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Preview #1

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Introduction: Heed the Call

“But these words people threw around — humans, monsters, heroes, villains — to Victor it was all just a matter of semantics. Someone could call themselves a hero and still walk around killing dozens. Someone else could be labeled a villain for trying to stop them. Plenty of humans were monstrous, and plenty of monsters knew how to play at being human.”

— V.E. Schwab, *Vicious*

Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition is a roleplaying game about people who are committed to saving a world overrun by monsters. Once they light a candle and hold it up to the darkness, they cannot turn back. They’ve taken their first step to uphold the Vigil, despite knowing the costs. After they peer into the shadows, they become so obsessed with the monsters lurking there, every hunt pushes them further and further away from a normal, humdrum life.

Hunters are underdogs who never stop feeling that chill running up and down their spines. For every bloodsucker they put down, for every haunted house they clear out, another horror lies waiting to strike. Sure, they might make sacrifices or suffer losses along the way, but to them there’s never a time when they’re not hunting. Either they stay sharp and focused, they become hunted themselves, or worse: They become the monster.

The Gathering Dark

Hunter: The Vigil debuted in 2008 on the heels of several Chronicles of Darkness game lines including **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Changeling: The Lost**, and **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Since that time, more game lines have emerged introducing new monsters, such as **Beast: The Primordial** and **Deviant: The Renegades**.

Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition takes note of these new additions by introducing a premise: There are more monsters today than ever before. The rules found in this book are designed to give players and Storytellers new, flexible tools to identify, hunt, and capture monsters while enhancing the definition of hunter.

Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition is a standalone game that can be played by new or existing players. The lore has been updated to not only reflect the uptick in monsters, but also the fact that hunting monsters is not exclusive to a location, group of people, or time period. There may be more monsters than ever before, but there are more ways to fight them, too.

Themes

Most people grow up believing monsters exist in fairy tales and on television. The Thin Man is the product of conspiracy theorists on message boards. Bloody Mary is just an urban legend cooked up by teenaged girls, and the Chupacabra is a rabid dog.

You’re not most people, because you know that monsters are real. You’ve seen one. Maybe it murdered your grandfather. Maybe it targeted your dog. Whatever the reason, however you encountered one, the truth shattered you. Instead of running away or hiding in a bunker, you’ve decided to do something. You’ve chosen to heed the call of the Vigil and become a hunter.

How? By finding similarly minded people who will fight alongside you. You know you’re outmatched. You *know* you’re outgunned — but you don’t care. Sometimes you’ll win.

Sometimes you'll lose. As long as you draw breath, you'll never stop fighting, even if you go down screaming.

Or, at least, that's what the Vigil requires.

Explained vs. Unknown

To be a hunter is to linger in the dark. The character doesn't know all there is to know about the supernatural — even if player *does*. Hunters know the unnatural things go bump in the night aren't regulated to nightmares. Cells understand they're real — and those “things” can be hunted provided they figure out how to track, capture, contain, or kill them.

The strange and unknowable are mysteries for the cell to figure out. A hunter encountering one flesh-eating humanoid might assume they know exactly what's feeding on people, until another flesh eater comes along and doesn't fit the profile. When combined with mysterious places — haunted houses, monsters' lairs, and roadside shrines with statues that bleed — hunters have their hands full when piecing together what's happening in that area before moving onto the next.

Storytellers are encouraged to leverage what hunters don't know as narrative tools to remind them they don't and *can't* know everything, no matter how hard they try — and that's what being mortal in the Chronicles of Darkness is all about.

Sacrifice vs. Self-Preservation

Hunters are pushed to the edge, but they don't have to hunt alone. In a cell, they can rely on other hunters to pitch in and get the job done. Compacts and conspiracies add to a hunter's community but, when push comes to shove, it's a cell that's doing the heavy lifting. Sometimes, however, hunters are forced to make hard choices. They must choose between taking down a monster or saving a victim. They must decide if they'll risk taking a perfect shot at a slasher when their buddy stands in the way.

