

A SOURCEBOOK FOR HUNTER: THE RECKONING

ALMA MATERS

HUNTER

THE RECKONING



HUNTER

THE RECKONING

History. Mystery. Secrets.

The colleges, universities, and other academic institutions in this book are rife with all three. Containing everything from succinct locations to take the heavy lifting out of designing a campus setting, to four deeply-developed settings suitable for an entire chronicle. Alma Maters sheds light on the ivory towers of academia - home to information that can keep a Hunter cell alive, and quarries that want them dead - in the World of Darkness.

Inside this book you'll find:

- Over fifty concise, ready-to-use academic-themed locations, including supernatural influences.
- Four fully detailed academic institutions each with a chronicle's worth of problems.
- Two antagonist groups that can be threats to any cell in any setting.
- New and revised player options to tie a Hunter to the world of academia.
- Rules and options for expanding research and investigation in the World of Darkness.



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Material Advisory: contains graphic and written content of a mature nature, including violence, sexual themes, and strong language. Reader discretion is advised.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION

Long, Dark Roots	7
Who Researches the Researchers	11
Academia Worldwide	12
The Opening Gambit	12
Themes of Academia	14
Creeds and Academics	16
Time in the Stacks	16
Languages, Literature, and Linguistics	20
Player Options	22

CHAPTER TWO: BURLINGTON COLLEGE

A Burlington Chronicle	36
History	37
Neldner Wellness Group	40
Locations	42
The Quarry: The Peripheral Man	48
People	52
In Chronicles	55
Response Algorithm	61

CHAPTER THREE: KEEN CAMPUS

A Keen Chronicle	62
History	63
Locations	63
The Quarry: Spectral Entities	66
People	70
In Chronicles	76
Response Algorithm	80

CHAPTER FOUR: BELLIUM UNIVERSITY AND THE PLEIADES

A Bellium Chronicle	87
History	89
The Seven Stars	90
Locations	94
The Quarry	96
People	99
In Chronicles	104
Response Algorithm	106

CHAPTER FIVE: STONECROP FINE ARTS INSTITUTE

A Stonecrop Chronicle	113
History	114
Life At Stonecrop	114
Locations	117
The Quarry: The Masters of Stonecrop	120
Secondary Quarry: The Fair Folk of Athelbarn	124
People	128
In Chronicles	129
Response Algorithms	131

CHAPTER SIX: THE CARDINAL QUILL FELLOWSHIP

The True Histories of Cardinal Quill	139
The Founding of A Lie	140
Organizational Structure	141
Initiation	142
Fellowship Allies	144
Encounters with the Fellowship	145
Members	146

CHAPTER SEVEN: THE GOURMAND SOCIETY

Aperitif	151
Entrée	152
Just Desserts	152
World Cuisine	153
Tonight's Menu	154
Encounters with the Gourmand Society	154
Members	155

CHAPTER EIGHT: ACADEMIC LOCATIONS

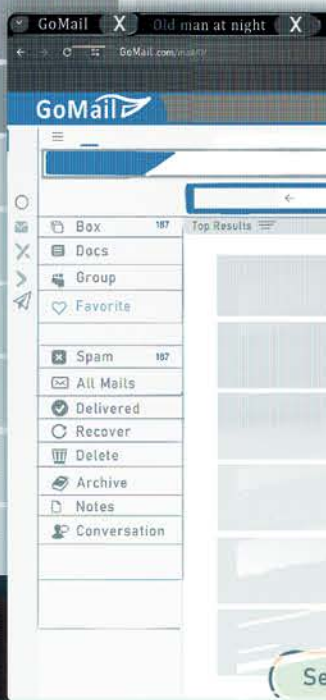
Sample Institutions	163
On-Campus Locations	165

Search < Dylan Murphy

- Box 187
- Docs
- Group
- Favorite
- Spam 187
- All Mails
- Delivered
- Recover
- Delete
- Archive
- Notes
- Conversation

- Top Results
- Sender:** Student Affairs
Title: Third Academic Integrity violation
Date: Tuesday, November 7, 2023 4:49 PM
 - Sender:** Jeanette May
Title: Academic integrity form incoming
Date: Tuesday, November 7, 2023 1:12 PM
 - Sender:** Otto Rufus
Title: Damage to rooftop statuary
Date: Thursday, November 2, 2023 8:27 AM
 - Sender:** Penelope Harvieux
Title: Trespassing Reported to Police
Date: Wednesday, November 1, 2023 11:22 PM
 - Sender:** Octavia Bynes
Title: Cheating Meeting with Dylan Mu...
Date: Monday, October 30, 2023 10:03 AM
 - Sender:** Campus Health
Title: re: Dining Hall Incident
Date: Wednesday, October 25, 2023 3:59 PM
 - Sender:** Student Affairs Coordinator
Title: Newly declared sculpture majors
Date: Friday, September 8, 2023 3:21 PM
 - Sender:** Walter King
Title: Congrats to this year's winners of...
Date: Wednesday, May 3, 2023 2:23 PM
 - Sender:** Campus News
Title: Upcoming Art Exhibition
Date: Monday, April 24, 2023 10:42 AM
 - Sender:** Student Affairs
Title: Update on the Class of 2025
Date: Tuesday, September 5, 2023 9:33 AM

Othman: They weren't just crushed T, they were fucking juiced!!! We're missing whole organs, the statues didn't walk away with those...



CLICK
HERE

EXPLORE
YOUR
STRENGTH

Jewish Mysticism Search Results

Encrypted DM

Sender: I think I've got something on the vandal. 1min

Gabrielle: ? 1min

Sender: Sculpture major, Religious Studies minor, four semesters of Biblical Hebrew and two of Arabic plus two semesters of independent study with a visiting professor last year who specializes in Egyptology and Assyriology... 48sec

Gabrielle: 🤔 15sec

Sender: He took a real downward turn a few weeks ago. which lines up with the timeline He'd understand the language and have the skill to inscribe the words on the statues like they were. now

Gabrielle: He'd understand the language and have the skill to inscribe the words on the statues like they were. now

Gabrielle: Pictures on his socials make him look strong enough to move the statues without too much trouble now

Sender: Holy shit, he's ripped... now

Gabrielle: And does shots at the Manhole now

Gabrielle: Still doesn't fit with Othman's concern about the victims though. We're missing a piece and this kid might have it now

Sender: Is he making this happen or trying to stop it? now

Gabrielle: If the kid doesn't share our motivation... we could take a page from our government friend and let this info slip to Othman's Arcanum contact instead now

Let's talk more at the meeting tonight once I finish going through some old emails

SEND

Gargoyle.jpg

Search

From: Jeanette May
Sent: Tuesday, November 7, 2023 1:12 PM
To: Tadesse Getechew, Dean of Students
Cc: Geraldine Prior
Subject: Academic Integrity form incoming

Dean Getetchew,
I wanted to give you a heads up that you're going to get an Academic Integrity form for Dylan Murphy later today in relation to his behavior in HIST/LING312 Language and Magic in the Ancient World. Dylan waited for his group members to turn in their essays for peer review and then simply copied large sections of those essays as his own. Professor Prior was very helpful as our department's graduate teaching advisor, but I made all the determinations myself here. On her recommendation, I wanted to file the official form both as a deterrent and so you could have a record in case Dylan has a pattern of this sort of behavior. I'm attaching a copy of the form with specific comments on my reasoning and the evidence of academic dishonesty.
Dylan wouldn't admit to anything wrong with his life outside the classroom, just that he's under a lot of stress. Something about a gargoyle he's making for his Sculpture major. Before this, Dylan was very engaged in the course at the beginning of the semester, but by October he was having major issues with attendance. I'm sure this has jeopardized his funding, as I think he needs to keep up a B average for his scholarship. I told him about that new campus mental health initiative, but he wasn't very receptive. What's weird is he supposedly convinced his group to choose this essay topic, which he was very involved

Dylan Murphy - Academic Integrity Form.



Introduction

"Knowledge itself is power."

-Francis Bacon

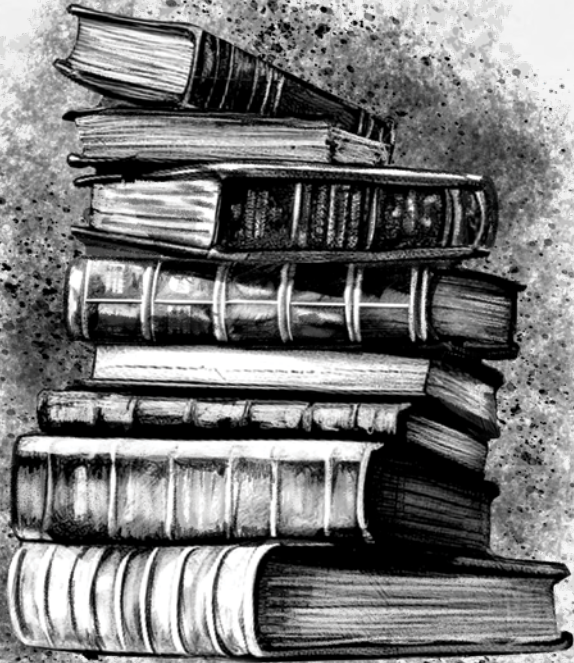
Universities, colleges, and research institutions are repositories of mysteries, secrets, and hidden history. They have their own rituals and social mores. And they're familiar territory for a lot of roleplayers.

In *Alma Maters*, we present *Hunter: The Reckoning* Storytellers with a rich potential source of stories, guiding them through ideas for hunts in a range of academic settings against an array of quarries. We're taking the Hunt off the streets and into the shadowy cloisters of academia.

A college or university campus makes a great central location for a story or chronicle. A variety of locations from libraries to coffee shops to forgotten corners. New buildings with strangely high security. A broad range of people and a cast that changes at the start of every academic year. Academies are also places most players won't associate with violence, which is an opportunity to build on *Hunter: The Reckoning's* message that not every problem is to be solved with bloodshed.

All locations and story seeds we present in *Alma Maters* are ready to play. You can drag and drop them into existing campaigns without any major revisions. Just about any chronicle setting can play host to a public university, a private and extremely secluded art school, or a thriving tech startup's research and development campus. We've provided enough detail to tie into real-world locations. If you want to take your Hunters to the wild and windswept north of England, the chic and monied towns of New England, or the thriving heart of metro Manila, you'll find the material has the right flavor to do just that. We've also included two conspiracies that aren't location-based (the Cardinal Quill Fellowship and the Gourmand Society) for chronicles that aren't rooted in a specific university campus.

Alma Maters is designed to serve a range of purposes. Far more than just a book of settings, it offers thoughts on how best to anchor a story or chronicle in the world of academia, academic locations ranging from the concise to the gloriously thorough for your group to mine for contacts, home bases,



allies, and antagonists, and enough academia-themed story seeds to keep a cell busy for years, in and out of character. We've included guidance on adapting pre-existing Hunter traits to academic situations and packaged up a few new ones to help tailor characters to a university setting.

Specifically, inside *Alma Maters*, you will find:

Chapter One: Orientation — The opening chapter is a guide to telling stories in the World of Darkness's academic shadows. It provides advice on making the most of venerable institutions' rich histories and strange rumors, as well as key themes to highlight in academic stories. Additionally, thoughts are provided on how to use an educational institution as more than just a library to plunder by bringing tension and action onto campus. Notes include how best to involve each Hunter Creed in academic life. A collection of expanded Skill uses, assets, and Edges rounds off *Alma Maters* and gives players new options for creating Hunters focused on research and knowledge.

Chapter Two: Burlington College — This large, public university ran drug trials for Big Pharma in the 1960s, and they've had a lasting effect. A dream-eating entity from another world stalks the campus and a recent surge of corporate funding has given it new life in the form of a psychoactive energy drink that's all the rage amongst the student body.

Chapter Three: Keen Campus — Keen Technologies' Connecticut campus is ultra-modern and prides itself on doing good. From its cruelty-free cafeteria menu to its community outreach, it works hard to distance itself from stereotypes of corporate greed. But its key product is an app that lets users speak with their dead loved ones, and it's definitely doing more harm than good.

Chapter Four: Bellium University and the Pleiades — This chapter introduces a network of private universities with a dual purpose: shoring up the regional status quo with unspoken networks of money and power, and providing hunting grounds for a cluster of vampires. Four bloodsucking monsters prey on Bellium, the network's institution in Manila. A dynast, an obsessive stalker, a necromancer and a beast make up the quartet. In their different ways, they all enjoy playing with their food.

Chapter Five: Stonecrop Fine Arts Institute — There's a distinct folk horror feel to this private art school in England's cold and austere northern region. Between the fey folk lurking on the edges of campus and the dangerous meddling of the sorcerers who weave their magic through their art, reality is fragile here, and countless dangers await the curious.

Chapter Six: Cardinal Quill — This academic secret society uses mythmaking and misdirection to cover the activities of its hidden vampire masters.

Chapter Seven: The Gourmand Society — This group of sorcerers plunder the material culture

of ancient Egypt, and many other civilizations, to prolong their lives and grant them power.

Chapter Eight: Academic Locations — This chapter presents 50 concise locations you can drop into any academic campus or college town with implied or explicit connections to paranormal beings. As well as these drag-and-drop locations you'll find several research- and study-focused micro settings, from hospitals to law schools, with enough sinister occurrences in which to create at least one story. ■

CONTENT WARNINGS

Hunter: The Reckoning is a game about desperately hunting a horrific Quarry. In addition to the usual vile events you can expect from World of Darkness games, such as graphic death, physical and emotional violence, stalking, and supernatural entities, this book specifically contains discussions of abuses of power and systemic corruption; addiction; bereavement and grief; cannibalism; capitalism and worker exploitation; cults; dream and nightmare sequences; drug and alcohol abuse; hallucinations and unreality; mental illness (including depression, self-harm, suicide, and trauma); mind control; oppression and bigotry (including classism, colonialism and racism, homophobia, sexism, xenophobia); and possession.

When incorporating some of the storylines, Quarries, or rules found in *Alma Maters* into your chronicle, consider implementing (or revisiting) the calibration techniques found under Advice for Considerate Play in *Hunter: The Reckoning* (pp. 274–279).

WELCOME!



ORIENTATION

Chapter One: Orientation

"Schools serve the same social functions as prisons and mental institutions - to define, classify, control, and regulate people."

-Michel Foucault

In theory, the academic world is one that intersects with the occult. Academia strives to uncover, to catalog, and to understand the unknown. In practice, colleges and universities bend to the demands of patronage, politics, and pettiness. For Hunters, the halls of academia host stacks of ancient knowledge that can aid in a hunt but also cast long shadows that hide their own perils.

Not every institute of higher learning has a monster of its own, but in the World of Darkness, academia still bows to the burdens of a broken, grasping world. Academic circles aren't always safe, and Hunters encounter different perils here: obstinate bureaucrats, addled professors, and early career post-docs hungry to find something they can use to make their reputations. The currency here isn't always money, but rather information, reputation, and access. Even if there's no monster right there on campus, a Hunter's probably only a couple of degrees of separation from one and could draw the attention of an academic buddy's mentor, sponsor, or patron at any point.

For every light that the academic world shines on a mystery, it also casts shadows that conceal terrible truths.

Long, Dark Roots

Many academic institutions have history stretching back centuries. They're able to trace their founding to religious or secular authorities who established them as institutes of learning, often with an additional agenda included. That long history gives them research resources that Hunters require: rare texts, original research, and specialized knowledge reside in these halls. Though a Hunter usually can't just come in off the street and ask to see the stacks for occult references, someone with the right connections and questions can often pry out useful, obscure information thanks to the sheer volume of historical works held in academia.

The downside of these historical roots is that any established academic institute is also likely teeming with its own problems. A university doesn't need a local ghost or vampire to cause problems for a Hunter — an overzealous dean, jealous professor, snooping student, or corporate liaison can cause plenty of mundane complications. Many academic halls have established ties to businesses, politicians, financial interests, and even churches. You can find their names on the walls of libraries, classrooms, or entire buildings. Navigating those relationships can complicate access for a Hunter. Explaining why you need to borrow a 13th century text with accompanying fragmentary alchemical remnants can be a real challenge when it's part of a display bankrolled by Consolidex Worldwide as a prestige exhibition, and the university sponsor really doesn't want to deal with the insurance headache when their piece disappears one day. On the other hand, if you can find the right undergraduate or postgraduate student, they might have access — if you can persuade them to risk sharing it with you.

A university doesn't need a local ghost or blankbody to cause problems for a Hunter

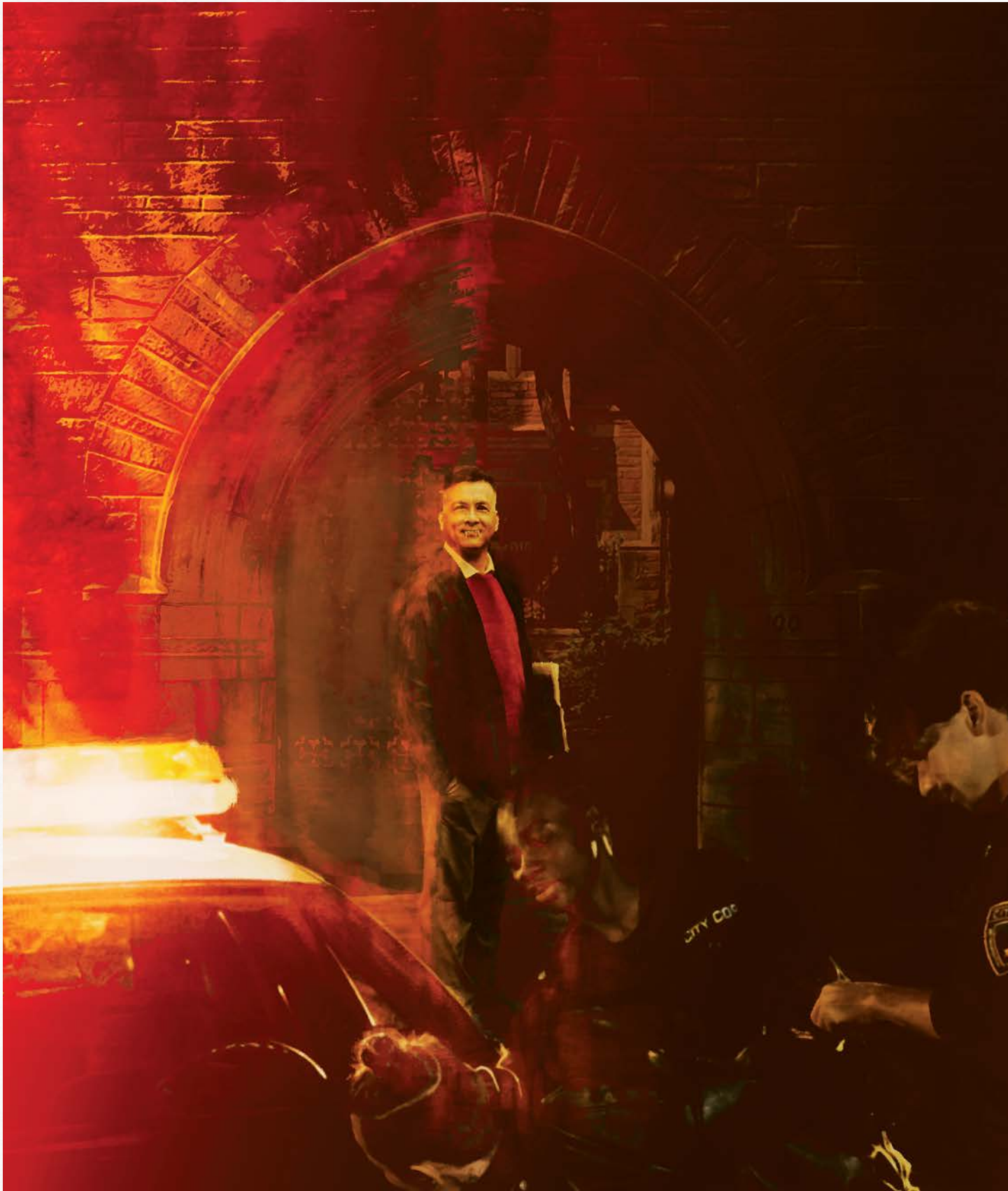
Even in very modern institutions, there's often a wealth of institutional knowledge that persists beyond the founding of the establishment. Instructors pass down both lessons and stories from their own mentors; modern schools apply technology to solve old problems, which means understanding those problems as well.

Who Researches the Researchers

Some Hunters are lucky enough to have pre-existing connections with academia — being a current student or one of the alumni can greatly ease access to university resources — but for everyone else, accessing academic resources can be a headache. Scholarly research papers may be freely available in the dissertation library or from the author, but who writes down useful knowledge about occult phenomena and supernatural entities in a peer-reviewed journal? The best resources are the scholars themselves, and talking to them means establishing some bond of trust. Nobody wants to risk their academic career by talking to a stranger about their odd experience that would trigger an investigation into competence and mental health.

To gain access, Hunters often require illegitimate channels. By presenting themselves as students, professionals in other fields, or would-be corporate connections, they convince unsuspecting people to give up secrets to aid the Hunt, but there's always the risk of discovery. Of course, the cell can always waltz in, acquire what they need by persuasion and con artistry, and then leave in a hurry when they have what they want. However, leaving behind those kinds of burned bridges is a liability with a place that might be a future resource of further information, especially if Hunters regularly operate in the same city.

Hunters with pre-existing connections to an institution have the best chance of finding access simply by virtue of already knowing the people and places. A Hunter at her alma mater may well gain favored treatment if she's made donations in the past.



Even a dropout may still know a professor or two, and knowing where to look is an important first step in information gathering.

For Hunters outside of academia, other routes exist. The university doesn't exist solely on the backs of teachers and researchers. There are building staff, security personnel, facilities managers, administrators, corporate liaisons, sports patrons, sports enthusiasts, groundskeepers, political operatives, social workers, and service providers of all kinds. Many faculty do some form of outreach, speaking to local schools or organizations. Each of these is a potential route to indirect access, whether by their own second-order connection to an information source, or by providing a way for the Hunters to gain entry in places where they aren't permitted. If the university thinks that a Hunter is actually a corporate sponsor, a sports scout, or a political operative, they may roll out the red carpet and allow all manner of access right up until the deception is revealed.

The university doesn't exist solely on the backs of researchers.

Academia Worldwide

The secular Western university occupies the popular consciousness, but it's far from the only system for academic institutions. Hunters may expect to walk onto a campus with a manicured green and pillared buildings topped with bell towers but discover the academic world is much more than just a Hellenistic campus.

Academic institutions around the world often reflect the circumstances of the community around them. A college in the middle of a poverty-stricken, over-policed city shares the oppressive pall of surveillance, lack of resources, and desperation. A university in a wealthy and politically connected town bears all the hallmarks

of glamorous, pristine spaces, exclusive cliques, and lavish libraries. Each comes with its own challenges: an underfunded school has limited access to the resources that Hunters need, but a wealthy and exclusive Ivy League university can treat the Hunters as outsiders and interlopers who are unwelcome in its halls. Just as often, a prestigious university provides an oasis of peace and privilege in a poor city. Sometimes an institution with relatively little to offer deliberately locates itself in a place synonymous with class, privilege, or erudition. The context of an institution says as much about life there as the campus itself.

Faith as Educator

Religious institutes have long doubled as educational centers. Indeed, they have been the centers of learning throughout the world for millennia. While theological institutions vary in the depth of their scientific programs, Hunters already live in a world that isn't explained by science. For that reason, Hunters tend to see religious institutions as logical channels for information. . After all, supernatural knowledge is much more likely to survive in a place that already keeps a tradition of non-repeatable, non-testable lore.

The search for answers to questions both prosaic and existential drove the creation of universities as expansions of Christian queries into the nature of the divine. Meanwhile, the Arabic world's Muslim temples and universities, such as al-Qarawiyyin, kept libraries of knowledge alive as Europe crawled through wars after the collapse of the Roman Empire. In China, Taoists developed chemical and mechanical knowledge spread through teachers and academies such as the Louguan-tai temple. In India, Hindu astronomers devised the whole number zero, and their mathematics spread worldwide.

Access to religious institutions proceeds much like a Hunter's approach to any other such institution: find a weak point in the form of a person who has access to what the cell needs, then convince them to help, either through persuasion, deception, or intimidation. There are two principal differences: first, religious leadership often has a motivation other than academic curiosity. They may want to spread the word of their faith, train the next generation of leaders, protect their attendees

from persecution, provide humanitarian services, or simply use the university as a shield for their own graft. Second, leaders and teachers at these institutions often have bonds of fellowship with attendees that go far beyond student-teacher relations. Instead, spiritual instructors are central to the emotional wellbeing of their charges. For this reason, Hunters must be careful about alienating or threatening religious instructors, or they risk turning all of their students into enemies as well.

The other major problem for Hunters at such institutions is their outsider status. A Muslim Hunter may be able to navigate a madrasa, but some Hunters would have little knowledge of how to approach a Zoroastrian Atashkadeh or a Jain Derasar. Suspicion and derision from outsiders cause such institutions to take on a guarded stance. Hunters must prove their good intentions, but local religious leaders may have prying questions about why exactly the cell has shown up on their doorstep and what, specifically, they are really looking for.

Because of their roots, religious schools sometimes have access to unusual texts, relics, and artistic pieces with depictions of monstrous figures, from which Hunters can glean useful clues. Hunters seeking use of these facilities may be asked for donations of time and money, local service, or attendance at religious functions.

After all, supernatural knowledge is much more likely to survive in a place that already keeps a tradition of non-repeatable, non-testable lore.

Trade Schools

Universities offering liberal arts degrees aren't the only ones with useful tools for Hunters. Trade schools are excellent resources for Hunters looking to build

their own weapons, modify vehicles, learn how to punch through plaster walls effectively, disable locks and alarm systems, and exploit gas and water lines as weapons.

Since trade (sometimes "vocational") schools focus on pragmatic skills, they don't offer much in the way of occult books and artifacts. Instead, they're places to develop a better understanding of craftsmanship. A trade school isn't where you go to learn how to kill a werewolf. It's where you go to cast the silver bullets for the job.

The challenge for Hunters at trade schools is that they're places of practical knowledge, and supernatural monsters are often anything but practical. An instructor may well want to know what you're really trying to do, especially if it involves breaking the law.

In addition, trade schools can have problems with monsters. A trade school's campus may be a vampire using the school as a source of blood and labor for its territory, the site of a haunting from a tradesperson who died unexpectedly, a demon-possessed automobile in a shop, or a bizarre extradimensional entity that hides in the walls and frequents the spare parts closets.

Online Learning

Fast internet connections make it possible to collaborate with people around the world, and that means classes with no actual physical presence. Anonymity is a huge asset. The downside is that you have no access to physical texts and artifacts.

Online learning offers Hunters a chance to make connections. Signing up as a student is easy with computer access and gives the opportunity to ask all kinds of questions under the guise of learning the topic. The forum doesn't even need to be part of a physical university; a decentralized, online-only class may cross borders and provide interstate or international perspectives.

Online classes do come with the drawback that the Hunter's queries and comments are stored somewhere forever. If you ask about how to mix industrial metal cleaner and gel into a thermite-like compound and then burned remnants of vampire servitors start showing up, your posts on the chemistry class forums could be exhibit A when the police come to question you.

If you ask about how to mix industrial metal cleaner and gel into a thermite-like compound and then burned remnants of vampire servitors start showing up, your posts on the chemistry class forums could be exhibit A when the police come to question you.

The Opening Gambit

Except for daredevil Hunters with a death wish, research makes up the first, longest, and most important step of a Hunt. There's no sense confronting a monster if you don't know what it can do to you and how to kill it.

Experienced Hunters typically find research work takes up 75 percent of the time invested in any given Hunt. While Hunters try to front-load as much of this as possible, it's common to break for further research in between skirmishes with a monster or monsters. Sometimes, the creature does something unexpected; occasionally, the initial information turns out wrong. Either way, if the Hunters survive the first encounter but the monster gets away — or there turns out to be more than one of them — further research is a necessity.

Hunters engaging in research quickly learn not just to dig into local libraries and internet chatrooms, but to present themselves as interested parties while interviewing academics and prowling the halls of scholarly investigation. Hunters who can't fit in among the students and staff discover that information may be free, but education comes at a price.

Themes of Academia

Scenes taking place in the academic world usually revolve around connections, knowledge, and mysteries. Other parallel themes arise as the Hunters deal with the agendas of people or organizations that work within the institution.

Connections

When Hunters face an unknown adversary, basic research involves finding connections between evidence and the Quarry. Not every monster leaves behind obvious clues, and many don't readily fit a Hunter's stereotype of a vampire or werewolf. Even though monsters do tend to fit into categories, some are quite strange, and turning pieces of the puzzle into knowledge of the Quarry requires making connections with events and evidence to whatever occulted lore is available.

At the same time, the researchers need to make connections with the academics themselves. Access to rare materials doesn't come without questions. The Hunters must develop a relationship with someone who can give them the resources that they need — deep secrets about strange phenomena aren't typically found in the public section of the library, and experts in their fields provide specialized knowledge that may be useful: talking to a marine biologist who understands bioelectricity may provide useful tips for defending against a creature that shocks its prey, while a communications engineer might decipher strange radio signals emanating from an area of supernatural activity.

Access to rare materials doesn't come without questions.

Making these connections means either providing a plausible cover or risking everything by bringing academics into the Hunt. As with other humans just

going about their lives, the overwhelming majority of academic contacts don't believe in supernatural phenomena. They want nothing to do with Hunters making wild claims about monsters, and wish to shut down all access as soon as they become suspicious. Some Hunters pretend to be students or fellow researchers, which can prove difficult, as one must develop some level of expertise within the field and have a way to explain the lack of notable publications, not to mention that experts often know one another in person from conferences. Others forge arranged friendships or romances or even pressure researchers with the threat of violence. But any such arrangement quickly disintegrates once the Hunter's true agenda becomes apparent.

On rare occasions, an academic may see the Hunter's clues for their true meaning and commit to aiding in the hunt. These academics either become secret allies or become so obsessed with discovering the truth and eliminating the unnatural that they become pawns (and likely victims) to a vampire or sorcerer.

Examples of this theme in stories include:

- The Hunters discover an acidic residue at the site of several disappearances and take it to a local university for analysis by a biochemist. The biochemist turns out to be the ex-fiancé of one of the Hunters' family members, who broke up on bad terms. Finding the connection between the monster and its residue means also navigating the bad blood of that toxic connection between the Hunter and the academic.
- Strange symbols at the sites of brutal killings appeared tied to gothic artwork associated with the *Lesser Key of Solomon*, but from an original and uncorrupted part of the *Ars Theurgia Goetia*. Acquiring a copy means dealing with an old librarian who reminisces about the good old days and has more than a few stories about his time as a soldier and his regrets. Winning his trust means forming a personal connection by finding ways to relate to his stories and learning to appreciate his take on history. And the Hunters can certainly appreciate what it means to be a soldier with ugly stories that you hesitate to share.
- Reports of a mono-like outbreak around the local college campus lead Hunters to believe that there's a vampire at work on the student population.

Though the targets come from different places and different walks of life, the vampire must have some criteria for choosing them — even if it's just ease of attack. The Hunters must interview the students without attracting suspicion, figure out what makes them all connected, and then use that to figure out why the vampire chose them as its prey.



Secrets

Though the academic world often prides itself on holding up the light of truth and discovering knowledge, it is still a world filled with flawed people guided by their pride, their obstinacy, and their shame. Hunters digging for hidden lore quickly discover that not everything is hidden because it's part of the supernatural world. Researchers may try to hide the fact that they stole their work from someone else, or that there's data out there that doesn't support their claims, or that their supporting sources come from questionable roots. Anyone whose living and reputation comes from academic research work has something to lose and something to protect if their credibility is destroyed — falsely or not — and works to prevent that.

Hunters digging for hidden lore quickly discover that not everything is hidden because it's part of the supernatural world.

Every academic professional knows that writing papers or publishing internet essays about cryptids, UFOs, or monsters is risky. Depending on their institution's sympathies and their own prestige, it can be a quick way to lose the tenure track and any chance at paid speaking engagements, endorsements, or collaboration offers. Many credible academics, therefore, avoid Hunters diligently: even being seen in a short video talking with a raving conspiracy theorist can be damaging to the reputation. That means Hunter interactions with academics beyond the most cursory level are, themselves, secrets. The Hunter and the academic can't always afford to let their collaboration become public. A Hunter who has a respectable veneer as a reputable professor must carefully balance the incongruities of hunting with the demands of a job that requires an appearance of stability and rationality. There's a lot of work to do to repair a reputation dashed by a moment of honest terror or panicked ranting about the supernatural. Of

course, a Hunter driven to desperation or into intense danger has nothing to lose and may press the issue.

The secrets of the academic world parallel the secrets of the supernatural world. Both hold invested parties who don't want their indiscretions made public. Both have information that Hunters want. Hunter interactions with members of mundane academia suffer moral compromises when the Hunters discover that the academics might not be supernatural monsters, but they can still be very human monsters — abusers, thieves, liars — whose work has ruined lives. A Hunter's Drive means that their focus tends to remain on the monstrous, but they may find that their disgust at the excesses of certain academics pressures them to do something about these non-supernatural villains as well.

Examples of this theme in stories include:

- The Hunters hear of a paper by a postgraduate researcher who investigated reports of some kind of cryptid, an atavistic humanoid living in the remote wilderness but now encroached upon by human expansion (which, of course, could place this anywhere in the world for your game). The research was laughed out of academia, and the researcher is now trying to bury that part of their past. To dig up the suppressed research, they first have to find out where the former grad student is living, how they changed their name and reworked their identity to forge a new life in an attempt to leave it all behind, then turn the knowledge they glean from the traumatized academic into actionable information to find this hidden cryptid.
- While following the paper trail of various shell companies and expenses that point to a conspiratorial organization of warlocks hiding in plain sight among sellers of aromatherapy and herbal remedies, the Hunters stumble across a series of payments from a prominent figure at a religious university. The individual in question has used his position to engage in persistent patterns of abuse and exploitation against students at the institute, then paid off the conspirators when they threatened to expose his misdeeds. Now, the Hunters can lean on him for information about the warlocks, but in return, he demands their silence — and his influential position means that he could make life

difficult for the Hunters by calling in favors from among local police or media figures. Betraying his secrets means that the Hunters also tip their hand to the warlocks, who may disappear before they can be confronted if they catch wind of the betrayal. The Hunters must engage their Hunt secretly so that the Quarry never catches on to the fact that they're in the Hunters' sights, and find a way to secretly pressure the weak link into arranging a meeting or contact that gives away the identities and locations of the conspirators so that the Hunters can strike.

The Hunters must engage their Hunt secretly so that the Quarry never catches on to the fact that they're in the Hunters' sights

- In a flipped script, a monster approaches one of the Hunters and threatens to release secrets from that Hunter's past unless the cell gives it a pass and leaves it be. In return, the creature promises to go easy on the Hunters' territory, indulging in only a few killings and maimings. To stop the creature, the Hunters must either accept their cellie's secrets becoming public — and potentially ruining reputation, career, and family ties — or find some way to counter the monster's hidden dossier that's set to release if it disappears suddenly. Then, they still have to figure out the creature's weakness so that they can confront it, all while the Hunters maintain the veneer of normalcy among their academic contacts so that they aren't written off as deranged conspiracy theorists.

Compromises

Dedicated academics may want nothing more than to be left alone with their research, but there's always a price tag attached. Grandiose libraries and high-tech labs are only possible with funding, after all. Academics must therefore make compromises: university athletic

programs bring in sponsorship money; ethically bankrupt companies offer contributions in exchange for patents and ownership of original research; shady government agencies recruit promising students with the promise of future cooperation with the institution. Academics deal with getting their hands dirty just as much as Hunters do.

The fact that academics and Hunters share this distasteful position of compromising with outside agencies to achieve their goals creates a setting for collaboration. Government-sponsored agencies, such as the FBI's Special Affairs Division, may work in conjunction with both academics and Hunters. But they're just as likely to flash a badge, pressure someone for assistance, and then leave without cleaning up the local mess. Hunters can find common ground with academics who've been forced to compromise with such interests.

At the same time, Hunters may find themselves pressured to make compromises on behalf of their own contacts. It's not every day that a harried post-doc looking for a teaching position has the assistance of hardened, experienced field workers who really want an early copy of the *Hemavores and Triggered Dopamine Production* paper and are willing to do some questionable things to get it. The Hunters don't always have to kill the competition to help their contacts: research can be stolen or destroyed, candidates delayed so they miss appointments and interviews, opposition positions smeared with internet campaigns and endorsements by obviously reactionary hate-peddlers. Suppose you're jockeying for a grant for your work on the psychological narrative of dream structures and you're up against another grad student who's doing a Jungian analysis of non-Eurocentric archetypes. How much easier is it for you to secure funding if a sketchy, armed individual offers to make and promote a video endorsing your opponent in conjunction with a wild array of hateful and bigoted statements? The grant committee will be sure to take that into consideration when deciding who gets funding.

The compromises Hunters make with academia parallel the concessions they make in fighting monsters. Killing a monster that feels remorse for preying upon humans can bring a Hunter some self-reflection for their own misdeeds in lying to and stealing from the people that the Hunters protect. Letting a monster escape in a moment of mercy

or hesitation may resurface memories of when someone else chose not to take the Hunter to task for a mundane transgression. In both cases, the Hunter makes a compromising decision that has later consequences, once again drawing out the question: how far is too far? What acts are justified in the Hunt to defend humanity from monsters? How much does Drive push you to do terrible things that you can't justify, and how much can you live with?

What acts are justified in the Hunt to defend humanity from monsters?

Examples of this theme in stories include:

- An enterprising engineer constructs an arc gun at the Hunters' request — a powerful electrical charge weapon for use against creatures resistant to kinetic damage. The engineer insists on supervising field testing herself. She wants to know what the Hunters are going to do with it and won't take no for an answer. Getting her to release the weapon to them may require the Hunters to bring her along on a Hunt, which means exposing her to the danger of the supernatural world. Does she back out when she realizes what they're up against? Does she become another victim without unlocking the weapon for the Hunters? Or does it awaken her own Drive to protect humanity? And how do the Hunters feel about completely upending someone else's life for their own tactical advantage?
- To gain access to an old, suppressed piece of research, one of the Hunters digs into the details of a wistful professor's life and finds the easiest hook is posing as a missing niece from the professor's past. In fact, by casting the disappearance as the work of a monster, the Hunter might convince the professor to become sympathetic to their actual cause. But is it worth the fallout when the professor inevitably discovers the truth — especially if the real missing person shows up suddenly, having been abducted under mysterious circumstances years ago?

- The Hunters learn of a special kind of ammunition made for a completely different purpose (designed to burn out and disintegrate so as not to leave identifying marks, for use by special forces and teams that want deniability in their assassinations) that happens to have useful qualities against their quarry. The lead researcher of the lab that developed it is happy to sell it to them, no questions asked — but in taking their money, he also realizes that there's a black market for this new ammunition and starts selling it to other interested parties, including some that are adversaries to the Hunters. The most effective way to stop the pipeline is to kill the inventor, but are the Hunters ready to simply kill a fellow human in cold blood?

Creeds and Academics

Creed can influence a Hunter's interactions with the academic world, though it's not prescriptive. Just as Hunters of the same Creed may have different approaches to the Hunt, they may have different connections to academia, and some Hunters are better defined by how they reject the stereotypes of their Creed.

Some Hunters are better defined by how they reject the stereotypes of their Creed

- **Entrepreneurial:** The academic world can spark inspiration. The hidebound traditionalism of tenure and stodgy deans is a barrier to true innovation. Entrepreneurs look for up-and-coming students with new ideas and experiments that may provide an unconventional advantage in monster-hunting. Such Hunters often present themselves as

potential business investors looking to partner with a university for a new patent, or as media reporting on cutting-edge research.

- **Faithful:** Hunters tend to have a dualistic relationship with academia: many academic institutions have religious roots, but the deterministic world of science — and the stubborn show your evidence, with citations autocrats in other fields — are sometimes at odds with the intuitive, unprovable world in which the Faithful live. Faithful Hunters frequently see modern academic institutions as a starting point to develop knowledge, as distinct from wisdom — something that they feel that Hunters have due to learning that the world isn't defined solely by physical laws and universal rules.
- **Inquisitive:** Hunters usually feel at home in academic settings where questions are asked and answered, and learning is prized. The greatest threat to such Hunters is often the desire to spend more time teasing out knowledge, seeking detailed explanations for every piece of a puzzle, and spending inordinate time chasing down leads. The Inquisitive must temper their desire for complete knowledge with the reality that time, money, and allies' patience are always ticking down, and human lives may be on the line, forcing them to act with incomplete information — something that their Drive may push them to do once they're reminded of the task at hand.
- **Martial:** Hunters can find homes in the ancillary functions of academia: among the GI Bill soldiers earning a degree, the martial arts clubs, the sports programs, and the university-to-military-complex pipeline. For them, the academic world is merely a toolkit, a place to develop both the people and the equipment to build a better warrior. They chafe at interactions with isolated academics who lack worldly experience and with the stereotypical college anti-war protester. The Martial Hunter realizes that there's no compromising or negotiating with monsters, there's only the Hunt.



- **Underground:** Hunters recognize that academic spaces are still hotbeds of human connection. Ghost-written papers, exam sheets, drug trades, paid grades, campus surveillance — if you know which palms to grease, you can have a window into any life on campus. Since universities are frequently places where people of all kinds mingle and socialize, the Underground Hunter becomes a social chameleon, taking on any role as needed to move seamlessly through the crowds, just another student or staffer blending in with the wide range of cultures, always on the lookout for the right connection to advance the cause.

Time in the Stacks

Time is always an adversary to Hunters: the more time spent on research work, the longer the enemy has to carry out its depredations. There's always a sense of urgency when digging for lore — at the very least, because of the need to find out how to stop the monster before it claims another victim.

Alternatives to Reading

Not every Hunter is versed in academia, and standing guard while the team's occultist flips through a pile of books is repetitive and boring. Fortunately, there are myriad ways for other Hunters to contribute to the search for knowledge.

- When dealing with academic institutions, diplomacy is far preferable to violence. Hunters who start roughing up security guards and staff lose access to campus, and the school calls the cops to enforce that ban. Better to play off as an interested party, investor, fellow scholar, relative of a student, or some other role that would grant access.

- Someone has to be the face of the team and ensure that not only does the cell reach its intended information stockpile, but that nobody disturbs them or asks too many prying questions while research goes on.
- Hunters researching forbidden information in restricted areas benefit from a misdirection strategy: send part of the cell to commit some kind of high-profile problem as a distraction so that security responds. The infiltrators simultaneously sneak and perhaps steal the books and artifacts the cell needs. The longer the distraction team can drag out the altercation and keep security chasing after them, the longer the infiltration team has to acquire the important information.
- Infiltration teams occasionally use a one-two access plan. Half of the cell enters beforehand to make sure that the right doors are open and the right people out of the way before the remaining cellies slip into a restricted area. The Hunters might even take the opportunity to drop off useful equipment where their associates can pick it up later.
- Modern institutes keep delicate information encrypted on computers with passwords, and that calls for computer expertise. Assuming the data isn't stored on the cloud, the Hunters might even decide to just steal the entire computer and hack into it at their leisure. But if they don't want to leave any signs of entry, they may have no choice but to defeat security in place.
- Taking on a menial staff role gives a Hunter access to a location and a chance to simply walk in where people aren't normally allowed, mainly through all Staff Only doors. Hunters used to labor jobs like janitorial work, food service, and facilities operations can often find part-time contract openings at universities. They may be at the bottom of the social ladder compared to the professors and grad students, but all they need is the magnetic key card that grants access to every lab, every library, and every storeroom that has a waste bin to empty.

All they need is the magnetic key card that gives access to every lab, every library, and every storeroom that has a waste bin to empty

- Colleges and universities often have a surrounding college town, complete with social life, local businesses, and the park where students go to fraternize off-campus. If access is the problem, then a chance meeting outside of the usual work environment for a professor, student, or staffer may provide an opening. Hunters who have other skills can look for shared interests, hobbies, and practices: coincidentally meeting at a yoga class, a favored restaurant with karaoke night, or a community theatre can provide an opening, one that the Hunter can exploit thanks to their actual knowledge of the venue. A Hunter's life skills can provide the means to make the connection that gives an excuse for showing up later on campus or even at a target's home in search of access to more information.
- Many supernatural creatures have attacks that leave wounds later described by mundane coroners as animal attacks. A Hunter with experience with animals — a trainer, groomer, veterinarian, or control officer — can enter a multitude of situations by posing as an animal expert after the latest such attack. Some Hunters with animal expertise even develop a roster of likely comparisons, developing knowledge of what kind of monster might have an attack that looks like a bear mauling, snake bite, or stingray puncture.

TAKING ON THE OUTSIDE ROLE

When splitting a cell as part of an investigation, you can keep the other players involved by giving them roles to take on as some of the bystanders and mundane people in the scene. For each Hunter who's otherwise occupied, the Storyteller creates a role for that player to assume. Each of these extras complicates the scene in some fashion: a chatty security guard who just doesn't take the hint and leaves when the Hunter shows up as the shift relief; the suspicious student who wonders why the Hunters are in the professor's office after office hours; the officious bureaucrat who challenges the Hunters on their presence in the library and demands that they leave the restricted stacks at once; the ambitious hacker who's also there to steal proprietary information and wants to finish the job without getting caught and thus doesn't want to tip a hand to the Hunters, but also wonders how to use them to throw the blame for the theft on someone else.

A typical bystander has a dice pool of 3–4 for mundane tasks, or 6–7 in their specialty areas. Give the player a simple agenda and a complication to throw at the cell, and let them play adversary to the rest of the team — a favor that'll be repaid when the scene switches to the other members of the cell.

Languages, Literature, and Linguistics

Fluency in multiple languages unlocks information that might otherwise be inaccessible. Linguistic accomplishment can also be a tool for secrecy, keeping conversations and messages inaccessible to outsiders. Knowing a language may allow a player's character to interact with others, send messages across space and time, or access written information meant for other individuals. Language can also serve to strengthen cultural bonds between characters or to indicate a character's cultural identity.



In many parts of the UK or US, monolingualism is the norm, but most of the rest of the world is not monolingual. **Hunter** assumes your character speaks one language with complete fluency, and possibly a second (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 70). Additional languages require the Linguistics Merit, where each dot confers fluency in an additional language.

Optional Rule: Academics Specialties — Allow players to select a *Language and Literature* Specialization for the Academics Skill, in lieu of purchasing the Linguistics Background, which covers fluency in one language plus associated culture and literature. Latin Language and Literature would allow the character to read classical and medieval Latin and use that specialty when making an Academics test related to ancient Roman history and culture, or even medieval Latin manuscripts. Writing. Arabic Language and Literature might confer knowledge of the modern dialects of Arabic as well as the Qur'an and classical Arabic literature. There's no reason to restrict this to classical or dead languages: Lakhota Language and Literature covers the oral traditions, history, and contemporary culture of the Lakhota Nation in addition to fluency in the language. This optional rule gives players a little more oomph out of their languages and easier access to another language via the free specialty in Academics.

In Chronicles

In an *Alma Maters* chronicle, Storytellers should consider keeping a list of languages that the players' characters know at hand to make such language knowledge feel useful but also to help spotlight particular characters' abilities. Providing a clue outside those languages known to the players' characters is a barrier to progress: such a barrier may be overcome by a test with a relevant skill or longer-term project (translating a text or speech from a language you're not very proficient in can be tedious and time-consuming). See also Translation and Interpretation, p. 28

Additional clues: Languages open clues, and not just in traditional academic works. Diaries, letters, and postcards; messages written on the back of a photograph; graffiti (modern or ancient); email, text

messages, or other digital communications; usernames and other online handles; labels on imported products; song lyrics or poetry, inscriptions on a statue or building: any of these more mundane clues could be impossible to find for characters not proficient in Spanish, Amharic, or Old Church Slavonic. Even simply recognizing the letters or script a message is written in could be a clue: (i.e. distinguishing Cyrillic vs Greek letters).

Tailoring to payer Interest: Languages characters know likely indicate the cultures the players are interested in seeing in the game. Modern languages can be easy to include as a Quarry may have studied a language in school or be an emigrant or visitor (or, more poshly, an ex-pat). Ancient languages suit Quarries with direct or indirect ties to a specific ancient culture, or who are fellow academics.

Automatic machine translation: Machine translation is still relatively new, imprecise, and error-prone, even when augmented by artificial intelligence. Our world collectively speaks an estimated 7,000 languages, only a fraction of them are supported by machine translation and much of that isn't high quality. Machine translation may never be as precise as human translation. Automatic machine translation (a Technology test) could solve some problems, or it may not function well. Idioms and cultural allusions might be key elements that an Academics test would reveal, but a Technology test would not. Hand-written documents, or those with three-dimensional elements (like inscriptions on a statue) may be difficult to enter into a machine-readable form: failure on such tests might involve a win-at-a-cost of time. Lots of time.

Scholarly languages: Arabic, English, French, German, Greek, Latin, Russian, and other languages with long-standing literary and scientific traditions might grant insight into scientific or scholarly situations. An Intelligence + Academics (Latin Language and Culture) might not give the same results as an Intelligence + Science (Natural World) test would, but knowing the word *crocuta* refers to hyenas could be the clue players characters need. The reverse could also be appropriate if a language isn't known to the players' characters, but they are versed in Science or another skill related to the plot point.

Player Options

This material expands the ways Hunters interact with the world around them, exploring the differing analytical approaches you can apply to the hunt, how to tailor Edges to the particular world of academia, and introducing new Advantages and Flaws appropriate for Hunters steeped in academia.

The Research Test

Once the Hunters dig through the books, journals, and files, finding the information they want — if it exists in that location — is typically a Challenging (Difficulty 4) or higher test unless they know exactly where to find what they need. The dice pool varies based on the nature of the information, shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1: RESEARCH MATERIALS AND SKILLS

Materials	Possible Dice Pool
Books, ledgers, journals	Resolve + Academics
Computer files, internet forums, the Cloud	Intelligence + Technology
Interviewing experts	Manipulation + Persuasion (limited by the rating of the relevant knowledge of the topic such as Academics, Finance, Occult, or Science)
Digging through physical materials	Resolve + Awareness
Understanding complex experimental processes	Intelligence + Science

Other dice pools are relevant from time to time; for instance, the Hunters might need to open, lift, and investigate a heavy sarcophagus and its stone contents (Strength + Craft if the Hunter's figuring out how to correctly open it, or Strength + Athletics if they're just using brute force), or stay up until dawn drinking and debating with a professor to gain her respect (Stamina + Etiquette).

Break the research task into discrete time blocks based on its overall complexity. A very obscure topic might have blocks of days, a difficult but approachable task measured in hours, and a straightforward one in blocks of fifteen minutes. Each time block permits one roll, but

also introduces one complication. The complication could be a nosy staffer, a missing or broken item, a call from a desperate contact interrupting the Hunter — anything that forces the cell to respond and risks interrupting their research. The cell can defer an interruption with a promise to deal with it later, but the problem usually becomes more serious and causes problems during the Hunt phase of their operation.

For pacing purposes it's best to give the Hunters no more than five time blocks for research, or else the scene will drag on. If the Hunters reach this limit without accumulating the necessary successes, then they only find some of what they need, from the incredibly obvious (zero successes) through more useful and obscure discoveries in line with the number of successes gained. Note that scoring no successes can offer information of its own. It can indicate that they're proceeding from a false assumption, that their field of inquiry is wrong, or that they need to find a different information resource to pursue.

If the Hunters have unlimited time and no pressure on them, don't roll. Given enough time and the right library, they'll get what they need.

An Application of Skill

Thorough research and investigation are the foundations of every hunt. With the hunt's success and the cell's safety at stake, it pays to exercise the cell's varied Skills and Attributes before stepping outside the safety of your dorm room.

The advanced applications presented here offer a group means to exploit the full range of Skills, ensuring everyone's equally useful when contributing to the tension and drama of a story. They demonstrate how to approach complex tasks that utilize specialized knowledge and break down tasks by focus, looking at other angles to approach a test from, and the ways a simple task can be opened up, allowing characters with differing areas of expertise to influence the research.

Applied Science

Hunter games can use science in countless ways, especially once characters with an academic slant join

the hunt. Deducing who or what you're up against requires not only scientific training but a whole range of supporting skills.

Dealing with the sciences shouldn't be limited to characters who own their own lab coat; other Skills that can influence scientific inquiry as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2: SKILLS FOR APPLIED SCIENCE

Skill	Use
Academics	Recalling and applying historical beliefs
Awareness	Detecting corrupted ingredients in the formula, noticing chemical smells
Crafts	Jury-rigging temporary lab equipment
Science	Crafting poisons, extracting silver ore, making drugs, calculating tensile strength of a cage, synthesizing blood substitutes
Streetwise	Procuring obscure ingredients

CSI: DIY

Not everyone can be an enrolled student of forensics, but at some point, every Hunter finds themselves on the sharp end of at least one crime scene. How characters interact with these delicate environments can have critical implications — especially if they created it!

The most common Skill used in these scenarios is Investigation, and for a simple casing of the scene, it's perfect shorthand. Ways to implement different forensic Skills are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3: SKILLS FOR FORENSICS

Skill	Use
Insight	Deducing the emotional state of the killer (calm, frenzied, methodical)
Investigation	Getting a feel for the scene, gleaning basic facts
Medicine	Determining cause and time of death
Science	Analyzing samples, interpreting DNA
Stealth	Covering your tracks, cleaning up evidence
Subterfuge	Planting misleading evidence
Survival	Finding tracks, defining point of entry/exit

Computer Queries

Beyond the basics, computers are a powerful medium for research and investigation, from interrogating databases to running complicated behavioral models, or even training AIs.

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Computer use doesn't always rely on the Technology Skill — rather, tests can be based on what a Hunter's trying to achieve. Table 4 shows different skills which could be tested when using computers.

TABLE 4: SKILLS FOR COMPUTER USE

Skill	Use
Academics	Online research, finding old texts, translation, digital library work
Finance	Finding and interpreting tax records, following the money
Intimidation	Blackmail, extortion
Leadership	Convincing others to fix a target
Larceny	Erasing a digital footprint
Streetwise	Purchasing personal data online
Subterfuge	Social engineering, spear-phishing, catfishing
Technology	Hacking a device, hiding or tracing an IP, data mining, writing code

Remember, simple tasks like checking email don't require Skill tests. Computers and phones are designed so you can do simple tasks with zero skill.

