take away from the danger of all other events. Won't your character be invincible until the time comes? Well, not necessarily. There's nothing that prevents the Storyteller from letting a character die before the appointed time if you do something silly. Also, a skilled Storyteller can think of all kinds of unpleasantness that doesn't involve death.

CHEATED!

The final option for your character's death is no death at all. What happens when a character senses he's going to die for his cause, but ends up surviving? Dramatically, this can be

a very interesting option. Your character can go through a variety of reactions, from deep despair to a reinvigorated sense of purpose. He might feel he has been released from his obligations, or he might seek a new cause.

This option should be cooperative between you and the Storyteller. If you've focused on getting your Martyr to an appropriate death and have it taken away, you may be less than pleased. On the other hand, knowing well ahead of time that an expected death won't materialize steals all the drama from the event. A good compromise is for the Storyteller to take you aside at the point of death and give you a choice: Do you want your character to die or survive? Survival should have a very high price: the redefinition of your character's newfound life.

EDGES

All hunters face the risk of becoming consumed by their pursuit of the enemy, but none lose themselves so completely to the struggle as Martyrs, who by their very nature sacrifice body, mind and soul to further the causes they believe in. This absolute dedication seems to have spurred certain among the devoted to develop edges not commonly found among many devoted, reflecting unique responses to situations that only the truly selfless could devise. As descriptions and examples of these new capabilities become more commonly discussed among the imbued, it's possible that others among the tested (and members of other creeds as well) will come to exhibit these same capabilities.

While many of these Edges convey considerable power to their wielder, it's important to point out that the source of a Martyr's strength is her willingness to sacrifice herself to some degree. Many of these new powers exact a proportionate price from the hunter who uses them. For a true Martyr, though health and long life are meaningless compared to the needs of a crusade.

• PROJECT

Martyrs are driven passionately by their beliefs. Fundamental certainty in the righteousness of a cause (whatever that may be) can allow them to face even the most desperate odds without fear or hesitation. Through Project, a Martyr's determination virtually exudes from his body in a display that most monsters are loath to face.

A Martyr may use this edge when he is confronted by enemies that stand between him and the furtherance of his cause. Dedicated describe it as wearing their hearts on their sleeves, virtually projecting the vigor for their mission as a palpable force. A Martyr's determined, focused appearance can't be ignored. As a result, monsters' uncertainty or fear is compounded in the Martyr's presence, making it difficult for creatures to impede or attack the hunter. Normal people and other imbued also sense the Martyr's intensity but are not unduly affected by it except perhaps in a social capacity.

System: Roll Mercy + Appearance, difficulty 6. Your character must spend one action to bring his determination to bear in a grimace, glower or other display. No monster who can see your character may attack or otherwise interact with him (neither physically or with supernatural powers, but perhaps not even conversationally) during the scene, unless it achieves a greater number of successes on a Willpower roll, difficulty 6. If a monster's Willpower roll fails, the Storyteller may spend a Willpower point to allow it another roll to resist in a subsequent turn. Note that this edge applies only to your character, and does not limit a monster's movement or actions in any other way or against anyone else. Thus, monsters can see and might follow your hunter; they just

can't interfere with him unless their will overcomes his presence. If any one creature successfully resists this power and interferes with your character, the edge ceases to function and cannot be activated again for the remainder of the scene. Similarly, this power fails if your character becomes Incapacitated.

The Storyteller may rule that a particularly powerful or ancient monster is unaffected by this edge.

People and other hunters can't mistake your character's intensity, even if they don't understand its nature. All Social rolls made for your character are at +2 difficulty. Others who also pursue your cause are not subject to this modifier. The effects of this edge cannot be conferred to other people, hunters or monsters to allow them to convey an intimidating intensity.

• • REVELATION

Martyrs, as victims of pain and suffering, can empathize with monstrous existence. Many of the dedicated even try to reach some sort of understanding of monster motives and desires. The path of Mercy does not allow the same remorseless liberty that Zeal does, and Martyrs often agonize over the necessity of destroying a creature unless the act is absolutely justified. Even then, killing can haunt a Martyr till the end of her days. Many of the devoted walk a razor's edge between compassion and aggression, suffering pangs of guilt no matter what course they take. This edge appears to have manifested from an effort to better understand whether a creature deserves destruction, and so spare the Martyr's soul to some degree. The dedicated tend to explain this capability in terms of mutual understanding — between tested and monster — in a harsh world.

System: Spend one Conviction point. Your character must spend an action making eye contact with a monster to

use this edge. Roll Mercy + Wits, difficulty 6. If successful, your hunter can sense what a single monster thinks and feels *at that moment*. Unlike the Witness edge, Revelation allows the hunter insight into the thoughts and feelings that are at the forefront of the subject's mind at the instant of use only.

One success allows your character to sense a monster's current emotional state (anger, fear, sadness). Two successes reveal the monster's immediate intentions (the creature is afraid and needs to talk to someone). Three successes provide more specific detail about the monster's thoughts (the monster is afraid because someone tried to sneak into its lair, and it needs to tell someone named Albert about the problem). Four or more successes give your character a glimpse of the monster's thoughts in considerable detail, providing insight into its objectives (the monster wants Albert to find whomever entered its lair and make an example of them). Note that you and your character are left to draw your own conclusions based on what's perceived in the monster's thoughts, which might be very straightforward or baffling out of context (using this edge is akin to finding a snapshot on the sidewalk and trying to make sense of what's going on in the picture based strictly on what's visible).

This sensitivity to the monstrous mind is not one-way. A creature is capable of glimpsing the user's thoughts, as well. The Storyteller can make a Wits roll for the monster, with a difficulty equal to your character's Mercy rating. The creature may sense the imbued's immediate thoughts and feelings, gaining greater detail through increasing successes.

An empathizing hunter runs the risk of being overwhelmed by a monster's intense hungers and passions. If the creature is in the grip of a potent emotion at the moment this edge is used (a vampire's frenzied hunger for blood or a



shapeshifter's berserk rage), the feelings overcome your Martyr. For more detailed explanation of such frenzies, refer to the **Hunter Storytellers Companion**. Make a Willpower roll, difficulty 7. If it fails, your character turns on the nearest person, friend or foe, and attacks with his bare hands. If you botch your Willpower roll, your character suffers an appropriate derangement, whether temporary or permanent, as determined by the situation and the Storyteller. Make another Willpower roll in each subsequent turn for your character to regain his senses after going berserk, or you may spend a Willpower point to recover immediately.

This edge can be used on the same subject only once per scene; repeated efforts have no effect. It does not allow your character to sense the thoughts and feelings of other hunters or people.

●●● INFLECT

For some hunters on the path of Mercy, the act of killing another being is almost too difficult to bear. They see their condition as little different from monsters' and cannot justify committing violence in order to prevent similar acts. This inner conflict seems to have led to the creation of Inflect, an edge that turns a person or monster's violent acts back upon it, causing it to suffer the same harm it imposes (though the Martyr pays a price, as well). Some of the devoted believe this shared harm is the karmic cost of a malicious existence. Others believe their personal causes are so compelling that harm is done to those who would interfere.

System: Spend one Conviction point. Your character must devote an action to activating this power, perhaps warning creatures that whatever harm they inflict will be returned, or pleading that creatures not attack for fear of them being hurt in turn.

Once this edge is activated, any physical damage inflicted upon your character in hand-to-hand combat or Melee is conferred back on the attacker, as well. Both bashing and lethal attacks are reflected. You and the attacker soak damage and/ or apply armor against the attack separately. This edge applies to physical attacks from anyone, other people and hunters included. Note that this power has no effect on ranged attacks whatsoever, not even spells cast by warlocks. This effect continues for the remainder of the current scene or until the Martyr cancels the edge or he becomes Incapacitated.

Example: Anon52 fights a bloodsucker and activates Inflect. The monster hits Anon with its claws and causes four levels of lethal damage. Both hunter and vampire suffer this damage and attempt to soak separately, if possible.

Conviction can be risked with use of this edge on any single soak roll made when damage is incurred and "reflected." If lethal damage is suffered and you can't make a soak roll against it, Conviction cannot be risked against that damage, either.

The effects of this edge cannot be conferred onto another subject to make her "reflect" any damage suffered.