Sometimes, however, hunters don't just sacrifice other hunters or the victims they're trying to save. They might be cornered or even kidnapped by a monster who wants to use them to find other hunters. They might be the hunter guarding an exit and, after all their cellmates have fallen, they're standing between the monster and freedom. When upholding the Vigil, hunters may say they're willing to sacrifice everything — even their own safety — to fight the darkness. Only the hunt will prove whether there's any truth to their claims, because somewhere along the way, each hunter will face their darkest fears and be forced to confront their own mortality.

In **Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition**, thematic devices and rules governing a hunter's place in the world remind them of what they stand to lose. Upholding the Vigil exacts a heavy toll, but it's ultimately up to the hunter what they're comfortable sacrificing or preserving.

Hope vs. Despair

Sometimes, hunters win. Sometimes they lose. Eventually, however, hunters come to the realization that the shadows won't stop gathering and monsters won't suddenly give up and remain in the darkness. This realization can happen during a hunt or investigation. It might occur before the cell starts fighting back. Once this terrifying truth is known, however, the hunter and their cell must find a way to keep going — otherwise they'll lose to utter despair.

While despair might be all-but guaranteed, hope is the only thing that can keep it confined. The candle hunters light is a representation of their burning desire to hold the line, but it's also a

visual way to show how important it is to feel hope even when the darkness is winning. As long as a hunter has hope in their heart, the darkness can't truly win.

Providing ways for hunters to feel hope in a chronicle is crucial to ensure the game isn't so dark and depressing it's no longer enjoyable to play. Storytellers are encouraged to give cells opportunities to win, even if it's small or temporary. These moments are fuel for the fire and will keep the Vigil — and the players' interest — burning bright.

Will you pledge to uphold the Code? Will you light a candle and stand against the gathering dark? If you do, don't worry. The flame you hold is not the only fire that burns. You'll have help from your fellow cellmates, and together you may burn bright enough to hold the line and keep the darkness from swallowing you whole.

Lexicon

In the world of **Hunter: The Vigil**, cells do the best they can with the knowledge they have. Often, they can't find the right words or don't know a monster's name — for good reason. As the underdogs, hunters possess varying degrees of knowledge that may or may not be relevant.

Though hunters may not understand what they're in for, a common vocabulary is used in **Hunter** to present narrative advice and relevant rules. These terms are setting-specific and, when appropriate, notable rules are mentioned in the description.

cell: A group of hunters who fight together. They share the emotional, psychological, and physical burdens the hunt requires, and often have similar views of the Code.

cellmate: An individual hunter in a cell.

blessings: Hunters belonging to a conspiracy receive gifts from their organization that are imbued with the supernatural. They often refer to these gifts as “blessings.” In the rules, these are represented by Endowments (p. XX).

bloodsucker: A slang word used to describe a vampire or other monster who drinks human blood.

cleansing: A word hunters often use to describe the process of removing the supernatural from a physical location or object.

Code, the: The Code represents an individual hunter's pledge to fight the darkness. This has both a thematic and mechanical effect in the game (p. XX).

compact: A regional organization to which multiple cells belong. Compacts (p. XX) may be formed around hunting a specific monster, a view of the Code, a method of hunting, etc. Each compact allows its members to earn status in exchange for additional benefits or resources. Structurally, compacts are represented in a tier-two chronicle.

conspiracy: A global organization to which multiple cells belong; each conspiracy often holds many factions. Conspiracies (p. XX) wield considerable resources to fulfill their unique agenda in the fight against the supernatural. Each conspiracy allows its members to earn status in exchange for additional benefits, resources, and Endowments. Conspiracies are represented in tier-three chronicles.

cryptid: A strange and unusual animal that may or may not exist. Examples of cryptids include the hodag, bunyip, wendigo, and yeti.

cursed object: A dangerous mundane or well-crafted occult item that displays supernatural properties. In **Hunter**, these are also called Bygones (p. XX).

darkness, the: A term hunters use to describe the world of the supernatural or its denizens.

demon: An infernal monster. Hunters often use language to describe demons through their cultural or religious lens, unaware of their true origins.