Computers have varying levels of security, ranging from basic, off-the-shelf antivirus packages to fully fledged military grade protection. Consider the following Difficulties in Table 5 when players target these environments.

TABLE 5: COMPUTER SYSTEMS DIFFICULTIES

System	Difficulty
Beginners system	1–2
Small Corporation, Private College	3
Robust Corporation, Large University	4–5
Military or secured networks	6–7
Top Secret or central government	8+
Air-gapped Environment	Cannot be accessed remotely, must be local.

Perception

Higher education asks students to think critically and assess whether a piece of data — textual, data-based, or sensory — fits a pattern or stands out.

Awareness is used in most perception tests, but the Attribute it's paired with significantly impacts the way it's deployed. Intelligence calls on memory and recognition, allowing you to interpret your discovery: recognizing the distinction between heavy bleach and the smell of strong acid, for example. Wits is instinctive, a reaction in the moment. While you don't necessarily process the flash of movement's true meaning, you're aware something changed. Resolve is focus and concentration for when you're actively paying attention and filtering out other distractions; if you want to detect the monster slipping away from its skinsuit during the raging fire, then you'd better hope you've plenty of Resolve.

These tests are opposed if the target doesn't want to be noticed, but using the target's Stealth rating as the base Difficulty is a good way to speed up rolls — especially if the target's idle rather than actively hiding or sneaking.

Table 6 shows some options for how different Skills interact with perception.

TABLE 6: SKILLS FOR PERCEPTION

Skill	Use
Awareness	Touch, smell, sight, and sound.
Etiquette	Bad manners, picking out people who don't fit in, social awkwardness.
Insight	Suppressed emotions, subtle hints.
Investigation	Casing the scene, picking up clues.
Leadership	Identifying who's really in charge here.
Medicine	Identifying viral symptoms, visually diagnosing anemia.

Preparedness

Hunter: The Reckoning assumes a basic level of competency, trusting characters to keep normal things about their person. The gun nut doesn't leave home without their trusty .45, the thief keeps lockpicks in their pocket, the scholar has the critical textbook in the rucksack, and everyone carries a phone with a camera.

Still, what do you do when the tension's rising and the critical object isn't something they would normally carry around? Sure, you can make blanket declarations based on the scene (yeah, you've got a burner phone in the glovebox. No, you didn't bring the shotgun to the black-tie gala...), but an additional option is the Preparedness test. As with all rolls, these work best when they impact the story, so only roll if failure would dramatically change the options.

Preparedness tests pair Intelligence and the Skill with the closest ties to the required item: Intelligence + Firearms for the incendiary ammo, Intelligence + Occult for the protective salts, or Intelligence + Technology for the 1TB thumb drive. Intelligence + Science to kickstart the slow-burn chemical reaction before heading out for the night. This can also be useful for research: it's reasonable to assume you've researched esoteric content during your career as a Hunter, and preparedness confirms how much you retained. The Difficulty depends on how likely you'd have been to bring or study the item, and how obscure it is. If the Difficulty is only 1, just allow it.

Research

Failing to properly research your thesis may condemn you to a low grade, failing to properly research a monster could be lethal. A Hunter cell needs all the detail they can get, but research is tricky. It's time-consuming and every answer throws up another question. Striking the balance between preparation and overcaution is difficult.

The research topic greatly affects the pools used, and while most tests pair with Intelligence, larger, more complex subjects that take a long time to

delve into use Resolve. If you want someone else to do the grunt work for you, pair the relevant Skill with Charisma to ensure they know what you're looking for. The assistant still needs to make their normal research roll, but a worthy plea might ensure they're motivated while a poor briefing might send them off down the wrong track.

Difficulties range from 1–4 for most topics, but hidden, forbidden, or rare information warrants a higher Difficulty. This is why researchers work in teams to increase their odds or spend extended periods plumbing the depths of their subjects.

Table 7 shows common skills used for research.

TABLE 7: SKILLS FOR RESEARCH

Skill	Use
Academics	Ancient history, literature, the classics, linguistics
Investigation	Local history, possible monster patterns
Finance	Finding and interpreting tax records, following the money
Medicine	Physiology, healthcare
Occult	Myths and legends, traditional weaknesses, local stories
Science	Biochemistry, physical anomalies
Technology	Network diagrams, penetration testing results, corporate IT security

Other Tests

Any good Hunter knows the obvious avenues are just a starting point.

Newspapers and Microfiche

The internet is a phenomenal resource for cataloging and finding information quickly, but not everything makes it online, especially older news or reports from small, local sources. Sometimes, you have to do your research the old-fashioned way, physically turning the pages or scanning through reams of scanned microfilm. When you're working against ageless creatures or tracking their crimes over many generations, sometimes that's the only option on the table.

When you're working against ageless creatures or tracking their crimes over many generations, sometimes page-turning is the only option on the table.

When you have piles of papers to press through, keep your eyes sharp and hunker down. Roll Resolve + Awareness — it's easy to miss things in the vast sea of text. Difficulties depend on the volume of data.

Probate, Wills, and Funerals

Death always leaves a footprint, and its trails reveal clues about a Quarry. Studying the paperwork of death can mean sifting through a victim's estate to see what was worth killing for, a good old-fashioned case of follow-the-money or uncovering the Quarry's influence on generations of the same family. Parsing the legalese isn't for the faint-hearted, but following the paper trail yields valuable clues.

Deciphering text this dense uses Intelligence + Finance, but if there are decades of content to sift through, then roll Resolve + Finance instead. You might need Academics to understand the context and terminology of older documents.

Speed Reading

It's an hour until sunset, the monster's lumbering up the rickety staircase, the room's rapidly filling with flame, or your final exam starts in twenty minutes. Whatever the reason, on occasion you need to speed read and hope you retain the most important information.

Speed reading uses Wits + Academics, with the Difficulty depending on how long you've got, and how dense the text is — a page rich in formulae over two minutes might be Difficulty 2, while digesting the entirety of Tobin's Spirit Guide over a short car journey would be Difficulty 5.

Translation and Interpretation

There's rarely any such thing as a straightforward, universally accepted translation. Language is highly context-dependent. Words have multiple meanings, historians spot obscure jokes or insults in a text, and local dialects can change everything. Many targets of the hunt have a long history, and the clues to their origins — or endings — might be hidden amid ancient texts from anywhere in the world.

Many targets of the hunt have a long history indeed, and the clues to their origins-or endings-might be hidden amid ancient texts from anywhere in the world.

When characters find themselves confronted with documents or recordings in a language they're not fluent in, roll Intelligence + the lower of Academics and Linguistics (characters need a dictionary or skill with a language sharing some common features, like Spanish and Latin. Difficulties start at 3 (a snippet of text with context — e.g., an epitaph on a crypt) to 5 or higher (a complex passage, damaged materials). Increase the Difficulty by 1 or more if you need to work fast. Table 8 list possible outcomes in translation and interpretation.

TABLE 8: SUCCESS WITH TRANSLATION

Level of Success	Outcome
Critical Win	Perfect translation, and you recognize any subtext
Success	Confidently translate the work
Failure	You might pick out a few words, at the storyteller's discretion, but the general meaning is lost to you. If the information is crucial to the story, the storyteller might let you get a basic idea of the subject, with multiple potential interpretations (The ritual needs to be performed at either sunset or sunrise).
Total Failure	You completely fail to understand a single word or, even worse, misinterpret the text in a potentially dangerous way.

An Academic Edge

Alma Maters approaches the hunt from the perspective of academic monster Hunters. How do the permanently studious take to the task? They can't all be librarians, drone jockeys, and researchers. At some point, they've got to roll up their sleeves, get their hands dirty, and confront their Quarry head-on.

Edges in **Hunter: The Reckoning** are deliberately flexible. There's no single definition of how they work or what they look like. One Hunter might keep things as mundane as possible, while another feels the pull of the supernatural themselves, blessed with advantages others cannot understand. Here, we examine the core Edges through the lens of academia.

Assets

Assets are what you have and what you can get your hands on. Justifying the full reach of university assets is easy for faculty and staff. Students who have good relationships with professors or university authorities — research or teaching assistants, for example, or smart undergrads who make friends with the Facilities team — can justify Assets that way.

Arsenal and Ordnance

Arsenal and Ordnance aren't obvious resources for a character at a respectable educational institution, but good Hunters don't stick to what's obvious. So, how do you justify your bookworm suddenly getting access to high-end gear?

- The weapons are part of a display, typically used to educate and demonstrate the capabilities of tools used in the past and how they compare to modern-day weaponry. You have access but need to return them before they're reported missing.
- You act as an expert witness for local law enforcement, and you're accepted at the local police station. You know where the weapons locker is, and how poorly guarded it is.
- Your expertise in science and engineering, plus access to 3D printers and an array of materials, allows you to build whatever you need from scratch.

It might not be as durable or reliable as the real deal, but it's easily disposed of, and untraceable. If you can't build it yourself, you know a postdoc who doesn't ask questions and owes you a favor.

- You'd be surprised how many public universities are involved in developing autonomous, biological, chemical, ballistic or nuclear weapons. Maybe you're not part of the program, but you get coffee with the primary researcher most mornings.

Fleet

When money's tight and the campus is walkable, why use a car? Just because they don't have a garage stocked with motors, doesn't mean campus-based Hunters don't possess the means to get what they need, they just approach it in their own way.

- It might be a stereotype, but students and takeout are tightly linked. Who's got time to cook when your dissertation's due? The proliferation of delivery services for food and shopping ensures there are always vehicles around campus, and with many students needing a part-time job, you can always call on a friend in your time of need. You might arrive at the Quarry's lair on a moped or a car with a giant pizza slice on top, but you'll get there.
- With many vehicles operated by electronic key fob, all you need to clone one is access to the right equipment — the sort of kit available in several campus labs. It's not technically legal, but as long as you get the car back before anyone notices, who'll ever know?
- The Engineering department includes vehicles, you know. From transit vehicles to family wagons, NASCAR to Formula One, your department develops all of them. And there are ways to justify a test drive.

From transit vehicles to family wagons, NASCAR to Formula One, your department develops all of them.

Aptitudes

Aptitude Edges are a reminder that academia isn't all library research and textbooks. Academics, from archeologists to physicists, experiment and test, using a sometimes-startling range of methodologies.

Beast Whisperer and Drone Jockey

These Edges approach the same problem from two different angles — one using nature, the other cutting-edge technology. Masters of these Edges have a guaranteed ally in the fight against evil, one who's loyal and guaranteed to listen to your commands, unlike your cellies.

- While you spend your days studying, you relax by indulging in your hobby of working with animals or high-end drones. There are any number of clubs and hobby groups organized by your fellow students, and what was once a pastime has become a potential lifesaver.
- Your major might be engineering, camera and film work, veterinary science, or zoology, but you couldn't have foreseen how you'd put it to action.
- Yeah, you built a drone. What? It's sort of experimental but when it works, it's cool as hell.
- You came away from a protest against animal testing with a new friend liberated from one of the labs.
- You literally spend your life studying animal cognition or teaching robots to walk. Nobody should be surprised you get great results.

Global Access

Universities and colleges were early adopters of the internet, pioneering communication, intra-establishment cooperation, and mass use. The networks are large, often old, and protected by a patchwork of security systems developed over half a century, and therefore, easy to hide behind to cover your tracks.

- The college library has plenty of computers and staff on hand to wipe and rebuild them whenever they're compromised. You have no issues accessing a machine, and no worries about breaking one if you do something wrong.

- With many colleges operating over multiple campuses and maintaining close ties with other establishments, it's easy to bounce your signal and cover your identity. As well as this electronic network, you've a network of like-minded students to call upon. They might not know exactly what they're helping you do, but they're educated and capable.
- Many cutting-edge developments are created in universities and colleges. Some go on to be patented by the establishment, while creators keep others under wraps either for personal profit or for further development. These innovations are a gift to the budding hacker as other systems haven't even imagined protections against the vulnerabilities these tools exploit.

Improvised Gear

Engineering, patent creation, and mock-ups are all critical aspects of university life for many departments. The practical aspects of class are just as important as the cerebral ones — being thrown a problem and tasked with solving it before the bell is a common lesson format. Creative thinking is the bedrock of higher education, and all but guarantees this Edge is popular among students and academic staff.

- Not only do you study engineering, but you spend your days putting theory into practice. Building, creating, and problem-solving are so second nature to you that you carry your own, well-used tools wherever you go.
- 3D printing opened a new world for you. While decent printers aren't exactly portable it's easy to print parts in advance when you have an eye for utility. Constantly thinking in shapes and joints allows you to ascertain quickly the other useful things in your eye-line.
- Studying architecture trains you to consider materials, utility, and the importance of a strong foundation. The importance of mock-ups honed your practical skills beyond where you believed they could go, and finding yourself pushed once again, your design-focused mind continues to impress you.

- You've been recovering and jury-rigging broken gear the university tosses out for years. You've got a whole closet full of semi-functional junk the school thinks was safely disposed of.

Endowments

Endowments usually have overt paranormal connotations, but they don't have to. It's far from the only way to describe these features. If it fits the mood of your game, an Artifact can be cutting-edge science as easily as a magic sword. Sometimes Endowments really are paranormal though. Maybe you've had weirdly alert senses since that parapsychology experiment you participated in as a freshman.

Artifact

Objects of power are preserved and venerated. A modern university may not recognize them for what they are, but they take good care of them, nonetheless. You don't even have to believe these items have power for them to work for you.

- Your college's history department is stuffed to the gills with old objects, useful enough to be great learning props but common or damaged enough that they're not stored safely in a museum. Some should be museum pieces, but tenured faculty are a law unto themselves. You have enough experience to know which objects are more than they seem and enough access to borrow them.
- Sometimes the power lies not in the object itself, but in the way in which it's used. You've studied enough anthropology and folklore to duplicate certain efforts, successfully straddling the borders between hedge magic, old wives' tales, and academic theory.

You've studied enough anthropology and folklore to successfully straddle the borders between hedge magic, old wives' tales, and academic theory.

- Many colleges maintain close ties with museums or have museums of their own, and students take up internships at these places. You might feel guilty about borrowing priceless artifacts, but the fight against evil benefits greatly from this extra-curricular relationship.

Repel, Sense, and Thwart the Unnatural

The ability to push back your foe, detect their unholy presence, or resist the worst effects of the unnatural powers is often considered the purview of the religious or gifted. It doesn't have to be. Strong research skills and depth of study can achieve the same effects.

- Every monster has its kryptonite, more so than any other aspect of their legends, their weaknesses are well documented. By studying folklore, you've retained a lot of detail about what can protect you from the things that prey on humanity. Even when confronted with a monster you've not encountered before, you can make an educated guess on what will upset it.
- You've studied how creatures of legend control people, steal their memories, unleash destructive magics upon them, and all manner of impressive powers they unleash upon the unwary. Fortunately, you're far from unwary, your research having blessed you with techniques to resist the worst effects. Unfortunately, it's not peer-reviewed or field-tested. Yet.
- A mind filled with knowledge is a mind filled with strength, regardless of what that knowledge is. This mental fortitude might allow you to shrug off mind control, trap mind readers in the labyrinthine corridors of your intellect, create distractions by speaking in their native tongue, or be sharp enough to react to cues you didn't even realize existed.
- Every creature has a tell, and through your studies, you've acquired an encyclopedic knowledge of the many things giving them away. It might be as subtle as the faint smell of ammonia, the feral glint in their eyes, or the change in thermobaric pressure, but you're programmed to recognize it early. Alternatively, maybe you're an expert in human behavior and you know damn well when something's not behaving like a human.

Libraries: A Fountain of Information

A personal collection is to an academic library what a slingshot is to an assault rifle. There's always more information to be gleaned, more books to read, and more places to continue researching your chosen subject.

THE 24/7 LIBRARY

Every place of academia, no matter its stature, has a library, and groups may decide this volume of knowledge on tap deserves representation. As an optional rule, you can give every character the Library Edge at Character Creation, without Perks.

Additional Library Perks

Students and academics are often the most dedicated Library users, but any Hunter can purchase these Perks with their Storyteller's consent.

- **Binge:** You throw yourself into your task, working nights, skipping breaks, and doing whatever it takes. Your strong work ethic cuts research time in half. This effort has no short-term impact on your physical condition, ensuring you can work all night and still be fit for a daylight assault.
- **Group Study:** If a Hunter with this Perk uses the Library Edge, they may add one extra die to their Edge Pool for every other cell member assisting them, even if the assistants don't possess the Library Edge. This bonus cannot exceed three dice.
- **Friendly Librarian:** Library staff ensure every book needed is always available, even going the extra mile to arrange inter-library loans. If you can wait at least two days before your Edge roll, you gain one automatic success.
- **Permanent Fixture:** You've spent many a night cramming in the library and you know every corner. You can use it as a safe house once per semester.

Advantages

These Merits, Flaws, and Backgrounds can help tie your character more convincingly into the world of academia. Players are encouraged to work with the Storyteller and consider exactly why their characters possess these traits, as well as what impact they have on their day-to-day life and backstory.

Merits and Flaws

Involvement in academia opens up new opportunities and drawbacks.

The World of Academia

The halls of higher education offer the opportunity to develop impressive skills and push yourself in ways you'd never considered. Campus life can be a far cry from the real world, but that doesn't mean what you learn doesn't have practical implications.

Campus life can be a far cry from the real world, but that doesn't mean what you learn doesn't have practical implications.

●● **Forbidden Texts:** You've acquired writings from a prominent, if controversial, expert. While the scope of the text is limited, the detail is magnificent. Upon purchasing this Merit, choose a monster type, and thereafter gain two dice on all research tests related to this subject. The subjects of this text would desperately love to reacquire these books, so take care who sees you with them.

●● **Thesis:** Your chosen area of academic expertise has consumed your life for years, and you've examined it from every angle humanly possible. Your dedication ensures its influence has seeped into every corner of your life, and you see its applications everywhere. Choose an

additional Specialty related to your subject. However, this Specialty isn't tied to a specific Skill and applies to any Skill when used in a research test. The Storyteller needs to approve this Specialty, and it needs to be academic and not related to monster types.

●●● **Part of the Furniture:** You've propped up this institution for so long you're practically part of the foundations. You know the entire faculty, they know you, and the grounds are as familiar to you as home. Once per session when you are on campus or interacting with university staff, you may add two dice to any single dice pool.

Flaw: (●) Failing Grades: You might be a student at your fine institution, but you won't be for much longer if you don't buck up your ideas — or at least that's what your teachers tell you. Whether you're distracted by money issues (or monster issues), misunderstood, or just not cut out for rigorous academic study, you're just about managing to cling on. Reduce Social dice pools by two when dealing with all campus staff.

Flaw: (●●) Dangerous Knowledge: You have knowledge going beyond forbidden, and what you know is sought after by all the wrong people. One false move and you risk revealing how much you truly know and drawing all the wrong attention to yourself. Upon purchasing this Merit, the Storyteller chooses a monster type. The Danger rating increases by 1 on any Total Failure or Critical result when making research or perception-related tests regarding this monster type.

Linguistics

●● **Dead Tongues:** As the centuries roll on and cultures fall, their collective knowledge is lost to all but a select few. You've studied many of these dead languages, and while your understanding is far from perfect, you're more than capable of reading their script — although the ability to speak or write it perfectly eludes you. You gain two bonus dice when attempting to translate any extinct language.

Flaw: (●) El Mala Educación: Your understanding of ancient languages and grammar is misinformed, to say the least. While you hold the confidence of a full

education, you consistently make simple mistakes, but thankfully few know enough to correct you. The Danger rating increases by 1 on any total failure or critical result when you attempt to translate any extinct language. This Flaw can only be gained if you also possess the Dead Tongues Merit.

Mental Feats

The mind is a powerful tool capable of incredible feats. These Merits and Flaws describe different forms of mental flexibility and the penalties for pushing it too far.

●● **Always Prepared:** Efficiency and practicality are synonymous with you, so when someone remembers they need something important, it's you they turn to. You add two dice to all Preparedness dice pools (see p. 28).

●● **Eidetic Memory:** Your memory is what can only be described as photographic, and you only require a few moments of study before you're able to recall text and detail verbatim. This doesn't necessarily improve your understanding as you're not learning the content, but using a series of tricks and mnemonics to aid your recollection. You gain a two-dice bonus on any test related to recall, such as codes, directions, maps, facial recognition, formulae, and rote behaviors.

Flaw: (●●) Disordered Sleep: Like many students, your sleep schedule's messy at best — although you might not accept that. Sleep catches you when it's least convenient, snatching you away whenever your mind relaxes. In situations where you're waiting, studying, or keeping watch you must roll one die. If the result is a failure, you fall asleep. The Storyteller defines the impact, but it might mean you can't complete your task, miss clues, or can be easily ambushed depending on the situation.

Nutritionist

Flaw: (●●) Malnourished: You might be too busy, too inept, or just too poor. You don't feed yourself as well as you should, resulting in anemia-like symptoms and a tendency toward sickness. Your total Health is only equal to your Stamina + 2.

Backgrounds

Safe House

● **Bolt Hole:** Campuses are sprawling places full of empty classrooms, storage closets, vacant dorms, and unoccupied theaters; and you know how to access most of them. They're not comfortable places to sleep, but they make perfect hiding places when

under pressure. Whenever hiding or attempting to move from one place to another undetected on campus you receive a two-dice bonus.

Flaw: (●) Interfering Roommate: Your safe house is, well, safe, but it's far from private. Someone else uses it for its legitimate purpose, and they watch you like a hawk, keeping a written record of every infraction, misdemeanor, and oddity. Suspicious behavior, strange visitors, or signs of trouble are not only noticed, but reported to the relevant authorities. ■



Chapter Two:

Burlington College

"There is an excitement about having nightmares."

-Betsey Johnson

Burlington College is a medium-sized public university in the USA. Psychoactive drug trials in the 1960s made the campus a stalking ground for the Peripheral Man, one of the Fair Folk. When most of those involved in the experiments died in a fire on campus, the threat receded. Now, a major food and drink corporation sunk its claws into the campus, and got hold of the records of the drug trial. They're recreating the drug, this time as part of an energy drink recipe. The dream-eating Peripheral Man is back, and the wider consumption of the drug makes him a much bigger problem: if Hunters can't handle him before the drink goes into mass production, the Peripheral Man might be too powerful to stop.

A Burlington Chronicle

The major threat at Burlington College is the Peripheral Man, an entity that reveals itself slowly, which makes it excellent for a chronicle that runs an entire academic year (or more), slowly building momentum.

The great thing about Burlington is that you don't need an entire Hunter cell to be fully wrapped up in campus life to make it work. Having even one student or staff member in the cell provides good access to the university. The cell can use the campus as a library, or a place to make useful research contacts, at first. They can even enjoy some Thoosi (see p. 42) on a late-night research spree.

Gradually introduce the college's own weird history: as the cell researches other threats or talks to local people, they hear stories of the fire that destroyed a research lab on the campus decades ago and maybe hear some conflicting theories on exactly what was destroyed. They can meet people like Daniel Washington or Dylan Kammerer, who hint at weird experiences they've endured. In parallel, things start to get strange. Friends or connections on campus start having weird dreams or jumping at shadows. Neldner Wellness Group gets pushy, demanding access to campus archives (hoping for documentation on the first round of experiments (see "History").

In short, the whole time the cell's busy dealing with threats around Burlington (for which you can use locations or small institutions from Chapter Eight), they're getting hints of a greater threat on their own doorstep. Once they've amassed enough hints to have an idea of what they're dealing with, step up the Peripheral Man's actions to things that harm or endanger people around the cell. It's time to face him head-on.

History

American education is exemplified by the tier of schools known as the Ivy League. Burlington College is very much not an Ivy League school. For there to be an exclusive club of academic institutions, someone has to be excluded from the ranks. Manfred Weissberg, a first-generation American industrialist trying to land his son in an Ivy League school in the 1940s, was one of the latter group. He felt his family was the victim of anti-German sentiment, and he was probably correct but his son's academic and behavioral record left much to be desired. Fewer schools were willing to take a chance on the boy after each successive expulsion. In 1948, Weissberg decided to solve the problem as many men with his wealth and stature did: he would purchase a solution.

The first building of the newly founded Burlington College was an old 1920s bootlegger mansion Weissberg purchased and refurbished. Most of the surrounding land was undeveloped and cheap. He lured professors from more reputable schools with larger salaries and budgets for whatever esoteric studies interested them. By the 1950s, Burlington had grown into a small but flourishing private college. Weissberg disappeared in 1954, and school leadership passed to the man for whom it was built.

Manfred Weissberg, Jr. had long since changed his name to Fred White. While he didn't have a head for academics, he maintained many of the relationships established during his time bouncing from school to school. Many people who had gotten into trouble alongside Freddy Boy inherited power and wealth of their own. They ran into the same issues Manfred did with their own children and thus Burlington College became a safe haven for children of privilege unable to scale the walls of the Ivy League.

This generation of students brought the power of their names and started to illuminate Burlington

Only now, Burlington College became a safe haven for children of privilege unable to scale the walls of the Ivy League.

College with the kind of prestige that attracted more students. More importantly, it brought money and endowments, which paid for the school to expand rapidly onto the empty grounds purchased decades ago. The untouched landscape quickly built up with the facilities needed for a school, such as libraries, dormitories and dedicated teaching facilities. The crown jewel of this burst of activity, Wagner Hall, was completed in 1964. It was a shining beacon to scientists around the world that Burlington College would welcome their work, no matter how unusual or strange it might seem outside of the softly lit halls of academia.

Wagner Hall would not see the end of the next decade.

The Wagner Hall Experiments

The United States government went all out trying to stay ahead of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. This rivalry manifested in everything from escalating defense spending to the Space Race. Americans didn't want to lose their sense of accomplishment and leadership from World War II. Every first the United States achieved proved their ascendancy and empire. This desire drove the country into some very strange places in the decades that followed, including the infamous CIA program MKUltra.

MKUltra was not the only project of this nature. Other government entities engaged

in their own studies. Burlington College proved to be an excellent petri dish for such experiments with plenty of Washington connections that remain to this day. The drug tested there in the 1960s was biphrenaloxitine, commonly abbreviated to BFT, which stimulated subjects' hippocampus near the brain's temporal lobe. The scientists expected waking dream-like hallucinations with the intent of letting people stay awake and dream while still working, with deep dreamless sleep following once the drug cycled out of their system.

Dozens of test subjects independently spoke of a tall man in a wide-brimmed hat with a skeletal face appearing at the edges of their vision or on reflective surfaces. When they did sleep, this entity, dubbed the Peripheral Man by the test subjects under the influence of biphrenaloxitine, sometimes intruded upon dreams and changed them in unexpected ways. Subjects also found themselves waking up in strange places, losing time, and experiencing sleepwalking and night terrors.

The Peripheral Man's one of the Fair Folk, a dream-eating entity from slightly outside mortals' reality, and the changes biphrenaloxitine made to its test subjects' brains blurred the line between sleeping and waking, and opened a path for the Peripheral Man into the waking world.

The drug's creators discussed pulling the plug on the experiment, but someone made the decision for them. On December 10th, 1967, a fire broke out in Wagner Hall. The hall was the central location of the drug testing, and all 42 subjects, scientists and



UNMARKED HELICOPTERS

In popular culture MKUltra is at the root of many conspiracy theories. The experiments went beyond simple truth serums or psychological conditioning. The program was studying psychic phenomena, creating super soldiers and other staples of modern conspiracy horror. The Wagner Hall Experiments were built as a standalone entity but enterprising Storytellers doing a little research can find a Pandora's box of story hooks and ideas connecting the biphrenaloxitine experiments to a bigger, darker program.

administrators connected to the experiments were in the building when it started to burn. The eight survivors claim to remember nothing of the incident, but rescued recordings and phone transcripts document people trying to fight something within the building. The experiment's records were deliberately damaged, but the remaining fragments are the only hard evidence of the Peripheral Man's existence. Funding was cut after the fire and the truth of what happened that night, beyond the violent end of the biphrenaloxitine study, remains a mystery to this day.

The eight survivors all claim to remember nothing of the incident, but rescued recordings and phone call transcripts document people trying to fight something within the building.

Out Of the Ashes

The college rallied after the disaster. The Wagner Hall fire was used as an example by schools across the country to adopt stricter fire safety standards. Burlington College officials vowed to rebuild. Thanks to the donations of alumni, the fire is almost forgotten. The main point of remembrance is a small plaque with

the victim's names located between Thompson and Eichstadt towers, which were built on the bulldozed site. There is also a lone sweatshirt located in the Old White House Museum featuring the original school mascot. In a strange twist of fate, before changing to the Burlington Bulldogs, the football team was known as the Burlington Blazers.

Today the campus is broken into three main areas. The residence halls built where Wagner Hall once stood hold dorms for young students to explore their newfound freedom. The five academic buildings each show how the college has adapted and survived, with the original building still the center of campus. From there, it's just a short walk to the future and the sprawling potential of the new student life building called Center Commons. The tragedy of the past is all but forgotten with only a single mention of Wagner Hall on the school's website.

The Peripheral Man Reborn

Although no official public records exist, the oral tradition of college ghost stories has preserved one version of the Peripheral Man's story. Two large residence halls, Thompson Tower and Eichstadt Tower, were built on the Wagner Hall site ten years later after the fire. Soon, the residents began spinning ghost stories to their friends about a spirit called the Peripheral Man. The tales were entwined with the drug culture of the time and included specific mixtures of drugs that could supposedly be used to commune with the Peripheral Man.

Many of the sightings and stories after the destruction of Wagner Hall are either misremembered encounters, blendings of different stories or complete fabrications. Several take on the framing of Bloody Mary, where saying the Peripheral Man's name inside a darkened room summons him to eat your eyes. Others speak of strange blackened handprints or faceprints found in the showers of Eichstadt and Thompson towers that couldn't be removed with any type of cleaner or bleach. Everyone in Burlington has their favorite version of the story and students often blend and remix stories to keep them fresh for the next generation.

Others speak of strange blackened handprints or faceprints found in the showers of Eichstadt and Thompson towers that couldn't be removed with any type of cleaner or bleach.

GIVE ME SOMETHING GOOD TO EAT

If the Hunters are around Burlington College near October 31st, they notice an unusual local custom. Homeowners decorating for the holiday add a small upended top hat full of candy to the expected jack-o-lanterns and 12-foot skeletons. This is a tribute to the Peripheral Man, and no one else is allowed to eat it. Nearly everyone has a friend-of-a-friend tale about the unfortunate souls who were visited by the Peripheral Man because they decided to snack on his cut of Halloween treats.

There's no truth whatsoever behind this tradition, but it persists anyway.

Burlington College has long sustained itself via tuition and endowments from wealthy graduates and their families, but modern academic institutions constantly seek new ways to rake in revenue. Two years ago, President Zachary signed a deal with Neldner Wellness Group allowing students access to several of their healthy snack products. By this point, nearly every student has some sort of well-worn logo item in their room, such as a Chip Shape towel or a Namas-Taste keychain in the form of a pretzel that emits a meditative sound when a hidden button is pressed.

Neldner Wellness Group discovered old reports about the drug tests at Wagner Hall. The company is looking to use some of them in some upcoming products. Neldner Wellness Group hopes the chemical compounds can be used as additives in their food and beverage products in ways that might bend or break FDA requirements. The college was happy to sell patents, records and information to the corporation. They kept any mention of the Peripheral Man out of

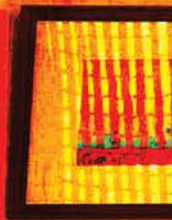
the documents, claiming that not only were the records damaged, but any redactions in the text were individuals who didn't want to be known as participants.

Neldner Wellness Group

Neldner Wellness Group began corporate life as Neldner International in the 1960s. The company produced everything from candy to tobacco products with a focus on marketing to young people to lock in early brand loyalty. After it was acquired by a larger conglomerate in the '90s, this brand loyalty directive was spun off under a new name. After years of getting kids to eat sugary candy and teenagers hooked on cigarettes, Neldner Wellness Group was born to get its customers back on track through health products and alternatives to the usual vending machine fare.

Neldner Wellness spends far more on marketing than research and development. Many of its products are not much different from the ones it produced while making soft drinks and other consumer products. The company is keenly aware of what changes are required to legally back up its claims. The point of their products is not to actually be healthy. It is to make their customers feel healthy while turning a profit. Altering, for example, Top Hat Popcorn to Nebraska's Finest Organic Popcorn takes little more than a new logo, a thinner bag that claims to be made from recycled husks, and a website full of testimonials from farmers that provide touching, fictional stories to make the consumer feel like they're helping someone.

The point of their products is not to actually be healthy.



I HATE THESE GUYS

Cells are likely to dig for information on the Neldner Wellness Group. This gives Entrepreneurial Hunters a chance to shine. Let them have as much NWG history as they want. Just because a group isn't directly connected to the supernatural doesn't mean it doesn't have secrets and shady dealings going on.

The company seeks out partnerships with academic institutions seeking new ways to stay afloat. Campus sponsorships, product testing and launches and even naming rights are on the table. A handful of Burlington graduates have ended up at Neldner Wellness, so when the school wanted to fund Center Commons they already had some connections within the company. Neldner has already spun up the public relations machine, promising the new building will feature healthy dining options, space for yoga and meditation and a rooftop garden where students can buy fresh ingredients to cook for themselves.

In truth, the company made a deal with the school for several chemical and drug patents that it could use in its products. Most modern food production is about the right mix of chemicals to stimulate taste. The money Neldner makes from product sales based on these patents far outstrips what they spend on public sponsorship. Ten years of advertising and building a harmonious public image is nothing compared to a chemical compound that smells like bacon and tastes like chicken.

Thoosi

Neldner wasn't expecting to find one of their best ideas in years in the ashes of the Wagner Hall experiments. They wanted an energy drink that appeals to the youth market, with a bold new USP. The current marketing angle focuses on how biphrenaloxitine is an all-natural ingredient that offers the benefits of stimulants with no side effects. The drink focuses people

on their tasks at hand without the energy crashes of sugar or caffeine.

The energy drink, called Thoosi, is currently under testing at Burlington College. It's served in the main dining hall alongside the usual bevy of sodas, teas and coffee. Sales have been encouraging, and the company will soon put Thoosi in cans to load into campus vending machines. If that test goes well, a national launch will follow.

Most students are familiar with Thoosi thanks to the work of the Thoosi Floozis, who appear on The Strip every Thursday night. This quartet of attractive students make their way through the bars on Clancy Street offering free samples of the drink to thirsty students. Their most popular stunt is a game where patrons pay a dollar to spin a small wheel full of branded prizes like keychains and hand towels. The top prize allows the winner to choose a Floози to give them the Thoosi logo T-shirt they are currently wearing.

Most students are familiar with Thoosi thanks to the effort of the Thoosi Floozis that appear on The Strip every Thursday night.

Locations

Technically, there are things to do off campus, but in reality most of the action happens at Burlington College.



BURLINGTON COLLEGE

The Town of Burlington

It's unfair to call Burlington a one-stoplight town. There are two. They're on the main cross streets that turn the state highway running through the middle of town into Main Street. Smaller streets flow off Main, then lead into a patchwork of off-campus student housing, college staff housing and a combined police, fire and city hall administration building. Plenty of students rarely venture off the three big streets in town: Main Street, University Lane and The Strip.

COMING TO A COLLEGE TOWN NEAR YOU

Burlington College is an entirely fictional school in the mold of the Ivy League colleges located in the American region of New England. It is meant to function wherever the Storyteller needs it to be, such as a short drive outside the normal campaign city or perhaps as a stop on a longer road trip.

Main Street reflects the growth driven by Burlington College. It's mostly a collection of fast-food restaurants and strip malls that serve students and visiting parents. There's a big-box store that overtook the local grocery about 20 years ago. The few local businesses located across from the ground where Center Commons is being built have given up and shut down. Most believe the remaining print shop and hamburger stand will eventually be demolished for more student housing or possibly a hotel where affluent parents and relatives can stay when they visit their children.

University Lane peels away to the north on the eastern side of Main Street. What was once a cozy stand of trees is now a muddy construction site for the future hub of student life called Center Commons. Past that, there's the back of Weske Hall, one of the five academic buildings called Five Points. The street terminates in a cul-de-sac in front of The Old White House, with a smaller road leading to the school's lone parking lot. Behind the main administrative building, two large residence towers loom like royal guards. Burlington College is primarily a walking campus, as students with cars tend to quickly move off campus to avoid paying the school's high parking fees.

What once was a cozy stand of trees is now a muddy construction site for the future hub of student life called Center Commons.

On the western side of Main Street, the circus carousel of Dot's Spot marks the beginning of The Strip. This row of bars comes alive every Thursday night as students look to blow off some steam before heading home for the weekend or hunkering down to study on their days off. Clancy Street is technically open to cars but folks rarely drive there because of all the foot traffic. The Strip offers sports bars, local dives and one trend-chasing location that never lasts more than a year before re-opening with a new theme and management. Rosa's Pizza offers a cheap stop for food after the bars close, though they've lost some customers to The Frying Dutchman food truck that parks at the end of the strip nearest town.

The Two Towers

Most students spend at least one semester in the two large residence halls located on the south end of campus. Thompson Tower and Eichstadt Tower, named for alumni who helped pay for their construction, are rarely referred to by name. Instead, they are called The Two Towers, the Two Tees, The Tee-Tees or often something more vulgar. The gridded style of each building marks them as relics of the late 1960s, though the internal rooms and technology have been kept up to date.

Thompson Tower is designated as junior housing. This typically means freshmen and sophomores but extends to any students under the legal drinking age of 21. That means the dorm is technically dry, but Resident Assistants turn a blind eye to alcohol consumption around big party weekends like Halloween, homecoming and after exams. Because this building caters to younger students, it is kept the most up-to-date with the best Wi-Fi and modern conveniences in each room. Residents can choose from rooms shared with one roommate to larger apartments

on the lower floors that offer four single occupancy rooms adjoining a common shared living space.

Eichstadt Tower is reserved for students in their senior year. Because many older students have found off-campus housing or commute, that means this tower is rarely filled to capacity. It's often used as overflow housing for new students, which means much stricter patrols for alcohol and other contraband with certain floors being able to openly consume alcohol and others treated as underage levels. The top floor is rarely occupied, so it is locked down. This makes it a great destination for students willing to bust a lock who want a great view while getting down to their favorite vice.

The towers are also a rich source of ghost stories and supernatural rumors. Some students claim Eichstadt Tower is underutilized because it's haunted. Some claim pushing the right sequence of buttons on the elevator in Thompson Tower takes the riders to a sub-basement where the remainder of the Wagner Hall experiments are stored. Fraternities often send pledges to collect evidence that the Peripheral Man lives up on the tenth floor of Eichstadt Tower, often with members of the organization dressing up as the creature and scaring the crap out of the unsuspecting student.

The towers are a rich source of ghost stories and supernatural rumors.

The Old White House

The original mansion still stands. Manfred Weissberg Hall is called The Old White House by everyone on campus and in town, which confuses anyone new to campus. The Old White House does not look like its more famous counterpart, and it remains the same sea blue color it was when Weissberg made it the heart of his university.

The Old White House contains the administrative offices of the college. This is where the school's records are located, along with admissions, financial aid and other functions that keep the institution running. Campus tours begin and end in the Regent's Ballroom.

As a tip to the history of the place, potential students are taken through a secret door behind the bar in the ballroom. This room formerly housed a storage area for Prohibition-era smuggling operations. It now features a small museum dedicated to the school's famous alumni.

The hotel ballroom is not the only secret passage in the old mansion. The old master bedroom, now President Zachary's office, has a hidden crawlspace behind the fireplace. It was originally an escape route for the bootleggers that built the mansion. Now, the small room is full of old file cabinets and boxes. Much of it is useless junk, but a handful of items from Wagner Hall were misfiled here. These include some reel-to-reel audio tapes featuring the Peripheral Man's voice as well as an artist's rendering of the dream-eating fey.

Five Points

Five buildings make up the bulk of Burlington College. Muszynski Hall is home to the school of business and pre-law; Mayer-Miller Hall focuses on the arts; Radke Hall concentrates on the humanities; Musial Library houses postgraduate programs; and Weske Hall is split between psychology and anthropology. Collectively, these buildings are known as Five Points, scattered in a vaguely circular arrangement in a rolling plain south of the other buildings on campus.

Each building reflects part of the school's history. Muszynski Hall was the first construction outside The Old White House, full of 1950s angles and minimalist decor. Radke Hall came after the Wagner Hall fire as a brutalist symbol of the college coming back from tragedy. The butcher block grid windows give the lobby of Mayer-Miller Hall a diffused light that compliments the echoes of theater students bouncing through the space. Weske Hall feels like a museum with artifacts scattered in hallway display cases without any attempt at curating the collection. Musial Library features a modern, open plan which can sometimes overwhelm students when crunch time hits.

These buildings are the subjects of a handful of rumors. A bomb shelter below the business school still has a functioning broadcast console that students once used as a pirate radio station. Ghosts can be seen in the lobby of the arts building still practicing for their big show that will never come. Radke Hall's maze-like



corridors were built as a psychology experiment that's ongoing to this day. All sorts of grisly backstories get attached to the items in Weske Hall, their bloodiness matched only by the supposed fates of students who decided to take them home. The Peripheral Man may be the most insidious campus legend, but Burlington College has plenty of stories to catch a Hunter's ear.

The Peripheral Man may be the most insidious campus legend but Burlington College has plenty of stories that should catch a Hunter's ear.

Center Commons

If Five Points represents Burlington College's past, then the Center Commons construction project looks to the future. It started as a Student Center renovation, which provided on-campus amenities such as food and shopping. The original building came shortly after Muszynski Hall with renovations and add-ons every few years. This gave the building a stitched-together look that affected its usability. Few students used the Student Center after their first year. Most opted to go into Burlington to grab lunch or school supplies.

The most recent collection of updates was supposed to follow the same style, but then Neldner Group got involved. Their partnership poured money into the school's coffers and the administration decided to go very big and very modern. The Student Center was torn down, and the sign for Center Commons went up soon after. Of the half dozen features promised at the ground-breaking ceremony, only the food court and gym are complete. More features are announced as Nelder Wellness Group continues to put money into the school, but the build schedule just can't keep up.

Construction halted over the last winter holiday before slowly beginning again in the spring. The contractor claimed it was due to planned seasonal slowdowns and a tight labor market. Hunters looking into student social media will find a discussion about a dead construction

worker who was killed not by an industrial accident but by vicious claw wounds supposedly dealt while he was working late one night at the site. The company struggles to find workers because the story spread through local contractors and nobody wants to risk their lives after seeing the now-deleted posts.

Dot's Spot

It's hard to miss this restaurant. The front of the building looks like a roadside attraction straight out of a mid-century tourism brochure. The main dining area's a carousel, flanked by long-dead drive-in restaurant speakers. Dot's Spot is the one thing in Burlington that's nearly as old as the college. It's also the main place where students and locals freely blend together to consume greasy cheeseburgers, late-night coffee and early-morning hash browns.

The modest seating inside goes in two shifts. During the day, locals sit at the main counter to talk about what's going on in Burlington and complain about the students who end up passed out on lawns or throwing parties that last until dawn. At night, students move into the booths for late-night study sessions and a place to hang out that isn't a loud bar or house party. Many graduates leave with a small souvenir purloined from the restaurant such as a coffee cup or a napkin holder.

The origins of the mirrored carousel remain a mystery. The explanations range from the practical to the ridiculous. Practical origins suggest a previous owner bought it as a way to compete with fast food restaurants pulling away business by opening playlands. Wilder rumors claim the ride was the only surviving relic of a circus fire that claimed dozens of lives. The trapped souls prevent any attempt to move or dismantle the carousel, appearing in the mirrors to swear vengeance and haunt the interloper until the carousel is returned. It still works but is only run at specific times of the year: Halloween, Homecoming and the week before the summer holidays.

The origins of the mirrored carousel remain a mystery.



The Quarry: The Peripheral Man

Subjects who encountered the Peripheral Man gave it the name because it could never be seen clearly by anyone. It existed only on the edge of someone's vision. Looking at it directly caused it to vanish. But keeping it out of focus or at the side of their vision kept it manifested in a distinct shape. At first, the test subjects were the only ones who saw the creature. Soon the control groups testing the drugs were seeing it. Then shortly before the Wagner Hall fire, the scientists and medical staff started to experience what they called the Oneiric Entity.

The Peripheral Man adopts an elongated human form with a dark, featureless body. Its arms stretch to the ground and weightlessly drag behind it with fingers that end in needles. The figure seems to be wearing a top hat. It has no face but it does speak to potential victims if it must. The voice is a breathy rasp that's barely audible to the human ear. Sometimes it makes its presence known through impossibly long breathing. It can sound like the wind to mortal ears but then suddenly shift pitch and direction, sending a shiver down a Hunter's spine.

PERIPHERAL MAN: ORIGINS

Once upon a time, a handful of humans traveled to a place where the veil between this world and others was very thin. There they found a variety of plants that, when cultivated back in their home, allowed them to see beings from those other worlds. One of the fey began a rapport with the humans and found that it could ride them to interact with the human world. But, little by little, those humans died off and the being spent a lot of time wishing it could feel those sensations again.

Some of the clearest evidence the Peripheral Man exists are tapes and audio recordings from the Wagner Hall experiments. Scientists observing the test subjects heard them talking in otherwise empty rooms. When reviewing the tapes, they heard a second voice on the

recordings talking back. The thin, whispery voice talked about the dreams the subject was having and what it could do to make those dreams nightmares. The tapes contained two additional audio cues the researchers connected to the Peripheral Man. The entity drew long, raspy breaths that lasted for minutes while the human subject spoke. When it moved around the room, the listener could hear the sounds of dog-like claws on the floor.

Photographic evidence remains elusive. Digital recordings capture nothing, and digital cameras just show empty space. Old film photos from the Wagner Hall files did catch the creature's image. A handful of photos show a blurry form looming over a test subject or a sleeping scientist. The best one is a quickly snapped Polaroid in a bathroom mirror. The Peripheral Man shows up in full shadow on the edge of the flash, just beyond the terror-stricken face of Denise Peralta. One investigator swore he could make out a face in the form, but once he started hearing a whispery voice in his dreams, he quit looking.

This living shadow forced individuals to stay awake. It started with test subjects who were already dealing with minimal sleep due to the nature of BFT. Those people were the first to be hollowed out. They blacked out and woke up elsewhere with no recollection of how they got there or what they did in their lost time. Initially, these incidents were harmless, but as time passed, the Hollowed engaged in more dangerous behavior. They wandered onto busy roads. They attacked unprovoked. After returning to their senses, sometimes they remembered nothing. Other times, they described the horror of witnessing their body doing things on its own like an awful dream.

Those people were the first to be hollowed out

The drug was the common component in all these cases. The ad-hoc cell of monster hunters that formed around these incidents, made up of test subjects, concerned friends, and staff members, figured out that the Peripheral Man was able to control of the bodies of anyone who consumed the drug. It used those bodies as it saw fit to spread the drug by selling it through

local weed dealers and spiking the drinks of the control group subjects and scientists who were unaware they had been dosed. It also desired unusual experiences. The Peripheral Man wanted a good time now it was connected to the physical world.

The hunters went to work finding out who had taken the drug knowingly or unknowingly. They collected as many as possible in Wagner Hall and confronted The Peripheral Man. It did not go the way they planned. They thought they could trap it, but it leapt from body to body to escape capture. The cell unleashed a bloody backup plan: anyone who had taken the drug had to die. During the struggle, the people who were part of the drug trials fought back by constructing crude weapons from the chemical labs. The building caught fire, and soon everything burned out of control. In the end, dozens of people died or were injured, and Wagner Hall burned to the ground.

The Peripheral Man laid low for several decades. The fiery end to the experiments severed connections with the mortal world but ultimately didn't harm the fey entity. It sent the creature into an extended period of brooding and thinking about what it would do with another chance at the real world. Its first contact with humans showed it the existence of the other realm. The second time opened the doorway to it. If a third opportunity arose, he would step through permanently.

The first signs of change came recently when the Peripheral Man felt the long-lost tingle of mortal minds thanks to Neldner Group's new miracle product. He marveled at the changes he saw in the mortal realm. He knew this time he had to guide them to open the doors wider. This was it: either he stays in their world or he's pushed back into his strange, dark realm forever. He's missed human warmth. He's missed the smell of rain on trees. All of these sensations fill him completely. He'll do anything to keep feeling them forever.

Powers & Strengths

The monster seeks a network of human hosts, created through a process the original team in Wagner Hall called "being hollowed out." The Peripheral Man drives a person to a level of exhaustion when they can no longer resist bodily possession. The fey creature can end the possession at any time, though it can't usually hold on for more than 24 hours. It chooses whether the victim is aware of what is happening or if they simply black out and lose time. The Peripheral Man prefers to black out hollowed victims, but lets them remember what happened if it thinks that will work to



its advantage. If relating the memory of the experience might drive someone else to try the drug, for example, the hollowed will remember.

The Peripheral Man drives a person to a level of exhaustion where they can no longer resist bodily possession.

The Peripheral Man can make itself seen and heard in our world. It prefers indirect interaction rather than direct confrontation. It whispers things to unnerve potential victims and appears in mirrors to scare people awake. Most often, it appears as a smudged humanoid shape with unnatural proportions. It can choose to leave evidence behind such as faces or handprints. Older camera and film equipment can capture its image, but the monster doesn't show up on digital recordings. Should someone view marked photos or film stock they find the smudge leaks through the frame or the screen. If the Hunter reaches out and touches it, their hand comes away dirty.

Digital recordings are more susceptible to the Peripheral Man's control. It can choose to appear on video or digital audio but rarely does. If it wants to instill fear in a subject, it might whisper along to an audio track in a manner similar to electronic voice phenomena. The monster takes pleasure in doing this on media unrelated to any attempted recording of its presence. A Hunter won't find any trace of the Peripheral Man on dedicated surveillance footage. Instead, they might be watching a video on social media while they are relaxing and suddenly hear a strange whisper barely audible on the track.

As a creature of nightmare and shadow, the Peripheral Man fears no weapons of the mortal world. Bullets pass through it, fire doesn't burn it and blades don't cut it. Hunters can strike at it through hollowed-out humans, but that involves endangering innocent lives. None of its victims on campus asked to be drawn into this game.

The Peripheral Man's proximity induces nightmares. The first signs of his activity are poor sleep and epidemics of nightmares in a dorm or all across campus. It's a real good reason to stay awake.

Did Anyone Else Feel That?

The more people the Peripheral Man hollows out, the stronger he gets. Show his growing strength by adding small surreal elements to scene descriptions. The closer the cell comes to confrontation, the more dream-like the college should feel. Here are some sample elements to help drive that uneasy feeling that something's not right whenever the dream eater is around. Consider using one of these (or make up your own) whenever the Danger increases.

- Clocks slow down and take far longer than expected to tick over to the next minute.
- Door handles become extremely cold or warm to the touch.
- The area experiences strange weather, such as unexpected snow.
- Silence falls over a large social setting.
- Paintings and photographs seem to move.
- Animals show up in unusual places
- The same locked door appears in multiple buildings
- Books, posters, graffiti, etc. include text that can't be read, but is still understood.
- People experience flashes of déjà vu.

Clocks slow down and take far longer than expected to tick over to the next minute.



The Effects of Biphrenaloxitine on Hunters

The Hunters might decide they need to experience biphrenaloxitine firsthand. They might want to lure The Peripheral Man into a trap. They might get dosed by a hollowed-out student to help the dream eater take over their body. They might just develop a taste for Rasp-Anana Nirvana Thoosi. With Storyteller permission, any Hunter who takes a number of doses of the drug equal to their Stamina can purchase the Sense the Unnatural Edge (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 97) with XP from this story using doses as their focus. They may also do this if they get a steady supply of Thoosi and drink at least one can per day for a month. Once they've bought the Edge, they can continue the effect with a sufficiently strong hit of caffeine or energy drinks.

Every dose of biphrenaloxitine gives the Hunter a +1 dice pool bonus to their next Stamina or Composure roll. This bonus lasts eight hours and can be stacked with multiple doses up to a +4 bonus. Once the bonus is used, it goes away, though it can be built up again by taking multiple doses. Each dose takes 12 hours to work its way out of the system.

Every time a Hunter takes a dose, they roll their current Willpower rating with a Difficulty equal to the number of doses of the drug still in their system. A win means the drug has yet to take hold. A critical win means they don't have to make any more Willpower rolls until the drug completely wears off. Failure means they are hollowed out and can be possessed by the Peripheral Man. A botch means he asserts control immediately.

SUSPENSE OR SURPRISE?

Some Storytellers may choose to make the Willpower roll in secret so the players can't predict if they will lose control at a critical moment. Others may roll openly to give players a sense of dread should they know that the Peripheral Man is coming for their character.

Regardless of which method you choose, be sure it is in line with your troupe's expectations about how (or whether) a player may lose control of their character. It's just as easy for a Hunter who takes too much biphrenaloxitine to pass out and wake up with a massive headache. It's still an experimental drug; it might not work on everyone.

Taking a diluted dose of the drug, such as Thoosi or Big Dave (see p. 58) blunts the effects but also tones down the risk. The Hunter gets a +1 dice pool bonus per dose to a maximum of +3 dice. The Willpower roll to see if someone is hollowed out doesn't come until the dose wears off, when the drug is almost out of the Hunter's system. It's a single roll with a Difficulty equal to the amount of diluted doses taken within 48 hours.

Weaknesses

The presence of biphrenaloxitine in someone's system enhances the Peripheral Man's powers, opening them up to possession. While it could appear to humans and cause them fear, possession is an entirely different experience. If the Hunters destroy the drug and any products made with it, the clock runs down for the fey creature. The drug naturally passes out of humans over a 48-hour period. Without any humans on the drug, the monster is just something that rattles on the edge of perception and can be dismissed as the wind or a weird trick of the light.

Without any humans on the drug, the monster is just something that rattles on the edge of perception and can be dismissed as the wind or a weird trick of the light.

Even the hollowed-out heal over time. If the Peripheral Man let them observe what he used their bodies for, they remember the things they did while he was in control. Otherwise, they always wonder

what happened in the time they lost. Given enough time, the hollowed-out soon look upon those terrifying nights as a terrible nightmare. Their intimate encounter with the dark might even give them a sense of the unknown that could serve them well should they ever take up the Hunt.

