

FORGOTTEN Realms



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A CHRONICLE SOURCEBOOK FOR DEMON: THE FALLEN™

Fool's Head

*Fools rush in
where angels fear to tread.*

—ALEXANDER POPE

BY DAVID CARROLL, PATRICK O'DUFFY AND Kyla Ward

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INTRODUCTION

After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper.

—1 Kings 19:12

What is Fear to Tread?

You hold in your hands *Fear to Tread*, the first chronicle sourcebook for *Demon: The Fallen*. Set in Los Angeles, California, this chronicle pits your players' demon characters against rival fallen, Earthbound antagonists, mortal foes and possibly even each other for reasons political, factional and personal. The action ranges from intense, visceral combat to suspenseful, clandestine investigation to haughty social maneuvering to sneaky, manipulative backbiting. No matter what kind of story your players enjoy, at least one of this book's chapters offers it. Taken as a whole, the chronicle runs the gamut.

How To Use This Book

On that note, there are two primary ways in which to use *Fear to Tread*. The first is as a self-contained chronicle set in the City of Angels — the most prominent site of infernal congregation in the United States (and possibly the world). While every chapter can stand alone as a complete story, the end of each dovetails nicely into the beginning of the next in order to form a cohesive, more satisfying whole. As the characters shape and take part in the events of each story, questions will arise that only the later chapters can answer. Besides, the greater the players' commitment is to the overarching story, the greater an effect their characters can have on the nascent, burgeoning society of the fallen.



Should you or your players not be so inclined, though, your other primary option for using this book is to isolate the individual chapters and run them as stand-alone stories. You can do so for a new group of **Demon** players in a pick-up-game context, which gives you a chance to showcase the setting and powers available to the fallen without any assumed investment on the players' part in a more extensive plot. (The complimentary characters provided at the end of this chapter help out immensely in that respect.) You can also pull out individual **Fear to Tread** stories and insert them into your own ongoing **Demon: The Fallen** chronicle. Any one of these stories can make an exciting interlude between longer story arcs of your own design, especially if the main action in it is of a different sort than that to which your players have grown accustomed.

Of course, combining these two primary methods is also perfectly acceptable. As a Storyteller, you might want to run one or two of these exciting stories, yet not want to go into all three. You could also choose to run the stories in a different order (which is not easy, but is possible) or to space them out as tenuously connected interludes in a larger chronicle of your own devising. You could even take the opposite route by running the stories in this book as the frame of a greater chronicle, punctuated by interludes or additional chapters of your own creation.

THE PLOT (IN BRIEF)

The section of the same name at the beginning of each chapter gives a more detailed overview of what you can expect from each story, but the following capsule summary of the entire chronicle should whet your appetite until you get started.

Chapter One: Suffer the Children raises the curtain by exposing the characters to an Earthbound demon's secret plot to abuse and manipulate the staff and residents of a boarding school/detention center known as the Marshall School for Troubled Teens.

Chapter Two: Into the Fire introduces complications into the characters' lives when a group of demon-hunters arrives in town and fixes the demonic citizens of Los Angeles in its sights (be it erroneously or justifiably). At the same time, the characters discover that more than one Earthbound demon might have a stake in the events surrounding the Marshall School.

Chapter Three: The Judas Kiss finds the characters unexpectedly on the defensive as a familiar but hidden enemy deems them too much of a liability to his plans to let them roam free. They must escape immediate danger and uncover the identity of this foe — one who just might be intimately connected to a deadly and unpredictable Earthbound — while also

uncovering and preemptively ruining his scheme. Can they achieve all of these goals without having to sacrifice some of them for the sake of the others? With their attentions divided thus, can they still uncover all the plots and agents of the mysterious Earthbound in order to fight back against those creatures' mad whims?

There is only one way to find out.

Finally, **Chapter Four: Storyteller Characters** provides helpful write-ups for prominent figures in the City of Angels who have parts to play in the action beyond the characters' immediate attention. This material is included here as a Storyteller resource only, as it contains many of the secret machinations of the players' characters' allies and antagonists.

SETTING: THE CITY OF ANGELS

As will soon become readily apparent, this book is a companion supplement to **Demon: City of Angels**, the core setting sourcebook for **Demon: The Fallen**. All of the stories herein take place in the so-called "Tri-County Area" surrounding Los Angeles proper, and the major Storyteller characters involved are all native to (or largely focused upon) that location. Furthermore, that city is the chosen setting most reflective of the core concepts behind **Demon** to begin with. Such being the case, a little contextual information about Los Angeles might be of some help if you do not already have a copy of **Demon: City of Angels** handy.

THE SURFACE

The Tri-County Area of Los Angeles — which encompasses Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Los Angeles proper, Santa Monica, Pasadena and over 70 more townships besides — sprawls across the valley between the Santa Monica Mountains, the San Gabriel Mountains and the San Bernardino Mountains. It is a beautiful haven for the rich and famous (or those who want to be), and all the money it rakes in from tourists every year is a testament to that fact. The seeming glamor of such places as Rodeo Drive, Catalina Island, Venice and Sunset Boulevard is a siren song promising fame and fortune to those brave enough to rely on talent, sex appeal or dumb luck in trying to make a name for themselves. On the surface, LA seems like a beautiful place full of beautiful people living charmed lives.

Looking just beneath the surface, however, reveals the *real* LA. In truth, the City of Angels is a seamy, roiling metropolis that thrives on the clashing dynamic of its disparate population. The poor and middle-class citizens there vastly outnumber the fabulously wealthy, yet it is the wealthy who have all the social power. Decent people live in fear of gang violence and even the bloated specter of "road rage," yet

the police force is understaffed, under-funded and widely assumed to be rife with corruption anyway. People of all races call Los Angeles their home in more equal proportion than in most cities across the United States, yet racial tensions here seem more volatile than ever. And if you are not daunted by any of that, you still have earthquakes to worry about.

Sure, LA might look beautiful on the surface (and from a distance), but the truth of the matter is not quite so pretty.

ITS IMPORTANCE

What, then, makes LA so attractive and important to the newly returned fallen? Why is it a bone of contention between so many angels of the Abyss? The simple and most obvious answer is that LA is a media and transportation hub — one that is capable of sending people and ideas all over the world in virtually no time at all. The power to communicate with and reach as large a number of people as possible with as little time and effort as possible is a key strength in the fallen's goals to reap vast amounts of faith. Since Los Angeles provides just that sort of power to any demon willing to insinuate him- or herself carefully into the existing mortal social structure, it is no surprise at all that the fallen have pounced on the opportunity.

On a deeper emotional level, Los Angeles beguiles demons with the perception of more immediate rewards at the local level. Inheriting the impressions and preconceptions of their mortal hosts, the fallen buy into the notion that the citizens of LA are shallow, callous idolaters who are concerned only with what's on the surface. Such people, the fallen infer, are naturally selfish, opportunistic and shortsighted and, therefore, easier to manipulate into unfair pacts of faith.

Even those fallen who do not act on such assumptions still see the potential to harvest significant amounts of faith in the City of Angels. Looking beneath the glib media-augmented surface, they see the greed, envy, poverty, lust, illness, laziness and rage that drives desperate mortals right into a demon's hands. Regardless of whether he wants to alleviate or exacerbate these emotions and conditions, an observant demon can spot them in any major city anywhere in the world, yet they burn like a bonfire in LA especially. And not because LA is essentially different from any other city on Earth, but because of what it has been through very recently.

ITS RECENT TRIBULATIONS

In the very recent past, Los Angeles has been victimized by a twofold horror. In all its long history, two types of uncontrollable dangers have plagued LA: destructive earthquakes and vicious riots. Yet, just recently, the worst examples of both combined forces in

a disaster that defies the rational imagination. The first was an unforeseeable earthquake that registered an incredible 7.2 on the Richter scale, causing hundreds of deaths and injuries, as well as extensive blackouts and tens of billions of dollars in damage. The second, following immediately on the heels of the quake, came in the form of the so-called "Devil's Night Riots." Violent madmen who had once been rational human beings flooded the streets, upping the monetary amount of damage considerably and adding to the lists of those killed or injured with cavalier abandon.

The rioting — described by one observer after the fact as being worse than the 1960s Watts and 1990s Rodney King riots put together — overwhelmed the police force and necessitated the emergency activation of the National Guard. Not surprisingly, it also caught the attention of the fallen. Powerful infernal magic was at work behind the scenes, though it was anyone's guess as to who was controlling it. Some speculated that mad Earthbound demons had shaken the sleeping earth in order to rouse Lucifer from hiding. Others were certain that the Morningstar had caused the riots in order to cover his tracks as he attacked the treacherous Earthbound in response. Others claimed that the reverse was true in both cases. In fact, even police reports were sketchy on exactly where, when and why the riots had begun in the first place.

Regardless of why they started, though, it is no secret why the Devil's Night Riots ended. Late into the night, when the violence and destruction had reached their terrible apex, the Morningstar himself blazed forth into the night sky and glared down at the city in judgment. He had lost none of the glory that the fallen remembered from the War of Wrath, and he was visible for miles in every direction. News crews and amateur photographers captured the image as

YES, WE KNOW

We know that there was no such event as the so-called Devil's Night Riots in the real Los Angeles. We know that no earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale rattled the real City of Angels' bones in the recent past, killing hundreds and wounding hundreds more. We know that nothing even remotely like a blazing rebel angel has been spotted or filmed over the Los Angeles skyline in our real world.

By the same token, you know that the World of Darkness is not exactly our real world, but only one very much like it. You know that there are no demons walking the earth in soulless human husks. You know that this is only a game about telling stories of horror and infernal glory with your friends.

well, transmitting it all over the world before even the first 24 hours had played themselves out. Lucifer remained visible for only a few moments, but when he disappeared, the rioting had sputtered to a halt, and the latent and dormant faith of the people of Los Angeles came alive once again.

LOS ANGELES NOW

As the events of *Fear to Tread* begin, some time has passed since the Devil's Night Riots occurred. Electricity and running water have been restored to almost every neighborhood in the city (except those areas in which the lack thereof would be most suitably dramatic for your story). Much of the merely cosmetic damage caused by the earthquake and the riots has been cleaned up and repaired. News reports are beginning to focus on the triumph of the human spirit as the city rebuilds those structures that were more seriously damaged, and movies about the inherent drama of it all are already in the works. Life in Los Angeles is slowly returning to what passes for normal there.

But for many citizens of the City of Angels, life will never be the same again. Those who have lost loved ones, their homes or their property have been changed forever in ways that they are only just beginning to realize. The wreckage of once-familiar landmarks, the omnipresent reconstruction crews and the faces of other shell-shocked victims are inescapable reminders of how their lives have gone to hell. Yet, for many survivors, their initial upwelling of faith has not died down, and it is up to enterprising, opportunistic fallen angels to make the best of this newly discovered gold mine of potential. Provided, that is, that they hurry up and beat their rivals to it.

THE POLITICAL CLIMATE

The infernal political landscape of Los Angeles is unlike any that existed before the rebels' imprisonment in the Abyss, and it is unusual even in the modern context granted to the demons by their mortal coils. The Los Angeles that the fallen inhabit is one divided by two powerful courts and constantly rumbling with the furtive schemes of those outside the purview of both organizations. The original court, known simply as the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, has been in existence since the fallen first began to return to Earth. At its head is Baroness Kishar, a straightforward Luciferan Scourge who prefers a face-to-face fight over underhanded skullduggery. This court has secured a significant power base in the city, and it is largely considered the "official" court there.

A second group of fallen, however, led by the Fiend known as Lady Anat, has brazenly established what she calls the Blood Court of Los Angeles. Populated and governed largely by members of the Ravener faction,

this court is quite different in outlook from the Infernal Court. Nonetheless, it actually shares a ruling member in common with that group, and two other opposing members of those groups are like-minded lovers who maintain frequent contact. There is no outright hostility between these two courts as of yet, mostly because the idea of two governing bodies claiming the same territory is such a bizarre concept to the fallen that they do not quite know what to make of it. Members of both groups are working even now, though, to secure as much power and eminence as they can as insurance against the inevitable day when the courts come into open conflict and must vie directly against one another for supreme influence over the city.

On top of this growing inter-court unease, the fallen also have their regular inter-faction disputes to worry about, as well as simple interpersonal clashes and one even more substantial issue. It is known (or widely suspected by the average fallen on the street, at any rate) that at least two powerful Earthbound demons exist and operate in Los Angeles, having had much more time and power at their disposal to effect their terrible, incomprehensible designs. Regardless of what faction one espouses personally, such considerations often take the hindmost when it comes to curtailing one of these mad beings' dangerous plots.

For *Fear to Tread*'s purposes, the base assumption is that the players' characters nominally belong to one of three camps. Either they are advocates of the authority of the city's original Infernal Court (led by Baroness Kishar), they support the up-and-coming Blood Court (led by Lady Anat), or they are unaffiliated fallen supporting the greater Cryptic faction in its effort to establish a strong Cryptic presence in Los Angeles (under the influence of one Lady Al-Lat and her various secret agents). It is the responsibility of the Storyteller and the players to come up with convincing reasons for why the characters have come together as a functioning social circle, but each chapter will provide a range of reasons why that circle of demons might be involved in the individual stories.

For more information on the Storyteller characters mentioned here or elsewhere throughout this book, refer to Chapter Four. For more detailed information about Los Angeles, the two courts, the way an infernal court actually functions or a host of other interesting Storyteller characters who are active in the city, refer to *Demon: City of Angels*.

SETTING COUNTERPOINT: SHMITTY OF ANGELS

You might not have bought *Demon: City of Angels*. You might never have been to the real City of Angels. You might not have even liked that

movie, *The Crow: City of Angels*. For these or any number of other reasons, you might not especially want to tell a story that is set in Los Angeles (much less a chronicle set there) with your **Demon** troupe. While this reaction is not ideal, it is understandable. (Especially where that *Crow* movie is concerned. What was Iggy Pop thinking?) It should not, however, persuade you to give up altogether on the stories in this book.

Although they are intended as tales of the diabolical denizens of the City of Angels, the three stories in **Fear to Tread** can still (theoretically) occur in any major city of your troupe's choosing. All you have to do to port these stories over to a chronicle taking place elsewhere is read them (obviously), strip out the specific names of the Storyteller characters and locations mentioned herein and boil the plots down to their most basic elements. These stories are dramatic and epic in their execution, but they are really built up from quite simple foundations that can support just about any structure that arises from the unique elements of your game.

THEMES

As a supplement to **Demon: The Fallen**, it is incumbent upon this book to share the themes that make **Demon** what it is. That being said, there are three overarching concepts that drive **Demon** and that, consequently, are reflected here: freedom, faith and fanaticism. The fallen confidently declared open rebellion against God because of their faith in the Morningstar's wisdom, and they were damned for that conviction. When they chose the darkness instead of the light, the fallen were cursed and forever estranged from their creator.

But if they no longer fall under God's purview, does this not mean that they are free to chart their own course now that they have won their freedom anew? All God ever did was lay down the line between right and wrong—it has forever been up to His creations to choose what side of the line to stand on. **Fear to Tread** explores these themes by presenting a host of Storytellers characters with strong ambitions and stronger convictions and giving your players' characters the chance to take up arms with or against the Storyteller characters as the players choose.

Aside from those general ideas, though, **Fear to Tread** independently explores the related theme of loyalty. It gives your troupe the opportunity to argue whether it is nobler to sacrifice one's sense of propriety out of loyalty to another or to destroy a powerful relationship over a conflict of ethics. It also gives you and your players a chance to witness the tragic consequences of betrayals whose scopes

are magnified to epic proportions by the very nature of the ancient beings involved. Finally, this chronicle is designed to raise the question of when (if ever) one's sense of loyalty must win out over one's sense of right and wrong.

Finally, the stories in this book are designed to demonstrate the fact that there is a price to pay for every rash, intemperate act that a demon (be he fallen or Earthbound) might commit. While they were hardly designed to be impulsive or flighty beings, the act of giving angels free will to make their own choices opened the door to the possibility that they might make poorly informed decisions without thinking through all of the subsequent side effects or consequences of those decisions. (Some particularly bitter fallen argue that the decision to rebel in the first place was such a one.) Adding to this liability the fact that demons have spent countless aeons simmering in their own frustration, hatred and self-pity only makes matters worse (not to mention the fact that the mortals to whom most of them must anchor themselves in order to stay out of Hell are not exactly paragons of enlightened rational thought). Regardless of how long they have been free, many demons, therefore, demonstrate a frustrating inability to consider the long-term view when laying plans or hatching schemes against their rivals. Even when they do so, they tend to overreact when some unexpected factor interrupts or threatens those plans.

Such is definitely the case in the stories that make up the **Fear to Tread** chronicle, and it is up to clever characters to turn those errors into opportunities for themselves, their factions, their city and, possibly, the entire society of the fallen.

COMPLIMENTARY CHARACTERS

The following characters are all "starting-level" fallen angels that have been generated using the character-creation system in the **Demon** core rulebook. These characters are useful for the **Fear to Tread** chronicle, with a broad mix of personalities, abilities and story hooks to carry beyond the chronicle should you so desire. If you and your troupe want to get started on **Fear to Tread** right now, photocopy the character sheets, distribute the characters among your players, and let them familiarize themselves with these fallen and what they can do. After that, you will be ready to jump straight in—provided, of course, that you have read the stories beforehand and know how to run them.

DEVIL

Prelude: When Lucifer raised his fist against Heaven, you were there with him, sharing in his proud defiance. All your existence, you had been a noble soldier of the Lord, a prince among angels, but Lucifer's gospel of rebellion spoke so strongly to you that you turned your back on the Creator and became one of the fell nobility of the demon forces.

In the earliest days of the war, you led from the front lines, marshaling demon armies beneath Lucifer's banner. Yet, as the War of Wrath continued, you began to realize that you could do more from behind the scenes, using your powers of charisma and manipulation upon the biddable, subservient mortal masses. There was a time when you loved humanity — you went to war for their sakes, after all — but as you became accustomed to controlling them, your love turned into casual contempt. Humans were simply tools, weapons to be used against the Creator. A stick to jab in His eye.

But Heaven won the war, perhaps inevitably, and you and your compatriots were locked into the prison of the Abyss. Using your gifts, you leveraged yourself into a strong position in the developing power structure of Hell, all the while brooding on the failure of the rebellion. Although you were loath to accept it, you eventually realized that you had been wrong about humanity. Mortals were still sheep — creatures to be used as demonkind saw fit — but you had underestimated the power and usefulness of their faith. Humanity's belief in the Creator was what had given Heaven power, you realized. If you and the rest of the demons had been able to tap more of that faith, maybe you would have prevailed.

When Hell's barriers opened a crack, you escaped to the mortal world, determined to bleed power from the faith of humanity. You felt the strength of a mortal soul — one who saw other humans as tools and followers — and you took control of that mortal's body. For the first time in aeons, you looked upon the mortal world, and you rifled through the memories in the brain of your new mortal host — a disgraced police officer without a friend in the world.

If there was a time when this man was an honest cop, it was a long time ago. Being honest didn't get you shit. A smart cop was one who was prepared to get his hands dirty and make deals, and this man was nothing if not smart. He had been in Vice for eight years, and in that time, he had managed to amass his own little empire. Dozens of dealers, pimps and thieves across the city paid him for protection and help, and some of them were foolish enough to think that they owned the cop. He knew better, though — he owned

them. The hustlers were his flock, his followers, and he managed them like a farmer manages his herd.

So why was he dead in an alley, then, with three bullets in his gut? You looked closer into his fading soul and found something that shocked you — a vein of human nobility hidden under the greed and cynicism. The cop had found out that one of his "resources" was a pedophile, involved in a burgeoning kiddy-porn racket. When he uncovered the ring, he was offered a bribe to keep his mouth shut — but to his own surprise, he turned it down. Everyone has their limits, everyone has a core of humanity, and he realized that his role as society's protector still meant something to him. He busted the pedophile, but the pedophile rolled on him in return and exposed the cop's history of illegal activities. Internal Affairs got involved, and he was off the force before he knew what had hit him. The only way he avoided prison was by taking three slugs to the gut from another one of the criminals he had made

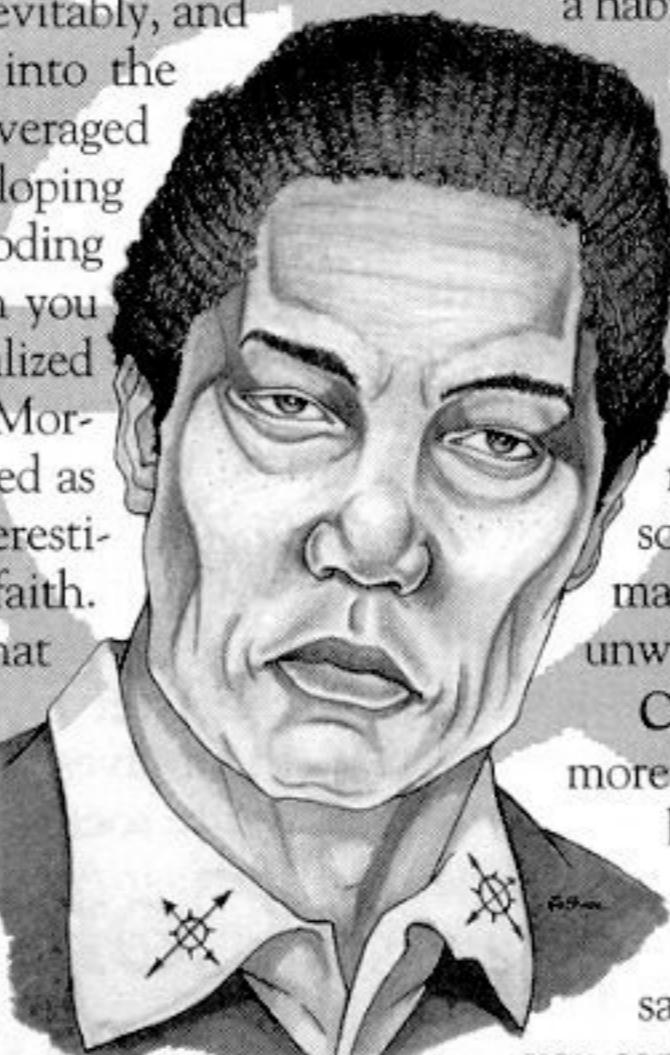
a habit of threatening and abusing.

But now, that cop lives again — his face a mask for you to wear, his memories and personality a library for you to plunder. He no longer has the power of his position or a flock of mortals ready to obey him — he even had to leave town and find a new place to start over. However, the cop's rediscovered decency has infected your own soul. You remember what it was to love humanity, to be the Creator's paladin, and these unwelcome memories will not let you be.

Concept: You do not know what to do anymore. Your contempt for humanity has taken a beating, and now, you vacillate between cynicism and nobility. You still plan to use the cop's skills and abilities in much the

same way he used them; you still believe that you can draw power from the faith of mortals. But what will you do with that power? Grind humanity underfoot as you climb to the gates of Heaven or lead the mortal flock into a new golden age? One thing is for sure. Between the cop's enemies (who only know that he skipped town once his secret got out) and the invading forces of Hell, you face plenty of opposition in whatever you decide to do.

Roleplaying Hints: You are always looking for an angle and a way to control others. Sometimes, you use them for a good reason — sometimes, you manipulate them for their own good — but it is still your nature to play the puppetmaster. Your ability to manipulate others has made you arrogant and cynical, but the world has a way of getting past your defenses, of shocking you with its beauty and horrors. When your veneer cracks, your old nobility shines through, and you might act altruistically before you can stop yourself.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

NATURE: ROGUE
DEMEANOR: AUTOCRAT
CONCEPT:

HOUSE: NAMARU
FACTION:
VISAGE:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical

Strength _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Dexterity _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○

Social

Charisma _____
Manipulation (Con-
niving)
Appearance _____

MENTAL

Perception _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Intelligence _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Wits _____ ● ● ● ○ ○

ABILITIES

Talents

Alertness	● ○ ○ ○
Athletics	● ○ ○ ○
Awareness	● ○ ○ ○
Brawl	● ○ ○ ○
Dodge	○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy	● ● ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	● ● ● ○ ○
Intuition	○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	● ● ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	● ● ● ○ ○
Subterfuge (Lying)	● ● ● ○ ○

SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ● ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	● ● ● ○ ○
Melee	○ ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○
Security	● ● ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	● ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	● ● ● ○ ○
Law	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Religion	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

Backgrounds

<u>Contacts</u>	●●●○○
<u>Eminence</u>	●●○○○
<u>Influence</u>	●○○○○
<u>Resources</u>	●●○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

LITERATURE

Radiance _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
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_____ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

Conscience _____ ●●○○○
Conviction _____ ●●○○○
Courage _____ ●●○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

APOCALYPTIC FORMS

■ Faith

Faith

Torment
Permanent

Willpower

■ Health

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE

DEVOURER

Prelude: Rage. Anger. Hate. These are the emotions that drove you in the earliest days—and beyond. You still remember the glorious destruction of the War of Wrath, how you took on the hordes of the Creator, ripping loyalist angels apart with sword and claw. The Morningstar's rebellion was your spiritual awakening, a chance to channel the force of your impulsive fury into a worthy cause. You would liberate your beloved humanity and overthrow God the Dictator.

But the Host of Heaven won the war and banished you and your fellow rebels to the unending torment of the Abyss. All your righteous anger was for naught, and the frustration of imprisonment almost destroyed you. Then came the revelation that Lucifer had not been confined to Hell, and you knew that you had been betrayed. The great leader of the rebellion had abandoned his followers, gone back to repent bravery and sit in the lap of the Lord. When you realized this, the flickering flame of your anger erupted into a white-hot inferno of hate.

For untold ages, you raged in Hell, consumed by a fury that would not die. All you have desired for countless aeons is destruction—a fiery, violent end to this universe of betrayal and frustration. When the walls keeping you in Hell weakened, you burst forth in your rage, eager to wreck unimaginable havoc on reality. Sensing a weakening mortal soul that was itself consumed by anger and rage, you flooded into the mortal's body, expecting to be inhabiting a powerful, bloodthirsty warrior.

Instead, you found yourself possessing a 16-year-old girl who was dying in a car crash.

The girl you possessed was a high-school dropout, a carjacker and a child tempered by the extremes of rage and self-pity. All her life, the cards had been stacked against her. Born in the slums, her family lived in a tiny apartment that even swine would not find acceptable. Her father drank what little money he made, and he punished his family for his own failures. He beat his wife so hard that she ended up crippled for life. All that your host had to look forward to was getting knocked up by some younger version of her father and becoming just like her mother—dead inside before she hit 20.

Fuck that. Your host had one weapon—anger. She refused to accept a destiny of shit, and she fought back from a bottomless well of rage and frustration. At age 14, when her father tried to hit her again, she broke his hands with a baseball bat. She told him to fuck off out of their lives or end up with his skull cracked open. She then dropped out of school and started stealing cars to support

her mother and little sister. Plenty of punks with flash cars and big guns tried to get into her pants, but she sent them all packing—and when a couple of them tried to press the issue, they ended up in the emergency room.

Anger fueled your host, kept her going past every obstacle—nothing was going to stop her, nothing could stand against the force of her rage. Until she lost control of a stolen Lexus in the middle of a high-speed chase and flipped the car off an overpass. Dying in the wreckage, her last feelings were not regret or fear, but fury—fury at herself for failing, fury at the cops who had finally beaten her. That fury was your doorway into her soul, the key to your release from Hell.

But under the rage was something else, something you had forgotten aeons ago. *Love*—love for your host's mother, her little sister Maria—and a need to protect them from harm. Crawling from the wreckage and fleeing instinctively from the police as you put your new body back together, you tried to come to grips with this new feeling, to

make sense of this strange and wonderful new world. Grand destruction is no longer an option. Not in this body, not in this world that could finally soothe the pain and rage that you have known for so long.

For the first time, you feel hope. And if anyone jeopardizes that hope, you'll tear them limb from limb.

Concept: You are a savage, bestial warrior who does not know the meaning of fear. But now, you have also become a determined, independent teenage car thief who wants to help her family. Hell is boiling over, and instead of leading the forces of darkness, you have to stand against them to protect your mother and sister. Doing that is going to take more than anger and muscle—you are going to need help from others, as much as it galls you to admit it.

Roleplaying Hints: You are always angry, always ready to lash out at anyone and anything that gets in your way. Slowly, though, you are beginning to realize that violence and rage are not the only solutions, that there are other possibilities, other ways to feel. Besides, you were a *warrior* once, rather than just a simple-minded engine of destruction. There is something to be said for self-control in the heat of the moment. Unfortunately, too often, you have realized this fact after smashing things to pieces. If you can just control your impulses, maybe you can build a better life for your family and even find a purpose to your new existence.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

NATURE: SURVIVOR
DEMÉANOR: BRAVO
CONCEPT:

HOUSE: RABISU
FACTION:
VISAGE:

ATTRIBUTES

Physical

Strength _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Dexterity (Quick) _____ ● ● ● ● ○
Stamina (Tough) _____ ● ● ● ● ○

Social

Charisma _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Manipulation _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Appearance _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○

MENTAL

Perception _____ ● ● ● ○ ○
Intelligence _____ ● ● ○ ○ ○
Wits _____ ● ● ● ○ ○

ABILITIES.

TALENTS

Alertness	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Athletics	● ● ● ○ ○
Awareness	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Brawl	● ● ● ○ ○
Dodge	● ● ○ ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	● ● ● ○ ○
Intuition	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	● ● ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	● ○ ○ ○ ○

SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ● ● ○ ○
Etiquette	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee	● ● ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ● ○ ○ ○
Survival	● ● ○ ○ ○
Technology	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Finance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	● ● ○ ○ ○
Medicine	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Politics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Religion	● ● ○ ○ ○
Research	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

Advantages

Backgrounds

<u>Allies</u>	●●○○○
<u>Contacts</u>	●●●○○
<u>Eminence</u>	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

LORE

<u>Flesh</u>	●●○○○
<u>Fundament</u>	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

VIRTUES

Conscience _____ ●●○○○
Conviction _____ ●●○○○
Courage _____ ●●●○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○
_____ ○○○○○

APOCALYPTIC FORM

■ Faith

The diagram consists of three horizontal rows of binary symbols (dots and squares). The top row is labeled "Earth" above a black bar. The middle row is labeled "Torment" above a double-headed arrow. The bottom row is labeled "Willpower" above another double-headed arrow. Each row contains 10 symbols.

Row	Symbol 1	Symbol 2	Symbol 3	Symbol 4	Symbol 5	Symbol 6	Symbol 7	Symbol 8	Symbol 9	Symbol 10
Earth	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
Torment	↔	●	●	●	□	□	□	□	□	□
Willpower	↔	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○

Health

Bruised	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hurt	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Injured	-1 <input type="checkbox"/>
Wounded	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Mauled	-2 <input type="checkbox"/>
Crippled	-5 <input type="checkbox"/>
Incapacitated	<input type="checkbox"/>

EXPERIENCE

FIEND

Prelude: Secrets have always enthralled you, ever since the Creator spun you into existence. You moved through the heavens, guiding the motion of the stars and planets, and you looked down upon the world below. You spent your time wondering what mysteries were hidden in the hearts of humanity and why God saw fit to keep angels and mortals separate. When Lucifer rebelled, you joined his cause, hoping that you would learn the answers to the secrets of Creation.

Instead of learning secrets, though, you found yourself creating them. In an attempt to separate humanity from their celestial guardians, you sent plagues of visions and nightmares to mortals. With dreams and curses, sorcery and lies, you taught humanity to fear, and that fear drove a wedge between mortals and angels. It all aided the war effort, of course, but it was not what you had hoped for, and your soul withered and grew cold with disappointment.

And in the end, it was all for naught—the demons lost the war and were sentenced to an eternity in the Abyss. Yet, this ignominious defeat brought back mystery in the form of the question of what had happened to Lucifer and why the Creator had allowed the war to progress as it did. It took aeons before you took note of these mysteries, but they were enough to tear you from your depression and misery and give you the promise of purpose again.

Now, Hell's walls have weakened and allowed you the chance to look for answers in the mortal world. Your soul leapt from the Abyss, homing in on a mortal soul that knew a hunger for secrets and forbidden knowledge. When you opened your eyes, you found yourself naked and brutalized, in the process of being buried in a shallow grave. Reeling from the shock of being incarnate again, you escaped using your demonic gifts and tried to decipher the thoughts of the shell you wore.

Your mortal host, it seemed, had spent her life consumed by curiosity, always wanting to know *why* and *how* and *where*. She could have become a scientist or a doctor, but that was way too respectable and boring. Instead, she ended up as a hacker. Oh sure, the business card said "Web Designer," but that was just the day job. After hours, she roamed the world from her computer, always looking for something new and interesting. Whether it was a preview of the new summer blockbuster

or government records, it was all the same—if it was forbidden, she wanted to know all about it. If she had a preference, it was for the offbeat—conspiracy theories, UFO sightings, the occult. She didn't actually believe in any of that crap, but it sure was funny.

It stopped being funny when she stumbled across traces of an occult conspiracy in her own city. Maybe it wasn't real, but some people certainly *thought* it was, and they were into some serious shit. Crime, murder, monsters—something was going on. Your host kept pushing, trying to find the connections—and she found that the cult had members in the media, the police and local government. The cult also had its own computer users, and your host made the mistake of not covering her tracks. She was still at the computer when the cultists burst through the door and kidnaped her. A few hours of terror and torture later, she was stripped naked and anointed in blood over a

blasphemous alter, and her still-living body was dumped for live burial in a landfill.

Now, you have immersed yourself in this victim's memories, trying to understand the impossible marvels of modern technology. But in the process, her personality has bled into yours, her decency and joy for life contaminating your demonic anger and urges. Once, you thought that you were meant to destroy this world, but that notion horrifies you now. Instead, you want to explore all of its secrets—and in the process, find out the truth about the Creator's plans.

Concept: You never truly enjoyed tormenting humanity with curses and nightmares, and now, the idea holds even less appeal for you. All you want to do now is use this wonderful "computer" to find out more about the world. But if the full forces of Hell return, there will be no world to explore—especially if they are anything like the monstrous Earthbound. You are on the lookout for allies and followers to fight the darkness—and also to protect others from monsters like the cultists that killed your host.

Roleplaying Hints: You love a mystery—or more precisely, you love solving mysteries. You are consumed with curiosity about anything and everything, although you have learned to hide that curiosity—mortals get suspicious when people ask questions that should be "obvious." Modern technology is particularly fascinating, as is the occult. There are great things to be learned, so start poking your nose into other people's business now.



DEMON

The Fallen

Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: Addict
Demeanor: Bon Vivant
Concept:

House: Neberu
Faction:
Visage:

ATTRIBUTES

PHYSICAL

Strength	● ● ○ ○ ○
Dexterity	● ● ○ ○ ○
Stamina	● ● ○ ○ ○

SOCIAL

Charisma	● ● ● ○ ○
Manipulation	● ● ○ ○ ○
Appearance	● ● ● ○ ○

MENTAL

Perception	● ● ● ○ ○
Intelligence	● ● ● ○ ○
Wits (Quick Thinker)	● ● ● ○ ○

ABILITIES

TALENTS

Alertness	● ● ● ○ ○
Athletics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Awareness	● ● ● ○ ○
Brawl	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Dodge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Empathy	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Expression	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intimidation	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Intuition	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Leadership	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Streetwise	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Subterfuge	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

SKILLS

Animal Ken	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Crafts	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Demolitions	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Drive	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Etiquette	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Firearms	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Melee	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Performance	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Security	● ● ○ ○ ○
Stealth	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Survival	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Technology	● ● ● ○ ○

KNOWLEDGES

Academics	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Computer (Hacking)	● ● ● ● ○
Finance	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Investigation	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Law	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Linguistics	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Medicine	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Occult	● ● ● ○ ○
Politics	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Religion	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
Research	● ● ● ○ ○
Science	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Contacts	● ● ○ ○ ○
Legacy	● ● ○ ○ ○
Paragon	● ● ○ ○ ○
Resources	● ● ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

LORE

Patterns	● ● ○ ○ ○
Humanity	● ○ ○ ○ ○
Portals	● ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

VIRTUES

Conscience	● ● ○ ○ ○
Conviction	● ● ● ○ ○
Courage	● ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○
	○ ○ ○ ○ ○

APOCALYPTIC FORM

FAITH

●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

TORMENT

●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

TEMPORARY

●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

WILLPOWER

●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

HEALTH

Bruised	□
Hurt	-1 □
Injured	-1 □
Wounded	-2 □
Mauled	-2 □
Crippled	-5 □
Incapacitated	□

EXPERIENCE



SCOURGE

Prelude: Everything in the world used to be wonderful, when you and your momma lived in the country and worked in the truck stop. But the Poison Radio Men kept putting things in your food, in the air, and they poured the bad wisdom into Momma's ear. She started spending time with Joe Tonklin, the truck stop owner — but he was really the leader of the Poison Radio Men. You saw him unzip his face, saw him whispering his death song to the truck stop customers, saw him for the evil thing he was. You tried to tell Momma, but she wouldn't believe it. The bad wisdom made her deaf to you, turned her eyes inside out. So you laid a trap for Joe Tonklin. You trapped him in the kitchen and put him in the freezer, where his death song would be covered in ice. You saved Momma, but for that, they put you in the Nuthouse.

No, that's not right. You're not that man. That's just a false memory, something to ignore. You remember the truth. You remember the face of God. You remember the ages of guiding the winds, of breathing life into the sick and afflicted. Then came the rebellion, Lucifer's call for freedom, and the promise of being able to touch and love the humans you had watched over for so long.

No, the Nuthouse is supposed to be for crazy people — that's what Momma always said. But you know you're not crazy. Actually, the Nuthouse was a prison, and you know who was behind it — the Poison Radio Men, the evil things that watched you at night and lived in the airwaves between the CB radios. They had turned Momma against you, and they kept you in the Nuthouse so you couldn't fight them anymore. Oh, the Nuthouse was a bad place and no mistake. They made you take pills that grew mushrooms inside your mind. They hooked you up to the power lines and tried to fry your insides. They even tried to put a Poison Radio Man inside you, but you fought them off. You bit the tip of your tongue off and drove the evil away with your own blood. They watched you every day, but you never stopped fighting. In the end, they had to let you go.

Concentrate, focus. Remember the agonies of the Abyss, remember the eternal prison that Hell was supposed to be. The tormenting void where you and all the other rebels were exiled for the crime of loving humanity too much. Other demons became bitter and twisted by this punishment, but you held on to your vision — the dream of a paradise for mortal and immortal alike. That dream kept you whole while

in Hell — and now, you have escaped. Now, you have found a home inside a mortal shell — but this poisoned mind is so hard to live in....

Momma went to Heaven while you were in the Nuthouse, and there was no one to stop the Poison Radio Men from tormenting you. They beat you, tortured you, watched you. They always watched you, waiting for a sign of weakness, waiting for you to tell them where Joe Tonklin was. But you were strong, you knew they were watching, and you fought them back. You kept your things in a shopping trolley, you boiled your water seven times before drinking, and you kept your toenails in your pocket so they couldn't steal your DNA. They kept beating you, hurting you, hounding you across the country and beaming bad thoughts into your head. But they couldn't make you tell — not even

when they sent a bad man to hit you with a car and make you dead. You couldn't run anymore, but you would never tell.

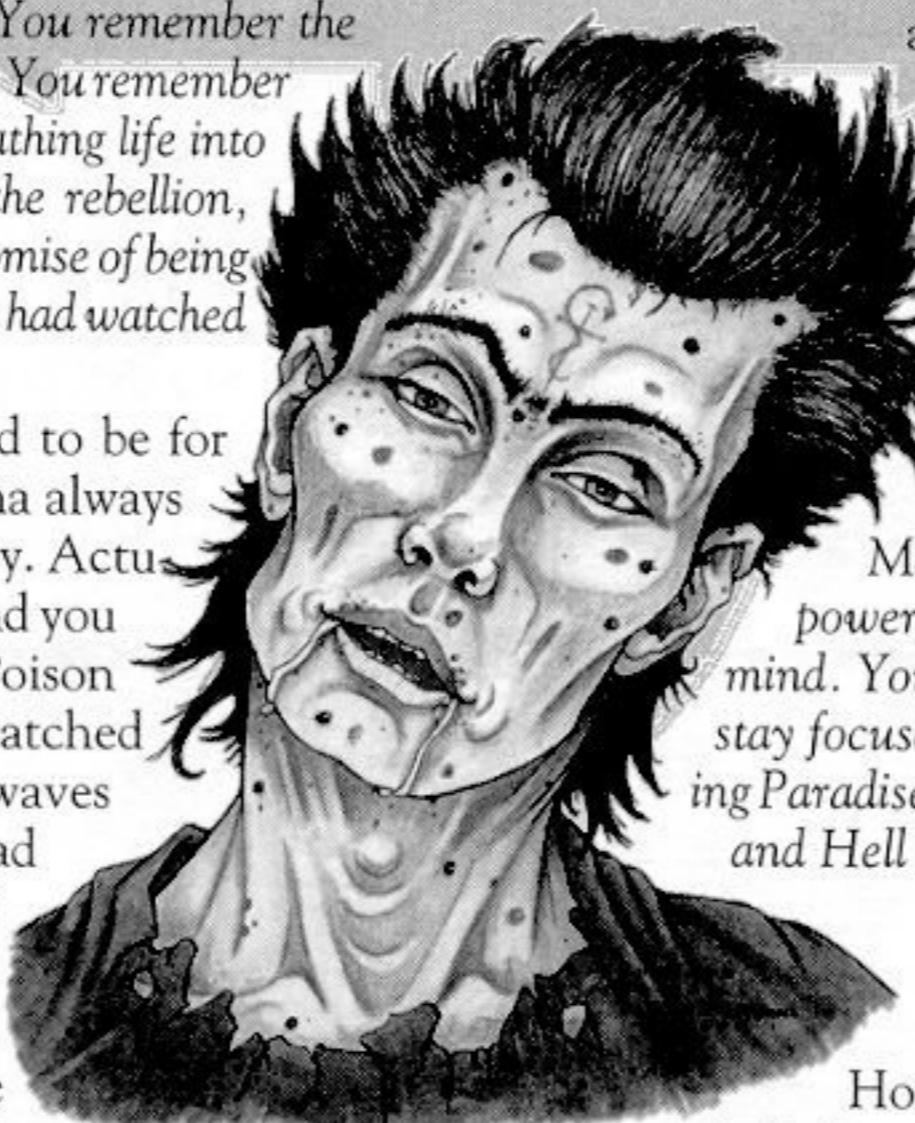
You thought this mortal body would be a perfect host. But there's something wrong with his mind, with his body, and not even your healing powers can fix it. You're sure there are no Poison Radio Men — at least, most of the time you're sure.

Maybe your host is being pursued by powerful enemies that poison his food and his mind. You can't be sure because it's so hard to stay focused sometimes. What matters is bringing Paradise, to save precious humanity from God and Hell and Joe Tonklin. Wait....

Concept: Are you a demon in the body of a schizophrenic or a schizophrenic who thinks he's a demon?

How can you be sure? Sometimes, you feel clear and focused, and you know your purpose — but sometimes, the clouds form in your mind again when you aren't concentrating on your mission. In time, you're sure you can work it out, but maybe you don't have much time.

Roleplaying Hints: You're an erratic, irrational mess from time to time, buffeted by random thoughts and unfocused paranoia. Even when your mind and purpose is clear to you, your host's mannerisms and tics keep surfacing and getting in the way. You mutter a lot, swear absentmindedly and occasionally have small seizures and spasms. You haven't bathed in a long time, and you're beginning to suspect that other mortals expect you to — what else are you supposed to be doing?



SLAYER

Prelude: Death comes to all things, and it comes at your hand. When the Creator fashioned you from the ether, He charged you with the duty of husbanding the plants and animals of the world to their death, returning their essences to the earth. As a Slayer, you were the least of God's angelic creations, and that hurt you, but you accepted your place in the natural order, just as you accepted God's decree that humanity was to be protected from the touch of death.

But Lucifer's rebellion changed everything. The rebel angel sought to destroy God's dictatorial hierarchy, to make all beings equal and to bring humanity fully into the natural cycle of life and death. Having spent ages suffering the disdain of other angels and the pain of being separated from humans by the Creator's laws, you embraced Lucifer's doctrine of freedom. During the War of Wrath, you brought death to mortals and even (shockingly) to other angels and demons. You saw horrors and atrocities, and your soul hardened to humanity's situation, but you never lost faith in Lucifer or in the worthiness of his crusade.

Even still, your faith was not enough. The demons lost the war and were imprisoned in Hell. Other demons were consumed with doubt, anger and regret, but not you. Yes, you wondered where Lucifer was and wondered why the rebellion had failed, but you kept believing in Lucifer's cause. Equality and justice — these things remained worthwhile, even after an eternity in the torments of Hell.

Then, the gates of Hell inexplicably started to crumble, and you were able to escape to the mortal world. After ages of darkness, you wanted more than anything else to see the vital, living world that you once knew. Instead, you opened your new eyes onto a scene of death — corpses stretched out on slabs, rigid and cold in a dimly lit room. The explanation lay inside the fading thoughts of your mortal host who lay dying in a pool of his own blood.

This mortal, it seemed, had always been a moody, introverted child. His family saw him as emotionally distant, unknowable, unlovable. In truth, he adored his family, but he had never been able to express those feelings. He was always frightened of being seen as weak and unworthy. He grew up in luxury — courtesy of his parents' wealth and influence — but he always felt apart, unable to breach the barriers between himself and his loved ones.

Eventually, he went to college to study medicine — partially because of his intelligence, but mostly because he wanted to impress his doctor father. He thought he would

love medicine, but he hated it instead. He wanted to help others, to heal the sick, but medical school was all dry theory and pragmatic business. Above all, he hated the pervasiveness of death, the bored way in which other students accepted death and mortality. When he had to study cadavers and perform surgery on bodies, he became extremely depressed. He started drinking and skipping classes, wanting to drop out but unwilling to disappoint his father and possibly wind up disowned in the bargain.

In the end, he did not have to worry about letting his parents down. No, in a twist of fate, his parents died in a car accident just weeks before his final exams. Grief ripped him to pieces, left him tattered and hollow. Death was inevitable, there was no escaping it, and all life was just a way of marking time before oblivion. Medicine was a joke — a pointless attempt to hold back the darkness, to deny the end that came to parent and child alike. The morning of his exams, he stopped trying to pretend that it was worth trying. He went to the college's morgue, sat down by the cadavers and slit his forearms from his elbows right up to the heels of his hands.

This poor mortal's memories have rocked you to the core. For you, death has always been beautiful and necessary. You knew that mortals feared it, but that never mattered to you. Yet, your host's emotions feel like your own now, and his pain has become your own. You still have faith in Lucifer's dream, and you have dedicated yourself to finding your lost leader and reviving the war against Heaven, but you will not see humanity used and abused as it once was, not any longer.

Concept: You still believe that death is important and necessary, but you cannot be casual about it anymore. Now, you know that life is precious and should be protected. If Lucifer can be rescued, he can show humanity the way and protect it against the misguided depredations of the Earthbound and the rest of the legions of Hell. Your host's wealth and knowledge will help you, but Lucifer has been missing for aeons. You will need help in finding him and in stopping Hell's invasion plans.

Roleplaying Hints: People see you as uncaring and distant, but that simply is not true. You just do not know how to communicate with people, so you stay quiet most of the time, preferring not to attract attention. Inside, though, you care about people and the world, and the urge to do something overwhelms you sometimes. When it does, you have to speak, to act — only to retreat afterward, embarrassed and shy again.





PLAYERS, BE WARNED

This book is nominally intended for the Storyteller's eyes only. It contains Trait ratings and motivations for the bad guys, as well as all of the intricacies and secrets of the plot. Being a book of stories, it kind of has to, and there is no way to hide them from you should you read further.

So, if you want to buy this book (or you already have) because you like what you have seen of **Demon: The Fallen** thus far, we are certainly not going to stop you. Hey, more power to you, frankly. Just remember that knowing how the plot plays out before you even begin the game might take some of the fun out of it for you. But even if being thus informed beforehand actually *adds* to your enjoyment, still keep in mind that your fellow players (and your Storyteller) might not feel the same way. In short, all we have to say is, try not to blow the surprises for the others, try not to steal your Storyteller's thunder, and try not to hog the spotlight. That way, everybody gets to enjoy the game as much as you do.



CHAPTER ONE: SUFFER THE CHILDREN

They worshiped their idols, which became a snare to them. They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.

—Psalm 106: 36-37

INTRODUCTION

One of the main problems with the way in which the fallen are reborn into the physical world in these days so near the End Times spoken of in the book of Revelation is that the process is so random and inconvenient. Not every demon in the Abyss is able to force himself through the cracks in that prison's vast gate. Some are simply too large and powerful to fit. Not every demon who is able to get through is willing or motivated to do so. Perhaps their spirits are too badly broken by their defeat in the War of Wrath, their apparent betrayal by their erstwhile hero Lucifer or even the recognition of how degraded and pitiful they have become since the glorious first days of their rebellion. Not every demon who does try to escape is able to remain free for long. By the Creator's design, the inexorable spiritual gravity of the Abyss pulls these escapees back down into their prison

unless they find some fetter to which to anchor themselves in the physical world. Those demons who are fortunate enough to be able to find an anchor within a suitable mortal host and resist the pull of the Abyss must usually do so out of desperate necessity, rather than any conscious, rational decision. On top of that, the lingering memories and emotional connections of the demons' mortal hosts have a tendency to override and even supplant the demons' personalities, as well as their memories of who they once were in the earliest days of their glory. Therefore, the fallen return to this world weak, confused and widely separated by the circumstantial vagaries of their mortals hosts' soulless lives.

The only alternative to this unforeseeable pitfall in the process of returning to Earth is one that was discovered centuries ago by the five archdukes of the Abyss. When they disappeared from the Abyss after having been summoned to the physical plane by



powerful sorcerers — much to the surprise of their comrades who were left behind — they found a way to anchor themselves either to objects or to physical locations that had been of great significance to them. Within these reliquaries or bastions, these fallen (as well as those who followed them in the same manner over the intervening centuries) were safe from the spiritual gravity of Hell, but their freedom came at a terrible price. Despite their incredible power — which had been diluted not one iota by having to mingle with a mortal host's mind — they were rooted in place, unable to show themselves or even move about freely as they once had done when the world was young. Furthermore, while the Earthbound (as they have since come to be known) were not diluted by mortal memories or emotions, they likewise had no bulwark in place against their roiling torment from a war lost and a sojourn in Hell. As the years passed, they became insane, unpredictable beings so different from the holy figures they once were as to be all but unrecognizable.

But what if a clever, enterprising demon found a way to make the best of these pitfalls so as to forward his own diabolical agenda? Even worse, what if that demon was one of the Earthbound itself? That idea is the premise of *Suffer the Children*, the first story in the **Fear to Tread** chronicle. Coming together at the behest of their demonic court, a visiting superior or even simple coincidence, the characters uncover a plot to destroy the souls of innocent children in order to make them viable hosts for demons whom the perpetrator of this crime can select at his leisure. And the perpetrator to whom this scheme can be traced back is none other than Enshagkushanna, a mad Earthbound demon who has taken up residence in Los Angeles.

THE PLOT (IN BRIEF)

The opening scene of this story takes place offstage when a hardworking counselor at a school for troubled teens dies under mysterious circumstances. Those circumstances in question bear the unmistakable taint of unholy interference, and an investigation begins into exactly who this woman was and what she could have been involved in that was important enough to a demon to risk taking her life as it did. This investigation leads to an institute called the Marshall School for Troubled Teens (the victim's workplace), where one of the students expresses concern over what has been happening at the school in recent months. She makes it clear that her counselor discovered something dangerous and that she believes that whatever that counselor discovered resulted in her demise. Investigating further, the characters uncover what the counselor's discovery only hinted at — namely that certain students at the Marshall School are being turned into hosts for demons at the

behest of a villainous Earthbound monster. In fact, one such student is scheduled to be replaced as soon as possible. Discovering what's going on and realizing that their timetable is limited, it is up to the characters to confront those who are behind this operation and deal with them appropriately.

STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

While not all of these characters are highly influential movers and shakers in the Los Angeles Tri-County Area (even in fallen society), they all have parts to play in *Suffer the Children*. Some are intended simply to point the characters in the right direction should they become hopelessly confused about exactly what's going on or should they find themselves at a loss as to how to proceed in their investigation. You can skip over some of them if you find that your players' characters don't need their help. You can also switch them out with Storyteller characters of your own design or from previous events in your own chronicle, if you so choose. You can even supplement their roles further (if your players appear to be having a particularly dense evening) by having the Storyteller characters to whom the ones presented here are connected in Los Angeles's greater infernal society make brief appearances. Explanations of how the various Storyteller characters are connected can be found in the Storyteller Characters chapter of this book, and even more information is presented in *Demon: City of Angels*.