enemy, the: Anything that threatens a human or animal life.

ghost: The spirit of a mortal who has passed.

horror: Another word for monster. May also be used to describe disembodied entities or spirits.

monster: The primary term used to describe all of the entities hunters fight.

mythic: Hunters often use the word “mythic” to identify legendary monsters, locations, or relics that either don’t exist (and therefore can’t be hunted) or are a once-in-a-lifetime find. Examples include: the phoenix, the Lost Continent of Mu, and Poseidon’s Trident.

mysterious place: Phrase used to describe locations or areas that have had reports of supernatural activity (p. XX). A nest is a monster’s lair, a tainted place displays supernatural effects, and sentient places are monstrous locations.

nest: A common term used to describe a monster’s home. It is a type of mysterious place (p. XX).

relic: A term some hunters use to describe a supernatural item that may, with time and study, be safe to handle and provide further benefits. In game terms, a relic is a true Bygone (p. XX).

rival cell: A competitive group of hunters that turns the hunt into a contest, whether the other cell wants to compete or not.

rogue cell: A group of hunters who operate on their own. Rogue cells are also referred to as “cancer cells.”

slasher: Serial killers and mass murderers who, for **Hunter**’s purposes, are treated as monsters (p. XX). A *ripper* is still considered human, whereas a *slasher* is not.

spirit: A ghost-like entity that may or may not have been human at one time. Hunters refer to anything that isn’t a ghost, but displays traits like one, as a spirit.

supernatural: A term that refers to the strange and unexplained; it is often used as a description for the darkness. Hunters often struggle with the definition and how it affects their view of the Code.

Twilight: A word a few hunters use to describe the world in which ghosts and spirits reside. Some hunters use this term without fully understanding what it means.

Vigil, the: A hunter’s never-ending fight against the darkness.

warlock/witch: A term hunters use to loosely describe occultists, summoners, necromancers, and other types of magic users treated as monsters.

How to Use This Book

Welcome to **Hunter: The Vigil**. **Hunter** presents a core set of rules and three options for gameplay. This toolkit is supported by additional rules and narrative systems that can be customized to fit different playing styles.

Chapter One: Flickering Candles provides an overview of a hunter's world, the types of hunters you can play, and three, separate types of gameplay included in this book: tiers one, two, and three. You'll also read more about **Hunter** lore and the history of the compacts and conspiracies.

Chapter Two: Compacts and Conspiracies are specialized hunter organizations that may be used for tier-two or -three games. In this chapter, you'll find write-ups for six compacts and six conspiracies, along with rules for tier-three Endowments and how to make them.

Chapter Three: Character Creation allows you to build and customize a character. You'll learn how hunters retain one foot in an unsuspecting world and another in the Vigil. Plus, you'll discover more about the Code and how it shapes their core identities and beliefs.

Chapter Four: Rules of the Hunt dives into the rules for gameplay. It also offers rules for specific aspects of **Hunter** that includes investigation and socializing.

Chapter Five: Monsters Around the World offers a taste of the strange and unusual monsters hunters may come across during the hunt. Sample monsters are presented according to the type of terrain from which they originate along with notes for how these creatures may be modified. Additionally, monster-creation rules, ephemeral-entity rules, and Dread Powers are found in this chapter.

Chapter Six: Mysterious Places takes another look at the **Hunter** setting by introducing where monsters live, locations the supernatural has tainted, and which places are actually monsters themselves. It offers new rules to handle each type of location, along with several examples.

Chapter Seven: The Slasher Chronicle is a sample chronicle setting. Yanked from the slasher-movie genre, The Slasher Chronicle is a horror movie-themed setting that includes rules for building slashers; customized approaches for tier-one, -two, and -three gameplay; new Storyteller characters; and more!

Chapter Eight: Storytelling offers advice for Storytellers to help build and manage a chronicle while fleshing out rules for Storyteller characters. Additional content includes advice for creating player-facing compacts and conspiracies.

Appendix 1: Equipment presents lists of equipment and rules for modifying and customizing gear. Equipment is covered in Chapter Four.