●●●● ORDEAL

The twin passions of sympathy and guilt drive Martyrs relentlessly, forcing them to acts of near-suicidal selflessness in an attempt to atone for the world's suffering. There is no greater gift that these hunters can give than to share of their own vitality, taking on the pain and heartache of others for the sake of the cause. Through use of this edge, a Martyr may heal other people by literally absorbing their injuries into himself, enduring pain so that others may carry on unharmed. The effects of this power do not usually manifest outwardly; the damage accepted by the Martyr manifests as internal bleeding and trauma. There have been cases of fanatically religious individuals expressing their

injuries in classic examples of stigmata, bleeding from palms, forehead and side, however. For many devoted, this edge is absolute proof of the importance of the cause — the mission assumes such significance that it virtually takes physical form.

System: Your character must make physical contact with the subject. Roll Mercy + Stamina, difficulty 6, and spend two Conviction points. If your roll is successful, *all* of the subject's injuries are immediately transferred to your character. (Your Martyr cannot take away a health level at a time; it's all or nothing.) In the case of absorbed bashing damage, make a Stamina roll to soak damage before it's applied. Obviously, any armor worn is useless in this situation. If the amount of damage transferred exceeds the hunter's remaining health levels, the subject is still fully healed, but your character is killed instantly.

Use of this edge is not limited to physical damage; mental illness, such as trauma or a derangement, may be conferred if your character wishes (in the case of a victim with multiple derangements, the Martyr may choose to assume one, some or *all* of them). Roll Willpower, with a difficulty determined by the Storyteller depending on the severity of the illness. If the Willpower roll fails, the user manifests the derangement(s) immediately. If the roll succeeds, your character sublimates the illness into his unconscious mind and can continue unimpaired, at least in the short term. The illness is by no means gone, merely pushed out of the hunter's conscious awareness, and can come back to the fore in times of great stress or fatigue. Record the new derangement(s) on your character sheet and indicate that it is/ they are sublimated... for now.

This Edge may not be used to heal the bodies or minds of monsters, only of people and other imbued.

●●●●● EXPIATE

The ultimate goal of any Martyr is to give himself, body and soul, for the salvation of the world. This need expresses itself in working long hours, taking extra watches and suffering untold amounts of pain so that others don't have to. Given the chance, most Martyrs wouldn't hesitate to cleanse the world of its evil, no matter the cost to themselves.

Expiate is the ultimate expression of these compulsions. Use of this power was reported by a group of imbued operating in the Appalachians. They witnessed a local preacher, supposedly a fellow hunter by the name of Father Moses, call the power of "divine grace" to drain a monster of its "burden of sin." According to the preacher, he drew the unholy forces from the beast, breaking its pact with Satan and returning it to its natural state. He claimed to have done the same to another creature, although those close to the preacher whispered that his behavior had grown increasingly bizarre after his supposed miracle. Two days after claiming to expiate yet another monster, the preacher declared to his congregation that the time had come for him to return to God. At that point, he doused himself and his audience with gasoline from a can hidden behind the pulpit and set the church on fire. The preacher and ten people died.

System: The power of this edge seems to rob a monster of its very nature by draining its supernatural essence and returning the creature to a possible natural state. A Martyr must have 10 Conviction available in order to use this power. The hunter must make physical contact with the intended target for three consecutive turns, during which a battle of wills takes place. Make a resisted Willpower roll between hunter and monster, with a mutual 6 difficulty. If the monster wins, it goes unaffected while the hunter loses a point of Conviction. If your roll botches,

all of your character's Conviction points are lost. Note that because this edge calls upon all of a hunter's Conviction, no points can be *risked* when using the power. If the hunter wins, his available Conviction drops to the minimum starting level for his creed — 4 — and the monster appears to lose its supernatural "being" permanently. Shapeshifters and warlocks appear to become normal human beings. Zombies and vampires are reputed to become inanimate corpses or piles of dust. This power does not seem to work on ghosts or goblins at all.

Your character must also pay a terrible price for performing such a miracle. Martyrs close to the Messengers speculate that a miracle worker draws a creature's very evil into himself, which manifests as inoperable tumors and organ failure, imposing terminal illness. No hunter edge can heal or alleviate these afflictions, and his condition grows worse each time the Martyr uses Expiate.

To reflect this degeneration, the Storyteller rolls a die each time the hunter uses this power successfully. On a roll of 1-5, the hunter incurs another derangement and the difficulties of *all* actions performed thereafter suffer a +1 modifier, permanently, as the user's body becomes increasingly decrepit. On a roll of 6-10, the hunter dies immediately.

Despite this extreme act of heroism and sacrifice, it's possible that certain creatures stalk the world that are so ancient or powerful that not even Expiate can absolve their existence. The Storyteller has final say on whether this edge can affect any given creature.

TAKE OF ME AND LIVE

The relationship between Martyrs and the rest of humanity is closer and more intense than it is for many other creed members. Unlike Avengers, for example, who often act out of their own deep-seated anger rather than concern for others, Martyrs cannot help but keep people in mind while they pursue a cause. Some of the devoted believe themselves symbolic figures in a crusade that can include regular folk as well as imbued. Others justify the terrible acts they perform out of love for friends and family. Whatever their motivations, Martyrs drive themselves ruthlessly to spare those close to them from harm. This compulsion has allowed some to develop an ability to share their strength with others, sustaining people in times of need at considerable expense to the self. Referred to simply as communion, this sharing of will is unique to Martyrs, as no other creed members can achieve the sheer self-sacrifice this capability seems to require. Indeed, not even all Martyrs can perceive the significance of the bond; a minimum of 1 Vision is required, in combination with any Mercy score. Compassion alone is not enough to empower others with personal strength. Some insight and imagination is required to understand how a cause can assume almost palpable form for its adherents.

A Martyr may hold communion with a total number of people and/or hunters equal to his current Mercy. The pact requires that a ritual of some kind be performed between Martyr and subject, the specifics of which are up to the hunter. The only stipulation is that the ritual involve some amount of discomfort or sacrifice for both participants. A common example is cutting palms and clasping hands as a gesture of oneness, or getting identical tattoos or body piercings. Other possibilities include destroying an item treasured by both parties, mutual exposure to harsh elements, or group fasting. Martyrs see this ritual as a self-affirming

demonstration of their deepest beliefs, and as a validation of their connection to other people and of their sacrifices for the cause. The devoted thus make a gift of something intangible — their very soul — to save others' lives and spirits.

Recipients of communion interpret the ritual in terms that they can understand, and even then the process can seem strange. Some might participate out of reverence for the Martyr or his passion, depending on the subject's spirituality. Others might just "go along" with a test out of sheer machismo or simply to humor someone who obviously cares deeply about them. Some maintain such a close bond to a Martyr that any moment of closeness or shared experience is cherished for its own sake, no questions asked.

During a ritual, a Martyr sets the terms of his blessing. His attention can be focused on protecting someone from harm, or his vigor may become inspiration for the recipient while furthering a mutual goal or cause. For example, a hunter could say, "Think of me when you're frightened or afraid," or "Use my strength to battle our common foe." The recipient must agree willingly to whatever terms the Martyr sets or the ritual has no effect. Only one communion may be established between a Martyr and single subject; multiple bonds cannot be formed based on different terms and conditions.

After a communal bond has been established, a subject has an ongoing, intuitive sense of the Martyr's presence and support, as if the hunter is at hand, lending awe-inspiring strength and aid. It's as if the bond formed between the two never leaves either entirely alone, no matter how far apart they might be. A recipient may thereafter draw on the hunter's Conviction to reaffirm personal determination. For regular people, any Conviction borrowed is converted into Willpower points to achieve automatic successes in the kinds of situations specified in the ritual. Fellow imbued with whom communion is performed may spend the Martyr's Conviction points as the same, as if they were her own Conviction points, or she may spend those borrowed points as Willpower, whichever is needed.

If a bond was made to protect a normal person, for example, that person could spend the hunter's Conviction as Willpower on a Dodge or Stamina roll to resist damage. If the recipient was given a gift to further a common goal, such as getting a family to safety, then an action toward that end may benefit. The Storyteller is the ultimate authority on whether a recipient's act is in keeping with the goal outlined in a Martyr's ritual. Only one Conviction point can be drawn at a time, and only one point can be drawn by a single subject in a single scene, whether it's used as Willpower or Conviction.

For his part, a Martyr senses a bond with each participant — a kinship or empathy is shared, no matter how far away distant subjects might be. If a point of Conviction is ever drawn from the hunter, he senses which kindred spirit is in need and gets a general sense of how. Say, the Martyr's wife needs to escape pursuing creatures while driving, and the Martyr senses that his family is in trouble while en route to shelter. The actual location or direction of subjects is not conferred. The moment when Conviction is drawn is simultaneously exhausting yet exhilarating; the hunter literally feels his vigor drain away, but his determination for and faith in the cause are reaffirmed by his act of sacrifice.