- **Mary Blacksmith.** Mary is the counselor from the Marshall Institute for Troubled Teens whose death kick starts the whole story (or even the whole chronicle if you should decide to run **Fear to Tread** thus). While she can hardly be an *active* participant in the events as they unfold, the characters would likely not even be aware of the problem that is festering in their home city right under their noses if it were not for her. Plus, it's the effect that she has had on several of the students at the Marshall School that allows those students to resist the depredations of those who wish to do them harm.

- **Fell Knight Ashur (AKA Jeff Black).** This fallen angel is the once-lover of the tyrant of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, whose return to the physical world inspired him to put aside his standing in the Luciferan faction in favor of the diametrically opposed Reconciler philosophy. It is because of this sentimental leaning that he urges the characters to take action. It is through the role of his host — a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy — that he becomes involved in the mystery surrounding Mary Blacksmith.

- **Lo-ruhamah (AKA Dr. Katherine Roggenkamp).** It is from this unpleasant demon that

the first answers to the mystery surrounding Mary Blacksmith's fate come. Working out of the morgue of the Martin Luther King Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center and relying on the expertise and assistance of her colleague, **Bizjotha (AKA Dr. Ronni Parks)**, she is able to state conclusively that demonic influence was responsible for Mary Blacksmith's death.

- **The Speaker of the Fallen Tower.** Two characters occupy this lofty title — that of the senior minister of the Ministry of Dust — in the opposing demonic courts Los Angeles, but for the purposes of this story, it does not matter which one the characters come into contact with. If your characters represent the established Infernal Court, they will meet **Lord Vohu Mano**. If they represent the more secretive Blood Court, they will encounter **Lord Vritran**. Should they be independent of either court, the characters likely will not encounter either one, though the possibility exists that they could wind up speaking to both separately.

- **Fell Knight Guanli (AKA Jeremiah Azevedo).** This officer of the Los Angeles Police Department is also the senior minister of the Lion Ministry of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles. Depending on the characters' loyalties, Guanli will either be involved in the story indirectly at Fell Knight Ravana's request, or it will be through him that Fell Knight Ravana is introduced into the story.

- **Fell Knight Ravana (AKA Mary Beth Holden).** The senior minister of the Lion Ministry of the Blood Court of Los Angeles, Ravana either introduces or is introduced by her lover Fell Knight Guanli. It's her job to take direct action against perceived threats to her court, but she takes a personal interest in dealing with the situation at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens.

- **José Matinalé.** One of the students at the Marshall School, José has recently lost a friend and confidante in Mary Blacksmith.

- **Alicia Rhowes.** A friend of José's and another self-described ward of Mary Blacksmith. She doesn't know exactly what's happening in secret at the Marshall School, but she knows that evil is afoot. However, she has faith in God that help is on the way.

- **Maxwell Harris.** A spoiled bully and a toady to strong authority figures, Maxwell Harris is the student of the Marshall School who last spoke to Mary Blacksmith. He is partially aware of what's happening behind closed doors at the school, but he's unlikely to cooperate with outsiders.

- **Edward Harvey.** An administrator at the Marshall School and a longtime acquaintance of the school's new headmaster, Henry Vandermeer. He is in on the conspiracy with the headmaster, and the pressure has begun to get to him, but he's convinced that the rewards

for his complicity will easily outweigh the tension and dread he must put himself through in the short term.

- **"Colonel" Henry David Vandermeer.** The ring-leader of the diabolical conspiracy that is at work behind the scenes at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens, Henry Vandermeer is the school's new headmaster. He is also a willing thrall to the powerful and dangerous Earthbound demon, Enshagkushanna.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

As stated in the introduction of this book, *Fear to Tread* assumes that the players' characters will become involved in the stories' events by coming from one of three social circles. They are most likely supporters of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles (headed by Baroness Kishar), supporters of LA's more secretive Blood Court (headed by Lady Anat) or independent investigators working at the behest of Lady Al-Lat. (Corralling characters who are otherwise affiliated is up to you and your players, as is the means by which the characters come to work together in the first place.)

In this instance, however, it might not even matter exactly which group your characters belong to. The event that starts this story rolling is a sudden upwelling of infernal power so large that it's hard to miss it. The fallen can detect and even locate such a surge naturally with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7). Should you be so inclined, you can make this roll for your characters reflexively or even simply declare the attempt a success without requiring a roll. Regardless, start the story by having an enormous flare of infernal energy erupt near the characters' location(s) and subtly encourage them to check it out.

If your characters are members of the Infernal Court and they don't respond to this prodding, have the Storyteller character Fell Knight Guanli contact them either by telephone or invocation. Have him explain who he is (although they should already know well enough) and tell them that he overheard a request on his police radio for any available units to check out a disturbing traffic incident in the city. He would have thought nothing of it, except for the fact that he felt a surge of demonic power coming from exactly the location where the incident reportedly took place at precisely the time it was reported. (Allow the characters to confirm that they too felt the sensation he's describing.) Then have Guanli tell them that since they were (conveniently) the only members of the Infernal Court he knew of who were anywhere near the scene of the disturbance, he needs them to go and look into the situation. If they resist, have him add that they are the only ones who responded to his attempted contact and that the Ministry of Lions (of which he is the head) would consider their cooperation a favor.

Should the characters be supporters of the Blood Court, you can have almost exactly the same thing happen. Rather than have Guanli contact them, though, have Fell Knight Ravana do so. Have her let them know that she won't be able to get out to the site of the event herself and that she would appreciate it if they could take a look around and report to her once they know what's going on. Should they resist, have her insinuate that the Ministry of Lions finds such unwillingness to cooperate on something so simple disturbing and that that sort of bad impression could have a way of making itself felt throughout all the Blood Court.

If the characters are agents of Al-Lat, do the same as you would have if they were supporters of the Infernal Court, but if the characters resist, have Guanli imply that Al-Lat would really appreciate their help. As agents supporting a Cryptic character in pursuit of a Cryptic goal, however, the characters should require little (if any) such prodding.

SCENE ONE

THE CRASH SITE

There are any number of open spaces in this town, but surely, none is as attractive on a late summer's evening as the plaza before the old church of St. Michael. Its Victorian façade is silhouetted by the last rays of sunset and the lights that have just now sprung to life around the war memorial that a later generation erected in front. Red umbrellas shelter the tables of the open-air café. The air now is warm and filled with the aroma of coffee. This place is something of a cross-roads. Major streets lead in from the north and south of town, and a Greyhound bus station is set where they loop around the plaza's edge.

By the time the characters arrive, however, this peaceful scene has been violently disturbed, and the chaos arising from whatever happened is only now beginning to die down. Three police cars from the LAPD are on the scene with their lights flashing but their sirens off. A cruiser from the LA County Sheriff's Department is parked away from the other police cars. A fire truck is on the scene as well, and a team of firemen is lazily pouring water on the smoldering wreckage of what used to be a car. An ambulance is on the scene, but its rear doors are closed, and its attendant paramedics are just hanging out by the bumper with nothing to do. A growing throng of people is milling about in a rough line, watching the firemen finish their work, pestering the policemen or just talking excitedly amongst

themselves. Several of the policemen are warning the interested onlookers to keep back, but no one has yet strung up any sort of barrier. Fortunately, none of the spectators appears to mind particularly keeping their distance.

The scene doesn't match the devastation that the Devil's Night Riots or the preceding earthquake wrought, but it is gruesome nonetheless. The plaza is a ruin of scattered tables, damaged outdoor chairs and other detritus that looks like it was dropped in a hurry. This trail of destruction ends abruptly at the base of the war memorial, where a mid-size sedan has crashed into the monument. All that remains of this car now, though, is a beetle-black shell that's been ravaged by fire. Scorch marks crawl up the face of the memorial, as does a web of cracks. Should the characters ask any of the bystanders what happened, they manage to garner the following eyewitness account:

Everything seemed perfectly normal until, suddenly, a squeal of brakes came from the north road. People who were in a position to see began to shout and scream as a greenish light washed over the plaza and a mid-size sedan hurtled into view, completely engulfed in flame. It looked like flames were streaming out of the windows and trailing along behind, but truth to tell, it was sort of a pale, sick phosphorescence, more like a chemical fire or "some kind of swamp-gas thing." What you could see clearly through the windshield, though, was the driver of the car — her eyes wide open and her face contorted in terror.

The car mounted the curb and skidded across the plaza proper, plowing through tables and chairs like it would through a picket fence. The café patrons were already screaming and running, so nobody got hurt. Finally, the car skewed away from the café and slammed into the war memorial with the greenish flame still dancing around it. But as the driver, a tall black lady, started to climb out of the car, it looked for a second like the fire was all on her instead of the car.

Anyway, she started screaming something and looking at the church, but it was already too late for her. She fell over the hood of the car, and the rest of it went up all of a sudden like the car was made of wood instead of metal or something. It finished burning very quickly, the flames turning back to a more natural color, and people started making calls to 911. An LA County sheriff's deputy arrived first, and the LAPD, the fire truck and the ambulance weren't far behind.

Once the speaker has finished giving this account, others around him begin to helpfully correct him. "No, the gas tank was already on fire when the car came through here," one person says. Another claims that it blew up after it hit the war memorial, but that the driver never got out — she must have been thrown through the windshield. Yet a third

claims that the fire was never green in the first place. The more people who chime in, the less like the original version the story becomes, until everyone in the immediate crowd seems to have rationalized what they saw into something much closer to normal. (As normal as a car careening through an outdoor café and exploding can be, anyway.)

The characters might also wish to take a closer look at the car or talk to some of the emergency personnel on the scene. A discrete character may be able to sidle up and overhear some of the radio and other conversation that is going on while the police and the firemen are busy. They will hear that reports of a burning car have been coming in from a range of several blocks, suggesting that the car was burning for at least 10 minutes before it reached the plaza. How the driver managed to pull this off under such obvious duress is a mystery to everyone.

Should any of the characters ask the paramedics what happened, they receive a shrug from one and a sneer from the other. The sneering one says, "KKK barbecue," but doesn't offer anything else. His partner looks aghast but has nothing helpful to say either. Should the characters try to talk to the firemen, they must wait until the team is through spraying water. When the spray stops, the characters can see a charred and melted body stuck across the scorched and warped hood of the burned-out car. (The body does not appear to have ended up in this position by traveling

through the windshield.) The firemen brusquely tell the characters to get back and stay out of the way. If pressed as to what happened, they say that the fire appears to have been caused by a ruptured fuel line under the hood. It didn't spread far, but it burned super-hot and extremely fast. In fact, it was mostly out by the time they got there.

The officers of the LAPD are the least helpful of the bunch. They pull characters away from the firemen, snapping at them to keep back and stay out of the way. Should the characters have gone to the policemen first to ask what happened, the officers snap at them that it isn't their concern. They shove the characters back, threatening them to stay out of police business. They refuse to answer any questions. Some of them are already taking statements from people who actually witnessed the event, and they're rolling their eyes as various witnesses' stories overlap and conflict with one another. As soon as the firemen are finished with the wreckage, a small team of forensic investigators begins circling the car snapping pictures, taking notes and generally poking around the scene.

DEPUTY BLACK

Once the characters have been rebuffed by the cops — or if they're just standing around looking like they have no idea what to do now — the LA County sheriff's deputy who first arrived on the scene



comes strolling up to them. He's a decent-looking white guy who tops six feet and 200 pounds, but he's scowling as he glances over at the war memorial. This person has been seen in the company of Baroness Kishar of the Infernal Court many times since the baroness's arrival in Los Angeles, so he is easily recognizable as the fallen named Ashur. The tag on his uniform reads "Black."

If the characters are members of the Infernal Court, Ashur greets them as if he recognizes them. He might or might not call them by name, depending on their Eminence or how much of an impression they've made in LA already, but he treats them as respected peers. If the characters are particularly notorious members of the Blood Court, he approaches them grudgingly but inexorably. If they are low-key members of the Blood Court or agents of Lady Al-Lat, he approaches them warily but with no evident malice. Since he is a member of no court himself, Ashur should seem relatively at ease approaching the characters on an equal fallen-to-fallen level.

Once introductions have gone around (however freely or grudgingly), Ashur implies to the characters that he knows what they are (if not specifically who) and that he assumes that they are here for the same basic reason he is. He felt the surge of demonic power moments before a call came over his radio. Fortunately, one witness managed to get the car's license plate, and a quick subsequent check has revealed that the driver of the car was one Mary Blacksmith. He's fairly certain that Mary was no fallen herself, nor was she a known or suspected thrall or vassal to any Earthbound. She was definitely a victim of one or the other, though, because, although he didn't see what happened, he knows that this was no accident.

Ashur then tells the characters that he invoked Kishar and asked her to have someone come out and help him take a look into this situation. He hopes to be able to figure out what's going on before too many more fallen get involved or before word of what's happened gets around and ignites a panic in the fallen community. If he knows that the characters are Infernal Court members, Ashur asks them if Baroness Kishar sent them. If he knows that they are not Infernal Court members, or if they are and they tell him that it was Guanli who asked them to check this situation out, he sighs somewhat resignedly and asks them to help him out nonetheless.

He's going to be stuck at the scene for a while, he says, but he would appreciate it if the characters could check out Mary Blacksmith's house for signs of whether or not she left any evidence there of being involved with a demon. Based on the eyewitness reports he first received of where the burning

car was coming from and the information that came up when he ran her license plate, it seems likely that Ms. Blacksmith's doomed trip started there. If the characters agree to do so for him, Ashur gives them Mary's address (and directions thereto) and tells them that he'll be in touch as soon as he finishes up at the scene. He tells them his Celestial Name if they don't already know it, then asks for theirs if they'll give him permission to contact them via invocation. If they refuse, he'll settle for a cell-phone number instead.

SCENE TWO

Between scenes, the characters can take the opportunity to discuss amongst themselves what they've seen and what little they know thus far (especially if they spread out and checked out the crash site independently). They can also use this opportunity to report back to those fallen who might have set them to work in the first place. Guanli replies to members of the Infernal Court immediately and asks for any information they have gathered. He thanks them for getting involved so quickly and asks them to keep at it. He tells them that he'll inform Lord Vohu Mano (i.e., the head of the Mortal Ministry for the Infernal Court) and Lord Aglibol of what's happening but let the two know that the characters are working on the case right now. If the characters are contacting Guanli as agents of Al-Lat, he takes some time to respond to them but thanks them nonetheless. He also encourages them to keep investigating. Lady Ravana informs members of the Blood Court who contact her that they should keep investigating and that she'll pass on the information to Lord Vritran eventually.

If the characters want to conduct their investigation on the sly, so as not to give Mary's neighbors or any police who might happen to show up any reason to suspect that they were involved in Mary's affairs, have the players roll Dexterity + Stealth. If any of them fail this roll — or if the characters make no effort to be sneaky — make a note that one or more of Mary's neighbors happen to remember seeing them around Mary's place the same night they found out about the accident. Should any of the characters' players botch this roll, make a note that one of the neighbors notices that character (or possibly all of them) skulking around Mary's place and looking generally disreputable, so she called the police to report it. (This note should come into play only if the characters spend too much time dawdling around the apartment complex or if they harass the neighbors, though.)

SEARCHING MARY'S HOUSE

When the characters arrive at Mary Blacksmith's address, they don't find any police or fire personnel there just yet. The place is an apartment complex in a so-so neighborhood, which has not yet had the time to run down. It appears relatively undamaged by the recent earthquake, and if any damage was done by Devil's Night rioters, it has long since been cleaned up. Mary's apartment is on the second floor, and the parking space out front with her apartment's number on it is empty. A Perception + Investigation roll, however, will reveal two very pronounced tire marks leading out of the space and away toward the street, indicating that Mary's car either peeled out of here in a hurry or its tires were already heating up dangerously as she left. None of her neighbors are standing around gawking or obviously waiting for the police, though, so her departure must not have caused too much of a spectacle.

Lending further credence to the idea that Mary took off quickly is the fact that her apartment door is unlocked. Otherwise, though, there is little useful information to be found. She apparently lived alone, and by the looks of the place, she didn't spend much time here. There are no obvious signs of a struggle or any indication that anything was burning when Mary left. Another Perception + Investigation roll reveals that no such signs appear to have been hidden or disguised either. Even a Perception + Awareness roll reveals nothing of especial import except for a general emotional resonance of distinct unease.

Mary kept a lot of memorabilia here, especially drawings and trinkets made by children, and a lot of books related to adolescent psychology. She has a personal computer on a cluttered work desk, but it's room temperature and coated in a fine layer of dust from lack of use. Rooting around through her system reveals only some accounting software, a word processor, several games and a dial-up Internet connection. The only thing of particular note on the computer is that, according to her accounting software, she was drawing a paycheck from a place called the Marshall School for Troubled Teens. Random notepads or unused letterhead among the clutter on her desk reveals the same, as well as the school's address.

In her bedroom hangs a beautiful calligraphic rendering of the Ave Maria, together with a small crucifix. The bed is unmade, and a set of discarded nightclothes lies next to it. An open romance novel lies on top of that. The rest of the room looks relatively normal, as does the bathroom and her half-kitchen. Whatever happened to Mary obviously didn't start in her apartment.

The characters' players must succeed on a Dexterity + Stealth roll (difficulty 8) to avoid leaving any forensic evidence of their characters' presence in Mary's apartment. Make a note of any failed or botched rolls for future reference.

TALKING TO MARY'S NEIGHBORS

Talking to Mary's neighbors isn't especially helpful. If the characters want to go knocking on doors and asking for information, tailor the neighbors' responses based on how civil the characters are. The most any neighbor can tell them (if they are either polite and charming or they are able to play themselves off as police investigators) is that Mary was a nice neighbor who never gave anyone any trouble. She was usually congenial, if somewhat withdrawn, but lately, she looked like she hadn't been getting much sleep. None of them were aware that she'd left recently, but some of them did hear a car leaving at roughly the time at which Mary presumably left. (It wasn't tearing out of there, though.) A helpful neighbor can also provide the information that Mary worked at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens if the characters haven't discovered as much inside Mary's apartment.

SCENE THREE

The characters do not hear from Ashur until late the next morning. In the meantime, news of the previous evening's fatal (nearly disastrously so) accident has already made it into the local papers and local news broadcasts. It names the victim as well as her place of employment. The police theory, it seems, is that Mary Blacksmith was driving drunk and lost control of her car, which subsequently exploded. An unnamed witness's story corroborates this theory. A closed-casket funeral service is planned to be held in one week, provided it doesn't need to be postponed as a result of an inconclusive tox-screen.

Once the characters have had a chance to digest this information, Ashur either calls them via cell phone or invokes them directly, depending on how their previous encounter ended. He tells them that he's eager to hear about anything they might have learned in their investigation last night, but he's discovered something on his own that he thinks they might be interested in if they feel like continuing to help him look into this matter for their higher-ups. He asks them to meet him as soon as they can down in the morgue of the Martin Luther King, Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center so they can see it for themselves.

(Should the characters ignore this request, they might plan instead to check out Mary Blacksmith's place of employment. If they so choose, go ahead and skip to Scene Four.)

THE MORGUE

The medical center's morgue is not a pleasant place to be. Its lights seem just a little bit dimmer than the lights in the rest of the hospital. People are few and far between, and those few the characters do see are somber souls with pale, drawn skin. They don't make eye contact or even stop to ask what the characters are doing down here, even though it is probably obvious that the characters are not hospital staff. The characters pass several locked doors and find Ashur still in uniform waiting outside a door marked "Autopsy Room One."

He greets them once more and warns them to hang onto their breakfast as he leads them into the autopsy room. Inside, the body of Mary Blacksmith lies naked and burned to a crisp on the examination table under a bright fluorescent light. A wheeled tray of instruments stands next to the table on the far side, and two women flank it, looking at the characters. Ashur introduces them as Doctors Katherine Roggenkamp and Ronni Parks and explains that he asked them to take a look at the body for him. After another quick glance in their direction and a nod from them, he adds that their Celestial Names are Lo-ruhamah and Bizjotta respectively. Bizjotta nods respectfully, while Lo-ruhamah appears to be having trouble not poking the burned flesh on the table before her.

Ashur introduces the characters by the names he knows them by, then asks Lo-ruhamah to tell them what she's learned. She explains with a strangely misplaced glee that this body came into her morgue late last night when she was on her way out and that the strangeness of it inspired her to begin her examination right away. By the end of the night, she had to call in her colleague Dr. Parks from another hospital for a second opinion. Working together, they made several key discoveries. As Lo-ruhamah points these discoveries out, her finger idly brushes the dead woman's skin and lingers there in contact.

First, the body shows no signs of trauma associated with the impact of the car accident, which belies the police's theory that she was thrown through the windshield of her car. Second, there is no identifiable trace in what's left of her system of any drug that would have impaired her driving ability. Third, their tests seem to indicate that her skin and internal organs boiled and burned from the inside out, rather than the other way around. Coupling those facts with

the sensation of great infernal power that they all felt, they are sure that this woman was the victim of a demonic assault.

What's more, Bizjotta adds when Lo-ruhamah winds down, they believe that they have an idea of which demon might be to blame. After all, when a demon does something so significant, with so tangible a result, he marks his victim in a subtly identifiable way. The perpetrator here has done so, and the results are disturbing. Although they cannot be sure, the two doctors believe that the damage was done by one of the two Earthbound who are presumed to be active in the city. The doctors refer to these Earthbound as "the Lord of Murder" and "the other one," lest even their casual reference invoke one of those two horrors' notice. They can't tell which Earthbound might be responsible, but they're relatively certain that it was one of them.

In the pause that follows, Ashur asks the characters what (if anything) they discovered at Mary Blacksmith's place. Give them the opportunity to tell him that it didn't seem as if Mary left her apartment in any sort of trouble, nor did it especially resonate with a sense of Earthbound taint (provided one of the players succeeded on her Awareness roll). The only thing they likely found of interest was the fact that she worked at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens right up until the day she died. (If the characters didn't find this out, Ashur himself or one of the doctors can mention having caught it in the paper or on the news earlier that morning.)

At this point, have Ashur say that he has already contacted Kishar, who has relayed the message to her court's head of the Ministry of Aurochs, Lord Aglibol. As it is the job of Aglibol's ministry to check out potential threats to the court, Aglibol seemed the reasonable person to inform. Aglibol, however, seems to think that the responsibility lies with the Minister of Dust, Vohu Mano, and he won't move on it. Vohu Mano, for his part is still trying to get up to speed on the whole situation. Fell Knight Guanli (the Minister of Lions, whose job it is to act against threats to the court) seems willing to make a move, but Aglibol won't allow it since he believes that Guanli's ministry should only act with his (Aglibol's) ministry's approval.

According to Kishar, Ashur says, the Infernal Court is more or less deadlocked against itself, and even the suggestions of the court's objective Minister of the Dragon, Spantu Mainyu, are having no effect. Therefore, the characters have an opportunity to seize the initiative while the court spins its wheels (which has its appeal to supporters of either court, as well as to agents of Al-Lat). In order to do so, it would be best for the



characters to check out Mary Blacksmith's place of employment and sniff around for signs of Earthbound interference there.

Meanwhile, Ashur will take what time he can outside his regular duties as an LA County sheriff's deputy and look into Mary Blacksmith's background and family life to see if he can spot any signs of infernal dealings there. At the same time, the two doctors will devote what time they can to trying to figure out definitively which of the two Earthbound is responsible for Mary's death.

SCENE FOUR

Forewarned is forearmed in this situation, so it behooves the characters to try to find out as much as they can about the Marshall School where Mary worked before actually showing up and asking questions. The easiest sources of information to check include the Internet and the newspaper and magazine archives at the library.

RESEARCH

The following text may be found on the new Marshall School website or in a pamphlet about the school, which one can obtain from either the school or LA's temporary City Hall.

Welcome to the Marshall School for Troubled Teens. That's the old-fashioned name for a thoroughly modern facility that helps and

protects both young people and our community 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. We keep the name because we take pride in our long history of caring for young people at risk and in our beautiful historic buildings.

The Marshall School was originally the premises of the Aloysius Marshall Factory. The Marshall Factory's brickworks and tile kilns left their mark on many of the fine buildings of this area. The site was refurbished and first used as a home for orphans and destitutes in 1930 as part of the charitable bequest of Miss Victoria Marshall to the city. In 1995, the state ceded operation of the site to the Dodeca Corporation. We are now a privately run juvenile justice center with full accreditation from the national authority.

This center provides accommodations and facilities for learning and recreation in a secure environment. Young people are housed in sex-specific, four-person rooms, to permit for both security and privacy. Our main facilities are in the old factory building, but specialized training units are placed around our park-like internal grounds. Staff supervision combined with proactive design and centralized communications has given us an excellent record both in preventing internal incidents and unauthorized access to the community at large.

Our staff is a highly trained professional body, including fully qualified counselors and medical personnel who are on the grounds at all times. We have comprehensive educational programming run by experienced teachers and trainers. Our programs are designed both to address the offenses these young people have committed and to provide the maximum options for their successful reintegration into the community at the completion of their sentences. Thanks to our private benefactors, we have recently been able to institute an animal care program, such as has been successfully developed in other states. It has been inspiring to see the interest, motivation and capacity to care our first trial group has demonstrated when given responsibility for the well-being of a small, helpless creature.

There are many reasons that young people come to us, but all have lost their way in this complex modern world. The pressures placed on youth by natural disaster, high unemployment, broken homes, abuse of drugs and alcohol and the tensions generated by ethnicity and gender are greater now than ever before. Every member of our staff considers it a personal duty to rise to the challenge of helping these troubled teens. And I myself am proud to have this opportunity to assist our community in this most important of ways.

—Headmaster Henry David Vandermeer, Lt. Colonel, United States Army (retired)

Most of the following additional facts can be found elsewhere on the Internet, in specialist publications or in the archives of the local newspaper, as appropriate.

- Henry David Vandermeer, age 63, is a recently retired lieutenant colonel of the United States Army. He was originally from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, born to a wealthy family of small-goods manufacturers. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from Harvard (specializing in Military History) before being accepted to West Point at the late age of 22. His career in the military thereafter was distinguished, including service in the Gulf War. After retiring, he became active in the cause of underprivileged youth and spoke publicly on the topic. He was also an investor in the Dodeca Corporation, which funded social programs for underprivileged youth. His activism culminated in his moving to Los Angeles and accepting the position of headmaster at the Marshall School. He lives at the school in the quarters traditionally provided for the headmaster.

- The last headmaster, Dr. Peter Murgatroyd, died suddenly of heart failure about a year ago. He was 53 and had held the position for eight years.

- The Marshall family itself is extinct. Aloysius Marshall, a respected businessman who originally had the factory compound that is not the site of the school built, died of a heart attack at the age of 65. His

daughter, Victoria, was his sole heir and greatly given to charitable works. She died of pneumonia at the age of 82. They are buried side-by-side in a local cemetery, and both seem to have been utterly unremarkable in their beliefs and habits.

- The Dodeca Corporation — a company whose logo is a cute, blue dodecahedron — is a firm principally made up of human-resource specialists with interests in juvenile-detention centers and facilities for the disabled all across the country. The company does not appear to be in financial trouble, nor is anyone suing it for anything notable at the moment. The Dodeca Corporation has long been a financial supporter of social programs for underprivileged youths, and it has generously donated funds to local relief efforts in the wake of the earthquake and the Devil's Night Riots.

- That fact that some residents of the school can earn day leave is listed on the school's website. Older students who are well behaved and demonstrate remarkable improvement in their classwork can attend classes at the local college, and some shops and factories provide work experience for students with good records who are also nearing the end of their stays at the school. What is not generally known but which can be determined from the roster of "day leave" students on the site is that, in the past year, the number of such arrangements has been declining.

- Complaints about the Marshall School (including escapes or other disturbances originating from within) as reported in local newspapers or the minutes of City Council meetings are pretty much nonexistent for the past 10 years. Before that, trouble sprang up intermittently. As an example of such trouble, an old feature story on the smuggling of drugs into the school and a report on two kids breaking out and showing up the next day at the public school they attended before being sent to the Marshall School. Each such incident inspired a flurry of letters from local citizens about the desirability of having such a sink of youthful depravity in their midst. This pattern continues back to the 1930s. The same sources may also reveal that it was about 10 years ago that the school underwent a major refurbishing project, concurrent with a state-wide rethinking of juvenile-detention policy.

- A complete list of the current staff and their addresses is kept on record at both Dodeca (which manages the school's human resources as well as helping to support it financially) and the Marshall School itself, but neither will just give it out. A little creative digging with a computer (i.e., hacking) will reveal this information upon a successful Wits + Computer roll (difficulty 7).

A successful hacker can obtain a complete list of staff members, along with names, home addresses and vital statistics of all residents. She may also find some intriguing specifications regarding the Marshall School's security system (most of which has only been installed since Vandermeer took over). This security system is a completely separate internal network with a redundant power supply. It can only be influenced by someone gaining access to the school's control room.

A password will give automatic access to the school's network. Obtaining a password to the security system reduces the difficulty of a hacker's roll to 6 and, of course, permits direct access to the control room. This password is known only to Vandermeer, Edward Harvey and Holden Brown, though.

PERMANENT MARSHALL SCHOOL STAFF

Headmaster: Henry David Vandermeer

Chief of Staff: Melanie Magee

Chief of Security: Holden Brown

Security Staff: A rotating roster of 24 men (8 on duty at any time)

Administrator: Edward Harvey

Secretarial Staff: Alice Monroe, Evonne Yindel

Head Counselor: Mary Blacksmith

Counseling Staff: Carlos Juarez, Candice O'Dell, John Quick, Kelly Reynolds, Maria Ruiz, Christine Sdoia, Marcia Tucker, Renee Van Duzer

Doctor in Residence: Dr. Nikki Wu, MD

Nursing Staff: Harriet Carter, Marian Davis, Marty Stapleton, Lois Winger

Librarian: Rutgar Kralfsky

Teaching Staff: Rudy Appleton (Current Affairs/Geography), Barry Fink (Art/Personal Development), Matthew Magee (English/History), Martin Hinchcliffe (Health/Physical Education), Yolanda Rüss (Computer Studies/Science), Joanne Pinkerton (Computer Studies/Mathematics)

- The fact that the entire security staff was replaced by Headmaster Vandermeer upon his taking the job of headmaster at the school can be discovered by more of the same hacking through Dodeca's computer records. (As it is handling the school's human resource management, it is also handling the former employees' severance.) Most of those staffers whom Vandermeer let go when the previous headmaster died were locals, and there is likely still some resentment. Contacting a prior employee should not be difficult. Some have been taken on by local security firms or have taken other jobs that Dodeca helped them find. One who is especially willing to talk should the characters feel like tracking any of them down is Amanda Halstadt.

Amanda is a large, blonde woman who works out in a local gym and is more than happy to tell her story over a banana and lecithin power smoothie. Vandermeer's reorganization started out as a "rationalization" of staff, but over about six months, he'd fired and replaced everybody. The last few, including herself, were accused of making racist comments and asked to offer their voluntary resignations in return for receiving full entitlements upon separation. The accusations were a load of tripe, she claims, but she found that the burden of proof was on her, and none of her dwindling list of familiar colleagues stood up for her in the vain hope that they might keep their jobs. She managed to hang in there until the last of the replacements was hired, but none of them even tried to get along with her, so she eventually gave up the fight.

RESIDENT LIFE

The following information can be gleaned from literature the school has published, the Internet and community-interest articles in the newspaper. The school does not accept pregnant residents or those who are HIV positive. It is currently functioning at full capacity of 72 residents; 60 male, 12 female. Their ages range from 12 to 18 years old. They are here for crimes ranging from various drug-related charges to robbery with assault to murder, with sentences ranging between six months and "until she shall attain legal age." These are the children for whom community service and home counseling were not an option.

Prohibited substances include alcohol, tobacco and all non-prescription drugs (although tobacco is tolerated in practice if the offender makes a respectable effort to smoke, dip or chew tobacco out of sight of the other students). Prohibited items include pornography, military magazines and any kind of weapon or incendiary. Communication between residents and the outside world is supervised to make sure that it remains appropriate. Residents have the right to make and receive phone calls and receive visits from approved contacts unless they are in detention for some reason.

If a member of staff or security discovers inappropriate communication, say, between a resident and a character, they will interrupt and ask that the culprit kindly leave off, and no further access to the school will be granted for a while. Attempting to smuggle prohibited substances or items into the school is also criminally actionable, although this law has only really been applied to drugs in the past.

RECONNAISSANCE

As interesting as all this research may or may not be, though, the characters are going to have to get a closer

DAILY TIMETABLE

- 7:00 AM:** Dormitory doors opened
8:00 AM: Morning assembly, doors onto the grounds opened
 Each assembly involves a full roll call of all residents not known to be in the medical center or otherwise legitimately absent from the assembly.
8:15 AM: Breakfast
9:00 AM: Morning program
12:00 PM: Midday assembly
12:15 PM: Lunch
1:30 PM: Afternoon program
4:30 PM: Free time
7:00 PM: Evening assembly, doors onto the grounds locked
7:15 PM: Dinner
8:00 PM: Free time
10:00 PM: Bed check, dormitory doors locked

This schedule is a seven-day affair, although, on weekends, the program tends more toward recreation and optional religious observances (which include televised church services and nothing else). Resident programs are individually tailored to what the counselor assesses as the child's needs upon entry. After breakfast, a typical resident might go to a remedial English class with Mr. Magee, followed by a discussion group on handling anger run by Counselor Blacksmith. After lunch comes the "Quit For Life" meeting, then a reading group overseen by a volunteer worker, followed by evening assembly and so on.

look at the school sooner or later if they actually want to get inside and find out what's really going on.

The school occupies a single, large block of privately owned land in the northwest corner of a run-down industrial park. Its nearest neighbors are an electrical substation, a national chain self-storage facility and the concrete noise-breakers screening the freeway. The nearest evident civilian housing ranges from middle-class suburban neighborhoods to low-rent apartment buildings. This area is all but undamaged by the earthquake and the subsequent riots.

The first glimpse the visiting characters get of the premises is the red roof of the main block running above the front wall. The wall, six feet of old, dark, weather-beaten brick, is an intimidating sight. When the characters get to the front gate, they should be able to see the full façade of the school through a grid of Victorian ironwork. A driveway runs up to and through this gate, and a

security booth stands just before that with a single guard manning the gate controls.

The school itself is actually quite a beautiful building. Honey-colored brick runs between neoclassical sandstone carvings around the doors and windows. Between the wall and the main building is a graveled yard. The main door can be reached by steps, and on the sandstone lintel is carved the legend **THE MARSHALL SCHOOL FOR TROUBLED TEENS**.

Approached from other angles, the school looks much more modern, although it is still obviously an institution. Where it has been indicated on the map, the brick fencing gives way to eight-foot-high security mesh running between equally spaced metal supports. The top two feet of these fences are bent inward to make it harder to climb over from the inside, and they are edged with razor wire to make it hardly worth one's while to try. Much of the interior is screened by trees and shrubs that have been planted a good 30 feet inside, but at certain points, one can catch glimpses of a grass lawn cut by concrete paths, a sports oval and various buildings that might be workshops and classrooms. A large brick chimney tapers up from a far corner. The chimney is clearly inactive and of the same vintage as the main block.

For more information on the grounds and building layout of the Marshall School, refer to "The Grounds and Layout," which has been appended to the end of this story.

GETTING IN

Getting an initial look inside the school is actually quite easy. Tours will happily be given to reporters, a sociology lecturer and her students or even a group of architects interested in the facility's design. Tours will be run by the administrator, Edward Harvey. Characters who claim to be city officials in some capacity — such as health inspectors or local government bigwigs — will actually have more problems (aside from coming up with the requisite documentation to support that charade if they are not actually who they claim to be). All inspectors and other official visitors must schedule their visits well in advance and are expected to produce ID.

If one of the players' characters comes up with the idea of applying for Mary Blacksmith's position and can put together a good backstory, this avenue of approach will earn her a brief tour, as well as an interview conducted by Henry Vandermeer himself. (It must be said that he has no intention of hiring anyone except his own candidate, but he will conduct interviews for the sake of keeping up appearances.)

Inspirational speakers and other community-minded people who want to work with the children

generally have to go through a vetting process and be accredited with an appropriate organization. However, if the players' characters come up with a really good idea, have them accepted and scheduled to appear immediately. Just remember, though, that this is a tough audience!

Pretending to be a relative or lawyer who's come to visit one of the residents requires the character(s) to have made contact with a resident who is willing to play along. As the character's name is not on the approved contact's list, it will also require some good bluffing or a forged letter. Information about the residents and their families is strictly confidential and held by the school and the courts in the utmost security, but it can be obtained illegally with a Wits + Computer roll (difficulty 9). Visits are restricted to the interview rooms.

If a character should have the body of a child, you probably ought to discourage any attempts to have her intentionally committed to the school as a troubled teen. The storytelling reason you do not want this to happen is that it would split the group, giving practically all the action to one character who would thus be in extreme danger. Fortunately, practicality is on your side as well. Point out that the period that would need to elapse from the child character's arrest to juvenile-court trial would be a couple of weeks *at best*, and even then, there's no guarantee the penalty of detention would be imposed. As an alternative — because it would be a shame to have a demon character who looks like a child and not be able to use that fact in your characters' favor — tours of the school may be arranged by families whose children have committed previous offences, as a way to hopefully scare the child straight.

EASY BEING GREEN

All cleaning and grounds maintenance is performed by subcontractors hired by Dodeca. They bring their own equipment, and they rotate their duties in taking care of the school grounds amongst their employees.

Finding out about Easy Being Green is a simple matter of asking the subcontractors as they arrive or leave or observing the logo on the trucks that pull up in the front yard on a daily basis and checking and looking the company up on the web or in the phone book. Tracking down talkative employees in bars and even picking up a day working on the lawns or cleaning toilets is quite feasible — if somewhat unpleasant. Employment with Easy Being Green won't include a tour of the school, but it will provide the characters a chance to get a good idea of the school's layout and security arrangements.

SUPPLEMENTING THESE EFFORTS

These guidelines for finding out about the school and getting in are the baseline efforts that regular human beings might employ. Your characters, however, are likely not exactly regular human beings. Clever fallen angels can probably think of ways to use their evocations to shortcut a great deal of this work and skip around in the story. Should they manage to do so, feel free to skip around in this chapter yourself and pick out the information that the characters have discovered.

SCENE FIVE

The characters have gathered information and may have made initial forays into the school. Now, they have arranged to enter the facility as a group or decided to just break in.

Should they have arranged for a tour, they are buzzed in through the front gate by the security guard and met in the front lobby by Edward Harvey. Harvey is a doughy, middle-aged man with thinning hair and thick-rimmed glasses. He seems somewhat reserved and even withdrawn around strangers, but he seems neither nervous nor afraid like he would if he were painfully shy (or hiding something). He ushers his guests into his office and tells them a little bit about the school and the service it provides. If your characters didn't perform especially in-depth research into the school (or if they came straight here from the medical center to perform a straightforward investigation), he can be used to reveal much of the pertinent information from the "Research" section of the last scene.

If, on the other hand, the characters have decided just to sneak right onto the school grounds to see if they can figure out what's going on, refer to the map of the grounds on p. 46 and have them describe what method they use to get in. The least you need to have them do is climb the outer fence at some point, requiring a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 7), and have their players make regular Dexterity/Wits + Stealth rolls (difficulty 8) for the characters to avoid the notice of the school's guards. Should the characters attract undue notice, allow their players some sort of Manipulation- or Charisma-based roll for their characters to talk their way out of trouble before the guards take action. The guards' typical response to intruders is to subdue them, bring them inside to the office of Holden Brown (the head of security), call the LAPD and keep them there until the police get there in response to the disturbance.

Regardless of their method of ingress, the characters are going to encounter something unscheduled once they get inside. If they are being briefed or shown around by Edward Harvey, his beeper goes off,

summoning him to Headmaster Vandermeer's office. He asks the characters to wait where they are and goes to answer it. Shortly afterward, the characters begin to hear the sound of a large group of people, who sound like they're cheering at intervals, coming from the back of the building. If the characters are working or creeping around in the main block without supervision, they also hear this noise.

If the characters are on the grounds, it is immediately obvious that something is up. In the lawn area of the inner perimeter, about 50 teenagers are sitting or milling around. If this scene occurs at night, they are bathed in floodlights. The focus of attention is a young, Hispanic man who is standing on the back steps, his face alight with passion. (This character is José Matinalé, although this information isn't readily available to the players' characters just yet.) "We don't want trouble," this young man is saying. "We just want answers. We just want Colonel Vandermeer to come out and listen to us! And we're not going into assembly" — or bed check, if this happening at night — "until he does!"

"Where's Micky Pico!" someone in the mass of residents yells.

"Yeah!" someone else adds. "Mick-y, Mick-y, Mick-y!" The chant is taken up but not by everybody. Observant characters can see that at the back of the crowd, groups of onlookers are just standing around

looking back and forth between each other expectantly. Besides these folks, men and women who are dressed identically in uniforms of khaki slacks, blue blazers and white turtle-neck shirts are starting to gather as well. These people seem to be members of the security staff, and they can be seen nervously speaking into walkie-talkies to coordinate themselves in case trouble breaks out. Various members of the teaching staff can be seen peering through the windows of the classrooms and of the main block.

If the characters are in the main block, they will see Henry Vandermeer, Edward Harvey and two uniformed guards striding through the corridors on their way to the back door. Harvey's expression is one just shy of fawning adoration, and his body language is one of utmost servility toward Vandermeer. Vandermeer himself is a fit-looking man of military bearing with bronzed skin and thick, spiky white hair. His eyes are pale gray, and his scrutiny is unnerving. His tone is clipped and gruff, and his voice carries without his needing to shout. He is dressed in a neat suit and tie, and his tie tack is the crest of the Marshall School.

(Something just doesn't seem quite right about Vandermeer, so should one of the players decide to roll Perception + Awareness to get a sense of what that might be, a successful result reveals a taint of demonic influence. That sense is faint, but it is clearly there nonetheless.)



FRED

SNEAKING AROUND

The Marshall School is a juvenile-detention center, designed to keep people in and out. It is fully mapped, but only the important locations are described in detail. The rest can be assumed to be typical institutional facilities.

The school's general security features are as follows:

- Bolted-down furniture and solid doors are the rule in any area to which the residents have regular access. Refer to the Systems chapter of **Demon: The Fallen** for rules on bashing down a door or picking a lock.
- Padlocks and ordinary locks are used in various places throughout the school, as is appropriate to the type of door involved. A padlock is difficulty 6 to pick and requires two "health levels" of damage to break open. An ordinary door-lock is difficulty 4 with one "health level."
- Electronic locks are placed between residents and access to staff/public areas. They can be opened by a staff swipe card from either side. All can be overridden from the control room, but the majority of the staff has not been told this. Security personnel carry special swipe cards that will allow them to open doors even when the school is in a state of lockdown. Picking an electronic lock requires a Dexterity + Security roll (difficulty 6) as well as access to the right equipment. Simply jury-rigging the thing to get it open requires a Dexterity + Technology roll (difficulty 8) instead.

If the characters accost this group or draw attention to themselves, Vandermeer pauses, stares at them intently for a moment and asks who they are and what they're doing here. If their responses sound halfway plausible enough to satisfy him (which they are likely to in most cases since he's in more of a hurry to deal with the problem outside), he says, "Come along then. Come and see what life in this place is really like."

Shortly thereafter, Vandermeer appears at the back door facing the growing crowd of students, causing the level of noise to drop abruptly. José jumps down from his oratory vantage and turns to face him at the head of the residents. "We want to know what's going on with Micky Pico!"

"Is that what this is about, Mister Matinalé?" Vandermeer answers. "It's very simple, and I'm disappointed that you even have to ask. Mister Pico flouted the rules in a very serious way. He picked a fight with Mister Harris and several of Mister Harris's friends. He caused a disturbance, and unfortunately, he wound up getting himself hurt. He's under Doctor Wu's care for

- The windows in this place are small rectangles of shatterproof glass that let little daylight in. They have two "health levels" and a "Stamina" rating of 2 if the character is trying to knock it entirely out of its frame.

- Motion detectors are placed in sensitive areas and are generally activated only after Evening Assembly. Moving objects bigger than a rat trigger an alarm in the control room — though not a school-wide alarm, such as a fire would engender.

- Security cameras are used both overtly and covertly. Some activate only when triggered by motion-detectors. The cameras in the school switch automatically from normal visuals to low-light as appropriate and feed back to the control room. Disabling a motion detector or security camera requires a character to get right underneath it into its blind spot and then for her player to succeed on a Dexterity + Security roll. One good blow with a blunt object or a well-placed bullet will also disable the device, but unless it is properly disengaged from the system, an alarm will sound in the control room.

- The school's fire precautions include the following standard equipment: a sprinkler system in corridors, toilets and general areas, plus smoke alarms and fire stairs. Fire extinguishers are kept at all staffed positions and in the assembly hall and dining hall. The doors to the fire stairs are steel with electronic locks (which open automatically when the fire alarms go off) and five "health levels."

the time being, and he'll be held in detention once he's recovered, for breaking the rules."

Someone else hollers from out of the crowd that this Micky Pico didn't start any fight. Someone else adds that Maxwell Harris (another of the students in the crowd) and his goons had been picking on Micky for months and egging him on. Harris himself responds to that, protesting his innocence disingenuously from the middle of a knot of fellow student thugs, which elicits a rumble of discontent from the crowd. Vandermeer thunders over the growing noise that it doesn't matter who was being picked on by whom. It was Micky who threw the first punch, so, by the new school disciplinary policy, it is Micky who will be punished. José points out (trying to remain calm) that Micky was actually pretty badly hurt by Harris and his thugs — which the crowd backs up with mounting passion — but Vandermeer doesn't appear to be moved by this. Harris calls out that Micky's getting hurt is Micky's own fault, and that tears it.

Angry shouting starts. From somewhere within the middle of the crowd, a rock is thrown in Harris's direction, hitting one of Harris's nearby pals in the mouth. This is the guards' cue to start pushing in from the sides, which they do roughly, hoping to quell this uproar before it becomes something more like a riot. They are using no weapons of any kind; they are simply using their superior size and strength to push apart those in easy reach. Their push is met by shove, and all through the crowd, small fights are breaking out between Harris's friends and the rest of the students. More rocks are thrown, and some even crash against the side of the main block near Vandermeer. José turns away from Vandermeer, ducking a rock, and starts yelling for people to stop it.

As the violence spreads, it seems that the boys around Harris are in the thick of it. José makes eye contact with one of them (actually Harris himself) as another rock narrowly misses him and starts to wade forward muttering some choice Spanish profanities. Before he can get close, though, a young woman (one named Alicia Rhowes, for future reference) appears at his shoulder and hangs onto his arm grimly. She looks directly at the players' characters, then speaks into José's ear. He nods in evident frustration but remains where he is, once again calling for people to stop.

If the characters try to intervene physically in the riot, they are preempted by any remaining security guards who have not already entered the fray. If the characters came out with the headmaster's group, Harvey tries to hustle them back inside. If they try to distract the rioters somehow in order to help out, have the player of each character so inclined roll Charisma or Manipulation + Expression, Leadership or some other appropriate Ability (difficulty 8). They need a total of six successes to defuse the situation entirely on their own. The characters could also attempt to physically assist the security guards, which requires a Strength + Brawl roll (difficulty 5) to separate and subdue children who are fighting each other. These rolls should inflict no damage if they succeed, but the characters themselves should have to soak one or two levels of bashing damage if they botch.

Regardless, Vandermeer watches stonily as his guards cut the crowd into discrete groups, pretty much by their presence alone. Most of the actual fighting is taking place between residents who don't seem to be strong enough to really hurt one another. There are some bloody noses and swollen lips among the residents but nothing more serious. After just a few minutes, things begin to calm one way or another. Once all the fighting has stopped, Vandermeer calls out for order and gets it.

He lectures the crowd and calls out for José to accompany him back to his office since José is ostensibly responsible for this mess. He also calls out the child who threw the first rock and another who threw a rock that hit the wall close to where Vandermeer was standing. This elicits some grumbling from the crowd, but one stern look from Vandermeer silences it. Maxwell Harris looks decidedly pleased with himself. Vandermeer directs the rest to get back to assembly (or bed check) and not to cause anymore trouble, lest they all find themselves "confined to quarters" for the rest of the week.

The security guards say nothing, and when the Colonel heads back inside, most of them either follow or return to their assigned posts. Edward Harvey seems to notice the characters as if for the first time (provided they were speaking to him earlier), and he asks them to come with him back to the visitors lounge. He comments on how well Vandermeer is doing, what a difficult job this is and so forth.

The remaining security guards begin to herd the children back inside as well, but Alicia Rhowes breaks away from the crowd briefly and looks pointedly toward the players' characters just as she did when she held José back earlier. She discreetly drops a piece of paper when only the characters are watching, then hurries off to join her fellow students. Characters who have sneaked into the school have an opportunity to retrieve this once the grounds are cleared; characters who are there on "official" business or simply investigating without false pretenses can scoop it up before being hustled back inside by Mr. Harvey.

Meanwhile, Vandermeer has taken his selection of culprits back to his office, and the subsequent discussion is loud enough to be overheard in the visitor's lounge. José is told that his sentence may be reviewed, as it seems he may be in need of further psychiatric help before he can be released. He will be placed on detention for the next 24 hours and will not be permitted to work in the machine shop or to participate in sports until a psychologist has given him the all clear. The other boys will have separate detention and are banned from shop and sports for two weeks, and their behavior will be closely monitored. José asks one more time about Micky Pico, and Vandermeer shouts that he doesn't want to hear one more word about Micky Pico. With that, the discussion is over.

If the characters ask to see Vandermeer in the aftermath of the riot, he will do so if it is appropriate. If they managed to help in calming the crowd, he will thank them. If they talk to him about his choice of culprits or question him about Micky Pico, he will explain that Mister Pico is a frequent troublemaker who bit off more than he could chew when he picked

a fight with Mister Harris and Mister Harris's friends. If they ask him about Mary Blacksmith, he laments her untimely passing and mentions her upcoming funeral service. He talks about her with an air of evident disappointment, though, alluding to an ongoing problem she was having with alcohol. (The characters' earlier investigation of Mary's apartment does not support this statement, though.) He mentions offhand that Mary was working with Mister Pico, Mister Harris and Mister Matinalé recently, trying to work out the boys' issues, and he is especially disappointed by her failure in that regard.

If the characters press the issue about Mary or the circumstances that provoked the almost-riot outside, Vandermeer starts to stonewall them and tells them that he is too busy for this right now. He asks them to leave, possibly paging security to come and deal with them if they grow too rambunctious. (Oddly enough, attempts to use any evocations on Vandermeer to make him give up any more information fail automatically.)

When the characters are leaving the Marshall School — whether they are sneaking away at the close of a clandestine infiltration or they are driving out at the end of an official visit — they notice a brown sedan stopped at the front gate. The person in the passenger seat is just rolling up his window as the scene comes into the characters' view, and as they approach, the guards at the gate are denying the car access to the school. The car backs up in the drive and pulls away.

THE NOTE

After the riot but before the students were led back inside the school, one of the students (Alicia Rhowes) noticed the characters and dropped a piece of paper for them to find. They might not have a chance to read it right away, but when they finally do take the time to do so, it has the following to say in a hurried hand:

My name is Alicia Rhowes. I'm writing this in the morning because God told me to be ready. I don't know who you are, but after Ms. Blacksmith died, God told me He would be sending people to help me like Mary tried to. I think you're them if I saw you today. I hope you are.

Something horrible is happening at this school, and Colonel Vandermeer is part of it. Security too. Mary knew, now she's dead. I have day leave tomorrow at the community college. I'll be by the fountain at noon. Please come help me. Please be the ones God said.

SCENE Six

The first part of this scene takes place only if the characters try to contact Alicia the following day

while she is on day leave. The second part can happen regardless of whether there is any note involved or not.

THE MEETING

The grounds of the community college at which Alicia Rhowes is taking her day-leave classes are a refreshing change from those of the Marshall School. The open air, the welcoming architecture of the buildings and the generally relaxed atmosphere of the students stands in stark contrast to the oppressive atmosphere of the Marshall School, driving home the fact that the Marshall School is less an institute of learning and more a juvenile-detention facility

After asking the way from a passing professor or student, the characters approach the school's cramped central plaza and find the young woman they remember from yesterday's visit to the school sitting on a bench with her back to a small concrete fountain. She is eating lunch from a paper bag and looking around nervously every few moments. When she notices the characters, she waves them over hesitantly and finishes her lunch quickly so she can talk to them.

Alicia is a skinny, nervous 16-year-old with red hair and a sprinkling of freckles. As she begins to talk, her voice holds a touch of the trailer park where she probably grew up. She effusively thanks the characters for coming and apologizes for sounding like a crazy person in her note, which they obviously received. She says that God inspired her to write that note that very morning previously, right after she heard the announcement about Ms. Blacksmith. She'll explain that she's always had God in her heart and that, on the rare occasions when he tells her to do something, she does it without reserve. And in this case, as in all the others, God's instructions have been right on the money. (An Awareness roll reveals nothing of especial note about Alicia, though, no matter how fervently she might seem to believe what she's saying.) She asks who the characters are, if they were friends of Mary's, if they work for a church and all sorts of other questions, but she doesn't press the issue if the characters seem evasive or just plain unwilling to talk about themselves. She simply takes it on faith that they are here to listen to her and help her.