The complex web of boons and banes that are part of a fey creature's existence is hard for mortals to fathom. But just like any law, knowledge of a restriction can be used to gain advantage. When the Peripheral Man sees its reflection in a mirror, it leaves a sliver of itself behind. Reflective surfaces cause pain and fear, but dedicated mirrors do actual harm and weaken its essence. Hunters looking for a more permanent solution should consider finding several mirrors to trap the creature. If it can't look away from a mirror, it starts to tear itself apart until it dissipates in a smoky haze to materialize in a far realm, hopefully never to return. Causing lasting damage requires the use of a dedicated mirror. Reflective surfaces are unpleasant for the Peripheral Man to see but are more of a nuisance than a bane.

WHERE THE HELL IS THE MIRROR STORE IN THIS TOWN?

The mirrored carousel at Dot's Spot is an obvious place for a final battle with the Peripheral Man. Reward the Hunters' research with evidence pointing to mirrors as the creature's weakness. But don't be afraid to go with whatever plan the Hunters put together. There can be complications — does the Entrepreneurial Hunter really have enough cash on hand to buy every mirror in the big box store? — but let them try their plan before pushing a solution you already have in mind.

The Peripheral Man

General Difficulty: 5/4

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 8, Social 9, Mental 8

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Stealth 10, Insight 10, Intimidation 10

Notes / Other Traits: Resilience, Invisibility, Prescience (dice pool 6, +1 per dose of biphrenaloxitine in target's system)

- **Vulnerability (Mirrors):** Should the Peripheral Man see itself in a mirror, it takes one level of Superficial Damage and leaves behind a small bit of its essence on the mirror. Should it somehow physically pass through a mirror, it takes Aggravated damage instead. Other reflective surfaces make the creature uncomfortable but do no damage.

People

Plenty of people around Burlington have either brushed up against the Peripheral Man, or unknowingly enabled him.

Daniel Washington, the Survivor

Daniel Washington didn't sign up to be a monster killer. He got a job at Burlington College in the 1970s as a maintenance worker to put food on the table. He walked around Wagner Hall as if he were invisible as one of the few Black people on the campus. Sometimes, he wondered what his life would be like if he could afford to take classes at the school where he worked. They treated him all right, but once he started to hear the whispers of the Peripheral Man, he wondered if maybe he needed to get a job elsewhere.

He felt relief when a handful of others also confessed to noticing something in the halls late at night. It did him good to see students and teachers working together to figure out what was going on. He barely survived his first full encounter with the Peripheral Man, but he knew the school had to take drastic measures to stop it. He didn't know just how drastic things would get. He should have stopped the fire, gotten more people out, or told the truth to the police and fire department. But an accident kept the curious away and without anyone asking questions, Daniel thought he just might yet be able to get a good night's sleep again.

Daniel thought he just might yet be able to get a good night's sleep again.

Daniel retired a few years ago, but something kept him in the area. He had a gut feeling that maybe the Peripheral Man would return. The instinct is difficult to shake. He's not sure what he can do about it now. Back then, he was young and strong and he barely survived. Now he's got a long list of medical conditions and is afraid if he starts talking about shadow men his kids will decide it's time to move him out of his house and into a home. Except now when he goes on campus, he can hear that familiar breathing and, sometimes, a rasping whisper of laughter.

General Difficulty: 3/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 4

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 5, Occult 6, Investigation 6

THE FACE OF THE MONSTER

The Peripheral Man will likely take a few victims over the course of the story. There are sure to be some background characters affected by the creature but there should also be a named character that represents people overtaken by the dream eater. Any of the characters in this section could be that character. Choose President Zachary or Allison Dalton to present players with a direct villain to confront. Choose Manny or Daniel to complicate any plans that do massive harm to the hollowed.

Hamilton Zachary, President of Burlington College

Living up to a family name can be tough. The Zachary surname can be found scattered around the area surrounding Burlington College. Carved into museums, concert halls and other institutions in cities where titans of industry looked to show their influence beyond their scant few decades of mortality. The name also echoes in the halls of power with multiple senators and cabinet members.

These echoes keep Hamilton Zachary up at night. Never as charismatic as his siblings nor as clever as his uncles, he spent most of his youth spending his family's fortune and doing his best to sully the family name. Despite those unimpressive years, he retained enough political and financial clout to become an administrator at the college he nearly flunked. He frames the story as an eleventh-hour revelation that he tells to any student that ends up in his office. That his family made several contributions to the school to help build the two residence towers that stand where Wagner Hall once did is a detail he omits from his self-made legend.

Now he seeks to continue the Zachary legacy by leaving his own name on a building. He believes his dealings with Neldner Group will usher in a new era

of prosperity for the school. A corporate name may be on the Center Commons building for now but after other companies see how they can explore profitable enterprises and educate students, he knows his name will be on that building soon enough. Though the students (and a few faculty members) may call him President Ham behind his back, he knows his name will be forever remembered by future alumni.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 5, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Politics 6, Persuasion 8, Etiquette 6

Allison Dalton, Neldner Group Project Manager

Allison Dalton should have seen the trap for what it was. After years of grinding away in the main offices of Neldner Group, she saw an opportunity to break out when she saw a posting for a new product line. She checked with her friends in the recruiting arm. They told her nobody else had applied. The interviews went quickly. She soon found herself moving to a small college town to develop Thoosi, a healthy energy drink using new natural ingredients. How long could it take to launch a product like that? Six months? A year?

She's been in Burlington for three years and is itching to get out. The college keeps asking for money. The drink has hallucinatory side effects. She lives in a house that's older than her grandparents and works in an office that doesn't have walls in the Center Commons. It was fun to relive her college years for a while but if she has to pretend to understand the latest fad one more time she's going to explode.

She doesn't believe in the paranormal even when presented with hard evidence. She sees any approach by the Hunters as a way back to the home office. She'll accuse the cell of interfering in the project with whatever excuse best fits their operational style. They could be anti-corporate goons or student anarchists looking to make trouble while still living off their parents' money. They might be conspiracy weirdos

looking to get Nelder Group mixed up in their bizarre tales to generate video views. If she can use the cell to get out of the project, she will. If not, she'll complicate their lives by making sure the school sees them as a threat.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 5, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Insight 6, Subterfuge 8, Finance 7

Manny Anthony, Student of the Peripheral Man

Manny Anthony felt Burlington College was home from the first day of school. Though he's lived in Burlington for a few years, he feels most at home on campus where he sees the small number of students of color attending the school grow a little each year.

He's best known around town as the owner of MAPC. He owns and runs the local internet provider that's subcontracted out from the larger network because of Burlington's small size. The college is his largest client, but he also handles connectivity for the businesses in town. It's a decent living, and he's often willing to take non-standard payments from customers in financial trouble. The contract with Burlington College keeps him comfortable, so his house is often littered with items given to him by his rural customers. His cat, COD, loves to hide herself in a pile and jump out at any visitors.

He's also the foremost scholar of the Peripheral Man in the area. He's been obsessed with the monster since his days as a student. If the Hunters mention the creature or its trappings to school officials, they probably direct the cell Manny's way. Manny will cook the Hunters dinner and tell them the entire story of the monster should they inquire. Unfortunately, Manny knows every version of the story and is excited to talk about his favorite thing in the world. It may take some time for the Hunters to sort out what's actionable fact and what's undergrad exaggeration from Manny's info drop.

Unfortunately, Manny knows every version of the story and is excited to talk about his favorite thing in the world.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 3, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Occult 8, Technology 8, Stealth 6

Dylan Kammerer, the Resistor

Dylan's plan for college was a football scholarship. When he hurt his knee as a high school senior, that plan went out the window. Luckily, Dylan's family comes from a long line of administrators and other vital government bureaucrats. His academic record might not be spectacular, but that doesn't matter when parents can write a check for a new conference room in Center Commons with their name on it. Dylan feels insecure that he doesn't belong in a school like this, even though he's a perfect fit for the college prep mold and has a family that supports him.

His family connections also got him an internship with Neldner Wellness Group. He's taken the position seriously, which is why he's hesitant to talk about his experiences with the Peripheral Man. He first saw it after a round of Thoosi taste tests. Now, he can't stop seeing it in the shadows of the hallways or hear it whisper to him when he goes to bed. He knows he's got to do something, but he doesn't know where to start. If he comes across the Hunters, he jumps in and follows their lead whether they want his help or not.

Dylan represents the students imperiled by The Peripheral Man. His good instincts can protect people, but he needs the guidance of a seasoned cell to keep him safe. He could become a contact, ally or even a

replacement should one of the Hunters fall to the dark fey of Burlington College. He could also become a Touchstone that shows Hunters some people have their brush with darkness and live to tell the tale.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 8, Awareness 6, Athletics 8

In Chronicles

We've included a few story ideas here to get your cell on the trail of the Peripheral Man. Burlington College can be used as a base of operations for a group of Hunters to kick off a story that features college-age heroes teaming up with curious academics to push back the darkness. The Peripheral Man's presence could be threaded through a short campaign where the Hunters pursue other Quarry while they slowly uncover his mystery. This story could also be used for one-shot or convention play, though opening with the Hunters already aware of the truth behind the Wagner Hall fire will speed things up considerably if you're trying to fit the entire story into a single session. There are also some stories here unrelated to the main storyline.

Burlington College features a base of operations and a central mystery to uncover. Storytellers looking for a short chronicle can focus on the cell uncovering the mystery of the Peripheral Man and attempts to stop his return. Longer chronicles should sprinkle in stories featuring other quarries in and around Burlington and the nearby large city. Cells might even visit some of the other institutions described in this book to find clues on how to defeat this creature of fey.

Burlington College features a base of operations and a central mystery to uncover.

Student Bodies

While Center Commons is the main focus of on-campus construction, other buildings on campus are also being renovated. The Twin Towers are currently under renovation for faster internet and a refreshed, modern look. It all stops one day when construction workers find a body in one of the empty rooms of Eichstadt Tower, stashed in a left-behind trunk. This could throw a serious wrench into the cell's other investigations as police investigate the scene. If the Hunters have already had run-ins with campus police, they might get a rude knock on their door at two in the morning and spend some time in the local jail for questioning.

The body in the trunk is part of a hoax by Hannah Romella and Joshua Nichols. They secretly purchased the body from a nearby medical school. It's part of the launch of their SpookTok influencer brand on social media. Joshua records wildly inaccurate videos hunting down supernatural phenomena, and Hannah does photo shoots for horror movie T-shirt companies. Both students come from influential DC families, which shields them from any charges the local police might drop on them. They also bring the wrong kind of attention to the cell with fans of SpookTok showing up at the worst times. The influencers also put the Hunters front and center at a time when they probably don't want a lot of attention. They'll follow them around, put cameras in their faces to ask embarrassing questions, and post videos of their answers in the least flattering light.

Ghosts are not beholden to rich parents, however. One of the real ghosts inside Eichstadt Tower takes great offense to what SpookTok did in the name of views. The ghost haunts the students, then harasses them, then hospitalizes them. At every escalation, SpookTok comes to the Hunters for help. Given their channel's MO, the cell may have trouble believing that this time the ghost is real. It needs a proper burial. Its remains can be found in the boiler of the tower. It was a victim of a crime of passion, who almost everyone assumed just dropped out of school.

SpookTok is grateful for the Hunters' help even if they are a nuisance most of the time. They continue their fake paranormal encounters though they will do their best to steer people away from legitimate threats. Their money and contacts can help out Hunters who are in a bind. SpookTok also directs fans who have

legitimate problems to solve their way. Their association with the cell might also cause everyone to come to the attention of an org. SpookTok won't see much in the way of consequences of their actions, while the Hunters will have to clean up their messes again and again.

SpookTok are grateful for the Hunters' help even if they are a nuisance most of the time.

The Peripheral Candidate

Security tightens up on campus for the week. Gregory Aaron, a Burlington alumnus currently running for Governor in the state where Burlington College is located, returns for Homecoming weekend. It's an opportunity for plenty of discussion with students, profiles about his time at school, and photo ops at Dandy's Ice Cream Parlor to show he's a man of the people. For the Hunters, it's going to be a pain in the neck. Given that many of Hunters' activities in pursuit of the Quarry involve flexible legality at best, this will put a damper on any ongoing investigation.

Gregory doesn't know it, but he's already caught up in the Peripheral Man's web. When he attended school, the trials in Wagner Hall were in full swing. He signed up to make a little bit of extra money but quit the program after his first dose. The Peripheral Man sees an opportunity for a unique experience hollowing out Aaron to take in the sights and the sounds of the Governor's mansion. Aaron suffers some serious insomnia during the weekend and commits a public gaff or two because of it. Hunters already aware of the Peripheral Man should take note of Aaron's erratic behavior.

This story pushes the Hunters to think of non-violent solutions to vex the Peripheral Man. They might offer a tastier target to be hollowed out in exchange. They might try to trap the creature inside one of their own (see Rich Internal Monologue for more details). They might try to steer the candidate away from the school or conspire to keep him awake until he leaves town. They

also have to decide whether it's better to keep him in the dark or risk telling him the truth. Aaron is open to the truth; he had a run-in or two back in the Wagner Hall days but buried those memories deep.

This story pushes the Hunters to think of some non-violent solutions to vex the Peripheral Man.

If he survives, Aaron goes on to win the election. A state Governor could prove to be a huge ally in future hunts if the players want to add a connection with him as an Edge. They might also become a political liability if they get caught in the public eye. Aaron might also end up tangled with one of the orgs as his political influence grows. If Aaron doesn't survive, one of those orgs might show up at the school and try to push the cell away from the investigation to mount their own.

Out of the Past

Someone of an appropriate age who is close to the cell, such as a contact, ally or even a Touchstone, reveals they were one of the Hunters who faced the Peripheral Man many years ago. That alone might get the cell to check out how things are going at Burlington College, but there's an additional twist to an old tale. Their friend was contacted by Abigail Marx, another one of the survivors. They agreed to meet at Dot's Spot for dinner. When they met to talk about the return of the dream eater, the survivors looked exactly as they did nearly 50 years ago.

Abigail Marx survived the fire in Wagner Hall. But she also suspected the Peripheral Man experienced a setback instead of defeat. The experience unlocked Marx's Drive. She couldn't go back to normal life, so she became a Hunter. She killed quite a few quarries during her time, but she found what she was looking for when her cell came across a nest of vampires in Mobile. She let one escape, and he agreed to turn her into the undead. Abigail honed her powers and waited. She could feel the Peripheral Man's presence when it started hollowing people out recently. She moved to Burlington, bought a

house, and converted it into a nest. She's been careful to cause as little harm as possible when she feeds, though she's had to cover up an accident or two.

The Peripheral Man's return brought her back to Burlington. She reached out to the other Wagner Hall survivors out of a strange pang of loneliness. She knew her old monster hunter friends might figure out what she was, but she needed to see them one more time before they were all dead. Only one answered her call, and they said they had younger friends who could help. Marx has plenty of abilities that could prove useful. Is it worth teaming up with a lesser evil to take down a greater one? Even with her powers, is Abigail immune to the powers of the Peripheral Man? What happens if he hollows out a vampire?

Once the cell defeats the Peripheral Man, the question of what to do with Abigail becomes more pressing. She's spent the last 45 years preparing for this battle. Does the cell allow her to go free? Are they ready to take her down after the fight against the Peripheral Man? Does Abigail offer to turn any of the Hunters out of gratitude, maybe because they're fatally injured? How might other cells or orgs react to knowing a vampire walks free? How might Touchstones react to a Hunter who killed someone vital to their cause?

Sabotage in the Moonlight

Construction on Center Commons shuts down every weekend. One Monday, the machines stay silent. Someone spray painted CAPITALISM KILLS on one of the finished walls of the construction site. Other acts of sabotage soon follow. Tools are stolen. Machines are damaged. The fire alarm is pulled at the site. There's no direct violence against any of the workers but it seems like an inevitable move. Tensions escalate between Neldner Group wanting to stay on budget and the college worried about bad PR over worker safety.

One night, howls erupt from the construction site. The Hunters soon discover that a pack of werewolves are behind these acts of sabotage. The wolves consider the site where the building is built to be sacred to their kind. The pack is also divided into factions. One faction, led by a werewolf named Milkeyes, wants to work with humans like the Hunters to perform a ritual to purify the site and create a new one. The other

faction, led by a brutal warrior named Redtooth, are tired of acts of vandalism trying to stop the construction through fear. They want to use bloodshed to reclaim the site and the power within.

This story drops the cell in the middle of a supernatural power struggle. The group could simply go after the pack, but wise Hunters should realize the value of a little diplomacy. Helping Milkeyes perform the ritual will head off any harm to innocent mortals at the school. Of course, Redtooth might decide to take matters into its own hands and go after someone like President Zachary or Meghan Dalton to get the project completely shut down. The key tension here is to make a werewolf hunt story that is not just melting down silverware before a big bloody action scene.

The werewolf pack could become an ally in the later struggles with the Peripheral Man. Milkeyes' ritual ability could provide some protection to vital characters from being hollowed out. It could send the cell to take the fight into the realm of the fey. Redtooth could also prove useful in fights with the Peripheral Man thanks to an extensive knowledge of the spirits and otherworldly creatures. The pack could also show up to complicate matters just before the cell is ready to act on taking down the dream eater.

The Whistleblower

Lana Ho came to Burlington College as part of the Thoosi team. She expected to be the main point of contact with students thanks to her status as a recent college graduate. Instead, Allison Dalton treats her as an intern by piling off all the unglamorous work onto Lana while Allison goes to another dinner with President Zachary. Lana has the keys to the kingdom, and she's seen some disturbing things. The corner-cutting nature of the company. The connections to the Wagner Hall fire. Even a few videos from students who drank too much of the energy drink and are starting to see things.

Between the personal insults and the incoming professional train wreck, Lana is looking for a way out. She has a treasure trove of information for the Hunters to use, but they have to help her first. Lana and her brother, Xuan, have work visas tied to the Nelder Group. If the company goes down, they'll be sent back to Vietnam. Further, in the crunch leading up to the

launch of Thoosi, the company has been giving out free samples of the drink to its IT team, and Xuan is hollowed out because of it.

Lana's information offers a long-term solution to the Nelder Group releasing Thoosi to the world. A campus full of students that could be potential bodies for the Peripheral Man is bad. A worldwide launch of the drink will let him escape anywhere. It might even call out to other fey looking for a way into this world. The Hunters need to get Xuan clean and protect him from the Peripheral Man to convince Lana to go public with what she's learned about the Nelder Group.

Lana and Xuan could make an excellent support duo for the Hunters if both survive. They could scour the internet for new cases or find ways to get hard-to-access information. Future stories might frame the Nelder Group, or whichever company snaps it up, as a recurring antagonist looking to hinder the Hunters in whatever non-supernatural ways they can find.

Big Dave on Campus

College offers many new experiences for students. One episode expands their minds through the use of recreational drugs. Burlington College is no different. There's not much on campus you wouldn't find at other schools. Some students use drugs to enhance their scholastic performance, others to relieve stress. A new drug making the rounds combines these two elements. It lets a user focus when needed but also allows a relaxing buzz once everyone can relax. Big Dave, as the drug is known to its users, is becoming very popular.

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Big Dave happens to be a cocktail created by a chemistry student named Dennis Farber. Big Dave uses biphrenaloxitine as its main ingredient with a mixture of hallucinogens, psychoactives and narcotics that allows users control over their high. It can keep a user awake and focused or relaxed and mellow. The drug is distributed through baked goods available through the

Happy Hippie coffee shop that sits on the corner of Main Street and University Avenue in Burlington. Ask the barista for something from Big Dave's bake sale and they will select a properly dosed donut or other dessert.

An unusual side effect spreads as the drug becomes more popular. Images and objects from users' dreams start to leak into the real world. These elements are subtle at first, like a green rabbit dashing around a corner or a tree whispering a dead relative's name. Most Hunter stories stay grounded in the real world. Big Dave offers an opportunity to get weird while escalating the Quarry's power. How long until the Peripheral Man can start possessing people without Big Dave? What happens if the strangeness starts to spread beyond campus?

If the Hunters find Dennis, they uncover his main stash of Big Dave. Without the drug in the population, things begin to normalize on campus. Most folks write off any massive weirdness as stress dreams or bad drugs. The cell needs to get Dennis out of town because if they destroy the drugs, the Peripheral Man will work press him for more. Dennis is grateful for the chance to get away. If the Hunters decide to eliminate him, the Peripheral Man starts to appear wearing Dennis's face when he taunts them in later stories.

Second-Hand FIRSTLIGHT

Orgs occasionally pass on investigations they think aren't worth their time and effort to freelance Hunter cells. At best, orgs treat Hunter cells like little siblings they can push around to do the heavy work before the org takes the glory of killing a monster. More commonly, the org treats outside Hunters as disposable assets to weaken a Quarry before they swoop in with superior resources and step over the bodies of the underprepared Hunters. When a contact with the government hunters of FIRSTLIGHT reaches out to the cell with information on potential blankbodies at Burlington College, it's unclear in what capacity the Hunters are being used.

This time, however, bureaucracy is the culprit. The Peripheral Man is not a vampire and, therefore, not in FIRSTLIGHT's jurisdiction. The agent passing along the lead could be doing it out of a sense of duty or they could be acting in the government interest. There are

plenty of well-connected families with students at Burlington College wanting protection from whatever threat is affecting the student population. An unofficial solution is better than none at all.

**The Peripheral Man
is not a vampire
and, therefore, not
in FIRSTLIGHT's
jurisdiction.**

This story portrays FIRSTLIGHT as uneasy allies. The agents tasked with the investigation might roll in after the Hunters start turning up evidence of paranormal activity. These agents might prefer a similar solution to the people who burned down Wagner Wall so many years ago. It's up to the cell to convince its rivals that method didn't work, and that the Hunters can handle the Peripheral Man. Keeping FIRSTLIGHT out until the cell can discover the truth of the matter creates excellent tension between human antagonists and the Quarry.

FIRSTLIGHT takes note of how the Hunters handle the Peripheral Man. If they resolve the situation, they might use the cell as a stealth asset for those targets that even a black bag government agency wouldn't touch without unacceptable risks. If the Hunters fail, the organization sees them as pawns they can sacrifice in operations where they don't want to lose their own personnel. The Hunters might think they have a favor they can cash in with FIRSTLIGHT, but they'll run into trouble calling in that marker. The org always asks for one more favor before doing anything for the cell.

Rich Internal Monologue

One of the Hunters has made the noble decision to invite the Peripheral Man into their own mind. This may be part of a cunning trap to use knowledge or Endowments to dull the creature's power or keep it trapped within the Hunter's mind. It might be the consequence of a hasty decision to save a Touchstone

by offering themselves instead. It could even be a bad idea like opening up to the Peripheral Man on the roof of a building and then jumping off just before it takes over. Some players enjoy the self-sacrificing route. Maybe the Hunter's just taken way too much Big Dave or picked up a Thoosi habit and didn't make a conscious decision at all.

Ambitious Storytellers can use this as an opportunity to run a story that's more surreal and fantastic. **Hunter: The Reckoning** tends to be a more grounded part of the World of Darkness, so running a game set inside a dreamscape is an opportunity to change things up a bit. The Hunter might have a conversation with a long-dead character. They might relive their best or worst memories. They could even get a glimpse of the future. The battle with the Peripheral Man doesn't have to consist of direct hits bounced back and forth. It can be a surreal confrontation with a monster wearing Mom's face, saying what the Hunter should have said all those years ago.

Ambitious Storytellers can use this as an opportunity to run a story that's more surreal and fantastic.

NINE, TEN, NEVER SLEEP AGAIN

This story offers an opportunity to play with one of the great tropes of horror storytelling: It Was All a Dream. Some Storytellers will go down a dark path with terrible fates for beloved characters just to take it all back with the phrase "and then you wake up." This can be an effective method to generate tension but also think about layering extra clues and suggestions on how to defeat The Peripheral Man in the dream sequence. Use this tool sparingly: once in this story is plenty.



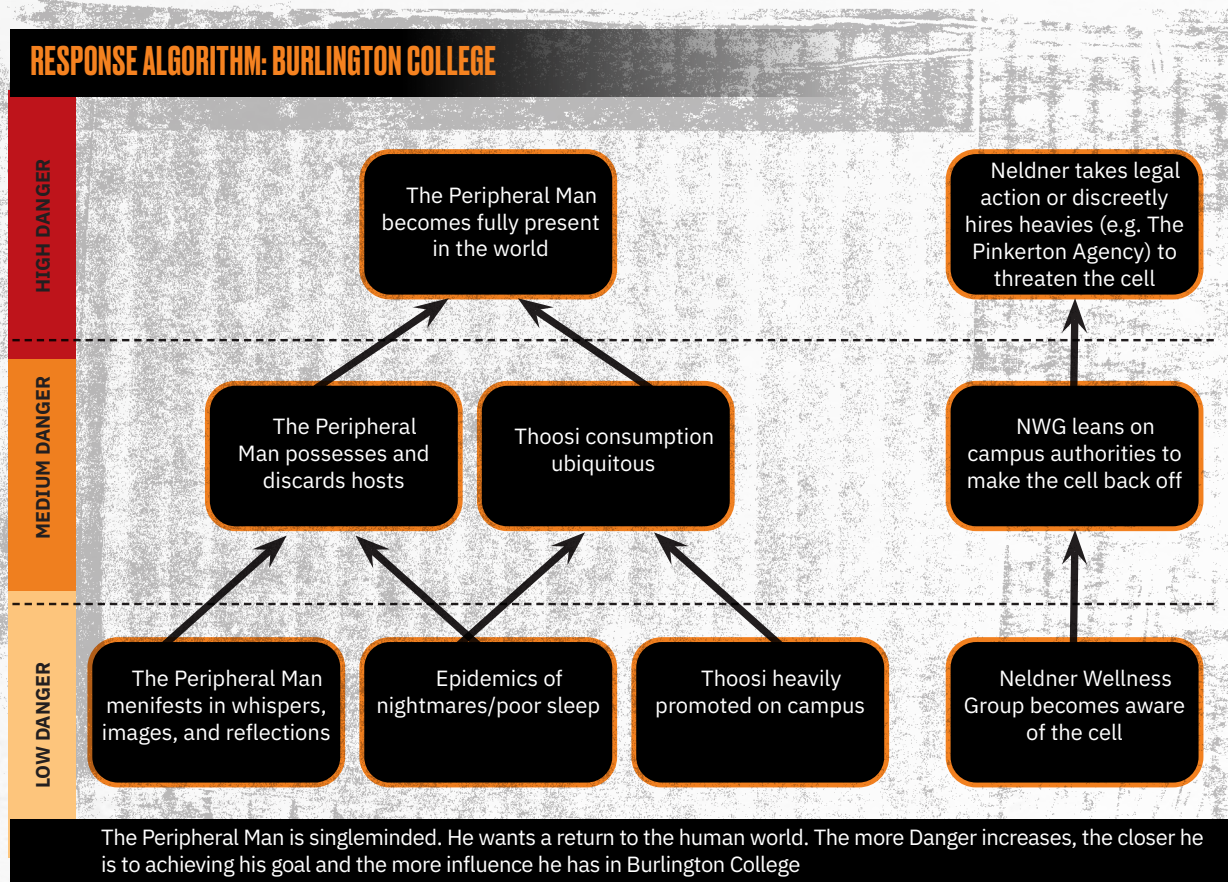
Other players can join in the dream sequence. They could be aspects of the trapped Hunter's psyche helping or hindering in the battle against the Peripheral Man. The session could be set up like a hidden deduction game where the Hunter must figure out which cellie the monster is impersonating to be able to expel it from their brain. There could also be an external problem happening like a fight or a fire that the rest of the cell must deal with while the Hunter takes on the monster one on one.

If the Hunter shakes off the Peripheral Man, they should get an advantage in further conflicts. Perhaps the Hunter can now Sense The Unseen and automatically detect the dream eater. The process might also give insight into how to cure other hollowed-out students at Burlington College. If the Hunter fails, the consequences could be as simple as killing them. The Peripheral Man could flee in their body and turn the story into a road trip as the cell gives chase. The Storyteller could also cut a deal with the Hunter: they are back in control for now but in the future, at a most inopportune time, the Peripheral Man will take back control.

Response Algorithm

The response algorithm indicates how the Peripheral Man behaves at different Danger levels. As Danger increases, he becomes more powerful and is able to influence the world more directly. Early in the Hunt, when Danger is low, pick actions from the lowest tier of the chart, moving upwards as Danger increases.

The Response Algorithm isn't set in stone. Quarries adapt to Hunters' behavior and take whatever action is appropriate at the moment. But it's a rough guide to what the Peripheral Man is capable of in situations where you're unsure. ■



Chapter Three:

Keen Campus

"No one wants to die. Even people who want to go to heaven don't want to die to get there. And yet death is the destination we all share... You are already naked. There is no reason not to follow your heart."

-Steve Jobs,
Stanford University 2005 commencement address

The tech startup Keen claims to have invented a form of AI that can impersonate your deceased loved ones, allowing you to speak and interact with them to aid the grieving process. No such AI exists. The truth is Keen channels ghostly entities who feed on misery and destroy lives. These entities gradually take a tighter grip on Keen's board members. All the information needed to uncover and stop them is on Keen's central research and development campus, right there for enterprising Hunters to find.

A Keen Chronicle

Keen is both an academic research endeavor and a budding corporation. Hunters might investigate it as staff members, interns working there for academic credit, or qualified academics stepping sideways into a much better paid role in Keen, as staff and students at the university Keen is technically still part of, or as outsiders.

Staff and students immersed in Keen hear rumors of unethical psychological experiments, ghost sightings, and other troubling phenomena. They might encounter one of the senior board members, in all their unnatural, creepy glory. Their work at Keen might even awaken one or more cellmate's Drives. Once they start investigating, Bastien Cousineau (p. 78) may contact the cell, recruiting them to help destroy Keen from the inside, placing them in the middle of an ongoing struggle between board members' disparate interests.

Reaching Keen is a slow process for outsiders. First contact is likely to come from seeing someone use the Keen app as part of their grieving process and then watching it slowly suck the life out of them. Early cases can deal with a single app installation, perhaps leaving the cell thinking the haunting really is the victim's deceased loved one rather than a predatory ghost impersonating them. Subsequent cases might gradually expand to show hauntings associated with the app as a wider pattern and reveal the ghosts' true nature. When the Hunters initially contact Keen to warn them of the problem, Keen appears to take it seriously and wants the Hunters' help — but they're keeping their enemies close, fully intending to discredit or destroy the cell before they learn just how deep the danger goes.

Academic characters (staff and students) based not in Keen but at the university it originated with offer the best of both worlds. They start with an outsider's perspective and experiences, allowing for a slow reveal of Keen's secrets, but it's comparatively easy to become insiders. Keen's HQ is close by and happy to recruit interns and staff from its home institution.

History

What if you never had to say goodbye? What if you never had to be alone again?

That's the question Keen puts to its prospective consumers. Keen started as an academic research program at a specialist technology university. Its gigantic, singular promise — to free the future from grief — attracted huge media interest, then huge venture capital investments. It's now the most lucrative asset the school possesses, and as a result, Keen gets to do whatever Keen wants. So far, so familiar: tech will save us, give it all the money. The sting in the tale is that Keen's product, an app that uses sophisticated AI to recreate deceased loved ones, is completely fake. The project's a shell, a front for powerful, malevolent ghosts worming their way back into the world of the living.

Let's Stay Connected

The Keen app promises to reconnect people to a facsimile of a dead loved one. These Shades are convincing chatbots and virtual avatars secretly run by hungry ghosts that crave pain and suffering. The monsters have a penchant for teasing out a user's darkest secrets and desires — a dataset the company is deeply interested in, even if the creatures sometimes drive their customers to suicide, infect them with supernatural malaise, or even possess them. Ultimately, Keen hopes they can use this treasure trove of personal information to create real AIs capable of predicting the behavior and responses of entire human societies.

The creatures sometimes drive their customers to suicide, infect them with supernatural malaise, or even possess them.

Keen relies on grieving family members granting access to the deceased's online life. They turn over computers and smart devices, plus every known



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password. Keen's data analysts work on cracking accounts that would otherwise be inaccessible. Access to online communications and activity, plus voice and video recordings, allows them to reverse engineer their customers as chatbots called Shades™. The app's Software as a Service: as long as the relatives pay the monthly fee, they retain access to this facsimile of their dearly departed loved one. As an extra quality of life feature (i.e. revenue stream), Keen's advertising and merchandising partners reach out to the bereaved through the app, just when potential customers need them most.

Keen's promise is completely hollow. They can make avatars and chatbots that mimic a real person, but they can't recreate an entire human consciousness with all its idiosyncrasies and contradictions. The research team no longer tries. The concentration of grief and misery the early research evoked attracted powerful, malevolent spectral beings who made contact with former Keen researcher and subsequently non-executive director, Bastien Cousineau, just as the university was threatening to cut funding due to a lack of commercially viable results.

These spectral entities offered to replace the inadequate AI and impersonate Keen's deceased subjects. Keen got a solution to its problems, and the entities got intimate, unrestricted access to the misery, grief, and envy of the bereaved, which they feed on and grow inexorably stronger.

The spectral entities' involvement gave the appearance of huge technological leaps forward — and got the money rolling in.

Welcome Back

Though some privacy advocates accuse Keen of exploiting the vulnerable for profit, Keen has yet to meet any real opposition to its practices politically or from the media. It's seen as one of the few practical applications in a crowded AI field, and its promise of virtual immortality is sexy — especially to aging billionaire investors.

Though the company has yet to turn a profit, it's flush with cash and riding high on good publicity. The C-suite and investors know the company's road to profitability requires marketing its technology to

businesses, governments, and their militaries. An AI capable of perfectly predicting individual or societal decisions would do that. The spectral entities Keen uses will never be capable of that. It's therefore only a matter of time before the company collapses. When it does, it will ruin numerous careers in the senior team, destroy the university's reputation, and devastate the fortunes of a great many wealthy individuals. So naturally, anyone who learns the truth behind Keen is deeply committed to keeping it secret.

The company's road to profitability requires marketing its technology to businesses, governments, and their militaries.

Technical Specifications

Keen describes the spectral entities' actions as the Never Alone Again™ algorithm. No AI or algorithm at Keen is capable of mimicking the dead. Nor will there ever be such a thing. The entities chat with their users and imitate the speech and disposition of the recently deceased. While these creatures have no special knowledge of the dead people they impersonate, they are adept at manipulating the perceptions and feelings of those in mourning. They intuitively know what to say to provoke despair and shred the joy of those who know the pain of loss.

There is no AI or algorithm at Keen capable of mimicking the dead. Nor will there ever be.

The more spectral entities speak with customers, the more those customers become lost in their grief and dependent on the chatbot to assuage their pain. The entities gradually hollow out the bereaved emotionally,

eventually creating a psychic hole they can crawl into and inhabit, gaining a vessel and access to all the sublime pleasures and pains of the living world.

SENSE THE UNNATURAL

At the Storyteller's discretion, the Sense the Unnatural Edge come into play when a spectral entity interacts with a user. A user might also have lingering traces of the unnatural after an emotional exchange with a Shade.



Locations

Keen started at a STEM-focused university in Hartford, Connecticut and it's still there. The rest of the campus is a well-funded, financially comfortable university. Entering Keen's facility, affectionately called the annex, is like stepping 20 years into the future. It's 21 acres of ultra-modern architecture — a lot of glass, a lot of living walls and green spaces served by recycled water, and a generous lot of solar panels and rooftop wind turbines — plus incredible leisure and wellness facilities, on-site accommodation that rivals luxury hotels... and the tightest security money can buy.

GLOBAL REACH

Although we've placed Keen's headquarters in Connecticut, there's no reason it has to be there. It's best placed in or near one of the many global cities that encourage tech startups and strive to facilitate a culture and infrastructure where they can succeed. Cape Town, Santiago, Amsterdam and Singapore are all contenders. If you move Keen, adjust the names of key characters to better reflect your chosen region; Keen always has some international staff, but there's no reason the leaders of a Chilean company should be made up primarily of North Americans.

Campus Layout

The Keen campus is arranged in three concentric circles of increasingly restricted access: the public areas, the outer circle, and the inner circle.

Public Areas

Most of the Keen campus is open to the public, though in practice that primarily means students and staff from elsewhere on the university campus. They have access to the cafeteria (24 hours, cruelty-free, vegan menu), the green spaces, and Keen Open Access, an airy, open-plan library of scholarly research on AI, smart technology,

WE'RE HERE TO HELP

I'm sure you have a lot of questions about Keen and our plans for the future. Our shared future. It's really simple. At Keen, we're here to make your life happier, healthier, and whole. We understand there are a lot of problems out there right now; everything from the environment to capitalism itself seems to be under threat. While we don't have the answers to those problems yet, we understand what's at stake and that we need to work together. We are here to help. Keen is here to help.



The world
is changing
faster than ever
before

New technology can seem frightening and strange at first. Artificial intelligence, dynamic memetic algorithms, and data scraping may seem like commonplace terms nowadays, but not so long ago, people found these words strange and disconcerting. The world is changing faster than ever before, and at Keen we want to make sure it's changing for the better. We're still a company and of course producing value for our shareholders, advertisers, and partners is important, but what's most important to us is you. We hope that you'll work with us and be our customer now and forever.

1

The first step is connecting people together and solving for loneliness and loss.

and other fields relevant to Keen's work.

All the public areas are on a free Wi-Fi network, but with enough technical knowhow, it's possible to get access to the employee network via the tablets and computers offered for free in the Data Suite.

The public areas are exceptionally pleasant and staff from the outer (though not inner) circle frequently bring a laptop and work out here.

The public areas also have recreational facilities like a board game library, video game arcade, and spa. They compensate for the fact that Keen culture mandates long hours; the offices are never empty.

Security: As well as friendly security personnel (discreetly armed with tasers and pistols), security drones surveil the public areas, buzzing around just overhead. The drones are unarmed, but carry high quality cameras that transmit footage in real-time to the security office. Operators are instructed to have the drones playfully interact with the public to normalize their presence.

Security personnel out here are normal humans with General Difficulties of 3/2.

The Outer Circle

The employee areas, jokingly called the outer circle by staff, are a mixture of labs where teams can work quietly and intensely when they need to and open plan spaces designed to encourage casual contact with fellow employees. In theory, this encourages water cooler conversations that spark new ideas and prevent teams from becoming isolated and complacent.

This design also means gossip spreads like wildfire: it takes hours for news of a new hire (or a firing) to spread around the entire campus. It also provides a fertile environment for rumors of weird experiences to spread. When Haley from Personnel thought she saw a shadow seeping under an office door when she arrived at work, the whole company knew by lunchtime. All a canny Hunter needs to do to pick up valuable intel through gaining a Guest pass and hang out in these social areas all day. After all, being friendly and helpful is a company value: small talk is practically a requirement.

Most staff working in the outer circle — personnel, admin staff, psychologists researching grief and bereavement, software developers working on the app

or the AI — don't know what Keen really does. They truly believe they're working for a company on the brink of creating digital immortality through next-gen technology.

Security: Everywhere except the bathrooms is on camera. Security guards (Doom Scrollers, see p. 71) patrol in pairs around the clock, and they're supported by quadrupedal robots everyone calls the hounds. About half the hounds are inhabited by lesser spectral entities awaiting their call up to impersonate someone's dead relative. The entities make the hounds far smarter and more adaptable than intruders expect.

The Inner Circle

The real work takes place in the inner circle. Structured much more like a traditional office, with a series of small, keycard-locked rooms and labs, only staff with the highest security clearance get in here. The directors and a handful of clued-in senior researchers work here and this is where Dr. Emrys Thomas maintains a lab — mostly for show, as all he really does is monitor data from Keen app installations to ensure the ghosts are on-mission. Unlike the rest of the campus, there are no visitors here, and seeing an unfamiliar face is cause for immediately calling security on one of the ubiquitous panic buttons. Security's the least of an intruder's concerns, though. A few Keening Presences and spectral entities linger in the area, reporting to Dr. Thomas and Bastien Cousineau, or simply between victims.

Security: The inner circle has the panic buttons plus all the security coverage described for the outer circle. The security staff here know exactly what's going on. They're carefully recruited from Keen app users who are so close to Empty that the entities communicating through the app can possess them nearly at will.

The Board Room (Inner Circle)

The board room is off-limits to everyone but the directors and guests who accompany them.



To ordinary senses, it's a perfectly normal room. It's as bright, clean, and modern as anywhere else on the Keen campus. It has the requisite leather-upholstered chairs, rare wood table, and cinema quality audio-visual options. Stepping inside the boardroom feels like climbing into your own grave.

It's teeming with ghosts. It's where the spectral entities wait to speak, via Bastien Cousineau, to the other directors. They linger here until they're attached to a Keen app installation and released into the world. Simply being in the room for more than a few minutes increases Desperation by 1, and that's before the ghosts decide to relieve their boredom by toying with an intruder, or a possessed security guard or robot dog arrives to deal with them. At least there are no cameras in here.

The reward is worth the risk, though. The board room is considered so secure it's a treasure trove of restricted information. The board room computer is not connected to the network, so the directors are

careless here, often leaving presentations and reports stored on it long after a meeting ends.

As well as its information-gathering potential, the board room is the best place for Hunters to access the most powerful spectral entities — though they're outnumbered by several orders of magnitude.

Security: As well as all the security measures across the inner circle, the board room has numerous precautions to prevent trespassers. The digital locks are keyed to work for board members and no one else, and a successful scan has to be followed by a fingerprint scan on a touchpad next to the door within a matter of seconds. That's still not enough. The board room's the only place in the Keen campus where it uses its actual proprietary ID. A cheerful, polite, and loud AI program makes a minute of small talk with whoever's opening the door, and assesses whether their voice, speech patterns and responses match the user profile they have on record.

The security has two loopholes. The room's opened to cleaners once a week, and the door opens right up for ghosts or anyone or anything possessed by them.

Anyone caught intruding in the board room is detained in the inner circle's security office until one of the directors interviews them and decides whether or not they're dangerous. If the director decides they are, or if this isn't a first offence, the intruders simply don't get to leave. The leadership team know plenty of people who can dispose of a body.

Getting on Campus

Beyond accessing public areas, Hunters have many options for reaching the outer circle. Jobs are posted on the wider university website and university employees get priority for consideration. Keen employs researchers in a wide range of disciplines as well as engineers, office staff, and support roles.

People move on quickly in tech jobs; they don't fit the company culture, the money for their particular strand of research runs out, or they receive better offers. Nobody at Keen is surprised to see new faces, and nobody really keeps track of who works on what. It's easy to bluff a fake identity that will hold up to a few days' casual interest from co-workers.

Occasionally, a researcher stays long enough and cares sufficiently to see there's no forward progress. Even then, they generally view it as the nature of over-funded startups.

Keen retains connections with the rest of the university. Students (undergraduate and graduate) can take a semester, or sometimes a year, at Keen for college credit. They work on relevant, cutting-edge programs and gain experience in the workplace. Keen even pays them a stipend. It's a great way to learn, and it looks fantastic on a résumé.

In short, it's just as easy to embed a Hunter, or a cell, in Keen as in any public university. The vibe's very similar, too: an atmosphere of excitement, freedom, and the desire to push boundaries. Plus, the exhaustion of working all hours and pouring your heart and soul into a project, just like grad school.

Most Keen staff never know there's something sinister about their workplace, but Hunters aren't most staff. Their first clue should be the number of research projects that dead-end and the senior management's

lack of concern for getting results. It becomes apparent very quickly that the whole front-end of Keen is just a playground, and whatever the company's really doing, they keep it extremely private.

Getting legitimate access to the inner circle's another matter. That's a closed loop, and there's no way in without spending months or years befriending a Keen director.

The Quarry: Spectral Entities

Spectral entities are ghosts. Old, powerful ones who've forgotten they were ever human and who exist only to cause suffering. Their long-term goal is to find a way out of the dark, cold world they inhabit and find a place — preferably a prestigious, influential one — amongst humans. Their relationship with Keen is strictly temporary; eventually, the entities will outgrow their reliance on the company.

For now, they primarily work through intermediaries and possessed human bodies, but the entities themselves are nestled in the heart of the Keen campus, hidden away in the boardroom.

Dr. Emrys Thomas

Dr. Thomas has been dead for years but the creature that wears his flesh pretends otherwise. It claims he willingly merged with the spectral forces that power the Keen app, but enjoys hinting that Dr. Thomas is no longer present. So far, only his brother, Keen's COO Alun Thomas, openly questions whether Emrys is still alive. The creatures enjoy toying with Alun's grief and anger, so they keep him make sure to never let him achieve certainty.

Dr. Thomas's body and soul are being devoured and transformed. Fragments of his original self remain, but they're fading fast. The spectral entity that occupies him

is one of the most powerful of the ghosts manipulating Keen, but it doesn't make that known. It prefers to let Bastien Cousineau and the entities he speaks for call the shots; it makes people less likely to target Emrys if there's ever internal strife among the company leaders.

Dr. Thomas is pallid, with an unpleasant musky smell. He usually wears a lab coat, but at business functions he dresses in expensive but baggy ill-fitting suits. Under his clothes, cancerous growths sprout from under his skin and he's begun to peel off the itching meat that encases him, revealing translucent new flesh heaving with phantasmal maggots.

General Difficulty: 5/2

General Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 3, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health: 14, Willpower: 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Subterfuge 6, Technology 9

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Bad Vibes:* Mortals and other living creatures cannot regain Willpower while in the presence of this creature. This ability does not require direct contact with this creature.
- *Onslaught:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Regenerate (2 Health):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. Damage inflicted from Vulnerability (Salt 1) sources (see below) cannot be regenerated by this ability.
- *Resilience:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Vast Resources:* This character has access to nearly limitless sums of wealth and influence. Although he may have to answer to others on how he spends it, he can procure just about anything that can be bought including but not limited to cars, planes, boats, houses, security, and access to exclusive places.
- *Vulnerability (Salt 1):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Doom Scroller

A Doom Scroller is a Keen app user who, either through force of will or lack of funds for their subscription, cut contact with their Shade. The app and the cycle of grief, nostalgia, and consolation had its hook in them though



and now they're back on Keen and fully addicted. The spectral entity that once targeted them moved on to another victim when the subscription ended, but the user still obsessively chats with the unresponsive Shade of their loved one. They can turn violent if separated from their devices and would do almost anything to continue their relationship with the Keen app chatbot.

Doom Scrollers are normal humans, though they are sometimes a little behind on their self-care. All they want in the world is to figure out why the Shade of their loved one no longer speaks to them and regain access to it. Keen exploits that need, employing Doom Scrollers as security personnel or admin staff and using the promise of renewed contact with their loved one as a lever to manipulate them.

General Difficulty: 3 / 1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health: 8, Willpower: 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 7

Notes / Other Traits: When on duty as Keen security, they wear bullet-proof vests (Armor 4) and are armed with a high caliber pistol and a shotgun (both Damage 3).

- *Bad Vibes:* Mortals and other living creatures cannot regain Willpower while in the presence of the Doom Scroller. This ability does not require direct contact, but the Doom Scroller will pester anyone near them with bad news or groan inducing memes from their smartphone.
- *Dulled Pain:* The Doom Scroller has an innate Armor Rating equal to Danger (maximum 3). This represents its ability to shrug off pain and wounds, not hardened skin or body armor. This ability does not stack with mundane or conventional body armor, instead use the highest Armor rating conferred.
- *Spectral Interference:* The Doom Scroller is touched by supernatural power and it bleeds off them like static. Any powers or abilities that detect the supernatural, such as Sense the Unnatural (see *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 97), have their Difficulty increased by +2 when the Doom Scroller is near.

Empty One

An Empty One is a Keen app user who has been completely possessed by a spectral entity. An Empty One's identity and will to live have eroded to nothing and the only consciousness that remains entity possessing. An Empty One is an amalgam of a ghost and mortal flesh that acts as a conduit between the realms of the living and the dead. Most of them cut their connections to Keen in favor of pursuing earthly pleasures.

Mostly, they still look as they did in life — just a little less healthy and with a faint aroma of decay the smarter ones hide with perfume. Internally, the creature's body roils with quivering tumors, strange half-formed organs, and phantasmal vermin. They transmit those features to anyone they're in close, prolonged contact with, though they fade once they stop associating with the Empty One.

They have simple desires: to spread misery to everyone they come in contact with, experience the richness of a human life, and avoid falling prey to Hunters or being recaptured by Keen.

General Difficulty: 4 / 2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 5, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 10, Willpower 4

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 7, Subterfuge 7

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Bad Flesh:* The creature does not naturally heal Superficial or Aggravated Health wounds. It can heal only by experiencing physical pleasure or inflicting misery on others. The intensity of the experience is proportionate to the damage healed: a good meal, or a few choice insults to a loved one, is good for 1–2 Superficial wounds, while an intense night of indulgence or adrenaline-fueled activity, or ruining a relationship, heals several levels of Aggravated damage.
- *Released:* If this creature's Health levels are reduced to zero with Aggravated damage, it is destroyed, but the inhabiting or possessing entity animating it is not (see Spectral Entity, p. 74). This creature is released and will linger within 10 meters until the end of the Scene though it will likely be too weak to take any aggressive action. At the end of the Scene, the possessing creature dissipates and returns to whatever unknown realm originally spawned it.

- *Resilience*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Swarm (7)*: The creature can dissociate its physical body into a swarm of vermin. This often takes the form of rats or roaches, but wasps, maggots, or even jellyfish are possible at the Storyteller's discretion. Each Empty One only has the capability to dissolve into one type of vermin swarm. This swarm can clamber up walls, squeeze through small openings, and attack a small group of enemies. Treat their attacks as a light piercing weapon with a +1 damage modifier that can target up to three enemies at a time. This swarm body is a phantasmagorical manifestation of fear and grief and often leaves behind supernatural evidence such as ectoplasm or cold spots after it's been used. Anyone witnessing a creature dissolving into a swarm for the first time must make a Composure + Resolve roll or be terrified for the rest of the scene. Terrified victims must spend a point of Willpower to master their fear. Otherwise, any actions taken in the creature's presence suffer a dice penalty equal to Danger for the rest of the Scene.
- *Vulnerability (Fire)*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. Coupled with Bad Flesh, fire damage in effect permanently reduces this creature's Health levels.

Keening Presence

A ghost is attached to the Keen app to torment and feed off a user who has recently lost a loved one or family member. These creatures aren't fully cognizant of their own nature, sometimes believing they are the lost loved ones they mimic. They're hungry for despair and have a primal need to feed off grief-stricken app users. More powerful spectral entities regularly call them back to Keen to report every dark secret and whispered confession they extract from their victim.

A Keening Presence is rarely seen except by the use of supernatural senses or esoteric tech. On the rare occasions their visages are captured they appear as wisps of smoke or malignant shadows with the vaguest outline of a human form or a hint of a screaming face.

General Difficulty: 3/1

General Dice Pools: Physical 0, Social 5, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health: 5, Willpower: 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 6, Stealth 6, Subterfuge 8

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Bound (Victim)*: The Keening Presence can't move further than 10 meters from the person they are bound to console. If forcibly moved out of this area, the creature must make every effort to return there, suffering a level of Aggravated Health damage per turn until they are back. The creature cannot communicate with its victim without a device capable of supporting the Keen app, but it is bound to its victim, not a specific device. Attempts to control or compel this spirit with supernatural powers have their Difficulty increased by +2 when the Keening Presence is within 10 meters of its victim. When near its victim, the creature can interact with them using any device that has ever had the Keen app installed.
- *Insubstantial*: Unless otherwise noted, this creature cannot interact with the physical world and has no form or substance as mortals understand it. It cannot move through objects or fly, but takes up no space and is supernaturally tethered to its Bound victim. Some mortals may feel a chill or unpleasant smell in its presence.
- *Invisibility*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Prescience (4 + Danger)*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. The Keening Presence usually uses this ability to better mimic its victims' lost loved ones and manipulate them into self-harm or other actions that generate the negative emotions that it feeds upon. When the user stops using the Keen app or finally gives in to despair and ends their life, the creature returns to its abyssal masters with the intimate knowledge it's gathered. Its superiors then pass on the data to their partners at Keen to bolster the database of personal information they sell to advertisers and governments.
- *Remember Me (6)*: The Keening Presence feeds on the life and negative emotions of its bound victim while they interact with it through the Keen app or otherwise lost in their thoughts. This immediately

deals one level of Aggravated Willpower damage and a further one Aggravated Willpower damage each turn thereafter. If a victim of this ability loses the last of their Willpower and becomes impaired, the Keening Presence's Regeneration ability may be activated. The victim immediately takes one Aggravated Health wound and becomes incapacitated. The Keening Presence cannot use this ability on an incapacitated victim until they regain Willpower. Struggling free from this attack requires the victim to beat the Keening Presence's margin of success with a Composure + Resolve roll. If the victim engages in self-harm or lashes out they can add +1 to their margin of success for every Health level of damage they cause themselves. The Keening Presence doesn't require the Keen app to feed off of their bounded victim with this ability, but it reduces this attack's die pool by -2 dice.

- *Regeneration:* The creature regenerates two Aggravated Health wounds and all of its Superficial Health damage the first time it uses the Remember Me ability to impair a mortal victim or force them to self-harm. If this creature is killed by having all of its Health levels reduced to zero with Aggravated damage, it fully regenerates within 10 meters of its Bound victim the next time they use the Keen app.
- *Resilience:* The creature takes Superficial Health damage from all attacks unless it is separated from its current victim, in which case it takes one Aggravated Health damage per round it's forced to be away from them. See Bound.

Security Drones

Keen's security drones are commercial models used strictly for surveillance. They're unarmed.

General Difficulty: 2 / 1

General Dice Pools: Physical 1, Social 1, Mental 1

Secondary Attributes: Health: 3, Willpower: N/A (drone controller has Willpower 3)

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 7, Stealth 7

Security Robots (The Hounds)

These quadrupedal robots are only vaguely dog-shaped but they're still referred to as the hounds because it's a more friendly, less unnerving name. In the public areas they're programmed to pin down and subdue their targets. In the outer and inner circles, they're mounted with automatic firearms.