Here are some sample rituals and their repercussions.

A Martyr performs communion with a sympathetic priest and friend. The hunter believes in defending the poor

who belong to the priest's congregation from the depredations of monsters. When the bond is formed, the hunter states that his strength is the priest's strength so long as the friend helps protect the homeless from the city's predators. The Storyteller is therefore justified in having the priest draw on the hunter's Conviction if the friend, say, tries to protect street people from a group of thugs, or he tries to prevent a mugger from rolling a drunk. The priest could not draw on the hunter's reserves to convince his parishioners to give more when the collection plate is passed. That act does not directly involve saving the homeless from predators.

In another case, a Martyr makes a bond with a longtime friend who has a serious drug habit. The stipulation is that the hunter's strength is the subject's to use in order to help kick the habit. Thus, the friend could call on the Martyr's Conviction to resist urges for drugs, or perhaps to resist the temptation to steal to afford a fix. Communion lends no strength to the friend when he's beaten by an angry dealer, for example, because the attack doesn't directly involve kicking the habit.

Finally, a Martyr performs communion with a fellow hunter, an Avenger. He tells the warrior that so long as she fights with compassion and regret, his strength is hers. So long as she does not engage in brutal or merciless acts, she may call upon the Martyr's Conviction when she needs it, to be spent as Willpower or Conviction of her own. He cannot help her when she acts out of blind anger.

The specifics of a communion ritual are everything. The relationship forged between Martyr and subject, and its effect on their future actions, provides a wealth of story opportunities and roleplaying challenges. In chronicle terms, the Storyteller may introduce all kinds of story hooks as a Martyr is drawn upon to save a friend or ally. With his loose sense of wrongdoing or trouble that he receives, your character might come to his companion's rescue, to perpetuate the cause alongside needy comrades.

There's no limit to how many Conviction points a recipient may drain from a Martyr over time, and such energy may be shared regardless of distance. No person or hunter may maintain a communion with more than one Martyr at a time, though.

Of course, if a Martyr has no Conviction at a given moment, he can't donate any points — an important consideration for any devoted who maintains communion with others and who runs the risk of exhausting his passion for the hunt. Nor may a Martyr refuse to relinquish any points drawn; they are taken despite his (or your) desires or plans. The selfless imbued who shares too much of himself with too many others may quickly find that he has nothing left with which to protect himself. But such is the nature of the devoted. This danger can spur a Martyr to ever-increasing acts of courage and self-sacrifice to keep Conviction scores high enough to support anyone who needs them.

The effects of communion last as long as a Martyr or subject lives. A hunter or recipient may break communion at will — usually as a result of some irreconcilable difference between participants — although such an act probably involves a considerable amount of agonizing and soul searching, both before and after. If a communion is ever broken by either party, another can be forged with a different subject.

Martyrs may participate in communion with humans and fellow hunters, but not monsters. Such acts of selflessness with creatures are usually too alien to consider, even for the most compassionate or the devoted.





CHAPTER 6: MARTYRS AT LARGE

How can I myself alone bear your cumbrance, and your burden, and your strife?

— Deuteronomy 1:12

It doesn't take much to make a person a Martyr, just a sense of causes and movements bigger than yourself. That awareness occurs in regular life if you're not too self-absorbed or introspective. Understanding the contribution you can and need to make is much more compelling when you discover a world ruled by monsters, though. Suddenly, you are very insignificant and quite disposable — you've been that way all along and never knew it. And yet, those two qualities can fuel a desire to save the world from its beasts. If you succeed, you've made a difference and you matter. If you fail, well, you tried, and no one will miss you anyway.

The following character templates give you a starting place for playing one of the tested. Each of them is ready to play, but can serve as inspiration for your own characters. The templates isolate some basic concepts of the creed (the three camps, the single-mindedness of a cause, the willingness to forego life itself) and personify those qualities.

EX-CONVICT

This can't be happening to me. I'm trying to start over, for Christ's sake!

Prelude: You stole your first car when you were 11 years old and drove it to the South Side where your best friend's cousin ran a chop shop. He gave you \$500 for it, more money than you'd ever seen in your life. When you got home, you went straight to the landlord and handed over the money. If you and your baby sisters wanted to keep a roof over your heads, there wasn't anything else to do.

Your dad ran off while the youngest was still in diapers. Your mom discovered cocaine shortly after, then heroin. There wasn't anyone else to take care of things but you. By the time you were 15, you'd been arrested twice for breaking and entering and grand theft, but gotten off light because you were a minor. Each time you promised the judge you'd quit. The next night you'd be up-town again, looking for easy pickings.

The day before your 16th birthday, your mom left home and never came back. To this day you don't know what happened to her. You dropped out of school to take care of your sisters and hooked up with a gang that specialized in boosting Mercedes and BMWs. The payoffs got bigger. You started carrying a gun because of the cash you ended up with. A small part of you whispered that things were slipping out of control, but there was no way to turn back. Honestly, you didn't care. All that mattered was giving your sisters the best chance that you could.

One night, the owner of a Cadillac surprised you as you were yanking out the wires of his car alarm. There was a scuffle and you shot him by accident. He died the next day, and you found yourself in serious shit. The guy was a prominent businessman. You were tried as an adult and the judge gave you a life sentence.

Your sisters wound up in foster homes, but they were old enough that they could take care of themselves by then, and did as well as could be expected. With no one to take care of and a lot of time on your hands, you tried to get the education you'd given up on before. By the time your parole hearing came up, it

seemed as if there might be hope after all. The hearing went better than expected. For the first time in what felt like your entire life, you were a free man.

It was hard finding work at first. You settled in another part of the city and finally found someone willing to give an ex-con a chance. Money started coming in and things were looking up.

Then came the night you ran into Mr. Morganstern outside your apartment. He lived down the hall, got into shouting matches with his wife nearly every night. Probably beat her, too, but you tried not to think about that. It wasn't your business. You couldn't afford any more trouble. The parole board had been very clear.

Mr. Morganstern walked past you, a frown on his pasty face. You turned to say hello — and over his shoulder, you saw that the "exit" sign now read "TORMENT." And Mr. Morganstern wasn't alone. There was this shape following him, like a mist in the form of a man.

You watched your neighbor head into his apartment. The thing followed — and went right through the door! The shouting started almost immediately. *Something* was making Mr. Morganstern hurt his family. But who could you tell? How could this happen to you now, just when you were getting your life back?

Concept: You threw away your early life for the sake of your loved ones. Now something has opened your eyes to the existence of monsters. If you screw up again, you'll be back in jail for good. But how can you ignore what these creatures are doing?

Roleplaying Hints: You're a decent and compassionate person at heart, caught on the horns of a terrible dilemma. At times, you rage against whatever's changed you, but ultimately you can't sit by and let monsters hurt defenseless people.

Equipment: Baseball bat, electronics tools, beat-up GM van



HUNTER-BOOK MARTYR

NAME: NATURE: Survivor PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy
 PLAYER: Demeanor: Penitent CREED: Martyrdom
 CHRONICLE: CONCEPT: Reformed Criminal STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength (Strong Grip) ● ● ● ● ○	Charisma ● ● ○ ○ ○	Perception ● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity ● ● ● ○ ○	Manipulation ● ● ● ○ ○	Intelligence ● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina ● ● ● ○ ○	Appearance ● ● ○ ○ ○	Wits ● ● ● ○ ○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness ● ● ● ○ ○	Animal Ken ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Academics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Athletics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Crafts ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bureaucracy ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Demolitions ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Computer ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl ● ● ○ ○ ○	Drive ● ● ○ ○ ○	Finance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge ● ● ○ ○ ○	Etiquette ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Investigation ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Firearms ● ● ○ ○ ○	Law ● ● ○ ○ ○
Expression ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Melee ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Linguistics (Spanish) ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation ● ● ○ ○ ○	Performance ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Medicine ● ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Security ● ● ○ ○ ○	Occult ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Stealth ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Politics ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise ● ● ○ ○ ○	Survival ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Research ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Technology ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Science ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS	EDGES	VIRTUES		
	NAME CREED LEVEL TRIGGER	MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
Allies ● ● ○ ○ ○	Demand Martyrdom ● ○ ○ ○ ○	1 ● x	● x	● x
Arsenal ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Foresee Visionary ● ○ ○ ○ ○	2 ○	○	○
Contacts ● ● ○ ○ ○	Cleave Vengeance ● ○ ○ ○ ○	3 ○	○	○
Destiny ● ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	4 ○	○	○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	5 ○	○	○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	6 ○	○	○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	7 ○	○	○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	8 ○	○	○
○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	9 ○	○	○
		10 ○	○	○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
 Hurt -1 ☐
 Injured -1 ☐
 Wounded -2 ☐
 Mauled -2 ☐
 Crippled -5 ☐
 Incapacitated ☐

DILETTANTE SAVIOR

Take it. No, take it all. C'mon — it's just money. You need it more than I do.