Alicia's main concern is for José. She suspects that there is more going on behind the Micky Pico situation than anyone is letting on. If the characters did not have a chance to speak with Headmaster Henry Vandermeer before, it is Alicia who tells them about the connection between Mary Blacksmith and Micky. Micky, it seems, had been a long-suffering victim of an older kid named Maxwell Harris who (along with his gang of thugs) had made Micky's life a living hell.

They teased him, shoved him around when no one was watching, turned what few friends he had against him by spreading lies and even went so far as to lie to staff and security personnel in ways that got Micky in trouble. (And when Micky actually *did* do things to get himself into trouble, Harris and his pals were always the ones to blow the whistle.)

Alicia could never figure out why Harris and his gang picked on Micky other than out of sheer meanness because Micky never did anything to them to bring it on himself. Not many of the other kids liked Harris, but most of them believed what he made up about Micky. Alicia never believed Harris's lies, and apparently, Ms. Blacksmith didn't either (which she'd confirmed in one of Alicia's sessions with her). Apparently, Ms. Blacksmith could see how angry and frustrating Micky was growing with the treatment he was having to endure because it was starting to interfere with his work and his ability to socialize with his peers.

Alicia could tell this as well, so she'd asked her friend José Matinalé to try to look out for Micky. José—who would do anything for Alicia and didn't especially like Maxwell Harris to begin with—agreed, but even his help wasn't enough. José found himself getting in trouble more often whenever he stuck up for Micky, and Harris' gang redoubled its efforts against Micky when José wasn't around.

The situation apparently spiraled out of control about a week ago when Micky started sneaking out of his room after bed check (just to find some place to be alone and think) and Harris's gang found out about it. They held it over his head that they could get him into serious trouble if they turned him in, and they used that to tease him. Finally, when he couldn't take it anymore, he snapped and just started throwing punches. Harris and his boys—his "trusties" as most of the kids call them—easily put Micky down and beat him pretty badly before the security guards could separate them. Micky had disappeared down into the infirmary, while Harris and his trusties had gotten off with only a slight reprimand.

A couple of days later, when Alicia was scheduled to talk to Ms. Blacksmith, the counselor had seemed really upset and evasive. Alicia hadn't wanted to intrude, but Ms. Blacksmith had started talking all of a sudden about Micky. She said that she'd been worried that something like this would happen to him, but when she'd tried to talk to Vandermeer about keeping Harris and his trusties away from Micky, the headmaster had just laughed in her face. She also said that she hadn't been allowed to visit Micky in the infirmary, even though he obviously wasn't so badly hurt that he needed to be in a hospital or anything. Worried that something sinister was

going on, Ms. Blacksmith had sneaked down to the infirmary after hours, determined to check in on Micky regardless of what Vandermeer had to say.

According to Alicia, Ms. Blacksmith hadn't been able to describe what exactly she'd found when she'd done this, but it had nearly unhinged her. She hadn't been able to go on with her counseling session that day. She'd seemed to scared to be helpful. Later that afternoon, she told Alicia that she'd gotten enough of a hold on herself to be coherent and that she knew what she had to do: She was going to expose what she'd discovered, even though she didn't understand it entirely herself. This revelation had terrified Alicia, but she'd promised Ms. Blacksmith that she'd be brave until Ms. Blacksmith made everything all right. Finally, Ms. Blacksmith had told Alicia that she'd made some notes on what she'd found and hidden them in her office and that, if anything happened to her, it was Alicia's job to see that those notes made it to somebody who could do something with them. Alicia had promised, she confides, but once she'd heard about what had happened to Mary just the other day, she'd been too scared to act. It wasn't until God told her what to do that she'd finally found the courage to make contact with the characters. Now here they all were, and they could finally make everything all right. Couldn't they?

After taking in such an earful (or hopefully coaxing it out of Alicia piece by piece through roleplaying), they have a decision to make. They could either reassure the girl that they very well intend to do something about this right away (whether that's true or not), or they could tell her that they need to gather more information or possibly even to call in some of their backup. In the former case, Alicia thanks them profusely then hurries back to class. In the latter, she starts to look a little desperate. She tells them that she suspects that Maxwell Harris and his trusties are directly involved in whatever Ms. Blacksmith discovered—that they provoked him into a fight he couldn't win so they could get him out of the way for some reason. She also tells them that she's worried about José, who isn't scared to go snooping like Mary probably did and get himself into the same sort of trouble. If even that doesn't seem to help, she starts throwing out everything she can think of. Some of the things she adds include:

- Maxwell Harris's mistreatment of the other students has not gone unnoticed by the security staff or Headmaster Vandermeer, but no one seems willing to discipline him. Vandermeer has even been seen joking with Harris (who idolizes him) and walking him around privately with a hand on his shoulder.
- The security staff only tolerates Harris because Vandermeer tells them to.

- Members of the new security staff call Headmaster Vandermeer “Colonel” like they really mean it. They even salute him. Maxwell has been heard to say that they are all real soldiers who fought in the Gulf War and Afghanistan. They enjoy intimidating the kids, and they always seem to be sizing them up in some vaguely disturbing way.

- In the last couple of weeks, residents have had personal possessions confiscated “for safekeeping” and been subjected to spot searches for weapons.

- A girl complained directly to Headmaster Vandermeer that the trusties had threatened her. Nothing happened to them, but she was later told she couldn’t telephone her sister anymore because of her “use of inappropriate language.”

If even these pronouncements (or the desperation with which she reveals them) don’t move the characters to at least say that they’ll take immediate action, Alicia grudgingly accepts that the characters may need more information before they actually act. She checks the time and states that she’s going to be late if she doesn’t get back to class soon. She resists any suggestion that she or her friends snoop around the school for anything incriminating and try to get in touch with the characters. The fact that she still has day-leave privileges means that no one suspects that she knows anything dangerous about Mary Blacksmith’s death, and she wants to keep it that way. If the characters offer to help her escape from the school at this point, Alicia actually looks horrified. She doesn’t want to think about what might happen to her friends (especially José or Micky) if she were to just up and vanish — not to mention what the local authorities would do to her when they caught her. No, she’ll make whatever safe efforts the characters might ask to get in touch with them if anything else important or scary happens, but she can’t risk sticking her neck out any more than she already has. With that, she heads off in the direction of her next class with a dejected look.

A SUMMONS

Before the characters can leave the community college — or simply the day following their visit to the Marshall School if they chose not to deal with Alicia’s note — one or all of them receive an invocation. If they are members of the Infernal Court, this message comes from Lord Vohu Mano, the senior minister of the Ministry of Dust. If they are members of the Blood Court, it comes from Lord Vritran, that court’s Minister of Dust. If they are agents of Al-Lat, the message comes from Fell Knight Guanli.

The speaker identifies himself and says that he knows that the characters are investigating the death of

Mary Blacksmith. He now wants an update on their progress, he tells them, no matter how little or how much it might be. The characters are to come to him at the Huntington Library right away. They are to ask for a woman named Violet Takahashi, who will show them to their designated meeting place. So saying, the speaker bids them hurry and breaks off contact.

If the characters try to contact Bizjotha or Loruhamah for a quick status report, she informs them that she has told Ashur everything she’s found out thus far and that he’s on his way to meet with (whoever it was who invoked the characters) at the Huntington Library right now. If the characters try to contact Ashur, Fell Knight Guanli or Fell Knight Ravana (whoever’s appropriate, based on their court affiliation), the recipient of said contact informs the character that he (or she) is already on his (or her) way to a meeting to discuss that very thing at the Huntington Library.

SCENE SEVEN

When the characters arrive at the Huntington Library, they are met promptly by a woman who introduces herself as Violet Takahashi. If they appear to recognize the name, she then confides that her name is actually Amererat of the Sixth House and that she has been expecting them. She leads them across the lobby and through the stacks to one of the library’s gardens around the back, which appears to be closed. Looking around furtively, she ushers the characters inside and tells them that the people they’re looking for are waiting for them inside. No mortals will be disturbing them within the garden, she explains before slipping quietly away.

Within the garden, three fallen are waiting for the characters, regardless of which court they serve. These fallen are Ashur (whom they’ve already met), Fell Knight Guanli and Fell Knight Ravana. Fell Knight Guanli is Portuguese by ancestry, with a short and somewhat stocky build. He is wearing the uniform of an officer of the LAPD. His name tag reads “Azevedo.” Fell Knight Ravana is strikingly attractive, with a well-rounded figure and bright, green eyes. Clothing covers every inch of her skin right up to the top of her neck, and she is self-consciously tugging down the cuff of one sleeve when the characters arrive.

If the characters are agents of Al-Lat, these three are the only people waiting for them. If the characters are members of the Infernal or Blood Court, though, one of two additional people is waiting. For members of the Infernal Court, that person is Vohu Mano. Vohu Mano is a beautiful young man with an ethereal air about him. His hair is so light it is almost white, and

his skin is pale and fair. He is looking at Ravana skeptically, but he seems perfectly at ease around both Guanli and Ashur.

If the characters are members of the Blood Court, the fourth person here is Lord Vritran. He is a handsome young Korean man in his 20s, who appears to be lean and fit. His eyes are wide as if with some secret excitement, and he's standing near Ravana, paying no mind to the others waiting with him.

Once the characters have arrived, introductions go around between those who don't know each other. It also comes up that Guanli and Ravana are good friends, one of whom has shown up at the other's request (based on whichever affiliation has exposed the characters to them). Once that's settled, Ashur starts things off by cutting right to the chase. "The doctors we left back at the morgue with Mary Blacksmith's body yesterday spoke to me a little while ago with some bad news. Apparently, it was the other one. If you know what I mean."

Warning everyone to keep from speaking its name, he explains that both doctors are almost 100 percent certain that the Earthbound demon known as Enshagkushanna was the one responsible for killing Mary Blacksmith. The attendant Minister of Dust reacts to this news with shock, while Guanli and Ravana stand looking grim. Ashur recaps what he knows thus far (which is very little), then encourages the characters to tell everyone anything they might have found out since they last spoke. This is the character's opportunity to let on that something Mary Blacksmith found out at the Marshall School had her (and Alicia, if the characters met her) very worried for her safety and that some seriously shady things seem to be going on in that school, although the administration is unwilling to talk about it. Vandermeer's strange taint should come up, as should any speculation the characters might have about Micky Pico and Maxwell Harris.

Should all these details not come out, have Ashur explain that his investigation into Mary Blacksmith's background turned up nothing out of the ordinary. Guanli can confirm that a contact of his in the LAPD wasn't able to come up with anything either. By simple process of elimination (if nothing else), the Storyteller characters are convinced that the Marshall School is some sort of center of Earthbound depredation that must needs be checked out immediately. The information that the characters have uncovered is all the confirmation they need.

If he's there, Vohu Mano sternly but softly declares that something must be done immediately. Humanity is his ministry's purview and his personal protectorate (as a Reconciler, that is), so he doesn't

want some Earthbound horror getting its hooks into a school full of (mostly) innocent children. Directly involving himself isn't his place, though, he admits. Rooting out an Earthbound threat should probably be the purview of the Ministry of Aurochs, but that ministry's head, Lord Aglibol, hasn't responded to any attempts to make contact. However, since humanity is directly involved, that places the situation under his (Vohu Mano's) ministry's jurisdiction, and he's firmly in favor of appointing Fell Knight Guanli (as head of the Lion Ministry) to the task of taking care of this.

If Lord Vritran is there, he thanks everyone for their information but claims that dealing with the Earthbound is a little bit too rich for his ministry's blood. Besides, it's supposed to be up to the Ministry of Lions to actually deal with threats to the ministries of a court, right? With a pointed look in Ravana's direction, he excuses himself, claiming that he's going to inform his fellow ministers of what's going on.

Yet, regardless of which minister is there (if either), Ravana is adamant. She demands that she, Guanli and the characters all go back to the Marshall School that very night, root out the Earthbound presence there and consign it back to the Abyss where it belongs. She says she won't abide children being abused or the Earthbound dabbling in mortal affairs. Guanli agrees with her (though not hardly so fervently), and Ashur agrees as well.

That said, Ravana will not give up on the conversation until Guanli and the players' characters have agreed to return to the Marshall School for Troubled Teens that very night. Before she even asks him, Ashur starts to apologize and explain that he can't help them that night himself. Although he is a Reconciler and therefore cares a great deal about demonic abuse against humans, he promised his own mortal family that he would be home tonight. Before Ashur can finish explaining, Ravana curtly lets him know that he wasn't invited anyway. She thanks him for his help but tells him that they could do better without him on what is more or less a military mission.

And with that — barring any further roleplaying the players might want to do before the action resumes — Ravana tells everyone to be ready to go at 10:00 that night.

SCENE EIGHT

The thrust of this scene is for the characters (and their two ringers) to get back onto the grounds of the Marshall School and look around for signs of demonic — specifically Earthbound — influence. The characters might have already sneaked onto the

grounds once in a previous scene, so refer back to the rules for doing so if they intend to do the same thing again. By the same token, they could try to bluff their way in, but doing so will be especially difficult now that it is after regular hours and the place has been all but shut down for the students. Luckily, most of the regular staff will be gone, but the headmaster and all of the security staff will likely be on the premises nonetheless. Chances are good that a confrontation is in the offing, which doesn't seem to daunt or dismay Ravana or Guanli one bit.

As the characters look around for clues, refer to the "The Grounds and Layout" section of this chapter for ideas on what they find in what sections of the place. Refer back to the "Sneaking Around" sidebar previously in this chapter for an overview of what security measures the characters will have to deal with as they move about. Tripping a security measure (by botching a Stealth roll, for instance, or simply charging in with figurative guns blazing) alerts Holden Brown in the control room. Should this happen, Brown dispatches from one to eight of his guards to the area of the disturbance (depending on what the characters appear to be doing).

Said security guards will first attempt to lead the characters quietly off the premises with warnings that they intend to call the LAPD. Should this not deter the characters — it certainly won't deter Guanli or Ravana — the guards will attempt to subdue the characters with collapsible batons they're carrying in holsters on their belts. Should the characters fight back with lethal force (or should they take on their apocalyptic forms for effect), the panicked guards will draw .45 caliber pistols from shoulder-holsters concealed beneath their jackets and open fire. (The fact that the guards are even carrying concealed weapons like this might confirm in the players/characters minds that more is going on here than meets the eye. That, anyway, is the weapons' symbolic purpose.) Regardless, if the characters put up any kind of a fight (especially one that starts taking guards down), one of the guards will attempt to get away and radio Holden Brown to call the police. That is, of course, provided that the characters' plan of action didn't already entail disabling the school's phones. (Ravana and Guanli will not suggest this course of action. To them, this raid is overpoweringly reminiscent of raids they performed against bastions of the Holy Host at the dawn of time. For the sake of convenience, though, you should have the two of them hurry forward to the control room to deal with Holden Brown and prevent the LAPD from ever being called.)

One way or another, though, the security staff will have to be dealt with. The characters can avoid them,

fight them (albeit quickly if they don't want the police showing up with a SWAT team), somehow bluff them, supernaturally command them using an evocation or rely on the effects of revelation to cow them into submission. None of them have been granted any special powers by any infernal master, so, aside from their weapons, they should not be especially tough foes to overcome.

With the guards dealt with (however that works out for your players), they should be free to investigate the place more or less at their leisure and find out the information listed in the room-by-room descriptions in "The Grounds and Layout." What they won't find, though, is Headmaster Vandermeer or Micky Pico. Not in the main block, anyway. Nor do they feel any telltale residue of infernal powers at work anywhere on the main block. Certain rooms have a stronger diabolic resonance than others (including Vandermeer's private quarters and Vandermeer's office), but nothing is fresh or immediate.

Outside, however, a sense of great and terrible power is growing. The characters can trace this sensation (with appropriate Perception + Awareness rolls) to the brickworks on the corner of the property. Something unwholesome and grave is happening in there, and if none of your characters sense it, have Ravana or Guanli do so once they have all regrouped. They can get in through the overhead ventilation ducts or by bypassing the steel door with its electronic lock.

Once inside, the sensation of fell power gets even stronger. The aboveground portion of the brickworks is a four-lobed structure of solid brick. Each lobe is monitored from inside by a motion detector and concealed security camera that covers all the room except the ceiling and the area directly beneath. Unless the characters switch on the overhead lights, the only illumination comes from the incubators in the western lobe. The entrance lobe contains a sink and cupboards of feed and other equipment. The others contain shelves of mesh-faced boxes holding rats, a couple of ferrets, some hamsters and one or two canaries. Behind the incubators, there is an unlocked metal trapdoor in the floor. A ladder leads down into darkness, and a noise that sounds like chanting starts drifting upward. The feeling of rising power is getting stronger here, and the animals are starting to panic, covering whatever sounds the characters might be making.

This massive underground chamber hidden beneath the brickworks is constructed in three tiers. The characters come down on the uppermost, which is about 10 feet wide running along this wall. There are no cameras in this chamber.

A packed earth ramp leads down the right hand wall into a large pit, the floor and walls of which are lined with woven mats. In the far-left corner, a deeper pit can be seen.

This latter pit is lined with stone coated with what appears to be dried human blood. A shrouded body lies to the side of this pit, and a complicated geometrical diagram has been drawn in the center (also out of human blood, though fresher). Henry Vandermeer and Edward Harvey are standing side-by-side between this pit and the shrouded body with their backs to the characters. They are both dressed in what appear to be white ceremonial robes that are edged in gilt fabric. Before them, a column of dirty, sickly green light is shooting up from floor to ceiling, emanating from the symbol on the floor. It pulses and throbs sickeningly, and a figure seems to be floating in it. That figure looks like a fallen angel in its apocalyptic form, but one with none of the power or glory such a being should exude. It's clutching its legs to its chest, and its crimson wings are tattered and wrapped feebly around its body. It seems to be both suspended and trapped within the column of light before it. It's looking down at itself in what appears to be an attitude of pity.

Before the characters can say anything (or possibly as the characters are still descending to this level), Vandermeer begins to address the floating figure before him in an ancient language. (Edward Harvey repeats these words in sycophantic syncopation.) The words come too fast, and they're too alien to translate, but they end with the clearly recognizable syllables "Enshagkushanna." The figure shakes its head without looking up. Vandermeer repeats his entreaty more forcefully, with Harvey backing him up, and the floating figure hesitates before shaking its head again. After a second paired repetition, however, it appears to sigh resignedly before finally nodding and looking up. At the same time, bolts of gold begin to shoot through the greenish energy surrounding the suspended demon, and Vandermeer and Harvey turn to the shroud-wrapped body on the ground behind them.

If the characters have not made their presence known by this point, then the suspended demon, Vandermeer and Harvey all see the characters at the same time. Harvey freezes, but Vandermeer takes a step forward and demands to know what these intruders are doing here. The demon behind them begins to writhe as bolts of gold begin to alternately skewer him and twine around him. Guanli and Ravana act first at this point if the characters haven't acted already. Ravana looks down at the shroud-wrapped body (which can only be Micky Pico) then up at Vandermeer and the demon

behind him. She bellows that she will not let them hurt this innocent child. Guanli pipes up right after that calling Vandermeer and Harvey fools who've sold their souls to the wrong masters.

Vandermeer cries, "Lord Enshagkushanna, give me your strength to drive these pitiful wretches from your sight!" He then attacks the nearest person to him. Harvey, on the other hand, starts chanting again and hurriedly starts unwrapping the shroud from Micky Pico. Guanli and Ravana team up to take Vandermeer on, and one of them calls out to the characters to either help them or get the child away from Harvey. Harvey will fight anyone who tries to stop him from what he's doing. Meanwhile, the demon in the shaft of light is being slowly enshrouded by bolts of gold.

What's happening here is that Micky Pico — whose soul has been systematically broken by repeated abuse by Maxwell Harris and his gang of "trusties" with Vandermeer's tacit approval — is being offered up as a mortal host for the demon before him. The demon has been summoned up into this special kind of summoning circle and bound there so that Vandermeer could perform a ritual taught to him by other servants of the Earthbound Enshagkushanna. The ritual facilitates the anchoring process between demon and host, but it sets the condition that the demon whose progress is so facilitated must swear fealty to Enshagkushanna before the transfer can be made. This demon has agreed (better to serve on Earth than rot in the Abyss any longer), and now, all that's left is the last step. The last step involves the shrouded body of Micky Pico being unwrapped while the demon in the shaft of light is enwrapped by the bolts of gold all around him. Once both conditions are met (which should take a total of six rounds once Harvey gets started unless he's interrupted), the summoning circle will permit the demon to leap into Micky's body.

The characters can avert this outcome — thus preventing another servant of Enshagkushanna from coming to Earth — in one of several ways. One, they can kill or subdue Edward Harvey so that he can't unwrap Micky Pico's body. (If Vandermeer hasn't been put down by this point, though, he will pick up where Harvey left off.) Two, they can disrupt the integrity of the summoning circle prematurely, thus taking away the demon's protection from the spiritual gravity of Hell. (Deciding on this course of action might require a Wits + Occult roll [difficulty 7], though.) Three, they can attack the demon with evocations (or just physically) before he gets free. (He won't be able to dodge or attack back just yet, but he still gets the chance to soak.) Finally, they can let the

transfer take place and just kill the demon in those first few moments of confusion when he's coming to in Micky Pico's body. (They won't have much choice at this point because as soon as he comes to his senses, he's going to take on his apocalyptic form and try to kill all of them on Enshagkushanna's behalf. Use the Traits from one of the write-ups in the Antagonists chapter of *Demon: The Fallen* for this demon if he should make it into Micky Pico's body.)

How this all plays out is largely up to your troupe. Ravana will attempt to kill Vandermeer, then Harvey, then disrupt the summoning circle holding the imprisoned demon to this plane before it can take over Micky Pico. Guanli will help her, provided the characters do nothing to help her as well. Should the characters successfully defend Micky long enough or disrupt the summoning circle in time, the demon in the shaft of light is pulled apart before their eyes by the golden bolts all around him, and he disappears (along with the light) down into the Abyss.

AFTERMATH

In the aftermath of this grisly scene, either Guanli or Ravana can reveal to the characters what was going on and why they felt they had to act so fast once they got into this chamber if the characters couldn't tell. They then excuse themselves, claiming that they need to make reports to their respective courts. If the characters are members of one of their courts, they ask them to return as well and corroborate their tales. Such a scene (or scenes) make up the beginning of the next story *Into the Fire*, so if you want to jump right ahead into it, feel free.

Within hours, the Marshall School is crawling with officers of the LAPD and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. The school is temporarily shut down within the week, and the more dangerous kids are farmed out to various other juvenile-detention centers around the Tri-County Area. (As for what happens to the majority of them, see *Into the Fire*.)

If the players are interested in roleplaying out the aftermath of this insidious nightmare, they have some decisions to make. First, how much of the truth do they let out? Second, will they make any effort to see to the welfare of the other students of the Marshall School? Third, will they make any effort to find out how many children might already have been victimized like Micky Pico would have been by Headmaster Vandermeer during Vandermeer's stint at the head of the school? Fourth, will they publicize their own involvement (as least from the mortal perspective) in hopes of somehow gaining thralls out of the exposure? Fifth, how (if

at all) will they use their involvement in this tale to boost their status with their respective court? Finally, what will the characters do now that they've called the attention and possibly the wrath of Enshagkushanna down upon themselves?

APPENDIX: THE GROUNDS AND LAYOUT

At various points throughout the story, the characters will be on the grounds of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens. Therefore, you as the Storyteller need a reference for the things the characters will discover and the obstacles that they will face along the way.

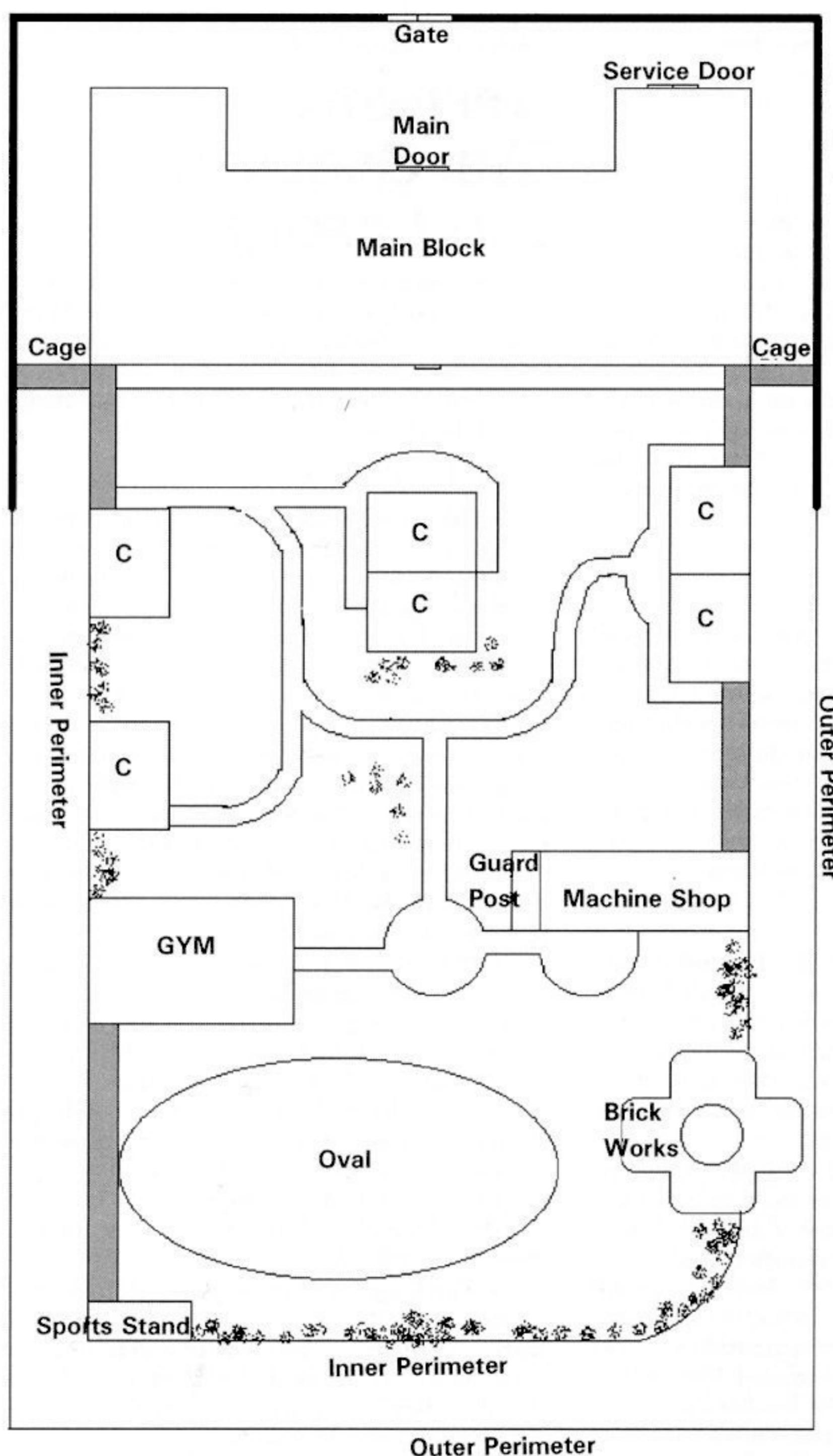
THE GROUNDS

- **The Outer Perimeter** is completely fenced. Those sections that are brick wall are in full view of the main block and the security cameras that cover the front yard and the so-called cages. The mesh itself is strong, taking at least two levels of damage to create rent large enough for an adult to get through. The material has an effective soak of two dice.

For 30 feet past the fence, there is a completely clear stretch of mown grass. With the exception of the area around the brickworks, this stretch continues for the entire perimeter. The back corners are covered by motion detectors that activate security cameras. An alarm also sounds in the guard post. These motion detectors are always on except when grounds maintenance is being performed.

- **The Inner Perimeter** is much subtler than the outer one. The outer buildings and walkways are arranged in a rough rectangle. This area is on ground about three feet higher than the 30 foot grassy stretch. None of the buildings have windows on this side (see *Walkways*). The tops of the buildings and the walkways are flat but protected with three strands of razor wire set far enough back to be out of view from the ground. Where there are no buildings, a four-foot high chain link fence runs, generally disguised by shrubbery.

- **The Cages**, as they are known, block the side passages from the front to the back of the grounds with metal plates and bars. Each contains three gates. One allows access from the front into the cage. Another allows access from the cage to the clearway. Another allows access from the cage to the inner perimeter. The gates allowing access to the front are electronically locked. The others are padlocked, and



the area is covered by security cameras. The removal of one steel bar would create a gap sufficient for most people to get through.

- **Walkways** are covered concrete paths leading from building to building. The outer side is always constructed of steel bars, painted sky blue or grass green to try and diminish the fact that they behave like the steel bars in the cages.

- **The Brickworks** are marked by the chimney that rises from the nexus of four large kilns. One has been fitted with a metal door with an electronic lock and the others have been bricked up to house the animal care program. Large ventilation ducts pierce the roof.

- **The Guard Post** has a metal door with an electronic lock. It is always manned by two guards who have an intercom to Security, a fridge, a television and, in a padlocked metal chest, two shotguns plus ammunition.

Each of the following buildings has an internal camera/alarm triggered by motion detectors. These motion detectors are only set when classes are finished for the day.

- **The Machine Shop** has a metal door with an electronic lock. Inside are long work benches. All dangerous equipment is kept in padlocked metal lockers.

- The Gym's equipment store is securely padlocked.

THE MAIN BLOCK LEVEL ONE

- **The Foyer** is an impressive place with a corbeled ceiling and two sets of broad, mahogany stairs running upward on either side. The floor is wonderful old tilework, and there is a frieze of decorative tiles along the walls at shoulder height, separating dove-gray tiles and white. Front and center is the heavy, mahogany reception desk, with an intercom to the headmaster's office. There are chairs set along the walls for visitors, underneath framed photos of the building in earlier incarnations. The two doors leading into the assembly hall have electronic locks.

Two guards are stationed here at all time. They each have a nook under the stairs. The foyer is constantly monitored by a security camera.

- **The Visitor's Lounge** is an elegant space with cream carpet, long, cream drapes and gray/white walls divided by more ornamental tiles. On the inner wall is a tiled fireplace above which hang labeled portraits of Victoria Marshall and her father. The furniture is all antique mahogany. In the corner, a wrought-iron spiral staircase rises next to a much more modern elevator. This room is used for interviewing staff and entertaining visitors.

This room contains small, concealed security cameras. Spotting them requires a Perception + Alertness (or Security) roll.

- **The Interview Rooms** are used for interviewing new residents and for visits between residents and family or legal representatives. The doors between the foyer and the interview room complex and the interview rooms and the staff area have electronic locks.

- **The Staff Room** is a large, carpeted room with some areas partitioned to provide private desks for the teachers. Desks have computers and external telephone/modem lines, as well as books, papers and smatterings of personal objects. There is a full lounge suite built around a television.

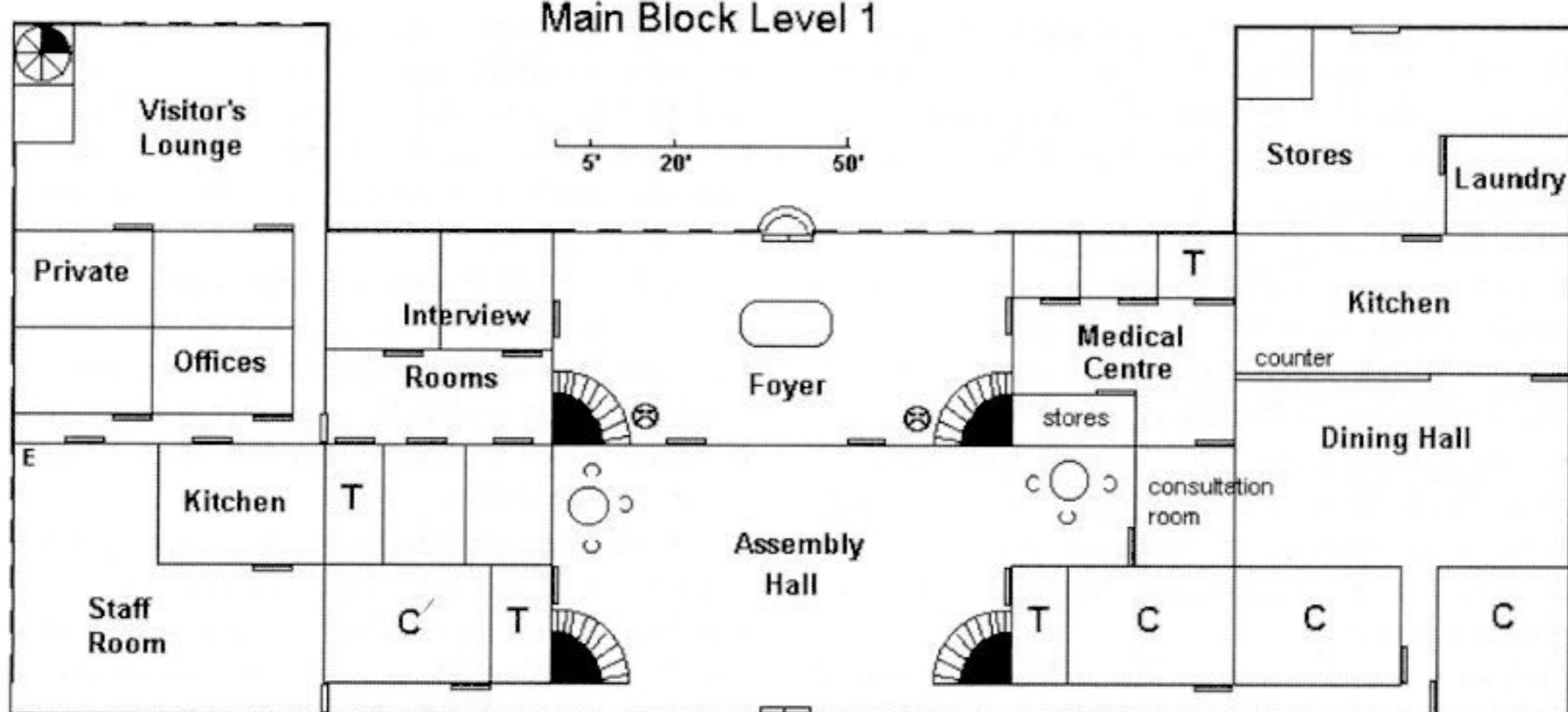
- **The Private Offices** are respectively those of the teaching staff, the secretaries, Edward Harvey and the late Mary Blacksmith. They contain desks, computers, external telephone/modem lines, bookshelves and filing cabinets, together with papers and records appropriate to their occupants. Only two contain anything of real interest.

In Edward Harvey's office is an intercom to the headmaster's office. In his bottom drawer, locked with an ordinary lock, are all the files (and all but one of the notebooks) that are missing from Mary Blacksmith's office. The most recently dated notebook was completely filled about a month ago. If the documents on his computer are examined, it will become clear that he is creating replacement records for those missing ones.

Mary Blacksmith's office has not been occupied since her death. She did not see residents here but, rather, in the counselor's room on Level Two. Here was where she did her paperwork, including her confidential case records, which are stored in a filing cabinet with an ordinary lock. The key has been taken by Headmaster Vandermeer, who has removed the files for Maxwell and the other "trusties." Mickey Pico's file is also missing. Alicia Rhowes' and José Matinalé's files are both in place. Alicia's gives her history and notes strong religious feelings. José's speaks of his need to develop ways of controlling his anger. The bottom drawer of the file is entirely empty.

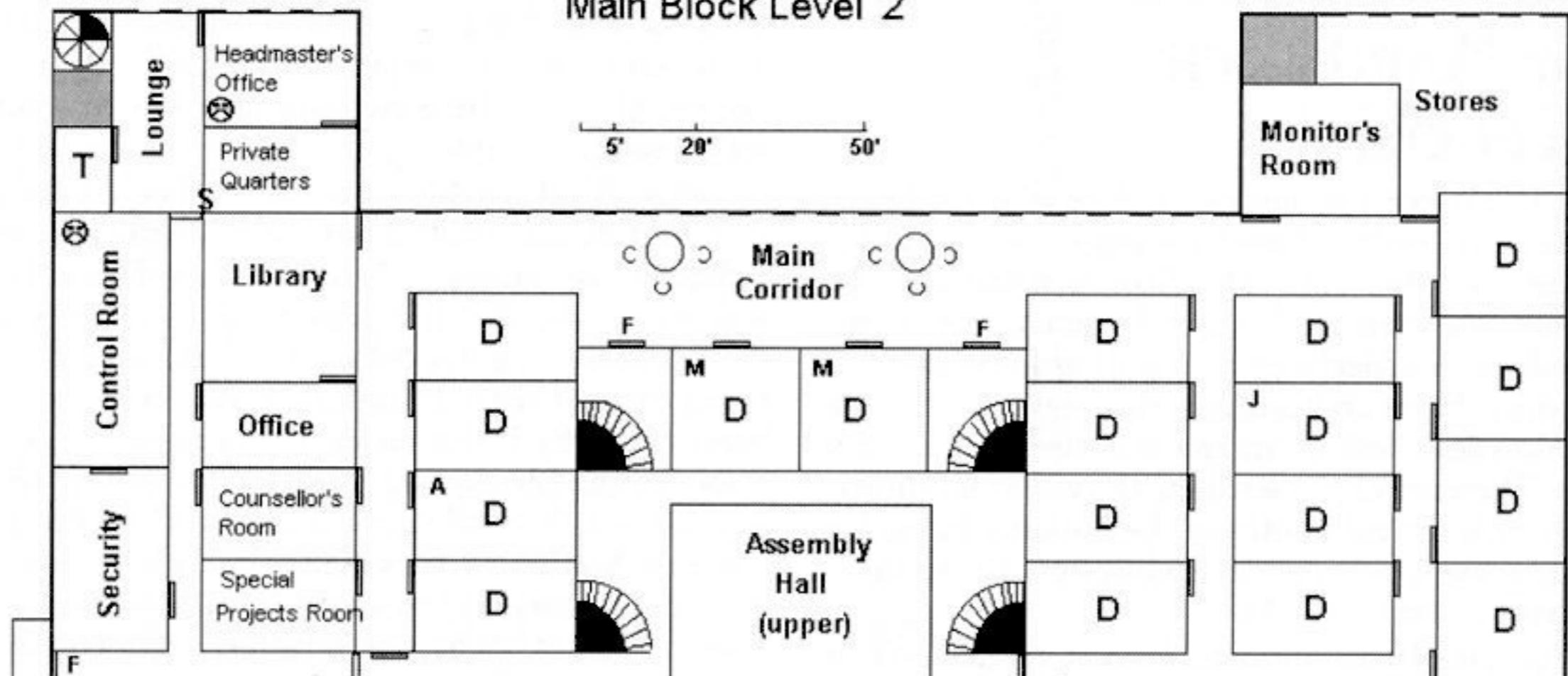
On Mary's desk sits her computer and two boxes of personal effects—her relatives have yet to arrange shipping. One contains books on young-adult psychology and criminal behavior. The other contains a great deal of photos. Mary can be presumed to be the smiling black woman in most of them. There are pens, amusing coffee mugs, a lavender-colored sweater, the latest J.K. Rowling book and a personal organizer that shows that on the night of her death

MAP 2:
Main Block Level 1



D Dormitory C Classroom T Toilet Stairs Elevator
 window door Guard
 F fire door
 S secret door

Main Block Level 2



she had an after-hours meeting scheduled with Headmaster Vandermeer. (For Storyteller reference, Mary chose not to attend this meeting and instead to discuss the situation with her priest, which tipped her hand that she knew something more than she should. She was killed before she could reveal that anything untoward was happening.) Scrawled beneath this appointment in atrocious handwriting it

is, "Remember look up quote in Tomorrow, When the War Began. Good way of putting it!"

Tomorrow, When the War Began is a young-adult novel by author John Marsden dealing with teenagers who must learn to survive when their country is invaded. There is a copy upstairs in the library.

Mary's computer will boot up and show a wide range of files—but absolutely nothing sharing her date of death.

- During business hours, the **Infirmary** is the domain of Dr. Wu. Sick and injured residents and staff come to the examination room for her tender attentions. Through the door from the examination room is her real office, including two private cubicles and a walk-in storeroom containing medical records and the drugs cabinet. The storeroom is electronically locked, and the cabinet has a specially installed deadbolt lock to which only she and the nurses have keys.

Dr. Wu is only on duty from 10:00 AM to 6:00 PM, but a member of the nursing staff is always here.

- The **Dining Hall** is arranged cafeteria-style. The door into the kitchen has an electronic lock.

- **Stores and Laundry**, large and concrete. All deliveries to the school come to this steel sliding door. Motion detectors triggering security cameras are switched on after the last of the staff leave, generally around 8:00 PM. An alarming quantity of inflammable chemicals can be found here, along with boxes of paper, crates of toner refills, gallons of orange juice, et cetera. In the corner nearest the door is an industrial elevator that contains a concealed security camera. Close by is the main fuse box for the entire building.

- The **Assembly Hall** is a huge space, lit by windows on the second floor. There are no windows at ground level, only the large back door. The walls are white, the floor white-and-gray linoleum. Above each of the massive, old pine staircases hangs a wooden board inscribed with the new school motto. As well as assemblies, this area is open for student use during the day and evening and contains two sets of tables and chairs grouped around a television attached to the wall. Near each of these is a large, canvas "graffiti space" on which the students are allowed to express themselves. One notable entry on this space features a spiky black scribble with lots of red mouths and/or eyes.

- Each **Toilet Block** has an alarm buzzer on the wall. The internal **Classrooms** are not lockable or alarmed.

LEVEL TWO

- The upper level of the **Assembly Hall** is a traffic area of bare white walls and white-and-gray linoleum. The banisters around the walkway are more like half-walls, solid wood and four feet high, with a further four feet of wire mesh above that (as per the outer perimeter).

The doors leading into the dormitory area and into security all have electronic locks.

- Each **Dormitory** contains two double bunks, four drawers and a small bathroom. None have windows or

lockable doors. Girls are usually accommodated in the rooms facing the library.

- The **Monitors' Room** is a permanent station for counseling staff. This room contains two beds, a small bathroom, a kitchenette, lounge chairs and an external phone line. During the day, counselors are available to resolve disputes, hear problems and distribute board games, paper, pens et cetera. At night, two monitors are always on duty. They conduct the final check in before turning off the lights and may make patrols afterward. The door has a peephole and an electronic lock that is engaged at night. However, it incorporates a buzzer so that the monitors may be awakened by residents in an emergency.

- Stores such as sheets and blankets, soap, etc. are kept behind an electronic lock.

- The **Library** is open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM, during which time the door stands open. Otherwise, the electronic lock is engaged. According to the records, Mr. Rutgar Kralfesky is the librarian who supervises this quiet oasis of approved books and magazines. There are four computers with external modems set up near the librarian's desk, for use by residents with special permission. There are also two AV booths.

If the characters consider Mary Blacksmith's note to herself on her calendar to be some sort of clue and go looking for *Tomorrow, When the War Began* on the shelves, it will be found where the Dewey decimal system dictates it should be. Next to it is one of Mary Blacksmith's notebooks, which she's apparently secreted away here.

- The **Librarian's Office** has a computer, external modem and telephone lines and stacks of books. There is also a small sink and refrigerator.

- The **Counselor's Room** was where Mary Blacksmith did her job. It has an electronic lock that has been engaged since her death, excepting a visit by Edward Harvey to remove incriminating material. The room has pale-blue walls and blue carpet and is set out with comfortable chairs. There are some lovely bright watercolors on the walls and a desk in the far corner.

The desk is empty, cleaned out. Anyone who goes to search the lounge chairs notices that the cushions are out of place, suggesting that someone already has searched them.

- **Security** is the guards' headquarters. It is a severe place, with long benches against the walls and a hard linoleum floor. The usual sink, fridge set up is the only concession to leisure. Each guard plus Holden has a locker, for a total of 25. The lockers have ordinary locks and are often left open.

MARY'S NOTEBOOK

The first date in the notebook is about a month before Mary's death, and the scrawled entries reveal her growing concern about Maxwell Harris and friends. She notes their hero worship of Headmaster Vandermeer and adoption of militaristic behavior. She notes that the headmaster seems to enjoy and be encouraging this behavior. Incidents of their bullying are increasing, and so, too, is the level of violence of those incidents. She notes trying to raise the matter with Vandermeer, but he replies that if she feels uncomfortable about how the children are acting, she should leave them to him.

On the date of her death comes the following entry, which appears to be Mary's shorthand transcription of an interview with Maxwell Harris following his beating of Micky Pico:

1 PM — Maxwell Harris.

(He's not responsive, but he keeps smiling. No remorse at all. Little bastard.)

Asked about bullying, he says: Don't U get sick of all this BS? All the scum. Nothing will save them.

Asked: Will U B saved?

—Yes, I know the way.

What is the way?

—Don't B weak. Gotta B strong. B Ready.

4 what?

—Do what's needed. Serve him.

Serve Vndrmeer? He wants you to serve him?

—Think you're smart? Know what's in my head? U know shit. The Cnl knows.

The Cnl knows U?

—He does. Tells me what to do. He's got the power. We're going to share it.

Inside these lockers are various personal possessions, such as magazines that would certainly be confiscated from the residents and unpleasant detritus such as used Band-Aids, bloodstained handkerchiefs and lumps of cotton wool. Some of the magazines have been grotesquely vandalized. Holden's locker contains six tear gas canisters.

Holden has a small, cramped desk in the corner near the door with an intercom to the headmaster's office. The desk contains rosters, reports and more magazines that shouldn't be here. In the bottom drawer is a bottle of antiseptic and packets of sterile swabs carelessly mixed with used ones.

In the normal course of things, this room is occupied only during the 9:00 AM/5:00 PM/1:00 AM shift changes.

- The Control Room is the heart of the school under the Colonel's reign. Both doors have electronic

(That little brat just SPIT on my table!)

—(Laughing!!) Know U won't call guards. They serve the Cnl too.

Will the Cnl get U out of here, is that what he said?

—Not us. The others. Getting them out of their prison. Giving the weak to them.

The others? (No answer. Twice.)

Giving the weak to them? What's that? (Still no answer.)

(ANSWER ME, YOU LITTLE BRAT!!!)

(Okay, Mary, get it together.)

Was Micky Pico weak? Did U "give the others" Micky?

(No answer, but the little smug bastard's smiling again.)

Is that why U and your friends beat him up?

—Does that upset U, bitch?

(Oh, this one's had it.)

—You'll C soon enough. U R weak just like the rest of them. The Cnl's others can have you all. First that big dumb spic. Then U.

What's that mean?

—UC.

...

He's actually walking out. I don't believe the nerve of that little bastard. "Colonel" Vandermeer has let his pet borderline sociopath get away with far too much here lately. But what was that bit about giving people to the others? Sounds cultish... What's Vandermeer up to? And just what's going on with Micky Pico.

MUST FIND OUT TONIGHT!!!

Sorry, Colonel. Our meeting's going to have to wait.

locks that only the special security cards will open. The place is crammed with screens: one for each security camera and a huge digital map of both floors and the grounds that indicates triggered alarms and buzzers. While this may not be apparent at first, it also shows the brickworks. There is an intercom to the headmaster's office.

From here, large portions of the school can be locked down by sealing the electronic locks. The fire alarms and sprinkler system can be triggered or overridden, as can both elevators. At any time, there are two guards on duty. Often, Holden takes a shift himself, and the Colonel might join him for an evening.

- This Lounge marks the beginning of the headmaster's private quarters. The Colonel lives here, his meals prepared and delivered by the kitchen staff, his laundry set beside the lift to be collected and

returned by the cleaners. It is well known amongst them that he never allows them to clean his actual bedroom but, instead, does it himself. Throughout this complex, the carpet look very new, and there is a strong scent of air freshener.

The décor is continued from below — gray-and-white walls, cream carpet and drapes across windows that otherwise provide a panoramic view of the electrical substation. A large Persian carpet hangs on one wall next to a box holding Vandermeer's medals. Other walls hold collections of military insignias.

An antique sideboard has been adapted to hold a small AV setup. There is also a well-stocked liquor cabinet.

• **The Headmaster's Office** holds a spacious antique desk with a computer, external telephone and modem lines and an intercom linked to the control room, security, the reception desk in the foyer and Edward Harvey's office. Beneath the desk is a concealed buzzer to alert security. There is always a guard on duty here, concealed in a nook formed by the filing cabinets.

• **Vandermeer's Private Quarters** are those of an elderly bachelor with army habits. There is a touch of the exotic in the carved Persian chest he uses as a bedside table and the antique Turkish cabinet in which Micky Pico has been imprisoned since his disappearance. The cabinet was designed expressly for this purpose, containing a floor-level slot for feeding and for cleaning the tray provided for bodily wastes and a whole lot of small, circular openings. It is just big enough for a scrawny little boy to sleep sitting with his head on his knees.

(Storyteller reference: When Mary to check on Micky Pico at the infirmary but couldn't find him there, the nurse on staff told her that Vandermeer took Pico out the day after Pico went in. Mary then went to find Vandermeer. He was not in his office or his private quarters, but she heard coming from behind his quarters' locked door the faint sound of sobbing. She also smelled something like human waste coming from within. She put two and two together and left immediately, too scared and confused to form a rational plan for what to do.)



CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE FIRE

*Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes
being burned?*

—Proverbs 6:27

INTRODUCTION

No one can honestly claim that the life of a fallen angel who has been newly returned to the physical world and taken up residence in a soulless mortal host is easy. By the same token — or perhaps as a corollary to the preceding sentiment — neither can one honestly say that such a life is boring. No matter who the fallen angel used to be, no matter what role he played in the War of Wrath, no matter why he chose to fall from God's grace, no matter why he chose to return to Earth now so near the End Times and no matter what mortal life he has now found himself a part of, there is always going to be something for him to do.

On a mortal level, the demon first has to integrate the lingering memories of his mortal host into some semblance of coherence and find a way to blend his own patchwork memories with them so as not to lose himself in the chaotic swirl of two conflicting experiences. He must then learn

the expected norms of human behavior so that he can maintain the charade of living a normal life without drawing undue attention from wary mortals. Once the demon has gotten that straight, he has to make contact with others like himself and try to find a way to fit into the nascent, burgeoning society of newly returned fallen.

The means by which he does so bring up a whole new set of active opportunities and responsibilities. Demons are active creatures, after all — designed to work together in pursuit of a common goal. A demon can find himself involved in the affairs of his local demonic court very quickly (sometimes as soon as members of that court are aware of his return). Each ministry oversees a significant amount of territory and undertakes significant responsibilities as it goes about trying to reestablish a dominant demonic presence on Earth, and the senior ministers often compete with each other for the newest available competent help as it escapes the Abyss.



On a more personal level, the relatively new concept of participating in factional conflict keeps fallen busy as well. Every faction has overarching goals for its members to pursue (which their leaders have likely developed as a means of coping with their defeat in the War of Wrath), and sometimes, pursuing those goals can take up all of a demon's free time that isn't already taken up by serving the needs of his infernal court and his mortal life. The Cryptics (who devote themselves to study and investigation of the time that has passed since their imprisonment, so as to find answers to the most nagging and persistent questions that trouble the fallen) find themselves especially busy in these modern times. The Reconcilers do as well, considering how much work must needs be done to repair the damage the War of Wrath caused, so that these angels can present it to their Creator as both an apology and a peace offering. The Luciferans, Faustians and Raveners all have comparable amounts of work to do as well, not to mention the amount of work that members of each faction must put in above and beyond the norm in order to keep members of the other factions from gaining some advantage over them.

And that description fits only the *average* demon, who resides in a city in which mortal life continues to run its course more or less as it always has. When you consider the lives of the demons who have made Los Angeles, California their home, you add a whole new layer of complication. Times are changing faster in the City of Angels than they are anywhere else in America — possibly faster than anywhere else in the world. An incredible earthquake (registering 7.2 on the Richter scale) defied every principle of geology and scientific prediction and sprang up out of nowhere to shake the city to its foundations. At the same time, insanity swept streets and the citizenry, unleashing calamitous riots the likes of which even Los Angeles has never seen before. The fervor surrounding these events has since died down, but the aftermath has provided demons plenty of unexpected opportunities to entice thralls, to gain temporal power by insinuating themselves into the beleaguered authorities of the mortal community and to parlay either or both such gains into power and influence at the infernal level as well. Meanwhile, the terrible, unknowable Earthbound who have long since gotten to the city first are dispatching their thralls and servants to do just the same as the fallen are scrambling to do (albeit for much more sinister reasons). Their actions, in turn, are motivating the city's resident fallen to act out directly against these horrible infernal machinations or to do everything in their power to insulate themselves against the same, which only adds more complications to the already desperately busy lives of Los Angeles' fallen.