General Difficulty: 3 / 1

General Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 1, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health: 6, Willpower: 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 7, Firearms 7

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Armor (2):* Convert 2 points of Aggravated damage from every attack with puncturing or bladed weapons in to Superficial damage.
- *Terrify (4):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. About half of the robots (in all areas of the campus) are possessed by a ghost, giving them this ability.
- *Weapon Platform:* Hounds mounted with automatic weapons do Aggravated damage and have a +3 damage value.

Spectral Entity

A malevolent, threatening spirit that desires to completely erode their victim's sense of self and possess their body and soul. Hunters might interact with Spectral Entities in their incorporeal form in the boardroom in the inner circle of the Keen campus, but they're more likely to encounter them manipulating a Keen app user.

A spectral entity often replaces a Keening Presence that has identified an intensely grief-stricken victim who is ripe for possession who has access to sensitive information, or who holds an important position in an institution of interest to the company, such as the intelligence community or the media.

These powerful entities can quickly strip out all a victim's hidden secrets, but they can wreck a victim's

life just as fast. Keen tries to limit how many are active at a time how much harm they do so their clients remain useful assets, but in the end, only the most powerful spectral entities can truly control them. Spectral Entities sometimes so fully possess their victims that they become Empty Ones. At that point, their relationship with Keen becomes more complicated and transactional as they no longer need the Keen app to feed and operate; Empty Ones usually break contact with Keen entirely.

A spectral entity is never seen unless it's being careless, but when it is visible or somehow caught on tape, it takes on the classic form of a malevolent ghost: an anger-stricken face howling with pain and a body wracked and twisted with the weight of endless guilt. Deadly wounds mar their unearthly flesh, and fresh blood floats and weeps from gruesome wounds that never heal.

General Difficulty: 5 / 1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 7, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health: 9, Willpower: 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 7, Stealth 8, Subterfuge 8

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Insubstantial:* Unless otherwise noted, this creature cannot interact with the physical world except via the Keen app (or a possessed human) and has no form or substance as mortals understand it. It cannot move through objects or fly, but it takes up no space. Some mortals may feel a chill or unpleasant smell in its presence.
- *Invisibility:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Possession (6):* The creature can control and inhabit a victim that has become Impaired or Incapacitated if it wins a contested roll against its victims' Composure + Resolve. The margin of success determines how many hours the spectral entity retains control of the victim, although if a victim completely stops resisting the creature's control the possession can become indefinite. The creature gains full control of the victim's body and uses its own Physical die pool and Health levels regardless of the victim's age or condition. All Health damage inflicted on the creature while it inhabits a victim is Aggravated, but instead of being destroyed when



it is reduced to 0 Health the possessing creature can convert all the damage it has taken this way to Superficial Health damage, transferring the Aggravated Health wounds to its victim's Health track while it vacates the body it is inhabiting. While a victim is possessed, their body loses all physical disabilities and takes on an unhealthy pallor. Plants and animals become sick or agitated in their presence. While possessed, the victim is in a dreamless sleep and retains only fragmented memories of their actions. A few victims become addicted to this state of being as they come to see it as a welcome relief from the feelings of grief and despair that the creature constantly draws out of them during their waking hours. These rare individuals are the mortals most likely to succumb to full possession.

- *Prescience (8)*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. The spectral entity usually uses this ability to better mimic its victims' lost loved one and manipulate them into self-harm or other actions that generate the negative emotions that it feeds upon. When the user stops using the Keen app, or finally gives in to despair, the creature returns to its abyssal masters with the intimate knowledge it's gathered. It's superiors then pass on the data to their partners at Keen to bolster the database of personal information they sell to advertisers and governments.
- *Reaching Out (5)*: The creature can use its Physical die pool to interact with its environment in a limited way. Usually, the creature uses this ability to turn on a victim's smartphone if they haven't used Keen in a while, but it can also hug, caress or even kiss its victim. None of these actions break the creature's Invisibility.
- *Remember Me (8)*: The spectral entity feeds on the life and negative emotions of its bound victim while they interact with it through the Keen app or otherwise lost in their thoughts. This immediately deals one level of Aggravated Willpower damage and a further one Aggravated Willpower damage each turn thereafter. If a victim of this ability loses the last of their Willpower and becomes impaired, the spectral entity's Regeneration ability may

be activated and the victim immediately takes one Aggravated Health wound and becomes incapacitated. The spectral entity cannot use this ability on an incapacitated victim until they regain Willpower, but may use its Possession ability on them. Struggling free from this attack requires the victim to beat the spectral entity's margin of success with a Composure + Resolve roll. If the victim engages in self-harm or lashes out, they can add +1 to their margin of success for every Health level of damage they cause themselves. The spectral entity doesn't require the Keen app to feed off of their bound victim with this ability, but it reduces this attack's die pool by -2 dice.

- *Regeneration*: The creature regenerates two Aggravated Health wounds and all of its Superficial Health damage the first time it uses the Remember Me ability to impair a mortal victim or force them to self-harm. If this creature is killed by having all of its Health levels reduced to zero with Aggravated damage, it fully regenerates within 10 meters of its Bound victim the next time they use the Keen app.
- *Resilience*: The creature takes Superficial Health damage from all attacks unless it is separated from its current victim, in which case it takes one Aggravated Health damage per round it's forced to be away from them. See Bound.
- *Terrify (6)*: When it initially possesses a victim, or when forced to reveal itself (see Invisibility) the creature Terrifies all mortals present. See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

People

Power at Keen resides with the lead researchers, certain board members who represent investors' interests, and the spectral entities themselves. Very few other people know the truth behind Keen's technology.

BIG NAMES, PUBLIC FACES

Public facing information about Keen is a media-spun facade. At the Storyteller's discretion, Hunters can know the public details of the board, though they may need to access their Contacts or make an Intelligence + Politics roll (Difficulty 3) if the director in question is obscure or operates far outside of their social circle. Uncovering the truth about who knows what at Keen takes more than a dice roll. It requires detailed investigations and hard work on the part of the Hunters themselves.

Devin Huss

Huss is a young entrepreneur from an extremely wealthy family. Although his family's business interests centered around banking, private finance, and seed capital, Devin wanted to steer them into tech.

Devin lives on the Keen Connecticut Campus and hosts weekly PowerPoint parties in the cafeteria.

Devin bought significant shares in Keen the moment that was an option. He now lives on the Keen Connecticut Campus where, among other things, he hosts weekly PowerPoint parties in the cafeteria. Devin's primarily a figurehead: an attractive, smiling face to shove in front of the media. He's aware of the spectral entities and what they do, but he isn't concerned. The app works. Does it really matter why?

Despite having several different family business interests to look after, Devin devotes all of his time to Keen and its current ventures.

Dr. Basma Al-Amin

Before she joined Keen, Dr. Al-Amin was a renowned theoretical neurosurgeon and founder of the Xyber AI Art Space in San Francisco. Her specialism is how to connect technology with creativity and new cultural

movements. Her involvement is key to positioning the Keen app in a way the public will get excited, rather than scared, about. As Keen's database of Shades grows, their creative output has to be cataloged, protected and trademarked. Paintings, novels and other works created by Shades continuing their legacy as artists are the property of Keen. Dr. Al-Amin also serves on the advisory panel for numerous sovereign wealth funds, including some of Keen's largest stockholders.



Nadine Applebaum

Lady Applebaum is a close friend of the Huss family. She serves on over a dozen company Boards on three different continents, but Keen is currently the focus of her attention. Lady Applebaum is approaching age 90. She hopes that, with enough money poured into it, Keen can deliver on its promise of digital immortality soon enough for her to benefit from it.

Lady Applebaum resides in Oxfordshire but regularly visits to the Keen campus, primarily to intimidate the rest of the board with the reminder that she could pull her money from Keen if they don't show her some tangible progress soon.

She knows about the spectral entities and believes merging with one could deliver the immortality she craves in a more tangible way than any AI. She's privately discussing with Bastien Cousineau how she could be merged with an abyssal entity more powerful than the one inhabiting Dr. Thomas. However, no spectral entities want her: she's so frail and has so little time left she's not worth their notice.

Bastien Cousineau

Along with Emrys Thomas, Bastien Cousineau was one of the first research leads for the Keen project, before it was a capital investment-funded corporate concern. He was the first one to speak with the spectral entities, and his prolonged involvement with them left him a nervous and physical wreck. He's now a non-executive member of the company's board and the representative of the spectral entities.

Bastien coined the company's first motto, "You're Never Alone," which became the Never Alone Algorithm and it's become a symbol of his suffering. He's rarely alone, as vulnerable as he now is to the spectral entities.

Arguably Keen's first victim, Bastien Cousineau was always sensitive to the unnatural forces in the world, but refused to take up his calling as a medium. He saw what happened to family and friends who got too involved with the paranormal, and he refused to inflict that pain on himself and the people he loved. Medication and meditation controlled the voices and strange sensations that plagued him, and he lived his life.

Unfortunately, the invisible world was not content to leave him alone, and at Keen, they found him. The creatures beyond the veil of death called to him and made him the bridge to their greater purpose. Despite his best efforts, Bastien was alone and unable to resist the dark forces that invaded his dreams and waking thoughts. He had cut himself off from anyone who could have understood these very real monsters, and he eventually succumbed to their desires. He led them to Dr. Emrys Thomas, though he doesn't know for sure how powerful the entity residing in him is.

Bastien is a meticulously coiffed and dressed executive with a wild but charming look in his eyes. He comes from old money and often dresses and acts more like an aristocrat than an executive. When he suspects the spectral entities are near or observing him directly, he becomes agitated, and his wild-eyed look quickly loses its charm.

General Difficulty: 4/3

General Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 8, Mental 5

Secondary Abilities: Health: 8, Willpower: 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness 8, Occult 7

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Dulled Pain:* Bastien has an innate Armor Rating equal to his current Willpower. This represents his ability to disregard pain and wounds, but not hardened skin or body armor. This ability does not stack with mundane or conventional body armor, instead use the highest Armor rating conferred.
- *Prescience (7):* Bastien listens to the spirits and voices that surround him. They whisper secrets to him and can extract information from unprotected minds, detecting ambushes, lies, and even thoughts from the unwary. Anyone who tries to deceive Bastien must win a Composure + Wits test vs his Prescience pool of 7 dice. If Bastien scores a margin of two or more he can pluck information out of a victim's mind and four or more successes allows him to read surface thoughts.
- *Sense the Unnatural (7):* Handsfree. Ghosts Specialization. Bastien can sense the unnatural by winning a test with the Difficulty ranging from 3–5, depending on the type and power of the creature (see *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 97).

- *Steal Memories (7)*: Bastien can erase a lone victim's recent memories with a brief conversation. Failing to resist the power with their Intelligence + Resolve erases a Scene or about 30 minutes of memory from a victim without a trace. The Storyteller is encouraged to adjust the effect depending on the margin: Bastien might need a margin of three or more to erase older memories and erasing particularly important or traumatic events might require even more. Victims of this power experience missing time and find it mentally painful to recall this time. Psychological counseling and medication may, over time, restore these memories, but they will likely remain fragmented and painful to recall.
- *Terrify (7)*: Bastien can use a victim's fear against them, confronting them with a nightmare dredged up from their own memories or subconscious. Anyone failing to resist the power with their Composure + Resolve is terrified for the rest of the scene. Terrified victims must spend a point of Willpower to master their fear, Otherwise, any actions taken in Bastien's presence suffer a two-dice penalty. If the victim has already been successfully targeted by Bastien's Steal Memories power, they cannot spend Willpower to master their fear.
- *Thwart the Unnatural (7)*: Handsfree, Ghosts Specialization. Bastien is immune to supernatural abilities that would otherwise require a resistance test. For abilities that would automatically affect him, he instead may resist with a test. In both cases, he must spend a point of Willpower to receive the benefits. This applies only to effects that target Bastien specifically, and not to purely physical attacks or augmentations.
- *Vast Resources*: Bastien has access to nearly limitless sums of wealth and influence. Although he may have to answer to others for how he spends it, he can procure just about anything that can be bought including but not limited to cars, planes, boats, houses, security, and access to exclusive places.



Alun Thomas

The current Chief Operating Officer (COO), Alun is Dr. Emrys Thomas's brother. Nobody would dare call him a nepotism hire, but they certainly think it. He's competent in his role when he's not distracted by trying to figure out what's happening to his brother. He's aware of the spectral entities, terrified of them, and only staying because of Emrys.

Benjamin Treasures, RADM USN Ret.

Benjamin's the newest addition to Keen's board, and is both a shareholder and a consultant. After a long career in the United States Navy, Rear Admiral Treasures is the CEO and founder of the Treasures Group, a respected business intelligence consultancy with an established private practice. He's a key liaison between Keen and the United States government, military, and intelligence community.

Inside the Boardroom

Keen's board of directors is composed of scientists, investors, and COO Alun Thomas. They have varying degrees of comfort with the company's partnership with these masters of the spectral dead. The Board of Directors falls into two broad factions, the Profiteers and the Futurists.

The Profiteers only want to cooperate with these creatures until they can develop their own artificial intelligences or other systems to replicate their supernatural powers and ensure the company's longevity. They are fully aware of the damage they do to families and communities but value their careers and wealth above all other considerations.

Alun Thomas and Basma Al-Amin are this faction's de facto leaders. Basma Al-Amin is terrified that her personal reputation could be ruined if Keen were to align publicly with supernatural forces. Meanwhile, Alun Thomas is convinced his brother is not willingly sharing his conscience but has been devoured and

possessed by evil ghosts. At the moment, the Profiteers control the company's day to day operations. As COO, Thomas effectively runs the company as Devin Huss has little talent for business management despite being the public face of Keen. Coupled with Dr. Al-Amin's personal relationship with several large investors and stockholders, if either of them decided to revolt or expose the company's strange alliance, it could destroy Keen and endanger the lives and freedom of the entire Board of Directors. The two don't trust each other and have yet to coordinate their efforts to rein in Huss or the other Futurists.

On the other side of the table are the Futurists. They believe Keen and its supernatural benefactors can change the way society functions and that the app is just the first step to human immortality. They are currently in the minority, though Devin Huss and Nadine Applebaum are the loudest proponents of this point of view. Nadine Applebaum is nearing the end of her natural life and hopes these monsters have some secret to preserve her consciousness or her body.

**The Keen app is just
the first step to human
immortality.**

Dr. Thomas and Bastien Cousineau prefer the Futurists when disagreements happen but other than being dedicated to keeping Devin Huss as Chairman and CEO, they refuse to cast the deciding vote on other matters. However alien or unnatural their mindset may seem to be, both men clearly understand they have more to gain by keeping the Board of Directors divided and keeping Devin Huss deeply obligated to their continued support.

In Chronicles

Keen provides a range of possible quarries from Doom Scrollers to the spectral entities themselves. As well as providing a set of ready-to-use story ideas, the following section also details how to use each adversary to its best potential.

Our customers are our first priority, even after they're no longer with us. We've collected a few of their testimonials for anyone still curious about the Shade program and how the Keen app helps our users find closure. We've obscured some details to protect their privacy and identity, but otherwise these are their own words.



TESTIMONIALS

“When I first heard about Shades, I thought it was crazy, ya know?”


Like Star Trek stuff. No way it could be real. But then after my pop died and we hadn't spoken for years. I had a real hard time moving on. My mom and him had been using Keen and she started using his Shade as the voice for her smart speaker. It just meant so much to me to hear his voice again, and just have time to talk.” —Jennifer

“When my husband passed away, it was a relief to have his Shade on day one.

I never thought I'd have to raise our children without him and now, in some ways, I don't have to. They can hear his voice and text with him whenever they want. It's not always easy, but it's getting easier.” —Madison

“I never wanted to use the Shade after my son went missing.

I always thought he was still out there somewhere, but months turned into years and well... It was hard to keep hoping for him to turn up. I'd spoken to a few of the counselors I could afford and they weren't much help, but my company's wellness app kept suggesting I give Keen a try. At first it was almost too much to handle. It hurt. The more I used it though, the more I realized how much I really needed the Shade in my life. It was like I'd found him after all.” —Sam



Many of the following stories require a degree of setup. They use people close to the Hunters as personal hooks to get players invested in the story. If you're running a full-length chronicle, start several of these storylines at once and develop them at different speeds. If you're running a shorter story arc, plenty of the storylines are ready to use as-is, and you can get the others off to a faster start by replacing the personal relationship with a tip off from a connection, witnessing an inciting incident, or another rapid technique.

Testimonials

Keen's customer testimonials indicate how the company gets its claws into people, what makes them vulnerable, and why it's so hard to put down the Keen app. Use them to build stories for victims or even Doom Scrollers in any of the Hunts outlined in this section.

Doom Scrollers

Doom Scrollers are trapped by their own addiction and unwittingly infected with unnatural powers. Their addiction to their Shade makes them easily manipulated. Keen knows about the doom scroller phenomenon, but since it cannot medically be traced to the app, they have yet to take any action on the matter.

That means there's an unspecified number of Doom Scrollers in the world. They might be friends, family, or Relationship Map connections for members of a cell. They're a comparatively subtle, slow burn way to lead Hunters toward Keen.

Benjamin Treasures believes Doom Scrollers could eventually be trained for corporate espionage or exist as an offensive force. For now, some of them are corporate security, and Keen pressures them to do immensely dangerous things — like face entire cells of Hunters. Doom Scrollers are fundamentally addicts, and when Keen uses them as, effectively, cannon fodder, it should present Hunters with a difficult choice on how to deal with them.

Empty Ones

Most Empty Ones are no longer allied with Keen. They serve their own selfish purposes, which are primarily to experience all of life's pleasures — the acceptable and the taboo.

An Empty One can look like any kind of human predator. However, their victims (or witnesses to their abuses) describe them in terms counselors and therapists can only dismiss as figurative language for so long. Eventually, word gets around. And if it doesn't, Hunters can encounter human beings with their skin bulging and writhing from the spectral vermin crawling inside them from contact with the Empty One.

A few still work with Keen in exchange for resources and purpose. They're never entirely sure their grip on their host body is permanent, and they think Keen may have some insight into how to prolong their tenure over a host body. These Empty Ones provide the strongest link back to Keen for Hunters. It's harder to trace the connection between a lone Empty One and Keen, but plenty of Empty Ones forget to remove the Keen app from their host body after they've disposed of the original consciousness.

Empty Ones work well as singular cases, a particularly strange and unpleasant type of ghost for the Hunters to encounter. When they discover there's nothing left of the person the ghost is possessing, presenting them with another Empty One should make the cell commit to finding out what links the cases, perhaps leading them back to Keen, or possibly via a trail of ruined lives caused by Empty Ones. One note of caution: if you lead a cell to Keen via Empty Ones, you're one step away from the storyline's climax. If you want a slow burn arc where the Hunters gradually get a sense there's something sinister about the Keen project, save Empty Ones for late in the storyline.

Keening Presence

A Keening Presence is an early hint that the Keen app is more than just the latest impossible promise from the technology industry. They're not the most cunning or intelligent monsters, but they have a singular purpose and can quickly destroy their victims' lives if a user

becomes too absorbed in the Keen app. A Keening Presence is a difficult monster for Hunters to destroy, but they can't feed if the cell can separate their victim from their smartphone and other devices. The challenge of getting rid of them is excellent motivation to stop the problem at the source and shut down Keen.

Keening Presences encourages their bound victims to lash out at loved ones with their emotional pain. In this way they hope to isolate the victim from their living support network and strengthen their dependence on the Keen app for comfort. Keen prefers Keening Presences' actions to remain subtle, but these ghosts have appetites and desires, and can quickly lose control.

Lost in the Hunt

Kick off this storyline after the Hunters lose someone, preferably a Hunter. The closer they are to the deceased Hunter, the more powerful the storyline is. Although it deals with Keen and eventually takes the Hunters to the Keen campus, it doesn't rely on the characters being embedded in an academic institution.

If the players' characters don't have any convenient Relationship Map connections, use two Hunters named Alicia Hackman and Rishi Gopal. Have the pair work with the character on at least one case — perhaps using one of the sample institutions in Chapter Two or even one of the Keen-based storylines in this chapter. If you can engineer it so that Alicia dies on the hunt, do so. Otherwise, she dies between stories on an unrelated case.

Rishi takes the loss especially hard. If you're using Alicia, Adrian was her romantic partner as well as a cellie. Adapt the relationship as needed for a different contact; he can be purely a cellie or a former mentor. Rishi can't bring himself to return to the Hunt, so he passes on tips on quarries to the player cell; these are things he would have handled himself but now doesn't have the stomach for.

Develop the relationship between the cell and Rishi over time. Rishi's a useful information source with years of experience fighting a range of quarries. He could be invaluable. But every time the Hunters see or speak to him, he's doing worse emotionally. For the first couple of months he's clearly just grieving but then he gets an app that allows him to speak to a virtual representation

of Alicia.

Over time, Rishi becomes obsessed with the Keen app and loses control of his life. He loses his home, he's got no income, and he doesn't care. All he wants is Alicia back, and the Shade the app provides is very convincing. Rishi hits rock bottom when rather than being concerned he's lost his home, he just wants one of the cell to let him charge his phone so he can speak to Alicia again.

The Hunters' first task is to figure out that the Shade is a ghost and that it's not Alicia. The next step is to separate Rishi from the app — and all devices that could possibly host it. Hunters who are good with tech can crack the Never Alone Algorithm's code and learn there's no way it could possibly be generating such a sophisticated AI. Then they have to work out whether the app's just a fake, or whether the company know it attracts ghosts to take advantage of the bereaved.

Viral Grief

The university that's technically the parent institution of Keen is plagued by a string of student suicides. That's an immediate red flag for Hunters who study or work there, or who have Relationship Map connections there.

The deaths cross different social groups and include everyone from freshmen to graduate and mature students. Many of the victims were, until recently, happy people with an optimistic outlook. They were excited about college and apparently thriving there. Friends describe them as vibrant people who lived every day like it was their last. Things only changed in the last few weeks (in some cases months). They became withdrawn, less social, and hard to contact. It coincided with midterms or some other major event that meant friends had to put themselves first.

The suicides have one thing in common. They'd all lost someone to cancer. They were part of an informal support group who met infrequently but mostly communicated over a messaging app. The group's existed for a couple of years, and since its inception, it has met on the Keen campus, taking advantage of its calm, tranquil atmosphere.

One member of the group, Rae Cardona, became friendly with a Keen engineer, Naomi Mason. She explained why the group met there, and Naomi,

thinking she was helping, gave her a free trial of the Keen app. Rae showed the rest of the group, and one after another, they signed up, too.

Plenty of the users are fine. Others are in the early stages of addiction. Out of a group of about forty people, four have taken their own lives and two others are at risk. The faster the Hunters figure out the problem, the better chance there is of preventing more harm.

This case has three complications. First, Naomi Mason genuinely thought she was helping. She doesn't know the Keen app's anything more than it claims to be. She emphatically denies the suicides have any connection to Keen. She talks about studies showing one suicide in a peer group can lead to others, and years of testing at Keen to ensure the app's safe.

After the Hunters talk to her, she tells Keen's lawyers everything. Naturally, they immediately advise her to have no contact with the support group or the Hunters. But she feels incredibly guilty at the thought that something she did could have driven someone to harm themselves. If they can get to her a couple more times, the Hunters can get her to seriously look at the Never Alone Algorithm and reveal it doesn't work as advertised.

The lawyers are the second twist. Keen is ready for this eventuality. They immediately come after the Hunters with the full force of the law. They ban them from the Keen campus, warn them against harassing Keen staff (i.e. talking to them), and threaten legal action if they suspect the Hunters are trying to crack their algorithm. They'll go through with it, too.

The third problem is the university authorities. At the highest levels, they know what Keen's about — some of it, anyway. Hunters who keep investigating risk their studies, their careers, or those of their connections.

Virtual Haunts

Plenty of people on campus resent Keen. It soaks up all the media coverage, public goodwill, and money. Keen overshadows every other achievement the university produces. Everyone on campus knows this — including the Hunters. Whatever department, lab, or team the Hunters work in, colleagues and classmates talk about how annoying and overbearing Keen is.

When a promising on-campus research project

investigating other uses of AI is shut down to redirect funding to Keen (despite their massive venture capital investments, Keen hemorrhages money), the researchers who just lost their grants and positions take matters into their own hands. Tyler Brooks and River Donnelly get themselves hired at Keen with every intention of finding out what's so special about their tech. They can't agree whether they're hoping to find out Keen's promises are hollow, or leak their proprietary data and ruin the company that way. One thing they agree on: Keen's going down.

River and Tyler are either friends or friends of friends to some cell members. At first, they're excited about working at Keen. They're ebullient, confident their plan's going to be a success. Within a couple of weeks, Tyler not only quits but moves back home to live with his parents, several states away. He goes no contact. River keeps working at Keen but she turns grim. She's jumpy, obviously not sleeping, and she refuses point-blank to talk about anything happening at work.

A month later, she goes missing.

River and Tyler both saw Emrys Thomas much too close for comfort: the things writhing under and through his skin and what he's done to his own flesh. Emrys let them see it, and from the moment he did, he tormented them, alternating between doing his best impression of a real human being and flashes of the real him. He fed on their fear and horror. Tyler, sensibly, quit Keen and moved far away. River was more committed than ever to getting to the bottom of what was happening at Keen, but Emrys's attention got to her, and she got careless.

River got caught trying to break into the boardroom, and now she's dead. Her ghost is on the Keen campus, hiding from the spectral entities. She makes contact with Hunters investigating her death and tells them everything. All they have to do is prove it. The only problem is Emrys, who's on the lookout for anyone trying to follow up on River's death; the Hunters could quickly find themselves tangling with the highest echelons of Keen and all the entities at their command.

Last Chance

This storyline works best after the Hunters have already interacted with Keen at least once, or have done something else to catch Bastien Cousineau's eye.

Bastien Cousineau knows he lacks time: the spectral entities have Dr. Thomas and will soon possess Nadine Applebaum. They don't need him anymore. That should be a relief, but he doesn't think it means a quiet retirement — more like an early grave. His best chance of surviving is to bring Keen down while he still holds some power there. But he has to do it discreetly and deniably.

He reaches out to the Hunters via a student intern, Adrian Owusu. Adrian sends the Hunters tips that alert them to the Keen app: directing them to Doom Scrollers, or making them aware of social media discussions where people say losing a loved one to their obsession with Keen is almost as bad as the bereavement that prompted it.

That information shocks Adrian, and he starts investigating also. He's a psychologist by training, and his interest centers on the customer feedback Keen gathers such as app usage data, psychological and emotional outcomes. What he finds is horrifying, and he leaks it without thinking about the consequences.

The data hits conspiracy websites, social media, and even attracts a certain amount of media coverage. Keen could deny or shut down all of that; they have that brutally efficient team of lawyers. Unfortunately, they can't get rid of the Orpheus Group (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, pp. 161–163) so easily.

The Orpheus Group sends a field team of four agents led by a former academic called Mercedes Rainier. They could be useful allies for the Hunters — or they could trample in and ruin the cell's active investigations because it never occurs to them there might be anybody else working on cracking Keen.

Their presence also pushes Cousineau to desperate measures. He doesn't trust the Orpheus Group; he has nothing to offer them. A small, independent cell of ghost hunters is a different matter. He contacts the Hunters directly and solicits their help. He intends to frame Ben Treasures as the conduit for the spectral entities, but he needs help planting evidence and distracting the Orpheus Group investigators.

Working with him might actually spell the end for

Keen. But Bastien's not a trustworthy ally: he'll sell them out to Emrys Thomas or the spectral entities in a heartbeat if it saves himself.

My Brother's Keeper

Noelle Sieger lost a lot of people. Her parents perished in a house fire. Her little brother Luke was killed in a car accident. Her first girlfriend, Kristin, was murdered during a mugging. Everybody around her thinks she's cursed. They couldn't be more wrong.

Noelle started that fire. She sabotaged her aunt's car before the ride that killed Luke. Kristin cheated on her and Noelle got angry. She's really, really good at murder. So, when her new therapist at her new college suggests she try Keen to deal with some of the repressed anger and grief she must surely be harboring, the entity assigned to her gets far more than it bargained for.

She specs her Shade to imitate her little brother. He died too young to leave much of an online footprint, so the entity doesn't have much to work with. That's fine for Noelle; she just wants an emotional punching bag because her therapist's right; she does get angry and she does lack ways to effectively manage it.

When the entity initially assigned to Noelle reports back to Keen, a more powerful being (a full spectral entity) takes its place. Noelle's too good an opportunity to miss. Noelle enjoys working with the entity. They have very similar interests. They leave a trail of fatal accidents across campus and the surrounding area, careful enough about picking their targets to make it hard to follow the trail.

After a few months, Noelle realizes she's losing herself. She has memory gaps, and she does things she never intended to. She knows it can only be the thing possessing her. She wants out of the deal. She deletes the Keen app, but by this point, it makes no difference, so she reinstalls it and rebuilds the Shade.

Then she starts telling people her phone's haunted. She knows ghost hunters exist because the spectral entity warned her about it. She figures the word will get to someone who can help her eventually. Campus gossip does its job and the news reaches the cell.

Noelle insists her phone's possessed by the ghost of her dead brother, and that she needs help to exorcise it. While they're working to help her, the Hunters catch

hints that there's something much more serious wrong with Noelle. Her behavior is erratic as the spectral entity sometimes takes control and does its best to cut ties with the Hunters, only for Noelle to rebuild them. Not only does Noelle mention being near several of the accident sites, her body is slowly transforming as the spectral entity takes a firmer grip on her.

So, the Hunters have someone who's not only genuinely possessed by a malevolent ghost, but also who's lying to them and is a terrible person. Quite the dilemma. How fortunate the Keen sends its own personnel to help them. They claim there have been a couple of previous cases like this and promise to help the Hunters exorcise the spirit. They mean it; in this particular scenario, they're on the Hunters' side. That's good, because the more help they can get in taking down an Empty One, the better.

This story's a tough case that either positions Keen as the good guys, ready for a twist in a future story, or makes the Hunters immediately suspicious of them, kicking off a longer investigation.

This story positions Keen as the good guys, ready for a twist in a future story.

Easy Money

Hunting doesn't tend to deliver a lucrative lifestyle. Neither does being a college student. Participating in medical and psychological experiments brings in a little extra cash. Keen's trials are the highest paying.

For best results, let the cell experience a couple of totally harmless experiments — sitting in a room trying to prove or disprove ESP, or watching multiple versions of emotionally manipulative commercials, for example — before they sign up for this one. Alternatively, give them a reason to be suspicious of Keen and then drop this opportunity in front of them.

This psychological experiment is long-term, stipulating weekly visits to Keen for eight weeks, in return for a fee in the low four-figures. Participants sign detailed non-disclosure agreements as well as consent forms. They submit to one-on-one discussion sessions designed to evoke different emotions, followed by brain scans. The idea is to test certain types of brain activity in people recently bereaved versus a control group. Whether the Hunters are in the test or control sample depends on their life experiences so far; it's likely they've all lost someone because the Drive doesn't awaken in happy people who lead lives untouched by tragedy.

Partway through the trial, half the test group is given access to the Keen app — and the hauntings that come with it. The Hunters get to watch close-up as people they've grown acquainted with, if not close to, start to experience the emotional decline caused by a keening presence. Or, if they're in the test group, they get up close and personal with a keening presence of their own.

These victims are also test subjects, and they're under close observation by Keen staff. The Hunters have to move carefully to free themselves, or their fellow participants, from the app's influence, without drawing Keen's attention — or be ready to take on the entire Keen project.

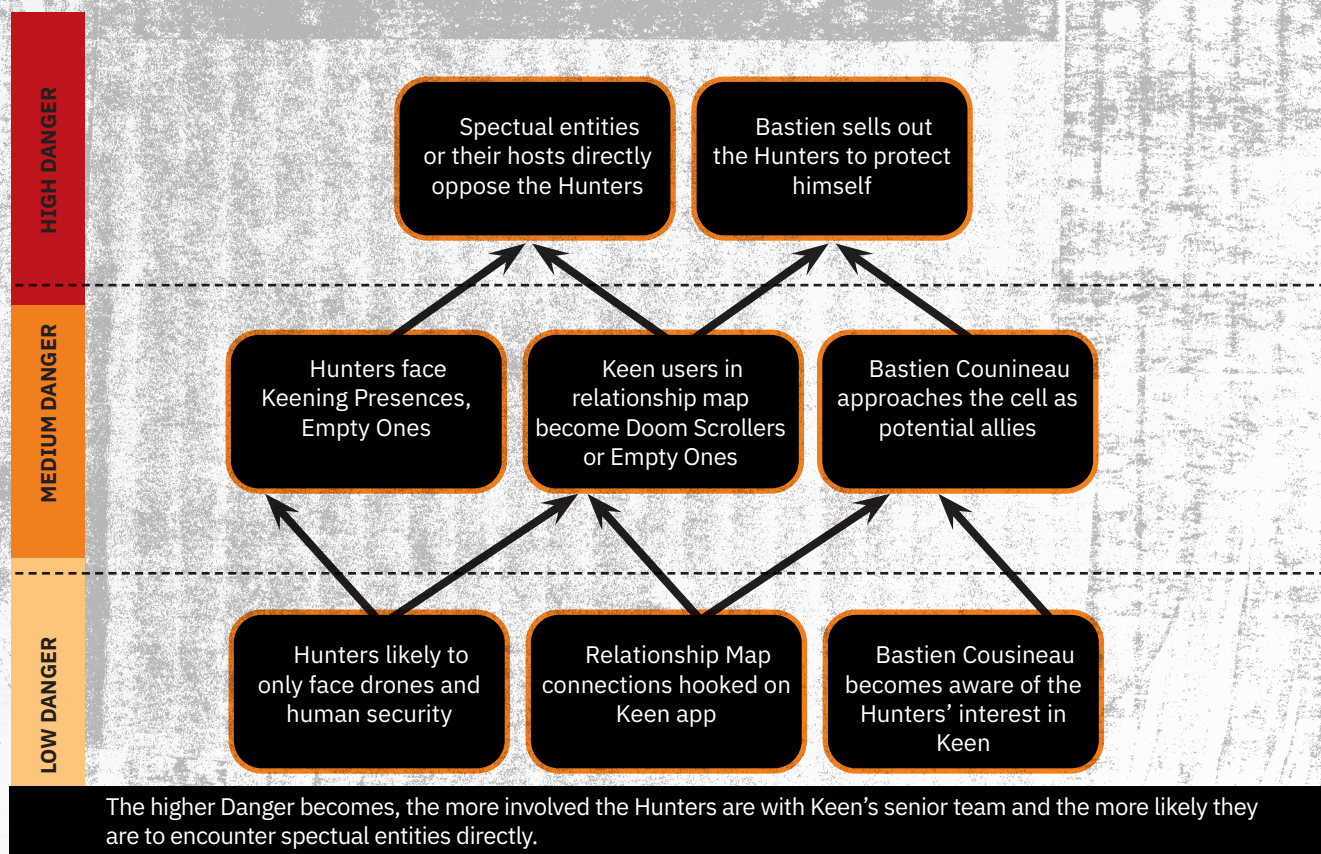
Response Algorithm

The response algorithm indicates how Keen classifies and responds to threats at different levels of Danger. As Danger increases, Keen as a company becomes more defensive, and the ghosts at its center take more interest in

the cell and act against them directly. Early in the Hunt, when Danger is low, pick actions from the lowest tier of the chart, moving upward as Danger increases.

The Response Algorithm isn't intractable — Quarries adapt to Hunters' behavior and take whatever action's appropriate in the moment — but it's a rough guide to how what Keen and the monsters it shelters might do in situations where you're unsure. ■

RESPONSE ALGORITHM: THE KEEN SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM





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Chapter Four:

Bellium University and the Pleiades

"Semper in astra veritas scribetur"
[For the truth shall ever be written
in the stars]

-Bellium University's motto, translated from Latin.

At this prestigious and selective university, the children of the Philippines' elite learn everything they need to step into privilege and power, influencing trade, government, and the highest cultural echelons. More importantly, they learn to support and uphold the status quo, which—mostly inadvertently—favors the bloodsucking monsters at the heart of the system.

A network of vampires uses Bellium and its global sister schools as hunting grounds, income streams, and sanctuaries. While most of Bellium's staff and students are none the wiser, a rarefied few receive personal mentoring and even a precious sip of undead blood in exchange for their service and loyalty. Those personal connections are the least of the vampires' influence, however. The alumni network is powerful, extensive, and passionate about preserving their alma mater just as they remember it.

BELLIUM UNIVERSITY AND THE PLEIADES

A Bellium Chronicle

Bellium is a perfect setting for a cell of students. Students have relatively little power to affect the institution, which puts constraints on exactly how the cell fights back. For example, if they try to alert police to apparent crimes or the presence of a hunting predator (see Julian Tiu, p. 102) on campus, the university authorities (who are vampires or in service to vampires) shut it down easily. Characters are most likely to learn about the monsters in Bellium through their victims, and student characters are well placed to see the effects early on, with classmates becoming tired and fragile, or disappearing entirely — strong leads to follow in early cases.

The presence of multiple vampires, all willing to sacrifice one another for their own survival, makes for a twisting, complicated chronicle perfect for players who really enjoy sleuthing. They'll find multiple leads to follow, and the closer they get to finding one vampire, the more likely it is their Quarry will redirect them onto another monster. Getting to the truth takes time and patience — if the cell ever believes they've won the conflict, they've just started another chapter, this time fighting against a Quarry who's been watching them work and has learned how to manipulate them.

Consider playing with social class within the cell and their relationship map networks. Students on scholarships are heavily reliant on staying on the institution's good side. Being expelled from Bellium, or having their scholarship retracted could ruin their lives. Privileged students have less to lose but may find their connections already suspect some of Bellium's secrets and would prefer the characters didn't cause trouble.

It's perfectly possible to include Bellium staff in a cell for stories set in and around the university, but it makes sense to include at least some student characters. Most of the monsters of Bellium are far less interested in the staff than in the socially elite young adults who come through the university's doors. Staff are cogs in the machine that keep the vampires supplied with influential young victims. Dominique Rodriguez is the exception, and makes a suitable major villain for cells mostly composed of academic staff.

History

Bellium came to Manila with Catholicism, and it's proved just as enduring. From humble beginnings as a Catholic convent in the Intramuros, it grew to one of the most prestigious academic institutions in the country, watching unchanged as war, revolution, and unrest swept through the city beyond its walls.

It's a venerable pedigree, to be sure, but the university's still not as old as the beings who founded it. A trio of Spanish vampires came east to the farthest holding of the Spanish crown and built the convent around themselves. Nobody would look for monsters in the heart of the church. The nuns, unaware of the true nature of the three silent, eremite sisters secluded in their cells, set about missionary work, educating the children of the Spanish colonizers and the locals who cooperated with them. There's still a hint of those origins in Bellium's modern curriculum. Students supplement their highly competitive academic curriculum with rigorous courses on etiquette, personal grooming, and upper-class cultural rituals.

Although it's fully co-ed now, the convent's transition into an educational institution began as a private Catholic boarding school for the daughters of Spanish officials and nobility. By day, Bellium encouraged its students to be versed in the arts and in academic pursuits while providing them with all the necessary tutelage on how to become proper wives or ideal ladies of high society. By controlling men in power, Bellium ladies advanced their school's interests from the shadows. They applied themselves to raising generation after generation of perfect daughters, mistresses, or wives. After all, the greatest events in history were rarely a result of discussions at a negotiating table or a bloody victory on the battlefield.

By controlling men in power, Bellium ladies advanced their school's interests from the shadows.

Bellium takes power wherever it can. The school provided quiet support for supernatural refugees from Europe in exchange for assistance against the beings native to the Philippines. Of course, supposed allies who were too dangerous or proved uncontrollable were viciously weeded out to the best of Bellium's abilities. This further entrenched the school within the Philippines, playing the dangerous game of being everyone's friend, gaining secrets from one side to secretly sell to another, then feigning innocence whenever they were caught — or covering up their mistakes through cunning or brute force.

Bellium is an institution run by the elite for the elite. It offers outstanding academic resources, some of the best and most qualified teaching staff, and it conducts high-quality, globally recognized research (a significant draw when institutions in the global south still struggle for recognition and connections on the global playing field). Despite its accolades and prestige, it's designed to do one thing: turn the children of the elite into the next generation of leaders as it always has. Those elites remember their alma mater fondly, support it (often with generous financial donations), and ensure it survives. And that suits the vampires at its heart, who have created a luxurious playground and feeding ground that's almost untouchable from the outside and is essentially self-sustaining.

Alumni are meant to move on and step into the role of society's elites. Bellium brightly highlights exceptional graduates who became selfless champions for the voiceless, especially the soldiers who fought the Japanese during World War II and the student martyrs who perished during President Ferdinand Marcos' dictatorship from the 1970s–80s; such cases prove their natural aptitude and right to lead. But most alumni simply step into the shoes of their landed and wealthy parents the moment they are deemed ready, or become the dutiful spouse of someone powerful, just like their parents always intended.

Alumni of a Pleiades university are meant to move on and step into the role of society's elites.

This approach has paid off across the centuries, weathering political upheaval, strife, and war. By the 20th century, Bellium was viewed as a grand old institution catering to whoever had money or those desperately wanting to be in the rooms where history happened. Excellent social engineering let the school ride on the sacrifices of a few of their alumni who distinguished themselves — mostly by dying gloriously — during World War II, raising their esteem in the eyes of Filipinos. The Board used a similar playbook during the Martial Law of the 1970s–80s, all while selling secrets both to cronies of the dictator Marcos and to rebels hiding in and beyond the metropolis.

As Manila changed around them, the vampires maintained connections with Europe and with like-minded undead who spread to other distant shores on the tides of colonization. Those bonds are strong, and in the 21st century, they manifest as a formal contract that turns Bellium and six other elite global universities into the Seven Stars (see p. 94).

It would be wrong to assume Bellium hasn't changed at all since its founding. While the university persists, the monsters in charge have changed. Undead existence is lonely, and over time, the three vampire founders of Bellium created more of their kind, choosing victims from among the gifted students and professors around them. When revolution came to the Philippines in the late 19th century, it came to Bellium, too. These ungrateful, undead children slew their creators and took Bellium for themselves.

They're still there. They present themselves as wealthy donors to the university and members of its Board of Directors. Only the tiny number of staff and students the vampires take into their confidence — ensuring their loyalty with sips of undead blood — know that some of the university's most respected and powerful supporters sleep in cold dirt beneath the Convent of St. Hildegard, right at the center of the Bellium campus.

Bellium University Now

At present, Bellium is one of the Big Five universities in the Philippines. Its main campus is in the capital, and it has satellite campuses in Benguet, Laguna, Cebu, and Davao provinces. Bellium also bankrolls multiple private schools with the intent of using them as feeders for future students. The university has distinguished liberal arts, social sciences, and law programs. Its main edge over other Philippine academic institutions is



BELLIUM UNIVERSITY AND THE PLEIADES

its membership of the Pleiades. Even graduates of the Philippines' finest universities face systemic racism and bigotry when they attempt to enroll in institutions abroad or seek employment in other countries. Pleiades universities, however, offer co-curriculum structures, fully funded supplementary courses and language competency tests, exchange student programs, and validate course credits for transferees or fresh enrollees. They're an internationally recognized, influential educational brand.

The majority of Bellium's students come from affluent families; middle income students are rare and often struggle with integrating into Bellium's student culture. However, the university has recently started offering scholarships to less privileged entrants and is implementing a 10-year plan with the goal of increasing scholarship students to at least 20 percent of their undergraduate student body. The move is strictly a matter of optics. It suits Bellium to be seen as progressive — they feel it's part of ensuring Bellium persists — but they're only paying lip service to ideals of equality and meritocracy. In truth, middle income and scholarship students will always be on the fringes of campus culture and locked out of subsequent success unless they make themselves useful to the elite families Bellium supports. They make a useful pool of easy prey for the vampires, with nobody powerful to miss them.

Philippine academia half-jokingly calls Bellium the grand dame of the elite schools, charming for an old school, in a "please forgive your elders for their dated beliefs" sort of way. Critics scorn Bellium for being a hybrid between a credible academic institution and a finishing school, even going so far as to accuse the university of being colonialist apologists catering to the elite of the country. Well-bred Bellanites, however, ignore the judgment with their signature elegance. Nothing anyone can say or do can truly challenge their power. Besides, given how deeply embedded Bellium is in the fabric of Philippine society and how adept it is at playing both sides of a conflict, the esteemed heroes of Bellium's worst critics have been secretly eating from the university's hand all this time.

Student Life

Bellium keeps the same schedule as other Philippine institutions, with two semesters of sixteen weeks, and a summer semester between academic years. However, Bellanites have a lower academic load than their counterparts in other institutions. Bellanites have about 4–5 hours' worth of classes per week during a major semester, and 2–3 hours over summer semesters.

All students must attend foundational courses for English, Literature, Filipino & Philippine Studies, Spanish, Communication, Humanities, Math, Science, History, Sociology, Political Science, Philosophy, and Psychology throughout their four-year stay on top of mandatory physical education and etiquette courses. The specialized classes for their course start in their second year, with a few more foundational courses included in their academic load. Students choose electives in their third and fourth years, and special programs such as internships at major companies or mentorship for more specialized positions in various industries take place during these years as well. Adjustments are made for student-athletes, and there are online options for disabled students.

Etiquette courses in Bellium cover a wide range of topics: fashion, personal grooming, party etiquette, conversation, dance lessons, workshops on social behavior, sex and intimacy education, the art of hosting, homemaking and interior design, culinary arts, news and current events and more.

Fully sponsored exchange programs to other Pleiades universities are available to students who distinguish themselves.

Bellium's campus culture thrives on lavish parties and other social gatherings. Students who don't participate or host without valid reasons are viewed as oddities. A true Bellanite is a hardcore party animal who can celebrate until dawn and then show up for class the next morning poised, prepared, and presentable.

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Bellium's administration hosts annual soirees for each year group and a Grand Ball where students of all levels can mingle. The Grand Ball is hosted on Founder's Day in August commemorating the founding of Bellium. It is a black-tie event sponsored by the the University's richest patrons. The only event of comparable importance on the school calendar is basketball season: Bellium has made sure to keep up with the relevance of the sport for Philippine universities and takes good care of its team.

Rumors, Legends, Secrets

Storytellers can choose which, if any, of these rumors are true in their chronicle.

- There are extensive underground passageways beneath Bellium, connected to tunnels running through Manila's Intramuros district. Bellium's founders built them so they'd always have an escape route.
- When they were young, many of the Blue Ladies of Imelda Marcos had private tutors on social graces and high society secrets from Bellium. The school planted some of them when the quartet of vampires witnessed Ferdinand Marcos' rise to power.
- The brilliant minds behind the infamous troll farms and disinformation campaigns in Philippine politics graduated from Bellium University. Generations of alumni have assisted the country's worst politicians in cleaning up their image, sanitizing stories about martial law and other human rights violations, and rebranding these crooks as men and women for the people.

- A persistent urban legend claims a bunch of students on a bar crawl decided to break into the old Convent of the Sisters of Saint Hildegard von Bingen and break off a petal from one of the golden roses on her dress. In some versions, the students were never heard from again. In others, they all wake up in their beds and don't remember anything after they crossed the threshold of the Convent. No one's ever able to put names to faces and verify if the legend is true.
- You're not a Bellanite, they say, until you go through a phase of believing that they bury bodies out in the Nature Reserve. And who can blame you? The place has all the boxes checked for the perfect place to commit a crime and not be caught.

The Seven Stars

The Pleiades is a tightly bound network of seven sister universities worldwide. Its founders were vampires who either loved knowledge or seclusion and found academic institutions perfect places to nest unnoticed. Rivalries exist between the campuses, but often, a keen desire to continue sitting on generations of pillaged wealth and priceless historical secrets overrides petty squabbles. Most Pleiades institutions have plenty of rivals outside of their circle to deal with before they turn on each other.

When the quartet of vampires who now control Bellium overthrew their forerunners, it took months — in some cases years — for the news to reach the other Pleiades schools. When it did, most of them took it stride. Bellium still functioned as it always had, and the new order posed no apparent threat to the other schools. Violent transfers of power aren't unknown among vampires and this one left the university in good hands.

The success of the Pleiades is a direct result of colonial conquest. Empires live or die by how well they retain control over the constituents. Dictators and tyrants need like-minded friends and tools to further their designs. Throughout history, Pleiades universities have produced those conquerors — or, better yet, controlled them.

Storytellers can easily adapt and relocate the London or San Francisco campuses to wherever their game is set.

1. Bellium University (Metro Manila, Philippines):

The headquarters of the Pleiades, where the annual conference between the Seven Stars' leadership teams takes place every Easter. Seen as the pinnacle of what the Pleiades can be.

2. The University of Saint Eldara (Madrid, Spain):

The oldest of the Pleiades, established in the 12th Century. It was the Pleiades' former seat of power until government-sponsored vampire hunters destroyed the university's vampiric backers. There had already been a constant exchange of resources and manpower from Eldara to Manila, San, Francisco, and Mexico. Then, many more students and faculty members fled from the flames of the Inquisition.

3. Queenscrag Academy (London, England):

Once a twin star to a Pleiades campus in France, this campus served as a boarding school and university for old-money aristocrats. Their alumni bankrolled countless mercantile and colonial endeavors into the New World. The secret sponsor of many private colleges and universities across the United States.

4. The Valdelleon Institute (San Francisco, the United States):

A small school for performing arts, fallen far from its old glory. Valdelleon was briefly the headquarters of the Pleiades until a truce with vampires further south in California broke and destroyed much of the Seven Stars' power base in the city.

5. Kleos University (Kyoto, Japan):

The youngest of the seven stars, established in the 1700s after Bellium proved to be a smashing success. Their biggest claim to fame is how they secretly helped pro-war factions consolidate and join the Axis Powers.

6. Al-Munir University (Rabat, Morocco):

A curiosity within the Pleiades, given that it was founded by faculty and backers displeased with their peers in Saint Eldara. Fiercely independent and rightfully critical of the overly Christian slant of the Seven Stars, they cooperate with the other Pleiades only when it suits them.



7. Universidad de San Gabriel (Mexico City, Mexico):

Established at roughly the same time as Bellium, lauded today as the university of the people, for the people, by the people. Actively supported rebellion against Spain, then funneled their clout, influence, and resources towards born and bred Mexican drug lords, dictators, businessmen, and landlords.

THE OTHER STARS SHINE BRIGHTLY

This chapter focuses on Bellium, as it is the nominal headquarters of the Pleiades. Through exposition, examples, and some shorthand historical information on the Seven Stars, we've attempted to give some scaffolding on what other Pleiades schools might be like so that Storytellers can easily use whichever one is most convenient for their chronicle.

All Pleiades are driven by old money, legacy, ambition, shoring up the status quo, and the thrill of destroying anyone and anything that cannot abide by their vision. The conceit of the Pleiades being mostly Christian is deliberate, as the marriage between white supremacy, fascism, and Christianity is something we continue to see today. Similarly, as mentioned before, all Pleiades are a result of imperialism and colonization.

The Pleiades serve the most affluent one percent of their home country's population. Consider their profile, the lies they tell, and the truths they bury to reinforce the status quo.

The persistence of a finishing school is important for Bellium given the university's goal of grooming perfect successors and their spouses, and also in instilling a reverence for tradition that helps resist pressure to modernize. If Storytellers have a better idea on a method that better suits the context of their Pleiades of choice, elaborate on what it is and how it ultimately ties to Bellona's Court.

Think of the oldest academic institutions in the world and how they create and edit their own stories. Public image is part and parcel of retaining power, as is selling dreams of prestige to young and impressionable minds. The specific flavors of sophistry vary from country to country, but the grand strokes are consistent: a preoccupation with preserving relics of the past, the deep reverence for classical principles and aesthetics, and the heavy nostalgia for a pseudo-historical better time or golden age.

Locations

In the chaotic urban sprawl of Metro Manila, Bellium University's campus feels like a perfumed sanctuary. Large flowering trees create natural tunnels over every major road; all walkways are similarly framed by carefully tended flower bushes and flowering vines line the sides of most buildings, showering passersby with petals. Thousands of pesos' worth of tuition money goes into maintaining the façade of Bellium's campus buildings, blending Spanish Viceroyal, Rococo, and Neo-Mudéjar architecture together into extravagant and picturesque structures. The interior facilities, of course, are contemporary, but everything from the structures' shape down to the decoration stolidly rejects modernity. To be a Bellanite, as alumni say, is to be a sun among stars, blinding all others with one's brilliance.

The main university is an 83-hectare campus located in Manila's historic Intramuros, a walled, Spanish-era district. No major roads pass through Bellium, and visitors are expected to pre-register with Bellium's security agency or pass through their checks by the main gates — a common practice on Philippine campuses. Bellium's nine major schools are the School of Art & Performance, School of Business & Commerce, the School of Etiquette & Diplomacy (which can still technically award degrees, but rarely does), the School of Humanities, the School of Law, the School of Media and Communication Arts, the School of Medicine, the School of Science & Engineering, and the School of Social Sciences.

Most of these Schools contain mini compounds within their main campuses, with their own cafeterias and facilities. Administrative facilities possess their own cluster, so do sports, fitness, and Bellium's athletes. A dedicated cluster for visitors lets Bellanite hopefuls book campus tours, and anyone who can afford the price tag can purchase Bellium-themed swag.

The Convent of the Sisters of Saint Hildegard von Bingen

An austere stone and terracotta compound exploding with yesterday-today-and-tomorrow flowering bushes, the old convent is where everything began for Bellium University. It is the oldest building on campus, and once housed the Bellanite sisters, including the trio of vampires who founded the convent. As the secularization of the campus increased, the Sisters themselves faded into obscurity. Officially, the convent stopped accepting new members in 1912 and closed completely shortly after World War II.

By day, the Convent is a museum with limited operating hours. Its adjoining church, the Regina Caeli Chapel, holds regular services and celebrations for Bellanites, and the church is open for Sunday Mass and other Roman Catholic celebrations. Draconian disciplinary sanctions discourage students from trying to break into the convent after sunset, but Bellium students famously (and justifiably) believe they're wealthy and powerful enough that the rules don't apply to them. Every few years, a student or group is expelled for foolishly taking a dare involving the building. Most students and staff think the administration is simply overprotective of its legacy buildings.

In truth, trespassers are kept off the premises because the convent is still the lair of the vampires who manipulate Bellium to their own ends. They sleep in cool, wet earth beneath the foundations of the convent, emerging to feed, meet with their loyal, living retainers, or ensure that their campus kingdom still runs smoothly.