Prelude: There was never a day in your life that you didn't have absolutely anything you wanted. Both your parents were executives in high-profile corporations, so money was never a concern. All you had to do was ask one of the servants for something and it appeared right away.

Naturally, you were sent to all the right schools, and your parents' wealth and prestige put you in the most exclusive social circles. Even the other "proper" girls were jealous of the extravagant level to which you were cared for, and your "friends" were really nothing more than backbiting cliques, each person turning on the next when the mood struck or to score points with the current group queen.

As you got older, you started to realize that there was more to the world than your own little sheltered environment of school, ski trips and parties. Most people didn't have the money or opportunities that you did, but you didn't understand why not. Your parents got their money because they had good jobs. Why couldn't everybody do the same? People gave you dirty looks as you drove your Lexus SUV around town, as if you didn't belong on the same streets they did.

The more you thought about it, the more it bothered you. Your friends just sneered at the "poor people" they saw at the malls, but you couldn't dismiss them so easily. People seemed to dislike you just because you had money. How fair was that? You didn't ask to be rich. You believed you were a good person — the servants all said so — so you were being discriminated against because you were wealthy. That realization hurt. And with it came the awareness of how alone you truly were.

You stopped hanging out with your friends. They didn't really care about you anyway. For a while, you flirted with suicide, but every idea you came up with seemed too painful and messy. So, you finally took the Lexus and spent your nights just cruising around the city, feeling like a ghost in an uncaring world.

One night, a wild impulse made you drive into a bad part of town. You saw a man with a

group of women at one corner. Suddenly, the man grabbed one of them and knocked her down. She screamed, trying to get away, and the others scattered. The man looked down at the fallen woman, who scuttled across the pavement, and started to follow her, his hands reaching for her almost as if he were sleepwalking.

Then a voice spoke from the radio. "PUSH BACK THE DARKNESS," it said. That was bad enough, but then you remembered that the radio was off.

Goosebumps rushed across your arms. The man had almost reached the woman. As he moved into the glow of a streetlight, you saw the rotting strips of skin hanging from his face and hands. You screamed — and floored the gas peddle.

The Lexus roared forward. There was no time to think. The SUV went over the curb like it was a speed bump and you slammed into the man. The dead thing flew 10 feet and lay in a twisted pile of limbs. You hit the brakes and just sat there, trying to stop your heart from bursting, unable to believe what you'd done.

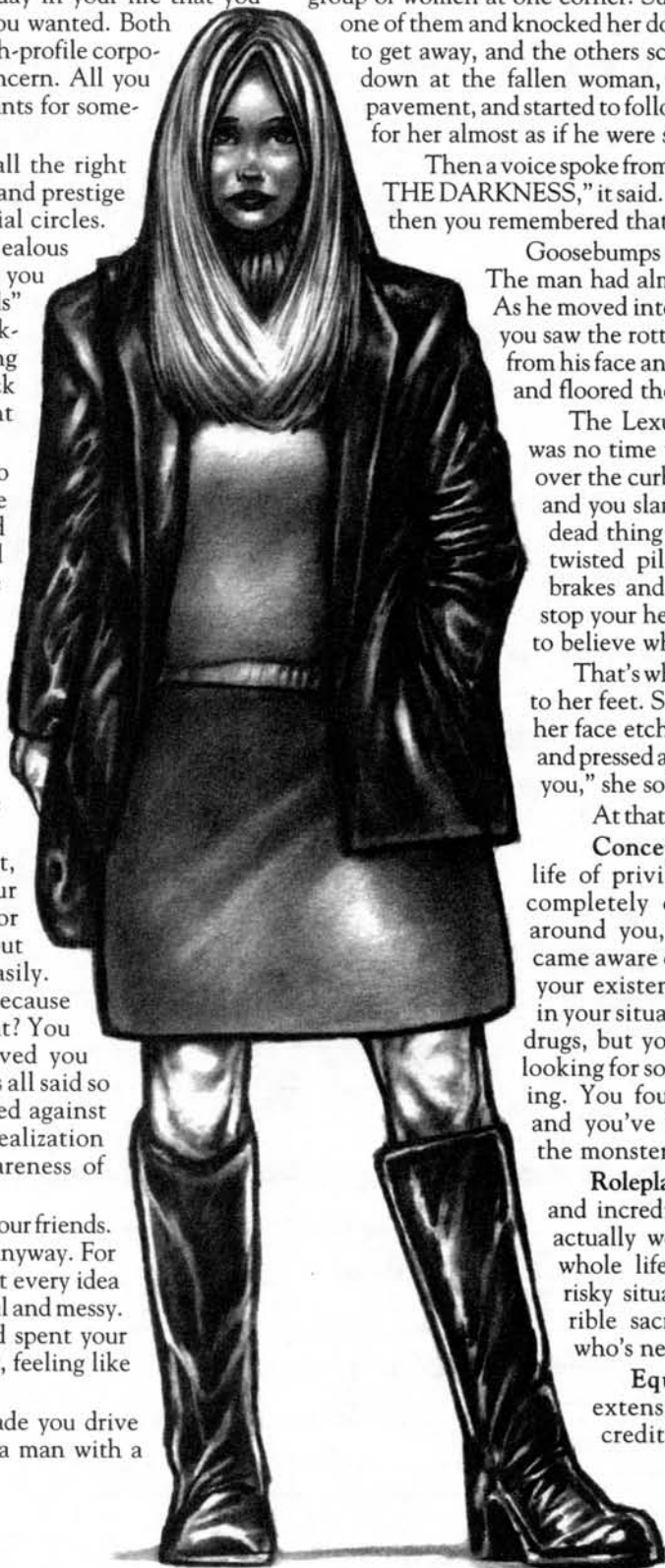
That's when the woman scrambled to her feet. She came to your window, her face etched with terror and relief, and pressed a hand to the glass. "Thank you," she sobbed before she ran off.

At that moment, you were reborn.

Concept: You lived a sheltered life of privilege and excess before, completely oblivious to the world around you, and only recently became aware of how lonely and empty your existence truly was. Most kids in your situation turned to booze and drugs, but you took a different path, looking for some kind of higher meaning. You found it at your imbuing, and you've hurled yourself against the monsters ever since.

Roleplaying Hints: You're young and incredibly naïve, having never actually worked for anything your whole life. You place yourself in risky situations and advocate terrible sacrifices as only someone who's never truly been hurt can.

Equipment: Lexus SUV, extensive wardrobe, stack of credit cards



HUNTER-BOOK MARTYR

NAME: NATURE: Bon Vivant PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy
 PLAYER: Demeanor: Fanatic CREED: Martyrdom
 CHRONICLE: CONCEPT: Wealthy Crusader STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL	SOCIAL	MENTAL
Strength _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Charisma (Charming) _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Perception _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Manipulation _____ ● ● ● ○ ○	Intelligence _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Appearance (Flawless) _____ ● ● ● ● ○	Wits _____ ● ● ● ○ ○

ABILITIES

TALENTS	SKILLS	KNOWLEDGES
Alertness _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Animal Ken _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Academics (Poetry) _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Athletics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Crafts _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Bureaucracy _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Demolitions _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Computer _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Brawl _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Drive _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Finance _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Dodge _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Etiquette _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Investigation _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Firearms _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Law _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Melee _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Linguistics _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○	Performance _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Medicine _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Security _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Occult _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Stealth _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Politics _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Streetwise _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Survival _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Research _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○	Technology _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	Science _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Resources _____ ● ● ● ● ●
 Destiny _____ ● ○ ○ ○ ○
 _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
 _____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Demand	Martyrdom	● ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
Project	Martyrdom	● ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____
_____	_____	○ ○ ○ ○ ○	_____

VIRTUES

MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
1 ● X	○	○
2 ● X	○	○
3 ●	○	○
4 ○	○	○
5 ○	○	○
6 ○	○	○
7 ○	○	○
8 ○	○	○
9 ○	○	○
10 ○	○	○

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○

WILLPOWER

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

FAMILY MAN

Oh, God. Not again.