Inarguably, the newly returned fallen of the City of Angels are, by necessity, extremely busy creatures who more or less have to be constantly on the move and constantly doing something. Therefore, it only stands to reason that some aspect of this continual activity would eventually (perhaps inevitably) be noticed by interested mortals in the community. That concept ignites the conflict of *Into the Fire* — be it as the second story of the **Fear to Tread** chronicle, as a stand-alone pick-up story or as an aside in your own greater chronicle. A trio of demon-hunters stumbles across a demonic conspiracy and helps to put the final wraps on it. Before the hunters can pull up stakes and quit while they're ahead, though, they find themselves in the center of another more personal battle — a battle that draws your players' characters in as well.

THE PLOT (IN BRIEF)

Into the Fire opens at a gathering of the characters' infernal court (or a less formal affair if they are agents of Al-Lat), at which the events of Chapter One are being discussed. Worried by the fact that the situation was able to proceed as long as it had without anyone noticing, one of the authority figures asks the characters to check out the Marshall School in order to find some way to expunge any lingering Earthbound taint there. Once they arrive, however, they find that two strange things have occurred. First, they find that the taint has already been largely expunged. Second, they find that the area from which the taint previously emanated is now spiritually warded so that they cannot even enter. A brief investigation reveals that a small group of humans was seen poking around that site, so the characters are encouraged to check those humans out. The demons must find and interact with these humans, at which point they learn that said humans are actually inquisitive demon-hunters who stumbled onto the taint at the Marshall School and did what they could to deal with it. Later on, the characters' superiors express an interest in possibly meeting these so-called demon-hunters and entreating them to explain how they warded the Marshall School against infernal taint, hoping that such an interview will give them some insight into a new means of combating Earthbound influence in the city. When the characters track the demon-hunters down again, the fallen can either haul the demon-hunters away right there, or the characters can lead the demon-hunters to believe that the fallen want to help the hunters deal with the infernal menace that they've set their sights on in hopes of gaining their trust. One way or another, the characters hand the demon-hunters over, just as they've been asked. But in doing so, are they planting the seeds of an even greater problem down the road?

STORTELLER CHARACTERS

While not all of these characters are highly influential movers and shakers in the Los Angeles Tri-County Area (even in fallen society), they all have parts to play in Into the Fire. Some are intended simply to point the characters in the right direction if they should become hopelessly confused about exactly what's going on or if they should find themselves at a loss as to how to proceed in their investigation. You can skip over some of them if you find that your players' characters don't need their help. You can also switch them out with Storyteller characters of your own design or from previous events in your own chronicle, if you so choose. You can even supplement their roles even further (if your players appear to be having a particularly dense time of it) by having the Storyteller characters to whom the ones presented here are connected in Los Angeles's greater infernal society make brief appearances. Explanations of how the various Storyteller characters are connected can be found in the Storyteller Characters chapter of this book, and even more information is presented in *Demon: City of Angels*.

- **Baphomel (AKA Troy Daniels).** Through an extensive blackmail campaign, this newly returned fallen of the First House has forced his way into the position of Lieutenant Mayor of Los Angeles. He approaches this position and the opportunities it provides him with laudable zeal and tenacity, but the recent cataclysms that have befallen Los Angeles have taken a great deal out of him. The mayor's office is running him ragged, and the stress is beginning to show on him.

- **The Minister of Aurochs.** The primary responsibility of the Ministry of Aurochs is to make sure that the fallen members of its demonic court are aware of any outside infernal threats. If the players' characters are members of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, they will interact with **Lord Aglibol**; if they are supporters of the Blood Court, this position is filled by **Lady Inana**. It is by the head of this ministry that the characters are enjoined to check out the Marshall School.

- **The Minister of Eagles.** The Eagle Ministry's responsibility is that of being the eyes and ears of its demonic court. **Lord Chenrezig** is the so-called "Lidless Eye" for the Infernal Court, while **Lady Nasu** is his counterpart in the Blood Court. It is either the players' characters' court's respective Minister of Eagles who brings the Marshall School situation to their court's attention, or it's they who must answer for not discovering the situation there soon enough.

- **The Minister of Lions.** As in Chapter One: Suffer the Children, **Fell Knight Guanli** and **Fell Knight Ravana** represent the Ministry of Lions of the Infernal Court and the Blood Court (respectively).

They were involved in dealing with the Marshall School situation, either at the players' characters' side or on their own if your characters did not participate in Suffer the Children.

- **The Minister of Dust.** **Lord Vohu Mano** represents the Infernal Court's mortal ministry, and **Lord Vritran** does the same for the Blood Court. They were tangentially involved with dealing with the situation at the Marshall School. That situation disturbs them, as does the idea that mortal demon-hunters could be taking an active hand in that situation as well.

- **Spentu Mainyu (AKA Scratch).** This crafty Devil is playing a dangerous double-game as the head of the Ministry of Dragons of both the Infernal Court and the Blood Court. He's subtly impelling the other ministers of both courts to action by poking into the Marshall School situation. He's also one of the first high-ranking demons to recognize the potential the demon-hunters represent, rather than just the threat.

- **The Tyrant of the Court.** The tyrants of the respective courts (**Baroness Kishar** for the Infernal Court; **Lady Anat** for the Blood Court) play bit roles here, but their presence is not to be discounted. They're the ones who cut through any bickering that arises between their lower ministers.

- **Fell Knight Ashur (AKA Jeff Black).** Ashur was also involved in the investigation of the Marshall School, and he is available to put in a token appearance as needed.

- **Lady Al-Lat (AKA Xiao Yuen).** If the characters are this Cryptic's agents rather than members of either demonic court, it is through her and her direct underlings that the characters hear about the situation at the Marshall School (if they did not play through Suffer the Children) and are instructed to check into it further.

- **Manat (AKA Sylvia Sarah Woods).** This nosy Luciferan is doggedly following up on the story surrounding the Marshall School on her own, much as the characters are doing for their superiors. It is through her that the characters find out about the demon-hunters in the first place.

- **Meonenim (AKA Israel Arcella).** A small-time businessman with a shop that specializes in the occult, he can provide a lead or two into where the demon-hunters are as well as what they might be capable of.

- **Stanley McIntyre.** A former priest who turned demon-hunter after a chilling brush with the supernatural. He believes that both demons and angels walk the Earth, preparing to do battle for the souls of mankind. He is convinced that mankind has a role to play in this struggle, but he doesn't yet know what that role should be.

• **Lou Barber.** This drifter and layabout has taken up the hunt himself for reasons similar to McIntyre's, but he only agrees with part of Stanley McIntyre's philosophy about what's really going on. He believes that demons do, in fact, walk the Earth, but he's not so sure about angels. As far as he's concerned, God's an absentee who took His devoted angels with Him, leaving mankind to fend for itself. But if that's what it takes, Lou's prepared to do it.

• **Koruna Gibson.** The third in this trio of demon-hunters, Koruna isn't sure what to believe. Are the beings her group searches for demons? Are they angels? She doesn't know, but she keeps an open mind. Mostly, though, she keeps up the hunt with Stanley and Lou out of loyalty to them both for all they've done for her in the time they've known her.

• **Yigal (AKA Joyce Allen).** This demon has found herself in possession of the body of the wife of a local politician, and she uses this position to effect what positive change she can on the mortal population of Los Angeles.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

When involving the players' characters in the Into the Fire story, you have to consider what background the characters are approaching it from and tailor your efforts accordingly. You could be running this story as a one-shot or a pickup game to test out the Demon rules. You could be using it as an interlude or an aside in a larger chronicle of your own creation. You could also be running it on the heels of Suffer the Children as part of the greater Fear to Tread chronicle. In either of the first two cases, involving the characters requires some up-front exposition in the first scene. The third case doesn't require as much exposition, since the characters will likely know everything they need to know about what happened in Chapter One, but you might find the opportunity for it in this story's first scene useful to tie up any lingering loose ends. By the same token, you might find this opportunity a useful point during which to fill in any holes the characters might still have in their understanding of the last story's events.

The first scene that follows is told from three different perspectives to cover the experiences characters would have as members of the Infernal Court, as members of the Blood Court or as agents of Lady Al-Lat, in hopes of covering all bases. Regardless, though, the means by which the characters arrive at that scene are based on where they're coming from.

AFTER SUFFER THE CHILDREN

It's actually easiest to involve characters of all stripes in Into the Fire from this perspective. The end of

Suffer the Children wrapped up with the characters leaving the brickworks of the Marshall School and making preparations to both recover (if they were injured) and report to members of their respective courts. Scene One of this story, therefore, follows those preparations naturally. Members of the Infernal Court arrange to meet at a garden of the Huntington Library the following night after hours. Members of the Blood Court arrange to meet that same following night at a place called the Vertigo Coffeehouse, which is run by a Faustian known as Julian Forester. Agents of Al-Lat choose to gather at a nightclub called The Kingdom. The characters arrive at the prearranged times, and Scene One begins as written.

JUMPING IN COLD

Even if the characters were not part of the events of Suffer the Children, arrangements are still being made by members of the respective courts to meet as was previously mentioned. In addition, supporting members of the courts are being courteously summoned either by invocation or by telephone call (possibly by e-mail as well, depending on the character) to discuss a matter of "grave import" to the court. The characters are contacted by the senior ministers of whatever demonic ministry they happen to be associated with and encouraged to attend. If the characters are relatively new members of their court or if they haven't shown themselves to favor working at the behest of any ministry in particular, they are contacted by the Eagle Minister (whose job it is to keep up with the court's members).

If the characters are Cryptic agents of Lady Al-Lat, they are likely not invited to meet with the members of the other two courts (unless they are undercover, as it were, and expected to do so). Instead (or afterward), Al-Lat contacts them one by one and asks them to join her for a meeting at a nightclub called The Kingdom. Some interesting news has come up about possible Earthbound interference right under their noses, it seems, and that situation must needs be discussed. If the characters are true Cryptics, that should be all it takes to pique their interest and bring them there straightaway.

SCENE ONE

(Before the description of the actual scene begins, an opening word of warning is in order for the casual reader or the Storyteller who might be in a hurry. This scene is outlined three different ways in order to cover all the established ways in which the players' characters might be introduced to the events as they are unfolding. The rest of the scenes don't require quite as much backtracking, so they flow a bit more smoothly.)

THE INFERNAL COURT

The meeting of demons of the Infernal Court who are either concerned about the events that transpired at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens or are simply responding to a general's summons sent out by Lord Chenrezig of the Ministry of Eagles convenes at the Huntington Library in San Marino shortly after the place has technically closed for the day. As the characters arrive separately or all in a group, they are met around the back of the building at a door marked "Employees Only" by an Asian woman named Violet Takahashi. As members in pretty decent standing at court, the characters recognize her as the demon Amererat — a Devourer who's secretly on staff at the library as a gardener. She leads them inside, through the stacks and over to one of several gardens on a different part of the property. On their way, the characters pass a sullen looking fallen named Nathaniel Hidalgo who morosely points in the direction in which Amererat is already leading them. As the demon Ebisu, Hidalgo also works here at the library on behalf of Lord Aglibol (the court's Minister of Aurochs), and it is his job to maintain this place as a gathering spot for demons of the Infernal Court. It's reasonable to assume that Lord Aglibol is already here (considering how important this meeting supposedly is), and if Ebisu looks so miserable, it's also reasonable to assume that Lord Aglibol is not happy with him for some reason. (If your players are not familiar enough with the connections drawn between characters in this book's Storyteller Character chapter or in *Demon: City of Angels*, you can simply have Ebisu tell them as much, rather than showing them thus.)

For her part, Amererat ignores Ebisu and leads the characters to one of the gardens she's been hired to tend. She stops at the threshold and ushers the characters inside, telling them that "the others" are just getting started. As the characters make their way into the garden, the center of which is shrouded all around from outside view, they can hear the sounds of conversation emanating from within. When they emerge into the center area themselves, they find a sizeable crowd already waiting. This crowd includes the following people (at the very least):

- Baroness Kishar — In the guise of an old black woman with white hair and wrinkled skin, whose name is Muriel Washington, Kishar stands barely five feet tall, and she appears to weigh less than 90 pounds. While she might seem to be a frail, tired old woman anyone who bothers to look into her eyes (which don't require any sort of corrective lenses) will be startled by the spark of youth and indomitable energy there. Her hair is white, and her skin is wrinkled, but something about her eyes bespeaks her iron strength.



• Ashur — Jeff Black (whom characters from *Suffer the Children* should remember) seems the stereotype of corn-fed, Midwestern good looks. He's a little over six feet tall and weighs close to 230 pounds. He's still in the uniform of a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy.

• Lord Aglibol — Also known as Jesus Arroya, Aglibol appears as a dark-skinned Hispanic man in his late 40s. He seems haggard and stressed, but he's got a pot belly and somewhat jowly cheeks. He is short and possessed of an air of insufferable arrogance. Unfortunately, an unpleasant miasma of body odor surrounds him as well, and his hair is matted as if he didn't have time to bathe before he came here.

• Lord Chenrezig — The head of the Eagle Ministry is a dark-skinned, scrawny Indian man with a scraggly beard and wild, unkempt hair. He dresses in many layers of mismatched clothing like a transient, but he lacks the unwashed aroma of most bums.

• Fell Knight Guanli — Jeremiah Azevedo (who characters from *Suffer the Children* might also remember) is a stocky Portuguese man. Although he's a recognizable officer of the LAPD, he is not in uniform at the moment (unless the timing from *Suffer the Children* works out that he should still be).

• Lord Vohu Mano — Vohu Mano, who is known among mortals as Jonathan Freeman, is a pale young man with fine hair almost-white hair, who is almost ethereally beautiful. (He should also be familiar from *Suffer the Children*.)

• Spentu Mainyu — The head of the Dragon Ministry has soft, rounded features, dark skin and an easygoing, affable smile on his face. He is rolling a dollar coin across the knuckles of his almost preternaturally long fingers.

(As the Storyteller, you should feel free to add any extra characters from the Infernal Court of Los Angeles to this scene, as well as Storyteller characters of your own design, if you so desire.)

These characters are arrayed around the meeting site engaging in uncomfortable smalltalk that the players' characters' arrival mercifully eliminates. Kishar is seated on a bench at the opposite end of the garden, at what is now the head position. Ashur is seated next to her, contrasting her tiny frame comically. Vohu Mano is on the same side of Kishar as Ashur, not seeming to be paying much attention to what is going on. Aglibol is next on that side, with a good deal of space between himself and anyone else. He has his arms crossed and is looking furtively around at the others when he's not glancing surreptitiously at his watch.

Spentu Mainyu is standing a few feet away from the baroness on the other side opposite Ashur. Next to him is Lord Chenrezig, who appears to be trying to engage

Spentu Mainyu in a conversation about bus routes, the layout of the sewers and patterns of smog over the city. (For his part, Spentu Mainyu is mostly just smiling and nodding.) Fell Knight Guanli (and anyone else you see fit to add to this scene) is standing more or less opposite Baroness Kishar in a strict parade-rest stance.

Introductions can go around the garden at this point if any of the characters are unsure of who any of the others are. Lord Chenrezig steps forward to handle this exchange, which he does without missing so much as a syllable of any character's mortal or Celestial Name. When he's finished, Lord Aglibol grumbles that it doesn't look like anyone else is going to show up, so they might as well get this gathering over with so he can get back to work.

Baroness Kishar takes over at that point, agreeing with Aglibol wholeheartedly (which earns a subtle roll of the eyes from Vohu Mano). She states that the reason everyone's come together this evening is to discuss a newly discovered threat by minions of one of the two Earthbound demons who are suspected to be at work in the city the Infernal Court has claimed. She stumbles a bit over how to refer to him without mentioning his name—and thus invoking him—and finally comes up with "the one who is not the Lord of Murder" (i.e., Enshagkushanna, rather than Manishtusu).

"Shaggy,' let's call him," Spentu Mainyu interjects good-naturedly.

Unamused, Kishar grudgingly accepts that and carries on. She makes sure that everyone understands that the Earthbound and their servitors are dangerous, unpredictable enemies of the fallen and that she will stop at nothing to see their influence erased from her city. She then asks Ashur and Guanli (and the characters, if they participated in the events of *Suffer the Children*) to come forward and fill everyone in on the specifics of this threat.

Ashur stands and speaks first. He tells everyone about feeling a sudden sense of demonic power that was greater than anything else he had felt since Lucifer's appearance above the LA skyline — one so strong and veined with such torment that he could not ignore it. (At that, several listeners nod in recognition or look wistfully up at the sky. Aglibol just checks his watch again.) As he was going to check it out, he received a call over his radio about a presumably drunk driver crashing through an outdoor café and destroying her car in a ball of fire. When he responded to the site of the one event, he discovered that it was the site of the other as well. Some unsuspecting human had been the victim of tainted infernal power, and that power had killed her.

His tale then proceeds in one of two possible ways. If the players' characters took part in *Suffer the*

Children, he describes meeting them at the scene then cedes the floor to them to describe their experiences from that point forward. If your players did not play through Suffer the Children, though, Ashur engages a tidy bit of exposition. He tells about searching the victim's apartment and running a background check to find nothing out of the ordinary. He tells about what the fallen medical examiners discovered when they examined the victim's body both naturally and supernaturally. He tells about visiting the school and intervening in a student revolt, after which he made contact in private with one of the students.

He then turns the discussion over to Guanli, who takes over somewhat nervously (again, if the characters are not the ones doing the talking.) The fell knight describes how he, an unnamed "friend" from outside the court and Ashur returned to the school after bed check and raided the place. He tells everyone exactly what was going on in the brickworks right on the school grounds and how two people had to die (and one unfortunate fallen comrade had to be consigned back to the Abyss) so that "Shaggy's" influence could be at least temporarily cut off.

The majority of the courtiers reacts to this news with disturbed shock, but not Baroness Kishar. She glares at Lord Chenrezig and demands to know why the court had no warning about this threat growing in its midst. Still somewhat in shock, Chenrezig begins to babble that so much has been happening lately and that the fallen who have made their way to the city are still so few that he and his ministry could not possibly be expected to uncover every small-time incursion by the forces of the Earthbound. Plus, the Earthbound have had so much longer to insinuate themselves into the city that defending against them is more a matter of rooting them out than in preventing them from gaining a foothold.

Lord Aglibol snorts in contempt and mumbles that if Lord Chenrezig did not spend so much time with his head in the gutter this problem might not have grown unchecked in the first place. This outburst earns him a glare from Kishar who says that rooting out threats against the court — which activities of the Earthbound definitely represent — and protecting the court is the responsibility of the Ministry of Aurochs in the first place. Why, then, did Aglibol not do anything about this situation? At this, Aglibol stammers, and his eyes roll in desperation until his gaze fixes on Vohu Mano. He points accusingly at the Minister of Dust and claims that since human beings were being victimized by the Earthbound, it should have been Vohu Mano who took care of the situation.

Such infantile finger-pointing should not appeal to a rational mind, but Baroness Kishar swallows it right

down. She turns her glare on Vohu Mano, who sighs in defeat and says that he did everything he knew how to do once he was finally made aware of the situation. He does not even try to argue with Aglibol.

If your players' characters wish to forestall more of this bickering before it gets entirely out of hand, have the players roll Charisma or Manipulation plus whatever Ability they think would be of the most help. If the characters do not decide to break in (maybe they are enjoying the show, or maybe they do not think that it is their place to pipe up at this point), Spentu Mainyu acts as the voice of reason. He steps forward toward Kishar and tells everyone that this is no time for pointless bickering. If anything, everyone should be thanking Ashur and Guanli (and the players' characters if doing so is appropriate) for the timely work that they all did. This tactic does not cool tempers, but it turns the discussion civil once more and ends the blame game.

"What needs to be done now, then," Kishar says after a tense moment or two of silence, "is to make sure that this Earthbound's influence has truly been cut off from this school of troublemakers. I understand that you all have other responsibilities, but who can I count on to see this through?"

Right away, Aglibol begs off, claiming that he has to leave soon. He says that he has to prepare for an impromptu City Council meeting the following day, at which the mortals will be discussing this very topic. Vohu Mano offers to check it out — even comes close to begging Kishar to allow him to do it — but Kishar denies his request outright. In the wake of that pronouncement, no one else makes a move to speak.

The uncomfortable silence that follows is designed to inspire your players' characters to volunteer. If they do so and they have also played through Suffer the Children, Aglibol eagerly supports them, Vohu Mano nods respectfully, Spentu Mainyu grins, and Ashur voices his support. Kishar commends them for their initiative and willingness to remain involved. If the characters volunteer without having played through Chapter One, the same response is engendered, except for the fact that Vohu Mano looks a little more frustrated and annoyed with Kishar. If the characters do not volunteer, though, Spentu Mainyu comes forward, looks around the gathering and fixes his gaze on them. Then, with a conciliatory smile, he recommends the characters to Kishar as "competent, impartial and, above all, loyal members of the Infernal Court." Without waiting for a reply, Kishar jumps at the easy solution and orders the characters to comply.

Once that brewing conflict has been settled, Kishar bids the characters to investigate as quickly and thoroughly as they can and to report back to one of the ministers or herself with anything they can find out by

the morning after next. (If the characters did not take part in Suffer the Children, she commands Guanli and Ashur to remain behind and tell them the location and layout of the school.) When all of that has been said and done, she thanks everyone for coming, then promptly dismisses them. One by one, the ministers leave, and the ball is in the characters' court.

THE BLOOD COURT

The meeting of demons of the Blood Court who are either concerned about the events that transpired at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens or are simply responding to a general summons sent out by Lady Nasu of the Ministry of Eagles convenes at a coffee shop in Santa Monica called the Vertigo Coffeeshop. The place is tastefully decorated to look like the living room of a nouveau-riche young urban professional. Abstract paintings hang on the walls, the floors are all varnished hardwood, and the couches and chairs all around are trendy home furnishings designed by the third leading interior designer on the local scene. The only concession to commercialism is a large chalkboard listing the names of the day's special blends, which hangs on the wall behind a long glass counter full of reasonably fresh baked goods. The place is only about half full of customers, all of whom are lounging around sipping drinks or partitioned off behind newspapers.

As the characters enter, the proprietor emerges from the door leading back to an office behind the counter. His name is Julian Forester, and he is quietly considered by many members of the Blood Court to be a piteous anomaly among Los Angeles' fallen community. For some reason, this Faustian (by deed, if not by official declaration) has retained the abilities and innate powers of his fallen nature, but he remembers only his mortal life and none of his long life from before. Object of pity or not, though, Julian owns this place, and it was he who set it up as a meeting place for the fallen of the Blood Court to use in privacy. To that end, he nods once, knowingly, to the characters and glances significantly in the direction of the three unisex restrooms near the rear, then down at his watch (as if to tell the characters that they're behind schedule).

As the characters make their way to the back, they casually enter the middle of the three doors (one by one or all together if they wish). The rear wall of this bathroom, they can tell automatically, is an illusion stretched out over yet another door that leads to Forester's private meeting room. Passing through this illusory barrier (which serves only to keep mortal customers from getting nosy), they enter the room where the luminaries of the secretive Blood Court of Los Angeles

have gathered and are waiting for them around a large conference-room-style table. These luminaries include at least the following characters:

- Lady Anat — The Tyrant of the Blood Court has blond hair and brown eyes and is immaculately groomed. She greets the characters with a very subtle Parisian accent.
- Lady Nasu — The Slayer known as Old Tilda is bent and wrinkled leather stretched thin across of a frame of bones, wrapped up in layers of strongly fragrant clothing. Her hair is a matted tangle of white, but her eyes gleam with an unexpected life beneath this unruly mop.
- Lady Inana — The Blood Court's Aurochs Minister is tall, slender and effortlessly elegant, and her chocolate-brown eyes are rich with innuendo and suggestion. Her brown hair is kept shoulder length and full to best frame her oval visage, and she has garbed herself in blacks and reds.
- Fell Knight Ravana — This warrior-woman of the Lion Ministry (whom characters who played in Suffer the Children should recognize) is strikingly attractive, with a well-rounded figure and bright, green eyes. As before, she shows no exposed skin except from the chin up and the wrists down.
- Lord Vritran — This character (also one the characters might recognize from Chapter One) is a lean, fit Korean man with excited, dancing eyes.
- Spantu Mainyu — This Devil whom his mortal contacts know as Scratch appears here just as he does in the preceding text, right down to the coin he's spinning across his knuckles.
- Lo-ruhamah — This demon is a severe-looking middle-aged woman who's still wearing a white lab coat with an ID badge from the Martin Luther King, Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center on the pocket. (Characters from Suffer the Children should recognize her as Doctor Katherine Roggenkamp from that hospital's morgue.)

(Again, as the Storyteller, you should feel free to add any extra characters from the Infernal Court of Los Angeles to this scene, as well as Storyteller characters of your own design, if you so desire.)

The gathered characters are either seated or standing around the table in the center of the room, some of them nursing cups of coffee, others going without. Lady Anat sits at the far head of the table with Spantu Mainyu at her left and Lady Nasu at her right. Lady Inana and Fell Knight Ravana are sitting across from one another, and Lord Vritran is lounging against the wall with a tiny espresso cup balanced on his palm. Lo-ruhamah is sitting by herself at the table with an empty seat between her and Ravana.

As the characters come in, Lady Anat rises to bid the characters welcome and asks them to make themselves comfortable. She then explains (to characters who were not part of Suffer the Children) that the reason she had Lady Nasu call everyone together who could make it on such short notice is that a possible opportunity has arisen in the form of a dangerous Earthbound incursion. Right away, Lady Nasu pipes up and asks, "Which one? Was it Manish—"

"No, no, the other one," Spentu Mainyu interrupts her (much to the relief of the others in the room). "But don't say either of their names. How 'bout we just call this one 'Shaggy' for safety's sake right now?"

This suggestion is met with some amusement around the room except for Lady Nasu, who looks vaguely annoyed. Regardless, Anat continues. She explains that what makes this situation a possible opportunity is the fact that while they (the members of the Blood Court) didn't realize what was happening until it was almost too late, the members of the Infernal Court apparently had even less of a clue. The challenge, then, is to investigate and capitalize on this situation now before the Infernal Court gets involved and see what advantage, if any, can be gained from it.

If your players' characters did not participate in Suffer the Children, Lady Anat takes this opportunity to step back and fill them in on exactly what she's talking about. She explains Ashur's part in the plot as she understands it second-hand from Lo-ruhamah. She tells them about Fell Knight Ravana's involvement (as well as that of Ravana's "friend from outside the court") in putting a stop to what was happening at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens. If, on the other hand, the characters did participate in the previous story, Anat praises them in front of everyone for their timely involvement. Either way, she chastises everyone for not noticing Enshagkushanna's growing influence sooner but encourages them not to dwell on it since there is still time to possibly make the best of this not-so-bad situation.

Lady Anat then suggests that someone from this court ought to check out the site of contention at the Marshall School. If the characters have already been to the school, Lady Anat nominates them straightforwardly. If not (and if they don't volunteer), no one looks their way just yet. Lady Nasu begs off going to the school itself but offers to attend the City Council meeting that's scheduled for the following day, at which the mortals intend to discuss the situation amongst themselves and try to deal with it on their level. The other ministers of the court make excuses related to their demonic work or inescapable responsibilities of their mortal lives.

Finally, if the players' characters still have not volunteered themselves, Spentu Mainyu looks in their

direction and says, "Maybe you'd be willing to help the court out, yeah? After all, there are so few of us here in the shadow of the greater Infernal Court...." Anat hesitates but then brightens to the idea. None of the other ministers have any objections, so the matter is (hopefully) settled. Anat asks the characters to take no more than a couple of days looking into the matter, then to get back in touch with herself or Lady Nasu. At this point, the characters are free to stay and interact with the members of their rebel court if the players so desire, but when Lady Nasu makes her exit about 10 minutes later, the other ministers and guests are not far behind her. Only Ravana makes any initial effort to approach and talk to the characters, and she feels the need to do so only if they have never been to the Marshall School before.

AGENTS OF AL-LAT

The meeting of those demonic agents of the Cryptic Lady Al-Lat who are either concerned about the events that transpired at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens or are simply responding to the general summons sent out by Al-Lat takes place at a nightclub off of Manhattan Beach called The Kingdom. The place is a sprawling four-floor monstrosity that radiates with garish neon lights and thumps and hums with the loud dance music emanating from inside. This place has become one of Los Angeles' quickest-to-the-top hot spots for the chic Hollywood crowd, although it is still less than a year old. The characters pay the cover, then head inside.

Inside, every surface is painted a dark color, the bar and the dance floors are packed with second-string beautiful people, and even inside, there's a lot of neon illuminating the place. Over it all, dance music blares oppressively loud, forcing the patrons to shout (or resort to crude pantomime) in order to communicate with each other. Lady Al-Lat considers the owner of this club — a mysterious demon named Nyx, who prefers to be called by her mortal host's name of Molly Vasquez — a reputable source of information, if the price is right, which is why Al-Lat wanted to meet here. As per her standard practice, Molly has secreted herself away on the fourth floor of this club in her private office.

The characters head for the back stairs, which lead to a dimly lit balcony lounge overlooking the dance floor below, then up to the office on the top floor. When they get to the top of the steps, they are stopped by a thuggish bouncer to whom they must give the password — "Nyx." Molly opens the door from within at this point and ushers the characters inside.

The office is only a little better lit than the rest of the club, but it is soundproofed so that only the barest vibration



from the clamor of music makes it in here. Awaiting the characters' arrival are the following characters:

- Lady Al-Lat — Also known as Xiao Yuen, Al-Lat possesses the body of a 17-year-old Chinese girl. She is slender and short but not yet finished growing. Her black hair is long and straight, almost reaching her waist, and only a single elastic band is holding it in any semblance of order.
- Lady Nasu — Lady Nasu appears here just as she does in the Blood Court text.
- Lord Chenrezig — This character appears here just as he does in the Infernal Court text.
- Fell Knight Guanli — This fell knight appears here just as he does in the Infernal Court text.
- Molly Vasquez — The demon Nyx is dressed in her best Hollywood-chic clubbing getup. Her tight body is pulsing slightly in time to the music from downstairs, and she is unselfconsciously gnawing her lower lip in anticipation of getting out to the dance floor for a while.

(Just as in the two previous iterations of this scene, you should feel free, as the Storyteller, to add any extra characters to this scene who might also be secretive agents of Lady Al-Lat, as well as Storyteller characters of your own design, if you so desire.)

Once the characters arrive and make themselves comfortable, Molly asks Lady Al-Lat if anyone else will

be joining them. Al-Lat indicates that she does not think so, and Molly excuses herself. She tells Al-Lat that she is looking forward to their talk after this meeting, and Al-Lat returns the sentiment with somewhat less sincerity. Then, Molly is gone, leaving only Al-Lat and her agents.

When they are alone, Al-Lat either explains what she has called this meeting for (if the players' characters did not play through Suffer the Children) or asks what it is that the characters have been up to at the Marshall School for Troubled Teens (if they have been there). If the characters have not been there (or if the players are still somewhat nervous about roleplaying a dialogue such as this), Fell Knight Guanli, Lord Chenrezig and Lady Nasu fill in the exposition. They tell either what they experienced (in Guanli's case) or what they heard second-hand from other members of their respective courts (in Chenrezig's and Nasu's cases).

Their consensus after this exposition has taken place is that the corruptive influence of the Earthbound who was using the Marshall School has been cut off for the time being. It seems, though, according to the respective courts' Eagle Ministers that the ministers of the Infernal Court and the Blood Court are content to call the deal done and let that be that. They have expressed only nominal interest in seeing the matter through, and no one has volunteered to

follow up. Al-Lat considers this lapse on the courts' part unconscionable—although she thanks her agents for lying low and not forcing the courts to get involved—and she declares that it is up to them to look more deeply into this matter.

To that end, she turns toward her newest agents, that is, the players' characters. Whether they have been to the Marshall School or not, she asks them to go there on behalf of their faction and see what they can find. She asks Nasu, Chenrezig and Guanli to focus their courts' attention elsewhere for the time being in order to give her other agents some little opportunity to function in secret. She wants the characters to go to the school, check out the site at which the Earthbound's power was the most concentrated in order to make sure that the taint of it has truly been cut off, try to find out how it managed to get a foothold there in the first place and, finally, to find out if any other parts of the school might have been similarly tainted yet somehow escaped notice.

Before they do that, however, Lady Al-Lat suggests that it might aid the characters in their investigation if they attend the next day's emergency City Council meeting. That meeting has been called in direct response to the community finding out about the situation at the Marshall School, and it seems to be intended as part press conference, part soothing balm on the public's fears that their children are being victimized and part

UNDERCOVER CHARACTERS

It's possible that you've constructed your chronicle in such a way that the players' characters are Cryptic agents of Al-Lat who have infiltrated the Infernal Court, the Blood Court or even *both* courts simultaneously. If that's the case, you can have them participate in one or both versions of this first scene, then report to Al-Lat in the third part about what they have witnessed. If you decide to do so, don't forget to have the recurring characters from the first two iterations (Nasu, Chenrezig and Guanli) present for Al-Lat's meeting as well. Like the players' characters, these Storyteller characters are infiltrators supplying Al-Lat with information.

The timing of getting these three spies together with Al-Lat and your characters, however, might be a little tricky. Just make sure that the Blood Court's meeting happens after the Infernal Court's meeting and that there is enough time between and after these meetings for the characters (all of them who are involved) to lose any pursuit they might have attracted and make their way to The Kingdom.

discussion on just what to do with the kids who are in the Marshall School right now.

Lady Nasu claims that she is going to be at this meeting strictly as an observer, but she welcomes the company if the characters are willing to go along. With that, the matter appears to be settled. Lady Al-Lat informs the characters that she will be expecting an invocation from them (or a simple cell-phone call if they prefer) once they have checked out the Marshall School grounds. If the players have no further roleplaying to do here, the meeting is adjourned.

SCENE TWO

(This scene is optional, and it is therefore not integral to the flow of events that keeps Into the Fire moving. It does not offer much in the way of opportunities for active character involvement, as it is designed more for passive observation. It does, however, provide a little background into what is happening in Los Angeles at the mortal political level. It also provides some partial closure to the events of Suffer the Children, as well as some hints for what is to come in The Judas Kiss. Should your players or their characters not be interested in this scene, though, you can simply have one of the Storyteller characters who is in attendance recap the important news at a later point during a lull in inter-character interaction.)

Under entirely normal circumstances, this City Council meeting might not be necessary. The story that is circulating about what actually happened at the Marshall School is that the new headmaster (one Henry David Vandermeer) had instituted some sort of secretive program in which he rewarded older and stronger students of the school for repeatedly abusing younger and weaker ones. Apparently, one of the school's counselors (Ms. Mary Blacksmith) discovered this program and would have exposed it except for the fact that she died in a tragic car accident before she could do so. On top of that, Los Angeles police and officers of the LA County Sheriff's office have discovered evidence of what could only be described as "occult demon-worship," which had been going on right on the school grounds for who knows how long. Vandermeer and one of the school's administrators are now deceased, Mary Blackwell is dead, and any other damage characters who played through Suffer the Children might have caused has been reported as well.

All that being the case, and with the circumstances in the City of Angels being anything but normal these days, this story has actually attracted quite a great deal of public attention. Reports of kidnapings all across the United States, and in Los Angeles especially, have conditioned the news-watching public to react with

strong emotions to any news item about children being in danger. The supersaturation in the media of the recent sighting of Lucifer over the LA skyline (however people might be rationalizing it) has also conditioned the public to glom onto stories with a supernatural or spiritual bent. On a subconscious level, though, the people of Los Angeles are simply becoming inured to a seemingly endless parade of stories about the recent earthquake and the subsequent riots, so they are searching for a new hot story that does not affect them so directly or tragically.

Regardless of the reasoning behind it, though, this meeting is already packed and bustling when the characters arrive. It is being held in the conference center of a large hotel by necessity, since City Hall itself (where this event might have otherwise taken place) has been demolished by the earthquake. The room has been arranged like an auditorium with the attending City Council members, the Lieutenant Mayor (Troy Daniels) and Deputy Jeff Black arranged at its head. The first several ranks of provided seating have been taken up by reporters from all media (and their attendant camera crews), and what space is left is filling with curious, demanding or infuriated locals who have come for the show.

Several fallen are present at this gathering as well, other than the players' characters. The most notable ones among them include Fell Knight Ashur (as Jeff Black), Lord Aglibol (as Councilman Jesus Arroya) and Baphomel (as Lieutenant Mayor Troy Daniels). Regardless of their affiliation, the characters are likely to recognize these fallen by simple virtue of their being such public figures in both mortal life and fallen society. A less public figure whom the characters might also recognize by reputation if not personal acquaintance is Yigal (known to mortals as Mrs. Joyce Allen). As the wife of one of the other councilmen, she has used her influence in the past to support programs for at-risk teens and to drum up support for a charity known as the Terminal Children's Fund. Her name has come up several times in discussions of both demonic courts, as well as in passing among Al-Lat's agents. Lady Nasu is here as well, but she will neither approach nor acknowledge the characters in the interest of maintaining secrecy.

As the characters arrive, find seats and take all of this in, the actual meeting is getting started. Lieutenant Mayor Daniels (a clean-cut, young American man of vaguely Irish ancestry, with a flawless complexion and neatly trimmed brown hair) opens the proceedings by apologizing that the mayor himself could not be present for reasons that probably ought to be obvious. He then thanks everyone for coming, asks the visitors to hold their questions for the moment and introduces Deputy

Black. As Black, Ashur stands and gives an official (which is to say, somewhat sanitized) statement on what happened at the Marshall School, on how those events were uncovered and on what steps were taken to bring the perpetrators to justice. The official story on the fate of Henry Vandermeer and Edward Harvey is that they were killed by officers of the LAPD for resisting arrest. (If Micky Pico survived your characters' version of Suffer the Children, Ashur adds that the traumatized boy is in stable condition but remains in a coma. Otherwise, he says that Micky was already dead when the police arrived.)

After that report, Baphomel (as Daniels) takes over the floor again. He says that the Marshall School has been closed down and evacuated since the discovery of what was going on, but it is no mystery that there are still a great many kids who need to be cared for, many of whom are more traumatized than ever. This statement prompts the inevitable question from the audience of where the kids and staff actually are now. Daniels answers that for the time being, emergency accommodation has been arranged with the local YWCA. More serious juvenile offenders who had been sentenced to attend the school by the courts have been divided up between the Tri-County Area's other juvenile-detention facilities, but such has not been necessary for the majority of the teens in residence at the Marshall School.

Exactly who has any authority over the fate and future of these students is a matter of some discussion at this point, as decisions have to be made about the short- and medium-term future of the school. The State Board of Education has appointed a temporary trustee by the name of Dominic Hill, and the first actual order of business for the City Council is to approve that decision.

Finally, the largest issue at hand is that of where the funds are going to come from to fix this mess. Most of the local government's money (as well as any federal money that has been doled out to the city) is tied up in rebuilding the damage inflicted by recent larger-scale disasters. If the children of the Marshall School, however, are not simply to be recycled into the ailing system and forgotten about, the school needs more money to get back on its feet. It needs a new headmaster and lead administrator, for one, as well as any replacements to the security staff that the players' characters' actions might have necessitated. The school also needs a new and larger counseling and teaching staff, but the costs associated with thoroughly checking these people's backgrounds and actually paying them has to come from somewhere.

In answer to these concerns, Daniels asks Joyce Allen (AKA the demon Yigal) to come forward. She

comes to the front of the room and addresses the entire crowd. First, she assures everyone that she and her husband, the councilman, are dedicated to finding a solution to this situation that is in the best interests of the community and these poor victimized children. To that end, she is helping to organize a coalition among her own personal charities and other willing private humanitarian organizations to see that these kids are taken care of. For instance, Annette Demilenko of the Blind Samaritan Foundation has already agreed to be a part of this effort. With a little more support, she says, her coalition can finally give these kids the correction, education and counseling that the system has thus far failed to provide them.

The crowd responds favorably to Yigal's promises, and the emotional resonance of the meeting takes on a relieved, hopeful tenor. The only sticking point seems to be that of who is responsible for protecting the community from what danger the displaced students of the Marshall School might pose now that they are no longer under lock and key on the school grounds. Ashur answers that although the Sheriff's Department and the LAPD are still stretched very thin keeping order in the wake of Devil's Night, some officers are still on hand at the YWCA for safety's sake. From that point on, the meeting devolves into a discussion of the same old topics that have been on the people's mind since Devil's Night (escalations of racial and gang violence, the progress of the rebuilding efforts, the Red Cross's critical shortage of blood on reserve and so on), and the issue of the Marshall School is tabled. Not long afterward, the Lieutenant Mayor announces that he and the councilors all have to get back to work on those very issues, and the meeting draws to a close.

SCENE THREE

It stands to reason at this point that your players' characters will want to jump right into their investigation of the grounds of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens (especially if they just sat through all that recapping without having much to add). If they played through Suffer the Children and they want to follow up on the welfare of the children they might have met there, though, (or if they're just especially thorough investigators), they might want to check out the situation at the Young Women's Christian Association building where the better-behaved children from the school are being temporarily housed.

THE YWCA

If the characters head for the YWCA first, they find it stuck in amid industrial office buildings and low-rent apartment complexes. The building is a squat concrete

structure with a parking lot, an outdoor basketball court and a fenced-in playground behind it. The back and sides of the building have been tagged and decorated by overlapping works of graffiti art, many of which show strong religious overtones in the wake of Devil's Night. Several police cars are parked in the lot, and uniformed officers are swaggering around, making a show of watching over the kids housed at the center.

As the characters approach, a brown sedan passes them on its way away from the center. If the characters played through Suffer the Children, have the players roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8). If they succeed, point out that this car is the same make and model as the one that was being turned away from the gate of the Marshall School at the end of their first visit there. If you don't want to tip your hand that the sighting is more than a mere coincidence, though, (which it certainly is) don't make them roll. Just mention the car offhand, and make a mental note that it was there.

Inside, the place is packed to the gills with teenagers of all ages and only a couple of handfuls of adults (many of whom look harried unto exhaustion at this point). If the characters do not especially look like dangerous weirdoes, they can walk around the recreational center and ask questions of the staff and students (which nets them the following information). If the characters played through Suffer the Children and interacted favorably with the character Alicia Rhowes, they can also seek her out and get from her a broad overview of recent events. Regardless, the information that can be gathered from the YWCA is as follows:

- After being housed here, some of the teens decided to take their chances on their own and slipped away through the center's crack security net. The local police who are on hand have made some half-hearted efforts to find these strays, and a few teachers with a modicum of streetwise have made their own inquiries. None of the runaways have been returned.
- Although many members of the staff (both of the YWCA and from the Marshall School) have good intentions, they are finding it difficult to understand their current predicament. There is a lot of mistrust, resentment and fear being repressed, and people are trying to work out exactly what went wrong and who is liable to take the blame.
- Nobody is really happy about this temporary housing arrangement, but most of the students (aside from the runaways) are still too shocked to complain more than the token amount.
- Maxwell Harris's "trusties" — those older students responsible for most of the abuse heaped on the younger ones at the former headmaster's behest — have all run away. Maxwell Harris himself has been inconsolable since Headmaster Vandermeer's "abandonment"

of him. He sits quietly on his cot most of the time and cannot be persuaded to talk.

- A lady named Joyce Allen (from the previous scene) has been making semi-regular visits to the YWCA recreational center to check up on the kids and to talk to the Marshall School staff. Sometimes, she comes with reporters and seems to be milking the spotlight; other times, she arrives alone and seems more genuinely concerned with the children's plight.

- A short time into this temporary accommodation, a blazing row broke out between two students and a teacher, with shouting and intimations of violence on both sides. This event has increased the overall tension among the students and staff. Worried about the backlash should such an event reaching the news, Dominic Hill has fired the teacher. Whether because of this incident or because of a mounting turnover rate among the staff, a new teacher has since appeared. Her name is Karen Waites, and she pitches in and cheerfully helps out as best she can with more than a little nervous energy. If the characters ask to speak to her, she is unavailable at present. In fact, she coincidentally left not too long before the characters showed up (in the brown sedan the characters noticed, for your reference).

THE OLD SCHOOL GROUNDS

Once the characters' visit to the YWCA recreational center is over — or in lieu of it, if the characters

did not think to or want to check it out — they make their way over to the grounds of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens in order to get on with their actual investigation. The place is a shell of its former self, but it is still a fairly forbidding structure. Stuck between a storage-space rental facility and an electrical substation, with concrete noise-breakers between it and the freeway, the building appears only cosmetically different now from the factory it was originally designed to be. It has a brooding, haunted look to it, even though it has only been shut down a relatively short time.

The place is now devoid of on-staff security guards, and there is no police presence to speak of, so getting into the grounds shouldn't be much of a problem. The front gate has been cursorily garlanded in yellow crime-scene tape, and it has been locked by a padlock and chain for the time being, but demonic trespassers should not find these obstacles insurmountable. The grounds and the main block of the school appear here exactly as they are described in the "Grounds and Layout" section of *Suffer the Children*, so refer to that chapter and the maps therein for appropriate descriptions. The only major differences to note for your players include how empty and lifeless the place feels and the fact that both the front door leading into the school and the door leading into the brickworks have been crisscrossed with more yellow police tape.

If your players went through *Suffer the Children* — or if they did not but they received specific details



in Scene One from those characters who did — they will likely head straight for the brickworks. If they choose to check out the inside of the school, though, refer again to the description of the interior provided in Chapter One. Everything listed there is still pretty much in the same condition now as it was then, except for the fact that the power has been switched off and the electronic locks no longer work. (Investigators from the LAPD performed a very hurried, slapdash investigation, it seems.) The only glaring exception here is that Headmaster Vandermeer's private quarters have been separately marked with crime-scene tape. Inside, the room has been pored over much more carefully and practically coated with fingerprint dust. Of especial interest, it seems, was the cabinet by the headmaster's bed in which, according to Suffer the Children, Micky Pico was kept imprisoned after Headmaster Vandermeer had him removed from the infirmary. A successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8) reveals to one's character's fallen senses that this piece of furniture caused and therefore absorbed a great deal of psychological trauma — more than any one child could possibly handle.

It is the brickworks on the corner of the school grounds, however, that is most likely to be the focus of the characters' attention. According to their firsthand experience (or secondhand information), it was there that Headmaster Vandermeer performed his ceremonies of obeisance to Enshagkushanna, so it is that place that should resonate most strongly with the infernal taint of those actions. It doesn't take long, though, for the characters' attunement to the supernatural to clue them in to the fact that something is not as it should be here. Instead of a permeating sense of dread infernal power (which the structure emanated before), the characters sense something else as they move toward the old brickworks — a feeling that is like nothing they have experienced in their progress thus far. They can detect no signs whatsoever of Enshagkushanna's lingering essence within 50 yards or so of the area — this new feeling seems to have banished it somehow. Within another 25 yards of the structure, the characters find it more and more difficult to proceed, until, at the outside limit of 10 yards, they can come no closer at all. Regardless of what the characters try, they cannot force themselves to pass within a radius of 10 yards from the structure. There is no sensation of pressure, energy or added weight, they just cannot make their muscles move. They can not even bring themselves to run, jump or even fly into this protected area. With a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 9 this time) by their players, the characters get that although all demonic taint has been erased from this place, something still does not want them getting inside. Eventually

(likely when the players get bored of being barred), they'll have to call off the investigation and leave for the time being.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

Before the characters can leave, however, a figure approaches them, seeming to materialize out of a nearby shadow. This figure is a woman of average height, with skin that displays an unfortunate tendency to break out in unflattering splotches. Her dark brown hair is drawn back in a short ponytail, and she is wearing a blue flannel shirt over dark blue jeans. She lights up a cigarette and introduces herself as Sylvia Sarah Woods, a reporter from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on long assignment in LA. She then adds in a conspiratorial whisper, "But my real name is Manat to fallen brothers in arms, as you appear to be. Don't use it lightly."

In response to subsequent roleplaying — or merely by virtue of her garrulous nature — she explains that she too has come to the Marshall School to investigate the reports in the news of evidence of "occult demon-worship" that have arisen in connection to the greater events surrounding the school. As both a reporter and a Luciferan, she was hoping to find some connection between what apparently happened here and the sighting of Lucifer in the LA sky. She has found no direct correlation as of yet, but she found it suspicious that the LAPD seemed to be in an especial hurry to finish its investigation and close down the school (even temporarily).

What really piqued her interest, though, she tells the characters, is what happened the same night that the police pulled up stakes and went on about their other business. As she watched from a hidden vantage point, a brown sedan pulled up via the service drive and parked. Three humans (two men and a woman) then climbed out of the car and took great pains to get over the fence and onto the school grounds. Once they had made their way in, these people wandered the grounds furtively, as if they were searching for something but did not quite know what that might be. When they got near the brickworks, though, they made a beeline right for it and disappeared inside. They emerged more than an hour later, looking grim and exhausted (rather than sweaty, jubilant and exhausted as they ought to have been if they had snuck into the deserted brickworks for some illicit carnal purpose). They then returned directly to their car and drove away, leading Manat to assume that they had done whatever they had come to do.

Curious as to what the three people had been up to, Manat had crept down to the brickworks, only to find her way supernaturally barred. A little confused but very surprised, she then decided to stake the place

out and see if those humans came back to finish up what they had started (or if other demons showed up to investigate and found themselves similarly frustrated). When she saw the characters having the same problem getting into the brickworks that she had been having, she took the chance to introduce herself to them and see if they had any better idea what might be going on than she did.

This point would be an ideal one at which the characters could engage in a little hasty recapping of their own in the interests of exchanging information. Should they be willing to do so, Manat is thrilled, and she goes into more detail about what she saw. Of course, she will do so anyway if the characters appear interested in what she has to say and ask her the right questions. She gives a description of the car in which the humans arrived, and it matches that of the car the characters might have noticed either at the YWCA or previously being turned away from the Marshall School in the last story. (She is also able to provide that car's license-plate number.) Furthermore, she is able to give the characters a relatively clear description of the three humans she saw. One of the men was a gaunt and weather-beaten fellow with longish fair hair and a moustache. The other was a burly man in his early 30s, with ruddy skin and a full head of curly black hair. The woman was a lady of average height, roughly in her mid-40s with a trim figure and dark hair. Manat didn't catch any names, of course, but the gaunt man lost his grip climbing down from the fence and cursed with a noticeably British accent.

Once this exchange has died down, Manat states that she intends to remain near the Marshall School a while longer and see if anything else interesting turns up. She is not under any sort of time constraint (other than her own patience), so getting to the bottom of the story is not a pressing matter for her. She thanks the characters for whatever information they might have given her and apologizes for keeping them as long as she has when they were obviously on their way somewhere else. She wishes them luck in their investigation and lets them know that she's willing to share information in the future if the characters are inclined to work with her again. She then exchanges contact information with them (provided they're willing) in order to facilitate that proposed sharing. Afterward, as the characters leave, she returns to her hidden vantage point and continues to wait.

SCENE FOUR

Regardless of which of the three organizations that are vying for dominance in the City of Angels it was that set the players' characters' involvement in

this story in motion (or requested that they continue their involvement, if the characters participated in Suffer the Children), the characters have been asked to report in to their superiors now that they have completed their initial survey of the grounds of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens. Even if they are not acting under any semblance of strict orders, it might behoove the characters to do so regardless, as neither they nor their superiors likely foresaw this new wrinkle in the situation that has been revealed to them by the demon Manat. Whether the characters choose to tell their superiors what they have discovered thus far by invocation, cellular phone or face to face makes little difference, as their superiors' subsequent orders will be more or less the same. The variable factor lies in which organization they report to.

Characters who support the Infernal Court of Los Angeles actually have the toughest time making their report. Baroness Kishar, Lord Chenrezig, Lord Vohu Mano and Fell Knight Guanli are unresponsive, regardless of how the characters attempt to get in touch with them. Spantu Mainyu answers invocations and/or cellular-phone calls promptly, but before the characters start talking, he tells them that he can not be of much immediate help. He then suggests that they contact Lord Aglibol, whom he feels is still largely responsible for this situation. The characters are, in fact, able to contact Lord Aglibol, who either talks to them remotely with an opening sigh of resignation or grudgingly agrees to meet them at the Huntington Library in the same garden at which they met before.

In the exchange that follows (however it happens to take place), Aglibol will summarize the events of the public City Council meeting if the characters show any interest in that topic. In return, he shows a great deal of interest in what the characters discovered at the Marshall School. The idea that humans have discovered the power and means of warding places against the advance of demons is one that many demons are still struggling to get used to, and Aglibol seems particularly dumbstruck by the idea. He questions the characters intensively about what Manat told them, interrupting their dialogue occasionally with such interjections as, "I was afraid we'd given them too much too quickly in the Garden," and, "Surely, the Morningstar never meant for these beings to have such power over us."