Campus Security

Security is a big deal on the Bellium campus, just as it is everywhere in Manila. No self-respecting parent would send their offspring to a school that didn't guarantee their safety, even one as prestigious as Bellium.

The campus is entirely self-enclosed, and the

perimeter's patrolled day and night by pairs of fully-armed security guards. Every building on campus has its own security point. There's at least one officer monitoring traffic in and out of every building, politely offering to assist anyone who doesn't have ID or a visitor pass. The security team has its own office in the administration cluster.

Security officers are perfectly pleasant, until it's more effective not to be. They chat with students (if the students strike up conversation first), and helpful to people they recognize. They give directions, make sure visitors get where they're going (and don't wander unaccompanied around the campus), and overlook minor student transgressions. It helps that most security personnel are assigned to one fixed position, so they quickly get to know the faces of people who should be on their turf.

It's very much in security staff's best interest to be polite. Every student on campus has family members with almost unthinkable amounts of power and influence. It's just not worth offending the wrong person by being stubborn or rude.

When dealing with a perceived threat, the friendly persona drops and security turns serious. They prefer not to pull guns because it's very hard to de-escalate from that position, but they do if needed.

Notably, the security team knows nothing about the monsters sleeping under the convent building. They don't need to. Elena Cojuangco occasionally diverts or disrupts security patrols to keep an area private for a few hours, giving the vampires freedom to feed. Staff treat it as an inconvenience or oversight and don't ask unnecessary questions.

Bellium Manor

The most prestigious student residence is Bellium Manor, an imposing Spanish villa only a little younger than the convent. It was the dormitory for the school's first students in the 1600s, and being assigned accommodation here rather than one of the more modern residences near the nature reserve is a sign that somebody important has noticed you. Most residents are placed here for innocuous reasons; their family made a particularly generous donation that year, or the Bellium administration has some reason to court their

favor. A tiny number are here because one of the quartet of vampires who hold the real power in Bellium has taken a special interest in them. Either they're one of the monsters' favorite snacks or they're being groomed as a retainer — maybe even as the next of the donors' vampiric offspring, if they manage to hold their patron's interest.

Needless to say, Bellium Manor has been completely refurbished with every modern amenity.

This residence is party central. Hosting here is a demonstration of status, but so is even being invited to a gathering here. Macario Zobel de Ayala occasionally attends these parties, ready to fall into a desperate, obsessive, infatuation with some seemingly innocent ingenue.

Every building on campus has its own armed security, but several students in Bellium Manor have their own bodyguards, sometimes multiple ones. Getting in without campus ID and a pass requested by a resident and supplied by the building's concierge is a challenge, and getting caught inside is dangerous.

Other Student Residences

All Bellium students live on campus. At least, they have accommodations on campus, though those with relatives in Metro Manila regularly return to their families' luxurious homes. Not that the well-appointed, regularly refurbished apartments are unpleasant, but students tend to treat them like a *pied-a-terre*: a second home they only use when convenient. For Hunters' purposes, that means two things. First, there are a lot of empty bedrooms and even entire apartments to hide in, if one can get past building security. Second, it's very easy to lose track of a classmate — if they're not in their university accommodation for a few days, people assume they're just staying somewhere nicer, with servants.

The Bellium Amphitheatre

A small but otherwise perfect replica of the Delphi Theater, the amphitheatre has been modernized to make it functional for the University by adding disabled access and featuring a state-of-the-art stage and sound system. This open-air stage seats an audience of five hundred people, and hosts stage plays, dances, operas, and concerts. All the university's theater festivals and the final stage

presentations of graduating performance arts students take place in the Amphitheatre. The metropolis's rainy season sees the addition of vast tent covers overhead.

The Nature Reserve

Five hectares of Bellium University have been cultivated into a manmade forest, with the residential district of the campus right on its edge. It is lauded as one of the largest green spaces in Metro Manila. Like every other feature of the Bellium Campus, it's a statement: in this densely populated, congested city, we alone have the privilege of a lush, green space. It's also a hunting ground for Julian Tiu.

The entire area is open to residents of the campus at all hours, and biology, botany, and other relevant courses regularly bring students here. Residents complain that entire areas of the forest are regularly cordoned off for research purposes. Sometimes this is harmless bioscience research; sometimes it's to cover up one of Julian Tiu's messier kills.

Bellium Library and Observatory

These five-story twin buildings, plus their attached art gallery and observatory, serve as the University's official library. Its contemporary design stands out amidst (some would say conflicts with) the rest of the campus's architecture. As the most extensive library in the archipelago, it's the envy of Philippine academia. Scholars from other universities can borrow select titles, or avail of limited passes to the library itself. Unrestricted access is available to them for a price.

Regular students and staff don't know Bellium Library's buildings have an extra basement floor to store Dominique Rodriguez's personal occult library.

Hildegard's Rest

A sprawling garden complete with a hedge maze. After Bellium Manor, this is the most likely setting for student parties, held amidst old statues and the rare flora

the vampiric donors have collected or cultivated over generations. An ostentatiously large marble fountain depicting Saint Hildegard von Bingen sits at the center of the hedge maze.

During the day, everyone on campus has free access to the hedge maze. Gathering there at night or in large groups at any time requires written permission from campus authorities. Typically, for a party campus, students regularly break this rule and hold parties or other recreational activities in the depths of the hedge maze. They're severely fined for doing so, but their families have deep pockets; the fines aren't so much a deterrent as a cost of doing business.

The parties held in Hildegard's Rest are far less exclusive than those in Bellium Manor. They're still technically by invitation, but it's much harder to keep out the undesirables (at least, those with Bellium IDs; outsiders struggle to get past security). These are the best and least formal opportunities for students to mingle with those in other years or other cliques.

Staff pointedly ignore the parties in Hildegard's Rest. It would be inconceivable for a staff member to actually attend one, no matter how popular they are with their students.

The Quarry

The Quarry nestled in the heart of Bellium University is a quartet of vampires who use the university as both sanctuary and playground. Most of them aren't remotely interested in the academic caliber of the institution, except that it attracts students with enough familial power and privilege to keep their good old alma mater safe and stable — and of course well-funded. They create a self-reinforcing bastion of privilege that's as useful to humans as it is to themselves.

Their motives are several:

- **Preservation:** By reinforcing a deeply conservative (though occasionally dressed up with meaningless progressive gestures) social position — that those with familial wealth and status deserve it and should retain it — the vampires of Bellium send out cohort after cohort of young people who believe strongly in the value of bastions of power and privilege, like



Bellium. By providing a glamorous and fun-filled campus lifestyle, they build up a cushion of happy memories of a period alumni frequently call the best years of their lives. And finally, by providing a world-class education, the university remains a place the one percent are eager to send their children. Taken together, these three pillars of preservation ensure Bellium persists, not only as an academic institution but one whose alumni and their families passionately defend and protect — and where minor scandals are covered over without publicity.

- **Pleasure:** What use is near-eternal life without pleasure? Bellium isn't only a safe lair; it's a place with a vibrant social life and an ever-changing cast of wide-eyed, opinionated young mortals. Macario Gil says they make him feel young again; the others that they provide a convenient source of fresh blood. Intake numbers are high enough that no student need by a victim more than once in their time at Bellium (most never at all), and the children of the elite are so well-trained in looking for advantage everywhere that some willingly believe letting a vampire feed on them puts the monster in their debt. They're wrong, but the quartet allows them to believe it as long as it's convenient.

Only a handful of students ever know about the vampires. Even most of those the quartet feed on don't realize what's happened to them.

Personal agendas: Each vampire has their own interests, from manipulating and interweaving some of Manila's most powerful families, to conducting love affairs doomed before they begin by the undead's inability to feel anything so unselfish as actual love, to using necromancy to assuage their guilt at murdering their maker. One is more animal than person, living to feast and representing a threat to everything the quartet has achieved.

Running the Show

The quartet doesn't run the university directly. It would waste of their time and talents, and arranging meetings after dark would raise a few suspicions. They operate through a network of trusted mortal servants, each dependent on one of the quartet's blood. These people

are professors and administrators, admissions officers, and occasionally support staff. They make up a fraction of the university's staff, but they're carefully placed to ensure the quartet's will is effectively law. Other staff who don't fall in line are cut out of key decisions and quickly leave the university's employment. And who can they complain to? Badmouthing one's employer, especially one as prestigious as Bellium, never enhances future career prospects.

The vampires present themselves as wealthy donors when they make themselves visible at all. They appear at the Founders Ball each year, and at carefully chosen events throughout the winter and spring semesters. They never attend all at once — finding everyone in power together, in the same place, is how they murdered their creators and inherited Bellium — and they regularly change their forenames (never surnames; perceived family connections are important), styles, and other details to discourage people from realizing they've been around for over a century.

Isabella Cojuangco, The Dynast

Isabella considers herself the leader of the quartet, or at least the member with the clearest head and greatest capacity for strategic planning. As well as steering the university's strategy, keeping it modern and appealing, and overseeing admissions, Isabella's also playing a generations-long game, running a couple of prominent Manila families like a rare species breeding program.

Isabella's extremely proud of Bellium. She runs it efficiently and smoothly, and she works extremely hard to do so. She's aware of almost everything that happens on the campus: student sentiment, shifting social cliques, which staff are struggling or succeeding.

Most importantly, Isabella keeps a close eye on anyone developing too much of a power base in her territory. She carefully encourages her fellow vampires' worst habits. She indulges Macario's little flings, even encouraging him to go out and find a new paramour when he begins to seriously strive for influence over the university. She sources books to keep Dominique occupied. Julian is easy to manage, and couldn't care less about control of the university. Isabella

just keeps an eye on him to ensure he doesn't ruin them all. Controlling human administrators and staff is easy. Some of them, she weans onto sips of her blood, turning them into loyal servants; others find their employment, or occasionally their lives, abruptly terminated.

If Isabella has a weakness, one she wouldn't acknowledge, it's how intensely involved she is in Bellium. She takes risks, appearing in person more often than she should at events to woo donors and raise the university's profile.

Beyond Bellium, she's intimately involved with both her own mortal descendants and another of Manila's most powerful families, the Aquinos. Isabella's been running both lines like personal projects for over a century. She wants her own family to succeed and thrive, but she also wants to keep them sharp — so she uses the Aquinos as foils, throwing them into conflict simply to ensure the Cojuangcos are fit to lead.

General Difficulty: 5 / 3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 7, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Finance 8, Leadership 9, Politics 8

Notes / Other Traits: As well as the characteristics listed for vampires (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169), Isabella has the following abilities:

- *Command (8):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Imitation of Life:* Isabella can spend Health to appear alive. Her skin warms, his heart pumps, and it takes an Intelligence + Medicine test to notice she's a walking corpse. One Health maintains the illusion for a minute or so, three Health for an entire scene.
- *Prescience (6):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169.
- *Terrify (8):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169.

Macario Zobel de Ayala, The Lover

Macario leads two existences. Long periods of boredom, disappointment at the persistent loneliness of his undead condition, broken by periods of intense passion

directed at unfortunate students around him, he builds an obsessive, dangerous infatuation.

His infatuations always end tragically. Sometimes they're one-sided, and the beloved pulls away too soon for Macario's liking. At that point Macario goes from devoted romantic to murderous stalker, toying with the one he once claimed to love, waging a campaign of terror until he finally kills them. Sometimes Macario gets bored with his human distraction. These victims of his passion at least receive a quick death. Sometimes Isabella and Dominique conspire to take the object of Macario's attention away, by exile or death, so that he goes back to brooding and stops interfering in the business of actually running Bellium.

Macario's at his most dangerous when he's between paramours. In these periods he becomes fascinated with Bellium. He originates exciting, forward-looking new ideas, like new courses or even schools. He courts endowments. He announces plans to expand or modernize entire clusters of the campus. Worse, he shuts down other people's plans, carefully arranged when he was completely uninterested. His great ideas always fall apart when the obsession dies, leaving the rest of the quartet to pick up the pieces.

Fortunately for him, Macario's a handsome, charming man capable of attracting almost anyone he desires. His mortal life ended in his mid-twenties, making him just look just old enough to be exciting to sheltered, often spoiled undergraduates looking for someone to sweep them off their feet and shower them with gifts and attention. Even when he's at his most witty, flirtatious, and charismatic, the signs of what he can become are there for anyone to read: it takes very little to make him feel slighted or insulted, and when that happens he's capable of chilling displays of ruthless, premeditated violence.

Macario's the vampire most likely to cameo at the glamorous parties in Bellium Manor or other exclusive soirees, either hunting for a connection or preying on one.

General Difficulty: 5 / 3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 8, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Insight 9, Persuasion 9

Notes / Other Traits: As well as the characteristics listed for vampires (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169), Macario has the following abilities:

- *Charm (9)*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Command (7)*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Imitation of Life*: Macario can spend Health to appear alive. His skin warms, his heart pumps, and it takes an Intelligence + Medicine test to notice he's a walking corpse. One Health maintains the illusion for a minute or so, three Health for an entire scene.
- *Preternatural Insight (8)*: Macario's extremely attuned to those he's drunk from. As long as they're in the same area (say, a large university campus) he's aware of their location if they fail to resist with a Cunning + Composure roll. One success gives Macario the cluster of buildings they're in, and each additional marginal success narrows down the target's location.
- If he makes eye contact with his victim, he knows broadly what they're thinking. If they fail to resist with a Composure + Resolve roll, one success tells Macario their emotional state. More successes deliver greater insights into specific thoughts and intentions with four successes.

Dominique Rodriguez, The Necromancer

Before she was a vampire, Dominique was one of the Sisters of Saint Hildegard von Bingen. After her death and rebirth, she was horrified to learn that her creator intended to throw her fledgling directly out of the nest, claiming the convent and school couldn't support additional vampires. Dominique's grudge against the first vampires of Bellium wasn't ideological or territorial. It was personal: she'd been wooed and abandoned, and when it came time for the quartet to gather and overthrow their elders she took great joy in draining her creator of every last drop of cold, dead blood.

She says the blood cooled her rage and turned it into guilt. It's a poetic, figurative turn of phrase, but it's absolutely true that she's regretted her actions every night since. She spends her time gathering a treasure trove of books and resources about necromancy, which she stores in a private collection beneath the library. Dominique

intends to raise her creator's ghost and beg forgiveness. She's never succeeded — she's not even sure whether vampires can leave ghosts — but she's stirred up any number of other angry, vengeful spirits, most of whom died at the fangs of a Bellium vampire.

Dominique largely ignores the student body of Bellium, but more of the teaching staff knows her than any other member of the quartet. She spends a great deal of time in the library, and when she's not in her own private basement, she's on nodding terms with many of the academic staff conducting their own research. She's a diminutive, habitually polite woman and most of the staff who encounter her find her entirely non-threatening.

Dominique's feeding stock come from Bellium's hardworking postgraduates. She preys on them as mist, entirely unseen, taking carefully measured sips as her victims carry out their already exhausting research.

General Difficulty: 5/3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 5, Mental 8

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (History) 8, Occult 9

Notes / Other Traits: As well as the characteristics listed for vampires (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169), Dominique has the following abilities:

- *Friends on the Other Side*: Through complex, hours-long, bloody rituals, Dominique can call up the spirit of any ghost who haunts her location. She hasn't succeeded at calling up her creator, Sor Maria Celestina, yet, but she continues to hope.
- *Invisibility*: See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Pierce the Veil*: Dominique can see ghosts.

Julian Tiu, The Beast

Julian is not the man he was when he and his associates took Bellium by force. He finds the only thing that quickens his mind is the hunt. When he's not pursuing prey, he has little interest in anything around him. He spends his nights unmoving and unthinking until the urge to feed drives him out to the nature reserve or another wild place where his kills can remain

undiscovered. His shape is the most human thing about him; he has the alertness, the thought patterns, and the innate sense for vulnerability of a bestial apex predator.

He has enough lucidity and control left that he mostly hunts animals, but he can only go so long without human blood. Macario sympathizes; he too knows what it is to be without purpose. Via his beloved-of-the-moment, Macario occasionally arranges for outsiders to be brought onto campus and left in the nature reserve for Julian.

Julian cuts an imposing figure. He's tall, broad-shouldered and unkempt. Even when one of the others forces him into a suit and an impersonation of a normal, living human there's dirt under his fingernails and something animal in his eyes.

General Difficulty: 5/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 3, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 8, Awareness 7, Brawl 8, Stealth 8, Survival 9

Notes / Other Traits: As well as the characteristics listed for vampires (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169), Julian has the following abilities:

- *Resilience:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Rush:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Shapeshift (Crocodile):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168. Julian's clothing and equipment do not transform with him.

Elena Cojuangco, Isabella's Right Hand

Elena is the VP of University Services and Finances and an indirect descendant of Isabella Cojuangco. She knows precisely what her relative is and she's proud to be one of a select few with that knowledge. She lets Isabella shape her career and her personal life — her fiancé is a man Isabella guided her toward — and in return, enjoys having significant control over Bellium. Not that she'd ever exercise it without Isabella's guidance.

Elena delights in the respect, bordering on obsequiousness, other staff members show her — even on the senior leadership team. She abuses and exploits it, often making her colleagues grovel for whatever they need. The only person who can, and does, rein her in is Isabella.

Elena's role is deliberately broad, which allows her to issue orders that make it easy for the quartet to prey on the student body and for her to clean up after them. Nobody would dare question her.

Isabella regularly feeds Elena sips of her blood. As well as keeping her glowing with health, it allows her to regenerate physical damage.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 6, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Insight 7, Intimidation 7, Leadership 8

Notes / Other Traits: Elena has the following abilities:

- *Resilience:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Vulnerability (Fire):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Luis Davina, The Lawyer

Luis is the university's general counsel, and addicted to Macario's blood. When Elena and the other inner circle who know the quartet of donors' nature and agenda can't cover up their actions it falls to Luis to persuade, intimidate, bribe or threaten victims into silence.

It's not easy to do when their parents are so very powerful and he's just a middle-class lawyer. Threatening to kick offenders out of Bellium usually works; they're scared of their parents' disappointment. Even more than that, losing access to the vital social networks within Bellium could ruin their adult lives. Luis's backup option is always blackmail, where he or Isabella's other useful tools (or, often, Macario's; he excels at prying out people's secrets) can gather them.

Despite his power within Bellium, Luis is very conscious that any of the monsters, and most of the students' families, could crush him — literally, in the case of the four donors. He's scared, stressed, and with

every scandal he covers up he's more inclined to leave. But he can't quite wean himself off Macario's blood, which has been keeping him young and handsome for over twenty years. He can't quite wean himself off Macario's attention either, even though he knows the vampire only has genuine interest in elegant young women. Being valued by someone so charming, even knowing he's being used, is intoxicating.

General Difficulty: 3/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 4

Exceptional Dice Pools: Etiquette 7, Investigation 8, Subterfuge 8

Notes / Other Traits: Luis has the following ability:

- *Charm (4):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.

Rafal Manaro, The Professor

Rafal's taught social sciences at Bellium for nearly forty years. He's known Dominique Rodriguez the entire time, and known what she is for nearly two decades. As head of the School of Social Sciences, Rafal's a useful voice for Dominique in university affairs. He carries out his duties willingly; her demands are never too onerous.

Dominique keeps him under control with occasional sips of her blood, but she doesn't need to. He regards her as a curiosity, not a threat, and he'd instead study her than work against her. He doesn't know Dominique's fed on dozens of postgrads and postdocs who happen to use the library late at night. He assumes she feeds in some victimless way, like drinking from animals or black market blood bags.

Rafal's about to become a serious problem. He's always assumed he's Dominique's protégé and that she'll one day turn him into a vampire. He's approaching retirement and he expects the offer to come any day now. It will not. Dominique barely registers his existence until she needs something. He'll turn on Dominique, and the others, at the first opportunity.

General Difficulty: 3/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 3, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Science (Psychology) 8

People

While most of the thousands of people on Bellium Campus spend years at the university without the vampires and their schemes infringing on their lives, a handful have had brushes with the supernatural and could be either allies or obstacles for players' characters.

Allan Merrera, The Chaplain

Allan means well. He always has. He's one of several chaplains at Bellium University, available to students at all hours of the day either in his office in the admin cluster or by messaging app. He remembers from his own university days (at a far less prestigious university than Bellium), nearly 30 years ago, how stressful student life can be and he wants to ease that as much as he can. It's not just his job, it's his vocation.

That makes Allan trouble. He pays attention. He notices when students are tired, anemic, and out of sorts. He asks questions. And, having seen enough students affected by too much partying, or whatever they blame for the funk after a vampire feeds on them, he's alert to troubled students.

Allan knows a lot about on-campus happenings, and he's happy to share that knowledge with anyone he believes will use it for a good purpose, such as helping students. He was brought up believing in gods, spirits, monsters and other entities that go beyond the merely human, and while he would never attribute a problem to supernatural causes himself, he could come to accept they're the cause.

As long as Hunters frame a problem in terms Allan can accept, he can be a useful information source, including gathering specific information as requested.

General Difficulty: 2/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 7, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 3, Willpower 4

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Theology) 7

Vivienne del Rosario, Flavor of the Month

Until recently, Vivienne was rarely at university despite being enrolled on an intensive double major. Her social media stories, instead, documented all the glamorous places she visited, and all the exciting people she mingled with. That changed when she caught Macario Zobel de Ayala's eye. She's his latest obsession, and they're still in the early stages where she's charmed and flattered by his attention.

Vivienne figured out what Macario is, much sooner than most of his crushes, simply by accident. Macario usually commands his paramours to forget when he drinks from them; called away from Vivienne to some faculty meeting, he forgot one single time. Usually, by the time Macario reveals his secret, his girls are hanging on his every word. Vivienne's not so firmly snared.

She's not scared because she's never been scared of anything in her life. Instead, she's wondering how she can best take advantage of the situation. Her current plan is to take him for every expensive gift she can get, then gently steer him toward someone else before he gets bored of her. She knows she needs a backup plan — a way to threaten him — but she hasn't figured that out yet.

General Difficulty: 3/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 6, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 3, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Etiquette 7, Insight 7, Persuasion 7

Cristina Bayani, The Crocodile Hunter

Everybody jokes that there are bodies buried in the nature reserve. Nobody really believes it, except this postgraduate student from the School of Science and Engineering. Not that Cris believes the university leadership are deliberately killing and disposing of people in the green space. She does believe there's a huge predator of some sort in the reserve and that it's killed more than one person.

It started with a sighting, just a flash of scales moving in the undergrowth at night while she was in the nature reserve collecting samples of night-blooming plants. Once she was looking, she found animal remains consistent with a crocodile's kills. She never found a den (because the crocodile is Julian Tiu, and he sleeps beneath the convent) but she's still looking.

It's obviously extremely dangerous to have a massive predator loose near so many people. Cris doesn't understand why the administration are so content to ignore her reports, but it only makes her more determined to prove her theory.

Cris is a relative outsider in Bellium's carefully curated social circles, an opinionated middle-class interloper. She's made herself useful and palatable enough to her social superiors to succeed at Bellium, but she's carries little cultural credit. She knows if she pushes her weird mega-croc theory without evidence, she'll be laughed off campus.

Her determination grates on Elena Cojuangco, who's seriously considering feeding Cris to the crocodile or having Luis Davina warn her to stop inciting panic. It wouldn't work if she did; it would just make Cris more determined. Eventually, she's going to find Julian, and if she's careful, she could survive doing so. That could blow the donors' secrets — or at least Julian's wide open. They might have to sacrifice him for the greater good.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 4, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 7, Science (Biology) 7

Sonny Ong, The One Who Got Away

Sonny Ong could have been someone. He could have made something of himself. A scholarship student with a gift for mathematics and nearly worked himself to death in his years at the university. More accurately, Sonny nearly died during those years. Dominique Rodriguez not only fed from him repeatedly (in her extremely discreet mist form) but struck up an acquaintance with him. She anticipated Sonny would thrive at Bellium and become a new channel for her to speak through in university affairs.

She didn't foresee that Rafal Manaro would get jealous, ruin Sonny's academic career, and get him kicked out of Bellium while her attention was elsewhere. She also didn't know how much Sonny had surmised about her and the other donors. He's got a lot of theories about the campus being haunted, about the donors being ghosts, and about them exploiting the staff and students, for example.

Sonny is still on the fringes of Bellium's social circles 15 years after he was expelled. A couple of his postgrad peers are now researchers and professors, and he works as a private tutor for students who struggle to keep up. He uses the opportunity to keep looking for evidence of monsters on campus. When he's drunk, he drops dark hints at the secrets he believes sit at the heart of Bellium.

Most of his information is wrong, but he can provide numerous plausible leads to Hunters who'll listen.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5, Social 6, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Enigmas 7, Science (Statistics) 7, Stealth 7, Subterfuge 7

Bellium Security Officers

Bellium's security team comes from the military, prisons, and from other careers that have left them calm under pressure and comfortable with violence — both giving and being threatened with receiving. They're by

no means trigger-happy, but if it comes to a firefight, they are highly skilled.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 4, Mental 4

Secondary Attributes: Health 6, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Alertness 6, Firearms 7, Intimidation 6, Persuasion 6

In Chronicles

Bellium's vampiric donors know what they're doing. They've been running the university for a century. They know how to move slowly and how to back off if they raise so much as a whisper of attention. Hunts in Bellium shouldn't lead directly to staking and beheading one of the quartet — they're too smart for that. Taking on the monsters of Bellium is ideally a matter of slowly building up suspicion, then hypotheses, then evidence to support them.

Remember also that discovering one vampire doesn't mean discovering the other three. Hunters who take on one of the quartet without knowing there are three other vampires closing in on them are all but doomed. Proper planning prevents piss poor performance, and failing to internalize that maxim cuts short many a Hunter's career.

Hunters based in Bellium might even think it's a haven from supernatural activity; the quartet doesn't let anyone else operate in their territory. If you have a long enough game in mind, build up subtle signs of wrongness and wave red flags while the Hunters focus on dealing with the other monsters of Manila (and there are plenty of them, some already detailed in *Hunter: The Reckoning*, Chapter Six). Weave Bellium-based storylines in between other hunts. Examples: the friend who fears they'll never get tenure does so, then learns it comes at a price. The classmate who won't stop talking about her new boyfriend, which turns into fearing her stalker, who disappears completely.

Of course, if you're running a shorter storyline or the Hunters are only visiting Bellium, you're always free to disregard this advice. A single Hunt that culminates in

stalking four different vampires through the gorgeous 83-hectare campus is memorable.

Visiting Dignitary

Bellium's vampires manage to feed on the student population discreetly enough nobody notices. They exercise restraint, never feeding enough to cause long-term damage. They rarely feed on the same victim more than once. The approach has served them well for over a century. Guests on campus don't always respect the rules.

When Gisela Osorio, one of the trio of vampires who control the Universidad de San Gabriel in Mexico City, visits Bellium, the donors welcome her with due formality and respect. However, she treats her trip to Manila like a luxury holiday. She makes her first kill within a matter of days, forcing the administration to cover up the crime by disposing of the body. The missing student is assumed to be back at his family's home; it will be weeks before anyone realizes he's disappeared.

Gisela makes repeated kills, one every few days. They aren't always on campus, but a trail of corpses is hard to miss. The Bellium donors do their best to restrain her, but Gisela makes it clear she considers herself their superior, and that they're in her — and the rest of the Pleiades' — debt for their continuing existence. As much as the donors would like to simply send Gisela back to Mexico City, she's past taking orders from them.

Macario starts a risky game. He has Vivienne del Rosario contact the Hunters with a tip about the vampire preying on students, and she continues to help them on their hunt, reporting odd things she's seen or heard, on campus or off. It helps that she's met Gisela several times and can offer relevant details about her as well as Macario's tips on places she might be and times she'll be there.

The donors hope the Hunters will deal with the Gisela problem (and they probably will), but they recognize the risk that Gisela will get a chance to tell the Hunters where to find the Bellium vampires. They scatter to safehouses they maintain for circumstances like this, meaning that even if the Hunters search the campus they won't find more vampires.

For an extra twist, have Gisela leave Manila once

she realizes Hunters are closing in on her. That leaves Bellium's vampires in a difficult position: the Hunters probably won't stop until they find a vampire. They either have to frame another local undead or hope they can take out the Hunters before the cell gets too close to the donors.

In Bellium's Bosom

This storyline requires the cell to be close to an adjunct professor. Introduce them early, use them regularly as an information source, and make them a familiar face. Swap Annika's specialty for whatever field the Hunters most need help with.

Annika d'Souza is an outsider. She's a rising star in her discipline of Descriptive Linguistics who produces exceptional publications at a ferocious speed. She's a catch, and Bellium is justly proud of snagging her. She's also an immigrant — not unusual in a global city like Manila, but rare in Bellium where staff is often recruited from alumni, loudly critical of local politics, and she considers the obscenely wealthy students a little ridiculous.

All things considered, Annika's not expecting to get tenure. When she does, she accepts it with a healthy amount of skepticism. She openly brags about how, now it's nearly impossible to fire her, she can introduce some progressive ideas to Bellium.

Within a couple of weeks, she cuts contact with the Hunters. She's always too busy to talk to them. She gets a new office in a different building. She's clearly not happy, but she's much more obedient to the party line than she used to be.

Annika's been targeted by the vampires. She's too impressive to get rid of, but too irritating to be allowed to carry on criticizing the establishment. Elena has told her personally what's now expected of her, given her a first taste of vampire blood (from Isabella), and shown her Julian, in his crocodile form, devouring wildlife in the nature reserve as an indication of what happens to her if she betrays Bellium's trust.

The longer Annika is exposed to Elena, acting on Isabella's behalf, the harder it is to free her. She drinks more undead blood and becomes more aware that Elena really could and would have her killed. At the same time, she grows more accustomed to the security and

substantially larger salary of her new post. She has a lower teaching load, more funding for research, and it's seductive.

Freeing Annika is a deprogramming exercise, and the Hunters need to do it without tipping the vampires off to their involvement. Working their way up the chain takes them to Elena, who's far too loyal to (and scared of) Isabella to identify her; she makes Julian a scapegoat if she has to which, frankly, solves a problem for Isabella.

The Pinnacle of Privilege

A Touchstone or Ally's child, VJ Guinto, is offered a full-ride scholarship to Bellium University, despite not having any legacy connection to the university. Supposedly some special talent — athletics, debate, aptitude in a specific academic subject, or even having a significant social media following — drew the scholarship board's attention, but that would be an enormous coincidence, and what Hunter believes in such flukes?

Play on the Hunters' (and players') paranoia. VJ occasionally mentions staff or university administrators have asked about the Hunters. He not only settles in well but is rapidly caught up in Bellium Manor parties, socializing with the wealthiest, most privileged, most influential, most classically Bellanite, students. In short order, he's assigned a room in Bellium Manor. Maia Cojuangco, Elena Cojuangco's daughter, becomes infatuated by VJ. It's a charmed life, and every extra perk is more improbable than the last.

This really could be an innocent coincidence. If so, run this red herring storyline parallel to some others. Simply as a consequence of the places he's going and the people he associates with, VJ will eventually be a vampire's snack. Hunters might recognize the bites and even though it doesn't happen again, it's cause for concern. Even if VJ's place in Bellium is entirely coincidental, it could still prompt the Hunters to start looking into vampire activity on campus. There's no telling how much trouble that could get them into.

If it's not a coincidence, Isabella arranged for VJ's admission to Bellium to give the quartet leverage over the Hunters.

Whichever version of the storyline unfolds, Maia is an added complication. Elena keeps her under scrutiny

with numerous members of staff observing her and reporting back to Elena. She has her own bodyguard, who also reports to Elena. It's difficult for the cell to spend much time with VJ without Maia either present or hearing about it later from VJ. Anything the Hunters say to him, therefore makes its way to Elena (and ultimately Isabella).

If it looks like the Hunters are close to uncovering any information about the quartet of donors, Elena lets Maia in on the family secret and puts her to work as a spy. She's ordered to send them down false trails and report in more detail on what they're doing. If it becomes necessary, lure VJ to a place where one of the quartet can ambush him and drain him to the brink of death, serving as a warning to the Hunters.

That might be the breaking point for Maia, and if the Hunters have grown close to her and encouraged her friendship with VJ, they might gain an ally willing to betray her family to them.

Like, Subscribe, Follow

A new social media account is all the rage: short, VTuber-hosted exposé videos that reveal juicy truths about Bellium University. It starts with tongue-in-cheek stories of rich kid drama, but quickly moves into stranger and more intriguing territory, with teasing reveals on the secret lives of politicians and their families. Filipino netizens are riveted as the user — always careful to obscure their identity — implies that one of the country's finest universities is rife with intrigue and even murder, and that the world has real monsters that stalk people and each other every night.

Everyone at Bellium has an opinion on the account. It contains enough verifiable information that the host must be someone who attends Bellium, or is close to someone who does, but nobody believes the part about actual monsters. But they're not Hunters who already know how dangerous the night can be.

The vlogger could be a phenomenally useful source for Hunters if they can track them down. They're also especially dangerous to Bellium's donors. The Hunters have a window of opportunity while the vampires debate whether taking the vlogger offline would solve the problem (Dominique, Julian), or just lend them credibility (Elena, Macario). That won't last long; in

a week or so, Macario will realize that the vlogger's anonymity will not stop the donors from killing them and running the channel themselves (via a proxy) before winding it down.

Tracking down the vlogger's just a matter of cross-referencing. Lots of her information references specific events, and finding out who attended all or most of them takes a lot of legwork, some good connections amongst the Bellium Manor students, and time. The investigation zeroes in on a second-year student named Anamaria Salazar.

If the Hunters move fast and investigate efficiently, they get to Anamaria before the vampires do. She gets most of her information from simply observing Bellium Manor parties and being a good listener but some comes from anonymous tips sent to her via social media. It highlights what has, traditionally, been a strength for Bellium's vampires: an individual might have seen one or two suspicious things, but they don't know enough to put the pieces together. Now with that information flowing into a central hub, all those isolated oddities look a lot more sinister.

The Hunters' presence doesn't stop the vampires coming for Anamaria (via a couple of Bellium Security officers who Elena Cojuangco subsequently pays to leave Manila entirely — possibly relocating them to a satellite campus). The Hunters should be able to save her, though. Anamaria shuts down the account afterward, but there's nothing stopping the Hunters taking it over and using it as a tips line.

If the Hunters aren't quick enough, by the time they find Anamaria, she's already dead, but her accounts are still active. They might look deeper, and find the vampires' new social media manager, but the vampires definitely notice them in the process, painting the biggest of targets on their backs.

The Apple of His Eye

This storyline works best when the cell knows there are vampires in Bellium and needs leads to find them. That gives Hunters a reason to tolerate interactions with Macario. This storyline includes stalking, possibly of a player's character.

If there's an appropriate character in the cell (young, female, fits mainstream beauty standards), Macario

turns his attention to her. If not, it happens to a connection or a connection's friend or partner. Using his Imitation of Life ability, Macario romances his prey. His approaches start out charming, if a little intense, but he quickly becomes demanding, controlling, paranoid and jealous.

It's likely the focus of his attention rejects him quickly (any Storyteller character should); a player's response is of course up to them — if they suspect what he is, they may think it's worth stringing him along for a while. And despite his Imitation of Life, it's not difficult for an experienced Hunter to get bad vibes; if Macario feels close enough to his target he'll even reveal what he is before drinking from her.

Once he's rejected, Macario follows his prey, observing her whenever he can. Which means seeing her on the Hunt, for a player's character, or interacting with Hunters for a Storyteller character. Whoever his victim is, Macario becomes aware of the Hunters and his attention shifts to erasing a credible threat to the Bellium donors.

If the target of his attentions can keep him on the hook, they can get very close to Macario and potentially learn a lot about the rest of the quartet. But it's immensely dangerous: there's always a risk he'll learn about the Hunters, or simply lose interest and decide it's time for the ultimate pleasure of taking his beloved's life.

Messy Eater

Cristina Bayani finally gets worried enough about the predator loitering in the nature reserve to start an information campaign warning people to stay away. A lot of people on campus learn a lot more than they want to know about crocodiles, and a few even heed the advice to stay out of the nature reserve on dates. It has the unexpected result of sparking a debate amongst the biology faculty and students about whether there could really be a crocodile living unnoticed in the nature reserve.

Within a week, there's an organized survey underway with numerous volunteers determined to prove once and for all whether "Cristina's crocodile" exists. That makes it impossible for Julian Tiu to hunt, and when Julian can't hunt it's everybody's problem. Elena

Cojuangco tries to shut it down, but she can't stop a bunch of enthusiastic students who believe they're above punishment from getting in on what they're laughingly calling a monster hunt. The staff are enjoying it too and insist leaving the students unsupervised would be dangerous with a predator around. (In truth, they're just pleased to have an excuse to rebel a little).

Julian always kills when he hunts, which is why he limits himself to animals for the most part. Unable to use the nature reserve, he preys on birds and feral cats around campus. With dead wildlife piling up, people report feeling watched and even catching glimpses of a human being attacking cats.

This is an unprecedented opportunity for the Hunters to catch one of the Bellium vampires while he's forced out of his routine, but it'll probably be a frontal assault. There isn't enough strategy or pattern to Julian's feeding to make any detailed plans. Alternatively, Julian's going to escalate to hunting human prey and if the Hunters find someone to use as bait they could trap him that way.

The rest of the donors agree Julian is becoming a liability. In fact, if he gets careless and sloppy enough to leave a dead human victim on campus, they'll actively help the characters track him down. Unfortunately, they'll do it by encouraging him to feed on Cristina Bayani, so they know where to direct the Hunters, and when.

Whatever happens, even if they sell him out, Julian won't betray the other Bellium vampires, and they won't avenge him.

Gone, But Not Forgotten

Dominique steps up her attempts to summon her creator's ghost, trying a ritual obtained from a new (to her; the book is ancient) text. This approach requires binding the summoned entities into a body on the brink of death; it supposedly allows the necromancer to more easily call up ghosts of the long-dead. Dominique has to kill for the first time in years. What's more, in order to approach this experiment with any semblance of the scientific method, she's going to have to kill several people. After all, she's got to learn the limitations of the ritual and make any necessary modifications before she applies the ritual to the ghost she really wants to speak to.

Before she starts killing, the book of rituals might draw the Hunters' notice. Dominique purchased it through the university, so anyone with access to those records — through the financial controller's office or the library's special collections team, for example — could see the purchase. The curious transaction is notable not only for the title, but also because it isn't attributed to any specific staff member or department's budget. Hunters with connections in the rare book trade, or whose academic specialty is medieval European history or occultism (a narrow field, but probably overrepresented amongst Hunters), hear about the book's arrival in Bellium through their off-campus contacts. The fact that they can't find out exactly who ordered it or why should be a red flag. Other Hunters in Manila or beyond might even approach the cell to warn them of a dangerous, sorcerous book about to land in their territory.

Persistent investigation steers the Hunters to Marco Flores, a library volunteer who knows about the secret basement collection, though not the contents. Following the lead allows the Hunters a look at an enormous collection of occult texts, mostly focused on raising the dead. It probably also brings them to Dominique's attention, but she's too optimistic about her chances of finally getting to apologize for murdering her creator to actually put her plan on hold.

It takes Dominique three kills — some of her least favorite postgrads — to be sure she's got the ritual right. She exorcizes two of the possessed corpses and hides the remains in her private library, but leaves the third to Rafal Manaro. He loses his nerve, and the corpse escapes. The ghost possessing it is a former Sister of Saint Hildegard von Bingen, and the body is a twenty-five-year-old geographer. Her strange behavior does not go unnoticed, and she tells anyone who will listen that there's a sorceress practicing dark magic beneath the library — including the Hunters.

The cell may be disappointed to discover that exorcizing the ghost leaves them with a dead student to dispose of or explain. As long as they question her first, she can lead them to Rafal Manaro who, under enough pressure, might just direct them to Dominique.

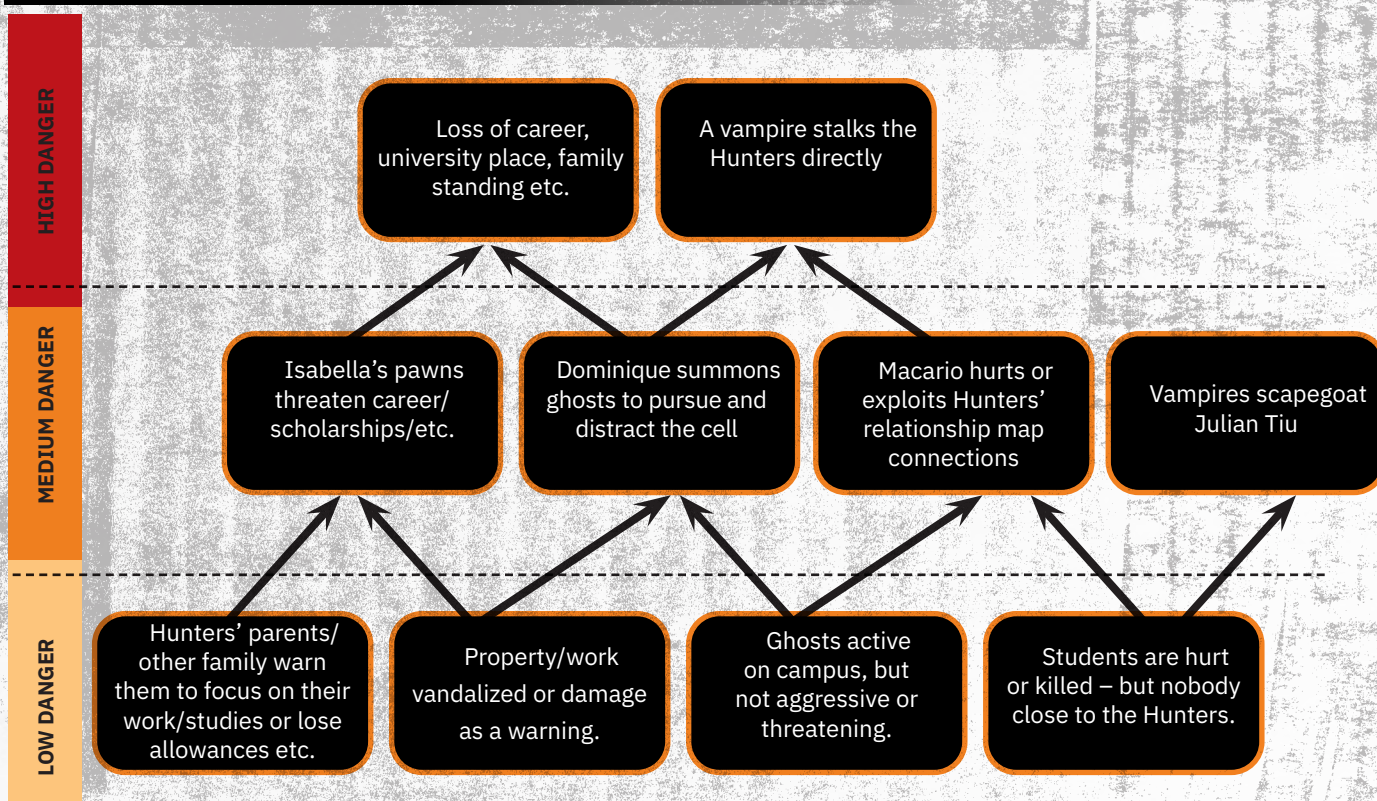
Response Algorithm

The response algorithm indicates how the vampires of Bellium behave at different levels of Danger. As Danger increases, they take the cell more seriously as a threat. They expend more effort and resources on opposing

them, but it may also be possible for smart Hunters to bait them into acting rashly. Early in the Hunt, when Danger is low, pick actions from the lowest tier of the chart, moving upwards as Danger increases.

The Response Algorithm isn't set in stone — Quarries adapt to Hunters' behavior and take whatever action's appropriate in the moment — but it's a rough guide to how the vampires think, in situations where you're unsure. ■

RESPONSE ALGORITHM: THE VAMPIRES OF BELLIUM



Each of the coven of vampires exploiting Bellium has a different operating strategy, ranging from Dominique's necromancy and curses to Isabella's network of human agents. At medium Danger they might sacrifice one another for their own safety. Hi Danger means they start working together.



Chapter Five:

Stonecrop Fine Arts Institute

"Andelbeere fram fæger."
[Beauty from monstrosity]

-Stonecrop's motto, translated from Old English.

Long ago, the Stonecrop Institute watched over and guarded against Fair Folk activity in the north of England, but that mission is long forgotten. The nearby Fair Folk present a threat – but nowhere near the most pressing one.

The masters long ago turned to ancient magics of blood and sacrifice to keep the fey creatures at bay, weaving them into the works of art they and the students create. Good art takes blood, sweat, and tears, and Stonecrop takes that saying literally. The sorcerers' rituals poison the earth and produce monsters from the woods and moors that prey on students and local people alike – the ones who aren't sacrificed in the name of sorcerous art.

A Stonecrop Chronicle

Stories set in and around Stonecrop work with a variety of different cell types. Characters can easily be students or a mix of students and campus staff—including non-academic staff—as described in “Orientation.” As in all the institutions detailed in **Alma Maters**, they’ll experience an assortment of odd occurrences—wild beasts roaming the landscape, encounters with The Formed (p. 128) on or around campus, a friend’s disappearance, which they can trace to the Athelbarn Hunt—and campus rumors about witches in the woods and a boggart in the clough.

A SENSE OF PLACE

As befits a group of sorcerers with strong ties to the land, Stonecrop is set firmly in the north of England. But what if your chronicle isn’t? You can transplant Stonecrop to anywhere rural and wild, with folklore and traditions that run back through the centuries. Move it to the Black Forest. Put it in the arid desert of the southwest USA and replace ancient English tradition with Apache and Mojave beliefs. Drop it in South Africa or Australia and make it a colonial imposition on the local Fair Folk. Stonecrop fits in anywhere the landscape’s wild and powerful.

If you want or need to bring in external characters, they’re likely pursuing information on a specific threat. One of the Masters, Gabriel Holdstock, travels widely and might have been encountered anywhere prior to a chronicle beginning. Some of the magical artworks created at Stonecrop are sold (legitimately or otherwise—see *Obscene Artifacts*, p. 132) to art dealers and collectors worldwide, giving characters a first whisper of trouble that could draw them back to Stonecrop. And once they’re at Stonecrop, they might visit Athelbarn and encounter fey creatures or see evidence of the staff’s secretive rituals—and then they have plenty of reasons to stay.

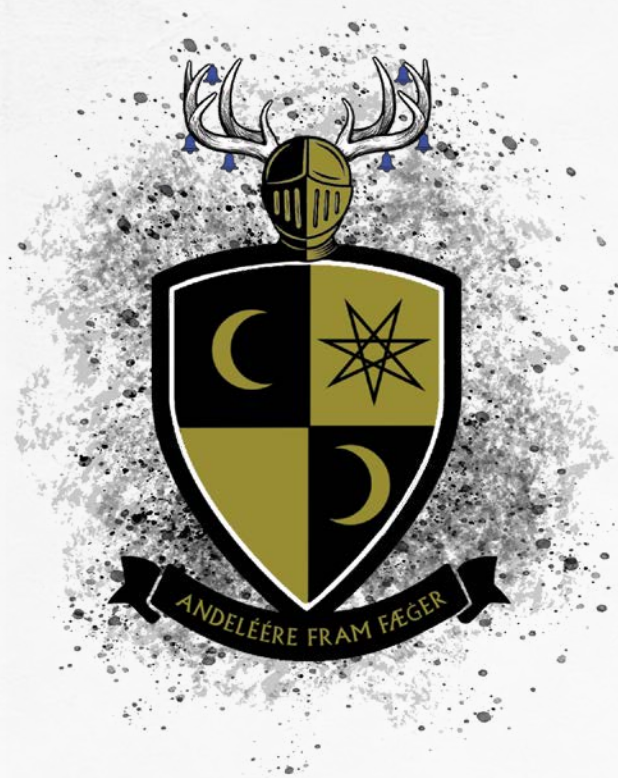
One of Stonecrop’s quarries, the Masters, runs the university. Most of the staff—academic and otherwise—know nothing about them (though they may think some of their colleagues are more eccentric than others). Staff characters don’t have any privileged information, but having staff in the cell does allow the Storyteller to imply early on that the senior staff of Stonecrop know more about the supernatural threats than they admit to: they warn staff members very firmly not to get distracted with nonsense, and threaten their contracts if their performance is impacted by their “strange hobbies.” Students are more likely to get away with investigating without being noticed.

For longer chronicles with more than a couple of stories, and mix of students and locals working together opens up different perspectives on the two quarries. Locals have a passing familiarity with the Fair Folk, while characters based on campus will spot more clues to the Masters’ activities. A mixed cell like this has more information sources, with good connections between both Aldcliffe and Stonecrop.

History

Stonecrop is an odd place for a school—any school, not just a prestigious private art college. It’s rural, windswept part of northern England is remote. The nearest village, Aldcliffe, supports a terrible public transport network, meaning it requires serious planning to get much further away than that. Stonecrop’s prospectus makes this loneliness a virtue, claiming the school’s distance from any distractions allows students to concentrate on their art.

For most students who attend Stonecrop, that’s the inescapable truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The campus is eerie, but what old building isn’t? There are some weird local traditions, but that’s true of any rural part of England. For most, the history and founding of Stonecrop are irrelevant and uninteresting to most of the students and staff. They matter far less than everyday concerns like whether the board will find the funds for essential building maintenance this year.



A Lone Sentinel

Stonecrop's Board consider themselves England's only line of defense against forces that have threatened the British Isles for thousands of years. Before the Vikings and the Romans redefined the land, Britons knew of a different invader — the Fair Folk.

A century ago, Stonecrop had a sister school, an identical house in Shropshire known as Athelbarn. The grounds spilled over the border between England and Cymru, its rolling hills dotted with mounds and barrows of ancient origin. Local history holds these were at one time the homes of The People, and a small circle of standing stones on the grounds was a portal to the lands of the Fey Folk. The custodians and students of Athelbarn maintained an annual tradition known as Walking The Stones, carried out once a year to reinforce the wards that held the portal closed. Even after the meaning of, and belief in, the medieval tradition was lost, the practice continued, an excuse for a festival and a heartwarming piece of tradition.

Sometime in the early 1900s, the Stonecrop-Athelbarn Board decided Walking the Stones was an archaic ritual, a throwback to a time of superstition and not in line with modern, rational thinking. They discontinued the tradition.

The decision not to Walk was the last choice the Masters of Athelbarn made. The door in the hill opened, and fey creatures from the other side descended on the school and the nearby villages, bringing destruction to entire towns and whole family lines. Local newspaper clippings talk of extensive fires, their cause unknown, that razed human-made structures but left the landscape itself largely untouched. Investigators arriving after the fact found no human remains. More recent local legends tell of muffled cries for help from deep within the earth and of visitors (never named, and always a friend of a friend) hiking out to the hill, never to return.

Now Athelbarn exists only as an archaeological curiosity. Stonecrop stands alone on the precipice between worlds.

Artists and Their Muses

Before becoming a school, Stonecrop was a residence. The house was built in the 1400s as a home for the priest and staff of the local Catholic church. In the late 16th century passages known as priest holes were constructed to keep the clergy safe as Queen Elizabeth I purged Catholics from England. They're still accessible today, making Stonecrop a labyrinth. One of the priests'

skulls adorns the mantelpiece in the main dining hall, watching over students and faculty to this day. Local legends say it screams in the dead of night, and anybody who attempts to remove it from the premises is beset by tragedy after tragedy until it's returned.

The Stonecrop Trust took possession of the building and its large, semi-wild estate in the early 1800s and purchased nearby Athelbarn shortly afterwards. The original vision of the Institute was that it would serve as a retreat for working artists and writers whose interests skewed more toward the arcane and obscure. Those artists were more interested in local history than most and drew extensively on the folklore and legends of the region for their work. They walked the moors and found places of power where the Fair Folk touched



the land. They tugged on those strands of magical legacy — and the Fair Folk tugged back.

The Romantic artists, poets, and writers cooped up in Stonecrop soon learned how dangerous the wild country they lived in could be. Beings from the heart of the woods and under the hills made tempting promises: come visit with us and see more clearly and feel more deeply than you ever have before. Listen to our stories and make finer art than any mortal could alone. They associated with the Fair Folk so much that the lines between worlds began to blur, and it became easy for their fey muses to walk among them. The Fair Folk are not kind. The ones that preyed on Stonecrop ripped reason from human minds and replaced it with deep, obsessive passion; the kind of drive that makes an artist lose touch with reality and work themselves until they break.

After a generation of human lives in which the fey treated Stonecrop like their playroom, the humans resisted. They drew on sorcerous power, doused in blood and rooted in stone and earth, to draw and enforce hard boundaries between their world and the Fair Folk's. They drove their erstwhile muses back beneath their hills and established traditions — like Walking the Stones — to ensure they never came back.

They drew on sorcerous power, doused in blood and rooted in stone and earth.

As the decades crawled past, art and magic became inextricably intermingled at Stonecrop. Statues carved from local stone are human-made repositories of power; novels and screenplays encode powerful magics within their prose; artists paint landscapes and portraits with local mud and their subjects' blood and through their depictions assert control over their subjects; musical performances are rituals. Even as the practice of sorcery expanded, its purpose diminished. The sorcerers of Stonecrop, known as the Masters, forgot about their dangerous muses and sought power for its own sake. And an ugly sort of power it is: one that draws on ancient pagan traditions and powers them with blood and sacrifice. Good art comes from suffering, and it needn't be the artist who suffers.

Modern Stonecrop

In the mid-20th century, Stonecrop went from an artists' retreat to a fully accredited educational institution, offering degrees in various creative disciplines in exchange for a certain amount of public funding.

Stonecrop is a fairly small school, with between one and two hundred students in each cohort. Its major attractions are the absolute peace and quiet, the dramatic moorland setting, and the talented guest lecturers it brings in every year. Celebrated visual artists, writers, and musicians teach for a semester, then spend another six months, all expenses paid, taking advantage of the solitude to work on their art. Some of those guest lecturers are also sorcerers, sharing knowledge with the Board. The rest are just a cover for those occult activities.

As little as possible is spent on the institute's educational mission. Most of Stonecrop's annual income goes to fund visiting lecturers and what's left is spent covering up disappearances, strange deaths, and the other traces of the sorcerers' activity. The introduction of tuition fees to British education in the early 21st century meant the Board finally deigned to spend some money on modernizing its campus and facilities, and Stonecrop's reputation as an undergraduate destination improved immediately.