Prelude: Life was never easy, but it was been stable and that's about the best anyone could ask for. You did well enough in high school and learned to fix cars at your uncle's shop. After you graduated, you married your prom date and settled down to raise a family. You went to church every Sunday and always had something to put in the plate. People thought of you as someone they could depend on when times were tough, and you liked that. It made you feel good to be able to help when someone needed it.

Time passed. You worked your way up at the shop and became a shift manager, then moved out of the apartment and got a nice little house in the suburbs. The drive to and from work gave you all the reasons in the world to be grateful. Your shop was downtown, near the missions. Every day, you saw people of every age and description walking the streets, looking for money or something to eat. Your heart went out to them, but you reminded yourself that you couldn't give handouts to everybody. You had a family to take care of, people who depended on you.

You always used to work late at the shop, covering other people's shifts and getting in as much overtime as you could. Four nights ago, you were headed home at 1 AM, driving through freezing rain. There were people still haunting the streets, huddled against the cold with nowhere to go. You couldn't help but watch them sadly as you drove past.

Then your truck died. You pulled over, hopped out and looked under the hood. Just in case, you pulled a heavy wrench from underneath the seat and tucked it in your back pocket. Homeless people could be a little nuts, and there were no cops anywhere in sight.

There was nothing wrong with the truck that you could find, which was strange. You closed the hood — and that was when you saw the man, standing at the corner a block away. It was like he was staring right through you. He sent a shiver up your spine. Above the man's head, the crossing sign blinked "DEAD" in red.

He crossed the street toward you and walked past without a glance.

Up close, you saw that he had to be a corpse. The shock was so sudden that you couldn't make a sound as this thing shambled past and turned down an alley. Then you heard the sounds of a struggle.

You reached the mouth of the alley in time to see the dead guy with his hands around a young man's neck. The man saw you and his eyes pleaded for help. Without thinking, you pulled the wrench and waded in. One blow to the back of the head, you thought, and the thing would go down.

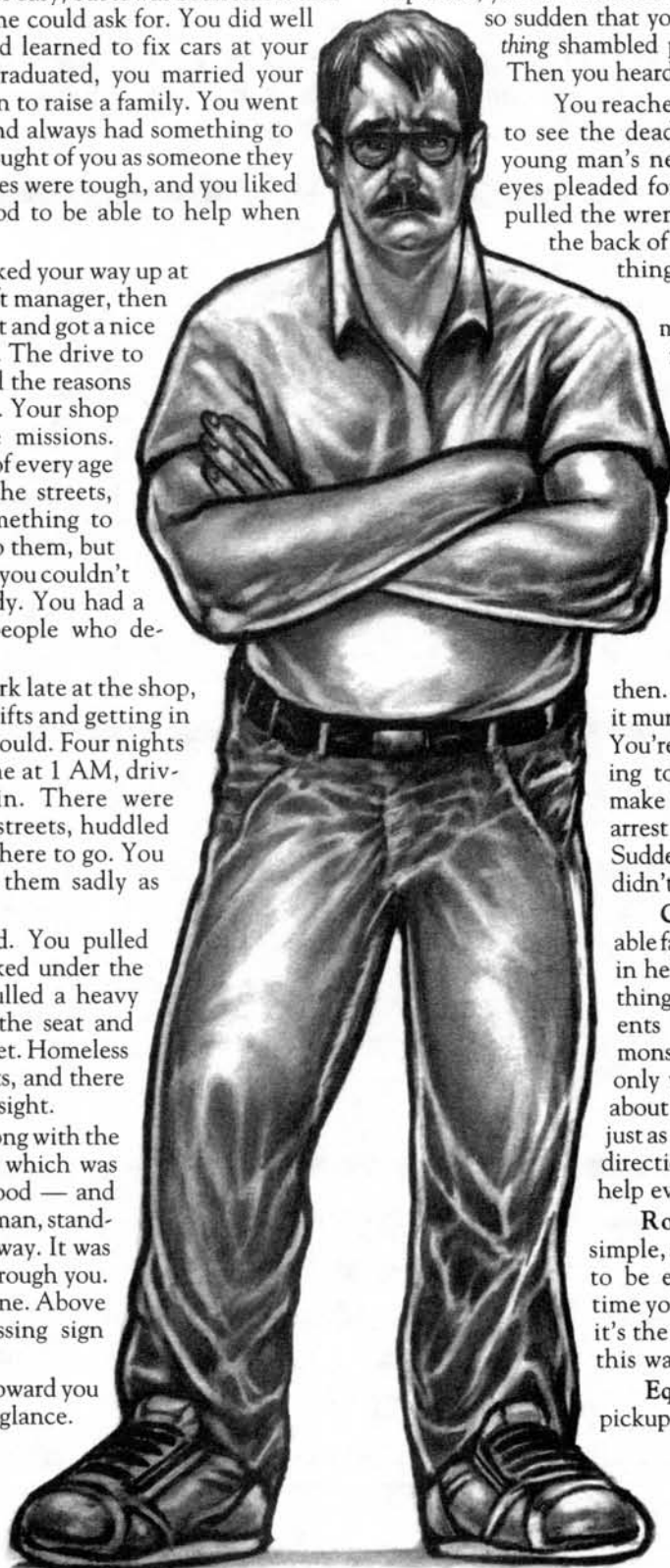
It didn't. The creature let the man go, but you found yourself fighting for your life. It took only seconds, but it felt like an eternity. You beat the creature with a strength you didn't know you had, and it finally collapsed, its head split like a rotten melon. Horrified, you ran back to your truck. You were halfway home before it dawned on you that your truck was working again.

You haven't slept a wink since then. What you did terrifies you. Was it murder? The thing was already dead. You're sure of that. And you were trying to save someone's life. Did that make it a crime? Would the police arrest you? Were you going to Hell? Suddenly, your safe, predictable world didn't make sense anymore.

Concept: You're a solid, dependable family man, someone who believes in helping others and doing the right thing, because that's the way your parents raised you. Now, you can see monsters. They're hurting people, and only you can stop them — but what about your family? Don't they need you just as much? You're being pulled in two directions, working yourself to death to help everyone you can.

Roleplaying Hints: You're a simple, straightforward person who tries to be everything to everybody. Each time you see a monster, you pray to God it's the last one, because you can't live this way forever.

Equipment: Pipe wrench, tools, pickup truck



HUNTER-BOOK MARTYR

NAME:

NATURE: Caregiver

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: Caregiver

CREED: Martyrdom

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: Reluctant Everyman

STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina (Relentless) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Awareness ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intuition ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts (Engines) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Demolitions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Security ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Technology ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bureaucracy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics (Spanish) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Research ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Arsenal ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Patron ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Resources ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Demand Martyrdom	☐	☐	☐
Witness Martyrdom	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

VIRTUES

MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
1 ☒	☐	☐
2 ☒	☐	☐
3 ☒	☐	☐
4 ☐	☐	☐
5 ☐	☐	☐
6 ☐	☐	☐
7 ☐	☐	☐
8 ☐	☐	☐
9 ☐	☐	☐
10 ☐	☐	☐

DERANGEMENTS

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

CONVICTION

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

HOMELESS GUY

Hey, buddy, relax! I'm not lookin' for a handout — I'm here to help.

Prelude: It's every man for himself in this world. If anyone should understand that, it's you.

There was a time, not so long ago, when you had a well-paying job, a house, a wife and two kids. You worked late every single night and most weekends, getting brownie points with management so one day you could tack that VP title to your name. It meant you didn't see much of your family, but that was the price you paid for private schools and minivans



street, begging for handouts to keep you going from one bottle to the next. The thought of having failed everyone you'd ever loved was a crushing weight that you prayed might kill you.