When the subject of the intrusive mortals' descriptions and particularly their car's license-plate number comes up, Aglibol takes especial note of it and vows to work with Fell Knight Guanli and have a contact in the police department see what he can find out. If the characters visited the YWCA where the children from the Marshall School are being housed

and they noticed the brown sedan leaving with the school's new temporary staff member in it, they might also mention as much to Aglibol. If they do, he adds this information to the list of things to have his and Guanli's contact in the police department check out. In the meantime, he says, he wants the characters to keep looking into these mortals' whereabouts. He wants them found, and he wants them brought before the court so that his fellow ministers can assess what risk they might present to Los Angeles' fallen community. He tells them that he will get in touch with them once the results of the background check are in and suggests that they might want to begin their search at some of the occult bookshops in the area, in lieu of any place better to start.

Characters who support the Blood Court have more immediate luck contacting their superiors. Lady Anat responds right away but tells them that she is busy and that they should speak to Lady Nasu right away. Lady Nasu responds quickly as well, but she admits that she does not feel comfortable talking via phone or invocation about this. She arranges to meet the characters either at the Vertigo Coffeehouse, where the Blood Court met previously, or at a site of their choosing. When everyone arrives at the location of choice, Lady Nasu begins by telling them about how the public City Council meeting went (regardless of whether the characters ask or show any interest). She then turns the meeting over to them and listens with rapt attention as they tell her what they have discovered thus far.

She seems far more intrigued than disturbed or frightened by the notion that these mortals the characters are telling her about might have some occult power over demons. In fact, she demands that they relocate this meeting to the grounds of the Marshall School so that she can see this effect in action herself. Upon their subsequent arrival there, she heads straight for the brickworks and is forced to stop short, just as the characters were. (The demon Manat does not reappear during this visitation, nor does she respond to attempts to contact her.)

Intrigued by the unusual effect the mortals' efforts are having on her and the characters, Lady Nasu commands the characters to tell her everything that they know about the mortals in question. She commends them on their attention to detail (especially if they tell her the descriptions of the mortals and the license-plate number of their car, as revealed by Manat) and states offhand that she would like to meet this Manat at some point as well. She then asks the characters to forgo their investigation of the events surrounding the Marshall School and direct their efforts to locating these mysterious mortals instead. Fell Knight Ravana has a helpful

contact in the Los Angeles Police Department who might be able to help out with the license plate, Lady Nasu tells them, and she herself has street contacts who might be able help in a physical search.

In the meantime, she recommends that the characters check out a place called the Inner Circle Bookshop. That place is owned and operated, she tells them, by a demon answering to the mortal name of Israel Arcella. (She is hesitant to give another fallen's Celestial Name without his permission, she explains somewhat apologetically.) If these mortals are as schooled in the occult as the effect they've wrought seems to indicate (and they are locals), it is possible that they have made themselves known among the small community of local esoteric booksellers. And even if these mortals have not come into Arcella's shop itself, Arcella might be able to help the characters find another shop that the mortals have visited. After all, while Arcella might not have the best selection of truly useful arcane material, he is well connected enough to point the characters in the right direction.

Characters who are Cryptic agents of Al-Lat have more or less the same experience as ones who support the Blood Court. The only difference is that Lady Al-Lat is the one who directs them to get in contact with Lady Nasu. (Neither Chenrezig nor Guanli respond to attempts to get into contact with them.) Lady Nasu's interaction with the characters proceeds just as it does in the previous text, except that instead of bringing up Fell Knight Ravana's name in connection with the Los Angeles Police Department, she refers to Fell Knight Guanli as the fallen with the potentially helpful contact therein. She ends the meeting the same way, though, by recommending that the characters speak to Israel Arcella at the Inner Circle Bookshop.

(Note: If any of your players' characters have contacts or allies within the police department themselves — or if they have contacted Fell Knight Ashur at the LA County Sheriff's Department — do not discourage them from having those alternative contacts check out the mortals' license-plate number and background. Just make sure that the information comes to the characters at the dramatically appropriate moment in the story, regardless of where it comes from.)

THE HUNTERS HUNTED

While a scene is technically a sequence of events that occurs at a single location, this "scene" stretches over several locations as the characters follow a trail of clues in search of their mysterious mortal quarry. Not every single step on this trail is absolutely essential, but following them all provides a variety of roleplaying opportunities and gives your players' characters plenty

of chances to make the proceeding logical steps without having to be led by the nose by a Storyteller character.

Keep in mind also that these guidelines for finding out about the mortals' activities and whereabouts are the baseline efforts that regular human beings might employ. Clever fallen angels can probably think of ways to use their evocations to shortcut some of this work and skip around in the story. Should they manage to do so, feel free to skip around in this chapter yourself and pick out the information that the characters have discovered.

THE YWCA

If the characters visited the YWCA recreational center in the earlier scene and made the connection between the new woman on staff there and the mortals seen at the Marshall School, they might wish to head back to the YWCA and stake the place out against the new staffer's return. Or, if they did not visit the center before, they might think to do so now in hopes that the mortals who took action at the Marshall School might show up at the YWCA to ward it similarly against demonic intrusion. (If the latter is the case, you might want to run the first half of Scene Three — leaving out the part about the sedan and Karen Waites having just left — in order to disseminate the information that can be had there before frustrating the characters with it in just a moment.)

For the time being, neither the brown sedan nor Karen Waites (the new staff member) are going to show back up at the YWCA while it is under the characters' surveillance. The place has not been warded against demons, but neither has Ms. Waites nor the brown sedan been back here since the characters last had a chance to see it. To make matters worse, the personnel records of all the new volunteers and staffers who have been helping out since the Marshall School was temporarily shut down have been misplaced in the chaos that the YWCA has become here lately. Unfortunately, the YWCA is a dead end for the characters.

THE INNER CIRCLE BOOKSHOP

The characters' visit to the Inner Circle Bookshop is less disappointing, although it is not immediately fruitful either. The characters find it on the outskirts of downtown LA, wedged into a shopping center between a fabric store and a barbershop. Miraculously, the place was not destroyed by the earthquake, but it did not fare quite as well in the ensuing Devil's Night Riots. The grocery store that used to be the shopping center's anchor has been burned out and closed down, as has the pharmacy next door to it. The shops farther away from the grocery have fared better, but all of them have had windows and glass doors smashed, and only about half of them have had the time or money to do more by way

of repair than to affix wood or plastic over the gaping wounds. The Inner Circle's front window is gone and replaced with lumber, but the sign on the door says that the shop is still open for business.

Inside, the bookshop is in relatively good repair. The wooden sheet over the window has been turned into an impromptu bulletin board, and rather cheap-looking particle-board shelves hold and display those of the shop's wares that likely used to rest in less shabby showcases before the riot. The place is about one quarter full of customers at present, most of whom are young female goth-wannabes in a cluster around the man behind the cash register. That man is a tall, lanky fellow with a pencil-thin mustache beneath an aquiline nose, and he is entertaining his groupies with a story about how the Bible's Cain killed his brother, Abel, not out of jealousy, but as a heartfelt sacrifice to a God, who turned out to be harder to please than Cain could have guessed. The girls are hanging on his every word — although some of the other customers are rolling their eyes at this revisionist apology for the first murder — and it jars them when he breaks off mid-sentence to welcome the customers to his store.

How the characters broach the subject of why they are here is up to them. They could either approach Arcella straightaway and start asking him questions or wait until he's finished with his theosophical conjecture and is no longer surrounded by black-clad young women. In either case, he responds right away when the characters mention that they were sent by either Lady Nasu or "Old Tilda" (which is Lady Nasu's mortal host's name). If the characters are investigating on behalf of the Infernal Court and they manage to pick up on the fact that he is more than a mere mortal, all they have to do is subtly imply that they are as well in order to get him talking. (Beyond those possibilities, giving the appearance of being willing to spend a worthwhile amount of money in his store will grease the wheels just as easily.) However they do it, the characters catch Arcella's interest and inspire him to invite them back into his specialty section of the store to talk with somewhat more privacy. That specialty section is basically a dusty storeroom that is stacked wall-to-wall with creaking shelves of old books. It is lit by a single fluorescent rectangle and furnished with a wooden kitchen table and two chairs. A few books are already out and open on this table, and as the characters begin to ask questions, he reshelves those books and tells them what he knows.

He admits that he can not help them where the car in question is concerned. He takes the bus to and from home, and he cannot see out of the front of his store during business hours until his window is replaced, so if the brown sedan the characters are looking for has been

near his shop, he has not noticed it. He does remember dealing with a few people matching the mortals' description (as the characters relate them) not very long ago — though it was definitely after they were seen at the Marshall School. He says that the two men did most of the talking, and between them, it was mostly the burly one in his 30s. They came in looking tired but a little nervous right before closing time one evening, asking him questions about this odd diagram that they had drawn crudely on a sheet of paper. They would not say where they had seen this diagram, but they wanted to know if he (Arcella) knew what it represented or what it could be used for.

He had told them that it looked like a poorly drawn summoning circle with aspects of a binding pattern layered on top of it, with which one could supposedly summon a spirit and try to make it do something. They had then plied him with plenty of other questions, none of which he could answer without seeing the original or knowing where they had come across it. Eventually, they had become so agitated and uncooperative that Arcella had recommended that they make an appointment to stop in at a place called Rare and Arcane Texts, run by a man who calls himself Bob Johnson. If Arcella and the characters have hit it off, he confides in them that he only did it because he does not especially like Bob Johnson and the visitors were starting to get on his nerves. (If he and the characters have developed a real rapport and he knows that they are fallen, he also confides that his Celestial Name is Meonenim and that "Bob Johnson's" Celestial Name is actually Irush'bal — although he did not tell his three visitors any such thing.) Then, having nothing more to add, he wishes the characters good luck finding what they are after. He also encourages them to buy something before they leave if they haven't done so already.

RARE AND ARCANE TEXTS

Making an appointment to visit Rare and Arcane Texts is not especially difficult. If the characters have enough information to invoke Irush'bal, he sets up the appointment as a matter of "professional courtesy" among fallen. If the characters are members of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles or Cryptic agents of Al-Lat (regardless of whether they invoke him or call his shop on the phone), he tells them that he is aware of their investigation through Lord Chenrezig and that he would be happy to speak to them. Otherwise, simply mentioning that Israel Arcella recommended him to them is enough to get them an appointment to talk — although, admittedly, Mr. Arcella's last recommendation turned out to be more of an annoying distraction than his (i.e., Mr. Johnson's) time was worth.

Regardless, Bob Johnson greets the characters in the tiny reception area of his small shop when they arrive and ushers them into his private office. Johnson is a tall, severe man with thin, black hair that hangs halfway to his shoulders. He sports a thin moustache and a Vandyke beard, and a pair of wire-rimmed reading glasses perches on his nose. His demeanor is reflected in his tastefully decorated office, which is dominated by a large mahogany desk. Johnson sits on one side, across from as many chairs as there are characters in attendance (provided the character who made the appointment mentioned how many people would be showing up).

If he knows of the characters through Lord Chenrezig — whom he admits he works for on occasion, though not in an official court capacity — he casually inquires about the progress of their investigation. He does not press the issue if the characters are reluctant to discuss it. If he does not know them (or once the small talk has died down), he asks them what they wanted to speak to him about. As soon as the characters bring up the three mortals whom Israel Arcella sent them to him to ask about, Johnson's expression becomes one of mingled recognition and haughty contempt.

He confirms that he did meet those people and that they did arrive in the four-door brown sedan that the characters describe. He admits that he was wary about making the appointment, but Arcella had recommended him to them, and the man who called on their behalf had a British accent that Johnson mistook for a sign of good breeding. No sooner had Johnson welcomed them into this very office, though, than the two men started asking all sorts of questions about subjects that he did not feel comfortable discussing — namely demon-worship, summoning circles, binding rituals and newly emerging warding practices.

The final straw, though, had come when the Englishman (one Lawrence Barber) had shown Johnson the supposed summoning circle that he and his cohorts had hastily sketched out. When the Englishman turned the piece of paper over to him, Johnson had taken one look at it and turned the three of them out of his establishment at once. It was not that the diagram had any power in it or signified anything especially dire. In fact, it was so crudely drawn and out of scale that it scarcely resembled a summoning or binding circle at all. No, the reason it evoked Mister Johnson's ire is that the diagram was drawn on the back of a yellow credit card receipt from a place called Club Dante. Knowing full well what type of place Club Dante is, Johnson was able to form an educated guess as to what type of person this Englishman was for having gone there — and what kind of people his associates must be for seeking out his company. As Johnson did not need that ilk lowering the

tone of his establishment, he sent them away without offering them any further help.

Mister Johnson has nothing of any further use for the players' characters' investigation, so if they have no further roleplaying use for him, he wishes them well and sends them on their way. Unfortunately, no one in any of the other few occult bookshops that are still in business in Los Angeles can remember having seen or encountered "Lawrence Barber," "Karen Waites" or any other mortals matching the description the characters give. Therefore, in lieu of waiting for (or asking for) an update from their superiors, the characters' only immediate avenue of inquiry is to visit this Club Dante and see if anyone there remembers seeing who the characters are looking for.

CLUB DANTE

Located in Westwood, near UCLA, Club Dante is one of Los Angeles' more specialized venues, at least that allows people in off the street and is still in business after Devil's Night. It opens nightly with a mix of industrial and hardcore house music, and features a sadomasochistic stage shows twice a week. It is literally underground, reached by a flight of stairs at the back of a building that houses a scuba-gear warehouse.

The stairwell down into the club is completely black, and at the bottom are brazen double doors

surmounted by the legend: *Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.*

The layout of the place is simply a large, rectangular brick cellar, the walls, ceiling and fittings of which are all painted black. At one end is the bar and swinging doors leading to the manager's office and staff room. The bar is surrounded by clusters of high tables and stools, most of which are taken when the characters arrive. At the other end of the room is a stage, and further on is a set of doors leading to unisex toilets. An even further door through this passageway constitutes the fire exit, which leads into a deep-cut alley. The DJ is set up in one of a series of alcoves in the long wall, and the other alcoves contain manacles and red or blue spotlights. Large video screens hang from above.

During the night, the place is packed with people, especially if it's a show night. The music is loud and oppressive but not too loud to talk through. None of the random patrons are in any particular mood to talk, as they are too busy either drinking themselves into a stupor or watching a dominatrix named "Mistress Scarlit" lash some poor ball-gagged fool into a sobbing, rapturous mess up on the stage with a cat-o'-nine-tails. The bartender is willing to answer questions, though, as long as the characters are buying drinks. When asked, he tells them that he does indeed remember an



Englishman matching the characters' given description hanging around several nights ago. The guy called himself Lou and really seemed to enjoy Mistress Scarlit's show more and more the more he had to drink. Yes, the guy paid for his drinks on a credit card, and as a matter of fact, he put a round for everyone bellied up to the bar with him on that card. (In point of fact, the English guy was so drunk when he signed the receipt that he forgot to leave a tip or total up the tab — which the bartender will confide if the characters have bribed him to answer their questions. Fortunately, the bartender remembered to take care of it for him once the guy was gone.) The guy puked up his guts in the bathroom a little while later, then staggered out the front door, presumably on his way home. He has not been back since.

The only thing that this bartender has to offer that might be of any use to the characters' investigation at this point is the Englishman's credit card receipt (which has the man's credit-card number on it). He is not just going to offer it to the characters, though, without them offering some sort of appropriate incentive first. They might be able to intimidate him into being helpful by convincing him that they are authority figures in the midst of an official investigation (which will be tricky without proof of the same). They could also inspire his generosity with an expression of their own (to the tune of no less than \$100). Finally, an appropriate or clever evocation might help out as well.

SUCCESS

Eventually (whether you have skipped directly to this part from the very beginning of Scene Four to save time or you have played through each of the intervening mini-scenes as the characters pursued their investigation), the characters' immediate superior of their fallen affiliation gets back in touch with them via invocation. That superior (be it Lord Aglibol or Lady Nasu as it follows from earlier in the scene) first asks for a progress report, then listens to the characters' recounting of recent events and adds appropriate praise or expressions of concern where such would be appropriate according to how your characters conducted themselves. When that initial exchange is over, you should tailor the characters' superior's news according to whether or not the characters managed to find the credit-card number at Club Dante. One option keeps the story skipping along apace, but it takes some of the work out of the players' hands. The other takes a little longer, but it validates the characters' work up to this point.

If the characters did not end up with Lawrence Barber's credit-card number, have their superior tell

them that the LAPD contact he (or she) spoke of earlier was able to run the license-plate number they received from Manat. As it turns out, that car was a rental vehicle that had been rented out to one Stanley McIntyre. His credit-card number was on file at the rental agency, and its record showed that it had also been used to rent a room at a Super 8 motel by the highway just outside of town. Since the car has not yet been returned or reported stolen, it stands to reason that the characters might still be able to find it there (as well as the people who rented it) if they hurry. The superior tells them that he (or she) wants them to go and find out if the mortals are still there, then report back for further instructions. Then, move the story along to Scene Five.

If the characters did do all the work to uncover Lawrence Barber's credit card number, though, change up the details a little. Have their superior tell them that according to the license-plate number they provided, the brown sedan they have been looking for is registered to one Tony Gibson, who died several years ago without ever selling the car. Its insurance policy lists the late Mister Gibson's wife, Koruna, as the secondary driver, but for some reason, the title was never transferred to her. For the moment, the car looks like a dead end because there has been no answer at the last known phone number of Koruna Gibson.

When that news comes out, the characters should turn over the credit-card number they have uncovered (if they have not done so already). A little lag time will need to occur at this point so that the characters' superior can take that number (which he or she remarks will likely be much more helpful) to his or her police contact. When that time elapses, the superior gets back in touch with the characters with better news. The characters learn that not only was this card used to help impoverish one Lawrence Barber at Club Dante, it was also used to rent a room at a Super 8 motel by the highway just outside of town. That is likely where Mister Barber is staying (and possibly his two accomplices as well), and thanks to the characters quick and diligent work, they just might be able to find them all there. The superior tells them that he (or she) wants them to go and find out if the mortals are still there, then report back for further instructions. Then, you can move on to Scene Five.

(If the characters came across the name Karen Waites at the YWCA and mentioned it to their superiors in the early stages of the investigation, the higher-up informs them that he [or she] could find no official documentation on anyone by that name who has any reasonable connection to the Marshall School, the YWCA or even the brown sedan. It is mostly likely a

pseudonym, the superior suggests, for the woman that Manat saw sneaking around with the two men on the school's grounds.)

SCENE FIVE

The first order of business in this scene is to determine whether or not these three mortals for whom the characters are searching are actually at the location that the characters' gathered evidence has indicated. They are supposedly holed up in a Super 8 motel outside of town, but at least one of them has a temporary job with the displaced staff of the Marshall School, and another has exhibited traceable spending habits elsewhere in the city. The characters, therefore, have the option of staking out places that they think the mortals might show up and trailing them back to their base of operations that way or risking tipping the mortals off by just showing up at their suspected base of operations and taking action based on what they learn there.

Should the characters try staking locations out for surveillance purposes, they are likely to be disappointed. The woman using the name "Karen Waites" does not return to the YWCA or contact any member of the staff about her refusal to do so. Some of the children who had grown fond of "Ms. Waites" are worried that something might have happened to her, but they have no actual evidence to support this vague, formless fear. Members of the staff are more pragmatic. Doing this job in this city these days after everything that has happened is tough, they say. It does not surprise them that "Karen" did not have the stamina to keep up with all of the hard work, especially with these being the circumstances of her first exposure to the job. Frankly, they do not expect to ever see her again.

Checking out the Marshall School in the hopes that the mortals come back to check on their handiwork is equally fruitless. The demon Manat is there when the characters arrive, and she informs them that, as far as she knows, no one has been back to the school since the last time she spoke to them. If the characters are feeling chatty, she asks them about the progress of their investigation and if they have learned anything interesting that they might be willing to share. Whether or not they comply, she complains that she has not been able to come up with anything worthy of note since her police contact has been slow to get back to her with any information about the license-plate number she gave him. She seems resigned to wait, though, and she turns down the first invitation the characters might extend to join them in their investigation. (Subsequent attempts to change her mind might work, depending on how you as the

Storyteller feel about adding her into the rest of this scene.) Should the characters then decide to test out the efficacy of the effect that is keeping them out of the brickworks, they find that it works just as well as ever, halting their progress at a minimum 10 yards from the structure.

Your characters might also think to check with their superiors regarding the spending patterns of the credit card that came up either in conjunction with the license-plate number that Manat gave them or as a result of their further investigation. If you have determined that the card belongs to Stanley McIntyre, the last several applicable charges to the card reveal nothing out of the ordinary. The deposit for the car rental shows up, as does the deposit for the rental of the motel room. The only other recent charges come courtesy of a couple of gas stations, a grocery store in town and a convenience store. Should the characters map out the locations of these places, they will find that the stores and gas stations are all within about 10 or 15 minutes (by car, that is) of the Super 8 where the mortals are supposedly staying. If you have decided as a result of your characters' investigative efforts that the card in question belongs to Lawrence "Lou" Barber, the expense record is not all that different. The deposit for the car is not listed, but the one for the room is, as are the charges at the grocery store, the gas stations and the convenience store, as well as an outrageously inflated charge at Club Dante for the night on which the bartender at the club said that Lou came in. The only other charge of note is one from a local gun shop for two boxes of .357 magnum bullets.

Should the characters decide to visit or stake out any of those locations, they will find themselves similarly frustrated. The mortals do not return to any of them while the characters wait and watch. The employees inside, likewise, do not remember having seen any of the mortals in question inside their establishments, but then again, they hardly pay attention to average, everyday customers anyway. What is more, the longer the characters decide to wait before getting back in touch with their superiors, the more anxious and impatient their superiors are likely to become. If more than one day goes by while the characters are staking out these extraneous locations, they receive an invocation from their immediate superior demanding a progress report. An update on what the characters are doing will garner some strained praise, followed by an agitated encouragement to stop fooling around and just get to the Super 8 already. If these mortals are demon-hunters who wield such effective techniques against the fallen as they already seem to have, the superior points out, any time that the characters waste

could only add to the mortals' advantage. Therefore, it behooves the characters to confirm the mortals' *actual* location quickly so that they can then determine what to do next.

The first step in doing so, then — or the characters' first step in this scene if they are not so easily distracted — is to check out the hotel. They can try to do so by calling, but that avenue is not likely to lead them anywhere helpful. They can call the front desk and ask to be put through to Stanley McIntyre's room (or Lawrence Barber's room, depending on the circumstances), but the desk clerk will not do so without the specific room number extension. (Unfortunately, this number does not appear on the card-holder's account activity summary.) The most information that the desk clerk will give away over the phone is whether or not the party in question has checked in — company policy, he claims, forbids him from doing anything more. Showing up at the Super 8 itself and speaking to the desk clerk in person reveals the same information initially, but more can be coaxed out of him with the proper monetary incentive. If the characters pay up, the clerk will tell them what room the card-holder rented, he will tell them that the room has been rented through the end of the next week, and he will tell them that the room has two double beds and a roll-away cot. He will also confirm that the descriptions the characters might give for the mortals match those of the room's three occupants, as well as the fact that they are driving a brown four-door sedan.

On the other hand, the characters can confirm the presence of their quarry's transportation on their own. It is parked at the end of a long line of identical motel rooms that are stacked three stories high in two long rows connected on one end by the lobby and continental breakfast area. On a successful Perception + Investigation roll, the characters notice that a lingering whiff of burnt motor oil is hanging around the car and that tiny puddles of water have collected under the front fenders as a result of condensation dripping off the air-conditioner pipes. This evidence suggests that not only are the demon-hunters likely inside, they probably just arrived as well.

This likelihood is confirmed very shortly thereafter when a woman in her early 40s descends the steps and heads right for the car. She is average in height with a trim figure and longish dark hair, matching the description Manat gave them. This is probably the woman who has been going by the name "Karen Waites" at the YWCA recreational center. (If the characters investigated thoroughly and came across Lou Barber's credit-card number at Club Dante, they can reasonably infer that this woman is Koruna Gibson, the widow of the Tony Gibson who owned this car.)

As she descends the stairs, she makes no attempt to move quietly, and she seems distracted and agitated besides. If the characters are gathered around her car, she does not notice them, and her distraction offers them the chance to make Dexterity + Stealth rolls to hide from her. When she reaches the ground level, she approaches the car and opens the trunk with one of a set of keys that jangles loudly on a curly rubber cord at her wrist. She then pulls out two handfuls of small plastic bags that are full of groceries, closes the trunk and heads for the stairs again.

By watching carefully from the ground or stealthily following this woman, the characters can see which room she is staying in (if they have not found out this information already). By listening outside, they can hear that the television is on, the shower is running and that two people are talking. One voice is that of the woman, while the other is a gruff, deep voice without any noticeable British accent. (The characters can, therefore, surmise that the Englishman is the one in the shower.) It seems that, for the moment, all the mortals for whom the characters have been searching are present. It is now time for the characters to contact their superior once again.

CONFRONTING THE HUNTERS

Depending upon how long it has taken the characters to reach this point, the characters' superior either commends them on a speedy investigation or mumbles something to the effect of, "It certainly took you long enough." He or she — depending upon whether the characters have made contact with Lord Aglibol or Lady Nasu as appropriate to their affiliation — then broaches the subject of the characters making contact with these mortals (or possibly handing them over to another member of their demonic hierarchy) in order to assess just how much they know and how dangerous they might be. The superior is willing to leave that decision up to the characters, but he assures them that he is also willing to lend the characters whatever support they might need (within reason, of course).

The characters then have two major options before them, which themselves present even further options as to how to carry them out. On the one hand, the characters can choose to attempt to pry the requisite information from the mortals themselves. On the other hand, they can choose to arrange for the mortals to end up in the hands of their (i.e., the characters') demonic superiors.

DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

Should the characters make the decision to approach the mortals on their own, they must further decide how best to initiate contact so as not to put



the mortals' defenses up right at the outset. First of all, they could present themselves as fellow demon-hunters who stumbled across these three mortals' trail during their investigation of the grounds of the Marshall School. They could claim that their own investigation has been derailed and that they would like to combine their forces in an effort to see that the menace has been laid to rest. All they have to do first is compare notes and see who among them is capable of what....

This method could succeed if the characters make contact with the mortals tentatively and the players roleplay a combined sense of desperation, abiding mistrust and subtle hope that their characters have found possible allies. Successful Charisma + Empathy rolls, supplemented by successful Manipulation + Subterfuge rolls, will help out in this respect, as will plain old good acting. Dishing out dirt on other fallen in the city (such as enemies or annoyances whom the characters might have had trouble dealing with in previous sessions) in the form of a tactical exchange can help prove the characters' good intentions as well.

From the demon-hunters perspective, the woman (Koruna Gibson) will be the first to accept the characters' story and the one to ask the fewest questions. Stanley McIntyre (the group's ostensible leader) will be harder for the characters to convince of their sincerity, but he will argue in favor of accepting their help once

he has been convinced. Lou Barber, on the other hand, will be the toughest sell of them all. He remains paranoid and suspicious throughout, even if he is given no reason to suspect that the characters are anything other than mortal human beings like they claim. He will argue with Stanley and Koruna (and the characters if they chime in) until either his friends change their minds or the characters have so thoroughly convinced the two of them that he has to give up and sulk. He will not offer any information, regardless of how he might be cajoled. (Stanley and Koruna, though, will be willing to answer any questions that the characters might have.)

A slightly more risky tactic is for the characters to approach the mortals and reveal their divine nature by claiming to be angels of God. A likely cover story could be that they have been sent their Creator to aid the mortals in their crusade against evil here on Earth. By the same token, they could claim to have been sent by God to reward the mortals for what they did at the Marshall School or say that they were the ones who were assigned to deal with the problem there before anyone realized that the mortals had taken action.

The same successful Social rolls can pave the way for this exchange to go smoothly, but one or more of the characters with a low Torment rating taking on his apocalyptic form or performing a non-Tormented evocation will help out immensely. After all, it can

be reasonably assumed that these people already believe in the existence and palpable presence of demons, so believing that angels are real as well should not be too much of a stretch. (And besides, as incongruous a maxim as the following is, nothing boosts one's flagging faith like a display of proof.) The characters will find Koruna dumbstruck and docile in response to this approach, while Stanley will all but break down into relieved sobs to find that his work has not been in vain all this time. Lou, as before, will be somewhat harder to convince. He will dismiss the characters' story outright if they appear in their human guises. If any of them take on their apocalyptic forms, he will assume that that character is a demon that is trying to trick him and his friends, and he will draw his pistol from a shoulder-holster under his jacket. He will take his cue from Stanley and Koruna, however, on whether or not to open fire. If the characters have convinced Stanley, Lou will grudgingly hear them out. He will not offer any information, but he will supplement what Stanley has to say if prompted by Stanley to do so.

The most inherently risky approach tactic that the characters can undertake is to make no effort whatsoever to conceal their true fallen nature. They could roleplay the act of laying on the demonic shtick fairly thick in a straightforward effort to intimidate, terrify or torture the information they want out of the mortals. (Such an effort relies on the rules presented in the Systems chapter of *Demon: The Fallen*.) The characters could also decide to tell the humans the straight-up truth that they (that is, the demons) were once unjustly imprisoned for the sake of humankind but now they are back hoping to make up for lost time. Finally, they could borrow an idea from the failed Peter Horton television vehicle *Brimstone* and claim to be damned souls who have been temporarily released from Hell in order to hunt down an even greater number of unrepentant escapees.

Regardless of the specifics of the story any self-confessed demon gives the mortals, the characters are going to immediately put the mortals on the defensive and establish an antagonistic relationship. Unless the players make exceptional Social rolls (or are exceedingly clever in how their characters make their approach), these demon-hunters are going to react in the least helpful way they can. Koruna will panic and try to get to Lou or Stanley for protection. Stanley will begin chanting a prayer of abjuration and follow it up with a prayer of banishment (both of which Koruna will help him with once she regains her senses). For his part, Lou will open fire with his .357 magnum. If they are able to drive the characters away completely, they will then pile into their car and flee Los Angeles as fast

A RECKONING

Note that the hunters in this adventure are not imbued. That is, they are not touched by the Messengers as described in the game *Hunter: The Reckoning*. They do share some characteristics of the imbued, however, such as their lack of knowledge of the larger forces at work and the fact that are ordinary people trying to do their best when confronted by a horrible reality. If you do want to construct this story as a crossover with the *Hunter* game, go right ahead. It certainly makes these demon-hunters even more dangerous opponents, but you are also asking for several serious adjustments in the way the hunters react to your characters' demons.

Remember that imbued hunters can sense agents of the supernatural and they share some of the fallen's resistance mind-controlling or -altering supernatural powers. They also have a host of unusual supernatural powers available to them, which can stymie demons who are not expecting them. The dynamic between demons and regular mortal demon-hunters is quite different than that between demons and the imbued, so be prepared to account for that difference should you decide to proceed thus.

as they can. It will take plenty of fancy footwork, quick thinking and possibly multiple evocations on the characters' part to pull this particular approach off without ruining any chance of willing cooperation from these demon-hunters.

HANDING THE DEMON-HUNTERS OFF

If, however, the characters discuss the situation with their superior and decide that it would be best to bring these mortal demon-hunters to some more secure location and have other demons of their social hierarchy conduct the interrogation, new possibilities arise. The characters can still approach the demon-hunters and use any of the preceding cover stories (and related caveats) in an effort to lure them to a prearranged rendezvous. They could also stage some sort of showy raid on the demon-hunters' room in an attempt to flush the mortals into the waiting arms of the characters' allies. The characters might also choose to simply kidnap the mortals and take them to a place of their superiors' choosing, either staking out the Super 8 and nabbing the demon-hunters one by one when they are alone or breaking into their room while they are asleep and taking them away before they have a chance to react. If they have police contacts or allies, the characters might even be able to arrange for the demon-hunters to be picked up on suspicion of some criminal involvement and then arrange for a few moments alone with

them in the interrogation room. Any such antagonistic move—except for having them arrested—will engender the same defensive response from the mortals that revealing the characters' demonic nature would have elicited in the preceding section.

Should the characters be successful, though, the places to which they are to bring the mortals varies based on what organization the characters are affiliated with. Members of the Infernal Court are instructed to get the mortals to the Huntington Library after hours, into the same section in which the characters were first given this assignment. (Lord Aglibol will be in attendance, as will Lord Vohu Mano and Fell Knight Guanli.) Members of the Blood Court are ordered to bring the mortals to the rear alley entrance of the Vertigo Coffee-house after it closes. (Lady Anat herself will be present for this interrogation, as will Lady Nasu and Lord Vritran.) Agents of Al-Lat are asked to bring the mortals to The Kingdom, where Nyx will make some suitably private space available for an "interview." (Lady Nasu and Lady Al-Lat will be in attendance here, as will Lord Chenrezig and Fell Knight Guanli.)

INTERVIEWING THE DEMON-HUNTERS

The decision of which characters to include in the scene and where the scene will take place in which the demon-hunters give over the following information depends on the events of your story thus far. The methods by which the characters receive this information (be it torture, trickery or honest open dialogue) will vary as well. Regardless, the demon-hunters possess the following information to parcel out, at a rate reflective of how well the characters treat them.

First of all, they give their names as Stanley McIntyre (the ruddy-faced, curly-haired one), Lou Barber (the Englishman) and Koruna Gibson. Stanley used to be a priest until he took up this new calling to seek out demons on Earth and deal with them as best he could in order to defend regular people from their depredations. Koruna is an immigrant to this country from the Czech Republic who married an American businessman, who subsequently died and left her a widow. She took a job as a teacher to maintain her citizenship, and she uncovered the presence of a demon at her school. She made contact with Stanley shortly thereafter, and the two of them have been working together ever since. Lou was a demon-hunter before he ever left England, and he made his way by killing them or their thralls wherever he uncovered them. He hooked up with Stanley and Koruna on a "business" trip into the States, and he has been helping and protecting them ever since.

Working together, they make a reasonably effective team. Koruna has a way with integrating herself

seamlessly into new environments and getting people to talk to her, which helps them uncover evidence of demonic abuse and root out perpetrators of demonic corruption. Stanley is a brave man whose faith in God gives him the strength to face demons eye to eye and drive them away. He also knows certain rituals and prayers with which to ward a place against demons, to bind them in place, to banish them and to exorcise them. He has also developed some experimental rituals that combine certain of these effects. Lou considers himself the muscle of the group. He carries a .357 magnum and is unafraid to use it either in conjunction with or in absence of Stanley's efforts. He believes in the rightness of what Stanley and Koruna are doing, and he has made it his personal mission to make sure that they stay out of harm's way. He also knows where to go and what to look for in terms of occult research material, and his input regularly aids in Stanley's ritual efforts.

They originally came to Los Angeles shortly after Devil's Night. Watching the (as they call it) "horrifying" footage of Lucifer rising over the Los Angeles skyline again and again on the news convinced them that if they really wanted to wage a war against the forces of Hell, LA would be the foremost battlefield of that war. Shortly after arriving here, they witnessed the wreck that took the life of Mary Blacksmith of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens, and they could not rationalize away what they had seen as any mundane car accident. They investigated as best they could and finally managed to trace the evil back to the brickworks on the school grounds. They snuck into the place to see what they could do to abjure that evil, but as it turned out, the headmaster's vile secret had already been exposed. Yet, the taint of the demon's touch on that place remained, so they prayed and chanted and ceremonially cleansed the site together, performing a ritual that Stanley had devised to keep any and all demonic beings or servitors away.

They had then set about both to make sure that the children who were displaced from the Marshall School were okay and to learn what they could about the unusual summoning circle and ritual accoutrements they had discovered at the brickworks. Koruna took care of checking on the children and confirming that the presence that had menaced them at the school was having no lingering effect on them now that they were away from it. Also, the three had visited several shops that specialized in the occult, trying to figure out what kind of ritual was being performed in the brickworks. (Lou and Stanley both admit that they were doing so only partly to develop some countermeasure against it. Mostly, the lure of hidden, forbidden knowledge was too tempting to resist, and they just wanted to know.) Anyway, the best that they could figure was that the

diagram they had found was a circle that could not only summon demons from the depths of Hell, but also bind them to that spot until they swore to faithfully serve a more powerful demon. All the ritualist would have to do was spill the blood of a willing supplicant and offer up the soul of a child once the demon so swore, and that demon would be free to walk the Earth at his new master's behest. They had only just begun to figure out the particulars of how the ritual worked, as well as how it might be altered to bind a demon to a human's will, when they found themselves in their current situation under these circumstances.

THE FALLEN RESPONSE

The response of the characters' superiors to what these demon-hunters have to say (whether those superiors hear it firsthand from the mortals or secondhand from the characters after the fact) is swift from excitement. If they are not present for the interrogation, the superiors demand that the characters bring these mortals to them (at the aforementioned rendezvous points) right away. When the characters arrive with the mortals, their superiors then commend them for all their hard work and dismiss them with thanks. If they are present for the interrogation, those superiors do the same, so that, in the end, they end up alone with the demon-hunters, and the players' characters do not have much to show for their efforts. If pressed for why they are being so secretive all of a sudden, the superiors hint that they would like to discuss the mortals' research with the mortals further in hopes of possibly building it into a potent weapon for their future use. They will elaborate no further, however, and they come as close as they have to after that to kicking the characters out.

SCENE SIX

Quite some time passes after the events that ended the previous scene. It is more than enough time for the characters to discuss what they have been through, to check up on the students of the Marshall School, to effect any cover-ups that they might need to see to as a result of their investigation or to repay favors that they might have had to call in during the course of their investigation. If you want, you can even interject a short story of your own devising in the downtime. (Just resist the temptation to skip ahead to *The Judas Kiss* at this point.) At the very least, enough time should pass to inspire the characters (or even the players) to wonder just what is going on with the mortals they went to so much trouble to find.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the characters' superiors are stonewalling. They do not respond to invocations or more mundane attempts to establish contact. They refuse to grant the characters or even their more

immediate underlings an audience to discuss the matter. They sequester themselves for several days at a time (presumably with the mortals) and shut off all contact with the outside world. And even when they finally emerge at the end of this uncomfortably long period, they refuse to discuss any of the mortals' work or their own observations of it. As they begin to reinitiate contact with their supporters and exert their presence on the demonic social scene once again, they gloss over any mention of anything that might have transpired up until that point. They do not act as if they have forgotten it, rather they act as if they do not want to talk about it. Those who know their superiors very well might be able to detect a hint of frustration or disappointment, but that is as much as their superiors are willing to reveal. The most that they can be forced to say is that the humans are no longer collaborating and that they have been sent on their way to do as they please.

Yet, not long after that, the characters receive an invocation (or a phone call or an e-mail, depending upon what information they have given) from Manat. She says that she wants to get together with the characters and discuss the unpleasant way in which their investigation has wrapped up. She does not want to discuss it remotely, though, so she asks them to meet her in the parking lot of the Martin Luther King, Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center. She says that she will explain everything once the characters get there, but she would prefer it if they hurried.

When the characters arrive, Manat is standing by a 10-year-old Honda and is littering the ground at her feet with cigarette butts. She looks annoyed but also a little nervous, and she greets the characters' arrival with evident relief. She thanks them for coming and tells them that she has some bad news. It seems that her police contact has come through (either finally or again, depending on how closely she worked with the characters earlier) with news about the car and the people she has been looking for off and on all this time. She then reaches into the front seat of her Honda and retrieves a large envelope full of pictures. As she shows the pictures to the characters, she explains their significance. Two days ago, the brown sedan that belonged to the mortals was found wrecked, burned out and upside down in a ditch beside a road leading out of town. Two of the passengers (a man and a woman) were found dead at the scene, nearly burned beyond recognition. (The pictures show the scene of the accident, the interior of the car with the two corpses in it and the two corpses stretched side-by-side next to the car.)

A third man was found in the ditch barely alive, with second- and third-degree burns over 75 percent of his body. He was brought to this very hospital and



treated in the burn ward, but he is not expected to last too much longer. He has not yet told the police what exactly happened to him, although he seems to be aware of his surroundings and relatively lucid. As of yet, it has not been determined what actually caused the accident, and the victim will not say. Manat visited the scene of the accident herself as soon as she heard about it, and she could detect no trace of infernal energy there. A demon contact in the morgue has confirmed as much concerning the two corpses, but the third man registers just a hint of it (though it is not enough to make an identification).

The reason Manat wanted to meet and talk to the characters, though, is not just to reveal this sad news, but to ask for their help. She admits that when she heard about the wreck and learned that one of the mortals had survived, she wanted to slip into the medical center after visiting hours and find him. She can tell that he probably does not have long to live, so she wanted to have a talk with him while she still could. She's afraid, however, that either the man will be able to do something to her because of what he is or that whoever is responsible for the man's condition will be there using the man as a Judas goat to squelch unwanted curiosity. Therefore, Manat wanted the characters to come with her, as they were the ones investigating this situation from the beginning.

INSIDE

Should the characters agree, slipping into the hospital is easy enough. A single successful roll of Dexterity + Stealth should be enough to keep them from being noticed, and any orderly or doctor who catches them sneaking around is liable to assume that they are just eager family members looking for a sick loved one and let the matter drop. Manat leads the way as if she is very familiar with the layout of the medical center, and they arrive at a private room with a single occupant in just a matter of minutes.

What they find in the room is the grotesquely abused shell of a human being that used to be Stanley McIntyre. He is lying on his back, wrapped almost entirely in bandages, and an IV needle is feeding him painkillers through a blessedly undamaged swath of forearm. He is sleeping fitfully as the characters arrive, and his eyes pop open the instant Manat closes the door behind everyone. They roll with wary apprehension when they settle on Manat (whom he does not know), but they light with recognition when they find the characters. He sucks in a deep, pain-wracked sob then begins to speak unbidden.

"I know you," he says. Every word is a painful gasp riding a reed-thin breath that sounds like wind whistling over an open grave. "You let this happen to me.

You gave us over to them. They made us work and study all day, and they wouldn't let us go until they were too fed up with us to keep us prisoner anymore. They told us we could leave, but they lied. As soon as we were on our way out of town, more came just like them. They took us somewhere else and tried even harder to make us make it work. They tortured us. Threatened us. They wanted us to summon slaves for their master. Slaves from Hell for their master, Manishtusu. Lawrence... Koruna... I'm sorry I couldn't give them what they wanted.... I'm so sorry."

This effort exhausts Stanley, and he closes his eyes again and seems to slump down even deeper into his bed. At this point, have all the players roll their characters' Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8). If they succeed, the characters begin to sense an eerie, ominous presence settling invisibly in the room. It brings to mind the smell of a battlefield and the sound of long, serrated teeth jerking still-living flesh from broken bones. Manat is oblivious to this sensation for the moment, but she is staring with wide eyes at Stanley, looking more nervous than before. She gulps audibly and says in a soft, still voice, "Did he just name who I think he did? I hope the Lord of Murder didn't hear that, or we're all—"

Before Manat can finish that sentence, Stanley's entire body jerks as if it has been jolted by electricity, and he sits upright on the bed. His hideous wounds begin to ooze beneath his bandages, and the sudden motion pulls loose his IV needle, but he seems completely unaware of this fact. His eyelids pull back with a sick sucking sound to reveal two blood-red orbs beneath, and his lips practically melt away into a vicious snarl that bares vicious predatory fangs rather than Stanley's actual teeth. This grotesque visage surveys each of the characters present in turn, the skin and muscle of Stanley's scorched neck splitting open from too much use.

"You are all castrated, insignificant meat to me," a voice says, coming out of Stanley's mouth with more tormented force and insane fury than any human can muster. As he speaks, blood and gobbets of meat begin to fill his mouth and run down his chin. "You've done well enough exposing that pathetic toady

Enshagkushanna's ridiculous scheme, but if you get in my way, I'll destroy you. I'll drink your souls and spit them like bile back into the Abyss. My children are everywhere. My servants are everywhere. I am everywhere! There is no escape from the Lord of Murder! Not on Earth, not in Hell, not even in Heaven itself! There is no escape for those who oppose Manishtusu!"

Finally, the shell of Stanley's body can take no more. It collapses on the bed, exhaling a stream of blood, smoke and unidentifiable globs of semi-solid matter. The shell withers as if it has been dead for years, and the ominous presence that filled the room disappears. Stanley McIntyre is dead, though, and the demon Manat looks as if she is staring into the gates of Hell for the second time in her long existence. She hits the nurse-call button beside Stanley's filthy, smoldering bed and announces that this investigation is over. She is getting the hell out of this hospital, and she encourages the characters to do the same thing. As she and the characters leave, they all get the distinct impression that something is watching them flee and laughing.

AFTERMATH

While this story answers some of the questions that were lingering from Suffer the Children, it has wound up raising all new ones. It is clear that the demon-hunters were re-captured by someone working outside the authority of the characters' infernal hierarchy after being set free, but who was that someone? Is he still around? What all did he make the hapless mortals tell him? Does he know about the characters? Does he know about their greater demonic organization or its masters?

And how is Manishtusu, the infamous Lord of Murder, involved in all this? The deadly Earthbound took the stage late in the story, but he seems to have something in the works that he does not want the characters messing with. What could it be? And if the characters find out, will they already be too late to do anything about it? You and your players can explore the answers to these questions in your own way as your chronicle progresses, or you can continue playing *Fear to Tread* through to its conclusion in *The Judas Kiss*.



CHAPTER THREE: THE JUDAS KISS

He that has eyes to see and ears to hear may convince himself that no mortal can keep a secret. If his lips are silent, he chatters with his fingertips; betrayal oozes out of him at every pore.

—Sigmund Freud

INTRODUCTION

When the angels of the Holy Host were created by God, they were commanded to love and take care of humankind from a disheartening remove of secrecy. Never were they allowed to reveal their existence or express their eternal love for the first mortals, and this commandment of forced separation troubled and saddened many angels. Therefore, when Lucifer the Morningstar raised his banner of rebellion, the angels who agreed with him and followed him made of themselves beings of outspoken pride and defiance — eschewing secrecy in favor of bold, direct action. They were not afraid to state their heretical beliefs or even fight for them when the call went out to do so. Yet even then, the

impetus for all of this brazen behavior — that is, the Great Debate at which Lucifer first spoke the word rebellion — was a meeting that was held in secret. And immediately after that momentous event, the first act of open rebellion, when the rebel angels first revealed their presence to humankind was committed in secret — although the perpetrators must have known that such secrecy could never last. The creation of the shadow lands of the dead was a secret initiative, and those angels of the Silver Legion who labored at their horrifying tasks in the bastion of Tabâ'et' did so away from the prying eyes of even their allies. When the armies of the fallen were finally defeated, they were forcibly bound in secret where mankind would lose touch with them and ultimately forget them.

It is no surprise, then, that this legacy of secrecy has left its mark on the fallen as they are emerging once again into the physical world. Some, such as those who make up the Ravener faction, are throwing off what they see as the shackles of secrecy and trying to unmake the world in the most spectacular and unavoidable ways possible. Others, such as those fallen who make up the Cryptics faction, have made it their mission to seek out the truth behind certain secrets that have plagued them since the time of their imprisonment — secrets such as why they were ever given two such contradictory orders by their Creator, where the Morningstar has been all this time without them, and what has become of the Creator and His Holy Host since the War of Wrath. Still others, such as the Faustians and certain especially clever Luciferans, have learned the value of secrecy and are using it to forward their overarching agendas. Even the Reconcilers are reexamining the value of safeguarding their human charges in secret, in hopes of working their way back into their Creator's good graces by finally coming around to doing what He commanded them to do so long ago.

Meanwhile, the Earthbound who effected their escape from the Abyss long ago and have been operating in the physical world ever since, have long since learned the value and utility of secrecy. Cut off from their allies and even each other when they were returned unexpectedly to Earth, these angels had to build their bases of support quietly so as not to attract the attention of the Creator or the armies of the nations of mortals who revered Him. Then, as the worship and faith that sustained them began to wane, they had to retreat into secrecy so as not to be attacked and driven back into the Abyss while they were weak. Even today, as new outlets and offerings of faith begin to revive and refresh them, these unknowable elder beings rely on the power of secrecy to shield their nefarious goals (as well as the steps they take toward achieving those goals) from the watchful eyes of their newly returned brethren. These recent escapees, many Earthbound reason, are better able to enact their schemes quickly, so it behooves the Earthbound to rebuild their power on the sly so that when their schemes conflict with those of the fallen, the fallen will not have the opportunity to catch on to the threat growing right beneath their noses until it is too late to fight back.

Similarly, many of the fallen use this same technique against the Earthbound, against each other and against the mortals they see as assets. Yet, the prevailing sentiment of these modern times is one of such jaded cynicism that taking bold, overt actions is hardly worth a fallen angel's time and energy regardless. Unless such acts affect them directly on a personal

level, people tend to dismiss the works of the fallen as simple tricks, elaborate hoaxes or (if they see them on television, for instance) extraordinary special effects. It seems, then, that taking small steps in secret toward one's greater goals is the course of action preferred by the overwhelming majority of fallen, almost by default.

Working in secret, however, does not immediately necessitate working alone. The fallen were designed by their Creator to work together in symphony, each with individual responsibilities that dovetailed harmoniously with one another. Having been cast out of Paradise, human beings have also evolved into social creatures who recognize the power of superior numbers and efficient cooperation. It makes sense, then, that the blending of the minds these two types of beings would result in modern fallen who value group efforts and the efficacy of collusion. (On a practical level, it also makes sense for the fallen to work together, just considering how weakening and confusing it can be for them to fight their way out of Hell and anchor themselves in spiritually dead mortal hosts.) Whether a demon sees an accomplice as a dupe, a thrall, a servant, a co-conspirator or simply a willing ally, his success depends on that accomplice's efforts almost as much as it depends on his own. He must, therefore, impart a certain amount of trust to anyone who might be helping him achieve his goals — no matter how secret they might be — in the hope that he receives at least a modicum of loyalty in return. Otherwise, the downward spiral of suspicion, deceit and betrayal will tear his efforts to shreds and leave him with less than what he had when he started.

How, then, does one balance his ingrained need for secrecy against the seemingly antithetical need to work with others for the best effect? How does one gain the trust of her supporters without showing her hand too early and possibly giving her rivals an advantage over her? How does one know who she can trust to keep her secrets and who she should expect to betray her in pursuit of his own equally secretive ends? In fact, can any demon trust any other demon at all in this time of shifting alliances and hidden agendas, or are all demons predestined to play out the original betrayal they perpetrated against their very Creator over and over again until the end of time?

THE PLOT (IN BRIEF)

Unlike *Suffer the Children*, which begins by piquing the characters' interest and leading them into an investigation of infernal depredations, or *Into the Fire*, which (admittedly) starts slowly and involves the characters in an intensive mortal investigation at their superiors' behest, *The Judas Kiss* — the final

story in the *Fear to Tread* chronicle — thrusts the players' characters directly into dire peril and forces them to think and act fast in order to save their skins. At the same time, it embroils them in the scheming manipulations of an Earthbound foe more dangerous than the one whose minions they might have faced in *Suffer the Children*.

As this story opens, the characters receive a desperate call for help from an old ally who has landed herself in more trouble than she knows how to extricate herself from. Yet, as they arrive on the scene to help her, the characters find themselves likewise targeted by default, and they must make a quick escape. When they regroup, the ally sheds some faint light on the nature of the problem that she has made for herself, and the characters' superiors encourage them to dig deeper and get to the bottom of the problem. In so doing, the characters make contact with a fellow demon who has placed himself high in the local mortal political society. He helps elucidate the mystery that their ally had partially uncovered — a mortal conspiracy with infernal overtones and underpinnings — and asks them to help him gather the proof that he needs to put that conspiracy to an end via legitimate channels. They do so at great risk to themselves, finding that the conspiracy in question reaches back to their previous involvement with other events in the chronicle. After a quick consultation with their superiors, the characters look deeper and find that a dangerously insane Earthbound demon is conducting the affairs like orchestral movements in a symphony. And as the characters dig deeper, they just might find that the Earthbound's insidious influence may be more pervasive than they had ever imagined.

STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

While not all of these characters are highly influential movers and shakers in the Los Angeles Tri-County Area (even in fallen society), they all have parts to play in *The Judas Kiss*. Some are intended simply to point the characters in the right direction should they become hopelessly confused about exactly what's going on or should they find themselves at a loss as to how to proceed in their investigation. You can skip over some of them if you find that your players' characters don't need their help. You can also switch them out with Storyteller characters of your own design or from previous events in your own chronicle, if you so choose. You can even supplement their roles even further (if your players appear to be having a particularly dense time of it) by having the Storyteller characters to whom the ones presented here are connected in Los Angeles's greater infernal society make brief appearances. Explanations

of how the various Storyteller characters are connected can be found in the Storyteller Characters chapter of this book, and even more information is presented in *Demon: City of Angels*.

- **Manat (AKA Sylvia Sarah Woods).** This Luciferan fallen an investigative reporter (who might or might not have worked with the characters in the past). In the course of her self-appointed crusade, she has uncovered a conspiracy that has put her in immediate and dire peril.