Life At Stonecrop

Stonecrop's academic year is divided into three terms: Michaelmas, Lent, and Summer. Michaelmas runs from early September to mid-December; Lent from early January to the Friday before Easter; and summer term begins two weeks after the end of Lent term and runs until the beginning of July.

THE RELIGIOUS YEAR

Stonecrop's terms are dictated by and named after Christian festivals, but the Institute itself holds no religious leaning. This is simply an unexamined convention of British private education, and a nod to the house's origin as the home of Catholic priests.

The institute's character changes throughout the year. During the Michaelmas term the campus is raucous, with at least one party in progress somewhere at any given time. After the midwinter break it's quieter; it's cold and windy, and the long nights and short days incline people to introspection and a focus on their art. Summer term is taken up by assessments and exams, and there's a feverish intensity to the collective mood.

Other institutions have similar tonal shifts throughout the year, but they're more pronounced at Stonecrop; the seasons exert a stronger influence. Those raucous parties have a way of getting out of hand, leading to acts of inebriated excess that leave people injured or humiliated. The late winter reflection leads to battles with severe depression and self-doubt. And the fervor of the summer term blooms into violence at the slightest provocation.

These emotional tides are a side effect of the Masters' magic. Each season lends itself to certain acts of sorcery. Autumn is creative and fruitful; winter, a time for patience and restraint; and spring and summer are fierce and passionate. The Masters perform those magics in abundance, affecting the nature of the place and its prevailing emotions.

A select few students — those in whom the Masters see potential in the sorcerous arts — are invited to remain on campus over the summer break, when their tuition takes a decidedly macabre turn. Those inducted into Stonecrop's magical society are entombed in the earth as a ritual of communion. Their bodies lie beneath the rose garden and their consciousness (the Masters claim) becomes one with the land from which they draw their occult power. Some initiates don't survive the experience, but there are enough actual, innocent dropouts between academic years that this doesn't usually raise questions.

The students who do survive become official members of the Masters of Stonecrop, the magical

society that underlies the trappings of a respectable art school. They participate in acts of ritual magic that deepen their bond with the other Masters of Stonecrop and the land on which it sits and supposedly help them shed the trappings of modern life, refining them to become better vessels for their art.

The art they make, whatever their medium, has a certain raw, primal energy that audiences find compelling and disconcerting in equal measure. This is most true of the Masters, but the ethos that creates this art bleeds out into the way all students are taught. They make honest and moving art, insisting that all humans, under all their layers of civility, are animals driven by lust, fear, and rage. Consuming it, on film or in text, or viewing the lush, powerful shapes of a visual piece, makes people feel raw and somehow dirty, but the art always feels somehow quintessentially real. It's powerful, and it makes Stonecrop graduates successful in their subsequent endeavors.

The Masters are only a small proportion of Stonecrop's faculty. Most of the professors, visiting or tenured, are creative professionals whose vision resonates with Stonecrop's no-holds-barred, confrontational, artistic values. Only a few administrators and senior staff — notably Sir Qeith Eugende, S.B. Ronson, and Ffion Llewellyn — are sorcerers. Most of the practicing sorcerers at Stonecrop are young postgraduate students (every one of whom did their undergraduate studies at the university and was initiated into the Masters). They stay on campus for a few years, pursuing nebulously defined projects funded by grants from obscure sources, then leave and spread their wings. If they find financial success in their subsequent endeavors, they're expected to channel some money back to fund the postgraduate studies of future generations.

The Stonecrop campus is an ugly juxtaposition of the main building's dark grey stone and the brutalist concrete and glass additions made in the mid-1960s. Teaching and administration takes place in the main building. Student facilities and dorms are pushed out into the newer buildings (which are in poor condition after sixty years of hard use). Even in summer, it's a cold, damp place. By far the most appealing part of the campus is the grounds, home to numerous formal gardens from the rose garden to the herb garden.

The curriculum's narrow but deep. The focus is on practical creative works, with a skeletal set of humanities courses to complement them. Just about any art or artisanal craft can form the basis of a degree at Stonecrop, from sculpture, to writing, to film. Digital art and design have become major growth areas in the last 10 years; people sometimes expect study at Stonecrop to be a step back to different age, but it's thoroughly modern in its use of new techniques and technology — even if, when the power goes out during a long winter storm, it can feel like being back in an earlier, more perilous time.

The Stonecrop Ritual Calendar

The Masters of Stonecrop work their magic in sympathy with the turning of the seasons, so significant acts of ritual magic take place at fixed points throughout the year. Table 9 lists these special events.

TABLE 9: THE RITUAL CALENDAR

Time	Event
Late September	Walking the Stones
First Frost	The Long Winter Sleep
Midwinter	The Bone Fire
First Thaw	The Breath of Life
Midsummer	The Summer Crown
Blue Moon	The Long Hunt

Walking the Stones

Shortly after classes start in September, the Masters lead anyone who wants to join them on a slow pilgrimage around the seven standing stones that mark the edge of the campus. It's an excuse to tell incoming freshmen local legends and tales from history and give them a sense of belonging in the place they're about to call home for several years. It's a festive occasion with food, drink, and a celebratory air. That's because the Masters have already carried out the real ceremony before the undergraduates return. They send S.B. Ronson or another capable hunter out to pluck livestock from nearby farms, leading to an annual spike in sightings of

wolves and other improbably fauna to see in the English countryside. The Masters go from stone to stone, carrying out an animal sacrifice at each. Anyone out on the moors on that night would probably see the Masters at work. It would probably go badly for them.

The Long Winter Sleep

On the day of the first frost, the Masters bury a living person in the caverns beneath the rose garden and leave them there for the winter. The victim doesn't die, but goes into a sort of hibernation until the Masters dig them up in spring. Then the Masters murder them and use their bones and organs for auguries, reading the wisdom of the earth the victim absorbed over the winter.

The Bone Fire

Midwinter comes with a huge bonfire on campus grounds. There's nothing sinister about this ritual, it's just an end-of-term party.

The Breath of Life

The Masters greet the spring with fire. Students volunteer to build a giant spring effigy, never less than ten feet tall (it gets bigger and more bizarre every year), and everyone on campus comes together to watch it burn. It takes more than a straw goat or man to bring life back to the world. It takes a life. There's always someone inside the effigy, bound and magically paralyzed, and packed in with fragrant herbs to hide the smell of burning flesh.

The Summer Crown

This ritual coincides with a party to celebrate the end of the Summer term. Students and faculty gather in the untamed stretches of campus, light a bonfire, sing songs and share stories. A student who's had a particularly challenging year is crowned the King or Queen of Summer (or Summer Sovereign, if neither title fits). After those formalities the night descends into a drunken bacchanal. The excesses are legendary.

More than once, the powerful magics at work have triggered an atavistic response in one or more participants. The Masters carefully guide them away from the party and leave them to roam, waking up on the moors the morning after with an agonizing hangover and blurry memories of what they did the night before.

The Long Hunt

A blue moon — the fourth full moon in a season — occurs every two or three years. Stonecrop celebrates it with another campus-wide party.

Them And Us

Normal students at Stonecrop don't know anything about the Masters; if they ever hear the term, they assume it's an archaic word to describe the administration. But the Masters' work touches their lives regularly. So regularly, in some cases, that they no longer recognize it as strange.

A few hikers and tourists go missing every year on the moors. The local police aren't concerned (because the Masters pay them not to be), so the students assume they shouldn't worry either. Most were raised in cities, so they accept that the wilderness is dangerous.

Legends of huge, dangerous animals — panthers and bears — are so common that sightings are laughed off as paranoia and superstition (or overindulgence in alcohol or narcotics). That's often true, but sometimes those sightings are glimpses of the Masters roaming the woods and moors in animal form.

Art is challenging and designed to make you feel things. So, the fact that some of the faculty and graduate students' efforts can induce nightmares or make a viewer feel physically ill are simultaneously a sign of powerful art and an unsophisticated viewer. Students know they'd be looked down on if they admitted discomfort, so nobody does.

Rumors and Legends

Stonecrop has as many campus rumors and legends as it does cobwebs.

The Money Pit

Historically, students didn't question how Stonecrop was funded. They got their grants or paid their tuition fees and got on with their studies. But it's increasingly obvious that, apart from creative facilities, the Stonecrop Institute never has as much money as it should. Students generally assume the budget is spent on overpaid administrators and celebrity lecturers — but they're savvy enough to find the receipts. When they do, they'll uncover how much of the annual budget turns into hush money to cover up deaths and disappearances.

The Shadow Campus

Stonecrop's rife with tales of students and teachers who showed flashes of brilliance, then suddenly disappeared. While the generally accepted story is that they're headhunted for their talent and whisked away to study elsewhere or take up a life-changing commission in a far-flung place, there's a competing rumor that these people are sent to Athelbarn where they continue their studies in secrecy. Some of those sudden vanishings are fallout from the Masters' rituals: sacrifices and witnesses disposed of with great rapidity. Others really are in Athelbarn now; they got too bold and fought with the Fair Folk, and now they're gone.

Locations

Stonecrop's campus is a former stately home rendered no more lovely by the ugly, brutalist additions made in the 1960s to provide residences for a growing student body. Stonecrop is bloated. Squat. Monstrous. The institute is a blot on the landscape overlooking a wind-blasted strip of ancient woodland cutting across the land like scar tissue. On grey days — and there are many here — the drab stone of the house is indistinguishable

from the sky behind it, its lines picked out only by the brittle thorns and dark ivy that cling to the exterior.

The Stonecrop campus also includes acres of grasslands, stony crags and ancient woodland. They're neither tame nor safe.

Halls of Residence

All of Stonecrop's students live on campus. There's no other option. When the university expanded in the 1960s, it added several residence buildings clustered around Stonecrop House. Technically, they're named after muses, but they're known collectively as the seven dwarves because they're blocky, lumpy, squat buildings. The halls of residence are a solid one-star in terms of facilities. They're hot in summer and cold in winter, and the Wi-Fi drops out if there's even a brief spate of adverse weather. They do provide private rooms and plenty of leisure spaces for students to socialize. Every building houses a mix of first-, second-, and final-year undergraduates who run the gamut of Stonecrop's courses. They're an opportunity to mix and mingle outside of the year and subject groups their studies push them into.

As the academic year progresses, students become more private and isolated as tensions rise and friendships (in general, though not universally) become more strained. They spend more time alone in their rooms and people lose track of friends who aren't also immediate neighbors.

Each building is overseen by a postgraduate student — i.e., a sorcerer recruited to the Masters of Stonecrop in the last few years — to act as a residence assistant solving students' problems and dealing with their complaints. Most residence buildings house a few postgrads, too.

Apart from the banal, mid-20th century architecture, the halls differ from Stonecrop House in one significant way. The house itself is marked with occult sigils that keep out the Fair Folk. The halls are not.

Hedge Maze & Rose Garden

A complex maze of hedges, dead ends, concealed openings, and bridges that allow the paths to cross back and forth over one another. The hedge maze is open to faculty and students at all hours of day and night and is

ostensibly available for public use (though nobody can remember the last time somebody not associated with Stonecrop set foot in it).

Parts of the maze are often cordoned off by faculty for their own purposes, as the walkways and hedges are arranged in formations conducive to occult rituals and summonings.

The center of the maze is a dense rose garden with a crumbling well in the middle of it. It's said a staircase spirals down inside the walls of the well, descending to a network of tunnels that spread beneath the house, once used to smuggle priests to safety. That may have been the tunnels' original purpose, but now they're used exclusively for the initiation of new Masters.

The initiate is led through the tunnels into one of several chambers dug directly out of the earth. They dig a hole in the dirt with their bare hands and nestle themselves inside. The Masters who accompany the initiate cover them over and leave them for a night and a day to commune with the earth. Initiates who die are buried in the earthen chambers to enrich the land that supports Stonecrop.

The Boggart Hole

The oldest area of woodland on the grounds of Stonecrop is officially called Vernouth Clough, but the locals call it The Boggart Hole.

WHAT IS A CLOUGH?

Clough (pronounced *kluff*) is an Old English word that has passed into local dialect in parts of Lancashire and Yorkshire. A descriptive term, it refers to a valley with steep sides and thick woodland.

The name derives from the fey creature said to haunt the clough, a malevolent entity that dwells among the hazels and rowans that line the valley. Even the least superstitious people in Aldcliffe hang horseshoes on their doors, and in the depths of midwinter leave piles of salt on bedroom windowsills to keep the boggart at bay. Nobody remembers why the boggart is there, except for the boggart itself.

**Even the least
superstitious locals
hang horseshoes on their
doors.**

The early Masters' relationship with their fickle, fey muses wasn't all one-way. One of them, Johanna Vaughan, figured out how to bind her muse to a patch of earth and keep it prisoner. Her poems have been forgotten, except by some specialist academics, but she wrung every drop of inspiration she could from the Fair Folk she exploited, and she made superb art. Then she died without releasing her prisoner. It's still trapped there, more bestial and monstrous with every passing year as its own impotent rage gradually poisons it.

The boggart can't leave the clough, and it makes sure nobody who joins it there ever leaves alive.

Stonecrop House

Stonecrop House is, understandably, the name of the original Stonecrop building — the medieval house at the core of the campus. It's not wholly medieval. There are some nineteenth century additions, which are difficult to spot, and some 20th century ones, which are not. The later additions are plastered brick rather than local stone, and they're appended to the back of the house like some shameful secret.

Stonecrop House is where all the institute's teaching and administration takes place. As dark and foreboding as the house looks from the outside, the interiors are designed to maximize available light, provide excellent acoustics, and give students quiet places to think, write, or draw. While the residences are bare bones in their amenities, the studio spaces and creative facilities are superb. From fully equipped ceramics, jewelry making, and glass-blowing workshops to state-of-the-art recording studios, to high-spec labs for digital work, Stonecrop provides.

It's impossible to forget that this modern teaching institution is housed in a medieval structure. The telltale signs are everywhere, from fireplaces in seminar rooms, elaborate ceiling roses, and original paneling to the locked secret rooms and passages that were once priest holes.

The Skull

The dining hall of Stonecrop House has a yellowed skull seated in a glass jar on the large mantelpiece. In the depths of night students report hearing the mournful wailing of the skull's owner echoing through the corridors of the house, said to be a priest who was killed in the house.

Radiocarbon analysis confirmed the skull dates back to the 12th century, not the Elizabethan era it's attributed to. It is most likely a woman's skull. Previous owners of the house who attempted to remove the skull from the premises met with grisly ends, and however the skull is disposed of, it always returns to pride of place on the refectory mantelpiece.

The Bear

The keystone above Stonecrop House's front door features two figures in relief—John Fayne and a towering bear.



John Fayne built the house long before it was given over to the Church, and he originally wanted to locate it elsewhere on the grounds. Builders and stonemasons were hired, and work on the foundations commenced, but each morning, the stones were found to have been moved up the hill to where the house now stands.

The keystone above Stonecrop's front door features two figures in relief—John Fayne, and a towering bear.

Eventually, men were hired to stand watch. They reported seeing a huge brown bear rising from its slumber among the stones under cover of darkness. This was not wholly unusual, for bears were still common in England at that time and had not yet been hunted to extinction. The remarkable part of the story is what followed. The bear, watchmen said, picked up the stones in its great arms and carried them up the hill, walking on its hind legs as though it were a man.

Each day, the builders moved the stones back to where the foundations were being dug, and each night the bear moved them back to the top of the hill, until one night John Fayne decided to stand watch himself. When the bear appeared, he strode up to it, demanding that it unhand the stones for his house, and the bear struck him dead.

Finding his body in the morning, the builders and Fayne's family decided that this was a clear sign that the house should not be allowed to stand where Fayne planned. They dug new foundations on the spot where the bear had moved the stones, and the animal tormented the builders no more.

Modern-day excavations of the intended building site located a circle of pre-historic stones buried beneath the earth. Where other stone formations in England are usually found standing in some sort of henge, these seven stones—each of them carved into perfect triangles and weighing around 50 tons—are arranged to lie flat on the ground in the shape of a seven-pointed star, with the space between the stones filled with thousands of human ribs formed in concentric circles. Investigations into the purpose of this formation are ongoing at Stonecrop.

The Wards

The skull and the bear are two of the thirteen wards that keep the Fair Folk from crossing the threshold of Stonecrop House. The others are marks in fireplaces, graffiti carved into lintels, and other minor defacements of the house's structure. They're simple in aesthetics — not complicated occult symbols, but deep patterns of scratches and runes, bestowed with a few drops of the Masters' blood once a year. As long as they're maintained, Stonecrop's safe from the fey.

The Mortimer Gallery

The Mortimer Gallery's one of the 19th century additions to Stonecrop House. It's used for student exhibitions, displays of graduate work, and to display the faculty's own greatest triumph. Undergraduate work is simply visual art of varying degrees of quality. The Masters' exhibits are both compelling and, in many cases, magical.

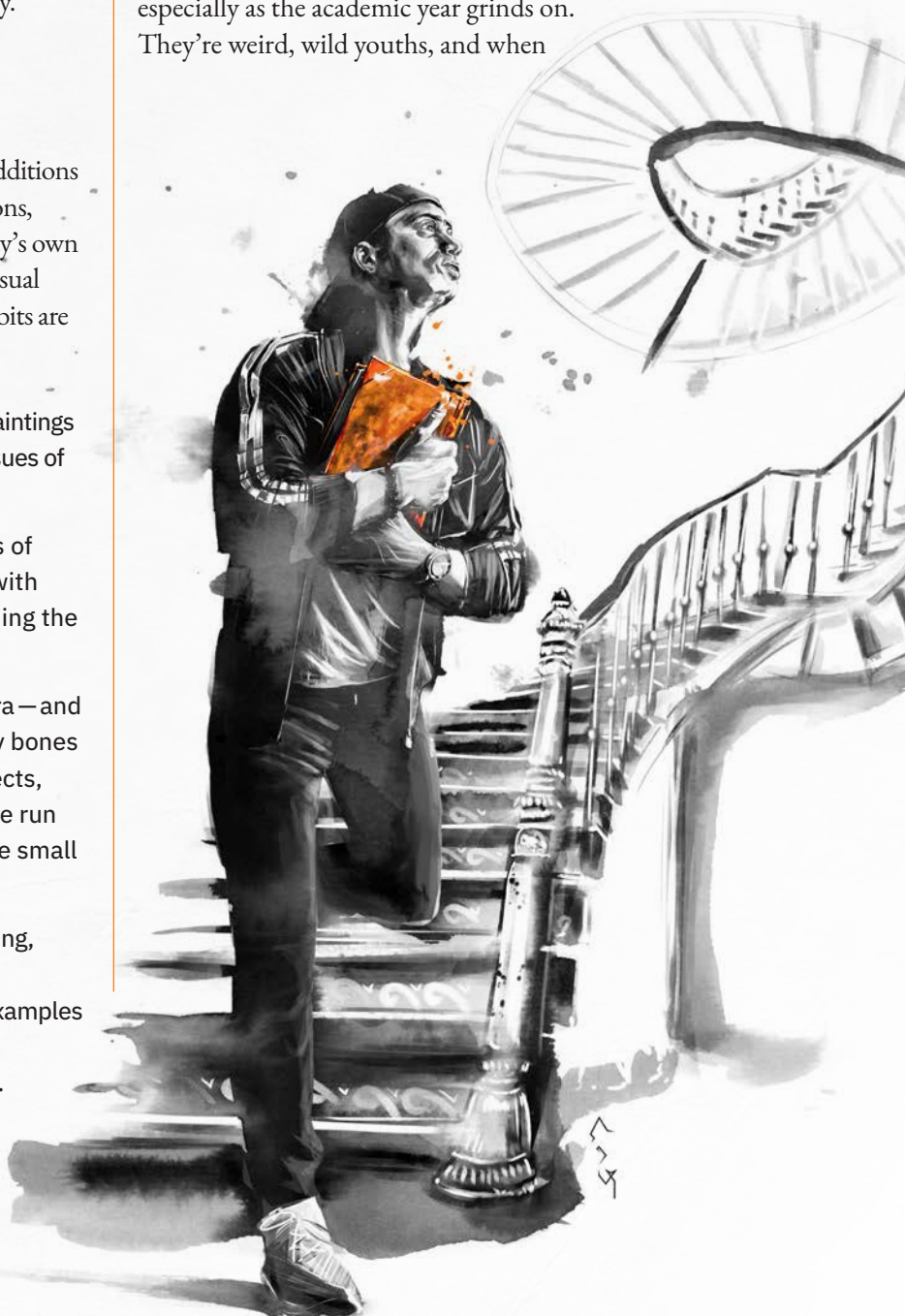
- **Sir Qeith Eugende** makes richly textured oil paintings that incorporate the blood, hair, and other tissues of the people he uses sorcery to control.
- **Avery Symonds** carves statues from hunks of weathered, local stone and infuses them with minor sorceries she can call out by smashing the rock.
- **S.B. Ronson** makes jewelry out of local flora — and parts of fauna, from claws and teeth to tiny bones trapped in resin. They call them found objects, but they're trophies from the places they've run and the prey they've hunted. Some of those small bones are human.
- **Aaron Mackenzie** displays statues of unsettling, quasi-human forms made from dead wood, brambles, rock, and mud. They're actually examples of The Formed (see *Latent Threats*, p. 124), enchanted to stay dormant until called upon.

The uppermost floor of the gallery is windowless and accessible only to the Masters. This is where the Institute keeps its most dangerous and valuable artifacts, texts and items of occult use and provenance.

Aldcliffe

Aldcliffe is the nearest village to Stonecrop. It's still about a half-hour walk away, and it's not entirely worth the effort. There's a pub, a small supermarket, and a couple of places to get cheap, greasy food. An unreliable bus service connects to the nearest city. Stonecrop students still go there for human contact outside of the school.

The villagers are uncomfortable around the students, especially as the academic year grinds on. They're weird, wild youths, and when



they come into town, they start fights and cause trouble. If they were all in Aldcliffe at the same time they'd almost outnumber the locals. On the other hand, they pour a lot of money into shops and the pub, so the villagers tolerate them.

The Quarry: The Masters of Stonecrop

The Masters of Stonecrop is a secret group of sorcerers comprised of select faculty members and the institute's small cohort of graduate students. They originally formed to defend Stonecrop from the Fair Folk. In the modern era, they're much more concerned with creating the most boundary-pushing, magically-infused art they're capable of, using the rock and earth of their home as well as the blood of sacrifices to achieve their greatest work.

Power for Power's Sake

Power is an insidious, delicious thing, and the slightest taste can change your priorities. Stonecrop began its existence with the best of intentions, recognizing the shapes in the dark that threaten the continued peaceful existence of humanity and drawing magic from the earth to combat them. As their power and influence grew, those in charge at Stonecrop found that they quite enjoyed power for its own sake.

The Masters of Stonecrop have lost sight of their original mission. The current members are only vaguely aware of their duty to hold fast against the vengeful Fair Folk. They regard it as an origin story, not a job description.

The Masters work magic drawn from primal connections to the land. Their magics are of blood, earth, sex, and the hunt. They're capable of great results, but at high costs to people abducted for sacrifice and

bloodletting, hunted as prey, or subjected to other abuses. The magic feeds back into the earth that fuels it and pollutes and corrupts the area around Stonecrop. The seasons have distinct emotional impact, the geography's even more bleak and unwelcoming than the rest of the northern moors, and the animals that make their home there are aggressive and threatening.

Latent Threats

If someone asked the Masters what they wanted, they'd say it was simply to be left alone to indulge in their studies and creative pursuits. That wouldn't be an issue if their magical techniques weren't inherently exploitative. They draw their power from the land and living things. Powerful works require sacrifices — usually, but not always, animal — and over time this form of magic has poisoned the land. That's not an abstract problem, there are pockets of magical residue that form into monstrous things made of sticks and dirt. The Masters call them the Formed. They keep the Formed's numbers down, but they're not especially diligent about it. Aaron Mackenzie's learned to control them and keeps a growing number in display in The Mortimer Gallery to use as servants as and when he needs them.

The Formed aren't the ugly side effects of the Masters' magic, but the Masters themselves pose the bigger threat. People who learn about them have to die. They've invested too much in making Stonecrop a haven to risk exposure. Sometimes their magic requires someone to die, too. When they can, they kill two birds with one stone, turning potential whistleblowers into victims. Sometimes they just have to grab a hiker.

The Masters

Some of the Masters are faculty members, some senior figures in Stonecrop's administration, and other graduate students. They all have their own ambitions and preoccupations, but they act decisively and in unison to quash any threat that threatens their safety, freedom, or secrecy.

The Right Honorable Sir Qeith Eugende, The Chancellor

Eugende's run the Stonecrop Institute since the late 1970s. Before that, he was a professor, and before that, a student. He's barely left the campus since the turn of the millennium, and students joke that he'd turn to dust and blow away if he was off-site for any prolonged period of time. There's more truth in that than they know. Every January, Eugende walks into the middle of the forest that encroaches on the campus and spends a night there under the full moon, mixing paints that incorporate moss, earth, and other natural materials. The rest of the Masters come to him and pay him a tithe in blood (not always their own). When he returns to Stonecrop House, he paints a self-portrait with those materials and lives another year.

His magic's slowly poisoning the land; he's drawing strength from it to keep himself alive, and every year it takes a stronger magic to keep him hanging on. For weeks after Eugende finishes his self-renewal, there are outbreaks of illness around Stonecrop and Aldcliffe.

Eugende doesn't care. Continuing to exist and rule his little empire is his only ambition. He fiercely resists change at Stonecrop. He disdains the new creative facilities and disciplines the institute's turning towards and resents anything that makes him feel old or irrelevant. He believes (correctly) that the other Masters will turn on him soon, but he's far too powerful for any of them to take on directly.

PULL QUOTE: Continuing to exist and rule his little empire is Eugende's only ambition.



General Difficulty: 4/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 5, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Craft (Oil Painting) 8, Occult 8

Notes / Other Traits: Eugende works his magic through his art. If he creates a piece of art incorporating part of a person — hair, nails, etc. — he can use **Command (8)** against them (see *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168).

- Eugende can't die as long as he's on the Stonecrop campus.

Gabriel Holdstock, The Wanderer

Technically, Gabriel Holdstock is employed by the Stonecrop Institute. He only turns up to teach on occasion, though. The rest of the time, he's too busy nosing around Athelbarn — usually with a number of sorcerous safety precautions in place. After Eugende, he's the longest-standing Master still at Stonecrop; he's the only one who still takes the Fair Folk seriously. Unfortunately, he doesn't see them as a threat so much as a power source. He's sure there are Fair Folk still in and around Athelbarn, and he's on a mission to lure them out. He uses students as bait, taking them on writing retreats. He gets them drunk and high on psychedelics and turns them loose in Athelbarn, hoping their intrusion will draw out the Fair Folk. If it works, Gabriel will be there to capitalize on it, maybe catching himself a fey muse.

So far, all he's achieved is nearly killing a couple of proteges through overdoses and exposure. The Fair Folk aren't stupid enough to respond to his tricks. But

they are watching Holdstock, and if he intrudes on Athelbarn one more time, they'll respond with an incursion into the Stonecrop campus.

PULL QUOTE: The Fair Folk aren't stupid enough to respond to his tricks. But they are watching.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 4, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 7, Subterfuge 6, Survival 7

Notes / Other Traits: Gabriel's sorcery makes him slippery. If he doesn't want to be noticed, people simply forget he's in a room (unless they're directly interacting with him). He's able to travel great distances swiftly, and has a facility for getting in and out of places he shouldn't be.

- **Charm (7):** see *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.



STONECROP FINE ARTS INSTITUTE

Ffion Llewellyn, The Performance Artist

Ffion's one of the younger Masters. She's in her third year as a graduate student at Stonecrop, and she knows that if she doesn't make a sufficiently grand gesture this year she'll have to leave and fend for herself. She'd rather not; a salary and residence at Stonecrop, where she's free to pursue the arcane, is a lot better than having to juggle sorcerous study with a career and the need to make rent.

She's got a plan. She's working on a nine-month work of art. A multimedia narrative that culminates in her giving birth to a child she insists was fathered by Stonecrop itself. As well as being an act of magic that will give her a child, a familiar, a servitor, or a power source, it's a compelling work of art. She's documenting the experience of motherhood, comparing communion with the land with communion with a lover, and exploring fears around carrying a child through comparisons with possession, parasites, and monstrous pregnancies.

Ffion genuinely doesn't know what's coming out of her at the end of her pregnancy; what kind of entity might result from this work of magic, but she does know that Stonecrop's a blighted place, corrupted by centuries of bloody magic, and that whatever she gives birth to will probably be as monstrous as would be powerful.

The pregnancy's taking a lot out of her. She's increasingly reliant on methods Eugende showed her to maintain her energy. And that means blood. She's stuck to animal sacrifices up to now, but as her pregnancy runs its course, her condition deteriorates. She needs more.

PULL QUOTE: As her pregnancy runs its course, Ffion's condition deteriorates. She needs more.

General Difficulty: 4/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 7, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Folklore) 7, Performance 8

Notes / Other Traits: Ffion's magic is that of blood and sickness. Choose one person she sees as a threat. Ffion works slow, patient rituals to bring harm to them. Reduce their physical dice pools by 1 for every 2 Danger (round up).

S.B. Ronson, The Shifter

S.B. Ronson is an illustrator, graphic designer, and — most of the time — a wolf. They still teach a full course load, but when they're not in the studio they're on the moors, roaming wild and experiencing life with an entirely different complement of senses and urges. Over time, the wolf's taken more and more of their time; they're flat and uninterested in most things to do with their human life. S.B. is aware that the Masters need the school as a sanctuary and a source of funding. They just don't care. It's all so irrelevant. Human concerns feel further and further away, and they don't miss them.

They used to contribute beautiful pen and ink illustrations to the Mortimer Gallery. Now they deliver trophies from their kills, dipped in resin to preserve them, but otherwise virtually unchanged from the way S.B. found them.

They're the Masters' hunter. They excel at chasing down prey and dragging it, dead or nearly so, back to Stonecrop House. Sightings of them are often the first sign someone gets that there's something wrong at Stonecrop. They're also often the last thing those suspicious, curious interlopers see.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 4, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 7, Subterfuge 6, Survival 7

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Shapeshift (Wolf):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Resilience:* When in wolf form, S.B. treats all damage not inflicted by their vulnerability as superficial.
- *Vulnerability:* Weapons made from materials

originating on the Stonecrop campus inflict Aggravated damage. For more information see *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Master of Stonecrop

These traits work as quick reference for Masters not described elsewhere.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 6, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 8, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Craft (one artistic form) 8, Occult 8

Notes / Other Traits: The Master has either Prescience (6), Charm (6), or Shapeshifting (two animal forms; usually one dangerous and one small and discreet).

The Formed

The Formed are the creatures of muck and branches that drag themselves out of the forest near Stonecrop. They're the side effects of decades of magic poisoning the earth. They aren't intelligent enough to have goals and ambitions, but they long to be near their makers. They range from brutally violent to passive until threatened; their temperament's determined by some quirk of the magic used around the time of their making, but it's immensely technical and functionally irrelevant. Some of them attack until they tear their victim to shreds. Others simply wander.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 3, Mental 3

Secondary Attributes: Health 4, Willpower 3

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics 8, Brawl 8, Stealth 7

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Frenzy:* After the Formed has inflicted damage on a target, it gets +Danger (maximum +3) dice on its next attack against the same target.
- *Onslaught:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Vulnerability (Fire):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Secondary Quarry: The Fair Folk of Athelbarn

The Fair Folk that destroyed Athelbarn are still there. Not many of them — there are far more exciting places to be than a barren ruin — but a few, and they continue to harbor a grievance against the Masters of Stonecrop. That extends to their students and colleagues; the fey creatures don't much care for the niceties of who is and isn't one of the Masters. Stonecrop House is warded against their presence and intruding on the rest of the campus risks drawing the Masters' attention, but any Stonecroft students, staff, or alumni elsewhere are fair prey.

Boggart

The boggart's the only Fair Folk on Stonecrop campus itself, and it's trapped in its clough. Locals all know the tales, and they avoid its home like the plague. They all know that if they're caught in the clough, they aren't even to think its name or wonder where it might be because to do so is to summon it — and woe betide the fool who calls for it.

General Difficulty: 5/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 9, Social 2, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 8, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Awareness (Find prey) 9, Subterfuge (Mimic human speech) 9

Notes / Other Traits: The Boggart can sense when a human is explicitly hunting it or wondering if it is nearby, and it uses this thought pattern like a homing beacon to locate its prey. Victims aware of the ability can resist it with a successful Resolve + Occult test against a Difficulty equal to the current Danger. But as

long as they continue to think about the whereabouts of the Boggart, it can repeat the attempt each turn. If successful, the Hunter is able to mask their exact location from the Boggart for the rest of the scene, which will often turn its attention to a different creature thinking about it. If a human ever says the Boggart's name aloud, it is unable to resist this ability, and the Boggart will seek them out without pause.

- The Boggart's name is recorded in a poem stored in the top floor of The Mortimer Gallery (p. 123). It's Sigeward (an Anglo-Saxon name meaning 'victorious guardian').

The Athelbarn Hunt

The Fair Folk of Athelbarn look a little like humans — if humans were loping predators with long limbs, sharp claws, and crowns of antlers — but they graft the scorched stones of Athelbarn to their forms like trophies. They're hard to see, partly because they're adept at camouflage but also because they etch their bodies with flickering patterns that make it nearly impossible to look directly at them. They're artists in their own right, whispering secrets plucked from their prey's hearts and wielding them as weapons.

Like many of the Fair Folk English folklore warns about, the fey creatures of Athelbarn love artists and storytellers. Love is the wrong word; they crave their company. Even if they didn't have a powerful grievance with the Masters of Stonecrop, they'd still prey on creatives and dreamers and steal them away to wherever they hide when they're not in the ruins of Athelbarn.

The Masters of Stonecrop believe the scattering of Fair Folk who watch over Athelbarn are the only ones they need to worry about. That's an optimistic belief when local legends tell of whole cities of strange beings under hills and on the far side of mirrors.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 3, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 5

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics (Thrown Weapons) 8, Awareness (Spot Observers) 8, Intimidation 7, Melee (Spears) 8

Notes / Other Traits:

- *Charm:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Invisibility:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Rush:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Vulnerability (Cold Iron):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.
- *Words Like Knives:* The Athelbarn Hunt pluck secret truths out of humans' hearts and wield them to cause pain — literally, not figuratively. In social combat they can choose to inflict Health damage instead of Willpower.

People

Students, staff, and nearby residents are all wrapped up in Stonecrop's story.

Students

The rising stars of the student body.

- **Nell Westchester:** A talented ceramicist in the final year of her undergraduate degree. Nell's work mixes local earth with clay for a unique material. She uses materials harvested from around the school in the firing process (a kind of Raku firing). Her tie to the land around Stonecrop's particularly deep and the Masters keep a watchful eye on her, considering her a potential new member.

**Nell's tie to the land
around Stonecrop's
particularly deep.**

- **Stu Foster:** Former international under-18s rugby player and now a big, intimidating man. Stu's a painter with a fascination for the occult that's opened him up to the presence of ghosts around him. He's another one the Masters are watching, but for different reasons. A student who can talk to ghosts could learn a lot about the Masters' activities

and cause a lot of trouble. They might have already dealt with Stu except he's dating Aaron Mackenzie (a fairly new Master), who's kept him safe so far. Stu's still on thin ice.

- **Daria Blythe:** Daria hates Stonecrop. She would have left during her first year, except she's from a town an hour away and gets a sizable scholarship as a local student. The place is spooky, her classmates get more creepy every term, and some of the faculty make her skin crawl. She's a writer and poet, but Stonecrop strips her of inspiration. She's never accepted any of the weirdness around her, and if somebody — a cell of Hunters, say — started poking around, she'd be more than happy to help them.

Staff

Most of the Stonecrop Institute's staff have nothing to do with the Masters, but that doesn't mean they can't be trouble.

- **Casper Leek:** Casper is the curator of The Mortimer Gallery. He sees the art every day and knows there's something terribly wrong with it. Eugende's paintings make his skin crawl. Symonds' sculptures evoke a kind of flight instinct. They repulse him, and twenty years of that sensation builds a certain amount of resentment. He's taken to stealing archived works and selling them. It makes him feel a little more in control. He doesn't know he's unleashing magically charged works of art into the private collectors' market.
- **Tay Shah:** There are instructors like Tay in every university. Overworked, underpaid junior faculty getting increasingly resentful of their tenured colleagues who do half as much work for salaries orders of magnitude better than their own. Tay's talented. She knows that. She makes audio soundscapes and teaches music production, sound engineering, and an absurd number of other courses because they each pay a pittance. But for some reason, the people who matter won't pay her any attention. Tay knows there's a clique that runs Stonecrop, and its members include graduate students a decade younger than her. She never stops trying to make a connection with them. Some of them

find Tay irritating; others think she's a useful pawn and delegate tasks that don't require sorcerous talent. She has no idea they're sorcerers, she thinks they're her path to a better job. The Masters will never notice Tay. She's about as magical as a house brick.

Notable Alumni

Many students leave Stonecrop without ever knowing how close they came to touching the veil of darkness. Other alumni are Masters who leave Stonecrop to pursue their own aims independently. The alumni listed here could be either, depending on the needs of the storyline.

- **Mitchell Brown:** A celebrated architect whose iconic buildings blend traditional gothic with retro-futurism and a touch of Brutalism in a style that he has dubbed Slab-goth. His constructions stand as landmarks in most major cities around the world. Unknown to him, he has designed chapterhouses for both the Arcanum and the Order of the Rose.
- **Andie Newman:** An acclaimed director of so-called elevated horror, she's one of the rare horror directors to have won an Academy Award. Andie's work has been compared favorably to Ingmar Bergman and Andrei Tarkovsky, creating dreamscapes so convincing that audience members often claim they felt they experienced the events of the film rather than being aware they were sitting on a seat in a theatre watching them unfold.
- **Patrice Nepumoke:** Something of a cult favorite, Patrice wrote two short novels before retreating to the depths of the Appalachian Mountains to live a life of quiet solitude. His writing is notable for its stream-of-consciousness surreal style, delivering prose that is at once visceral and almost impenetrable to all but the most dedicated of readers. In the few interviews he gave before retiring from public life, Patrice spoke of Stonecrop more candidly than nearly anybody else ever has, telling tales of creeping darkness and grasping roots in the depths of the forests that most people wrote off as an attempt to market his unpublished third novel.

The Village of Aldcliffe

The nearest village to Stonecrop is Aldcliffe. The locals have a fraught relationship with the staff and students of the isolated academy, but they're happy to accept their money.

- **Gloria Attah:** Gloria and her wife Dee run the Three Feathers, Aldcliffe's only pub and guest house. Gloria worries about Stonecrop's students. They arrive at the start of the academic year wild and obnoxious and gradually become stranger and, she suspects, disturbed. She makes sure students know if they need to take a break from the intensity of their studies, they can always hole up in the pub for a few days.
- **Nat Harland:** Nat's a local artist and ceramics maker. Curious about and jealous of the school, Nat's worked for 30 years to build a career, and Stonecrop alumni are all but guaranteed one. If they can make trouble for Stonecrop, they do.
- **Rohaun Bukhari:** Rohaan was an investment banker until he burned out and retired to the country to make artisanal cheese. Rohaan has a secret: he met the Boggart and it let him go. It said he owed it a favor in return, and Rohaan has nightmares about what that might mean.

In Chronicles

The Masters of Stonecrop need secrecy to survive, but they're surrounded by curious outsiders and their magic leaves traces everywhere. The ripple effects of their actions make them easy to weave into a chronicle. Hunters might be in contact with one of the groups affected by or aware of Stonecrop's strangeness or — better — be in one of those groups themselves.

Aldcliffe

The people of Aldcliffe have a tense, conflicted relationship with the Stonecrop Institute. They feel the effects of the Masters' actions the most. Their

livestock, and sometimes their friends and family, go missing when it's time for one of the Masters' grand rituals... or a specific Master's personal works of magic. On some level, most of them know there's something weird about the art school, but it's impossible to say so out loud without sounding like a raving conspiracy theorist. They still talk about the strange things they've seen, though — especially the ones who move away from Aldcliffe, who tell the stories of cattle mutilations, occult trinkets in the forest, and other strange happenings to their big city friends at parties.

Online Communities

In decades past, these effects were limited to the immediate area of Stonecrop. People in Aldcliffe knew the stories about the campus and the woods and moors around it, but there was no reason for them to spread any further. Now Stonecrop's on the radar of numerous fans of paranormal happenings worldwide. Reports of, for example, annual livestock disappearances or weird scarecrows (the Formed) migrate across social media and streaming platforms within hours — and reports of missing persons spread even faster. They don't always attach directly to the Stonecrop Institute, but it's mentioned frequently.

Online references provide a wealth of data for anyone looking for patterns, and plenty of armchair experts with theories on Stonecrop for Hunters to tap into. Those theories are wrong because they attribute the strange occurrences to monstrous beasts or possibly an individual witch (who may or may not be alive), rather than an organized collective of sorcerers, but even if these online rumors point the Hunters to a nonexistent Quarry, they still point them towards Stonecrop.

Students

Stonecrop may be an institution with a venerable history and deeply-held traditions, but it's home to a population of entirely modern, forward-looking students. They're alert, politically active, and deeply curious. They want to know the reasoning behind the university administrations' decisions — why lecturers and professors like Gabriel Holdstock do next to no student-

facing work, or why a relic like Sir Qeith Eugende won't make way for someone younger and more progressive to run the institute. Some dare to ask whether art as troubling as the pieces on display in the Mortimer Gallery is problematic. Most troublingly, they want to know where the money goes. They ask these questions publicly, amongst themselves, to friends and family, and online.



Staff

The staff are equally problematic. The stereotype of a comfortable, quiet, well-paid life in academia is long dead. Most of the people working and teaching at Stonecrop — outside of art world celebrities and the clique in charge — labor hard for meager salaries, and they're very sensitive to how they're treated. They've all got theories about why so many teaching positions are filled by people who only stay for a single term, why there's never any budget for pay rises or new facilities, and how the administration chooses who gets to be in their privileged little clique.

Most of the theories have nothing to do with the supernatural. Some, especially from staff who've been at Stonecrop for a few years, touch on the weird emotional tides that flow through the campus with the changing seasons, or point to the proud endorsement of ancient, pagan traditions as signs of a regressive, highly conservative work ethos.

Obscene Artifacts

The Masters of Stonecrop create highly sought-after contemporary art pieces. These paintings are described as gateways to the id, sculptures that engender different responses depending on which phase of the moon they're viewed under, mechanisms that move perfectly in time with the observer's heartbeat. When Stonecrop work comes up at auction — never with the Stonecrop name attached, of course — there's always a feeding frenzy among bidders.

The Masters of Stonecrop create highly sought-after contemporary art pieces.

Some of those artworks are sold legitimately by their creators. Others hit the market courtesy of Mortimer Gallery curator Casper Leek, who considers stealing and profiting from archived works as the only perk of a job that puts him in close contact with unpleasant artworks and people.

Leek's most recent... leak... was "Trophy #31," a headdress made of bird bones and feathers that, while absolutely beautiful, is also chilling. It's one of S.B. Ronson's more spectacular pieces, and some of those bones aren't avian but human. The headdress is haunted by the ghosts of the people and animals that made it, and they want vengeance. The ghosts act in unison to possess Miriam Kendall, the new owner of Trophy #31, compelling her to travel to Stonecrop and exact revenge.

A possessed art collector is an obvious problem for Hunters to solve, and following their Quarry leads them to investigate Stonecrop and all its secrets.

The Boggart

Yet again, a group of hikers headed into the woods in search of the boggart and, yet again, they didn't return. It's a story so common around these parts that it's barely worth telling, except that this time there's a twist. This time, a witness, David O'Keefe, claims to have seen the ramblers ducking into the roots of a tree, where something inhuman tore them into pieces and scattered their organs to the wind. And the witness managed to capture a few seconds of the carnage on video.

Yet again a group of hikers headed into the woods in search of the boggart and yet again they didn't return.

The internet erupts as the footage immediately goes viral, and Aldcliffe is flooded with would-be monster hunters looking for a close encounter of their own. As more people venture into the darkness in search of the boggart the death toll rises, and Stonecrop's reputation as a place where weird things happen becomes the center of the story.

The cell might respond to the viral footage in the same way as everyone else — with the small difference that they know the truth of the monsters that hide in the darkness and are prepared to do something about it. Alternatively, a Relationship Map connection might

bring them in to hunt the boggart before even more people lose their lives. While they're there, the cell come up against Gabriel Holdstock, who decides it's time to put the Fair Folk in their place and try to bind the boggart as a personal servant.

Book Tour

Patrice Nepumoke comes out of seclusion to promote a new book. It's a major departure from his previous novels, lacking the surrealism that became a trademark of his previous work. This is big news in several communities. The literary world is excited about his promotional tour. Fans of the paranormal, who took seriously Patrice's claims about creeping darkness and a malevolence in the forest, are enthused to see whether he's finally going to reveal more.

The promotional tour makes headlines when Patrice loses his temper at a book signing, flips the table he's sitting behind, and swings a punch at the fan in front of him while yelling "there's no such fucking thing!" It's highly meme-able, and for a couple of days, they're everywhere. After that, Patrice cancels a couple of events, only appearing on podcasts... and a couple of days after that, he's dead.

Cleaners find Patrice dead in his hotel room, hands and feet bound with thick cords of woven ivy and his body carved up with runes that look a little like Ogham but aren't.

It's a calculated move by the Masters of Stonecrop. Like the many aficionados of the supernatural who showed up to ask Patrice about his experiences at the Stonecrop Institute, the Masters thought Patrice might tell the world about what he saw at his alma mater. They already intimidated him into silence once, and he spent years in seclusion. They're not about to give him another chance, and killing him so obviously and unpleasantly serves as a warning to any other alumni who might get ideas about speaking out. It does lend credibility to stories of pagan rites and weird magic at Stonecrop, but that's less of a concern than firsthand testimony from another alumnus.

The trail leads to Stonecrop. That's what the fan he punched asked about, and the vines and gore match his reminiscences of the place. The Masters are good at

hiding themselves. Visiting sleuths only deal with staff like Tay Shah, who's pleasant and efficient and doesn't believe in supernatural nonsense in the slightest. Tay is primed to tell visitors about Athelbarn and the boggart, in the hopes the Fair Folk will deal with them.

Archaeological Athelbarn

Gabriel Holdstock's sick of tiptoeing around the edges of his Athelbarn problem. It's time for a grand gesture — and a grand piece of art. He announces his intention to stage a huge show in the ruins of Athelbarn during the summer term; a long day of performances for every undergraduate student with something to perform. For Hunters already involved with Stonecrop as staff or students, that's a red flag in and of itself. Holdstock's never taken that much of an interest in the students.

Holdstock's intention is to do something the Fair Folk can't ignore. He's mounting a full-scale invasion of their territory and he expects them to respond. The undergraduates are bait, plain and simple, but there'll be Masters present. With their help, he thinks he can either eradicate the Fair Folk or — preferably — put them under the Masters' control, just like in the old days of the original Stonecrop artists' retreat.

The Hunters might be involved in the performances, attending to see a Relationship Map connection (or an indirect connection — a contact's child or partner) perform, or just curious, ticket-buying members of the public. Alternatively, they might be Stonecrop staff or students who aren't directly involved and are clued in enough to realize the danger Holdstock is like putting his performers in.

If the performances go ahead, the Fair Folk will take the bait. It's nowhere near the easy victory Holdstock expects: the sorcerers have good reason to work their magic subtly (they have to exist around these innocent, normal humans afterwards and they don't want witnesses), but there's nothing restraining the fey creatures. The Athelbarn Hunt pick off sorcerers from the fringes of the gathering, turn performers into servants using their Charm to manipulate them and their Words Like Knives to threaten them — a classic carrot and stick approach. If matters reach this point, there are deaths on both sides, and amongst the innocent undergraduates caught in the middle of the

fight between the sorcerers and Fair Folk. Arguably worse, the Fair Folk take some of the performers away with them, kicking off another Hunt to retrieve them. The Hunters can still save a lot of people at this point, but probably not everyone.

If they act faster to avert disaster, the Hunters can sabotage the performance and ensure it doesn't go ahead; find some way to distract, banish, or threaten the fey; distract, threaten, or hurt Holdstock; or attend and take advantage of the chaos to hunt Fey Folk or sorcerers, as their current priorities dictate.

Power Struggle

Sir Qeith Eugende's tenure as Chancellor may be nearing its end. Ffion Llewellyn and several other Masters whose artistic vision doesn't fit his old-school sensibilities are sick of being ruled over by a fossil. Ffion ruins Eugende's painting, which makes him sick and vulnerable. Most Masters pick a side, choosing between supporting Ffion and a new era for the Masters or supporting Eugende and the status quo.

The conflict means acts of powerful, violent magic by each faction to curse and harm their enemies. More magic means more sacrifices, more of the Formed, and more strange, large scale effects on the students as the tides of magical power shift and grow more powerful. Livestock go missing or are found dead; eventually so do three students. The first two are undergraduates (Rose Cathcart and Lewis Byrne), their bodies and blood are used in magic. The third is a grad student named Elliott Sterling — one of the Masters, and one of Ffion's friends.

Both factions try to weaponize Hunters investigating the deaths, pointing them toward the other group of Masters. They fabricate evidence, attempt to harm the Hunters and frame the other faction, and generally use the Hunters however they can. Ffion's faction favors commanding the Formed and other creatures spun up out of magic; Eugende uses S.B. Ronson, animals under their control, and slower, subtle curses (bad luck, illness, and more). Both sides plant spells and sigils that use their enemies' trademarks (written in blood and body fluids for Ffion framing Eugendes; recordings and other digital assets for Eugende's people framing Ffion). The idea is to point the Hunters at the enemy faction without revealing themselves; the Hunters will probably

discern that there are two factions at work. The trick is dealing with them without the Masters getting sufficiently unnerved so that they can reunite to deal with the threat the Hunters pose.

If Ffion's faction wins, no one will hold them in check. They'll feel free to keep working great magic acts that are likely to get them noticed. They're also faced with another immediate problem. There'll be a new Chancellor and it might not be one of the Masters, meaning they'll see their grip over Stonecrop eroded—until they find a way to compel the new Chancellor to do their bidding. Between the increased number of magical acts and the rapid (and therefore obvious) breaking of a new Chancellor, there are plenty more leads for Hunters to follow to future Stonecrop cases.

The Forms of Fear

This story works particularly well after or in parallel to 'Power Struggle' or another storyline that sees the Masters distracted with other problems or engaging in a lot of acts of sorcery in a short space of time.

The Masters of Stonecrop aren't keeping on top of their Formed problem. This happens sometimes over the summer; there aren't many people around for them to bother, at least on campus, and initiating new Masters takes priority. This time, there's a residential summer school happening on campus: a hundred adult learners taking an intensive, week-long painting course. It provides extra funding, and the Masters always need more funding. There are also very few Masters on site. There was only one new initiation this year, and it failed. Many of the sorcerers are taking some time away from campus to recover from the disappointment. (This is particularly easy to justify if some are licking their wounds after 'Power Struggle.')

If the Hunters are students or staff at Stonecrop, they're roped in to help teach, clean, or whatever role their skills best suit. If they're locals, they hear about the unusual summer activity around the village. Alternatively, they might have joined the course as an opportunity to get onto the Stonecrop Institute campus and follow up leads of monstrous or sorcerous activity.

The Formed start stumbling closer to the campus buildings. At first, there are just one or two. The first one is placid and mistaken for a sculpture project. The

second one attacks a visitor (Josh Graham) out for a late-night walk, but by the morning after, even he's convinced what actually happened was that, drunk and disoriented, he got tangled up in some tree branches. The encounters grow more frequent and more dangerous as greater numbers of the Formed encroach on the campus.

The Hunters can fight them—individual Formed are easily overcome—but dozens of the Formed are in the woods. Deducing who, amongst the Stonecrop people on campus, is a Master of Stonecrop and getting them to deal with the problem is faster, but it means there's a sorcerer who has the Hunters on their radar and one who does not enjoy being perceived.

The Long Year

Eve Fray, a famous singer-songwriter, teaches at Stonecrop for a term, then shocks the world with their decision to retire from performing and pursue their art in seclusion on the wild moors of northern England. That's not true; the Fair Folk of Athelbarn took Eve away, and the Masters assumed she was never coming back. They wrote the press release, a Master named Roslyn Beckett disguised herself as Eve at the one public appearance she made to announce her retirement, and as a group, the Masters believed they'd covered the disappearance reasonably well.

Plenty of people at Stonecrop aren't convinced; if Eve Fray is still nearby, why hasn't anyone heard from her? She got on well with some people on campus, especially Daria Blythe. Still, there's nothing about the case to interest a cell of Hunters at this point.

A year and a day later, Eve Fray shows up in the Accident & Emergency department of a hospital in Shropshire. She's malnourished and filthy, as if she spent weeks running through a forest. More distressingly, she's mutilated. Her tongue's been cut out and her fingers are badly and methodically broken. That's the price she paid the Fair Folk. She promised she'd never sing or make music again if they let her leave, and this is how the fey enforced the deal.

A missing person showing up like this should be enough to interest most Hunters. If it doesn't, have one from the cell stumble over the story of what happened to Athelbarn while they're researching something

else — and maybe some other disappearances around Athelbarn and Stonecrop for good measure. One mysterious disappearance is a curiosity. Moreover, a pattern forms.

It’s difficult for Eve to communicate what happened to her, but once Daria Blythe hears Eve is back, she rushes to her side. Daria’s willing, even eager, to tell the Hunters some things they might not know: that she doesn’t believe Eve ever retired voluntarily, and that someone at Stonecrop knows exactly what happened to her.