One winter night you found yourself huddled over a heat vent near Broadway. You watched the well-dressed socialites hurry along with their dates. A man wearing a tuxedo headed your way, a woman wrapped in furs hanging on his arm. His eyes were pitiless; there was no charity in him. As you started

HUNTER-BOOK MARTYR

NAME:

NATURE: Survivor

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: Caregiver

CREED: Martyrdom

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: Down and Out

STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Awareness ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intuition ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts (Improvised Cooking) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Demolitions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Security ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Technology ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bureaucracy ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Research ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Allies ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Contacts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Patron ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
Demand Martyrdom	☒	☐	☐
Hide Innocence	☒	☐	☐
Discern Judgment	☒	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐
	☐	☐	☐

VIRTUES

MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
1 ☒ ☒	☐	☒ ☒
2 ☒ ☒	☐	☐
3 ☐	☐	☐
4 ☐	☐	☐
5 ☐	☐	☐
6 ☐	☐	☐
7 ☐	☐	☐
8 ☐	☐	☐
9 ☐	☐	☐
10 ☐	☐	☐

DERANGEMENTS

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

CONVICTION

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised ☐
Hurt -1 ☐
Injured -1 ☐
Wounded -2 ☐
Mauled -2 ☐
Crippled -5 ☐
Incapacitated ☐

TERMINAL PATIENT

It's okay. I'll do it. Hey, what's the worst they can do?

Prelude: You were diagnosed with the disease when you were 12. Your parents noticed the danger signs long before you did. Sure, you were tired a lot, but what was the big deal about that? When you saw the doctors, they were all very upbeat and optimistic. You were still basically healthy and strong. They were going to beat this thing, and you could go back to living a regular life.

But some things, you came to learn, couldn't be beaten no matter how hard people tried.

Months passed, and you were put on a multitude of different medications. The effects were so powerful that you had to leave school and be home-tutored when you felt up to it. You insisted that you were strong enough, even when you didn't really mean it. ~~It was better to be doing something, even~~ if it was just schoolwork.

The disease would not relent. Sometimes the doctors would make it go into remission, but that never lasted longer than a few months. There were still a few friends who came by to visit, but most of them moved on. You couldn't blame them. They had lives to live. You were just holding them back. So, you turned to books as a way to fill the hours and took walks when the physical therapist said it was okay.

When you were 17, things got really bad. The disease stopped responding to the drugs, and the doctors decided to give you chemo. It was the most horrible experience of your life. Prisoners of war had laws to protect them from the kind of tortures the doctors put you through. They said it built character.

You spent the next months in the hospital. They'd given up on chemo and were now going with radiation treatments. You were bald and your skin was pale, almost translucent. The veins showed at your wrists and neck. You felt tired all the time. Maybe it was the disease or maybe you just didn't have a reason to be any other way. It was as if you were just marking time. Only your parents visited you anymore. Even the nurses had a hard time being

around you, though they did their best to hide it. You felt like a freak, a monster from another world. For the first time, you felt like you wanted to die.

When you saw the woman late one night, you thought you'd finally passed away. You'd been sleeping, but something woke you. And there she was, dressed in white, at the foot of your bed. It didn't occur to you to be scared. You rubbed your eyes. When you looked at her closely, you could see that she seemed sick herself, and very sad. Then a voice spoke, clearly and calmly, as if from nowhere: "THE DEAD HAVE NO PLACE HERE."

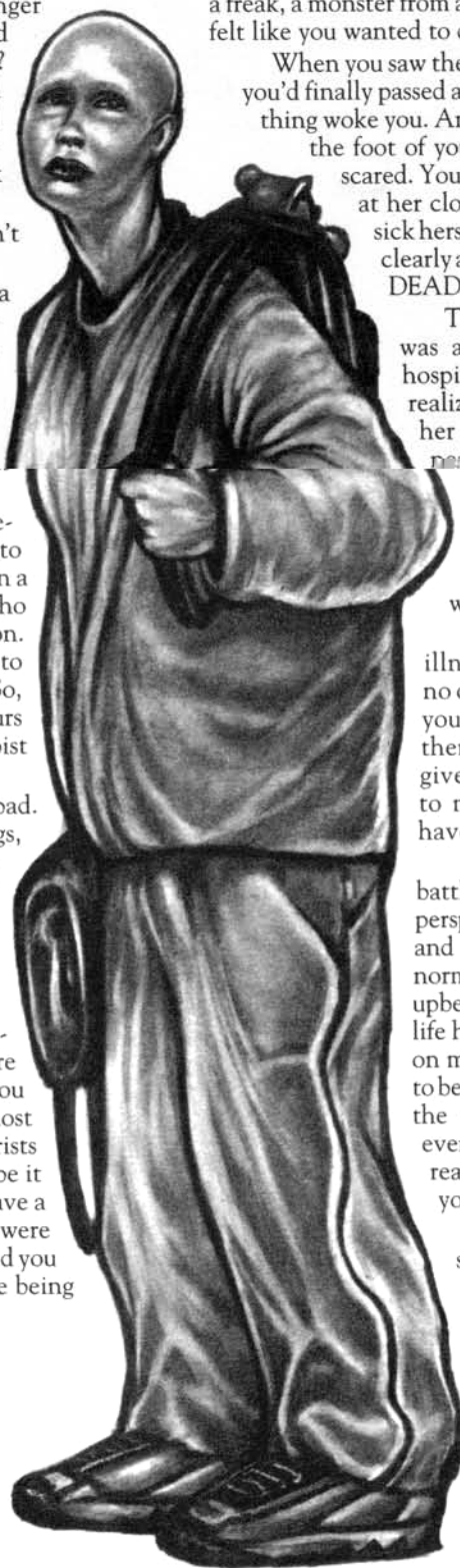
That's when you understood that she was a ghost. Maybe she'd died in the hospital and didn't realize it. Once she realized you could see her, she came closer, her face lit with something like happiness. ~~She didn't want to be here, that much~~ You didn't want to be here, that much you could tell.

So you tried to help. When you finally set her free, you knew that your work had only just begun.

Concept: You're dying of a terminal illness. How much time is left exactly, no one knows. It doesn't matter. Because you're 18 now, you've refused further therapy and left the hospital. You've been given a great gift, and you are determined to make the best of it in the time you have left.

Roleplaying Hints: Fighting a losing battle against death has given you a lot of perspective on life. You get sad sometimes, and a little jealous of people who've had normal lives, but you mostly try to stay upbeat. The disease that's dominated your life has also given you a unique perspective on monsters. You understand what it's like to be alone and tormented, unable to change the thing that makes you different from everyone else you know. That's the main reason you've been given this gift, and you're determined to use it well.

Equipment: Laptop computer, chess set, backpack



HUNTER-BOOK MARTYR

NAME:

NATURE: Caregiver

PRIMARY VIRTUE: Mercy

PLAYER:

DEMEANOR: Masochist

CREED: Martyrdom

CHRONICLE:

CONCEPT: Doomed Savior

STARTING CONVICTION: 4

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dexterity (Sleight of Hand) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SOCIAL

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

MENTAL

Perception (Astute) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Wits (Wily) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Awareness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Expression ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Intuition ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

SKILLS

Animal Ken ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Demolitions ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Security ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Survival ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Technology ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

KNOWLEDGES

Academics (Classics) ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bureaucracy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Finance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Research ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Destiny ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐
Exposure ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

EDGES

NAME	CREED	LEVEL	TRIGGER
<u>Demand</u>	<u>Martyrdom</u>	☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
<u>Witness</u>	<u>Martyrdom</u>	☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____
_____	_____	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐	_____

VIRTUES

	MERCY	VISION	ZEAL
1	☒ <u>x</u>	☐ _____	☐ _____
2	☒ <u>x</u>	☐ _____	☐ _____
3	☒ <u>x</u>	☐ _____	☐ _____
4	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
5	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
6	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
7	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
8	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
9	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____
10	☐ _____	☐ _____	☐ _____

DERANGEMENTS

CONVICTION

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

WILLPOWER

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

EXPERIENCE

HEALTH

Bruised	☐
Hurt	-1 ☐
Injured	-1 ☐
Wounded	-2 ☐
Mauled	-2 ☐
Crippled	-5 ☐
Incapacitated	☐

PROMINENT MARTYRS

The following devoted have had an impact on the Martyr creed and imbued society as a whole. Some have served as examples to follow. Others personify pitfalls to avoid. Most are just regular people trying to get through a life that has gone utterly insane, and who just try to live up to the standards they have set for themselves, before and after.