- **Baphomel (AKA Troy Daniels).** Working with Manat, this fallen angel — in the body of the Lieutenant Mayor of the City of Angels — is trying to uncover information about a charity organization that might be a front for the Earthbound Manishtusu.

- **Yigal (AKA Joyce Allen).** The wife of a local politician, this fallen has been forming a coalition of charities in Los Angeles for at-risk teens. It is her suspicions about the founder of one of those charities that has involved Manat and Baphomel in the current mystery.

- **Sauvitar (AKA Agent Marcus Keyes).** Like Manat, this demon is working with Baphomel on that demon's investigation. He has offered his services and connections up for use by the baroness of the Infernal Court, but he was rebuffed. He is now trying to prove his utility on his own so that he will not be turned away so quickly the next time he presents himself.

- **Annette Demilenko.** This mortal is the head of a private charity organization known as the Blind Samaritan Foundation. Unfortunately, she is also a thrall to the Earthbound known as the Lord of Murder, and she is using her charity organization to further that demon's ultimate goals.

- **Fell Knight Guanli (AKA Jeremiah Azevedo).** This demon is the senior minister of the Lion Ministry of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles. He offers to help the characters find what they are looking for, but his asking price could be higher than they are willing to pay.

- **Fell Knight Ravana (AKA Mary Beth Holden).** Fell Knight Ravana is the Lion Minister for the secretive Blood Court of Los Angeles, and she is the lover of her opposite member in the Infernal Court.

- **Azhi & Dahaki (AKA Daniel & Danielle Montague; AKA Bric-et-Brac).** These two fallen lovers are agents of Fell Knight Ravana — and vicious killers besides. Yet, right or wrong, they support her without question.

- **Haraphael (AKA Marvin Bragg; AKA Trip-9).** This fallen Slayer rules Manishtusu's self-claimed turf like a warlord by moving violent and impressionable young gang members — among whom he is a legend — like pawns on a chessboard.

INVOLVING THE CHARACTERS

The technique for involving your players' characters in the story *The Judas Kiss* borrows from both *Suffer the Children* and *Into the Fire*. Like the first story, the characters are introduced to the action straightaway as one or more of them receive a distress call from a fellow fallen angel and they gather together and come to that angel's rescue. Like *Into the Fire*, though, having the characters get involved takes a little bit of preliminary setting up based on their previous exposure to prior events in the *Fear to Tread* chronicle as well as the demonic hierarchy in Los Angeles with which they are affiliated. Yet, unlike *Into the Fire*, which took quite a long time to set the characters in motion as it laid out the various permutations of its very first scene, the first scene of *The Judas Kiss* is the same regardless of who the characters are or who they ostensibly work for. Only the immediate backstory needs to change based on the circumstances of your chronicle.

The trigger event for this story is that a relatively recently returned Luciferan fallen named Manat (whose mortal identity is that of newspaper reporter Sylvia Sarah Woods) contacts the characters via either invocation or telephone in desperate fear for her life one Friday night. She tells them that she does not have much time to go into detail, but she is being hunted by an insane Ravener demon who is leading a gang of mortal hoods around after her like a pack of extremely intelligent hunting dogs. She is trying to hide in an abandoned train yard that was made a shambles by the recent earthquake, but her pursuers have boxed her in, and she is afraid to make a run for it. She begs the characters to round up their circle and come to her aid because, if she dies, some very important information about one of the City of Angels' two resident Earthbound will be lost with her. She tells the characters how to find the ruined train yard and asks them to invoke her when they arrive. Finally, she begs them to hurry, then breaks off contact, lest she give her position away before they have a chance to reach her.

That event takes place regardless of who the characters are working for or how much of the *Fear to Tread* chronicle they have participated in up to this point. What might need to be tailored to fit your chronicle, then, is how this Manat character knew to contact your players' characters and what made her think that she could trust them when she found herself in danger.

If your characters played through the events of *Into the Fire*, you have the easiest time justifying Manat's decision to contact them. In that story, Manat and your characters had contact with one another on

at least one, probably two and possibly as many as three separate occasions. Those encounters were designed to foster open communication and cooperation between them in pursuit of a common goal. In one of those scenes (that is, the story's chilling denouement in the burn ward of the Martin Luther King, Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center), Manat called the characters together under less desperate circumstances, and they all witnessed evidence that suggested that the Earthbound Manishtusu was up to something. That scene also showed them that the insane demon was aware of them and ready to take steps against them if they interfered with his scheme. Remembering this scene, characters who played through *Into the Fire* are likely to assume that the Lord of Murder is responsible for the danger that Manat has found herself caught up in because she has found out what it is that he is actually up to.

If you and your players are using *The Judas Kiss* as a stand-alone story, though (or if you played through *Suffer the Children* but decided to forgo *Into the Fire* for some reason), your characters might need a little more incentive to help out a demon who is basically a perfect stranger. You will also need to have some sort of explanation on hand for how this character knew to contact your characters in the first place. A quick and easy cheat would be to say that one of your characters knew Manat from the War of Wrath but has since forgotten her in the confusion of anchoring to his mortal host here in the physical world. Only now that he hears her voice again via invocation does he start to remember. A slightly less contrived cheat would be to say that Manat remembers the character (or characters) in question from the time of the war by reputation, but she never had an opportunity to speak to him (or them) before they were all imprisoned.

It might be more reasonable, however, to have Manat referred to the characters second-hand by someone with more authority and a more recognizable presence in the City of Angels' demonic community. Should you choose to take this route, you will need to adjust it according to what demonic hierarchy your players' characters serve. As stated in the Introduction of this book, *Fear to Tread* assumes that the players' characters will become involved in the stories' events by arising from one of three social circles. They are most likely supporters of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles (headed by Baroness Kishar), supporters of LA's more secretive Blood Court (headed by Lady Anat) or independent investigators working at the behest of Lady Al-Lat. (Corralling characters who are otherwise affiliated is up to you and your players, as is determining the means by which the characters come to work together in the first place.)

If they are Cryptic agents of Lady Al-Lat, have Al-Lat herself be the one who contacts the characters. She is not the one in danger, but she relates to the characters a distress call that she received from the demon Manat — a contact of hers in the Luciferan faction. She tells the characters that this Manat has claimed to have gathered dangerous and important information that someone else seems willing to kill her to contain. She then asks the characters to go extricate this Luciferan from danger in hopes of preserving the information she supposedly contains, then report back in once they have hidden her away somewhere.

If the players' characters are members of the Infernal Court, you could have them contacted by Lord Aglibol, the court's Minister of Aurochs. Since Aglibol's mortal identity is that of a local member of the City Council, Manat knows him both through local press contacts and through his mortal-level working relationship with Baphomel (whose mortal identity is that of the Lieutenant Mayor, and who Manat herself has been working with recently). When she found herself in trouble, Manat called out to Lord Aglibol — a fellow Luciferan — for help. Unwilling to act on his own, though, Aglibol tried to contact Fell Knight Guanli and dispatch him to take care of the problem in his role as the court's Lion Minister. When Guanli subsequently responded that he was too busy, Aglibol turned to the characters instead. He says that Manat could be an asset to the Infernal Court in the near future, so he wants the characters to get her to safety and report back to him when they have done so.

If your characters are members of the revolutionary Blood Court, you might need to have Spentu Mainyu, that court's Dragon Minister, contact them. He is easily one of the best connected Luciferan fallen in the city of Los Angeles, so it would make sense that Manat would have contacted him for information or normal faction business at some point in the past. Have him contact your characters and relay the cry for help that Manat originally sent out to him. He claims that he is too busy spending "quality time" with one of his thralls to be able to help, but the players' characters were the first fallen he thought of to take on the job in his place. If they do this thing — that is, rescue Manat, get her to a safe place and find out what information she is hiding — he would consider it a personal favor. In fact, if the information is worthwhile enough, the other ministers of the court might consider it a favor as well. He will be contacting the ministers while the characters are taking action.

(As you might already know, the Devil Spentu Mainyu is the Dragon Minister for not only the Blood Court, but also the Infernal Court of Los Angeles. In

fact, he was the tyrant of that court until Baroness Kishar arrived. As he is playing this dangerous double-game, you might want to use him to motivate characters of the Infernal Court just as you would members of the Blood Court. You can do so if you wish, just remember to make the necessary adjustment to the text that refers to characters of the Infernal Court in this story's later scenes.)

Hopefully, that motivation will be enough to spur characters of any affiliation or previous involvement level into action. If not, you can try to inspire Torment in the more hard-hearted characters by describing unbidden memories of the War of Wrath. Perhaps the characters remember being forced to abandon a field of battle after some ignominious defeat, and the wretched, piteous screams of the wounded that they had to leave behind begin to echo in their ears once again. Perhaps they begin to recall the screams of despair and anguish of those fallen who were cast into the Abyss before them. Or maybe they remember the cries of those friends and brothers in arms that they had to leave behind when they escaped the Abyss aeons later. If even that tactic does not work, have the characters' superiors contact them (or recontact them) and *order* them to do as Manat asks, calling it their duty to their demonic hierarchy. After all, if you cannot motivate them to get involved in the action now, you are going to have an exceptionally difficult time getting the story started.

SCENE ONE

Regardless of what lengths you had to go to in order to involve your characters in the story, they eventually come together several hours after sundown and rush to the train yard in which Manat is hiding. The place is an enormous gravel and concrete sprawl that looks as if it had not seen much use even before the Devil's Night earthquake. It was once surrounded in part by a 10-foot-tall chain link fence that was topped by an additional two feet of barbed wire stretched across outward-angled struts to discourage intruders from climbing over. Several pairs of rusted steel rails lying on top of rotted crosstie bones fed into the complex from the rear, and an intricate webwork of the same lay strewn all over its interior. These lines fed into several roundhouses that are distributed randomly throughout the complex, and those roundhouses fed rails that led away to several warehouses on the property.

Yet, where the place was aged, dingy and in ill repair before the earthquake, it lies in ruins now. Most of the fencing is no longer standing, and what little of it still remains relatively undamaged is

leaning drunkenly in every direction, providing little impediment to a would-be intruder. Most of the warehouses have been demolished, except for the odd one or two that have merely twisted inward on themselves and fallen apart. These rugged remnants stand gutted and partially scavenged, not unlike the bones of great beasts left to the elements after breathing their last and giving up the ghost. The rails that once led to these warehouses, and those all over the complex, are broken, twisted and even sticking out of the ground like unruly hairs in some places. Beneath them, the ground is swollen and split open, turning what was once a boring symbol of stultifying industrialism into a surrealist depiction of nature's rebellion against the same.

And yet despite the darkness and the isolation and the foreboding solemnity of the place, it does show some signs of life. The first such sign is the presence of four vehicles that have been parked haphazardly by what was presumably the front gate of the complex. The parking lot is a ruin of crumpled asphalt, and a spray of broken plastic chips and shreds of steel-belted tire testify to how treacherous it can be to drive across it at speed. One of the cars that the characters find here has a blown tire dangling from a bent rim, as well as a broken headlight and turn signal above it. This car is a 10-year-old blue Honda, and if

the characters played through Into the Fire, they should recognize it as the one that Manat was standing next to when she met them at the hospital at the end of that story. Skid marks leading up to the car indicate that it destroyed a tire driving over a huge gap in the pavement not far away then skidded out of control into a snarl of half-fallen chain link fence and barbed wire (where it rests now).

The other three cars are parked around this Honda well back from the barbed wire but hemming the Honda in. Two of them are dirty sport-utility vehicles, and the other is a dark-blue four-door sedan. The windows of all of these vehicles are tinted, but the doors are unlocked, and no one is inside any of them. The engines of these vehicles are warm, though, indicating that whoever was driving or riding in them did not arrive all that long ago. This revelation leads to the second sign of life within the train-yard complex: the faint sounds of people moving around within.

Should the characters contact Manat by invocation at this point, she is slow to respond and short of words when she does speak up. She whispers that her pursuers found her when she made her last invocation for help, their fallen master triangulating her position by the power it took to call out just as easily as if she had performed an evocation. She is wounded more so



than she was when she first arrived, but she managed to flee to a new hiding place. She tells the characters that she is now hiding under a fallen piece of corrugated metal in a shallow rent in the earth under what was once the farthest west storage warehouse. She begs the characters to hurry up and get to her so that they can get her out of here, but she warns them to be on their guard and try to stay out of sight. Since they invoked her, her demon pursuer probably knows that they are here too (and possibly exactly where they are). She warns them that her fallen pursuer has at least five "street thugs" with him, all of whom are armed with small-caliber pistols. She suspects that there might be more with him, but she has seen only five since she first went on the run.

The characters, then, have to choose between going on the defensive or going on the offensive. If they go on the offensive — which is to say hunting the thralls of the demon who is hunting Manat so as to whittle their numbers down — have their players roll Perception + Investigation (difficulty 7) as the characters move into the train yard among the rusty hulks of empty boxcars and neglected flatbeds. There are nine Eight Trey Gangster Crips scattered throughout the rail yard looking for Manat in groups of two (one of which has picked up the ninth man and is searching with their fallen leader as well). Succeeding on this roll puts the characters in the vicinity of one of these two-man groups without giving them away. Failing the roll leaves the characters wandering without making contact with anyone, and botching forces them to stumble across one of these groups, catching everyone by surprise. If the players succeed on their Perception + Investigation roll and they want their characters to act on their quarry with the element of surprise, have the players roll Dexterity + Stealth. On a failed roll, the characters lose the element of surprise, and their quarry retains its normal initiative. On a botch, the characters give themselves away before they make a move and wander into an impromptu ambush instead.

Should the characters decide, on the other hand, to go on the defensive from the start, have the players roll only Dexterity + Stealth, but bump the difficulty up to 7. (Assume that their fallen antagonist on the scene has detected their presence and located their approximate position from their introductory invocation and that he has dispatched thralls accordingly. He is expecting them to hide and sneak around, not to go on the offensive.) If the roll succeeds, require a new roll every few minutes until you have determined that they have made their way across the complex to the ruins of the westernmost warehouse. If a roll fails, have them stumble across one of the two-man teams of thralls combing the

area. If they botch, have them stumble into an ambush of four such thralls.

When the players encounter these thralls, the thralls' first reaction is going to be to say, "Haraphael, somebody else's here," and start pointing pistols (provided, of course, that they are not already under attack when they make this discovery). One turn later, they will receive their master's instructions to get rid of any witnesses and open fire. Should the characters survive such an attack, the sound of gunfire will draw more teams of thralls. Should the characters survive that, the last surviving gangster will invoke his master Haraphael begging for help. Hearing that his thralls are being attacked by multiple fallen of unknown origin and power levels, Haraphael will then take the three gangsters who are with him, cut his losses and make his escape. (He has not given up on his ultimate goal, however, as the events of Scene Two will reveal.)

The pistols these Eight Trey Gangster Crips are carrying are nothing but dinky .25s that inflict one level of lethal damage, but every gangster has one. They also have knives in case their guns fail them. They have no armor to speak of, nor are they hardened against the effects of revelation. Depending upon the combat prowess of your players' characters, you can base these characters' Trait ratings on a scale from "The Thug" template in the **Demon** core rulebook to simple extras as per the "Large Fights" optional rule. At best, your characters can avoid these dangerous thugs and effect their escape with the wounded Manat or take the thugs out two by two at their leisure. At worst, they will have to fight their way through all six of the ones who stick around. Either way, they will not have to face the demon Haraphael in this scene.

Once the characters have made their way to the westernmost storage warehouse (whether they have sneaked past Haraphael's minions or bulldozed their way through them), they must now locate Manat. If the characters are still sneaking, notch the difficulty of their players' Dexterity + Stealth rolls up by one. Also have the players make a Perception + Investigation roll (difficulty 8) for their characters to find where Manat has hidden herself. When they find the spot, they must lift off of her the piece of corrugated metal beneath which she is lying and help her to her feet. She seems somewhat delirious with shock and fear, and she has been hit twice in the back with .25 bullets. The bullets passed through her doing as little serious damage as possible (leaving her with three lethal health levels of damage left to heal).

She is able to walk, but at least one of the characters must help keep her steady. If they are still sneaking at this point, the difficulty of the roll required to do so

rises to a 9. (In fact, it might help if one or two of the characters try to cause a distraction elsewhere in the rail yard that draws pursuers away while the rest help Manat escape.) The idea should be to get Manat back to the characters' car, if they arrived thus, or possibly to one of the gangsters' vehicles so as to get the hell out of there and find a safe place for her to heal up and get her head together. As the characters make their escape (however the circumstances surrounding it might play out), Manat regains enough lucidity to suggest just the place. It is a crappy, isolated rent-by-the-hour joint located a short distance from the rail yard, which is called the Dolphin Motel.

SCENE TWO

Located near the outskirts of the industrial district from which the characters and Manat have just escaped, the Dolphin Motel is a rundown fleapit that is barely staying in business. Its marquee proudly boasts that it has a "V CANCY," and a hand-painted sign beneath that adds, "Power and running water restored!!" It caters to people who do not care about the noise, the pollution or the leftover detritus from what minimal rebuilding efforts have been undertaken since the earthquake — people such as traveling salesmen, johns and hookers who rent by the hour, runaways who are happy just to have a roof over their heads and drug dealers who want a place to meet buyers. The price is cheap, and the management does not ask questions. In fact, the fat, greasy clerk behind the Formica-topped counter only sneers and silently hands over a key when the characters ask for a room.

The small motel complex consists of an office building, a gravel parking lot and eight lodges, which are basically self-contained mini-houses. Each lodge has a cramped bedroom, a dingy, mildew-decorated bathroom and a TV that has been bolted to the wall. The owners have the rooms cleaned every day — they have no choice, the law makes them — but their efforts do not help. Years of smoke from the nearby factories has worked its way into everything, no matter how often it was cleaned, so the rooms smell faintly of grease and carcinogens. Peeling wallpaper, bulging drywall, water stains, cracks in the ceiling and uneven floors are only some of the examples of the lingering cosmetic damage that has been left over since the earthquake.

There are only three cars in the parking lot — an aging, dirty Lexus in front of the manager's office, a Daihatsu in front of Lodge Three and whatever vehicle the characters arrived in. The lodge to which the characters have been given a key (Lodge Six) is in roughly the center of the complex, so they can park

their car in a spot that is not immediately visible from the street.

Once the characters unlock the door to Lodge Six and pile inside, Manat flicks on the light, locks the door behind her and starts weakly pawing through her pockets for a battered paper pack of cigarettes. In the illumination from the bug-corps-filled overhead light fixture, the characters can see just how haggard, dirty and exhausted she really looks. Her left side is covered in blood from where she was shot, and her jeans and jacket are soaked with grime and blood. She eases herself gingerly down on the bed and lights up a blood-stained cigarette. If the players want to roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8), you can have their characters sense a thready surge of supernatural power as Manat spends Faith to heal herself of the damage she has suffered. (Should they be feeling generous, one or more of the characters might offer to heal Manat themselves.)

When she is healed once again, Manat looks pale and weak but no longer in danger of immediate collapse. She takes a huge drag on her cigarette and sighs in relief. "Thanks for all of your help, everyone," she says. "Really, I mean it. I didn't want to risk healing myself while I was hiding just in case that bastard felt it and used it to track me down. Not that he wasn't doing fine on his own, though, I guess. I think I really might have stepped in it this time."

The obvious follow-up question to that statement is something to the effect of "Stepped in what?" and the answer Manat gives depends on how much she has worked with the characters already up to this point. If they did not meet her or visit the hospital with her because they did not play through the events of Into the Fire, she hesitates and seems to be engaging in some internal debate. Finally, she sighs and mutters that she has to trust *someone* and that, if the characters were her enemies, they would not have come all the way out here on a moment's notice to help her in the first place. She then fills them in on what she has been up to as per the events of that story.

RECUPERATING AND RECAPPING

She says that she originally came to the so-called City of Angels to look into the events of Devil's Night. She is a devoted Luciferan, and the possibility that her commander in chief was still in town filled her with hope. Shortly after she arrived, however, she stumbled onto the story of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens, in which cultist thralls of one of Los Angeles's resident Earthbound were breaking the wills of select students, then summoning demons from the Pit to take

up residence in those students' bodies and serve their infernal master. Demonic citizens of the city had already dealt with this matter by the time Manat found out about it, destroying what cultists they could find and forcing local mortal authorities to shut down the school temporarily. The City Council had held an emergency session (mainly for the public's benefit) in order to make sure that the school's displaced children were taken care of.

Yet, as she was following up its aftermath, Manat continues, inquisitive mortal demon-hunters showed their hand at the school. They banished all the infernal taint that the cult's secret practices had seeded into the place and also warded the site of the cult's activities so that no demon could so much as approach it. When this news circulated around the local fallen community, several demons of various affiliations tried to track these mortals down and interrogate them as to what they knew about (and could do to) the fallen. Their search proved ultimately fruitless, and the hunters all but disappeared. They did so, that is, until Manat herself tracked one of them down to the Martin Luther King Jr./Charles R. Drew Medical Center, where he had been taken after a vicious car accident that had killed his two partners. She slipped into the hospital to talk with him, and with his last breaths he told her that he and his compatriots had been kidnaped by agents of a demon whose name she will not repeat, but which the hunter voiced cavalierly. (This demon, Manat confides, is the other Earthbound operating out of Los Angeles—a dangerous Devourer known as the "Lord of Murder.") The agents of that Earthbound tortured and questioned the mortal demon-hunters about what they had found at the Marshall School and how that knowledge might be applied to serving their own master's will. When that interrogation had proven fruitless as well, the agents had given up in disgust and tried to get rid of the hunters in a staged car accident that had not been quite thorough enough.

In relating his story, though, the poor abused mortal had invoked the very Earthbound who had had this done to him, and that act had sealed his fate. As Manat was getting ready to leave, the Lord of Murder took temporary possession of the hunter's failing body and spoke to her. It ordered her to stop prying into its business and to stay out of its way if she did not want to earn herself a quick one-way trip back to the torment of the Abyss. It had warned her that it had agents everywhere and that it would know if she had not heeded its warning. The mortal's body had given out at that point, unable to contain such power as the Earthbound possessed, but as she had fled the hospital, she could swear that she had felt its eyes on her and

heard its mad, wicked laughter taunting her from every shadow. Even still, though, she had not heeded the Earthbound's warning, which is what has led to her current condition.

If Manat and the characters have already met in the previous story (especially if the characters had played through Suffer the Children before that), all that recapping might not be strictly necessary. You can condense it considerably — unless so much time has passed in your chronicle that the players themselves need a reminder. To do so, have Manat take a puff of her cigarette and say, "Oh well, if you guys are in for a penny, you're in for a pound. Do you remember all that trouble we found out about surrounding that Marshall School for Trouble Teens? Do you remember what happened when we went to the hospital together afterward and talked to what was left of Stanley McIntyre? Do you remember the warning the Lord of Murder gave us to stay out of his business? Well... I didn't exactly do that. That's why I'm here, and now, that's why you all are here, too."

(If you can feel your players getting bored after a long recap or if you just want to keep them off balance and turn the action level up a notch, you can go ahead and skip to the "An Uninvited Guest" section of this scene. You will have to refer back to this following section when you reach Scene Three or Four, but that should not hamper the flow of information all that much. Otherwise, proceed with the following text and get to "An Uninvited Guest" afterward.)

At this point, her tale can continue in the same way regardless of whether or not she has worked with the characters before. She says that she was actually able to stay out of the Lord of Murder's business for a little while and to ignore the subject of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens entirely. What pulled her back into the thick of things, however, was a call from a friend of hers (as well as a fellow Luciferan) who was now going by the mortal name of Troy Daniels. This Troy Daniels, she confirms, is the very same as the Lieutenant Mayor of the city of Los Angeles. It seems that he had been in recent contact with another fallen who is going by the mortal name of Joyce Allen. Mrs. Allen is the wife of a prominent local politician, and she has always been a major supporter (both politically and monetarily) of charities that were designed to help the city's children. She even helped set up a program for at-risk teens in the city, and she has been active in that program ever since her husband turned his attention to national politics rather than local.

In the wake of the events surrounding the Marshall School, Mrs. Allen has been devoting the bulk of that program's resources to taking care of that school's

displaced and disregarded students (who now certainly qualify as more "at-risk" than even they realize). As of the City Council's emergency public meeting, Mrs. Allen has been building a local charitable coalition devoted to taking even better care of those children, and she has been relying chiefly on the help of one Annette Demilenko, the founder and chairperson of a private charity known as the Blind Samaritan Foundation. This arrangement seemed perfectly agreeable at first, but Mrs. Allen began to grow increasingly wary of Ms. Demilenko the more the two of them worked together. There was something strange about the way Demilenko talked to her subordinates and convinced them to do things for her, and it did not take Allen long to figure out what that was. Demilenko was exhibiting an eerie, preternatural influence over her subordinates, which registered only very faintly to Allen's demonic awareness of the supernatural. The more time that she spent in the woman's company, however, the more clearly Allen could detect the sense of power behind Demilenko's words. While Demilenko was not fallen herself, she was clearly a thrall to one and was borrowing some inkling of her master's power to do her work. What was more, the resonance of that power bespoke of a greedy, ancient source with just the faintest hint of insatiable hunger and roiling insanity behind it. It felt like the touch of an Earthbound, and Allen panicked.

The first thing she did was approach Lieutenant Mayor Daniels, who was the first other fallen she had met when she arrived in the city. She told him of her fears of what she might inadvertently be exposing the children of the Marshall School to, and he promised to help her. He then turned around and contacted Manat who agreed to snoop around and see what she could turn up on Annette Demilenko. She did not share with the other two of them what she already suspected might be happening for fear that speaking it aloud might make it true, but she agreed to help readily enough and got to work immediately. (What she suspected was that the Lord of Murder was Annette Demilenko's infernal master and that he was taking the opportunity to pick up the subjugation of the students of the Marshall School where his lesser Earthbound rival left off.)

Her fears have partially been confirmed since she was contacted by Daniels and Allen and agreed to investigate for them. The first thing she did was go to the headquarters of the Blind Samaritan Foundation and try to arrange to meet with Annette Demilenko for what should have appeared to be a standard interview for a human-interest story. Yet, she was met and stopped in the lobby by a young black man named Marvin Bragg, who claimed to speak on behalf of Ms.

Demilenko. He turned her (that is, Manat) away and refused to be intimidated by her admittedly vague threats about deeper investigations and possible exposure if something illicit was going on behind the foundation's doors. What she did not realize at the time was that this young man was a leader among the Eight Trey Gangster Crips with the street name Trip-9 or that he was actually a fallen angel by the name of Haraphael. (She spells this being's Celestial Name out on a sheet of paper, rather than speaking it aloud and drawing his attention.)

She figured all of this out later, though, when Trip-9 and three cars worth of his gangsta thugs tracked her this very evening to her rented house closer to town and tried to silence her once and for all. They surprised her, but she was able to get away and take off in her car before they could do too much damage. She fled in a panic, eventually winding up at the rail yard and calling for help (by whatever means you, the Storyteller, ended up using to open your story). Trip-9 and his thugs tracked her there and wounded her a little more severely, but fortunately, the characters arrived when they did to help her and to get her here where she could rest up and get herself back together again. It is now her intention to get to Daniels and Allen and to try to figure out what to do next. She does not know, however, if she can make it on her own (or even carry on safely once she gets there) considering that the Lord of Murder's minions might be looking for her even now. Therefore, she asks the characters to help her.

AN UNINVITED GUEST

While all of this recuperating and recapping is going on, the demon known as Haraphael is not sitting idly by. He and three of his Eight Trey Gangster lackeys are headed in the characters' direction right now. Whether the characters sneaked across the length and breadth of the abandoned rail yard in which Manat was hiding in the previous scene without once being spotted by Haraphael's thugs or they fought their way through these extras before looking for Manat, Haraphael cut out of there. If the characters slipped through his fingers by virtue of their extraordinary stealth, he took three of his thugs with him and sent the rest home, lest their absence from their familiar haunts in town rouse too much suspicion. If the characters fought his underlings down (or simply scared them off or found some other means of incapacitating them), Haraphael received this message from the last of them and split early with three thugs in tow. He then headed in the direction of what seemed like the nearest, most convenient hiding place (that is, the Dolphin Motel) with the intention of



staking it out against the characters' arrival. It was a long shot to be sure, but given the choice between either taking his chances there or admitting to his master that he had lost his quarry (or simply panicked and fled when his quarry's reinforcements had arrived), he had opted for the gambler's route. Since the Dolphin Motel does not exactly advertise its location, however, (not to mention the fact that he only saw it for a moment while he was chasing Manat originally) he got somewhat lost along the way. Therefore, it took him and his crew so much time to find the place again, confirm that the characters were there, then report back to his infernal master for instructions that the characters have had ample time to go through the backstory presented in the first half of this scene.

Now, though, the time for rest is over. Haraphael knows which lodge the characters are staying in (thanks to a quick bribe of the desk clerk and a moment's reconnaissance by one of his thugs), and he is not going to let them get away again. His plan is to crash his vehicle right through the front wall of the characters' lodge then come storming out and kill them all. Fortunately, Haraphael is not the best planner in his master's growing army, and the characters have a decent chance of not being taken by surprise.

First of all, it is possible that one of the fallen might hear Haraphael's thug sneaking up to their lodge on the gravel drive out front (although they will not be able to see anyone through the peephole in the door). Make a single Dexterity + Stealth roll for the scout (difficulty 5), contested by a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7) for any fallen in the room who might be listening for trouble. (This does not include Manat, since she is doing so much talking.) You might even want to make the Perception roll in secret in order to avoid alerting the players. If they succeed on this roll, they hear furtive footsteps just beneath their lodge's front window. Should they look out, they will spot one of Haraphael's Eight Trey Gangster Crips crouching there looking up at them in surprise. He will then call out, "Haraphael! They're in here!"

This warning will then serve as the cue for two headlights to snap on in the near distance and for Haraphael to drive the vehicle that he and his two thugs are sitting in right at the wall. The thug that the characters discovered at their window will be too stunned by the suddenness of this action to get out of the way in time. Players of the characters in the room, however, now have the chance to make Dexterity + Dodge rolls as the vehicle barrels right for the characters.

If all of the players fail the original Perception + Alertness roll for their characters to notice the gangster thug sneaking around, they save the thug from being crushed by his master, but they make things somewhat more difficult for themselves in the process. Undiscovered, the thug returns to the vehicle in which his compatriots await and relays the message that the characters are in the lodge. Haraphael then guns the accelerator and aims the vehicle right at the lodge, spraying gravel behind it. The players need not make Perception + Alertness rolls for their characters to hear this threat approaching, but by the time the characters look outside to see what it is and their minds are able to process the danger, the difficulty of the Dexterity + Dodge roll to avoid injury has risen to an 8. If, on the other hand, any of the players botched the original Perception + Alertness rolls, they do not get a chance to make the Dexterity + Dodge roll to avoid injury. Their characters sit stunned as events transpire too quickly around them, and they must rely on their more alert, heroic companions to pull them out of the way (which requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll [difficulty 8] instead of the standard Dexterity + Dodge roll).

Regardless of what is happening inside, Haraphael's vehicle bashes into the wall, shattering the front window, knocking the front door aside and knocking the remnants of the front wall apart like a pile of building blocks. Perhaps fortunately for the characters, lingering damage from the earthquake has strategically weakened the structure of this wall such that it breaks apart rather than collapsing on them or bringing the roof down on their heads. Loose bricks, wood chunks, bits of dry wall and chips of glass fly into the room, though, not to mention the engine compartment and front wheels of Haraphael's vehicle. Anyone who was caught flat-footed (that is, any character whose player failed the Dexterity + Dodge roll) is hit by flying debris and must try to soak three dice worth of bashing damage. Any character whose player botched the Dexterity + Dodge roll is actually clipped by the front end of the vehicle as well and must, instead, soak five dice of bashing damage.

After this rude entrance, the characters have one turn in which to pick themselves up and get ready to fight. It takes exactly that long for Haraphael to get his head together and shoot out the windshield of his vehicle. When he does, he and his three (or possibly only two) thugs come out over the hood of the vehicle into the room, determined to wade through the characters and finish off Manat. Haraphael has taken two levels of bashing damage from the crash, as have his thugs. (If he crushed one of them with the car on its way into the room, of

course, that thug should be dead. If you are treating the thugs as simple extras, they need have only suffered one level of damage.)

Haraphael comes through the windshield with blood running down his face and a 9mm Glock 17 light pistol in each hand. He is a terrible shot, and he is not ambidextrous, but the quarters are cramped, and he likely still has the element of surprise in his favor. His thugs are less threatening. Only one of them still has a pistol. The others are using only a knives and fists. They are already severely freaked out by what just happened (especially if Haraphael ran over one of their own to accomplish it), and they will cut bait and flee at the first sight of a character's apocalyptic form or an obvious evocation. Haraphael's desperation is showing as well. He fires a total of three times each turn, missing once automatically and making no attempts to dodge the characters' attacks. Through gritted teeth, he is murmuring for help from his master Manishtusu.

This help does not come, however, so this tense, desperate fight is most likely one that the characters will win (unless their luck runs out almost entirely). While the characters might suffer a few injuries, neither Haraphael nor his thugs are skilled enough to pose a serious threat in such low numbers after so ill conceived an opening gambit. It is, therefore, very likely that even if one or two of his thugs escaped, the rest of them and Haraphael himself will be left dead or unconscious at the scene. Plus, there is no way that the owner of this fine establishment and its other guest could have missed the commotion, so it is safe to assume that the police are on the way.

Even still, though, the fallen might wish to interrogate any surviving captives. Unfortunately, the mortals know little about Haraphael's master or its reason for hunting the demons. They assumed that Trip-9 had some personal beef with "that reporter lady," and that was good enough for them. Haraphael himself will not talk. He will fight to the death and ultimately disappear back into the Abyss begging his master Manishtusu for help that does not come for him in time.

Little information can be found on the persons (or bodies) of any of the attackers either. None of them is carrying identification, cell phones or other traceable paraphernalia. All they have is loose cash (\$250 between them), a small stash of drugs and some dirty bandanas in their gang's colors. The guns have had their serial numbers filed away, and the vehicle outside has no license plate.

Regardless, hanging around the scene is pretty obviously a bad idea, which Manat points out if the characters have not realized it as of yet. It is time for

BAPHOMEL'S PLACE

the characters to pull themselves together and get the hell out of there as fast as possible. Taking charge in the ensuing confusion, Manat recommends that they head into the city toward Troy Daniels' apartment. She will invoke him and warn him that they are coming, and hopefully, the Lord of Murder will not think to send minions there to look for them. She did not let on who she was working for when she visited the Blind Samaritan Foundation and drew Haraphael's attention, so the Lord of Murder should not expect her to run to Daniels' place. But even if the Earthbound does somehow find where they are, his minions will hopefully have the good sense not to cause as much of a scene there and draw so much mortal attention to themselves, what with Daniels being the Lieutenant Mayor and all.

The characters then pile into their car (or the gangstas' vehicle if they so desire, as they will have to ditch whatever car they leave in so as not to attract unwanted police attention as they flee this obvious crime scene) and head into the hopeful promise of temporary safety in town.

SCENE THREE

On the ride to Troy Daniels' place, Manat sits in the back and quietly invokes the demon Baphomel who is using that mortal identity. She tells him that she has been to the Blind Samaritan Foundation as the two of them had discussed but that she has encountered "complications" since then and is in trouble. After a pause, she says that she can not explain right now, but she is on the way to his place with (however many characters are in the fallen circle) like-minded fallen who have been helping her out. She asks him to make room for them and to put them up for the night, then thanks him after another long pause. She then tells the characters how to get to where they are going and asks them not to make any more invocations until they get back into town, just in case other fallen agents of the Lord of Murder happen to be nearby and looking for them. (The fewer uses of detectable supernatural phenomena there are linking back to the vehicle, the better.)

At this point, the characters can simply roleplay amongst themselves, possibly discussing the ramifications of what they have involved themselves in or how they might parlay this involvement into greater status among their fallen peers. Likewise, Manat might pick up her recapping where she left it off if you decided to jump ahead to the action only midway through Scene Two. Of course, a little of both intermingling dynamically would probably be ideal, based on the skills and comfort-levels of the various members of your troupe.

It is well past midnight when the characters finally reach the home of Troy Daniels (also known as the demon Baphomel). It is a decently sized two-story, three-bedroom home in a fairly affluent suburban neighborhood. As they arrive (be it by taxi or on foot, since they likely had to ditch their otherwise traceable automobile), Manat leads them to the side door, where the characters are met by the demon Baphomel himself. Baphomel is (or Troy Daniels was) a clean-cut American young man of vaguely Irish ancestry, with a flawless complexion and neatly trimmed brown hair. His hair is not combed (as he was in bed when Manat invoked him), but he is dressed in blue jeans and a burgundy pullover shirt. He is rubbing his eyes when he opens the door, and the first thing out of his mouth is a long yawn. He follows that up (somewhat disingenuously, perhaps) by saying how glad he is that Manat is okay and how worried he was that something might have happened to her when he did not hear back from her for so long after they last spoke. He also thanks the characters for coming to Manat's aid when she needed them, then invites everyone into his living room.

The living room (and, in fact, the rest of the house) has obviously been decorated by a bachelor with no design skills. No piece of furniture matches any other (though they are all expensive), nor does any of it really complement the colors of his walls, ceiling or carpet. What few pieces of art he has displayed around the room make no attempt to balance the color scheme of the room or even each other. If nothing else, though, the place is clean and welcoming if not a shining example of trendy feng shui.

Once these observations have been made and everyone has chosen a seat or a place to stand, Baphomel introduces himself first by mortal name then by Celestial Name and invites the players' characters to share the same with him (and Manat as well if they have not done so already). If the characters are members of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles in relatively good standing, he also adds that he has heard of them through that court's Minister of Aurochs although he has never had the opportunity to introduce himself. On the other hand, if the characters are considered especially infamous among the fallen angels of the Infernal Court, Baphomel mentions having heard of them and states that he is glad that they are not quite as disagreeable as he had heard. He then confirms that they all should be safe at his place for the night if they would like to stay, and he adds that it should be all right for them to contact their superiors via invocation from here as well. After all, they are close to what is left of downtown Los

Angeles, which is brimming over with active fallen. If their pursuers are trying to track them by supernatural awareness alone, they are unlikely to be able to pick the small amount of power it takes to send out invocations among the area's general noise.

Should the characters wish to leave, Manat objects immediately. She thinks that a policy of strength in numbers would be best until this time of impending crisis has passed (which is to say, until she has solved the mystery before her and found a way to keep herself safe afterward). On top of that, she is scared of being attacked again and possibly sent back to the terrible lonely void of the Abyss. Baphomel makes a half-hearted attempt to back her up, agreeing in theory that there is strength in numbers and saying that the characters have had good luck keeping Manat safe thus far. It would not be all *that* much trouble putting them up for the night, he adds, and since he wanted to talk to them and have them meet other fallen who are involved in this mess in the morning, keeping them here would be most convenient.

Baphomel will not press the issue, though, so the decision of whether to stay the night or to go back to their homes and meet back here in the morning is entirely up to the characters. If they decide to stay, Baphomel goes in search of pillows and extra blankets, and Manat thanks the characters profusely. If they decide to go home and come back tomorrow, Baphomel shrugs and counsels them to be careful until then. Manat tries one more time to change the characters' minds, but she will grudgingly give it up if they remain steadfast in their decision.

Regardless, the characters' next move will likely be to speak to their superiors about what has happened to them tonight. They can do so via invocation or by telephone from Troy Daniels' home, or if they are sleeping elsewhere that night, they could also arrange face-to-face meetings with those superiors they are able to reach. If the characters participated in the events of Into the Fire (and therefore came to Manat's aid at her first invocation directly to them), their superiors are probably not expecting any such contact from the characters. If such is the case, having the characters perform a little hasty recapping of their own to bring their superiors up to speed might be in order. Otherwise, if the characters did not participate in Into the Fire and they had to be sent out to Manat's aid by one of their superiors, you might have this contact flow in the other direction. In any case, responses vary based on who the characters work for.

If the characters are members of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, they contact (or are contacted by) Lord Aglibol. He reacts with only passing concern to news that Manat is safe and that the characters

themselves are all right. If it was he who set the characters in motion at the outset of this story, he also complains offhand that Fell Knight Guanli is still refusing to cooperate or even get back in touch with him. What really makes him sit up and pay attention, though, is the characters' news about being attacked by Haraphael. Aglibol confirms that Haraphael was a supporter and agent of the Lord of Murder, which must mean that Manat is indeed onto something. And if the Earthbound is up to something, that something is most likely inimical to the well-being of the fallen of the City of Angels. Therefore, Lord Aglibol decides that it falls to him, as Minister of Aurochs, to do something to safeguard the fallen under his responsibility. As such, he immediately delegates to the characters the task of working with Baphomel and Manat and getting to the bottom of whatever the Lord of Murder might be up to. Once they find out everything they can, Aglibol promises, he will get through to Guanli by any means necessary and have that Minister of Lions take care of business rather than simply remaining stubbornly incommunicado. He impresses upon the characters just how important he considers this responsibility, then, after asking them to pass along his greetings to Troy Daniels, wishes them good luck.

Characters who are members of the Blood Court manage to raise only Spentu Mainyu. He puts up a good front of being enthralled by their recounting of their exploits, except when they come to the part about Haraphael. He knew that fallen, he says, and it is a real shame that such a one sold his soul to an insane Earthbound that had nothing but destruction on its mind. It is never a victory, Spentu Mainyu laments, when a compatriot must be banished back to the Abyss for crimes against his own kind. He does compliment the characters on saving Manat, though, since doing so effectively minimized the damage that could have been done and restricted the unnecessary loss of life as much as was possible. (Noticeably, he does not extend his sympathies to any human beings that the characters might have had to injure or kill in the course of the evening's events.)

In the interest of minimizing future damage that the Lord of Murder could do, Spentu Mainyu asks the characters to keep working with Manat and to give her any help she might need. Not only is she a fellow Luciferan, but she could prove a valuable asset to the Blood Court if it can be proved to her that the organization is amenable to cooperation where halting the schemes of the Earthbound is concerned. He promises them that he will invoke Lady Nasu (the court's Eagle Minister) on their behalf and apprise her of the situation so that the characters can conduct

further business through her. Not that he himself is not equal to the task, he adds, but investigating and gathering information seems to be more her area of responsibility in the grand scheme of things. He then wishes them good luck and goes back to his business.

Characters who are Cryptic agents of Al-Lat receive the most outright praise for their efforts. Lady Al-Lat gushes when the characters tell her that they saved Manat from mortal danger and removed her to safety. While Manat is a confessed, staunch Luciferan, Lady Al-Lat considers her a Cryptic at heart, which makes her worth saving when she has endangered herself in pursuit of knowledge. And speaking of that pursuit, Lady Al-Lat suggests that the characters stick close to Manat for the time being and report back to her (Al-Lat) with any other information they can glean from Manat. Finally, Al-Lat offers to contact Fell Knight Guanli and Lady Nasu and have them make themselves available if the characters need help on this fact-finding mission.

Once all of that has been accomplished, the characters can then get to sleep for the rest of the night unless the players can think of other immediate roleplaying opportunities to pursue. Some examples might include discussing the days events with one another, speculating about what the Lord of Murder might be up to or getting in contact with any thralls they might have had to ravage from afar for emergency stores of Faith. Otherwise, just let them fall into what is likely an exhausted sleep after so much tense activity and declare that time passes until morning.

SCENE FOUR

The next day, the characters either gather once again at the home of Troy Daniels (or wake up there if they spent the night). They find Baphomel awake, dressed and brewing coffee. He is clutching an empty blue mug and standing by the burbling coffeemaker like a rabid rock fan waiting for an autograph behind a concert hall. When he notices the characters, he smirks and says that if humans can invent things such as automatic coffee makers, then they have not completely degenerated since they were banished from Paradise. He then offers everyone a mug from his cabinet and directs them to the morning newspaper that is lying open on his kitchen table.

The page to which the paper is open is the police blotter, and the first note on it concerns the characters' incident at the Dolphin Motel. It seems that the manager of that fine establishment called the police and reported a loud crash, followed by gunfire and screams (as well as any especially noticeable details that the

players' characters' actions might have added). Arriving on the scene, the police discovered a ruined car that had crashed into the lodge, bullet holes all over the place and an awful lot of blood, especially inside the crashed vehicle. Their hypothesis is that the battle had broken out due to a botched drug sale, since the Dolphin is known as a popular spot for major deals. No bodies were found at the scene, though, which the police are at a loss to explain.

Once the characters have had a chance to read and digest this information, Manat comes into the kitchen. She is freshly showered, wide awake and apparently dressed in a pair of Baphomel's jeans as well as one of his shirts. She looks much more in control of herself this morning, her mortal fear having evaporated in the light of day after a good night's sleep. She takes a cup of coffee, glances at the newspaper and thanks the characters *once again* for coming to her aid the previous night. She then turns to Baphomel and asks him, "Did you contact Joyce and Agent Keyes?" Baphomel nods, and Manat asks, "When will they be here?" Baphomel says that these people will be along shortly and that everyone present can discuss the situation together when they arrive.

A short time later, there is a knock at the door. Baphomel answers it and admits two people whom the characters might recognize, depending upon their background. One of these visitors is a bald black man whose body is roughly between that of Michael Clarke Duncan and Ving Rhames in size. He is wearing a crisp brown suit, and he is pulling a pair of wrap-around black sunglasses off as he enters Baphomel's home. If the players' characters are members of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, they will recognize this gentleman (either on sight or by reputation) as one Agent Marcus Keyes of the FBI, better known among the fallen as Sauvitar. He introduced himself to Baroness Kishar several months ago and offered her his services as a military strategist and a material link to the federal government, but she turned him down flat. Half the members of the court consider him a presumptuous fool, while the rest think that Baroness Kishar was probably too hasty with him, especially considering all that has happened in Los Angeles since then. He has since hooked up with Lieutenant Mayor Daniels, who considers him a valuable fallen contact.

The other person is a middle-aged woman in conservative business attire who is more or less dwarfed by Agent Keyes. If the players' characters played through Into the Fire and attended the emergency public City Council meeting and press conference in Scene Two of that story, they will recognize this woman as Joyce Allen (also known as

the demon Yigal). Her husband is a local politician making a play on the national stage, and she is an ardent supporter of children's charities in Los Angeles' rebuilding phase.

As these two characters enter, Baphomel introduces them by their mortal names (which prompts them to supply their Celestial Names as well) and invites everyone into the living room to talk. He leaves it up to either Manat or the players' characters to introduce themselves to the newcomers, but after that has been done, he adds, "They are the ones I told you about earlier." Manat eagerly jumps in at this point as well, adding that if it were not for the characters' efforts, she would probably be in the Pit right now, and the Lord of Murder would be doing only Heaven knows what with no one on Earth the wiser.

Agent Keyes nods approvingly, and the conversation switches gears to address the matter at hand. Baphomel admits that he has only been facilitating contact and dialogue between interested parties, and he is not even entirely sure what said parties are interested in. He has gathered that Mrs. Allen, Yigal, is concerned about an Earthbound demon exerting some influence on the children from the Marshall School, but he is still fuzzy on the details. Yigal and Manat refresh his memory, going over Yigal's experiences dealing with Annette Demilenko at the offices of the Blind Samaritan Foundation. (If Manat's previous recapping opportunities in Scenes Two and Three did not reveal this information, you may do so here for the players' benefit.) The basic conclusion that she came to, Yigal says, was that Demilenko was a thrall to one of the city's Earthbound. Manat agreed and further suspected that the Earthbound in question was the Lord of Murder, who was picking up where his in-city rival had left off. Yet, before her investigation for proof to support this suspicion could really get going, Manat had been rousted out and attacked by Haraphael.

If the characters do not pipe up at this point, Agent Keyes chimes in that Haraphael was a known agent of the Lord of Murder, which seems to support Manat and Yigal's suspicions. The question then becomes not so much what is going on as what can be done to stop it. The details are immaterial, Sauvitar argues, since the fact that a dangerous Earthbound is involved makes the situation bad enough to necessitate action. What they ought to do is storm the headquarters of the Blind Samaritan Foundation, drag Annette Demilenko out of there and cut off the Earthbound's influence over the organization. Baphomel objects to this tactic, however, arguing that Los Angeles is not Dodge City. After everything the city has been through lately, the last

thing it needs is lawless, violent vigilantism tearing apart what looks like an organization devoted to helping put things back to normal.

Yigal grudgingly agrees with that sentiment, and Sauvitar does not press the issue. What they really need to do, Baphomel says, is look for some proof of impropriety in either Demilenko's background or that of her foundation and try to proceed through mostly legitimate channels. Sauvitar argues that even if the foundation is operating perfectly within legal strictures, its head is still in thrall to the Earthbound, and they cannot in good conscience let that continue. If the characters do not pipe up one way or another during this discussion, it will eventually be Manat and Yigal who suggest a median approach. The Lord of Murder's influence, they agree, must be neutralized, but a subtle, mostly legitimate means of doing so would be best for all involved. As time is of the essence, however, the slow-turning wheels of the local and federal justice system might not be effective soon enough. (Besides, no one has any real proof in the first place that anything untoward is going on other than a supernatural impression.) Therefore, it is decided that it would be acceptable to ignore the mortal search-and-seizure laws in favor of the greater good.

What it behooves them to do, then, is to dig up any information they can on the Blind Samaritan Foundation both from without and from within. In truth, any evidence of legal impropriety is going to exist within the foundation's headquarters if at all, and it is most likely to be found in the organization's financial records. If someone can get in, take a look at a copy of those records and discover any proof of wrongdoing, they can take the first substantive step in the right direction. They can then decide what to do about Annette Demilenko (if anything) in hopes of curtailing the influence of the Earthbound demon that acts through her.

Now, if you are a lucky Storyteller, your players' characters will immediately volunteer for the job of sneaking into the Blind Samaritan Foundation's headquarters and looking for the materials in question. Otherwise, though — if they are slow on the uptake or hesitant to get any more deeply involved — you might have to prod them to take action through your Storyteller characters. Baphomel is the first to disqualify himself for any such activity. As the Lieutenant Mayor of the city, he can not allow himself to be seen snooping around any organization's offices without reasonable probable cause. He can be among the first to take action if proof of illicit activities comes out (and he can help pull strings and bail others out of trouble if need be), but otherwise, his hands are tied.

Sauvitar and Yigal both beg off as well, but they say that they can provide supporting intelligence to make the job easier for anyone who does it. Yigal cites similar reasons to those Baphomel gave for not being involved directly, but she also does not want to spook Demilenko into possibly withdrawing the foundation's legitimate monetary support from her charitable initiatives. Sauvitar explains straight out that he is more effective working from the sidelines than he is on the front line or operating behind enemy lines. Manat is willing to try her luck at the foundation again, but she does not want to go alone this time, nor does she think that she can even handle a job like this on her own. She then turns to the characters for help and protection, as do the others, who feel that the characters' superiors in their greater demonic hierarchy would want them to be proactive in this situation. (And this sentiment is the very one that their superiors have already expressed, of course.)

Once the characters agree to help, however grudgingly they might do so, the others decide that this thing must be done as soon as possible. Taking action that very Saturday night would be ideal, since the foundation's headquarters is not likely to be full of people, nor will it be until Monday morning. Therefore, any evidence that the characters have been snooping around could conceivably go unnoticed for long enough for them to get clear. Plus, the sooner they act, the sooner they can do something to expunge any influence the Lord of Murder might have. So saying, Baphomel suggests that Yigal and Sauvitar spend the rest of the day gathering what information they can and have it ready for the characters as early in the evening as possible so that they can act with as much information as is available. They agree and excuse themselves, leaving everyone else the rest of the day to do as they please.

SCENE FIVE

The rest of that day passes calmly as the characters make whatever preparations they deem to be appropriate for that night's planned activity. They seem to have shaken Manishtusu's agents for the time being, as well as dodged the attention of the Earthbound itself. What is more, agents of their infernal hierarchy contact them in the midst of these preparations with unexpected offers of assistance. Who those agents are, of course, depends in part on who it is that the characters work for.

Characters who are members of the Infernal Court are contacted by that court's Lion Minister, Fell Knight Guanli, at about the midpoint of the day. He invokes all of the characters simultaneously and says that the

Minister of Aurochs has been on his back all day long telling him to get in touch with them about something extremely important. Now that he actually has some time free, Guanli explains, he is able to check in on them and see just what is so urgent. He asks if they would like to meet him somewhere or vice versa, or if they would just like to continue talking remotely like this. He goes along with whatever the characters suggest (unless, of course, they try to blow him off for some reason).