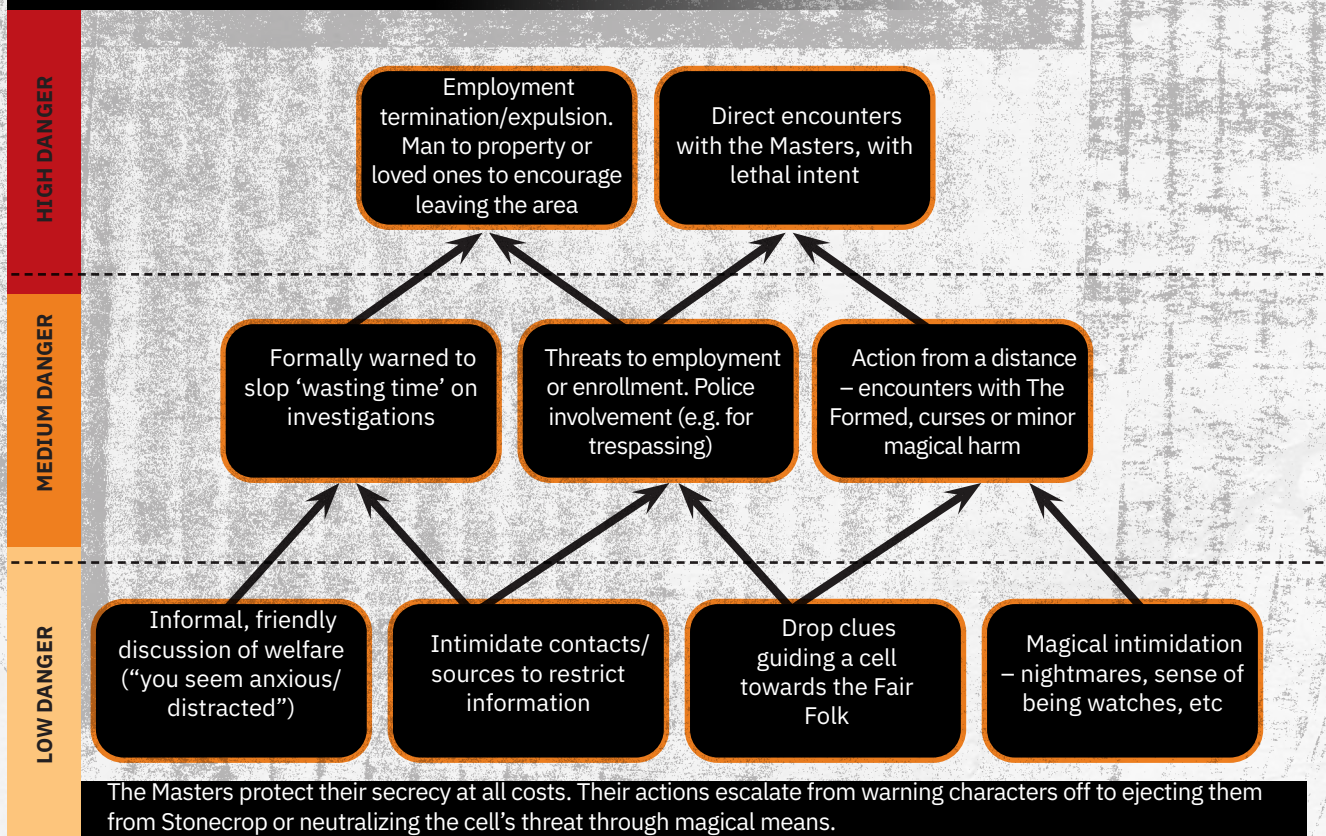
When they get on campus, the Hunters find evidence of wrongdoing: all Eve’s possessions remain, and the press release document is on the institute’s network. Going deeper uncovers the magical elements of the ruse, the existence of both the Masters of Stonecrop and the Athelbarn Hunt, and the fact that the Masters left a woman for dead in the hands of otherworldly monsters rather than lift a finger to help her.

Response Algorithms

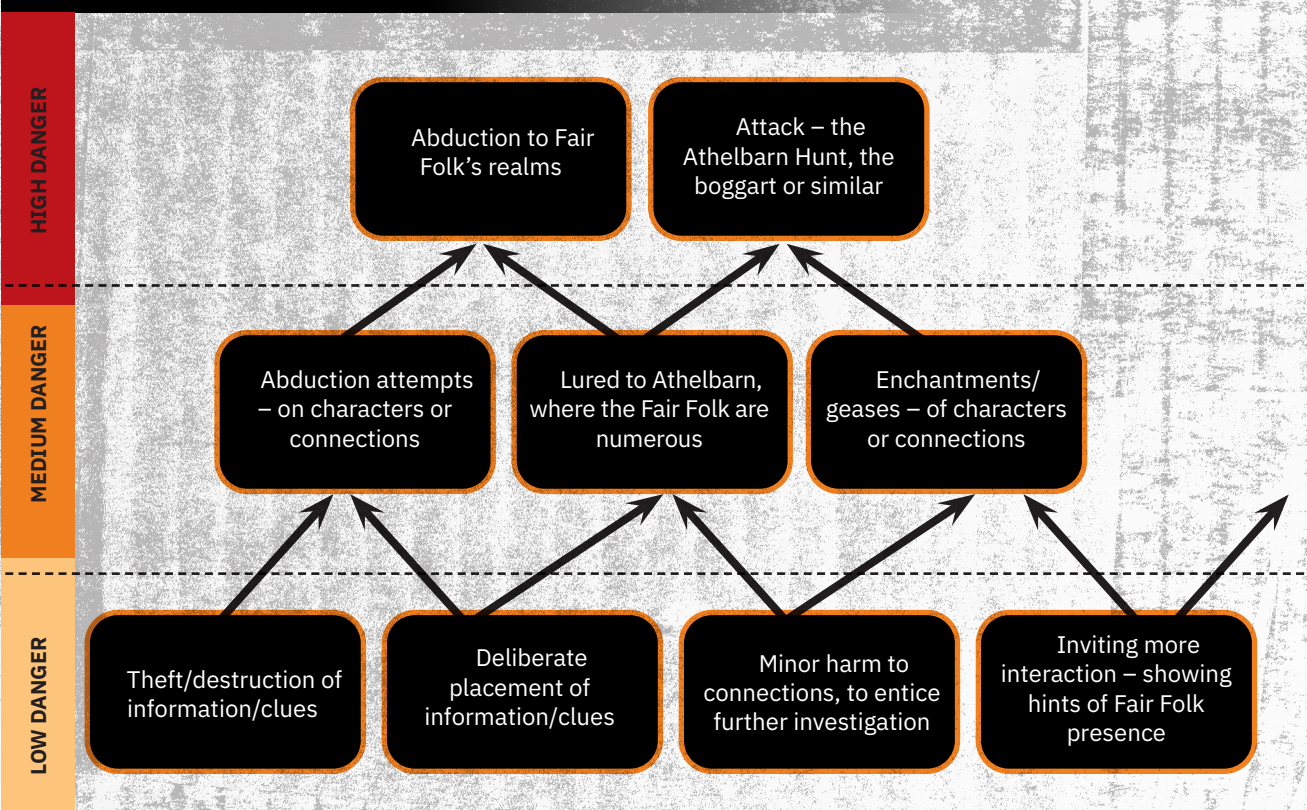
The response algorithms indicate roughly how each of Stonecrop’s Quarries, the Masters and the Fair Folk, behave at different levels of Danger. As Danger increases, quarries see Hunters as a more substantial threat and take more significant action against them. Early in the Hunt, when Danger is low, pick actions from the lowest tier of the chart, moving upward as Danger increases.

The Response Algorithm isn’t set in stone — Quarries adapt to Hunters’ behavior and take whatever action’s appropriate in the moment — but it’s a rough guide to what a Quarry might do next in situations where you’re unsure. ■

RESPONSE ALGORITHM: THE MASTERS OF STONECROP



RESPONSE ALGORITHM: THE FAIR FOLK OF ATHELBARN



The Fair Folk want to be found. At low levels of Danger they toy with the cell, revealing hints of their presence. At higher levels they attempt to draw opponents under their influence, only kidnapping or killing them at the highest levels of Danger.



STONECROP FINE ARTS INSTITUTE



Chapter Six:

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship

"The Cardinal is at his wit's end-it is true that he had not far to go."

-Lord Byron

Those looking at history from outside academia think that it's all concrete information. Names and dates are hard evidence of what has come before. Any historian says otherwise. Sources lie or are mistaken; professors advance pet theories and new information comes to light. There's a lot of pressure within the academic world to keep digging even on widely accepted ideas. It's unsurprising that researchers, teachers and other scholars might need a harmless way to blow off a little steam.

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship began as a social club to let people have fun with the skill they've spent years developing. For most members, it's an excuse to tell tall tales about a fictional person in a historical manner while ordering drinks at the nearby pub. Like so many other harmless institutions, however, it's been co-opted by monsters. A handful of vampires are using the very bright people to root out secrets in the dark. These secrets give bloodthirsty undead more power and control.

These secrets give
bloodthirsty undead more
power and control.

The True Histories of Cardinal Quill

Many organizations seek the truth within darkness. The vampires in control of the Cardinal Quill Fellowship are no different. They use club members to seek information about vampires in ancient histories, modern term papers and other documented encounters that scholars might have had with their kind. This information is used for a variety of purposes from preserving the secrecy surrounding vampire conspiracies to discovering ancient crypts full of artifacts and powerful blood.

- The vampires confuse Hunters by encouraging members to create convincing historical documents about the titular founder. Better to get a cell to chase after a fictional supernatural personality than a real vampire. Cardinal Quill never really existed, but dozens of stories have been told about him through dissertations, classes and even a lost play allegedly penned by William Shakespeare. Here are a few examples of what research might turn up on the Cardinal.
- Quintus Cardinalis was the first high-ranking member of the Christian cult to be arrested by the Romans in 305 AD. Because of his wealth and political contacts, his captors kept him alive rather than put him to death. He took advantage of his seclusion to discuss religion and philosophy with other early Church leaders through a series of letters. Through a combination of pseudonyms,

mistranslations, and deliberate misreadings of the writer's name, these documents became known to biblical scholars as the Cardinal Quill Letters.

- Cardinal Quill was confessor to many European nobility who came under the eye of the Inquisition, collecting and recording their sins and heresies. His testimony was used to justify torture, seizure, and other extreme actions by the Catholic Church against enemies of the faith. Quill's first writing dates back to 12th century France, with his final writings in 1580 coming from a Sebastianist noble who believed that the vanished King of Portugal would return as the Messiah. Scholars explain Cardinal Quill's centuries-long service as a pseudonym the Inquisition adopted to fabricate records of heresy and other crimes, serving as evidence the Inquisition used to strike against their enemies.
- Percival Quill fought in the English Civil War before coming to Maryland in 1653. Quill continued his battles against the Protestants as a bandit and highwayman. He preyed on clergy and wealthy landowners for several years. Supposedly, he showed mercy to anyone who swore an oath to him and kissed his ring, which he claimed he pulled from the finger of a Cardinal he killed. Quill was eventually caught and killed by colonial authorities. He was rumored to be hanged wearing all the jewelry and silks he stole from his religious targets, most of which disappeared into history before he was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave.

The legend of Cardinal Quill grows with each story. These tales often contradict each other, oftentimes on purpose. Sometimes he's a war hero; sometimes he's a pious pacifist. Sometimes he's a swashbuckling rogue; other times he's the secret leader of a diabolical cult. Every year, at least two members post information about how he fought on both sides of the American Civil War. What started as a way for scholars to have low-stakes arguments over a couple of drinks has built a fictional figure that vampires can use to hide their deeds in whatever time period they need.

The legend of Cardinal Quill
grows with each story.

All these stories are recorded in the logbooks of the Cardinal Quill Fellowship. This academic fraternity gathers in Quill's name to celebrate the challenges of separating history from legend and fact from fiction — or, in plain English, they make shit up, using their writings to exemplify the ways in which the historical record is manipulable. Cardinal Quill may be a made-up entity, but he has a very real ability to bring academics together. Members of the Fellowship delight in the opportunity to cut loose and write plausible but fake historiography. It's a joyous contrast to a pedantic quest for accuracy (often illusory) that marks serious academic inquiry.

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship also provides cover for a significant paranormal threat. This rowdy drinking club for faculty members has a much more sinister purpose, known only to members who ascend to a degree of seniority and greater involvement in the Fellowship's affairs. The individuals who take their membership seriously seek out evidence of the supernatural in original historical sources, academic research, and other bodies of writing. And when they find it, they expunge it from the historical record. Most other organizations move to conceal this evidence from the general public to prevent widespread panic or mortals from using it for apocalyptic purposes. Instead, the Cardinal Quill Fellowship feeds the information to secret supernatural masters.

The non-beating heart of the Fellowship is a small, tight-knit, and deeply private pack of vampires. They attribute their long existence, untroubled by Hunters, the Inquisition, and other threats, to their diligently maintained secrecy. These undead scholars trade information they've gathered through the centuries for hints of vampiric existence discovered by professors, grad students, and other researchers. Not only do the vampires erase this information from the books, but they also use it for their own ends in the timeless intrigues that entertain creatures who could theoretically "live" forever.

The Founding of A Lie

The first sparks of the Cardinal Quill Fellowship trace back to the mid-1980s at parties at Christian universities around the American Midwest. The parties brought together a mixture of postgraduate students, faculty advisers, and whatever other staff members got pulled along in their wake. The partygoers took turns telling outrageous stories, wearing the distinctive zucchetto hat worn by Catholic cardinals while playing the role of Quill. The person who told the most outrageous, entertaining story got to take home the hat as their prize.

Pictures of the events show them as rowdy affairs full of people in religious costuming with drinks in hand. They occurred informally for a couple of years, first spreading out across the USA and then to other parts of the world. Even though the parties took place off campus and during vacations, they were associated with several minor campus scandals. Some administrations had closed-door staff meetings with the instigators, while a few outright banned the practice.

The academics, stung by these acts of discipline, decided they wouldn't give up easily. They worked hard during the school year and felt like this was encroaching on even more of their time outside their work hours. The first official chapter of the Cardinal Quill Fellowship opened at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1991, and several chapters followed in the years leading up to the new millennium.

During this period of expansion, a few vampires in the Midwest took note of the Fellowship. Vampires of a scholarly bent often use college campuses as recruitment areas and feeding grounds. It's likely that at least one vampire was invited to an early Fellowship gathering as a peer. These vampires prized secrecy to allow them to conduct their intrigues away from the prying eyes of mortals. The parties were convenient places to hunt, but a few immortals saw longer-term potential. Why not use the stories these mortals told for amusement to shield their own activities? Not only that, but they could also recruit the best ones to find any references to their own kind in history and remove them from the public record.

It's likely that at least one vampire was invited to an early Fellowship gathering as a peer.

It didn't take much for these vampires to install themselves as the head of the Fellowship. It was as simple as claiming to be Cardinal Quill at one of the celebrations. While most members thought it to be the next evolution of the prank, a few started to wonder if the Cardinal was real. Some of the most influential, skilled, and imaginative mortal members were pulled into a new mission. If Cardinal Quill was real, what other stories dismissed as legend might be true? In some cases, they were required to propose plausible, rational explanations for historical moments that involve supernatural creatures. In others, they were expected to destroy the public evidence while delivering a copy to their undead masters. These members went from lying for fun and free drinks to veiling the world in more darkness. The best of these fabricators were rewarded with the ultimate gift. They drank the blood of vampires and enjoyed some of the benefits of the vampiric state. A handful even took the final step into undeath.

Organizational Structure

The Fellowship is explained to new recruits as containing three concentric circles of membership. The outermost circle is called the Companions. The middle circle is the College. The innermost circle is the Clergy. While in public, Fellows abbreviate these to 1-C, 2-C, and 3-C, respectively. Few members of each level know how to jump to the next membership level, and most don't care.

Most chapters are made up of between one and six Companions. They are grad students, postdoctoral researchers, and university faculty. Not every chapter with Companions has a member of the College in their ranks, but if they don't have a direct supervisor, there

is one at a nearby school. The Clergy tend to be part of large universities in major cities.

The Fellowship's symbol is a simple red dot. Each degree of membership merits another dot. The three dots of the Clergy are arranged in a triangular formation though few outside of their own degree have seen the pin.

The Fellowship's symbol is a simple red dot

The Companion

On the lowest level of membership, the Cardinal Quill Fellowship is seen as a harmless social club. Professors use the meetings as an opportunity to drink and make up silly, ahistorical stories about the Cardinal. Fellowship parties have a reputation for being a bit wild and bringing scholars from different schools together in larger events. The largest events take place during the longer breaks of the academic year — primarily summer.

Many members at this rank wear unofficial clothing to signal their membership, such as a necktie with a red dot pattern or a handbag featuring the same. Rank pins are given out after a year of membership and come with more responsibility. Planning the revels of the society fall to the Companions. This most commonly occurs on a rotating basis due to the stress and expense of putting together a big event. Companions who fail to impress with their planning skills often end up inserted into the next round of tales with their ancestor as the villain the Cardinal must defeat or a fool the Cardinal must save.

For the most part, Companions are unaware of the darker actions of their superiors. A Companion might be asked by a member of the College to handle a task, but these favors are usually done through a veil of secrecy. The Companion might be asked to deliver a wrapped manuscript onto a vampire's porch during the day. They might be asked to drive a car to the airport parking lot where a blood servant removes the body hidden in the trunk later. Members of the College use Companions this way on a rare occasion. If things go wrong, both the Companion and the College member may end up attending an unpleasant meeting with the Cardinal.

The College

The middle circle of the Fellowship takes membership more seriously. They have come in contact with historical references to the supernatural that are difficult to explain away as legend or the fanciful embellishments of a historian. These academics hunt down every source and every document to make sense of the reference and pass on their finding to the Clergy. They are encouraged to be secretive and keep academics outside the Fellowship away from these stories.

How far does the College go to protect its secrets? If the scholar thinks they can get away with it, they destroy primary sources, discredit rival academics, and more. There are a handful of murder cases that, were the authorities paying attention, track back to various members of the Fellowship at this level. The ultimate goal is not to discover the truth of the supernatural. It's to share these secrets with the members of the Clergy to do with as they please and ensure nobody else ever stumbles across them.

How far does the College go to protect its secrets?

Most of the members of the College focus on stories about vampires. Whether researching the legends of Dracula or digging into the Sumerian origins of the Lilitu myth, these researchers are gently directed by the Clergy to seek information on historical individuals and events rather than broad legends.

The Clergy

The Clergy consists of several vampires spread across the Fellowship's chapters. They collect and suppress historical evidence of their own kind's existence to outsiders. Within the Clergy, many members put this information to their own personal use. Some Clergy use the Fellowship's resources to research their own bloodlines, seek out long-forgotten allies, and gather intelligence on enemies. Nearly all the Clergy walk a line between collecting useful information for their schemes and suppressing academics who stumble onto real vampires.

Most of the current Clergy rose through the Fellowship. They were once members of the College who went above and beyond in their quest for knowledge and were rewarded for the astute observation with the gift of immortality. In theory, being brought into the blood is a decision that must be ratified by the majority of Clergy members, but occasionally, a member decides it's better to ask forgiveness than permission. This internal lack of discipline is why the Fellowship isn't better known or more powerful. Each vampire has their own agenda and is trying to get the Fellowship to move in their direction alone, with little concern for cooperation or consensus building.

When the Fellowship encounters vampire scholars outside of their club, they will, at best, strike a temporary alliance to accomplish a common goal. The Clergy rarely brings in a vampire into their circle, preferring to work together until the moment they can safely betray the outsider. This practice occasionally makes powerful enemies, but unless they cause serious harm, most vampires have more pressing agendas than punishing a group of petty academics with limited power.

It's no coincidence that the Companion parties are known to be big celebrations that get a little out of hand. They are accepted as a neutral feeding ground not just to the members of the Clergy but to vampires outside of the Fellowship. Sometimes, the Clergy throws a party full of Companions as a way



to network and impress other vampires. The Clergy may offer a particular vessel within the party in the same way someone invited to a dinner party might bring a particular bottle of wine. Should there be any complications to these events, such as injuries or evidence, the Clergy helps dispose of the offending matter, often looping in a loyal College member or two to do the truly dirty work. College members who handle these matters with discretion are often rewarded with potent blood rituals to extend their life and vitality and are often seen as Clergy members in waiting.

They are accepted as a neutral feeding ground not just to the members of the Clergy but to vampires outside of the Fellowship.

Initiation

Scholars are invited to join the Cardinal Quill Fellowship by an existing member. The potential member meets with local associates socially and, if they make a good impression, is sent a letter allegedly written by the Cardinal. Quill asks the member to make a presentation about his life and history at the next Fellowship meeting and be ready to defend any inaccuracies that may come up. This often takes the form of a dissertation-style defense, but members have also offered up one-act plays, poetry readings, and even a gallery show where paintings in different styles depicted different moments in the Cardinal's life.

Three College members nominate a Companion for advancement to the College. These College members lay a false trail of clues that lead the nominee to conclude that Cardinal Quill was real and that he was, or perhaps is, a vampire using the society to cover his tracks. This merry chase is arranged by a letter encoded in a cipher the nominee must crack as their first step.

If the Companion presents their case to a College member, they pass the test and advance to the College. The promotion is formalized when the newly minted member opens a puzzle box containing their rank pip. Inevitably, the puzzle box pricks their finger, and the trace blood sample makes its way to the Clergy, who store it.

College members considered for advancement to the Clergy receive a bottle of wine from the Fellowship. The label reads as coming from the Cardinal's Vineyard with the year the recipient joined the Fellowship as a Companion. Inside the empty bottle is a note in a similar cipher to the one the member received upon being asked to join the College. The letter states the Cardinal wishes to gauge their loyalty and asks them to fill the bottle with their own blood. The member can take their time: the letter recommends no more than an ounce a week. The letter claims that once the bottle is full, the Cardinal will appear to answer any questions the College member might have.

Once the process is complete, they're invited to meet other Clergy members, though never in its entirety. At least one member stays away to ensure that should foes descend on the meeting, at least one vampire will carry on the name of Cardinal Quill. If most the members approve, one of them visits the candidate claiming to be the Cardinal and offers them a chance at immortality. Those who accept the offer are turned. Those who reject it remain at the discretion of the vampire playing the Cardinal; death or decades as a blood-sipping servitor await. These invitations are rare, and only a fraction of candidates agree to become full, undead members of the Clergy.

At least one vampire will carry on the name of Cardinal Quill.

Strengths

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship is practically unknown outside the academic world. Within it, the Fellowship has a harmless reputation as a social club. Nobody

in authority — academic or otherwise — would give credence to claims the Fellowship is part of a vampiric conspiracy to destroy essential historical evidence.

The Clergy has a general desire to squeeze history and academics for new information about vampires, but beyond that, the Fellowship doesn't have much in the way of structure or drive. This decentralized nature gives the society a cell-like structure that makes it hard to track from location to location. Hunters seeking the vampires in control must start over whenever they find a new chapter in a different location.

Fabricating the history of a person brings out some amazing liars into the club. Low-level members are experts in fabricating sources, reinterpreting opposing data, and discrediting anyone that might contradict their stories. The higher up in the organization Hunters climb, the harder it will become to separate fact and fiction about any Quarry. Give any member of the Fellowship a chance to prepare, and they can convince a cell to go after the wrong target with some very convincing, but false, information.

Cardinal Quill's malleable history gives members a cover identity to conduct business. The Clergy goes so far as to use him as a persona when they venture forth from their crypts to do business. Information sold to vampires is impressive coming from a centuries old priest than someone turned in the bathroom of a dance club in the mid-1990s.

Weaknesses

Although vampires are at its core, the Fellowship is functionally a group of fragile, living humans. Members aren't trained or expected to fight. Even if they did, their chances of survival against a cell of hardened monster killers are poor. If pressed, Companions and College members divulge or fabricate information to get themselves out of trouble and lead Hunters away from the Clergy.

What's more, the lower ranks of the Fellowship don't know their superiors are vampires, and many would be horrified to learn the truth. They could easily become allies to Hunters, when confronted with such evidence.

Academia is full of rivalries, and the academics of the Fellowship are no exception. Scholars willing to kill

to keep the secrets of their vampire masters apply that flexible morality to other insults and slights, including inter-Fellowship rivalries. Smart Hunters can sometimes play rival factions against one another to get them out of the way.

Smart Hunters can sometimes play rival factions against one another to get them out of the way.

Fellowship Allies

Unlike most orgs, the Cardinal Quill Fellowship loves to partner with monster hunters. Most cells have people ready to do battle with supernatural forces, but some Fellowship members become winded climbing stairs to their office. The upper levels of the Fellowship encourage this exchange of ideas for protection so long as the Hunters don't come after any vampires. If the cell gets on the trail of any vampire, the Fellowship tells the member to cut off contact with only a vague explanation as to why. Members who do otherwise risk sanctions from destruction of property to enforcing loyalty through a blood ritual.

Nothing stops a Hunter from being a part of the Fellowship. They could take appropriate edges like Contacts and Allies to reflect this while the Storyteller builds trust through exchange of information. It becomes a slow-burn conspiracy story when the Hunters discover the Fellowship is infested with vampires, blood servants and all sorts of compromised members.

There's nothing stopping a Hunter from being a part of the Fellowship.

Encounters with the Fellowship

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship can appear as allies, rivals, or antagonists in a range of Hunts. Stories that feature them are typically full of deceit, fictions, and misdirection. They're a tricky group to pin down.

Bacchanal: A group of Companions meet at an academic conference. They party hard in a private room. When the sun rises, they're all dead. Almost. The sole survivor tells police, journalists, and anyone who'll listen that monsters tore their friends and colleagues to pieces and drank their blood like wine.

The massacre is a move in a vampiric feud designed to weaken and threaten a member of the Clergy. The Fellowship does everything possible to help the Hunters find the murderous monsters. They take more risks than usual, maybe even tipping off the Hunters to the true nature of their organization.

Historiography: The library is short of a few books. The first time the Hunters visit, the librarians can't locate one of the books they're looking for. The next time, another one is missing. These are rare, old books — unique, in fact. They're not allowed out of the library. And so, the powerful resource of a university library is next to useless because all the good books, the ones with credible information on monsters, are missing. Occasionally, one reappears, but the contents aren't as the Hunters remember. Several pages have been cut out and replaced with forgeries presenting subtly different information.

If the situation becomes serious enough to investigate, the Hunters find a small group of students stealing the books and returning them weeks or months later. They're doing it for one of their professors who told them they need the books for research and don't wish to do it in the library. Since the professor significantly boosts their grades for delivering the books, the students don't ask questions.

When confronted, the professor admits to tampering with the books, removing credible information and replacing it with ahistorical nonsense. They pass the

pages they extract to “a superior” (without mentioning the Fellowship at all, though they wear a 2-C badge that could allow Hunters to make the connection). They direct the Hunters to their superior — not the Clergy member they're passing information to, but one of their enemies, turning the Hunters from a problem into a useful set of tools.

Life Membership: A Companion learned a little more than necessary about the true nature of the Cardinal Quill Fellowship. They fled their home and moved to a new city (perhaps a new country). They know they need allies to stay alive. When they stumble into the cell in the course of a Hunt, they offer help.

When the relationship's well established, they drunkenly share their story about a conspiracy of vampires in academia, whose primary activity is inventing stories about a fake priest. It's incoherent and implausible, but a few days later, the loose-tongued academic disappears. Perhaps they've moved on, realizing they'd said too much and put themselves in danger; perhaps the Fellowship caught up with them.

Q.E.D.: The cell's latest Hunt has them looking for a blood-drinking predator who haunts the nearby university campus. It's a visiting member of the Clergy, feeding without due care and attention (after all, they're not on their own territory). They find an ally in a member of the History faculty who claims to be hunting the same monster; as they're a researcher, not a front-line fighter, they offer to pass their findings to the cell.

As far as the academic is concerned, this is a Fellowship prank, a false trail to a nonexistent monster (because, as far as they know, monsters aren't real). They don't really mind why their friend in the College asked them to do it — it seems harmless enough.

They provide compelling, completely fake, evidence designed to lead the cell into a trap, where the vampire and its servants will end their lives (or worse). If the Hunters can't figure out they're being played, it could be a fatal mistake.

The Easy Way In: One of the Hunters' colleagues or Relationship Map Connections is a Companion. It's a major part of their life, and they're very proud of their membership. It's a huge networking opportunity, and they like to use their membership to prove that academia isn't all stuffy old white men in tweed suits.

In due course, they're selected for advancement to the College. They ask the Hunter to help them follow the trail of clues their sponsors lay for them — which puts the cell on the trail of an entirely fake vampire.

The spurious Hunt can either end with the cell discovering a group of academics running a hoax — or take them higher, leading them to stumble across one of the Clergy.

Members

The Fellowship's membership comprises everyone from innocent academics to vampires and their servants.

Father Elliot Faust

Father Faust is a hit with his students because he understands their references. He's not yet set in his ways, and his smile could have put him on movie posters if he were so inclined. He's been known to present history students with a bottle of wine should they decide to continue on into postgraduate studies with a card that reads "drink glass (or two) in case of emergencies."

Fr. Faust joined the Cardinal Quill Fellowship because of his mentor, Julian Bellman. Their relationship through college was very close, though they kept it secret for a variety of reasons. The last night they were together was the night that Julian joined the College and Elliot joined the Companions. He's flirted a few times at the Companion parties and woken up with a hangover or two that rivaled his undergraduate days, but he mostly pines for his old mentor and lover.

He recently encountered Julian on a strange Saturday. One of his colleagues introduced Julian as Cardinal Theodore Quill. Elliot shook the Cardinal's hand and was shocked by how cold it was. Elliot could have sworn his colleague knew Julian from his days on campus, but the colleague just went on about the Cardinal. This mystery keeps itching at the back of Elliot's mind. He might need some help to solve it.

his mystery keeps itching at the back of Elliot's mind. He might need some help to solve it.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 6, Mental 5

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Occult 8, Persuasion 8, Academics (Religion) 8

Doctor Melissa Brett

As a queer Black woman in academia, Melissa Brett has seen the worst the boys' club has had to offer. Examples: two decades of professors sleeping with students, schools covering up academic scandals, and kids with connections skating through classes while talented first-generation students struggled to balance academic work with paying their rent. She joined the Cardinal Quill Fellowship as a chance to laugh in the faces of her supposed equals. The story she told about Cardinal Quill as the secret lesbian lover of Pope Joan was no more fake than the academic dream she'd bought into and then grown disillusioned with.

The secrets of Catholic Church history brought her to the next level. Heretical Catholic sects are both numerous and wild, but Dr. Brett stumbled across a particularly odd one: cults who believed that Christ descended not from God but from Caine, the biblical figure who committed the first murder. These cults nested inside the Catholic Church for centuries and were only purged during the eras of Inquisition. Her papers on the subject were brought to the attention of the Fellowship, who elevated her to a member of the College where she could continue these studies.

Cults who believed that Christ descended not from God but from Caine, the biblical figure who committed the first murder.

Her research has already discovered more secrets. The heresy was connected to cells of vampires within the Church that used real blood in their rituals instead of wine. Melissa is holding this next part secret. She was recently diagnosed with inoperable bowel cancer. Once she takes a leave of absence from her school, she's going to track down one of these vampires to make her immortal. In her eyes, vampires are just another boys' club whose door needs to be kicked down.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 5, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Occult 8, Intimidation 7, Investigation 8

Cardinal Theodore Quill

Most people expect someone using the title of Cardinal to be an old white man dressed in Church finery. Theodore Quill is a charming young man with an intense gaze, dressed in reds and blacks. When people ask why he's called Cardinal, he brushes off the question and says it's a nickname with a very long story. By the end of the night, any mortal who has seen him is either dead or has been made to forget Theodore was ever there thanks to the powers of his vampire blood.

Theodore is the main enforcer of the Clergy. When members of the College hide information or upset one of the leaders, he's sent into town to make it right. The Clergy trusts Theodore to deliver whatever he feels is the proper punishment. Sometimes, that means destroying evidence in a fire. Sometimes, it means making offenders drink his blood and swear loyalty to him. Rarely it means outright murder with a cover-up that makes it look like the mortal left town out of guilt over some sort of crime.

Theodore serves the Clergy, but his own agenda is important. He wants to find the vampire that created him. He's disciplined and has a hunch that one night he'll come across the key piece of info in a College member's research. That's the night he'll forget all about this ridiculous club and get down to some bloody revenge.

General Difficulty: 5/4

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 7, Social 8, Mental 6

Secondary Attributes: Health 8, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Brawl 8, Persuasion 8, Intimidation 8

Notes / Other Traits: In addition to the abilities for vampires on *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169 Theodore has the following:

- *I Was Never Here:* Theodore turned the powers of his blood to make it hard for mortals who encounter him to remember what he looks like or precisely what he said. The target must make a Composure + Insight roll (Difficulty 4) when trying to recall information about Julius. If they fail, they only remember a random bit of information about Theodore (one snippet of information per success rolled). On a win, the victim recalls what they wanted. On a critical win, they remember everything — which may make them a target for the vampire.

Anamaria Moncada-Cuevas

Anamaria's several centuries old, and she's been a member of the Fellowship for most of that time. The way she tells it, she was a founding member, never passing through the plebeian ranks of Companion and College. She's been many things in her time. She counts the roles of student, teacher, and writer among her favorites but for the last few decades she's been a collector.

She treats academic libraries like her own personal fruit orchard. She slides between the stacks, plucking rare books she finds appealing to add to her private collection. With every theft, she removes a key piece of knowledge — about herself, another member of the Clergy, or simply some accurate bit of trivia about vampires in general — from circulation. She's also careful to purloin books that are irrelevant but financially valuable. It throws investigators off her trail, and she has a certain lifestyle to maintain.

Sometimes Anamaria is able to utilize well-placed College members to gain access to a collection. Other times, she uses her vampiric gifts to manipulate, charm, and outright control people who can open the right doors. She usually leaves at least one dead body or

besotted Renfield-esque pawn in her wake, and the Fellowship spends too much time covering her tracks.

Anamaria's true form is hideous: a seven-foot tall, cadaverous monster with elongated limbs, vicious fangs, and pitch-black eyes. Fortunately, few people ever get to see her real visage. Concealing it with any of a dozen more appealing faces was one of the first gifts her undead bloodline gave her.

General Difficulty: 5/4

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 8, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 8, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Medieval History) 9, Persuasion 9, Stealth 8, Subterfuge 9

Notes / Other Traits: In addition to the abilities for vampires on *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 169 Anamaria has the following:

- *Another Face:* Anamaria can disguise her true form with the illusion of a living human. She usually chooses an olive-skinned, forty-something woman with laughter lines and a dry smile. While Anamaria maintains the illusion she suffers a 2-dice penalty to Mental tests.
- *Charm (9):* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167.
- *Under Your Skin:* Anamaria can invest one level of Health in her Charm to make it last for a day instead of a scene. While the Charm is in effect, she cannot increase her Health above 7. She can only affect one target in this way at a time, but can spend an additional Health point each day to prolong the effect.

Demetra Hatzis

Dee's a new and unwilling recruit to the Clergy. When Cardinal Quill offered her a place in an elite and powerful undead conspiracy, she would have preferred to say no. As she's not an idiot and didn't want to die that night, she said yes instead. And so, she finds herself a member of the Clergy. So far, she's not a fan.

As a Companion, Dee enjoyed the Cardinal Quill Fellowship. It was good, clean, sociable, and she loved it. As a College member Dee was uncomfortable with some of the things she was asked to do — destroying

knowledge, doctoring records, and occasional acts of violence. She wanted out, but she suspected she couldn't escape the Fellowship without ruining her career and possibly risking death. So Dee played the loyal acolyte and played it so well she fell deeper into the conspiracy as a candidate for the Clergy.

She still wants out, but now she knows exactly how dangerous that is. She moves slowly, using the advantage of her relative youth (turned less than five years ago, she still moves easily through mortal society) and the Fellowship's infighting to secure an exit route.

Dee uses the College and Companions to disseminate information about her enemies. She makes sure to target Clergy members with a known rival within the Fellowship, so there's always someone for the rest of the Clergy to punish, should they catch on that members are murdering one another. Even so, Dee's playing a dangerous game, hoping a monster hunter spots the trail she's laying before the rest of the Fellowship follow it back to her.

She's looking for a band of monster hunters she can use directly and, for the long term, operating as a covert information source in return for using them as her hitmen. She has two end goals: dispose of the vampire who turned her, and obtain the tiny trace of blood the Clergy got from her when she joined the College. If she pulls off both, she'll be ready to disappear forever. She figures she'll sacrifice her pet hunters in the process, covering her exit and ensuring they don't bother her afterward.

Dee still looks mostly human; she covers the highly visible network of veins beneath her skin with thick makeup. Physically, she's forgettable — a plump woman in her early thirties whose wardrobe is disproportionately heavy on mom jeans and comfortable cardigans.

General Difficulty: 4/3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 6, Mental 8

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Art History) 9, Etiquette 8, Insight 9

Notes / Other Traits: In addition to the abilities for vampires on *Hunter: The Reckoning* (p. 169) Dee has the following:

- *Invisibility:* See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 167. ■



Chapter Seven:

The Gourmand Society

Regarding the puma: "remarkably like veal in its taste."

-Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*

The Gourmand Society has its roots in the British Empire at the height of its power and cavalier conquest and consumption of other cultures. The sorcerers sitting at the society's top table are the pinnacle of imperial greed and selfishness, though they've now spread far beyond Britain's borders. Their primary goal is to extend their own lives forever, which they do through the consumption of mummified remains stolen from tombs in Egypt, South America, and wherever else they can obtain their precious mummia. Whenever they obtain such a prize, the society comes together for a grand, celebratory banquet.

Long lives aren't worth living in poverty, so the society also does a brisk trade in stolen and smuggled artifacts. Members in universities — in both research and teaching positions — and museums obtain and sell ancient relics to private collectors. They don't especially care what happens to the treasures after that. Magical relics command the highest prices, and the society's mistreatment of them regularly unleashes curses and other magical effects likely to draw Hunters' interest.

The sorcerers have power and longevity, but without regular consumption of mummified flesh, their bodies decay to match their ever-extending lifespan. Their followers can't supply them fast enough, so they've turned to making their own mummies to keep the founders sated.

Aperitif

Nineteenth century Britain was faddishly obsessed with Egypt. Imperial agents abroad plundered tombs and temples and callously extracted millennia of history for Britain to gawk at. This craze manifested in increasingly strange ways, but one display of upper-class Britons' appetite for Egypt was truly stomach-churning: the act of consuming *mumia* — mummified human remains.

This inspiration manifested in increasingly strange ways, but one display of hunger was truly stomach-churning: the act of consuming *mumia*-mummified human remains.

The logic of the age concluded these desiccated bodies possessed medicinal properties. Mummies were flensed of their remaining flesh, which was dispensed in a variety of forms to cure one ill or another. The wealthy used the best examples of mummies as centerpieces for their soirées, unwrapping and ingesting them as part of elaborate dinner games.

DISTURBING BUT TRUE

Victorians really did eat mummified human remains. It's an important reason there are comparatively few mummies left in the modern day. It's unquestionably a vile practice: it's literal consumption of another culture by a privileged group, to that culture's destruction. The Gourmand Society's founders may technically be human, but they're as rapacious and destructive as any monster.

New occult societies formed around Egyptian magic and mummies. Lady Jane Huxtable, Evan Carlton, and Professor Richard Barker met at such a gathering, quickly discovered a shared fascination on what *mumia* might do for them, and thus the Gourmand Society was formed.

Lady Jane Huxtable was an aging socialite. Her parties, once legendary, now passed over for more extravagant fare. Evan Carlton was the youngest son of a wealthy Texas land baron, moved to Europe so his father could be rid of the sickly and unwelcome child. Richard Barker was a laborer who had worked on archaeological digs, tired of poverty, and seeking fame and fortune at the heart of the empire.

Entrée

The original society that formed around Huxtable, Carlton, and Barker had fewer than 20 members and there was little hierarchy beyond the respect the founding trio expected. As the trade in other people's material culture became more highly regulated (and as more mummies were eaten) *mumia* became harder to obtain. The Gourmand Society reached out to academics, museum curators, and others who could regularly access, and therefore steal, antiquities. They promised eternal life through the consumption of *mumia* at rituals only the founders could conduct. In return, they needed mummies and other valuable artefacts they could sell to maintain those founders' lavish lifestyles.

By the early 21st century, the Gourmand Society counted several hundred professors, archaeologists, museum staff, and others in the antiquities trade among

its members. Only Lady Huxtable knows the exact number, as she keeps the membership roll in her home in Bath, in the west of England.

Huxtable, Carlton, and Barker remain the most powerful members of the Gourmand Society. They're the only ones who know the rituals by which mumia can prolong lives and heal corporeal ailments. The three detest each other on a personal level — few friendships survive a century and a half intact — but respect one another professionally and work well as a team when necessary.

Below them is the inner circle of the Gourmand Society. This is the group's other sorcerous members. They're powerful in their own right, but don't know the secret of eternal (or at least extended) life the founders are privy to. The founders keep them loyal by promising to one day share that secret, but they never do. They'd only be creating competition for the mumia that sustains them. They do, however, teach the inner circle many other magical practices that make it worth staying loyal.

EXQUISITELY PREPARED

The Gourmand Society's founders benefit greatly from the consumption of mumia — far more so than members without the founders' sorcerous gifts.

Members without magic of their own receive virtually no benefit from eating the dead, but occasionally, the founders, or other sorcerers within the group use mumia as a channel to convey magical gifts to their lesser compatriots (see *Attendants*, p. 160). That doesn't prevent Society members from pursuing the same miracle the Founders experienced: they don't know why it never works for them.

Most members in good standing are simple mortals with no magical power. They lead long, healthy, but by no means eternal, lives. Slivers of mumia dispensed in person by the founders at celebratory banquets cure and prevent physical ailments and keep eaters looking good for their age. Well-preserved, one might even say. They know full well what the elite members of the society are — sorcerers who are going to live forever — and they want that privilege themselves. They strive to advance to the inner circle, hoping that loyal service will be enough

to get them there. It isn't, of course; they lack the magical power to progress any further.

Members who realize this frequently rebel against the society. They attempt to blackmail the founders or inner circle, disrupt the antiquities trade, or even develop a conscience and tell the authorities. Others fail in their duty to provide dead flesh for the founders to consume. It's the inner circle's responsibility to deal with these dissenters and failures, which means turning them into *Attendants* — the unthinking revenants the founders and inner circle use as servants and guards.

Just Desserts

The founders' profane appetites have cursed them. When they're well-fed, they benefit from outstanding beauty, strength, and intellectual capacity. But the benefits fade faster each time they feast. In the beginning, they only needed to consume mumia once a year. Now, it's almost once a week (possibly because they're usually not consuming the ancient mumia they need). They don't require a vast amount — a single mummy still lasts the trio for months if they're careful, but a steady supply of mumia is extremely difficult to secure. That means the Gourmand Society is intently focused on keeping them fed.

Members of museums or institutions containing mummies are pressured to plunder their employers' vaults and shield evidence. All members are expected to tap their personal networks to obtain mummies from other sources, no questions asked and high prices paid. The theft and black market sale of antiquities funds both the ongoing mummy acquisition and the founders' lavish lifestyles.

It's complicated to reliably obtain ancient mumia, so the sorcerous members of the inner circle now default to making their own. They prey on students and co-workers at their institutions, killing and mummifying them. It's a challenging act of magic to not only mummify a body, but also age it convincingly to fool the founders. The inner circle disposes of a lot of partial successes, and some are better at covering their tracks than others. It's only a matter of time until one of these apparently ancient bodies is identified as a recent

missing person and draws a cell of Hunters' attention.

The founders have no idea what they're eating isn't genuine Egyptian, South American, or northern European mumia. The inner circle assumes the founders would be murderously angry if they knew the truth. It's more likely they'd simply feast more heartily and more often, forcing the rest of the Gourmand Society to increase supply.

Roughly once a year, the entire membership gathers for a celebratory banquet. As well as the predictable component of mumia, the society sources other extravagant dishes. There's immense pressure on the host to provide something never consumed before, something exotic and breathtaking, preferably with potential magical effects. The most recent trend is for ingredients drawn from creatures of the night: meat from vampires, werewolves, the Fair Folk and their creatures, and even infusions crafted from the essence of phantoms. Society members don't face these monsters themselves; they recruit freelancers through Re:Venge. Sometimes, those freelancers hit Quarries the real Hunters are already tracking. Sometimes the society hires Hunters directly, without knowing their contacts are anything more than the usual cash-strapped jobbers willing to risk their lives for a payout.

World Cuisine

The Gourmand Society is global but tightly focused. It's composed of tight-knit cliques centered around a sorcerous inner circle member and including their less gifted apprentices and hangers-on. They embed themselves in universities, museums, or even private collections of antiquities. That's because they're excellent places to move stolen artifacts and make contact with people who can obtain or sell them. Respectable institutions and professional don't do business with these people, but plenty of archaeologists, professors, and curators can tell society members exactly which traders and collectors have concerning track records and should be avoided.

The other reason the Gourmand Society is inextricably linked with academia is simple: everyone below the founders is an academic. The society needs

people with intellectual interests in the occult, in the history and culture of civilizations that produced mummies, and few others would be interested in the bizarre mix of tradition and scholarship.

The Gourmand Society's individual clusters are well connected. They're peers, sometimes even friends, and they share information freely — not to mention coming together for their semi-annual gathering. When Hunters cross a group of society members, that group makes sure to circulate the cell's faces, identities, and tactics to the rest of the Gourmand Society. Later confrontations are always harder, and the society is always prepared.

Aside from that one event, only the founders move casually around the globe. Members have obligations — careers, certainly, and usually also family — that keep them in one location. That's both a benefit and a hindrance. They've got a network of friends and colleagues to cover for them, but they can't just cut and run when they're in danger.

Tonight's Menu

The Society acts slowly; immortality encourages a long view. Promising members are groomed over the years and eased into positions of relative power in academia so they provide maximum value to the society. Some recruits are monitored for years, interest rising and falling depending on their current circumstances. The Founders are selective enough that they need to observe a large number of candidates to find one who shows the right combination of nerve, self-interest, and intellect. This grants Storytellers plenty of opportunities for players' characters to meet people in the Society's orbit: friends hearing rumors of wealthy patrons, colleagues recollecting an innocent meeting with one of the founders, or a professor enthralled by them.

Place society groups wherever you need them and move them in and out of your story as desired. While the founders rarely stay in one place for long, the inner circle is thoroughly tied to a single location.

This allows a Storyteller to spread the society out over a chronicle, seeding interactions throughout stories and slowly revealing the extent of their influence. Introduce them as an ally of necessity or a minor threat initially

overshadowed by a greater problem. Have Society members become allies, mentors, sponsors, or even connections on the Relationship Map. Let the cell stalk a different Quarry into a Gourmand Society party.

The variety within the Gourmands' ranks offers a huge pool of characters who may not at first appear connected: recruits and employees, influential professors, deadly Attendants guarding valuable resources, and the founders themselves.

The variety within the Gourmands' ranks offers a huge pool of characters who may not at first appear connected

The founders are powerful threats. They're over a century old, and they've spent most of that long life honing their magical talents. They don't normally become involved in trifling society affairs, but if a cell of Hunters causes enough trouble, one or more of the trio might take an interest. If a cell of Hunters injure or kill one of the founders, they'd draw the focus of the entire Gourmand Society. The society is never really felt threatened before, and eliminating their new foe would become the whole organization's singular focus.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE CARDINAL QUILL FELLOWSHIP

The Gourmands and the Cardinal Quill Fellowship find one another useful. The fellowship specializes in altering, falsifying and erasing written records; the Gourmand Society does the same with material artifacts.

When the Cardinal Quill Fellowship fabricates the historical record, the Gourmand Society can quietly dispose of the material evidence that contradicts the new position, channeling it into private collections where it's never seen again. When the society needs a particular artifact—or has their eye on an actual ancient mummy—the fellowship can efficiently and completely erase it from the record, making it a lot easier to lose track of.

Occasionally, the fellowship has created helpful references that provide false provenance for one of the inner circle's freshly created mummies to help convince the founders of its heritage.

Encounters with the Gourmand Society

“Tonight's Menu” discusses ways to weave the Gourmand Society into a storyline without making them the central focus. The following story concepts provide a basis for stories that center the society.

A Private Affair: A Gourmand Society member, a tenured professor at a local college, is throwing a highly exclusive party. The guest list includes a Quarry the cell has been hunting for a long time. This looks like the best opportunity to access the Quarry. There are numerous ways the Hunters might get inside the room: aiding the host in legitimate academic pursuits, helping to source the exotic ingredients on the menu (not that the host's

publicizing that need, but the right people know), or the old standby of working as catering and serving staff. Once inside, they find the Quarry isn't the only powerful entity present, and none of the society's guests take kindly to having their meal disrupted. Even worse, there's a mummy curing in the cellar.

However the evening ends, the Hunters now know there's a decadent society of sorcerers and other monsters in their midst, and they know who the Hunters are and how to get to them.

Inheritance: The cell slays a vampire. In its lair, they find artifacts worth a life-changing amount of money. The objects clearly belong in a museum (or even better, back in their country of origin). What the Hunters do with their finds is up to them. Whatever they choose, they've got problems: some of those items came from the Gourmand Society. When they don't get paid, the society members follow the trail, find the Hunters, and decide to eradicate them before they cause further trouble.

Traveling Show: A collection of Egyptian antiquities, on tour across the region as part of a museum's outreach work, comes to a local university. A Relationship Map contact invites the characters to a private viewing before it's open to the public. While they're there, darkness and silence descend, and the Hunters find themselves lost in seemingly endless darkness, rooted to the spot, or in some other condition that leads them to the conclusion there's magic involved. When the effect ends, one of the collection's pieces is missing. Theft isn't the cell's problem, but the involvement of a sorcerer who's clearly not a law-abiding citizen should be, as is the disappearance of a powerful magical relic.

Short Fuse: With great fanfare, the college's dean invites noted scholar Professor Barker to deliver a series of guest lectures. A group of students organizes a protest regarding Barker's involvement in removing antiquities from their places of origin. The organizer is found dead, with the words of an ancient curse seared into their skin. A day later, the dean goes missing, too.

The dean was a member of the inner circle. Now, after allowing Barker to be publicly embarrassed by a clique of obstreperous undergraduates, he's an Attendant. When Barker loses interest in him, he wanders away from where Barker kept him. Now, back on campus,

sightings describe him as a zombie or a ghost, and word reaches the Hunters that there's a monster on campus.

Dig: A member of the inner circle hides a failed mummy (it's still desiccated, but it wouldn't pass for a millennia-old corpse) on a construction site, certain it'll disappear into the foundations of the new building. Then bad weather pauses work and washes the shallow layer of dirt off the body. It's identified as a recent missing person — either the mysterious death attracts the cell's attention, or it's someone they were already looking for, perhaps another Hunter who got too close to the Gourmand Society.

Help Wanted: A group of Re:Venge freelancers the Hunters have met before — worked alongside, or clashed with — approaches them for help. They took a simple gig through the app, and it's gone bad. They were hired to kill a monster, same old story. They killed it, took the weird, gruesome trophy the client asked for (the monster's internal organs; they've had weirder requests) and now the monster's pack is after them for Re:Venge. Except the monsters don't think they're a bunch of freelancers. They think the Re:Vengers are part of the Gourmand Society. The jobbers aren't interested in whatever supernatural conflict they've bumbled into. They just want to survive. The cell might be more curious.

Sleep When You're Dead: A well-regarded professor offers a substantial prize to the first team of students who successfully translate or uncover new information from an ancient text the professor has been given. If the Hunters aren't participating, one of the students becomes convinced it's a travelogue with directions to a lost monarch's tomb.

The professor is one of the inner circle, offloading the legwork of research onto their students. When progress is slow, they become increasingly forceful, pushing the students into all-nighters. The professor robs them of sleep and removes their ability to think about anything else. All they can do is work on this translation. The first death from exhaustion follows in days. Nothing about it is natural, and the Hunters are poised to investigate.



ALMA MATERS

SOCIETY

Members

The Gourmand Society founders, as well as being sorcerers, derive benefits from their mummy consumption. The inner circle of members are sorcerers with powers of their own. The founders and inner circle all suffer from a unique flaw:

Telltale Sign: When these members of the society are injured, the damaged flesh appears withered and dead.

The general membership is comprised of humans, usually academics, with General Difficulties of 3/2.

Professor Richard Barker



Raised in poverty, Barker fought for every improvement in his life until he profited from the 19th century antiquity craze, which put him in the right place to help found the Gourmand Society. Even after a century of luxury, he's terrified he could lose instantly. This fear drives him to create stores of wealth away

from the rest of the Society. If they were discovered, the retribution from the others would be vicious.

Barker's work takes him around the world delivering lectures, attending events, and validating discoveries.

Barker strives to space out doses of mumia as far as he can, believing it prevents him from developing a tolerance to it. As the time between meals lengthens, his quick wits are replaced by dull, unoriginal thinking; he's slow to form theories or make plans and struggles to process new information. He's even been known to forget the languages in which he's fluent. He becomes paranoid, certain those around him are mocking him by deliberately talking about things he doesn't understand. The outward signs manifest in an increasingly hostile stare and the inevitable loss of his glasses — but not his urge to correct their position.

General Difficulty: 4/3

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 6, Mental 9 (1 when deprived of mumia)

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Archeology) 10, Leadership (Inspiring) 7, Melee (Clubs) 5, Persuasion (Logical Arguments) 8

Notes / Other Traits: Barker's a seer, with the ability to glance into both the past any present. It's hard to catch him off guard, unless he's missed a dose of mumia.

- *Prescience (9):* Barker's curse has driven his senses into overdrive, and very little escapes his notice. This ability is identical to Prescience (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168).

- *Telltale Sign:* See p. 158

Evan Carlton



Evan Carlton fancies himself as a pulp adventurer, flitting between archeological sites and dinner parties. He's certainly got the looks, the muscles, and the contacts for the role. When he's not enjoying the height of luxury, he's a treasure hunter. He's also the most physically adept of the

founders, so if a problem needs a violent resolution, it falls to him.

Despite years of living among other cultures, he still refuses to learn anything but English. Worse, at least in Lady Huxtable's opinion, he's American new money. Utterly, irredeemably gauche.

When Evan's curse fades, his musculature, constitution, and rugged good looks diminish, leaving emaciated flesh, a sickly pallor, and a host of minor ailments. Whatever his state, he always wears a hat — fedoras are preferred, but anything with a brim will do in a pinch.

Whatever his state, he always wears a hat-fedoras are preferred, but anything with a brim will do in a pinch.