MAMAN BOUMBA

If there's one person among the tested who rivals Dictatrix 11 as a paragon of the creed, it's a 63-year-old woman from Zaire who calls herself simply Maman Boumba. Boumba is a widow with a large extended family who has worked for the Red Cross in Brazzaville for 15 years, providing aid to any and all who need it. According to a legend spreading among some hunters, she was imbued the night local soldiers raided the shelter for medical supplies. Boumba faced down the Kalashnikov-armed troops with a broom and a forbidding glare, and suddenly she saw that the leader of the troops was, as she put it, "a soul in need of dying again." The officer, apparently a member of the ruling government's secret police, threatened to arrest her and "teach her respect for the law." Boumba looked him in the eye, seeming to pierce into his very soul, and told him that he was wasting his time if he thought that bullying an old woman would earn him respect from his *master*. Whatever the comment meant, it had the desired effect. The officer was so rattled that he gathered his troops, left immediately and didn't trouble the shelter again.

Although Boumba herself eschews computers and the Internet, another imbued in Brazzaville writes about Boumba and her exploits, describing the calm and self-assurance that guides the woman through repeated confrontations with spirits, shapechangers and bloodsuckers. In each case, Boumba tries to treat the monster with compassion and even respect, and she uses uncanny empathy and insight to alleviate the being's hostility. She has had notable success in laying spirits to rest without conflict, and has apparently negotiated an understanding of sorts with the local man-beasts that guarantees the safety of Brazzaville's residents. Her reputed encounters with local bloodsuckers and warlocks have been much more contentious.



Even in these cases, Boumba refuses to resort to violence, relying instead on her wits to gain the upper hand. So far, every creature that has lashed out at her has met its end, not through retaliation, but through outside influences, particularly rival monsters.

Boumba and her years of hard-earned wisdom have made her something of an icon among those devoted who have heard of her. One has even traveled to Zaire to meet her, only to find a stout, middle-aged woman who steadfastly denies any notions of divine insight or importance. Lately, she has become much more reclusive, even to the extent of limiting ties with local hunters. Evidently, she has become uncomfortable with her notoriety. That elusiveness is perhaps for the best; some fear that if her renown makes her enough of a threat to Brazzaville's monsters, none of Maman Boumba's wiles will save her.

MELISSA LYNN HART, AKA JOAN296

Melissa is the child of prominent investment bankers in Boston. Until recently, she spent her life as a spoiled, indolent brat who lived for nothing but formal functions and shopping sprees. By 17, she was a jaded young socialite primed for an Ivy League education and utterly, completely without a soul.

Were it not for a failing grade in Latin, Melissa might have gone on to live a cynical, materialistic life. Instead, she was paired with a young student from Brazil, Amelia Rodriguez, who in time opened Melissa's eyes to the sobering fact that the world didn't revolve around her. This dawning awareness, however, was only the first step to an even more frightening realization. When a shapeshifter tried to kidnap Amelia, Melissa heard the call and threw herself in the monster's path.

Struggling to come to grips with the existence of creatures, Melissa turned to the Sunday school lessons she dimly remembered from her early childhood. Like many people who find religion after an empty, materialistic life, she surrendered herself completely to her newfound faith. Driven by her own unconscious self-importance, Melissa believed that it was her destiny to be the living symbol of her cause, and she immediately set out to call others to her banner. Tragically, she also believed that all people, blind and powerless as they are, must contribute to the struggle as well. She now celebrates her followers' deaths as examples to inspire still others.



It is Melissa's utter certainty in her faith that has made her a force to be reckoned with, both for monsters and other imbued. Although posters to hunter-net repeatedly scorn her naïve, idealistic views, she is powerfully self-composed and charismatic in person. Hunters who have spoken to her face-to-face report that she has an otherworldly presence about her that commands attention, and she can be exceptionally inspiring when she discusses her beliefs. Whether this quality is the fevered allure of a lunatic or the aura of one divinely blessed is open to conjecture.

Melissa's fanaticism, however, is beyond question, as demonstrated by her self-admitted torture killing of Amelia Rodriguez in an attempt to purge the girl of the "stain of evil." She leaves no doubt as to the necessity of sacrifice on the part of God's faithful and advocates an inquisitorial role for the devoted, a sort of moral authority among the imbued. What's truly frightening is the growing number of people who listen to what Melissa has to say, whether they understand or not.

Melissa's whereabouts are unknown, but it's speculated that she remains in Boston, protected by her supporters. She is wanted for the Amelia's murder, but the charges only seem to make her more of a hero to her homegrown army. Two hunters recently posted to hunter-net that they were going to the city to "take care" of Joan before her movement got out of hand.

PROFILE

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

Abilities: Academics (History) 3, Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Computer 2, Drive 1, Etiquette 2, Finance 1, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Linguistics (Latin) 1, Politics 1, Research 2, Stealth 1

Backgrounds: Resources 5

Edges: (Martyrdom) Demand, Project, Witness; (Judgment) Discern

Mercy: 4, **Zeal:** 1, **Conviction:** 8, **Willpower:** 9

TRAVIS MILLER, AKA TRAVELER72

Travis never stood out. He was born in 1970 to working-class parents in Oklahoma City. Growing up, he listened to Michael Jackson, outgrew that, listened to Public Enemy, got a business degree in college, got a job with Cafferty Industrial Machinery in Tulsa, got married and got a ranch-style house in the suburbs. Now he listens to Luther Vandross and Vanessa Williams.

That's not all there is to Travis' life—not even all there was to his life *before* he was imbued. There were the fights with his wife Colette about having children. (She won: He got a vasectomy, but that still didn't prevent their divorce.) There were some bitter feelings in college that never really got resolved. And there were words unsaid to his mother before she died.

But none of that really matters anymore, now that everything has *changed*.

Recently, Travis' boss has given him a "last warning" about sagging sales. All that Travis cares about is keeping his frequent-flyer miles whenever he finally gets fired. At least that way he can continue to deal with monsters the same way he always has.

Travis pursues the hunt with a purity rivaling that of more notorious hunters such as Crusader17 and Potter116. In fact, his approach may be even more pure. Unlike so many others, Travis deals with monsters without preconceived notions. Where Crusader sees an angry Jehovah and Potter sees a benevolent Higher Power, Travis has no strongly held beliefs with which to interpret (or misinterpret) the call. He



sees it as something higher and more important than himself, which is why he's found it so easy to let go of his previous life.

Travis doesn't make a big deal of his suffering and sacrifices. He doesn't see himself as the important one. Whereas other hunters are willing to starve, throw themselves in the path of bullets and go on sleepless prayer vigils, Travis believes his mission is to pursue the hunt for as long as he can. To him, that doesn't mean sacrificing himself. It means taking care of himself.

Travis is good with people, and he applies those skills to the hunt. Traveling the country as a crane salesman, he's had the opportunity to bring a lot of hunters together. Few of them realize what a good job he does of navigating the troubles that arise between people of different races, cultures and classes. They just figure it's the course of nature that things stay together as long as they do. Even Travis is unaware of how crucial he's been at establishing the nascent hunter underground. As far as he's concerned, he's just one guy, sticking his oar in the water, doing good where he can.

PROFILE

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics (Music) 1, Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 1, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Finance 3, Firearms 3, Investigation 1, Leadership 2, Melee 2, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Bystanders 1, Contacts 4, Patron 1, Resources 3

Edges: (Martyrdom) Demand, Witness; (Defense) Ward, Rejuvenate

Mercy: 4, **Zeal:** 3, **Conviction:** 6, **Willpower:** 8

DOUGLAS SANDS

Douglas was among the most reluctant of hunters. Set in his soft, middle-aged ways, he took several weeks to truly heed the call, even after discovering that a vampire stalked his mistress and, later, his wife. He eventually drove the monster away—its predatory leer finally enraged him—but Douglas was unwilling to even pursue the creature. He didn't feel fit to judge it. For the first time in his life Douglas became aware of



the faltering direction of his own moral compass, however. He didn't *change*, mind you, but he did begin to feel guilt.

"Eventually, the persistent vampire forced Douglas' nanā and the reluctant imbued resolved to move against it. How else might he atone for the misdeeds of his past and present: the infidelity to his wife; the death of their son, for which Douglas blamed himself? Even now, he doubts his moral fitness and the legitimacy of the hunt, but he's willing to assume the responsibility of wrongdoing himself, if only to spare others.

Douglas has fallen in with a group of hunters in his home, Iron Rapid, Michigan. His old life is falling apart. He has lost his corporate job and is estranged from his wife. He's made off with their joint savings to support his endeavors — merely another sin in the name of the hunt. His wife may not understand, but it's for her own good.

In just a few months of activity against vampires and shapechangers, Douglas has gone from green recruit to seasoned veteran. He is always close-mouthed about his victories and defeats, but stories about him start to spread nevertheless.