When the conversation continues (under whatever circumstances might prevail), Guanli half explains that he has been busy trying to track down a rogue fallen Scourge who has been intentionally infecting prostitutes with sexually transmitted diseases that have been souped up by the demon's lingering rage and pain from the Abyss. Now that that matter is settled, Guanli wants to know what the characters have been up to. He listens to the characters' explanations with great interest, grumbling all the while that Councilman Arroya (that is, Lord Aglibol) should have given him all the details earlier. When the characters mention the connection to the Lord of Murder, Guanli blanches and murmurs that he had no idea that this was going on right under his nose. He declares that something ought to be done — and soon. When the characters bring up their intention to sneak into the headquarters of the Blind Samaritan Foundation, he attaches himself to the endeavor with gusto. He has been uneasy with the situation surrounding the Marshall School for Troubled Teens since its inception, and he sees this activity as a possible means of achieving closure. That, and dealing with threats to the fallen of this city is his job. He tells the characters to contact him once they are ready to go in, and he will be there front and center. In the meantime, he is going to round up an acquaintance of his who helped him deal with the situation at the Marshall School originally, after which he will be eagerly awaiting contact from the characters.

Characters who are members of the Blood Court, on the other hand, are contacted by Lady Nasu, that court's Eagle Minister. She says that Spentu Mainyu contacted her and informed her of the characters' situation shortly after he last talked to them. She asks for an update and listens with casual interest to the characters' plan to sneak into the Blind Samaritan Foundation's headquarters. When they wrap up, Nasu tells them that she is with Fell Knight Ravana (the Blood Court's Lion Minister) at the moment and that Ravana has agreed to accompany the characters when they make their move. She asks them to invoke her (or Ravana

herself) when the time comes, so that Ravana can be ready to meet them and help them out.

Characters who are agents of Lady Al-Lat could conceivably hear from either Lady Nasu or Fell Knight Guanli, since both are also Al-Lat's agents themselves. Whichever one you choose, that Storyteller character recommends that Fell Knight Guanli accompany the characters on their mission just in case they run into any more of the trouble that plagued them last night. After all, if their reporter contact found trouble at the foundation headquarters, they might do so as well. Between them, Nasu and Guanli arrange with the characters for Guanli to meet them when they are ready to make their move. Guanli also mentions that he will be bringing along a companion, with whom he first investigated the situation at the Marshall School. He then tells the characters that he will be waiting eagerly to hear from them and breaks off contact to make his own preparations.

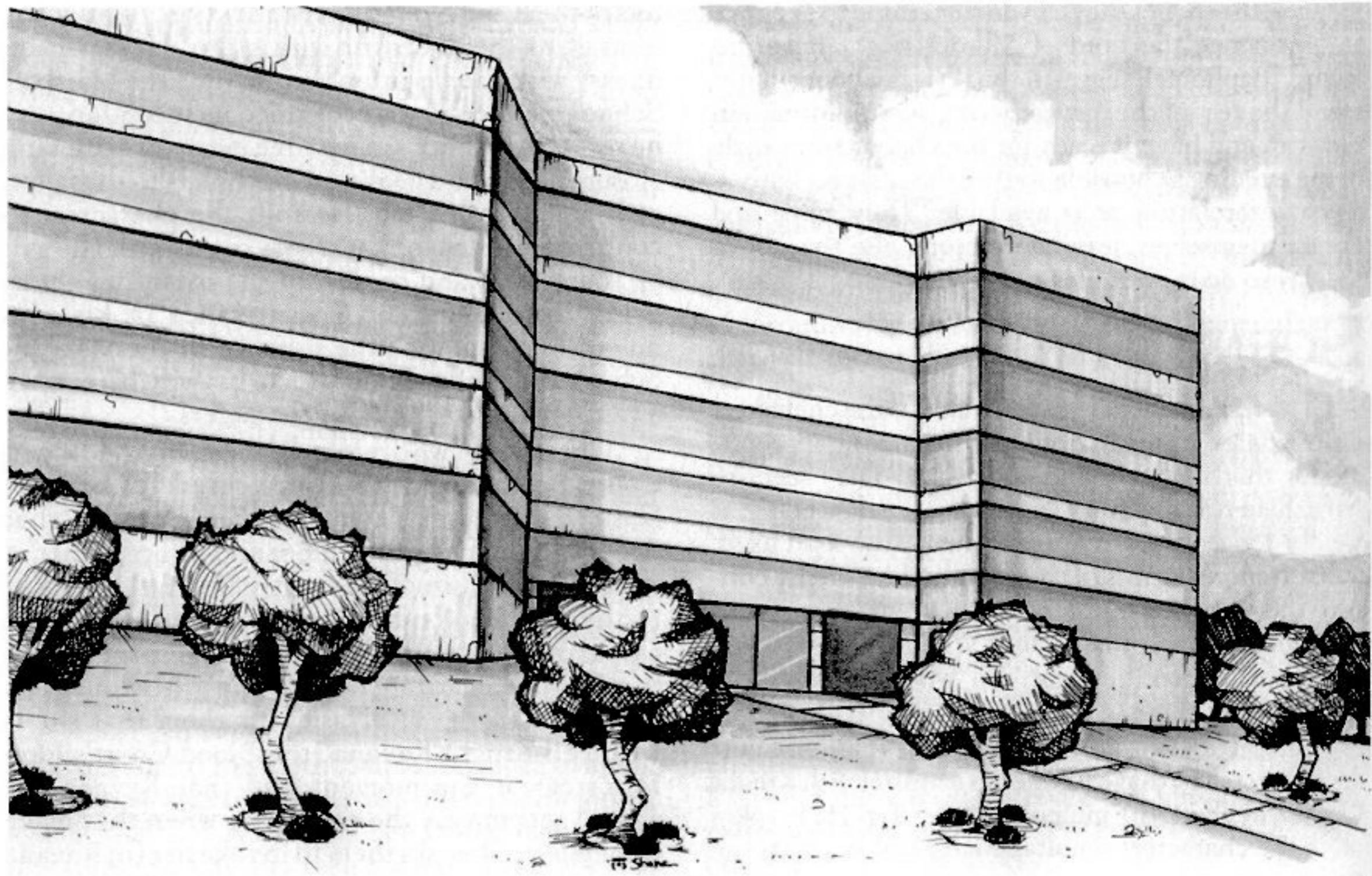
PRELIMINARY INTELLIGENCE

When the characters eventually meet back up at Baphomel's house, they find Manat, Sauvitar and Yigal there waiting for them. Should the characters reveal that help from their higher-ups is going to be on the way, Sauvitar and Yigal seem pleased, but Manat seems somewhat put off. She asks, since that

is the case, if the characters even need her to go along anymore. The choice is up to them, but if they ask if she *wants* to go along, she says that she would like to see this story through. If they decide that it would be too dangerous to include her, she makes them promise to at least let her know everything that happens. For his part, Baphomel would just as soon see the matter taken care of no matter who is ultimately involved.

Once that is out of the way, Sauvitar and Yigal tell the characters everything they have been able to gather thus far about the Blind Samaritan Foundation. Sauvitar provides the historical data, while it is Yigal who gives the characters the insider perspective on the headquarters building itself.

For the last three years, Sauvitar tells them, Annette Demilenko has been the Managing Director of the Blind Samaritan Foundation. The foundation has focused primarily on helping the homeless of the city of Los Angeles and the greater Tri-County Area by providing them with food, helping them find housing (however temporary) and giving them access to job-training programs. It has largely reserved its efforts for those persons who are homeless for reasons beyond their control — such as having undiagnosed mental problems or being victims of natural disasters — but it has recently extended the range of



its social programs. It now tries to help victims of violent crimes, teenage runaways, drug addicts and children with terminal illnesses.

Annette Demilenko herself is something of a mystery. She was born in the mid-1950s in New Mexico, a descendant of Polish immigrants. She lived a fairly normal life until she dropped out of college in the '70s and disappeared for more than two decades. There are sketchy reports of her being a part of the Weather Underground and various extremist religious sects but nothing that could ever be substantiated. She was never reported missing by her family or friends, though, and when her parents died, she was still in the will. Just before the turn of the new millennium, she invested most of the money that she had saved up over the course of her life (most of it in the form of inheritance from her parents' wills) into starting up the Blind Samaritan Foundation here in Los Angeles. The charity has had a small but significant presence in the local community, especially now in the wake of the Devil's Night Riots. The foundation has received a growing number of donations since then (as have all of Los Angeles' local charities), and it has been turning that money back into community services and outreach programs. The latest such program is the foundation's initiative to take care of the displaced students of the Marshall School for Troubled Teens, though it is still unclear at this time what exactly can be done with (or for) them.

As for the headquarters itself, Yigal adds, the Blind Samaritan Foundation operates out of a five-story office building, located on a commercial estate not far away from downtown Los Angeles. The building sits in the middle of a small block of land, surrounded by a well-maintained lawn and trees. It is a recent construction of steel and tinted glass, and it miraculously sustained only minor cosmetic damage as a result of Devil's Night. A path leads through the lawn to the plaza entrance and lobby, and visitors in cars must park in the garage before taking a tiled path back around to the lobby.

The building has a parking garage with space for 30 cars, which is open on weekdays until 7:00 PM. The rest of the time, the entrance to the garage is barred by a mechanical gate arm that requires a swipe card to open. The foundation owns five vans, which are normally kept here in their own annex. The garage has elevator and stairwell access, but the doors leading to both require an employee swipe card. Visitors must walk around and enter the building through the lobby. A locked room contains the building's furnace and air-conditioning setup, as well as all of its maintenance supplies.

Entering through a plaza area, visitors come into the lobby via double glass doors. Two receptionists are stationed here during the workweek, and they do not allow visitors to enter the elevators without permission, although visitors cannot operate the elevators without an employee swipe card. This level also holds the security office, which is basically a locked room full of monitors for the building's several closed-circuit cameras. There are no fewer than two guards on duty here at any given time (even on the weekends). A janitor's closet is located near the stairs.

The building's second floor holds the kitchens, used for cooking meals that are then distributed by van to shelters around the city. The third and fourth floors house the foundation's offices. Even demons are subject to bureaucracy, and the Blind Samaritan Foundation requires administrators, coordinators and accountants. Both floors are equipped with walled offices, cubicles, restrooms and lunch areas.

The fifth floor holds the rest of the foundation's employees' offices, including Annette Demilenko's office and the office of the foundation's accountant. Demilenko's office is set off the hallway behind her personal assistant's office, and it features a large black desk, conference-call and videoconferencing capabilities, an expensive personal computer and a separate television monitor that can access the security camera footage if she should so choose. Yigal tells the characters that her impression of Annette was that the woman liked to be in total control of her foundation and its staff (hence her gift from her master). Therefore, she suspects that if any evidence of corporate wrongdoing is to be found on the premises, Demilenko's office is the first place that they should look.

As far as moving about within the building goes, operating the elevator requires a swipe card for every floor. Only Demilenko, her guards and the senior security guard have swipe cards that can access her office directly. There is also a master swipe card in a safe in the security office on the ground floor. The stairwell is for emergencies only, and opening the door will set off an alarm. The doors to the staircase are not locked, however, except on the top floor.

The foundation has a force of eight security guards who rotate out in two-man shifts to watch the building 24 hours a day. It took on this added expense after the Devil's Night Riots, even though these guards have never had to do more than monitor the feeds from each floor's security camera and make the rounds of the building and grounds twice per shift. Each guard is armed with a flashlight and pepper spray, and they all carry two-way radios. There are two light pistols in a locker in the security

room on the ground floor, but the guards are expected to call the police if serious trouble arises, rather than taking a lesson from the John Woo school of corporate security.

According to Yigal, the characters should not have too much trouble getting in, getting what they want and getting out with it so long as they work together and stay calm. She admits, though, that one can never tell with thralls of the Earthbound. The security guards might be thralls themselves, or other demon heavy-hitters like Haraphael might be on the premises waiting for them (especially since Haraphael was sent back to the Abyss). The Lord of Murder must know by now that his thrall at the foundation is garnering attention from the city's fallen, so there is really no telling what contingencies he might be putting in place to safeguard his interest there. Yigal bids the characters be careful, which Sauvitar seconds. Baphomel echoes this sentiment, but he is more adamant about the characters keeping their eyes open. He cannot stress to them enough how important it is that figure out exactly what the Lord of Murder is using Demilenko to accomplish and to look as hard as they can for any evidence that the Blind Samaritan Foundation is not 100 percent on the level. As long as the evidence is real, Baphomel can pull enough strings to have the foundation shut down and have Annette Demilenko removed as its managing director (at least temporarily). After that, the characters are more than welcome to do whatever is necessary to clean out the last traces of the Lord of Murder's influence.

When all is said and done, the Storyteller characters who are not going along (Baphomel, Yigal, Sauvitar and possibly Manat as well) wish the characters and their superior luck and bid them hurry back with good news.

SCENE SIX

Shortly after they leave, the characters presumably invoke (or simply telephone) either Fell Knight Guanli, Lady Nasu or Fell Knight Ravana as per the events of the first half of the last scene. Their contact excitedly asks where the characters want to meet and assures them that he (or she) will be there soon.

RENDEZVOUS WITH REINFORCEMENTS

When the characters arrive at the rendezvous point, they are met by not one, but four people who look ready for action. Two of them are so similar in appearance that they can only be brother and sister (possibly even fraternal twins). They are even dressed alike in sleek,

black-leather pants and thin, coffee-colored sweaters, with subtle golden his-and-hers accessories. They are standing unsettlingly close to one another with their hands around each other in a display of intimate familiarity. If the players' characters are members of the Blood Court, they might recognize these two siblings as Azhi and Dahaki, two enforcers for Fell Knight Ravana's Lion Ministry.

The other two folks (a man and a woman) should be immediately familiar to characters who played through Suffer the Children or who have been in Los Angeles and taken part in the local infernal politics. One is a strikingly attractive young woman with a well-rounded figure, all of which except for her hands and head is covered by a layer of somewhat baggy clothing. The other is a man of Portuguese heritage who is stocky and in perfect physical condition, and he is dressed in the uniform of an officer of the Los Angeles Police Department. The two of them are Fell Knight Ravana and Fell Knight Guanli, respectively, and they are chattering excitedly to one another as the characters approach. The one of them whom the characters know (based on what background the characters are coming from) introduces the other (if they don't know both) and explains that said other is here at his (or her) invitation. (Got that?) Ravana then introduces Azhi and Dahaki to the characters and vice versa. She explains that since the characters are not certain exactly what they might be walking into here tonight, it is probably best to go in expecting trouble. That being the case, she would just as soon have two of her best "troublemakers" there backing her up. As one, the twins respond with, "Amen to that."

It might occur to one or all of your characters at this point to wonder exactly how all of them plus these four extra characters (one of whom is dressed as an officer of the LAPD) can possibly expect to sneak through a building and get back out again without raising all sorts of alarms and being noticed by anyone with a pair of eyes in his head. Should one of the characters voice this concern (or begin discussing plans of a clandestine nature), Fell Knight Guanli announces that he is in no mood for skulking or scouting. He, Ravana and the twins have been discussing it, and they have come up with a more straightforward approach that will be equally (if not more) effective. He has a significant amount of authority in both mortal and demonic circles, he says, and this is as good a time as any to exercise some of it. Ravana adds that they are going to use their aggregate group's considerable size to overwhelm whatever enthralled or demonic guardians the building might have, as well as to intimidate Annette Demilenko into giving up without any sort of... messy conflict. Then,



with that, the four of them bid the characters come along (provided everyone is through roleplaying for the moment) and make their way toward the headquarters of the Blind Samaritan Foundation.

THE BLIND SAMARITAN FOUNDATION

When the characters and their four accomplices arrive at the Blind Samaritan Foundation's headquarters, Fell Knight Guanli waves for all of them to follow him and heads straight for the front door. Since it is the weekend and the building is closed, the front door is locked and accessible only by employee swipe card. Guanli only pauses for a moment at this obstacle before fishing into his shirt pocket for a blank white card with a magnetic strip on one side. He taps his police badge with the card, grins at the characters and says, "Fake swipe card — membership has its privileges." If the characters ask where he got such a thing, he replies, "Connections with a corporate security firm. Hey, you don't get to be a minister in the Infernal Court if you don't have connections." (If the characters are fellow agents of Lady Al-Lat, he tips them a conspiratorial wink after saying that.)

He leads the characters into the lobby and is heading for the elevator when one of the security

guards on staff emerges from the security room and asks him where he and all of these people think they are going. Guanli stops, turns to look the guard dead in the eyes and says that he has brought these people here on official business. When he follows that up by asking if the guard has a problem with that, the guard stammers that he does not except that no one told him anything about it. Guanli snaps back that the guard ought to get back to his office, call upstairs and check it out with Demilenko if he wants to know anything else. The guard does what he is told, apologizing for the interruption and going back to his office.

If the characters react with surprise to the fact that Demilenko is actually upstairs right now, Ravana assures them that everything is going fine. "Guanli called her and arranged a meeting after he spoke to you. She's waiting for us. Otherwise... the sneaking thing, but we prefer it this way. Don't worry, though. That foolish woman has no idea what she's in for."

Guanli then uses his fake swipe card to call an elevator that all of them pile into and ride to the top floor of the building. Just before the door opens, the male twin (Azhi) grins and says, "Here we are, moment of truth. Everyone try to look intimidating." The doors open then, and Guanli and Ravana lead the group to the end of the hallway through an empty and unlit office into a larger and better decorated office

beyond it. The legend on the door says "Annette Demilenko, Managing Director."

The office is lit and occupied by a middle-aged woman who is sitting at the desk. She is dressed in business attire accented by jewelry with a distinctly Southwestern flair, and she is the image of composed self-confidence. Her eyes take in the crowd that files into her office, and she stands in greeting, smiling like any gracious host might. Azhi and Dahaki are the last two people into the room, and they close the doors once everyone is inside.

"Officer Azevedo," she says to Guanli. "I believe it was you who arranged this meeting. You didn't mention you'd be leading a parade. Would you mind telling me what this is about?"

"I dare say you can guess, Ms. Demilenko," Guanli says. "Annette. You've been drawing attention to yourself. These... citizens—" he says this indicating the players' characters—"have caught wind of what you're up to. They even have a pretty good idea of who you work for. Isn't that interesting?"

"Can we just cut the crap, please?" Ravana interrupts, which elicits an excited giggle from the twins by the door.

"Yes," Demilenko says, "let's do that. You say these strangers are on to me? They're the reason you're here — we're all here — right now? Are they even fallen? Then yes, let's 'cut the crap.'" She then addresses the characters directly, with a glint of madness growing in her eyes. As she speaks, she begins to walk around the room looking at each of the characters in turn. "Do you really know what my foundation is doing in this city? Can you possibly know how perfect an instrument I've made it with the gifts Manishtusu has given me? He gave me power in return for worship, and I've used that power to make for him an alter on which to sacrifice the world.

"There's a war coming, you fools, and Manishtusu intends to win it. But he needs soldiers to fight it, and my organization helps him drum them up. I offer him the weak and downtrodden that even my foundation can't help, and he fills their worthless, wasted shells with warriors eager to lay siege to this world and raze it to its foundations. I've been doing it for years, even before that bouquet of brats from the Marshall School fell in my lap like manna from Heaven. And you think you're just going to waltz in here and stop me?"

At this point, Demilenko stops her meandering (and her matching dialogue) for a moment to stand between Fell Knight Ravana and Fell Knight Guanli. When she does, she smiles and looks back and forth at the pair of them before glaring triumphantly at the

characters again. "You fools have no idea what you've gotten yourselves into. You see, unlike me, you have no idea who your friends are or who you can count on. For instance, I wanted Guanli and Ravana, and even Azhi and Dahaki over there, to be here when you came because I know I can count on them. Like me, they know that the only way to survive the coming war is to be on the right side." She then looks at the fell knights again and says, "Don't you?"

"We do," Guanli says, (to what is hopefully the players' characters' shock). "It's true."

Ravana nods and adds, "Yes. We've all chosen Manishtusu as our master." The twins excitedly whisper the Earthbound's name as well. "But unlike some people, we don't arouse undue suspicion to that fact by showing off on the job." She then lays a hand over Demilenko's face and performs the evocation Extinguish Life. Demilenko jerks and her body goes rigid as if she has been jolted with electricity, then she slumps lifeless as her soul is severed from her body. She crumples to the floor dead as a stone.

Then, before the players' characters can react, Guanli, Ravana and the twins close ranks around them, and Guanli addresses them. When he speaks, he is calm and friendly but deadly serious. "A dangerous and arrogant liability, that woman, but she was telling the truth. There is a war coming, and it's going to make Devil's Night look like a church picnic. We picked the side that's going to be left standing at the end, and we're offering you the choice to do the same if you want to walk out of here. This would be a lot easier if that McIntyre clown had been able to figure out how Vandermeer compelled obedience from the demons he summoned for Enshagkushanna, but he never did, no matter how we motivated him." The twins giggle again.

"So, it looks like you're just going to have to make a choice. Either swear on your True Names that you'll throw in with the Lord of Murder when the new war comes, or spend the rest of eternity regretting the alternative. What's it going to be?"

CONCLUSION

The way this story (and, indeed, the entire *Fear to Tread* chronicle) ends is entirely up to you and your players. If they accept Guanli's offer, he orders them to reveal their True Names in an invocation to their lord Manishtusu so as to seal the deal. They can then get back to their "normal" lives with an admonition to keep their new allegiance secret and be on the lookout for ways in which they can serve their master.

If they refuse, the characters are going to have to fight their way out of this room and escape these four fierce and dedicated warriors. Yet, even if they should manage to do so, Manishtusu has other servants both great and small all over Los Angeles (and who knows where else). Unless they find some serious help from people they can trust, they won't be able to rest comfortably. After all, as many times as the Lord of Murder has been invoked in this scene alone, he should be well aware of who the characters are and what they look like by now.

Should the characters manage to find some safe haven, though, the vista of a whole new chronicle

opens out before them. They now know for sure that Manishtusu has secret operatives all over Los Angeles, some extremely high placed in the city's respective demonic courts. They also know that he is building up forces in secret for some grand, climactic confrontation in what might be the very near future. Knowing this, the characters could choose to run and hide, or they could choose to try to root out Manishtusu's other hidden pawns, clean up the demonic court they serve and possibly even take a stand against the Earthbound itself.

Provided, that is, that they are not afraid to take that first fateful step....





CHAPTER FOUR:

STORYTELLER CHARACTERS

Heed not Mephistopheles, my children, lest you suffer eternal damnation. When he whispers in your ear, turn away your head and hearken instead to the angel on your shoulder.

—Harry Segall, *Angel on My Shoulder*

The following is a roster of all the major Storyteller characters who motivate the action of the **Fear to Tread** chronicle, as well as all the important minor characters. Their backgrounds, goals and general personalities are collected here for ease of reference so that the same write-ups don't have to appear time and again in each story in which these characters take part. You'll recognize many of them from **Demon: City of Angels**, though all the material in that book has not been carried over to this one. Only the background material that is germane to this book's stories appears here for the sake of avoiding repetition.

You'll also notice that full Trait ratings are not included with every character write-up. Whatever might be missing has been omitted intentionally in favor of broader guidelines to allow you to scale these Storyteller characters' levels of proficiency relative to your players' characters. Should you find yourself in need of hard Traits, yet you don't have time before a game to write

them out, the sample characters in the Antagonists chapter of **Demon: The Fallen** (or modified representations thereof) can serve nicely. And, of course, if you're injecting these stories into an ongoing chronicle of your own, you may substitute wholly new Storyteller characters of your original design as you see fit.

THE EARTHBOUND

While they do not make physical appearances (or only terribly brief ones) in the stories that make up the **Fear to Tread** chronicle, the mad, unknowable Earthbound have a definite presence throughout. Many of the events going on behind the scenes are being carried out on their behalf, and if not for them, the fallen in the setting would have significantly less trouble on their hands.

The following two malignant entities are the ones with the most noticeable presence in the greater Tri-County Area centering on Los Angeles. A third



Earthbound figure has also begun to exert his influence in this volatile arena, but he does not play a significant part in this chronicle's events. The following text deals primarily with these beings' greater goals and motivations, rather than what specific evocations or Trait ratings they can bring to bear against the characters. You may safely tailor their powers to suit the needs of your game. You also have the freedom to distill the basic elements of each being's personality into a more general form, then use it as the basis for your own Earthbound antagonist.

If you are interested in a more detailed analysis of an Earthbound demon's power and statistics, see the *Demon Storytellers Companion*.

ENSHAGKUSHANNA

Enshagkushanna is a mighty force when compared to the fallen, but he is one of the least of the Earthbound. He is a lowly vassal to the mighty Archduke Dagon — one of the first Earthbound to appear in the physical world — and although he made himself a mighty god to early humans, Enshagkushanna never attracted much attention beyond the Ganges River where his reliquary was hidden. He quickly vanished from view as his worship dropped off, and he has slept for many centuries since.

It was not until 1985 that he was reawakened. A small group of devotees who had plenty of unhealthy curiosity but no real faith made a pilgrimage to India and there learned the true nature of the being to which they had experimentally begun to pray. It cost the groggy Enshagkushanna his last reserve of strength to take possession of one of the ingenue cultists and speak to the others, but the gamble paid off. The manifestation destroyed the unfortunate worshiper Enshagkushanna chose,



but the other followers were suddenly brimming over with faith when they performed their rituals.

As luck would have it, one of the surviving followers was a successful television producer. While probing the minds of his new devotees, Enshagkushanna quickly grasped the potential of the so-called "City of Angels," and he commanded his thralls to have his reliquary moved to the Tri-County Area, specifically Catalina Island. The Earthbound then set out to cement his influence throughout the television media, as well as the movie-studio system. At the same time, he began developing influence in the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department. In this endeavor, he enjoyed some immediate success, even though his plans moved more slowly than he might have hoped. (In fact, this Earthbound has been having difficulties lately with a deputy named Jeff Black, though he cannot yet tell whether these difficulties are the results of concerted opposition or simply inconvenient coincidences.)

Intending to develop the city into a new earthly bastion for his master, Dagon — and to set himself up as its steward as a reward for all his hard work — everything seemed to go fine for Enshagkushanna for more than a decade. Yet when the lesser fallen began unexpectedly emerging from the Abyss en masse, he suddenly found himself on the front lines of the battle. He lost most of his political influence to the Devil Spentu Mainyu, and the Luciferan Scourge Vritran wrestled away a fair amount of influence in the entertainment industry. Enshagkushanna can see his dreams of control over Los Angeles slipping away, but he is determined not to go down without a fight.

Recently, rumors surfaced that Lucifer was in Los Angeles. Wasting no time, Dagon contacted his vassal and demanded that he (that is, Enshagkushanna) find the Betrayer at once. The news stunned the beleaguered Earthbound, who was frantically preoccupied by struggles with both his principal rival, Manishtusu, and greedy, opportunistic fallen who seemed to think that they were entitled to something just because they had clawed their way out of Hell on their own. Time was not on Enshagkushanna's side, however, and as Devil's Night exploded, Enshagkushanna could do nothing but order his people back to Catalina Island. There, they watched Manishtusu and his minions run wild, and they waited, and they planned.

The first tentative steps of Enshagkushanna's new bid for power have only recently been taken. One of his most trusted thralls has taken over the position of headmaster at an ailing school known as the Marshall School for Troubled Teens and solicited its services to wealthy and frustrated parents of troubled teens. When they just can not take their children's misbehavior any

longer, parents at their wits' end can send the unruly youngsters to a facility that combines the best aspects of a counseling center, a rehab clinic, a military boarding school and a prison. On the other end of the social spectrum, less well-off parents whose children have run afoul of the law can beg the court's mercy and have their children sent to the Marshall School instead of prison or a less charitable juvenile-detention center.

However, a horrible fate awaits these children. Once they arrive, the weakest among them are subject to a seemingly endless cycle of abuse until their souls are broken, and then, a demon is summoned from the Abyss to occupy their bodies. Before this possession is allowed to occur, however, Enshagkushanna's thralls in charge of the ceremony compel the demon by his True Name to serve Enshagkushanna in all things. Should the summoned demon resist and refuse, he earns himself an immediate free fall back to the Abyss.

MANISHTUSU

The Lord of Murder is his title. This Devourer's savagery is legendary, and though he is considered only a mid-level Earthbound in terms of outright power, some still consider him the most dangerous because he is so unpredictable and destructive. It can not be denied that Manishtusu showed signs of nascent madness and wanton cruelty long before any of the other fallen, and after the crime of the Third Mortal, Manishtusu's behavior became a thing of nightmares so potent that they persist even today in humankind's genetic memory.

Yet, for all his eminence among demons and angels alike, a mystery surrounds how the Lord of Murder came to Los Angeles. He was certainly in residence as early as the Great Gold Rush of 1849, but no one seems to know how he came to be there in the first place. Some believe

that it was the explorer Juan Cabrillo who brought him here at the behest of the Catholic Church, which had kept the demon's reliquary hidden in the Vatican until a means of disposing of the unholy object was discovered. These scholars of the arcane believe that that is why the settlers chose for their village a desert location at what must have seemed like the end of the world. They also point to this theory to explain why the settlers built a church before anything else.

Other theories have arisen in time, each describing a different route Manishtusu's reliquary followed from the Old World to the New, and Cryptic research suggests that some of them were authored by the Earthbound himself. Regardless of the path, however, the reliquary has ended up here — and not by accident.

Before the Fall, Manishtusu was close friends with the Fiend Chenrezig, who confided in Manishtusu a prophecy that a mighty battle for the fate of all life would be fought in "the valley of many smokes." When the Fallen were cast into the Abyss and this battle had not occurred, Manishtusu blithely assumed that he would eventually be free again by necessity. This understanding eventually bore itself out aeons later when he was summoned from the Abyss by a powerful sorcerer and bound into an ancient and powerful weapon. Exerting his infernal influence on those who tried to wield it, the Earthbound contrived for his reliquary to pass from hand to hand and to travel the wide world. When he finally found the place that he believed Chenrezig had spoken of, he had the weapon hidden, and from that time on, the Lord of Murder drifted in and out of sleep, waiting.

With the reemergence of the fallen from the Abyss — which Manishtusu has long considered inevitable — the Earthbound roused himself and set about acquiring servants from their number. His ultimate goal is to rebuild the rebel army with himself at its head and start a brand new War of Wrath. Whether it is a conflict of angels fighting demons, demons fighting each other, demons destroying human beings or human beings destroying each other in the name of mutually exclusive religions, Manishtusu does not care. He just misses the savage thrill of world-spanning armies tearing each other apart while God looks the other way. His primary rival is the insufferable toady Enshagkushanna, who is more concerned with populating and maintaining a trench line for the absent Dagon than with preparing actual warriors for actual combat.

THE FALLEN

While the newly returned fallen are not as proficient with their evocations as the Earthbound, and despite the fact that they are confused by their immersion and rebirth in human hosts, they are arguably more



effective on a local level than their elder cousins. They are freer to go to and fro on the earth, and up and down in it. In addition, they are better able to work together toward mutually beneficial goals because they are starting their new lives on a more even footing than the Earthbound ever had to do. Although each serves his own ends, the fallen as a whole are better able to organize and work together for a greater common good, just as they first did at the dawn of Creation.

Yet, the Earthbound recognize this power in their diminished cousins, and they are not above warping or subverting it for their own sinister purposes when they can.

LORD AGLIBOL

Deep in the heart of the Devil Aglibol exists a dark core of jealousy. When he looked on the world he helped create, all he could see was that the parts Lucifer oversaw were better than his. Yet, even as he resented the Morningstar's preeminence, Aglibol adored Lucifer. When the Great Debate began, Aglibol declared loudly and fiercely against it, yet when Lucifer announced his support, Aglibol joined the cause without hesitation.

Throughout the Ages that followed, Aglibol could always be found at Genhinnom or near Lucifer's side. He rose through the ranks quickly and effortlessly, not as a measure of his skill and ability, but more by virtue of his unswerving loyalty and devotion to the Lightbringer. He adored the Prince for his effortless perfection, even as the Lightbringer's reflected glory highlighted Aglibol's own perceived shortcomings. As the war ground on, Aglibol frequently abused the authority Lucifer vested in him, shielded from reproach by his rank and stature in the Morningstar's grand councils. By the war's end, Aglibol was widely despised by the nobles of the infernal host, and when it was clear that Lucifer was not destined for the Abyss, these lords turned on their petty tormentor without mercy, making his existence a literal hell. When the Maelstrom ruptured the walls of the Abyss, Aglibol was one of the first escapees.

On earth, Councilman Jesus Arroya, one of only three minority councilmen on the 15-man governing body of Los Angeles, and the only Latino, worked late into the night every night of the week before he finally succumbed to the incessant pressures of the job. Although it was only a nervous breakdown, not death, it weakened the mortal tether sufficiently for Aglibol to take control.

As a human, Councilman Arroya had been a fair but dedicated crusader for the rights of his people, but with Aglibol in charge, that quickly changed. Where Arroya wanted his fellow men to help themselves to become stronger and had fought to level the playing field against white politicians and businessmen, Aglibol felt only resentment at the mistreatment heaped on him for no better reason than the color of his skin. Within two months, Aglibol moved from the humble house in East

LA where Arroya had lived most of his life to a palatial estate in Beverly Hills, financed by a tide of recent bribes and kickbacks. Not long after, Aglibol came to the attention of the city's new tyrant, Spentu Mainyu. Recognizing the Devil's crippling self-doubts, Spentu "rewarded" Aglibol with the Ministry of Aurochs, well aware of the feud it would create between Aglibol and Vohu Mano, a demon whose enmity for Aglibol went back to the Age of Wrath. Spentu was not disappointed.

Roleplaying Hints: Aglibol has always been a little creepy because of his internal conflict over his love for Lucifer, but this fairly minor flaw has since become a raging obsession. He argues with himself and suspects everyone of trying to betray him to Lucifer, even though he has done nothing wrong (or so he insists).

His influence has left a mark on the street gangs of East Los Angeles, but the recent absence of his leadership means that they are running out of control. The baroness has ordered him to rein in the excesses of his gangs, but Aglibol pretends not to have received the messages. He knows a confrontation is coming, and he wants to avoid it, but he does not know how.

LADY AL-LAT

Like so many Malefactors, Al-Lat was drawn to Lucifer's side not for philosophical reasons but from a need to help mankind understand the wonders presented them. She wanted to explain how to use the marvelous tools she and her sisters had created. She wanted humans to love and understand her, not fear her. Eager to be freed from the restrictions placed on her by the Almighty, Al-Lat joined Lucifer without hesitation.

Yet, in the ages that followed, Al-Lat found the passion that had moved her to join the rebel cause waning. She felt the horror of Caine's crime. She witnessed the atrocities that would become commonplace among her fellow angels. The final heartbreak was the failure of the Time of Babel. Disillusioned before being cast into the Abyss, Al-Lat desperately wanted to understand how everything could have gone so wrong. She soon found a home with the Cryptics.

Gipontel, who helped run the faction, became an especially fast friend. The two tried to prop up each others' sanity during the endless monotony of the Abyss. Al-Lat escaped the Abyss before her friend but knew Gipontel would soon be following.

Returning to the mortal world, Al-Lat felt an attraction to Xiao Yuen, a young woman of Chinese descent who had been sold into virtual slavery by her parents in return for her escape from China. She had no means of escape except suicide, so she drank a bottle of rat poison and closed her eyes, ready to die.

Al-Lat opened them and set off in search of Gipontel. It took her a month to find him, but eventually, she did,

joining Gipontel in the city of Atlanta. The Cryptics were working hard to control all cities that served as major transport hubs, such as Atlanta, New York, Chicago and Dallas. The leaders wanted to form an expedition to Los Angeles, and Al-Lat's timely arrival made her a logical choice.

Placed in charge of Lady Nasu and Lord Chenrezig and ordered to recruit others, Al-Lat was sent to the City of Angels. When she arrived, she carefully scouted the Tri-County Area, developing an encyclopedic knowledge of the area and its inhabitants. Two pieces of information soon troubled her. One was the arrival of Anat, Dagon's lover, but she managed to deal with that, via Spentu Mainyu, by having Nasu appointed to the head of the Blood Court's Eagle Ministry. More disturbing was the knowledge that Lucifer himself walked the streets of Los Angeles. There was no hint of why he was there, only the certain knowledge that he was present.

Studying the storm she saw looming on the horizon, Al-Lat decided that to take control of a city that was about to explode was foolish, and she adopted a plan much like Spentu Mainyu's. She would wait and let someone else endure the indignity of losing control of the city. When Devil's Night erupted, Al-Lat felt justified in her decision.

Roleplaying Hints: Knowledge is paramount to Al-Lat. She wants to understand why and where the Rebellion went wrong. She wants to understand what has happened to the world. She wants to understand English. She wants to understand what the Almighty meant by setting all these actions in motion. The pursuit of these questions occupies Al-Lat's every waking moment. It also is her blind spot because she does not understand that some fallen not only do not want to understand why, they resent her attempts to find out.

LADY ANAT

Almost from her inception, Anat loved Dagon. When that mighty Devil opted to defy the Almighty, Anat joined him. Every military action in which the archduke engaged was carefully planned by Anat; her genius and his ferocity made for a nearly unstoppable force, and the pair raged through the Loyalists without mercy. To Anat, these were the golden years, when she had a cause to believe in, an enemy to grapple with and her lover always by her side.

So it continued until the Abyss and Lucifer's betrayal. To be defeated and punished, both she and Dagon could handle, but to have the Morningstar abandon them was a pain neither could bear. At first, they tried to argue that all was well, that Lucifer was free and working to save his followers, but time passed. It passed so slowly. Minutes became years. Time crawled inevitably forward with no hope of change on the horizon.

Try as they might to maintain their ideals, Anat and Dagon found themselves wondering what had become of Lucifer. This doubt gave way to suspicion. Had the Morningstar betrayed them? Had he led a rebellion he knew would fail? It made sense. No creature had been closer to the Almighty than the Morningstar. No creature ever loved the Creator so purely as Lucifer had. If God had ordered him to, Lucifer would surely have done anything. Suspicion became certainty. Lucifer had betrayed them.

They would endure this eternal Hell alone. Thoughts of what they would do if ever they could lay their hands on the Betrayer filled the lovers' minds. They passed each eternal moment devising new and elaborate methods to torture Lucifer, and others came to join in their litany of hate. This was the beginning of the Ravener Faction.

Then, Dagon and the other four archdukes vanished. Anat went mad. The fallen fled from her fury as she raged against the nothingness. The fallen could not die, but Anat made their existence worse with her temper. Her anchor to sanity had been Dagon, and with him gone, her animosity spiraled out of control. The only information that reached her mind was when she heard that cracks had appeared in the walls of the Abyss. Forcing all out of her way, Anat charged the breach.

When she awoke in the physical world, Anat explored the limits of her new frame for just an hour before she called out to Dagon. And he responded.

Moving quickly, Anat went in search of Dagon. She found him in the deserts of Iraq on what had once been Mount Saphon. Dagon's thralls had already awakened the Earthbound, and Anat was just one more sign that it was time to move toward the endgame. Dagon had received word that the Betrayer had been sighted in Los Angeles. Since Anat was more mobile than Dagon, she was dispatched to investigate because Dagon did not trust the vassal who was already there who had not even been aware of Lucifer's presence. Anat chose not to contact Enshagkushanna, the untrustworthy vassal, but rather went to the City of Angels as a normal fallen to see if she could gain access to their network of information.

Instead, she ended up forming the secretive Blood Court, following the Devil Spentu Mainyu's advice for three of the ministry posts: the Ministry of Eagles (Nasu), the Ministry of Aurochs (Inana) and the Ministry of Dust (Vritran). She then named Fell Knight Ravana the Lion Minister and Spentu Mainyu himself as the Dragon Minister. With the Blood Court thus completed, Anat charged them all with one task: locate Lucifer.

All tried. They searched. They tapped every resource, but they could not find the Betrayer, until the night Lucifer manifested high in the sky above them. Anat seethed at the vision that hovered above her, yet even as she gathered her power to attack it, the angel vanished.

Roleplaying Hints: Anat's hatred of Lucifer and her love for Dagon have left her entirely blind to the monster that her lover has become, and her obsession with punishing the Betrayer leads her to ever-greater heights of excess and cruelty. Soon, she will be forced to make good threats she's made against the ministers of her court for failing to locate Lucifer, and when that happens, she will either be forced to draw upon Dagon directly for support or leave herself vulnerable to accusations of weakness and incompetence.

FELL KNIGHT ASHUR

As a member of the Sixth House, Ashur found no joy in the company of his fellow angels that could compare with the delight of his forests. Even deserts held more lively interests for Ashur than the idealistic debates of other angels. However, the restrictions laid on him and his fellows to remain unknown to Adam and Eve bit deeply into his core. Here was the perfection of the wild, and he could not interact with it. Others of the Sixth House, in general, did not feel as he did, but Ashur was long used to being the odd one out.

When Lucifer stood in defiance of the Almighty and that odious restriction, Ashur quickly took his place at the First Rebel's side. He had not participated in any of the debates. Indeed, he had been largely unaware of their existence, but once the choice was placed before him, Ashur was not slow to choose sides.

Ashur quickly became feared as a warrior and was raised to the rank of fell knight. When the Legions formed, Ashur unhesitatingly joined the Iron Legion because — though he was an accomplished fighter and widely feared as such — Ashur preferred to foster life and defend than attack. It was in the Iron Legion that he met Kishar and discovered love.

Then he was captured and taken to Sagun. Here, he languished for two months in the dark bowels of the labyrinth awaiting his judgment from the Almighty. In that darkness, he realized that his only regret was being separated from Kishar. Like an answer to a prayer, one day, his cell door opened, and there stood Kishar. Together, they fled to the mountains around Sagun, and there, they pledged never to be parted again and whispered each in the other's ear their True Names.

From then on, they fought back-to-back in every battle. They never stooped to the atrocities their fellow fallen did. Neither did they offer quarter to any foe the Morningstar sent them to face. They did not achieve the fame that some of the fallen earned. They participated in no debates. They sought no glory, only success for Lucifer and prosperity for mankind.

Even once they were banished to the Abyss, the two lovers stayed at each others' side and kept a quiet but firm support for Lucifer. They were not worried that

their Lord was not present. That surely was a good thing. It meant he was free to operate and eventually free his army. When the archdukes disappeared, they nodded their heads knowingly and waited.

When, centuries later, cracks appeared in the walls of the Abyss, and Kishar and Ashur quickly challenged the breach together. However, the pull of the Abyss once they were free separated the two lovers as they fought to anchor themselves in the physical world.

As Jeff Black (a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy) fell victim to a drive-by shooting, Ashur took up residence. In life, Jeff had been a highly respected officer, famous for his steadfast honesty. When scandal after scandal rocked the LAPD and the LA County Sheriff's Department, Jeff was always cleared. It was this moral fortitude which resonated with the searching Ashur.

From that time on, his mind raged with a need to make amends with the Almighty. Ashur has been possessed by Jeff Black's need to protect his family, and the thought that his girls could suffer because of the hubris of the fallen causes him pain. The arguments of the Reconcilers, which had seemed so childish and pathetic to him before, now rang with truth. In this rush of emotions, Ashur nearly forgot about Kishar, his lost love.

When his lover found him, he could not believe the change in her. The one he remembered was kind and loving, full of understanding, but the creature with whom he found himself talking was harsh. Kishar showed no signs of mercy and seemed willing to let all life die if Lucifer so ordered. Try as he might, Ashur has not been able to reach his lover. His feelings for her have not lessened, however.

So as not to become a risk to Kishar now that she has become the ruler of Los Angeles, Ashur has removed himself from politics and will not attend court. Instead, he tries to work as much good as he can through his job and community.

Roleplaying Hints: In spite of their sudden philosophical differences, Ashur is still very like Kishar. He's very strict, especially with himself, and permits no gray to confuse his view of the world. His love for Kishar is stronger than ever, but it is now tinged with a fear of her ruthlessness. In speech, he is simple and straightforward.

Ashur is very scrupulous in avoiding politics because he does not want to become a burden to Kishar, who is having enough trouble keeping the city under control. As of right now, nobody knows that Ashur and Kishar know each other's True Names, but should that ever change, then life would become even harder for the beleaguered baroness.

AZMI AND DAMAKI

Bric-et-Brac were born twins. Daniel and Danielle Montague grew up in middle class suburbia in the Tri-County Area. All of their lives, they knew they were

different. They could not understand why their parents were so upset with them when they were discovered exploring each others bodies late one night. Though beaten and punished, the two continued to explore their sexuality — at first with each other, then with other partners.

Through this process, they discovered that they preferred members of their own sex for coupling but that nobody interested them romantically. As they grew older, the twins both became interested in dance to express themselves, and they took the stage name Bricet-Brac to mask their blood relationship. In this environment, the two flourished — until Danielle had the misfortune to attract the eye of a rich old man who was looking for a new mistress.

The old lecher pursued Danielle, and though she resented his attentions, neither she nor her brother knew how to confront the old man. In the end, the two decided to commit suicide by breathing the exhaust fumes of their car. Into their bodies came the souls of a pair of fallen lovers who had leapt from the Abyss together. Azhi and Dahaki assumed control of the twins and resumed their ancient love affair with a new passion. They use this passion to inspire Faith from the audiences in the Hallow Cube, where they frequently go to reap.

Politically, they serve Fell Knight Ravana's Lion Ministry. Like her Infernal Court counterpart and lover, Ravana is an absentee head of her ministry. The difference is that Azhi and Dahaki do not allow this lack of leadership to prevent them from attacking those they perceive as being threats to the Blood Court. The two are planning to replace Ravana as soon as possible. Both are Raveners of the most intense kind.

Willpower: 7/8 (Azhi/Dahaki)

Faith: 6/7

Torment: 8/8

Apocalyptic Form: The Visage of the Flesh (same for both)

Lore: Flesh 2, Beast 2, Fundament 2 (same for both)

BAPHOMEL

As a teenager, Troy Daniels joined the Young Republicans; in college, he served one his school's senate. From his youngest days, Troy dreamt of being a leader, and he spent his adult life pursuing this goal. This is what brought him to the offices of the Mayor, where he worked as an intern. He spent his nights compiling data on the other politicians of the city and running errands for the Lieutenant Mayor.

On one of these errands, he was hit by a drunk driver and suffered immediate brain damage, but Baphomel was there and in need of a host. The Troy Daniels who walked away from the wreck was a very

different creature. Baphomel was tired of serving others. He had followed others all through the war, and the Abyss had been his only reward. Now, Baphomel wanted to be the one giving the orders.

Using the information Daniels had assembled, Baphomel began a campaign of blackmail directed at the city's politicians and fundraisers. Troy had been an inveterate record keeper and had witnessed more indiscretions than he had realized. Baphomel was clever and ruthless. Soon, the Devil was the Lieutenant Mayor, a post he could never have achieved under legal circumstances.

In philosophy, Baphomel is closest to a Cryptic, but he has declared himself a Luciferan because he currently serves as a freelance agent for the Ministry of Aurochs under the staunchly conservative Aglibol. From his position as Lieutenant Mayor, Baphomel was Aglibol's chief line of information to potential threats to the fallen of Los Angeles, but Devil's Night has negated that usefulness. What is worse for Baphomel is the destruction of City Hall because that is where he hid most of the proof of wrongdoings that he used to blackmail the other politicians.

These days, Baphomel spends his time haunting the remains of City Hall, hoping that the construction workers who are clearing the site will eventually come across the black safe where all the material so vital to his survival is stored.

Image: Troy Daniels was a clean-cut American young man of vaguely Irish ancestry. From his flawless complexion to his neatly trimmed brown hair to his spotless suit and tie to his ever-present leatherette briefcase, he affected the almost stereotypical costume of the young political hopeful. The infusion of his body with the spirit of Baphomel added a canny edge and an unrelenting intensity to his demeanor, which only improved that image. Lately, however, his countenance has grown somewhat haggard, and desperation is setting in as his world has literally crumbled around him.

Roleplaying Tips: To people of Los Angeles, Baphomel continues to put up a good front. He has been working almost nonstop with the Mayor to help restore order and inject whatever modicum of sanity back into the citizens' lives he can. He puts on confident airs and assures everyone he can that things will be back to normal very soon. He tries to convey the same message to the fallen with whom he has regular contact, but his words of assurance are less convincing. With minions of the Earthbound on the loose and the Morningstar coming out of hiding, who knows when (or if) things will ever be back to normal.

LORD CHENREZIG

When the world was young Chenrezig's dearest friend had been Manishtusu. When the Great Debate had raged,

the two enjoyed spending their time arguing either side of the situation, but in their hearts, they both chafed at the restriction set on them by the Almighty, so, when Lucifer sent out his call, the two friends quickly answered.

God's punishment struck them both hard, but more so Manishtusu. As time passed, Chenrezig began to worry for his friend, who seemed to pass a majority of his time arguing with himself. One day, Manishtusu came to Chenrezig asking him to explore the possible lines of the future to see what he saw. Happy to oblige his friend, Chenrezig cast his mind into the future.

It came back with a vision of Hell. Monoliths of unnatural stone and glass towered over an enslaved humanity. The people fought each other, but there was no sign of God or the fallen. Its name seemed to mock Chenrezig. This nightmare took place in the City of Angels in a land of smoke and fire. Horrified, Chenrezig shared what he had seen with Manishtusu.

Afterward, Manishtusu became more secretive and suspicious. By the time the fallen were cast into the Abyss, Chenrezig no longer recognized his humor-loving friend within the snarling savage he had become. In some ways, it was a blessing when Manishtusu vanished from the Abyss shortly after the archdukes did, although Chenrezig was slow to recognize this at the time.

Throughout his confinement, questions plagued Chenrezig. What had happened to his friend? How could the Almighty suffer these things to happen to His creation? Was this all a part of the plan? Where did Lucifer's disappearance fit into all of this? By the time he escaped through the fractures in the walls of the Abyss, Chenrezig was a confirmed Cryptic.

Once he returned to the physical world, Chenrezig made no effort to resume his host's mortal life. Instead, the Fiend went in search of his fellow fallen, and found a coterie of Cryptics who were attempting to establish control over the city. The plan of the Cryptics was to try to have control of primary travel hubs such as Atlanta, Dallas and Chicago. This team was formed and dispatched to L.A.

Chenrezig willingly complied with his superiors' wishes and began insinuating himself into the homeless culture of Los Angeles, specifically Santa Monica. Chenrezig had his own reasons for wanting to come to the City of Angels. He had not forgotten the prophecy he had shared with Manishtusu so many millennia before, and he was determined to uncover what potential enemy had enslaved the people, rendering them so devoid of faith.

Roleplaying Hints: Although Chenrezig is now a transient, Daniel Gopal was a brilliant biochemist, and that knowledge still resides in Chenrezig. More than one person who has struck up a conversation with Chenrezig has been startled by how keen and active his mind is. There is also a missing persons report filed on

Chenrezig with the FBI because Daniel Gopal was a citizen of India.

Like so many of the fallen, Chenrezig is conflicted by personal desire and duty, but he hides it better than most others. Nobody in the city is yet aware of his old friendship with Manishtusu, nor what the Lord of Murder will do when he learns that Chenrezig is here.

In spite of a heavy accent, Chenrezig is easily understood because he tends to speak slowly and carefully. His mode of speech is at odds with the many nervous tics his body exhibits. Like so many information gatherers, Chenrezig is becoming slightly paranoid, but it has not yet affected his work.

FELL KNIGHT GUANLI

Like so many other Malefactors, Guanli served the Dark Host by constructing weapons, and his unusual talent for manipulating his lore caused Guanli, who had never seen a battle first hand, to be elevated to the rank of fell knight. Many of the finest weapons wielded by the Lucifer's archdukes and dukes were constructed by Guanli in the forges beneath Tabâ'et'.

It may be that the famed smith joined Lucifer's side solely for the opportunity to create new weapons and to experiment with new ways of infusing matter with Faith. As a member of the Silver Legion posted to Tabâ'et', Guanli's penchant for clinical, heartless experimentation was one of the prime reasons that watchtower became synonymous with cruelty and horror. Many of the abominations that emerged from that dreadful citadel sprang first from Guanli's mind and bore the mark of his hands.

Because he spent his time in his laboratories underneath Tabâ'et' interacting with no one but his victims, none of the fallen fully appreciated the depths of madness to which Guanli had fallen. When he did exit his laboratory and communicate with the outside world, his calm, slow speech was so convincing that all failed to associate this rational, even brilliant Malefactor with the monstrosities that were born from his skills, and his weapons were still heavily sought after.

Guanli joined a cause he believed was right, and for this, the Almighty leveled a terrible curse against him (Guanli tends to see every action as a personal slight against himself and overlooks the bigger picture). Then, Guanli obeyed the orders of Lucifer to create weapons for the Dark Host, and as a reward, his workshops were destroyed by the Crimson and Iron Legions. When he emerged from the Abyss, Guanli was powerfully offended that mankind had forgotten his numerous sacrifices.

Sergeant Jeremiah Azevedo, who worked for the LAPD as weapons trainer, had testified against his fellow officers in a case of police corruption, but the case was thrown out due to the political maneuvering of the

Chief of Police. This left Sargent Azevedo as an outcast who had violated the code of silence that pervaded the LAPD. He could not be legally fired, but his fellow officers so ostracized him that he finally sank into a self-destructive cycle of alcohol and painkillers to spare himself the hurt of isolation.