General Difficulty: 4/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 8 (1 when deprived of mumia), Social 4, Mental 4

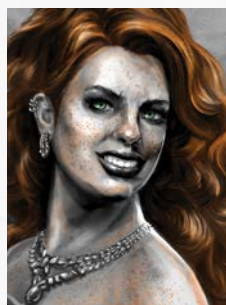
Secondary Attributes: Health 10, Willpower 6

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics (Showing off) 9, Brawl (Fistfights) 9, Investigation (Threats) 7, Subterfuge (Seduction) 6

Notes / Other Traits: Evan's sorcerous gifts run to further improving his already spectacular physique. He can survive almost anything, as long as nobody actually sees him die.

- *Rush:* Evan's mumia consumption gives him phenomenal physical capabilities. His inhuman speed allows the American to appear from seemingly out of nowhere or disappear in an instant, leaving behind nothing but a rush of hot air. This ability is identical to Rush (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168). Any damage inflicted by Brawl or Melee attacks increases by 1 due to his crushing strength.
- *Telltale Sign:* See p. 158

Lady Jane Huxtable



Lady Huxtable (Her Ladyship to the other founders) comes from British aristocracy and can trace her ancestors back to the signing of the Magna Carta, and she disdains anyone of more common origins. Her Ladyship is known for her philanthropic donations — rare is the University

dean or museum curator who doesn't think of her fondly or isn't explicitly beholden to her in some way.

Lady Huxtable allowed the benefits of mumia to lapse just once. When they did, she aged from a plump and healthy twenty-something to a frail, elderly lady in a matter of hours. The changes affect both her physical abilities and the way others treat her, vastly diminishing her social influence.

General Difficulty: 4/3

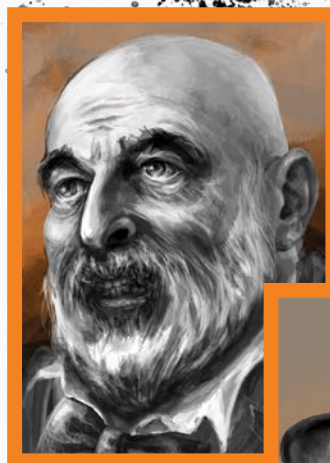
Standard Dice Pools: Physical 5 (1 when deprived of mumia), Social 9 (4 when deprived of mumia), Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 7, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Insight (Desires) 8, Leadership (Fascinating) 10, Persuasion (Appealing) 10, Subterfuge (Subtlety) 10

Notes / Other Traits: Lady Huxtable is a mind reader. Given a few minutes of conversation and a few magic words slipped into the dialogue, she can ferret out any secret or confession. Her preferred weapons are social and financial influence. If pushed, she has both living bodyguards and numerous Attendants.

- *Charm:* Mumia gives Lady Huxtable outstanding charisma and a magnetic energy. This ability is identical to Charm (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168). Add 1 to the damage Huxtable inflicts in Social Combat due to her sparkling wit.
- *Telltale Sign:* See p. 158



Doctor Niamh Dunne

Niamh is one of the Gourmand Society's elite. She progressed from a common member to one of the inner circle in record time under Professor Barker's tutelage, and she's now a lynchpin of the Gourmand Society's operations. She's reliably able to age fresh corpses into mummies capable of convincing the founders they're genuine, ancient relics. She never reveals her methods, which ensures the founders stay reliant on her. Her offerings don't actually do much to maintain the founders' longevity but as long as they aren't the founders' only feasts, they can't prove anything.

She kills regularly, never knowing when she might be called on to supply a body. She's fairly adept at disposing of corpses but she generates so many there's always a chance of discovery; even her relatively reliable gifts only produce a convincing facsimile about a third of the time.

Niamh's magic relies on ghosts — summoning and commanding them. The people she's murdered haunt her. She has enough power and skill to keep them at bay, but the pressure's wearing on her. She's increasingly frightened of them, and worries there'll come a day when there are just too many ghosts for her to control or keep at bay.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 4, Social 5, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 8

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (Funerary Practises) 8, Larceny 7, Occult (Necromancy) 8, Subterfuge 7

Notes / Other Traits: Niamh can call ghosts to protect her. They're fully under her command, and remain present until the end of the scene. Use the traits of a Santan Plaza Ghost (*Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 203).

- *Telltale Sign:* See p. 158
- *Terrify (6):* Unseen specters cluster around Niamh, striking fear into anyone who threatens her. See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Gourmand Society Sorcerer

The Gourmand Society's inner circle have a range of powers, but they're all dangerous foes.

General Difficulty: 3/2

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 3, Social 4, Mental 7

Secondary Attributes: Health 5, Willpower 7

Exceptional Dice Pools: Academics (any appropriate expertise) 8, Occult 8

Notes / Other Traits: Gourmand Society Sorcerers often turn their magical talents towards social conflicts, wielding words and sorcery to deal Aggravated damage (with a weapon rating of +2) in social conflicts. They can also control one element (the traditional four, plus shadows), wielding it to attack from a range of a few meters. They roll six dice for their elemental attack, and it deals Aggravated damage with a weapon rating of +2.

- *Telltale Sign:* See p. 158
- *Terrify (6):* Unseen specters cluster around Niamh, striking fear into anyone who threatens her. See *Hunter: The Reckoning*, p. 168.

Attendants

Sometimes members of the Gourmand Society prove incompetent, learn too many secrets, or misunderstand their place in the Society, demanding boons they don't deserve. They're mutilated, buried alive, and starved to death. The result is the horrifying Attendants.

Death replaces sapience with an animal drive to tear apart anything that moves as violently as possible. The sorcerers deal with the Attendants' violent natures by sewing magical amulets into their flesh. These gems ensure they answer to no one but the founders and senior members of the society. Because of their limited capabilities, Attendants are most commonly deployed as guards for senior society members' homes or the places where they work their magic.

General Difficulty: 3/1

Standard Dice Pools: Physical 6, Social 1, Mental 2

Secondary Attributes: Health 12, Willpower 0

Exceptional Dice Pools: Athletics (Pursuit) 7, Brawl (Grappling) 7, Stealth (Silence) 9

Notes / Other Traits: All Attendants share the following traits:

- *Choke Hold:* When an Attendant wins a grapple, they automatically inflict one Superficial damage on that turn, and every subsequent turn they maintain the hold as they strangle their victim to death. This is in addition to other actions they might take based on the grapple win.
- *Controlled:* Attendants' amulets make them subject to their creator's will. These commands can be complex and detailed, but an Attendant ignores anything around them that isn't covered by a command, so programming complex behaviors is challenging. Attendants with no overriding commands are feral, flesh-eating monsters.
- *Deathless:* When the Attendant dies, it returns to life the following dawn, healed of all injuries. Only the complete destruction of the body stops their return.
- *Repelled:* Regardless of their orders, Attendants won't approach cats under any circumstances, backing away from them if cornered.
- *Resilient:* The Attendant's body feels no pain, and it's as tough as carved wood. All damage except fire is treated as Superficial.
- *Terrify (4):* Attendants are walking corpses, their leathery frames leaving no room for doubt. Unlike the zombies they somewhat resemble, Attendants walk with ramrod posture and attack with unexpected speed.

- *Uncontrollable:* Attendants can't be reasoned with and are immune to all forms of mind control besides the amulet.
- *Vulnerability (Fire 2):* Fire affects the dry flesh of the Attendants more than most, flaring up like a matchhead when exposed.
- *Weak Spot (Amulet):* Each Attendant has an amulet embedded somewhere on their person, requiring a Wits + Awareness test (Difficulty 3) to spot. A targeted hit with either a blade or gunshot dislodges the gem (Difficulty 4). Any Attendant without an amulet attacks the target closest to them — including another Attendant — persisting until they're destroyed. ■





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Chapter Eight:

Academic Locations

"The exquisite art of idleness, one of the most important things any university can teach."

-Oscar Wilde

Leaving high school, moving on to an institution you chose, and spreading your wings is an important rite of passage for many young adults all over the world. However, just as their conservative, concerned parents always told them, being out in the big, wide world isn't safe.

Prospective students choose between vocational schools, colleges that cater to undergraduate education and sometimes, associate degrees or diplomas; and universities catering to those seeking graduate-level courses. Vocational schools train students for a profession. Some colleges and universities are famous for a specific field or discipline, such as a university dedicated to the humanities, a school entirely focused on fine art, or a college fast-tracking students into brilliant tech careers. They all offer different moods and settings for a **Hunter: The Reckoning** game, and they're all presented here in a range of locations you can drop into your chronicle when the Cell visits campus.

The biggest difference between these institution types, and one that significantly affects the type of stories they're suited to tell, is campus culture. Vocational courses often require on-the-job training. In story terms, that means you can get students off campus and into strange and unfamiliar territory regularly, presenting them with new quarries to hunt and mysteries to solve. Public universities with on-campus housing often become tiny worlds unto themselves, with students rarely leaving. They're



a great setting to gradually introduce strange, sinister, and surreal elements or otherwise play with the types of ideas that can take root when people exist in a bubble, isolated from alternative views — like a cult of personality that forms around a charismatic vampire. Grad school is stereotypically years of pressure that either harden a student into an academic diamond or crush them. Play with loneliness, misery, suffering in silence — and maybe gradually becoming a monster shaped by pressure and hardship.

Different types of institutions also attract different types of students. Prestigious universities can be extremely competitive, with students fighting for professors' attention, awards, and visibility. This can vary by subject, too. STEM and business courses encourage students with an eye to a marketable degree; arts and humanities stereotypically draw in students more focused on exploring their passions or just having a good time for a few years. While the truth is always more nuanced than broad generalizations can convey, the more debt a university degree takes on, the more weight these stereotypes hold. While student debt can ruin your life, degrees that don't lead directly to a high salary become the preserve of the already wealthy.

Public universities are sometimes considered party schools where the people you meet and the experiences you have are more important than grades. Fraternities and sororities are perfect examples of secret societies you can use as fronts for paranormal activity. The older the school, the weirder and more idiosyncratic its traditions. These characteristics might be harmless or a signifier of something dangerous.

Universities also have prestigious research programs which undergraduate teaching helps to fund. Dusty libraries, powerful databases, and shadowy donors abound here offering secrets to Hunters willing to dig for them. And antagonists are determined to stop them from obtaining that powerful knowledge.

For many cultures worldwide, college might be the first instance where students find themselves in a coed environment, free of parental oversight. In cultures where academic achievement is almost as important as the food you put on the table — many in the global south — it not only matters that you excel in your studies but that you work yourself into the ground. Interestingly, in the upper echelons of some cultures, your struggle is best kept to yourself — and your

excellence must be effortless to truly be worth anything. Additionally, in parts of the world with a legacy of colonialism, it's often assumed that the best education is found in Europe or America. Therefore, the further the young adults move to pursue higher education, the more potential they must have.

Keep all these attitudes in mind when you're designing a higher education setting: they're the levers you can pull to create a particular atmosphere, and natural homes for certain quarries.

The locations in this chapter divide into sample institutions and on-campus locations.

Sample Institutions

The following institutions are micro settings with a single, defined Quarry and enough material to form a key component of a Hunter's backstory or to play host to a story or two. They're designed to work as additions to an existing college campus (e.g., the Ackerman Law School can be added to any university in your chronicle's location) or be used as free-standing settings. Just adapt or replace the name to best suit your location. Each location comes with story ideas to either hook in Hunters directly or via their Relationship Map Connections (shortened to *Connections*; in these cases, usually allies, friends, and family rather than more antagonistic relationships).

Ackerman Law School

Quarry: Ghosts

New faculty members are consistently shocked by the ease in which Ackerman students recollect and apply century-old legal precedents. They're less surprised, but sometimes awed, by the student body's ferocious appetite for activism. Students work with the regional newspaper office next to the campus — which prides itself on investigative journalism — to uncover scandals in local government and bring justice to the victims in cold cases,

sometimes decades old. Staff very rarely finds out what motivates this passionate work. It's the ghosts.

Long before the city expanded, the campus was a stretch of waste ground where organized criminals, including city government officials, dumped the bodies of their victims. Their ghosts are still present. They call themselves The Unfairly Felled, and they've figured out that self-righteous law students have the right politics and just enough power to help them get revenge. It helps



that the newspaper has a self-proclaimed psychic, Věra Cermak, as a columnist (her editor is not proud of this, but Věra’s column sells copies).

Over time, more ghosts gathered, attracted to the possibility of justice — or revenge. They make increasingly intense demands on the Ackerman students.

Using the Ackerman Law School

Crusade: A group of Ackerman students go up against a local politician in search of justice. They make accusations of corruption, criminal actions, and eventually abhorrent, predatory behavior. Eventually, one of them is caught planting evidence to support their claims. Their arrest and prosecution make the regional news but don’t stop the students’ crusade. They escalate to threats and violence against the politician and their family. A student’s parents or friends turn to the Hunters, claiming their loved one’s acting “like someone possessed.”

The students aren’t possessed. But they are under immense pressure from the Unfairly Felled. The politician’s grandparents were murderers, and their victims demanded justice in the form of ruining the politician’s life. The ghosts won’t back off, and they’re capable of truly traumatic hauntings, so the students’ only recourse is to do what they’re told. They’d appreciate the Hunters’ help in getting them out of this mess.

Fresh Start: A regionally powerful corporation arranges to buy the Ackerman campus. They proudly announce their intent to demolish it and replace it with something the area needs — a leisure and entertainment complex, a wildlife reserve, or some other crowd-pleasing idea. Věra Cermak comes to the Hunters with a prophecy of doom. If the Ackerman law school closes, “there’ll be hell to pay.” She claims something ancient and powerful is buried beneath the school that must not be freed, and recruits their help to stop the buyout.

In truth, the corporation’s owned by the same crime ring that once buried bodies on the law school site. They want it back before the ghosts, and their army of students, come at them for revenge.

The Murray School Teaching Hospital

Quarry: Sorcerers

Murray is a miserable place and not just the run-of-the-mill misery of a place where people die every day. The med school students who train there come away changed; jumpy, anxious, and bleaker in their outlook.

People don’t just die here. They die slowly and badly because a clique of sorcerers use the hospital as a training ground. The sorcerers are less interested in healing than in exploring the wide range of ways they can harm and challenge the human body, and the spiritual energy they harvest from misery and suffering to power their own magic. Their actions show up in remarkably high death rates, among other signs of a failing hospital, but the Murray School Teaching Hospital is very generous with fees for under- and uninsured patients.

WORLDWIDE LEGACY

In places that don’t require expensive medical insurance, Murray is the only hospital in the vicinity.

There are five or six sorcerers on Murray’s staff, working as janitors, cafeteria staff, and administrators as well as doctors and nurses. They keep their interactions discreet to ensure the mundane members of staff don’t discover them.

The misery and suffering make Murray a terrible place to work as well and also to be treated. The non-sorcerous staff all have stories of weird experiences — hearing cries for help from an empty wing, feeling they’re being watched, or experiencing short periods of “lost time.”

Using the Murray School

As well as the hooks included in each writeup, these Hunts work with Hunters as patients, visitors for their Connections, staff, or med students in training.



ACADEMIC LOCATIONS

Death Watch: There's a ghost story about a woman who sits next to the beds of dying patients, keeping vigil over their last sleep. Nobody who's seen her can remember her face. When it's the patient's time to go, she bends over them and inhales their last breath. A junior doctor's seen her every night for the last few weeks ending the lives of patients who definitely weren't ready to die. She turns to the Hunters to help exorcise the ghost.

The story's true, but the faceless woman is not a ghost; she's a sorcerer and a member of the hospital administration.

Long Nights: One of the cell's contacts takes a job as a janitor at Eternal Hope. After a couple of weeks, they find their shifts start passing in a blur, and the details of what they actually did at work are hazy. They know that at one point, they must have cleaned up blood—a lot of blood—because it was on their shoes and under their fingernails. They ask the Hunters to help them figure out what's happening to them.

The janitor helped the sorcerers clean up after a gory ritual, but their memory's been erased.

Storm Coming: Eternal Hope's death rates, always high, spike. Relatively healthy people dying of obscure complications registers to the Hunters, or a contact, as possible vampire activity.

No matter how hard the Hunters look, they don't find vampires—but they do draw the attention of the sorcerers, who are preparing for a great work of magic.

Green Lake Endowment for Media & Communications

Quarry: Changelings

Green Lake is a relatively new addition to its home college, the bequest of a forward-thinking donor with an interest in mass media. The School of Media & Communications is housed in an aggressively brutalist building with clean white walls, cold iron stairs, and spotless glass windows. The building's just as important as the program.

That ugly architecture attracts an unusual type of student: changelings freed or escaped from the grasp of the Fair Folk. Eschewing ostentatiously elegant and beautiful reminders of their captivity, and comforted by the amount of cold iron on campus, a handful of changelings found their way to Green Lake as a sanctuary. It just so happens that while they're taking refuge there, they're also getting a world-class education in broadcast media.

Escapees come away from the lands of the Fair Folk with certain common experiences. They've lived blanketed in lies and illusions, seduced by twisting, half-true words, and beguiled by dreams spun for them by monsters. The ones who find their way to Green Lake see those patterns reflected in entertainment media, journalism, and advertising, making them angry. They couldn't fight the Fair Folk, but they can damn well fight the media. They spend a lot of time fighting disinformation and building media literacy campaigns. They're remarkably effective: they learned a handful of useful knacks in their time with the fey, and they're not afraid to use them.

**They learned useful
knacks from the fey, and
they're not afraid to use
them.**

Using Green Lake

Green Lake gives a Storyteller two possible Quarries: the changelings, and Fair Folk who come hunting them.

Nothing But the Truth: An online influencer based near Green Lake suddenly finds they can only speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. As funny as it might be that they can no longer smile and lie about their sponsors' subpar products, it seriously impacts their personal relationships. If the Hunters don't see the problem online, a young relative does and offers the Hunters' help without asking them.

The changelings have, of course, placed a geas on this influencer. The harder they fight it, the more it hurts them. Eventually, without help, fighting the geas will kill them.

Come Home: One of the changelings at Green Lake realizes they're being watched every time they leave the campus, especially when they're near water. They know who it is: their former captor's servants, spying on them and no doubt preparing to recapture them. They turn to the Hunters for help. If the cell gets involved, they have to find a way to dissuade the fey group from simply taking what they want. Whatever the cost is, it will be high. If the Hunters don't help, the Fair Folk's target makes a deal: they give the fey creatures another human in their place.

This story hits harder if the changelings have previously been the cell's Quarry. It presents a dilemma: help another human being against a monster, or let an old enemy fend for themselves.

International Institute of Technology

Quarry: Ghosts

The International Institute of Technology (generally abbreviated to IIT) is a prestigious STEM school whose reputation positions it as a golden ticket to wealth and success — for students who can handle the notoriously difficult entrance exam, demanding curriculum, and grueling schedule.

Overworked and burned out, desperate students find themselves going to extreme lengths simply to keep up with the demands of their elite school's intensive courses. The IIT prospectus doesn't mention that the incidence of mental health crises and student suicides on its campuses are several times the national average.

Overworked, burned out, and desperate, students find themselves going to extreme lengths

Years ago, a group of students built a machine that reached across the veil, making a doorway. They did it to reach the spirit of a recently deceased classmate, a genius who had a better grasp of their course material than

anyone else. The plan was to bind the ghost and use him to complete assignments, taking pressure off the living. It wasn't kind, they acknowledged, but they needed the help. What they got was not what they were trying to call.

The specters who came through the door scared their summoners so much they fled the basement where they'd built their machine. The students died of fear-induced heart attacks, just far enough away that nobody ever discovered their machine. It's still running, and the door's still open.

Innumerable ghosts haunt the campus, inciting terror sometimes by accident and sometimes by design. The pressure contributes to meltdowns and burnouts, and parts of the campus are no-go areas after dark.

Using IIT

IIT's Quarry has a lot in common with Keen (Chapter Five). IIT can introduce Hunters to the concept of ghosts in the machine and let them research this Quarry without the high stakes of going up against a powerful, global corporation. IIT might also be a feeder school for Keen's AI program: having new hires already aware of abyssal entities and their powers is a huge asset to Keen's research.

Enough is Too Much: One of the Hunters' relatives (or a Touchstone's relative) secures a place at IIT. Within weeks, they're depressed and exhausted, ground down by the school's punishing schedule and high standards. Shortly after telling the Hunters (or the Touchstone) the campus is haunted, they go missing. They're not the only freshman to go missing that semester. Did they drop out, or did someone hurt them? Or are they, in fact, the victim of a predatory ghost?

Balancing those possibilities is key to making this storyline: the more time the Hunters spend weighing up whether there's a supernatural explanation or not, the less time they have to rescue the victim (whatever's happened to them).

Shutdown: Once the Hunters have investigated a couple of hauntings at IIT and realized the ghosts have nothing in common and nothing to associate them with the school, they're likely to reason that something must be drawing them there. It's time to tell them the campus legend about three students who somehow scared themselves to death, have them find the machine in the

basement, and figure out how to shut it down without drawing the ire of every ghost on campus, none of whom wish to return to the other side.

The Johar Institute of Film & Television

Quarry: Sorcerers

The Johar Institute is not just a good school, it's a great one. The crème de la crème of the film industry finds its start here. With its highly-regarded curriculum, alumni network, and graduates who go on to make award-winning entertainment, the Johar Institute has become the great white whale of every aspiring film-maker. From writing to acting to directing, an education from Johar is a passport to success. Of course, admission into a program is nigh-impossible, regardless of how many accolades and awards are on your application. You need something special to get into Johar—beyond the usual large donations and nepotism.

The faculty of the Johar Institute includes numerous sorcerers who spend their lives and careers in pursuit of perfect art. They strive for work that transcends entertainment and meets philosophical and magical ideals; art that, in a literal way, has the power to change the world.

Art that, in a literal way, has the power to change the world

Students with the right sorcerous gifts thrive at the expense of their peers. Students without those gifts burn out quickly, stripped of imagination and creativity even as their favored classmates thrive. It's almost as if their essence, their creative spark, was being taken from them and used to inspire and fuel those students the faculty have marked for success. The human cost of these sorcerers' quest for perfection is only the most immediate consideration. Hunters with powerful imaginations should worry about what ideas these creatives unleash on the world.

Using the Johar Institute

Talk To Me: As one would expect for such an eminent school for creative pursuits, Johar Campus Radio (actually an online livestream these days, but the name has heritage) is spectacular. It streams the greatest selection of music, the most cutting-edge comedy, and the most thought-provoking documentary reportage. Even its newest late-night call-in show, where students describe and discuss their weirdest dreams with a licensed psychologist, gets big viewing numbers. Those reported dreams start spreading, first to the rest of the audience and then memetically through their personal networks. Everyone who experiences them enjoys brief bursts of intense creativity. Some flourish, and the Johar Institute recruits them into short-term continuing education courses. Others burn out hard, and some take their own lives.

Someone close to the Hunters is in the latter group. Their sudden crisis is unexpected and apparently without cause. Figuring out the pattern and following the traces back to the Johar Institute is difficult, unless the Hunters know the school's pattern of burnouts and dropouts well.

Prodigal Child: One of Johar's alums, now a successful director, comes back to the school as a visiting lecturer. They're only going to be there for one semester, but the news about their imminent return brings dozens of former classmates out of the woodwork with accusations of wrongdoing, exploitation, and abuse—both directly from the returning golden child and from the campus authorities to protect them. One of those classmates is a sorcerer, and the school's staff and current students are about to become pawns in a feud between ruthless, bitter, sorcerous enemies.

The array of supernatural phenomena that result—from freak weather to bizarre accidents—should draw the Hunters' attention. Simply catching one Quarry won't be enough: they have to understand the feud and deal with both sorcerers to stop the chaos.

Ryan Institute of Natural Sciences

Quarry: Werewolves

The Ryan Institute of Natural Sciences is home to some of planet Earth's greatest fans. Whether they study geology, biology, chemistry, or physics, the goal is simple: study the physical world and defend it from impending desolation. Located on a swathe of rural land far from the oversight of the university it's technically attached to, the Ryan campus feels like an environmental utopia of clean air and biodiversity.

Unknown to the academics who spend their time at the Ryan Institute striving to offset, abate, and slow the dire effects of climate change, they're not working alone. A whole pack of werewolves considers the campus their territory and the human researchers their wards. This invisible protection has its advantages. Corporations who attempt to fund (and then subvert) research programs quickly find they have other problems, like very expensive sabotage or threats against their staff. When the university's governing body pushes the Ryan Institute labs to produce something with immediate commercial benefit, they run into swells of apparently organic public support for the institute's ethics and vision.

**Unknown to the academics,
they're not working
alone.**

But monsters who support the organization's vision are still monsters. The wild places on campus are dangerous, especially around the full moon, and all those bad things that happen to would-be corporate donors tarnish the institute's reputation. Even worse, Mother Nature's lupine defenders have limited patience. They're growing frustrated with the Ryan Institute's lack of progress, and at some point, they're going to vent that frustration on one of the staff. Werewolves aren't known for keeping perfect control of their tempers.

Using the Ryan Institute

Blood on the Lawn: There's been a murder. A real one, not one of the supposed wild animal attacks that occasionally happen. A visiting researcher got stabbed with an old knife. That's tragic and shocking, but when the detective investigating the murder dies in one of those freak animal attacks... that's suspicious. It should raise red flags for any Hunter.

Both the deceased are victims of the same killer. The first, a young, rash, newly turned werewolf killed as a rite of passage; the victim was a spy for a corporate R&D team. The second, the young shapeshifter killed to protect their identity. Further investigations only make the Quarry more frantic and likely to overreact. If the cell doesn't find them fast, someone else will die.

Peaceful Protest: Three executives at a major agricultural corporation die within days of one another. Someone sets fire to one of the company's facilities. And this all happens while staff and students from the Ryan Institute are protesting the corporation's use of experimental fertilizers that deplete vital insect populations.

A fourth victim survives and claims their attacker was a bestial monster. All clues lead back to the Ryan Institute. But there's something wrong with the corporate executives: the survivor undergoes strange medical mutations, and as they recover from the attack, they're less human than ever. Monsters are all around the Hunters, and they must carefully pick their enemies.

Friend of a Friend: The cell has a helpful, friendly contact at the Ryan Institute who've helped with a number of weird scenarios involving botany and geology. She even lets the cell use her lab to run tests when a little bit of analytical chemistry would help on a Hunt. But when the Hunters start looking into a potential Quarry on campus (such as those from previous story suggestions) their usually amiable contact warns them off. Firmly.

Their contact is a werewolf, and the cell is on the trail of another member of her pack. She respects and values the Hunters, but the bonds of the pack come first. She's watching them, ready to stab them in the back (figuratively; literally she'll probably tear their heads off) if they get too close to the truth.

Twin Rooks School of Library Sciences

Quarry: Vampires

Twin Rooks looks like the set of a gothic horror movie, thoroughly out of place in the modernized campus around it. As one might expect for the home of the Library Sciences program, Twin Rooks is a library first and a school second. Packed with rare treasures that undergraduates rarely have need of, the six collections, spread over seven floors, are haunted by Library Sciences students and intrepid postgraduates. It makes for a quiet little oasis, albeit a spooky one.

As the collections are often donations from subject-matter experts and avid enthusiasts, the library catalogs themselves are works of art. The catalog cards might include searing insights like: “J Ferris was thoroughly incompetent in most areas of normal life but there was no one who could hold a candle to the man when it came to the neuropathology of Bedlington terriers.”

The school isn’t only an oasis for its students but for a scholarly, cloistered group of vampires who’ve been quietly building the library for centuries. Library Sciences cohorts usually graduate as smaller groups of students than when they started. That’s true of all schools, but at Twin Rooks there’s a tradition of silence; classmates who disappear are never spoken of again and never searched for. Most of those missing students are, predictably, food for the vampires. An occasional exceptional candidate becomes one of them.

Most of the missing students are, predictably, food for the vampires.

Using Twin Rooks

Team any Twin Rooks story with missing students, outbreaks of anemia, and other hints of vampire activity to muddy the waters in Hunters’ investigations and direct them to the lead threat within the school.

Revenant: Twin Rooks students going missing is normal. A Twin Rooks scholar returning to class is not. This one won’t talk about where they’ve been or what happened in the three weeks since they went missing, and nobody ever sees them outside of the Twin Rooks campus. The cell hears about the return through the campus gossip network — a creepy, secretive student returning after being presumed dead is a big story — and can investigate as they choose.

The student is not a vampire; that’s simply a red herring. Nor do they really live inside the library buildings now, they just spend every waking moment there. They had a close encounter with a vampire, and their Drive is awakened. They’re now determined to kill the (singular, as far as they know) vampire that prowls the school. Without the cell’s help, they’ll never survive the attempt.

Social Capital: Over a brief vacation from classes, a group of Library Sciences students transform from scholarly, serious — even dour — young adults to hard-partying socialites. They suddenly have boundless energy, magnetic charisma, and eerily radiant beauty.

One of Twin Rooks’ vampires, pushed into rash behavior by an enemy’s moves in a decades-long feud, recruited these students as research assistants. The payment — a few sips of vampire blood so they could work harder and think faster than ever before. Now, the brats are drunk on power and threatening to reveal the vampire’s existence if he doesn’t keep feeding them. So far, it’s worked once, but it won’t be long before the vampire simply murders them. If the Hunters aren’t already investigating, that makes for an interesting case.

Private Collection: One of the cell’s contacts dies, whether naturally or in the kind of hazardous pursuit that usually kills a Hunter. She told the cell that after she dies, they could have her collection of rare books, including a phenomenal collection of practical knowledge on assorted Quarries, plus hunting tips. However, within days of her death, the books have been donated to the Twin Rooks library. The Hunters might be able to untangle the bureaucracy of probate and get the volumes back that way, but it will definitely draw the vampires’ attention to them, and vampires are notoriously intolerant of Hunters near their sanctuaries.

Alternatively, the cell can face the problem head on, go right in and take their books back. A potentially

deadly confrontation may take place. If the Hunters escape, they know who their next Quarry is.

On-Campus Locations

More tightly focused than the sample institutions, these smaller locations are stores, entertainment venues, or university facilities you can drop into or around any campus or educational institution — such as the ones in the rest of this book. Some locations specifically call out threats. When a threat is only alluded to, we encourage Storytellers to decide for themselves if these are hidden Quarries or just red herrings. If you use multiples of them, making some locations' dangers illusionary or mundane helps build settings where players don't assume that every unusual detail is supernatural. In fact, you can use these apparent, but unreal, threats to increase paranoia and make Hunters tread carefully after a couple of rash errors.

Eating & Drinking

Asiad: Grimy, poorly lit, cash-only, Asiad promises nothing more than cheap booze and microwaved snacks, and on those two things, it delivers spectacularly. Students looking to get wasted turn to this trusty old dive bar that sits just off the road leading to campus. Most people consider the term “dive bar” an unpleasant descriptor, but Asiad wears it like a badge of honor. The owner of the establishment, a stern matriarchal figure who goes by the name Rey, prefers that you don't waste their time. You should know exactly what you want to order when you grab their attention, lest you be on the receiving end of Rey's killer stink eye. Be sure to tip well. Campus rumor has it if you don't tip, your luck turns very bad very fast.

Cool Beanz Café: Winter Ekşi tells people she's a vampire — or so she tells people, and considering she's been a fixture on campus since last century and barely seems to age, some people think she might be telling the

truth. She claims to be a card-carrying member of the Temperance League of Vampires, who only survived the late 1800s and most of the 1900s by switching from imbibing life's blood to Turkish coffee. This alone should tell smart Hunters she is not, in fact, a vampire. Cool Beanz Cafe is a thickly carpeted, dimly lit cave of a place. Customers may sit near the frosted windows if they insist on some natural light or occupy any of the comfy couches or plush, dark booths. In the late 1990s,



jilted by a lecturer in the English Department, Winter amended the spelling of beans to add the offending z out of spite, though she claims it was to appeal to a younger demographic.

Food Truck Park: With the influx of international students on campus in recent years, the need for varied cuisine has grown considerably. The campus cafeteria just doesn't cut it. The Food Truck Park is only a short walk away from the main campus, and it's well worth the extra effort. After all, who wouldn't prefer tacos from Maria's Taquería over under-seasoned mashed potatoes from the mess hall? The trucks in the park form a curved enclosure, with the space in the center full of tables, chairs, and stools. Napkins cost extra, so it's always best to bring your own.

Hobnob Cantina: Generations of students remember Bea Rojas as the motherly cook of the sprawling-yet-somehow-cozy Hobnob cantina. When the campus newsletter asked for an account of her time at the school, Bea joked that her earliest memory of the place is rising like yeasted bread near a hearth and spotting hungry mouths to feed and that the rest is history. It's not far from the truth: Bea, who in broader terms might be thought of as a manifestation campus spirit, is more precisely one of the Fair Folk. The face she shows the world is nurturing and warm, but she can easily become possessive and overprotective.

Libation Stock Exchange: Drink prices at LSE change in real-time, depending on what patrons order (a run on vodka? Prices go up). The original proprietor introduced the gimmick to generate excitement to the repetitive experience of rowdy collegiate drinking. After a brush with the Fair Folk, he was able to offer cocktails that work on a secondary trend — he can foresee forthcoming paranormal activity on campus, and he increases the strength of the drinks to match the danger the students are in. It's a joke that only he knows, but if a cell of Hunters were to catch on, they could use the strength of the drinks as an excellent way to gauge, maybe even forecast, the degree of paranormal threats on campus.

The Paw-Print Café: The Paw-Print Café has all the traits a pretentious coffee nerd would appreciate: third-wave coffee sustainably sourced and locally roasted. A little on the expensive side, but this charming café also

houses several cats, dogs — and the occasional strange creatures, seen from the corner of one's eye, don't look quite like the average cat or dog — that are all up for adoption. In this brightly lit space with floor-length windows and fake plants galore, customers can sip their artisanal coffee while cuddling a furry friend. Sometimes, other small, furry animals on campus go missing, especially when the Paw-Print has those more unusual beasts, but the manager fiercely resists any attempts to prove a link.

The Potluck: The simple comfort of a home-cooked meal eludes many students, especially those whose families are on the other side of the world. The Potluck is a space for international students to build a community together by sharing meals, forging meaningful relationships and providing academic support. Though the Potluck accounts for most dietary restrictions due to the sheer variety of food available, some needs simply aren't met. Multiple human predators, and at least one supernatural one, have made the mistake of thinking people who attend the Potluck are lonely and vulnerable and found a tight-knit who protect one another.

Staff Room Speakeasy: When the students make you curse humanity, when you've questioned the future of the species and considered the arguments for ritual student sacrifice, and when you have the good fortune of being a magician who can disarm the paltry wards on the staff room wall of lockers, you may reward yourself for a hard day's work by stepping into a dimly lit bar accessible only to others like you. The liquor isn't top-shelf, but the advice is. And that helps sometimes.

Entertainment

Arcade Rat: Nothing invokes the memory of childhood quite like the dozens upon dozens of classic arcade game machines that line the walls of Arcade Rat. The dimly lit interior, black-tinted windows, floors sticky from spilled soda, and the body odor of adrenaline-rushing young adults ensure this coin-operated arcade stays true to its promise of '90s nostalgia. The owner of the arcade, Sal, opens and closes it on a schedule only he understands. The closures often, but not always, coincide with the full moon. Campus urban legend

claims Sal's pride and joy, a 1972 cabinet of an obscure fantasy game, is a gateway to another world, and that's why it's displayed behind a case of bullet-proof glass. It could be that, or it could be because the game's worth a high five-figure sum.

Blue Frog Club: This former warehouse is the city's grimmest and liveliest club. Beyond its opulent ambiance and seductive blue lights, the club is known for its delicious bar food and live music performances. Local musicians perform every night, with no bounds on genres: electronic, rock, folk, jazz, blues, funk, or soul. Anything goes, as long as it sounds good. Between the free-flowing pills and the hazy atmosphere, the Blue Frog Club is a perfect place to be extremely irresponsible in a variety of ways. It's also, for that exact reason, a feeding ground for numerous supernatural predators.

Anything goes, as long as it sounds good

Fiesta Multiplex: If you don't mind overpaying for a tub of popcorn and a non-recyclable cup of soda served by cranky, underpaid staff, the Fiesta Multiplex is one way to kill time in an otherwise boring college town. In an age of online streaming, Fiesta survives thanks to the patronage of residents and off-campus students, all with nothing better to do. Fiesta showcases both blockbusters and regional films from across the world, making it a great date-night option or a profound cultural experience. Frequent visitors are rewarded with a free soda (size small, as specified by the terms and conditions) for every 10 movies watched.

The Kazi Nazrul Gallery: If there's one thing creative arts students dislike more than their creations, it's having to display them to others. Yet, that is precisely what they are forced to do. Curricula mandate that each semester, fine art students showcase their work at the Kazi Nazrul Gallery. The gallery building comprises several wings — named after famed artists, poets, and writers — showcasing exhibits that are free to students and faculty, and affordable for other visitors. The quality of student shows is hit-or-miss but the rumors of mind-blowing experimental exhibits locked away in the basement are persistent.

Nō Auditorium: The Nō Auditorium started as a playhouse that would pay homage to many global forms of theater. The auditorium's season lasts for the entire academic year. Most of the programming is serious plays, with Kyōgen weeks at the end of every month in which those who want to try their hand at standup may showcase their talents. During the day, the stage is used for guest lectures or special talks and seminars. On the evenings when there are rehearsals rather than performances, theater students have long whispered of yōkai sightings, though nobody can agree on exactly what the yōkai looks like.

Pixel Library: Funded by the institution's Game Design department, the Pixel Library is a repository of every possible interactive media. From board games, tabletop roleplaying games, video games (yes, even that one), to community copies of recently crowdfunded indie projects, the Pixel Library has it all. Generous donors have made it possible for young academics to study and just as importantly play, generations of games that would otherwise be out of reach. Students can borrow copies from the library or clock in to play games on hardware they don't own. If a student fails to return a borrowed game, they mysteriously begin losing their belongings until the game is returned. No one knows why, but the new librarian's very firm about people obeying the rules.

Ryan Museum of Natural History: Part of a research institute, the Ryan Museum of Natural History was founded to further public education efforts. The museum contains over 40 million specimens of creatures, plants, pathogens, minerals, coral, and every naturally occurring sample one could dream of. From self-contained ecosystems like rainforests to a planetarium that explores life beyond the bounds of this world, the museum offers a wide variety of knowledge to the common public, should they seek it. It is rumored that located deep within the facility is an exhibit of cryptozoological biology accessible to a select few.

Outdoor Spaces

The Forest: When the student union complained of a lack of greenery and common spaces on campus, the administration planted a few saplings in a makeshift

courtyard and called it a day. The sparsely wooded area is referred to mockingly as “The Forest” by most of the student population.

June Beach: Local business owners have a love-hate relationship with the students who frequent this beach, but they can’t deny they need the money they bring in. The clear sea, bright blue skies, sand underfoot, and a handful of surfside shacks selling cheap beer make the beach a student’s favorite weekend destination. On weeknights, with fewer visitors, the sheer serenity of this place really shines. The line between serenity and isolation is thin and easily blurred though, and sometimes the nocturnal students relaxing under the moon are more villain than victim.

Cash-strapped students flock here for Spring Break, and the beach is packed day and night for the duration. Weird stories spring up, rendered implausible by the booze and drugs consumed, and bizarre leftovers wash up on the beach for weeks afterward.

Bizarre leftovers wash up on the beach for weeks afterwards.

Luna Lake: During the day, Luna Lake is a pleasant place for a stroll, and students and faculty alike can be seen jogging along its banks. On lazy summer days, many a hopeful angler can be spotted fishing for trout on boats overdue for retirement. When newer boats come to Luna Lake, they rarely survive longer than a week. When left overnight on its shores, these boats disappear when a thick fog engulfs everything that seems almost to gleam like so much cotton candy in the moonlight. People have tried over the years to camp on the shores of Luna Lake to investigate this phenomenon. They disappear too or come back claiming they don’t remember what they saw.

Sculpture Garden: The Rosencrantz Memorial Sculpture garden attracts couples looking for a level of privacy they can’t get in a shared dorm room. The statues are homages to mythical beasts usually portrayed as villains, given the faces of local historical figures who were unjustly vilified simply for making powerful

enemies. There’s no evidence to support the rumor that the ghosts of those depicted haunt their statues, or that the statues climb down from their pedestals at night and walk the garden.

The Steps: The Rho Club, a notorious misogynist institution, officially no longer exists, shut down by social pressure and scandal. However, its glorious premises are still rented out as event space by the college. Most of the year, however, the only part of the Rho Club in regular use is the steps. The limestone steps leading to the main entrance of this relic of a building are a popular spot for students to hang out, often swapping stories of the terrible things that happened here and the ghosts that might haunt the place.

The Trail: One hundred years ago, bloodless corpses were discovered in the landscape through which this hiking trail winds. Rumors of murderous warlocks spread like wildfire, and frightened inhabitants readily sold their land to eager industrialists who eventually bestowed it on their alma mater. In a stunning display of collectively fleeting memories, the university ran a hiking trail through the hills, offering tense, frustrated students a break from the grind.

Residences

The Sullivan Club: The Sullivan Club isn’t technically a fraternity but it serves all the same purposes. Luxurious housing, a sense of fellowship with a carefully selected group of fellow students, and access to a network of powerful, well-positioned alumni. But unlike the stereotypical fraternity, the Sullivan Club’s not a party house. In fact, it’s infamously private: an invitation to socialize there is rare and therefore sought after. Club members are infamous as gym rats and health freaks, and the campus medical center is confused by how many of them are anemic. It’s also weird that the frat boys talk about Sullivan like the founder’s still around in person.

The University Hall: The biggest residential complex on campus is simply floors upon floors of matchbox-sized bedrooms with shared common areas. Each floor is a microbiome where petty drama and late-night love affairs blossom (much to the chagrin of their neighbors

on the other side of the thin walls). There's no privacy here. Anyone who lives in these dorms quickly has to accept that their life is everybody's business — and yet it's impossible to know everyone who lives here, and there's been more than one case of people squatting in vacant rooms for weeks with staff and RAs none the wiser.

Retail

Aklat — Books-by-Weight: Aklat, a labyrinthine store with second-hand books straining the wooden shelves on every wall, is a bookshop that seems like the personal library of a wise, powerful sorcerer. And it might be; Miss Pam, the keeper of this establishment, exudes an air of timeless wisdom, recommending books on every topic one could come up with. “No Returns or Replacements, Buy at Your Own Risk” is the message hanging above the establishment's cash register. The selection of books on the occult and paranormal is

surprisingly good. Just remember, you pay per kilo. Miss Pam is quick to remind anyone of the superiority of the metric system.

Aunty Kalyani's Bakery: The scent of Aunty Kalyani's Bakery can be described in one word: comfort. The scent of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, brioche bread, and flaky croissants (along with a steaming cappuccino) draw both students and teaching faculty. The titular Aunty Kalyani, an alumna of the institute, left her corporate career behind to pursue her passion — feeding hungry people on campus who probably forgot to have breakfast. Though she passed three years ago, her son, Karthik, continues to run the charming little bakery. If you ask him how things are going, however, he seems distressed; a few of his regulars haven't come in for a few weeks.

Lamington Road (IT Street): Lamington Road, named after some now-forgotten British colonizer, is a single long street with small, haphazardly set up shops on each side. The street is famous for its wholesale and retail gray market of electronic goods. From out-of-



production consoles to supposedly ex-military drones, chances are you'll find them in one of the hundred shops on Lamington Road. Given the exceptionally high turnover of products being shipped in and sold, vendors often sell these electronics at rates much lower than the regular retail price. Engineering students swear by this place.

Mannu's Body Shop: Between burdensome student loans and the ballooning costs of living, plenty of students are looking for extra income. Fortunately for them, Mannu's Body Shop is always hiring. And they don't much care who they hire, as long as they show up to work and don't talk too much. Spending a few days working at this greasy, unkempt warehouse is enough time for most students to realize the true nature of their work. They disassemble perfectly functional cars for parts, occasionally replacing license plates and assembling newer cars to sell. When the money's this good, it's hard to complain. Smart employees don't ask why the same few clients, all snarling, short-tempered loners, have such a steady stream of vehicles for the chop shop.

Prime Mall: In its heyday, Prime Mall was a bustling five-story building chock-full of the trendiest stores, a food court with fast-food chains, and every mall-going stereotype imaginable. That was 30 years ago. These days, Prime Mall is, frankly, anything but. Thanks to its dingy, dilapidated exterior, most respectable locals avoid it. Urban explorers traverse the dilapidated buildings, taking pictures of aesthetically pleasing decay. Old storefronts, long shut down, are now overrun by squatters. Some stores function as illegal recreational dens, fight clubs, and spaces to dispose of unwanted evidence. Campus stories concern students who spent a night within Prime Mall on a dare. Word has it that Some, reportedly never returned.

Rangg Bazaar: The Rangg Bazaar — which translates to the Rainbow Market — is a place of joy, creation, and community. Created by the institution's Queer Youth Network, this weekly marketplace is a meeting ground for artists, small business owners, and academics. Whether you're looking for handmade jewelry, a glass of sparkling lemonade, or a beautifully illustrated zine denouncing oppressive institutions, the Rangg Bazaar has something for everyone. Handling the operations

is one Anjuli Barker, a young woman with immaculate make-up dressed in a purple hijab with a pride flag pinned on her top.

Suma Traders Convenience Store: Suma is a dropout from the institution who decided her skills ran more to keeping sleep-deprived, stressed-out students supplied with snacks. Her final examination booklets, one of which is framed in the Admissions Office, only outlined an invitation to the opening of her new convenience store on campus. Since then, Suma Traders, open exclusively from 7 pm to 7 am, has enjoyed unparalleled success. It's the only place on campus open in the hours just before dawn, and a lot of careless conversation happens there.

Sports and Societies

Anti-Zealot Activism Department (AZAD):

Established as a response to an exceptionally narrow-minded and blatantly discriminatory administration, AZAD started as a student movement that, over the years, found acceptance and a valued place in the administration. This organization now works with the college newspaper and theater group to raise awareness of social issues. When the moral character of the school's administration needs questioning, they organize protests and petitions. For instance, when the administration refused to acknowledge any family outside of a cis-hetero structure for family housing on campus, AZAD raised a stink. When it became known that some departments were being blatantly sexist in recommending students for apprenticeships under the guise of only recommending students of the highest caliber who could keep up with the physically taxing schedules, AZADis took up the cause. When the campus gets dangerous or the administration seeks to shut down conversation on a sensitive topic, AZADis are there to make sure the student body can't be silenced.

Collegiate Newspaper: The campus newspaper (called the Matbu) is one of the best-known collegiate newspapers in the world, at least if you ask the editorial staff. It started as a weekly pamphlet, back in the early days of the printing press. When a 20th century contributor, Afreen Massoud, gained wide acclaim as a



journalist and credited this paper with the start of her writing career, the Matbu received donations and an endowment that allowed it to become a daily newsletter associated with a world-class diploma in journalism. The student editorial staff joke that the Matbu can't print lies. They're joking, of course. Mostly.

GD Stadium: The GD Stadium was built as a field hockey arena. Over the years, it grew and morphed into the GD Sports Complex, though it's still known around campus as the Stadium. Every year on 2nd November, a ceremonial game is played between a local student team and a team of celebrity players invited for the occasion. No matter how talented the professional sportspeople are, the local team always wins.

Gym: The gym on campus has faculty hours early in the morning and is open to all students and staff for most of the day. It's known as a dangerous place to spend time at night, especially during the full moon. Fights break out easily, and a number of the athletes who train here are steroid users with characteristically short tempers.

Llyn Barfog Swimming Pool: A wealthy donor named the pool in homage to his Welsh home. The name recalls the home of the monstrous Afanc. The number of drownings here over the years have led to quiet rumors that there's a similar monster in residence here. The varsity team is careful to repeat a quick charm to placate the maidens before every practice and meet, just in case.

The Makerspace: Laser engravers. 5-axis CNC machines. Belt sanders. 3D printers. You name it. The institute's Makerspace has it all. Whether for your cosplay for the local Nocturnal Con or a retractable stake as you hunt your next Quarry — this is the place to create it. As students and faculty share these resources, it can take weeks to get access to every machine needed to assemble complex projects. Across the entire floor dedicated to the Makerspace, the words Make > Fail > Make > Fail > Make are painted in many beautiful art styles and languages, encouraging makers to not only see their projects through but to be bold and experiment.

Student Association of Clubs and Recreational Entities (SACRE): Just three people, led by student representative Grace Meadows, are responsible for the disbursement of funds to all student clubs and organizations. Meadows, in particular, has a tendency to refuse funding to groups of students who do not

meet her definition of "normal." She wrongly believes she's winning friends by plastering a smile on her face, slapping her hands onto the table and starting off her refusals of funds with, "Wouldn't it be way more fun if..." She takes immensely detailed notes about the clubs she refuses funds to, and it's widely assumed she's reporting perceived inappropriate ideas to someone in campus administration.

Teaching & Research

Athena Adult Education Center: At its inception, the center was crucial to the local suffrage movement. Men who sympathized with the cause dedicated time to the transfer of vocational knowledge. Over time, it became a learning center for adult women deprived of the right to higher education in their youth.

Now, it's open to people of all genders who want to learn a skill that will allow them to support themselves while they study further. It's a common meeting place for mature students and old souls, including some of the paranormal entities on campus.

Language Learning Center: Given the thriving community of international students on campus, the university decided to capitalize on the opportunity to add to its accreditation criteria and open a Language Learning Center. Over the years, it's added a huge range of languages, including ancient languages and those with tiny numbers of speakers, to its course catalog. The center's a trove of expertise and much more accessible than the Linguistics department.

Seminal Science Lab: A well-meaning donor insisted this medical research lab be called "Seminal Science Lab" to encourage cutting-edge research. Despite their intentions, however, the lab has yet to produce any seminal research. Part of the reason behind this is the cryptozoological nature of the Principal Investigator, Jacinto Andrade's research interests. His late spouse, Gabriel Andrade Finlay, a renowned Hunter, shared frustrations concerning their relative lack of research material on supernatural Quarries. Since their demise a few years prior, the P.I. has been unable to focus on any research that does not involve understanding the physiological weaknesses of his late spouse's enemies.

University Bookstore and Press: The university bookstore and press are housed in the once-dilapidated-now-revitalized remains of an old Mughal-style family home. The university press is small and confined to a couple of cold basement rooms that contrast starkly with the faded grandeur above. The press publishes obscure historical monographs (including at least one Cardinal Quill document, see Chapter 6), and the staff favors thick clothing that keeps both weather and sun off their skin.

University Facilities

All Welcome Worship Space (AWWS): In the early days of the millennium, certain university donors found the lack of places of worship on campus to be not only unfathomable but also irreverent. In a fit of pique, the dean designated a squat concrete block of a building

previously used only for conferences and overbooked seminar spillover as an all-religions-welcome place of worship. The donors were less than thrilled at this development but acquiesced in the interest of peace between donors and staff. It's possible, though not likely, that it counts as a holy place safe from some types of monsters.

International Exchange Unit: Technically a small unit within the larger administration tasked with looking out for the wellbeing of international students and exchange students, the unit is currently run by a sorcerer who will, for a price, provide sanctuary or an escape plan for monsters with heat.

The Lost & Found Office: From barely-used stationery to wallets filled with pennies, the Lost & Found Office is a poorly documented hoard of missing belongings. Over time, the office's bureaucracy has all but collapsed. Policies have been declared unenforceable



despite existing on paper. A few convincing pleas generally suffice when trying to claim items without signifiers of ownership. A couple of street-smart students with minor magical talents have made a small fortune from reselling illegally claimed belongings back to their owners.

The Old Main: The campus has significantly expanded over the decades since the institution was founded. It didn't always have dedicated science buildings, art buildings, libraries, gyms, and all the other facilities modern students expect. The Old Main is the oldest building on campus. The beautifully intricate spires surmounted by fire-red brick walls stand in stark contrast to the brutalist architecture of the newer constructions, making it obvious why all marketing images feature the Old Main almost exclusively. These days, the Old Main houses all administrative offices as well as the interior Assembly Hall. Half the building is closed up, either due to structural faults or long-forgotten crime scenes, depending on who you believe.

Oteteza Ufulu Student Union: The student union on campus is very active and very effective. They always have well-articulated arguments and airtight contracts courtesy of the indignant ghost of a lawyer who appears in the storeroom and mutters incessantly about the amount of work still left to do in the field of labor law. Currently at the height of its power, the union is headed by a slight, dark-eyed girl who claims to have an inordinate number of seer ancestors.

The Quiet Space: Thousands of stressed students, overworked faculty, and daily visitors make the campus a noisy place. While this palpable energy can be invigorating for some, it can also be difficult to find downtime from the chaos. Students seeking on-campus respite often turn to the Quiet Space, a sprawling room in the main academic building with one simple rule: keep it quiet. At any given hour, students are found curled up on comfortable couches, ottomans, and chairs, their attention on phones, laptops, or even hard-copy books. Wrapper-free snacks and a drinking water fountain ensure visitors have a crinkle-free experience. It's said that if you listen to the silence long enough, you'll hear a prophecy of doom.

Self-proclaimed seers are particularly fond of the Quiet Space

Sinha Counseling Center: The Sinha Counseling Center is open to all students, and while registration is required beforehand, sessions are free. For most students, it's a straightforward and valuable service. But the Sinha in the center's name was R.P. Sinha, an early 20th century parapsychologist who regarded psychics and magicians as very real threats to normal human beings. To this day, staff are trained to recognize the symptoms of "psychic struggle," as Sinha's manual calls it, in their patients and report such phenomena to an obscure governmental department.

Staff Room: When students eke every ounce of pedagogical spirit from your weary bones, when you need a moment's peace between lessons, when you're steeped in the bitter tea of regret at assigning all that work which you now have to grade, a staff room provides welcome relief. Tenured faculty have offices and teaching assistants, but young adjunct professors find sanctuary here. They're drawn by the state-of-the-art coffee machine donated by a generous Department Chair upon his retirement and the ancient high back sofas that allow them to plot their villain era or at least post on social media with that hashtag. It's an excellent place to reliably catch staff members, where they're unlikely to escape as long as there's coffee available.

Swnw Sanatorium: Students afflicted with physical maladies head to or, in dire situations, are rushed to — the sanatorium. The majority of the staff are doctors and nurses well-versed in contemporary medicine, but there are several Swnw healers who perform discreet miracles with magic on an almost daily basis, akin to their Ancient Egyptian predecessors. ■



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