ANNA SULJIC, AKA DICTATRIX11

Anna is no longer sure she can remember a time before monsters. Even before the Heralds opened her eyes to the horrible truth, she had seen the depths of human evil. She had just started working as a lecturer at the university in Sarajevo when the war broke out. Yugoslavia, the country she had always known, collapsed around her. Croatia was the first storm, but Bosnia-Herzegovina was the worst.

She listened to media analysts and armchair historians the world over try to sum up her homeland's conflict: It was the Serbs' fault, the Croats' fault, the Muslims' fault, the EU's fault, the UN's fault. Anna knew all too well that blame is futile. Croats, Serbs and Muslims all did a thorough job of brutalizing one another while the world sat back and watched. The fact that the Serbs wound up running the camps and dragging Anna and her family off had more to do with power than politics. All evil has to do with power.

The months in the camp were a blur of pain and fear. Goran, a Serbian boy who had once been a friend of the family, took special pleasure in using her, and she reserved a special hatred for him. Anna bears a terrible scar on her neck and shoulder from



where he taught her a lesson with boiling kitchen grease. One night, when he was drunk on smuggled Russian vodka, she stole his knife and showed him just how "helpless" she really was. That the UN peacekeepers rolled into town the next day was just fate's way of making Anna live with the memories.

Anna's brother married an American in the 1980s and she immigrated with their help, leaving the insanity behind. Of course, the dreams of Goran, The Pig and the rest of her tormentors persisted, but she hoped for a better life in the United States. Instead, she discovered new nightmares.

That first night at her brother's house in Queens, the dreams came stronger than ever. Instead of the disparate images of pain and life before, she relived abuse after abuse in detail. Goran, The Pig, Goran and The Pig. She was drowning in her own despair — or being choked by it. She woke with a start to discover the *things* over her bed. Translucent people smiling with rotted teeth, feeding on her pain. The hungry *dead*. She screamed and pushed the *things* away.

Anna discovered the first hunter-net shortly after she started work at the New York Public Library as a researcher. Other imbued helped her establish a rapport with the ghosts who haunted her, and she finally got one of them to convince the rest to leave her alone. She shuddered when the spirits faded for the last time — more death in her life. Anna participated in several "hunts," both alone and with other imbued. She met Scott Fairlane, a contractor who'd also seen the truth, and convinced him to join hunter-net as Builder50. She and hunter-net founder Witness1 became friends, at least as much as people can be in anonymous cyberspace.

But despair slowly eroded whatever resolve Anna had. There were too many monsters, and she watched the other imbued slowly tear each other apart. Friends died and others became as bad as her onetime abusers. She slowly dropped out of the "life," stopped posting to the list and tried to ignore the monsters. She read but rarely responded to email sent to dictatrix11@hunter-net.org. Traveler and Witness sent her the most reliable news: Oracle171's madness. The murders of Cop90 and Builder50. More and more death.

Then came Sam Baines. An imbued madman, he was convinced that the greatest monsters were "skulkers," hunters who weren't as committed as he was. Having lurked on hunter-

net, he tortured and killed other chosen and would have made Anna another of his victims. She was ready to let it happen, to finally give in to the pain and despair. She wanted to die.

But she couldn't. She couldn't leave the cause to madmen like Baines. The imbued needed to know there was a way to fight, to die if need be, without becoming monsters themselves. She fought back, and she killed Baines.

Anna is still fighting.

PROFILE

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

Abilities: Academics (History) 4, Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 2, Computer 2, Crafts (Metal Work) 1, Dodge 2, Empathy 3, Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Law 2, Leadership 1, Linguistics 4, Medicine 1, Melee 2, Research (Library) 4, Science 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Allies 1, Arsenal 1, Contacts 3

Edges: (Martyrdom) Demand, Witness; (Redemption) Bluster; (Vision) Foresee

Mercy: 5, **Vision:** 2, **Conviction:** 5, **Willpower:** 8

SUNDARAM SINGH

Rumors persist of a holy man hiding in the wilds of Indian-occupied Kashmir who has declared a *jihad* against not only the oppressive Indian rulers of the province, but also against the "blue-eyed devils" who control them and the Pakistani government. This leader, one Sundaram Singh, reputedly was a school teacher in Peshawar when he received a vision one night showing the "work of the great devils" that set India and Pakistan at odds. He claims, through religious leaflets distributed in the region, that the devils' ultimate goal is to start a terrible battle for Kashmir that will broaden until it engulfs the world. Given that the two countries are the world's newest nuclear powers, Singh's prophetic statements possess a frightening degree of credibility.

People who have met Singh — mostly Pathan tribesmen — claim he is a small, unassuming man "with the power to move mountains." His feats of strength have already become legendary in the province, as has as his supposed ability to heal

the sick. The latter acts, in particular, have apparently earned him a desperate following in this poor part of the country and brought his teachings an eager and loyal audience.

Singh's miracles, however, have a chilling purpose. Since his name has become widespread in the province, there have been an alarming number of suicide bombings directed against Indian government outposts and civilian settlements. It's said that once he heals the sick, Singh explains that he gives a gift from Heaven that must be repaid. Unless the person uses his or her divinely given vitality to strike at the heart of the devils, Heaven will return the sickness a hundred-fold. The Indian government regards Singh as the leader of a Pakistan-funded terrorist group and has sent a number of soldiers into the field to apprehend him. So far, the Pathan tribes have managed to protect him from capture. Pakistan has responded as well, increasing funds to "freedom fighters" in the province and using Singh's example to stir up increased resistance against the Indian government.

Certain members of hunter lists have commented that, despite Singh's claims, he actually appears to be helping *true* devils turn his home into a nuclear flashpoint. None of the imbued know as yet what to make of Singh, but several hunters have voiced an interest in journeying to the province to make contact with him.

THE ANGEL OF BERLIN

Certainly one of the best-known and yet most mysterious of the devoted is an individual whom German hunters have begun to call the Angel of Berlin. No one admits having ever seen this person in the flesh, but his (or her) exploits have saved the lives of several hunters who have suffered reversals against the bloodsuckers that infest the German capital.

The Angel's *modus operandi* appears to be shadowing a hunter or group, providing timely warnings of monster or police ambush, and occasionally arranging for vital equipment or medical supplies to materialize. Whoever the Angel is, he has demonstrated considerable skill at surveillance and computer hacking, and at long-range marksmanship in more than one incident. The only contact the Angel makes is by telephone or email. Hunters who have heard his voice report that it's electronically altered, and emails that have been traced always lead back to one of Berlin's many cybercafes. The emails themselves always end with the same phrase, "We also serve who watch and wait." Below the sig line is a text-improvised representation of the devoted symbol, proof for many that the Angel is one of the imbued, not a subtle bloodsucker manipulating hunters for its own ends, as some still suspect.

Most speculation regarding the Angel leads hunters back to the same basic profile. The person is a fellow imbued, evidently one of the devoted, who must have considerable personal resources to perform his acts of generosity. He also clearly has extensive contacts within the Berlin police and a considerable amount of hard intelligence on the activities of the city's monsters.

If anyone can point to a flaw in the Angel's activities, it's that he is apparently willing to support hunters regardless of their motives or ruthlessness. It's been confirmed that the bomb that tore through an office building near the newly renovated Reichstag was built with explosives provided by the Angel. The blast claimed 15 lives, most of them innocent civilians on their way home from work. As well informed as the Angel seems to be, it seems hard to believe that he wouldn't know how the explosives would be used, which leads some to question if Berlin's mysterious benefactor is as angelic as his name suggests.



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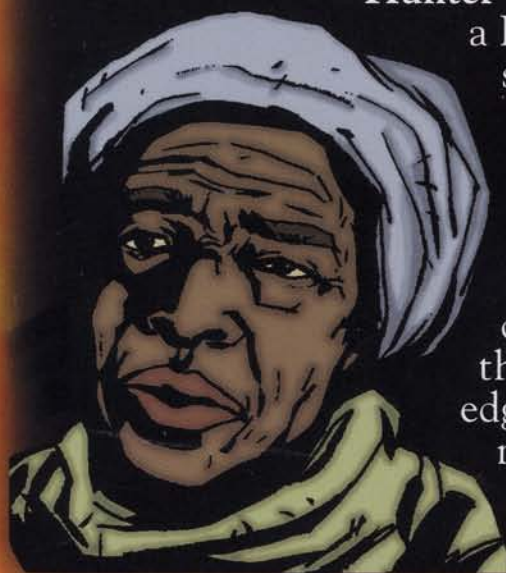
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