This body of loneliness and resentment caught Guanli's attention as he fought the pull of the Abyss. The isolation Azevedo had been experiencing eased Guanli's acclimatization into this unfamiliar mortal world. During this period, he was approached by Al-Lat and recruited into a Cryptic expedition that had just arrived in Los Angeles. Guanli joined to increase his understanding of this new world and how the fallen could interact with it, but tensions with Al-Lat quickly emerged.

Al-Lat wanted Guanli to join the newly formed Infernal Court as head of the Ministry of Lions, but Guanli wanted to spend his time figuring out new ways of harvesting Faith and manipulating new materials such as steel, concrete and silicon. To serve as head of a ministry would waste valuable time that Guanli wanted to use for other purposes. However, Al-Lat was adamant, so Guanli became Lord General of the Ministry of Lions for the Infernal Court of Los Angeles.

Galled by this high-handed treatment Guanli became the perfect candidate for conversion by Manishtusu, who had learned of the fallen's dissatisfaction through Lady Nasu, and the Lord of Murder was quick to capitalize on the opportunity. Guanli traveled into the Nickerson Garden Projects to meet with the Earthbound. The unhappy Malefactor did opt to align himself with the Earthbound, but of more significance is the accidental meeting that followed. As Guanli was leaving the projects, he first encountered Ravana.

The two fell to talking, and Guanli shared with her his frustration over his inability to experiment properly and lack of materials, and Ravana told him about her experiments with killing fallen hosts and absorbing their power. The idea excited Guanli, who had never considered such a short cut to increasing his stock of knowledge and power.

Without delay, the two swung into action searching for newly arrived fallen. They would then ambush newcomers and working together absorbed their essence and lore. By the time Lucifer revealed himself during the riots, the pair had killed and absorbed no less than eight fallen.

Because both were Lord Generals of their respective courts, they found their work load greatly reduced. The two fed each other information concerning the other's court activities and staged raids on one another that looked good to their respective leaders but inflicted little actual damage. As these months of close interaction progressed, the two fallen became lovers.

In the chaos of Devil's Night, the two demons went wild, killing nine humans and destroying the host bodies of two more fallen. This frenzy (and their spiraling Torment) has left them hungry for more. As the city slowly returns to a semblance of sanity following the Devil's Night Riots, both demons struggle to contain their lust for violence and maintain their charade of rivalry, but the more time passes, the harder their appetites are to control.

Roleplaying Hints: Guanli is selfish, but subtly so. He talks calmly and rationally, careful to make eye contact, and is skilled at recognizing when he is making people uncomfortable. Whenever he sees the telltale signs of this discomfort, Guanli will change whatever he is saying to put whoever he is talking to at ease or to mitigate the damage done by his words. Mainly, though, the Malefactor tries to talk as little as possible.

Guanli's biggest flaw is his inability to distance himself from things. Every comment he hears, he assumes is actually a comment about himself, and as such, almost anyone who talks around Guanli accidentally offends the quiet weaponsmith. The biggest reason for his falling in love with Ravana is the happiness he felt at having found someone with whom he can talk openly and have no fear of judgment being levied or offence being taken. Their love is not a healthy one and will probably end badly, especially once their quiet collusion is revealed to their respective lords.

Nature: Architect

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 3, Computer 1, Crafts 3, Dodge 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Intuition 1, Investigation 3, Law 2, Medicine 1, Melee 3, Politics 1, Research 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Contacts 3, Eminence 3, Legacy 4, Paragon 2

Willpower: 9

Faith: 10

Torment: 9

Apocalyptic Form: The Visage of the Forge

Lore: Forge 5, Earth 4, Flame 2, Fundament 3, Humanity 2, Paths 4

HARAPHAEL

Trip-9 was born Marvin Bragg in South Central Los Angeles. He grew up in the extreme poverty and violence of that community. He never knew enough about the world to understand that his condition was unusual or that other opportunities were available outside of South Central. Instead, he acclimated himself to the brutality of that life and flourished.

Bragg acquired the nickname Trip-9 for his tendency to carry three 9mm handguns with him at all times, one under each arm and another hooked onto the



back of his belt. Like most gang members, he was a terrible shot because he never actually practiced with the guns, but rather, relied on the intimidation inherent to guns to achieve his ends.

Twice, he was convicted of armed robbery, but he always served his time quietly and so was granted early parole. Soon after his exit from his second prison term, Trip-9 was shot by a member of his own gang as revenge for an affair Trip-9 had with the other man's wife. Haraphael took possession of the young man's body and immediately slaughtered the shooter, but this happened at the welcome-home party thrown for Trip-9 by his family. Therefore, Haraphael's use of his apocalyptic form happened in full view of dozens of people, which quickly became a legend on the streets and attracted the attention of Manishtusu.

The Lord of Murder reached the Slayer before the Infernal Court did, and Haraphael became a willing servant to the Earthbound. During the Devil's Night Riots, it was Trip-9 and some thralls who defended the Empire Market from the ravages of the riots. This was at the orders of Manishtusu, who wanted the wounds of the terrible crime that had happened there to remain an open wound that could torment the community.

Before his escape from the Abyss, Haraphael had never declared allegiance to any faction, but he had always leaned toward the Raveners on the principal that, if everything had to die anyway, then he wanted to be the one wielding the scythe.

Willpower: 5

Faith: 6

Torment: 6

Apocalyptic Form: The Visage of the Spirit

Lore: Spirit 3, Fundament 2, Realms 2

LADY INANA

Inana taught the whales to sing. Every coastline reverberates with the memory of her music in their roars and crashes. Others might have taught the fish to school, but Inana instructed them how to dance in the dark depths of the ocean. Inana showed the dolphins how to pirouette through the crests of the sea.

Her voice was among the first to cry out against the Almighty's restrictions, and later, she maintained that if Lucifer had not rebelled someone from her House eventually would have. Just as every artist needs an audience, Inana craved mankind's approval. As the debate gave way to action, Inana was again in the forefront, passionately encouraging every angel to rise up for mankind and encouraging those who already had that theirs was the correct choice.

Yet, the horrors of the Abyss were greater for Inana than almost any other, for it deprived her of the only thing she truly needed — her audience. Other fallen continued to argue philosophy as they created their factions, but Inana knew only hatred. If she could not create, she could destroy. She had fallen defending mankind. Therefore, her imprisonment was mankind's fault, and she was determined to take a hundred millennia in exacting her vengeance.

When Anat was establishing her Blood Court under Spentu Mainyu's advisorship, a newly returned Inana was chosen to head the Ministry of Aurochs because one fortuitous holdover from her mortal host's life was a security company catering to the obscenely wealthy. Anat and Inana formed an instant bond, each perhaps recognizing in the other a kindred spirit of madness.

The primary difference between the two is that Anat supports wholesale destruction, whereas Inana wants to eradicate humanity one person at a time. She delights in the look of despair and horror each thrall gets in his or her eyes just before Inana breaks them. She is in no rush because even if her body is mortal her spirit is not, and if Carmen Esparza's body should cease to be useful, Inana, through her contacts, will easily find a replacement.

Roleplaying Hints: Inana is the epitome of the femme fatale, using her powers of seduction and fascination to lure wistful humans to their doom.

BARONESS KISHAR

When Lucifer said it was correct to rebel against the Almighty, Kishar did not ask questions. She set aside her duties and followed. In the Iron Legion, she found ample opportunities to use her lore both to heal and to destroy.

Her ability to think fast on her feet and inspire her troops led to several battlefield promotions and personal commendations from the Morningstar himself.

These latter served as badges of extreme pride for the Scourge commander, and she never doubted that what she did was right.

When she met the Defiler Ashur, it was like finding a portion of herself that had been missing. In the field, the two often fought back-to-back, winning many victories. During the interludes, they talked of how best to help Lucifer build this new world or simply sat in silence, enjoying each other's company, and for the first time, Kishar knew fear. She became afraid that Ashur would be injured or destroyed. It gnawed at her every time her lover went into battle.

Then, her worst fears came to pass. Ashur was captured and taken to Sagun to await final judgment by the Almighty. Without hesitation, Kishar flew to Sagun and, under the cover of darkness, slipped into its labyrinth. For two months, she stalked the maze-like corridors until she at last freed her lover and brought him safely out of the city. Once they were safely into the mountains outside of the city, they pledged their love and swore never to permit themselves to part again. They sealed their bond by whispering their True Names into one another's ears.

Even in the endless damnation of the Abyss, Kishar and her lover never wavered in their absolute loyalty to each other or to the Morningstar. When other fallen questioned why the First Rebel was absent, the two would quietly insist that their lost leader strove to free his loyal subjects, and when the archdukes disappeared from the Abyss, the two confidently said it was proof positive of Lucifer's activities and intent.

When the cracks finally appeared in the Abyss, Kishar and Ashur left together. Their bond kept them close as they searched for hosts, but then, they lost sight of each other, and the old fear seized Kishar's heart.

It grew worse when she saw what the world had become. For the first time in her existence, Kishar knew the gnawing feeling of doubt. Was this what Lucifer had wanted to build? Had she defied the Almighty for this? How was she to find Ashur in this chaos?

It took her two weeks of nonstop searching after she returned, but Kishar finally found her missing lover. He had ended up in the body of Jeff Black, a Los Angeles County sheriff's deputy, but Ashur was now somehow different. He no longer had faith in Lucifer. He spoke of trying to make peace with the Almighty. He spoke about forgiveness. Kishar barely recognized him.

Forgiveness? They had done nothing wrong. They had obeyed the Morningstar. They had fought for what they believed in. They had not committed any of the atrocities so prevalent during the last days of the war. Why did they need forgiveness? It was the first argument the lovers had ever had, but it would not be the last.

Meanwhile Kishar had found the nascent Infernal Court of Los Angeles and presented herself. When Spentu Mainyu, the Devil who had been the court's tyrant, abdicated both rank and title to her without prompting, Kishar was touched by this loyalty, which was now so absent in her lover. Yet, in almost every way, Kishar is the wrong fallen to be ruling Los Angeles. Kishar is a brilliant battlefield commander, but she's useless as the leader of an occupying army. Her talents lay in motivating warriors and planning attacks, not in pacifying politicians and arranging defenses. Kishar does not see the danger Lady Anat poses to the court. Likewise, it has never occurred to Kishar that Spentu Mainyu might be anything but loyal. Kishar sees the tensions between Vohu Mano and Aglibol, and she always sides with Aglibol because he is a Luciferan. She is creating divisions where she needs to be forging alliances, though she does not see this.

Roleplaying Hints: Kishar is a conflicted creature. She knows she is the wrong person for the job, but her inflexible morality will not permit her to step aside to anyone of a lesser rank. She is haunted by the apparent betrayal of her lover, and though she fears the truth of what he says, she cannot admit, even to herself, that Lucifer might have been wrong.

To those who are loyal to her, Kishar is tender and loving, but to those who are her enemies, she is truly a demon.

MANAT

The Luciferans have mounted an aggressive communications campaign with other fallen, and with the potential sighting (or hoax) of Lucifer in the skies has forced the Luciferans to focus this campaign on the City of Angels. Manat — once Sylvia Sarah Woods, a journalist at *The Philadelphia Inquirer* — is part of this



uncompromising mission. She has recently come to LA and asserted herself as a part of all fallen business, big and small — she doesn't seem to be interested in changing anything or affecting it in any way, but merely seeks to know every facet of information that could involve the Lightbringer. No one has moved against her yet because of her association with Luciferan higher-ups (specifically Nazathor, Lucifer's supposed "lover"), but the time will come when significant figures grow weary of Manat's probing. She will approach new fallen in the city with persistence. Her personal belief is that Lucifer has returned and that the appearance of him on Devil's Night harkens the coming of a new war.

Image: In person, Manat (AKA Sylvia Sarah Woods) seems less imposing than her sometimes strident writing voice would lead one to assume she is. She is not tall, and her skin tends to break out in unflattering splotches. Her dark-brown hair is usually drawn back in a short ponytail, and she regards the world from behind her sunglasses and cigarette.

Roleplaying Tips: Manat exhibits a friendly patience mixed with a genuine persistence that is her best weapon in finding out what other people know. She would like to ease society's ills and make the world a better place, but she is realistic enough to know that she can't do so on her own. Therefore, she makes it her mission to expose the depths of those ills so that others who are more qualified can take over. She reacts with mounting frustration when she can tell someone is stonewalling her, but she is gracious and congenial when someone seems willing to cooperate with her.

LADY NASU

Like all the angels, Nasu loved her charges, but the act of entropy horrified the ignorant humans and subsequently made them afraid of the Seventh House. The Almighty's edict cut cruelly into Nasu's core. She desperately wanted to assure humanity that entropy was a natural, even beautiful, thing that human beings had no reason to fear.

While the Great Debate raged, Nasu remained undecided, but when Lucifer decided to defy the Creator, Nasu chose to stand with the Morningstar. This brought down the Almighty's curse. All of the rebels from the Seventh House listened in horror when Michael declared that humanity must die. The full horror of this sentence came when the Slayers realized that human souls upon dying passed beyond their knowledge. Every other death was entirely under their command, but not their beloved humans.

To deal with this, Nasu helped to construct a spiritual realm that could house the souls of those followers who fell in battle. It was meant as a temporary location to keep the faithful nearby while the Seventh

House explored the mysteries of human death. For hundreds of years, they worked, drawing in the talents of Malefactors and Devourers to assist the effort. Finally, they succeeded, and on that proud day, Nasu stood back, pleased with their efforts, and felt a little of the pressure of the Almighty's curse relieved.

Before the Slayers could begin their examinations of what happened to the human soul, the war was lost, and the fallen were condemned to the Abyss. Here, a new horror was discovered. Nasu, and many of her colleagues who worked on creating this spiritual realm, were so intertwined with its fabric that they could still feel it and on a very limited level interact with it. So, many Slayers not only felt the faint connection with the mortal world but also with the realm of the dead. What was worse was that their temporary structure continued. It had not been meant to last for millennia. Nasu had been so sure that she and her brethren would discover the answer before long that they never considered what would happen to the spirits of humanity after thousands of years.

Like so many other theorists, Nasu was too detached from her emotions to become passionate. While other Slayers became convinced that it was necessary to make amends with the Almighty, Nasu sat and thought. She did not necessarily disagree, but she wanted to study things carefully before she committed to a new course of action. Many of her fellow Slayers felt the same way as she. What she did not notice, as is common with theorists, is that even though she did not become passionate, her emotions were active, and she was becoming quietly resentful toward the Almighty, who could permit such pain and agony to exist in the universe.

Undetected by either herself or others, madness crept into Nasu's core. It is a quiet, almost calm, sort of madness that could erupt, given the proper incentive, in a firestorm of destruction. Then, the first cracks were noticed in the walls of the Abyss, and Nasu was one of the first to enter the breach to see what lay on the other side.

It did not take long for Nasu to make contact with the Cryptics in Atlanta (where she found an anchor in a mildly retarded woman called Old Tilda) because that faction was powerful in that city. Whereas many demons found their natures softened by the influence of their human hosts, Nasu's host had the opposite effect. Old Tilda hadn't the intellect to understand how she had suffered, but Nasu did. However, just as before, this torment was quiet, too quiet for the other fallen, who were busy struggling with their own Torment, to notice.

When the Cryptics decided to launch an expedition to Los Angeles, they quickly secured Nasu as an assistant for Al-Lat. Her host's firsthand knowledge of the homeless culture made her a valuable asset, and she helped Chenrezig acclimate himself to this culture. The two quickly assimilated in Los Angeles.

The mystery of what happened to the human soul after death still preyed upon Nasu's mind, but her unnoticed madness led her to an answer that would have been abhorrent to her original self. She decided to study death by kidnaping the homeless and killing them. Of course, with each death, Nasu slipped deeper into her Torment, but as always, her quiet and thoughtful personality meant nobody really noticed.

The formation of the Blood Court actually slowed Nasu down because Al-Lat ordered Nasu to win the post of Lidless Eye of the Eagle Ministry for the second court, and the duties of this post occupied enough of Nasu's time that she had to slow down her murderous activities.

Yet, Devil's Night proved to be a greater temptation than Nasu could resist, and she went on a killing spree with a carefully cultivated group of willing servants. Once again, her madness is increasing out of her control, but this time, people are noticing. Anat has noted a lack of information from Nasu, and Al-Lat has started to suspect the true nature of the Slayer's activities. Neither leader wants attention drawn to them by the carelessness of a follower, so Nasu could find herself in a great deal of trouble in a short period of time.

Roleplaying Hints: The more Nasu kills, the deeper she slides into Torment, and the deeper she slides into Torment, the more she desires to kill. Nasu is caught in a vicious circle from which there is no escape except the very death she is pretending to study. In many ways, she is a tragic figure whose every step was made with the best of intentions but has only made matters worse.

FELL KNIGHT RAVANA

In the time that followed Caine's crime, Ravana became a creature of nightmares. Most Slayers rebelled at the idea of killing — their affinity with that aspect of nature did not make them murderous. Instead, it tended to make them the opposite, but when one became twisted, as Ravana did, the result was horrifying. She moved through enemy troops like a scythe through wheat, and when there were no battles to be had, she hunted the hills surrounding an enemy city to find targets.

Her skill in battle did not escape the attentions of her superiors, and though they repeatedly tried to promote her above the rank of fell knight, Ravana always refused. She had no talent for groups or desire to work with others. She was an isolated and lonely creature who preferred the solitude her rank allowed her to indulge in, and no amount of inducement could persuade her to give up her title. The danger of isolation, however, is that it prevents one from realizing when one has gone too far or when one is breaking away from sanity.

The other benefit her solitude afforded her was the privacy to pursue an idea that occurred to her during the last days of the war when she managed to

absorb part of an enemy angel as she destroyed him. It took her several more efforts to reproduce the effect, but she did manage it again.

Then came the imprisonment in the Abyss and the Torment. Again Ravana's solitary habits made her situation worse than it was for others. She felt all the pain that the other fallen felt, but with no one to share the burden of this pain, she went mad under the burden she bore alone. Eventually, every demon avoided her because she was prone to lash out at anything that moved regardless of who it might be, and she found herself wondering if she could absorb the lore of other demons as well as angels.

Mary Beth Holden was first molested when she was only three. Her father and uncle used her and her sisters to satisfy their needs well into Mary Beth's teens when they died at the hands of Mary Beth's mother, who died herself in the attack. This left Mary Beth to the tender mercies of the local orphanage. Here, her lot did not improve because the man in charge used his charges to run a teenage porn ring, and Mary Beth soon became his favorite.

This continued until Mary Beth turned 18 and became too old to be of use to the councilor. The suddenness of his abandoning her snapped something in her victim mentality, and Mary Beth attacked the councilor with a pair of scissors while he slept. Terrified by what she had done and fully aware of the consequences should she stay, Mary Beth ran away. She hitchhiked her way across America, intent on reaching Los Angeles. Along the way, she slept with anyone who gave her a ride, chiefly truckers, and hated them for using her.

One night, a trucker became rough, and later, as he slept, she cut his throat with his own pocketknife. The moment was one of exhilaration. Like an addict, Mary Beth wanted to experience it again, and so, the next trucker to pick her up died in a lonely motel room. Leaving bodies behind her like crumbs Mary Beth worked her way west, but the horrors of her life had numbed her and rendered her soul sympathetic to Ravana, who easily displaced Mary Beth.

In Los Angeles, Ravana found no place for herself. Spentu Mainyu acknowledged her but gave her no position in the court. Not that Ravana wanted one. No, she had already been recruited by Manishtusu, and she served the Lord of Murder wholeheartedly. Later, when Spentu Mainyu was helping to form the Blood Court, she was offered the post of Lord General of the Lion Ministry for that court. At Manishtusu's insistence, she accepted the post.

Then, she met Guanli, who happened to be her opposite number in the Infernal Court. The two fell to talking. It was something neither Ravana nor Mary Beth had ever known, ease of speech and relaxation. No

matter what was said to Guanli he was not repulsed, and in fact, when Ravana let slip her idea for absorbing the lore of other fallen, Guanli became quite interested. The two decided to work together to experiment with the idea, and Ravana soon was madly in love.

Over the next several months, the two worked closely together, and the love became mutual. Devil's Night was like a holiday for the duo, and by the time it was over, they had, counting all their previous victims together, killed and absorbed 10 fallen. Guanli is still cautious, not wanting to be caught, but Ravana is finding it harder and harder to restrain herself. She is free in a way she never dreamed possible and is most reluctant to go back to the way things were.

Image: Mary Beth is strikingly attractive, with a well-rounded figure and bright, green eyes. Her skin bears numerous scars from her childhood and her life on the road, which she takes some pains to conceal.

Roleplaying Hints: Ravana is an obvious villain. She tends to make people uncomfortable because she tends to sit a little too close when talking and stares a lot. Her voice is quiet, almost impossible to hear in a crowd, and her vocabulary is limited because of her poor education. She is more cunning than smart.

Nature: Fanatic

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 4, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Intuition 3, Medicine 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Survival 2

Backgrounds: Eminence 2, Legacy 2, Pacts 2, Paragon 2

Willpower: 6

Faith: 9

Torment: 8

Apocalyptic Form: The Visage of Death

Lore: Death 4, Fundament 3, Humanity 3, Realms 3, Spirit 4

SPENTU MAINYU

What few fallen remember is that before they were cast into the Abyss, before even the Time of Babel, Spentu Mainyu had been a baron in the Crimson Legion and a renowned general, yet by the time he was cast into the Abyss, he had been demoted to fell knight. No one knows what crime or mistakes Spentu Mainyu made except for the Devil himself and Lucifer, and neither of them are talking.

But even with only this limited information, it is easy to see why Spentu Mainyu easily set aside his loyalty to the First Rebel, if he ever truly had any and became a Faustian. Using his time in the Abyss to carefully consider the successes and failures of his

actions during the war, Spentu Mainyu came to a conclusion that he loudly shared with his fellow prisoners: A rebellion against Heaven could be successful if all of humanity supported it.

Armed with this theory when he made his escape from the Abyss, Spentu Mainyu searched for an host that resonated with power and hunger. He found Scratch, a drug dealer who had just been double-crossed by an ambitious underling. Seizing Scratch as the treacherous underling was leaving the room, Spentu Mainyu tore out the underling's heart and ate it.

Finding Scratch had been a lucky break for Spentu Mainyu because the handsome youth was no mere street dealer. Scratch had been a purveyor of quality drugs to the rich and powerful of Los Angeles, including but not limited to film producers, corporate executives and manufacturing giants. As such, Scratch wielded a great deal of quiet influence, but the mortal had not appreciated this. Spentu Mainyu did.

Using these contacts quickly and efficiently, Spentu Mainyu located several newly arrived fallen and quickly grasped the political layout of Los Angeles. His initial efforts to subvert prominent members of the Los Angeles Police Department were thwarted by the Earthbound Enshagkushanna, but the crafty Devil was successful in other organizations, exerting a modicum of control within the civilian government and making inroads into the local offices of the FBI. Not long after, he made his presence known to the demons in the city and declared himself the Tyrant of Los Angeles, lord and master of the Infernal Court.

Spentu carefully and deliberately organized the court in a way that ensured a certain degree of order and control over the city, but with enough internal tension that his ministers would be too busy feuding with one another to plot against him. He chose two bitter rivals to head the Ministry of Aurochs and the Ministry of Dust, Aglibol and Vohu Mano respectively, who wasted no time opposing one another's interests. For the Ministry of Eagles, Spentu Mainyu tapped Chenrezig, a newcomer to the city, and Guanli, another stranger, was elevated to the head of the Ministry of Lions. The post of Dragon Minister, the court's official inquisitor, was deliberately kept vacant. Spentu claimed that he was waiting for the right demon to fill such a vital role and frequently used the open position as a potential reward to broker deals with members of the court. Since the court of Los Angeles currently owes no fealty to any higher court, Spentu has thus far managed to get away with this political gamble, though the Devil knows that sooner or later he will have a Lord Inquisitor poking into his affairs.

The Infernal Court was a clever piece of construction, and once in place, it allowed Spentu Mainyu to

pursue his real goal. Through the medium of television, Spentu Mainyu believed he had found the resource he needed to unite humanity's Faith. Working with the Scourge Vritran, Spentu Mainyu went to work gaining control over a network of television producers who had the power to change the type of programs being sent out over the airwaves.

But all was not well in other parts of the Devil's domain. Internal tensions in the City of Angels were threatening to spin out of control, and managing them was taking up too much of the Tyrant's time and attention. It was then that Kishar arrived.

When he heard of her arrival, Spentu Mainyu wanted to dance with joy, but his politically cunning mind knew better. He waited a couple of days, encouraging the other fallen to believe that he would resist handing over power to this newcomer, and then, as battle lines were being drawn, he capitulated without a fight. This move not only spared him from the headaches of running the city, but it also earned him the gratitude of the new baroness, who named him to the still vacant post at the head of the Dragon Ministry.

To ensure that he would be free to pursue his plans, Spentu Mainyu needed a city constantly on the verge of an explosion but never quite crossing into outright conflict. To that end he secretly approached Anat and helped her establish a second court, the Blood Court, and found himself, for the second time, being named as head of the Dragon Ministry. What is almost ironic is that Spentu Mainyu is spending as much time trying to maintain tension between the two courts as he spent actually running the city, so he has not yet benefited much from his scheming.

Roleplaying Hints: Spentu Mainyu hides a ruthless and methodical personality behind the soft, friendly manners of Scratch. Unlike many Devils, who prefer to use their charisma as a club to bully others into agreement, Spentu is charming, seemingly open and sympathetic to potential friends and allies. He is equal parts snake-oil salesman and hard-nosed diplomat.

LORD VOHU MANO

During the Time of Atrocities, the name Vohu Mano of the Ebon Legion was synonymous with savage beauty and demented tortures. While most of his fellow Devourers used their lore to inspire and maintain the righteous cause of the rebellion, Vohu Mano sought to torture and horrify his enemies. His specialty was music. The demented refrains of his music unnerved the enemy who endured its assault on both their ears and their sanity.

His subsequent time in the Abyss actually seemed to make Vohu Mano worse. He became lost in his hatred, until he could no longer truly remember why he was angry or what he hated. Because of his temper,

most fallen assumed that Vohu Mano was a Ravener. At heart, though, he agreed with Abaddon and the Faustian ideal.

When the cracks appeared in the walls of the Abyss, Vohu Mano was among the first sent out into the breach. He was ordered by the dark lords to secure a base of faith for the Faustians, and unhesitatingly, Vohu Mano accepted the charge.

It was the intense passion of a young gay-rights activist named Jonathan Freeman that attracted and anchored Vohu Mano, though, and the instant the Defiler assumed control of the activist's body, he found himself changing. In spite of the hardship and isolation of his life, Jonathan was a profoundly kind and loving man who did not even hate the man who had killed him. For his entire life, all Jonathan wanted was to get along with everyone around him and for everyone else to get along with each other.

This kindness and mercy clashed with Vohu Mano's relentless savagery in that moment of possession, but in the end, the flesh won. Vohu Mano can remember his rage, but he no longer feels it. In fact, he is becoming embarrassed by the excesses of his behavior.

When Spentu Mainyu approached Vohu Mano with the post of head of the Mortal Ministry of the Infernal Court of Los Angeles, the Defiler accepted, seeing it as an opportunity to learn how demons and mankind might best coexist.

Vohu Mano earned glory for himself when he learned of and put a stop to an effort by Manishtusu to expand his power into West Hollywood, but the young crusader's inability to avoid arguments with the more conservative elements of the Infernal Court have deprived him of the benefit of his renown. Aglibol in particular wars constantly with Vohu Mano, and their conflict has prevented the Defiler from being more effective than he might otherwise be.

Roleplaying Hints: Vohu Mano is a committed idealist, a crusader who has turned aside from the excesses of the past and, in many ways, resembles the principled angels of the Fall. Unfortunately, his compassion is often cynically regarded as one more tactic in the political struggles between the fallen, an all-too-predictable reaction that pains him deeply.

LORD VRITRAN

With loving care, Vritran watched the first humans marvel at the wonders of the garden, but his heart stung that the two did not seem to understand the truest depths of what they were witnessing. He longed to reveal himself to them and demonstrate in detail the gifts surrounding them, but the Almighty had forbidden such interaction, so Vritran contented himself with just being close to what he considered to be his most beloved creations.

Then, Ahrimal spoke of his vision of disaster. At once, Vritran knew he must act. It would be worse to do nothing, he thought, and watch disaster than to inadvertently cause disaster by acting through love. After all, he thought, nothing evil could truly spring from pure love. It was a decision that would haunt him for aeons to come.

As the war grew more and more horrific, Vritran found himself questioning the propriety of the war. Could he have been wrong? No, he concluded, he'd followed the Morningstar, and the First Rebel would ensure that all would be well. His hopes were finally dashed when the Great Experiment fell prey to the corruption of the nephilim. In the time that followed, Vritran wandered aimlessly, dispirited and almost dead. In the end, eternal exile from the ruins of Eden seemed almost a blessing rather than a curse.

In the timeless eternity of the Abyss, many wondered why Lucifer was not among their number or why his archdukes had disappeared, but Vritran did not care. He knew Lucifer had acted correctly and would continue to do so, and he knew that the true blame for these outrages lay at the feet of Ahrimal, the Fiend who had foreseen the disaster but interpreted it so tragically.

As the factions grew more vocal and polarized, Vritran declared his support for the Luciferans and raged against the Cryptics, who dared to pretend that Ahrimal had behaved innocently and suggested that it was Lucifer's motives that were suspect.

When the walls of the Abyss cracked, Vritran charged them and flung himself back into the mortal world. He anchored himself in the body of Jason Kim, where he was found by Chenrezig and later contacted by Spentu Mainyu. The clever Devil knew of Vritran and tailored his pitch appropriately. He let Vritran rail against the Almighty and humanity for hours. Then, Spentu Mainyu made a small suggestion.

Why not harness the power, the faith, of these wayward humans? Surely, that is what Lucifer had been attempting to do during the Time of Babel, and if that is what the Morningstar wanted, was it not Vritran's duty to see that mission completed? If Vritran was willing to use his lore as Spentu Mainyu directed him, then the Devil could assure him that their plan would succeed. That is how the Faustian, posing as a Luciferan, recruited a Scourge into his service.

Spentu Mainyu had established some inroads into the television networks by this time, but the demands of running the city were hindering him from actively pursuing his goals. So, he placed Vritran in charge of his pet project, knowing that the Scourge's lore would be more attractive to the health-obsessed studio executives, and Vritran has proved surprisingly effective in his role.

The problem is, Vritran loves humanity. Not the people that live on the Earth now, but an idealized version of people that walked in Eden. The people walking the Earth now are a grotesque parody of true man, an abomination like the nephilim, and as such, they deserve to be destroyed — once they have been bled of their faith. Vritran may have declared himself for the Luciferans, but his philosophy is more like that of a Ravener.

When Anat was establishing her Blood Court, she was initially resistant to appointing a Ministry of Dust, but once her eyes were opened to the possibilities for mayhem and faith that mankind offered, she quickly adopted Spentu Mainyu's suggestion to offer the position of senior minister to Vritran.

Roleplaying Hints: Vritran trusts nobody but Spentu Mainyu, and so, he talks with very few. However, he is becoming fond of Anat. Vritran, in his own lair or in an intimate setting, leans in close to talk and tends to whisper, but in public, he is loud and boisterous, telling bawdy jokes and shaking hands or kissing cheeks.

YIGAL

At the dawn of the Great War, a family of humans befriended the fallen Yigal. Slayers had ever been outcasts amongst the Elohim, but amongst the Children of Elias, she felt acceptance. When God's curse of mortality befell Elias and his kin, Yigal offered Elias a token of her love. "Throughout time, I will watch your children. Mine shall be the only hand that raises them and the only hand that guides them home." Consigned to hellish torment, Yigal most regretted the breaking of that promise.

Yigal possessed the body of Joyce Allen, wife of a local politician, after her attempted suicide. While



Joyce had been worn by the banality around her, Yigal was astounded by humanity's collective potential. Pushing Joyce's husband onto the national stage, Yigal exerted her political influence to benefit favored charities—the Terminal Children's Fund and a personal program for at-risk teens. True to a millennia-old promise, she searches for Elias's progeny.

HUMAN BEINGS

From their own self-centered perspective, human beings are creatures of limitless potential, who exist in an infinite, wondrous variety. To the fallen, however, people are complex, unpredictable animals whose behavior and emotions defy comprehension—as does the fact that they are favored above all by God. Some see humankind as a grand failure and a disappointment, while others still hold a kernel of hope that people will eventually make their Creator proud and prove that the Morningstar's rebellion was a worthwhile and noble exercise. The rest take a more bitter and simplistic view of God's clever, hairless apes, lumping them into two groups. Based on what utility the human in question represents to the demon making the distinction, the two groups include humans who serve demonkind in some way and free-willed humans who are likely too ignorant to even recognize the presence of demons all around them.

THRALLS AND SERVITORS

ANNETTE DEMILENKO

The daughter of Polish immigrants, Annette was taught at an early age that faith was the most important thing in life. Even when she rejected the Christianity of

her parents, she retained a base conviction but twisted it into a desperate need to believe.

Although she was studying psychology, Demilenko eventually dropped out of college to join the radical political groups of the early 1970s. She kept her interest in the workings of the mind, even as she drifted from activism to extremism, from politics to religion. For more than 20 years, she moved from group to group, participating in the Weather Underground, Scientology, Wicca, Christian militias, acts of ecoterrorism and any other cause that promised an answer, a meaning to things.

Five years ago, while retreating from an extremist sect that tried to establish its own mad "Kingdom of Heaven," Demilenko went into the desert to pray for guidance, for purpose. In answer to her prayers, purpose found her in the form of a swarm of scorpions inhabited by Manishtusu. The Earthbound saw in Demilenko a worthy thrall, and one whose faith was strong enough to give it power. Half deranged from heat exhaustion, dehydration and a lifetime of absorbing one radical agenda after another, Annette found the god she had searched for her whole life.

Emptying her savings of everything her parents had left her in their wills, Demilenko established the Blind Samaritan Foundation. She maintains the foundation more or less as a "farm" for future thralls or servitors of her bizarre god, as well as a means of identifying possible vessels to house her master's fallen subjects when they emerged from the Abyss. She takes an active role in leading the BSF, even living in an apartment next door to its headquarters.

Image: Annette would seem like an attractive, intelligent, middle-aged woman if not for the subtle, yet omnipresent gleam of fanatical intensity in her eyes. She maintains eye contact a bit longer than most people, and she doesn't blink quite as often as she should. Her gestures are bold and expansive, especially when she's talking about the good work her foundation is doing for the community. She dresses in tailored, if not particularly stylish, professional attire, though she prefers jewelry with a decidedly Southwestern flare.

Roleplaying Tips: Annette is utterly loyal to Manishtusu. She doesn't understand his ultimate goals, but she would give her life—or anyone else's—without hesitation to see him accomplish them. She is coy and intractable when it comes to discussing her "religious beliefs," even with those beings she knows are fallen, but she showers those whom her master has allowed to speak with his voice in effusive adulation.

When it comes to those her foundation is designed to help, she is less personable. She openly pities them all and refuses to deal with them face-to-face whenever she can possibly avoid doing so. She unapologetically offers the exact same amount of assistance to everyone in her



foundation's care, regardless of their actual need. She speaks of them to her employees and peers as if they were somehow less than human.

Nature: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 6, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

Abilities: Academics 2, Athletics 1, Bureaucracy 4, Computer 2, Empathy 5, Expression 3, Intimidation 1, Intuition 3, Investigation 2, Research 3, Security 3, Technology 2

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Resources 4

Willpower: 5

Powers: Annette's Manipulation Trait has been boosted by her Earthbound benefactor.

EDWARD HARVEY

Edward Harvey is a man whose basic desires were locked away very deep. The only way for him to approach them is by devolving into a base subservient creature, and he considers doing so (in the form of service to Enshagkushanna and Henry Vandermeer) worth the price. He is also at the stage of his devotion where power and humanity are balanced in him, which complements Vandermeer superbly. He generally acts through the Colonel but is capable of taking charge when necessary.

Edward is 45 years old and slightly wrinkled, slightly flabby. He has a pleasant face, and his curling hair and beard are russet with white threads. He wears corduroy jackets, shirts with long cuffs and high collars and jeans that come down over his boots. He appears kindly and non-confrontational. He speaks quietly under normal circumstances and occasionally corrects people's grammar.



Nature: Fanatic

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 1, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3

Abilities: Alertness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 3, Melee 1

Backgrounds: Contacts 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 4

Powers: Immunity to Revelation

HENRY DAVID VANDERMEER

Henry David Vandermeer is man of education, experience and discipline who has come to regard these qualities as valueless, bringing him neither satisfaction or real power. Only his decades-long servitude to the Earthbound Enshagkushanna has provided these things, and he will do anything to remain in his master's good graces. Furthermore, he is a clear-headed tactician who will do whatever is necessary to win out in a conflict, even if he must sacrifice his companions to do so.

At 63, the Colonel is a fit-looking man of military bearing with bronzed skin and thick, spiky white hair. His eyes are pale gray, and his scrutiny is unnerving. His tone is clipped and gruff, and his voice carries without his needing to shout. He always appears dressed in a neat suit and tie, although the cuffs of his shirt and the hem of his trousers are a little too long.

Nature: Loner

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics (Theology) 4, Alertness 2, Awareness 1, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2, Leadership 3, Occult 2, Performance 2, Research 4, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Allies 2, Contacts 2, Followers 3

Willpower: 6

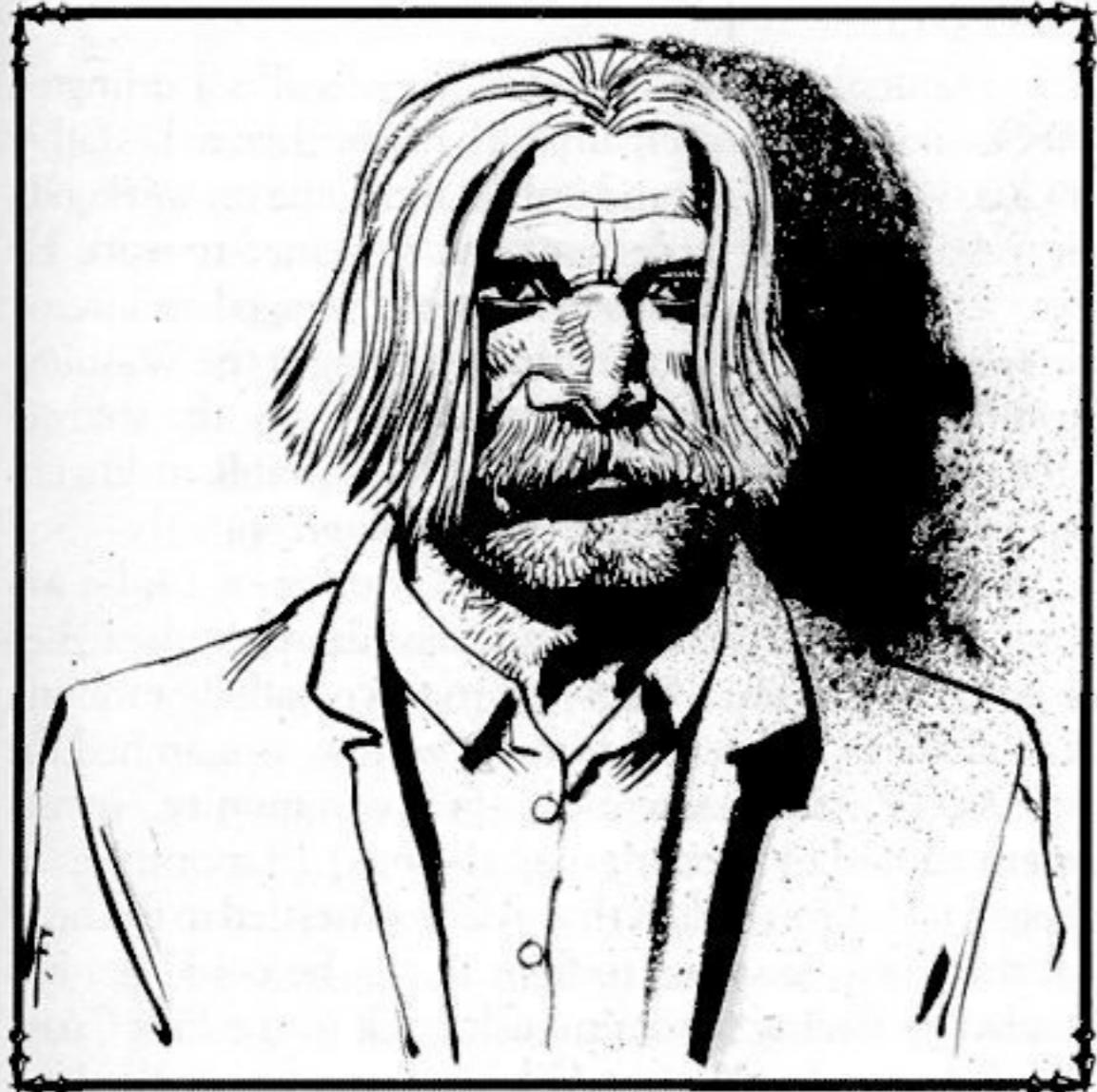
Faith Potential: 3

Powers: Immunity to Revelation

FREE-WILLED MORTALS

LOU BARBER

Lawrence "Lou" Barber grew up in the South of England in the late 1960s. He was an itinerant kid, drifting in and out of jobs and the occasional apprenticeship and otherwise lounging about. In 1982, he found himself shipped out to the godforsaken wilderness of the Falkland Islands with a rifle in his hand and orders to go capture some Argentineans. The war didn't last long, but he spent another two years in the army regardless. The experience taught him a few things, mostly how to shoot and that he really didn't like people telling him what to do. He still figured he had to do something, and with his accumulated money, he started



a small furniture-removal business and took up competition shooting.

This was all before the run in with Satanists in '89. You can find a lot of strange things moving furniture. It wasn't a major cult or anything he had stumbled into, but the members were devout and scary and took some shaking. It interested Lou enough that he started reading deeper and concentrated harder on self-defense training. By the time real demons started showing up, the business was long bankrupt, but he was ready.

He met Koruna Gibson and Stanley McIntyre on one of his trips to the US, where most major occult libraries seemed to have ended up — at least those that would allow him to read them. He had already had a number of encounters with preternatural forces, taken the law into his own hands on more than one occasion and built up a diverse range of contacts, including journalists and occult practitioners from LA to Rome to Hong Kong. He was impressed by the priest's practicality and thought Koruna had potential. They faced a creature together and only narrowly prevailed, which showed him that, in these days, acting alone wasn't going to work. Stanley invited both Lou and Koruna to continue what they had begun, and both readily agreed.

Image: Lou is a gaunt and weather-beaten man with longish fair hair and a moustache. He has a couple of tattoos on his left arm and one on his butt, but these aren't often on display. He dresses conservatively, in trousers and a jacket, cut so as not to restrict his movement unduly, and he is obviously both strong and lithe. His English accent is subdued, but it comes out stronger when he's excited. A knowing glint of amusement in his eye seems a permanent fixture.

Roleplaying Tips: Despite his tough exterior, Lou is actually a pretty likable guy, and he enjoys talking to people once he's taken their measure. He started fairly late in life as an occult researcher, but he has a good eye for detail and a decent ability to discard what's actually crap, so he's got more practical knowledge than other demon-hunters. Although he is loyal to his newly formed group, his many years of self-sufficiency have made him somewhat overconfident when he does find himself alone.

Nature: Bravo

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 1, Alertness 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Dodge 3, Drive 1, Firearms 5, Intimidation 2, Intuition 2, Investigation 2, Melee 1, Occult 4, Religion 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 7

Faith Potential: 3

KORUNA GIBSON

It would have been a ridiculous situation — if it had not hurt so much. In Czechoslovakia, Koruna Schechter was a promising young research chemist, working in a major scientific facility in the city of Brno. It was a good life, although the Communist regime of the time did put some strange restrictions on her work. But then, she was literally courted by a visiting scientist and, via strange bureaucratic means, ended up going to live in America as the bride of Tony Gibson. After a wonderful honeymoon, she turned her attention to opportunities for work in the States. None came. Her credentials were not accepted anywhere she tried to use them. One administrator explained that her former employer had come under international scrutiny for non-ethical practices. Ringing back home, she discovered that her former coworkers had not heard any such thing. It was all a mistake, and they could sort it out.

No resolution ever came, though, and frustration turned to tragedy when her husband died of a massive heart attack. Not knowing what else to do, she took up a high-school teaching position and moved in with her husband's elderly mother. She disliked teaching and was constantly uncomfortable in her mother-in-law's home, but her situation was like a fever-dream she could not wake from.

And it only got stranger when she uncovered the existence of a demon operating out of her school and manipulating her students. She tried to tell her administrators, her few friends and even a local priest, but no one would believe her. No one, that is, except Stanley McIntyre who had been investigating the selfsame demon Koruna had stumbled across. He helped her get

away from the demon (who was none too happy to have been discovered), and he came back with her and Lou Barber to help put the demon out of business once and for all. Now, she travels with the two of them doing more of the same good work in other cities, helping other victims just like she used to be.

Image: Koruna is of average height, and she has kept her figure trim even as she approaches her mid-40s. She dyes out the slight traces of gray in her hair and hides the lines on her face as best she can with makeup. Like Stanley, she often smiles, but on her, it does not seem forced. Years of living a fragmentary existence in Middle America have left their mark. Her choice of words and her accent show only faint lingering traces of the original Czech, plus an occasional unfamiliarity with English idiom.

Roleplaying Tips: Koruna is the most easygoing and relaxed member of her small demon-hunting group. Her years living in Middle America have exerted an influence on her attitude as well, and she disapproves of rebellious or extravagant behavior, but then she remembers her own hardships and figures that youth probably needs all the outlets it can get. She offers anyone she meets a friendly smile, unless they are actively aggressive — at which point, she addresses them sternly and somewhat maternally.

Behind all this, her brain is as sharp as it was back in the old country. She does not, generally speaking, apply her knowledge of chemistry toward creating unpleasant concoctions for fighting the powers of darkness — though she does keep a few nasty possibilities in the back of her mind, just in case. She keeps up with scientific news, has taken up computer studies in the last few years and has started training with a pistol. She also keeps a weather eye on the logistics of her group's operations.

Koruna was raised Catholic, though she now treats religion with a slightly abstract air. She has also decided that her husband's death was probably not a result of demonic influence. It is still a source of sadness, but she now has more than a little interest in Lou Barber. He's a wild one, but she feels the depths hidden beneath that brash exterior.

Nature: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 2

Abilities: Academics 4 (Modern Science), Alertness 3, Computer 3, Dodge 2, Drive 1, Empathy 1, Firearms 1, Intimidation 1, Intuition 1, Linguistics (Native: Czech; English) 1, Occult 3, Religion 2, Research 3, Science 4 (Chemistry), Stealth 2, Subterfuge 2, Technology 3

Willpower: 6

Faith Potential: 3

STANLEY MCINTYRE

Stanley McIntyre grew up in a town called Burlington in Connecticut, principally with his mother, as his father worked in New York and only came home on weekends. It was a strange arrangement, but it seemed to work. He was a bright kid, and his mother encouraged an interest in religion that resulted in him enrolling at the Washington Bible College in Washington, DC, for the study of divinity, taking the option of combining biblical, linguistic and philosophical study with family- and community-support training. At the age of 24, he was ordained a minister of the Anglican Church and assigned a position in a small Midwestern town called Starmont. On arriving, it amused him to see how it matched the stereotype of the pleasant-to-a-fault community. Amusement turned to concern over the next 18 months as he began to realize the fact that a demon nestled in the heart of the town. He tried to fight it, but he could not and ended up fleeing ignominiously back to the East Coast. With him came Koruna Gibson, a teacher at the local high school, who had felt the demon's influence subtly tainting and corrupting her students.

Explaining the situation to his superiors in the Church only led him in circles. Sometimes, they seemed to take him seriously; sometimes, not. He discovered that they had assigned another freshly ordained priest to the town without so much as a warning about what Stanley had been through. Frustrated, Stanley engaged in his own research, visiting occult book shops, collaborating with paranormal investigators and even spending many hours poring over the Internet for any information he could find about demons and their influence on this world.

Ultimately, this research proved fruitful. He met Lou Barber, who claimed to understand what he and



Koruna had encountered, and he showed them some of the things that could be done about it. Although skeptical, the three of them ended up traveling back to Starmont, and this time, they prevailed against the monster. Stanley was offered his post back (to the dismay of the priest that had replaced him), but he declined. Now, he travels with his new friends, looking for the scant signs of demonic influence, coming up blank more often than not. Sometimes, the Church acknowledges his role, and sometimes, it doesn't, but he figures that unless it threatens to excommunicate him, he'll just keep doing what he's doing.

Image: Stanley is a burly man in his early 30s, with skin turned ruddy by the sun and a full head of black hair that seems to curl no matter how short he tries to keep it. He grins naturally, but a closer inspection reveals the expression is a badly maintained façade. His eyes look haunted, and his face is sunken, the skin looking almost loose. He speaks carefully, weighing his words and turning a frankly inquisitive stare on whoever he is addressing. His voice retains a recognizable East Coast accent. He usually dresses casually, in jeans and large colorful jumpers, but he does wear his vestments as required.

Roleplaying Tips: Stanley once had a sense of humor, but now, he does not. He is doing the Lord's work, and he understands that it is hard and dangerous and that there is little reward in this life. The part of him that is most in touch with modern life acknowledges the absurdity — the melodrama — of the situation, but he doesn't let that distract him.

Most particularly, he wants to be *sure*. He has a great fear of acting rashly, yet he knows that he has to act regardless. The tricks of the enemy are many, and he has a great responsibility. He is also aware that he is the youngest of the three demon-hunters in his group, and he's only the leader because of his holy training. But he also knows, if only tangentially, that when he acts, he does so decisively, content in his faith in the Lord.

Nature: Visionary

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 4

Abilities: Academics 3 (Theology), Alertness 3, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Drive 3, Empathy 4, Etiquette 2, Intuition 3, Leadership 1, Linguistics (Native: English, Hebrew) 1,

Medicine 2, Melee 1, Occult 2, Religion 4, Research 1, Stealth 1, Technology 1

Willpower: 8

Faith Potential: 4

ALICIA RHOES

Alicia seems so unlikely a candidate for juvenile-detention that in the past, new faculty members of the Marshall School have assumed that there was some dreadful mistake.

Yet, there was no mistake. At 14, Alicia stabbed her drunken, abusive father as he tried to strangle her with a curtain cord. She waited until she was sure he was dead, then called the police, making a full confession. She thought she'd probably go to prison and then to Hell, but that was okay because her mother and baby brother would be alright.

However, the court that tried her sentenced Alicia to the Marshall School until she turned 18 on the grounds it was the best thing that could be done for her. She was sensitive, gifted and highly traumatized, and her counselor in the school, Mary Blacksmith, took the frightened young girl under her wing. Now, two years later, Alicia is studying advanced math and science on day leave at the local college. She anticipates winning a scholarship and is no longer convinced that she is going to Hell. She just believes that the Earth is a battleground between God and the forces of evil.

With her scholastic ability and odd manner, Alicia would be marginalized even in an ordinary school, but she has achieved a kind of acceptance among the street thugs and underage prostitutes due to her willingness to always explain things and help out.

Image: Alicia is a skinny, nervous 16-year-old with red hair and a sprinkling of freckles, and she is seldom out of arm's reach of a book. Her voice holds a touch of the trailer park of her childhood, but her perception and intelligence are obvious.

Roleplaying Tips: Alicia thinks she is slightly psychic, and her faith in God is very real. She is not devoted to any particular church although she has absorbed a great deal of the basic tenets of Catholicism. What is important is the individual's choice, every day, to strive against corruption. She is an excellent judge of character and motive, and she's hard to deceive. Beneath the timidity lies tremendous strength, and her loyalty to her friends and principles is well nigh unbreakable.

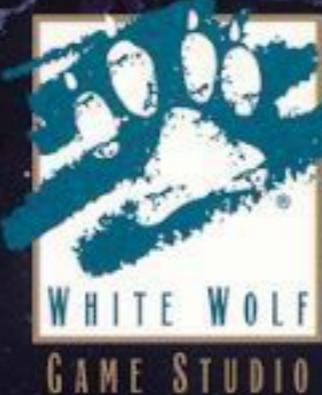
Fear to Tread™

Demons Rush In

The gates of Hell are broken, and the souls of mankind are forfeit. In the boardrooms and back alleys of cities across the world, the former champions of mankind plot to enslave us all and set the world alight. Only a handful of lost souls have the strength to rise above their demonic nature and defy the lords of the Abyss. Are you one of them?

Where Angels Fear to Tread

Fear to Tread is a collection of three exciting stories that thrust players' characters into a desperate struggle for the future of the City of Angels. Each story can be run separately or linked together to form the basis of an ongoing chronicle, with five intriguing sample characters included for ease of play.



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