Appendix 2: Tilts is a list of Tilts that may be used in a **Hunter** game. Rules for handling Tilts are addressed in Chapter Four.

Appendix 3: Conditions is a list of Conditions provided for ease of reference. Rules to use Conditions are found in Chapter Four.

Other Chronicles of Darkness Games

Hunter is a standalone sourcebook that presents all rules necessary to play the game. It is compatible with the **Chronicles of Darkness Rulebook**, which acts as an introductory game for a player's first brush with the supernatural. The rulebook may be used to build a prequel for a group of characters who haven't committed to the Vigil or to expand options for hunters and

monsters. Additional rules found in that book range from specialized systems for ghosts to psychic abilities, as well as the God-Machine Chronicle.

Dark Eras, the **Dark Eras Companion**, and **Dark Eras 2** are historical collections of chapters set during unique time periods. The line offers Storytellers a deeper look at each **Chronicles of Darkness** game line through a historic lens; the **Hunter** chapters offer deeper options for roleplay while highlighting the rich lore of compacts and conspiracies such as The Cheiron Group.

Introduction to Roleplaying Games

Chances are, you know what a Storytelling — or roleplaying — game is already. But, just like hunters, we enjoy finding new people to uphold the Vigil. So if you're new here, let's talk about the basics.

In **Hunter: The Vigil**, you play out stories following a core cast of characters as they fight their way through the *Chronicles of Darkness*, a version of our own everyday world filled with monsters. It's a lot like a TV drama, something like *The Walking Dead* or *The X-Files*. Individual gaming sessions, generally running two-to-four hours, are like weekly episodes. Secrets will be revealed, relationships will be tested, and blood will be spilled.

Around three-to-five players are recommended to play **Hunter**, but the game can be played with two people. Each player slips into one character's role: a hunter. You'll make decisions for your hunter — when their best friend betrays them, you'll plot a scheme for revenge. When another hunter picks a fight, you'll decide whether they run or negotiate with them. Perhaps most importantly, you'll tell the story of how you stand up to monsters even though you're terrified, to uphold the Vigil.

One player, the Storyteller, is responsible for portraying characters who don't belong to specific players and presenting fictional situations that challenge the other players' characters. Think of these as the supporting cast of our imagined TV series — both ongoing characters who help or oppose the core cast, and guest stars of the week who turn up to cause unique kinds of trouble.

As for challenging the player characters, it's the job of the Storyteller to come up with scenes where the players must make decisions fraught with conflict and danger. In *Hunter*, these scenes are often related to the hunt for the supernatural. The Storyteller narrates a situation, then the other players say how their characters respond. The most important question a Storyteller can ask is: "What do you do now?"

When a character acts, the outcome of the action is determined by rolling a handful of 10-sided dice. The basics are simple. You add a few numbers on your character sheet (a mini-dossier) and roll that many dice. You'll find out whether your action works or fails. Failures affect your story by getting your character into more trouble, while successes provide opportunities for your character to move forward as they intended.

While players other than the Storyteller will generally be advocates for their characters' success, planning ways in which they can succeed, a lot of drama and fun comes from those moments when an elaborate plan turns to ash. Again, think of a television series: The most interesting episodes are often the ones where everything goes wrong for the characters until they find a way to turn it around. That said, the Storyteller should make sure characters have a way to bounce back rather than constantly dumping ways to suffer on them.

Player Responsibilities

Each player is responsible for a different part of the story. When combined, your group will weave an elaborative narrative as you fight monsters together.

The Storyteller is responsible for...

- ...bringing the Chronicles of Darkness to life through description.
- ...deciding where scenes start and what's going on.
- ...portraying characters who don't belong to other players.
- ...involving each player and their character in the ongoing story.
- ...putting players' characters in tough spots, encouraging interesting decisions.
- ...making sure poor dice rolls affect, but don't stop, the story.

The players are responsible for...

- ...creating their own individual characters as members of the cast.
- ...deciding what actions their characters take.
- ...making decisions that create drama and help keep the story moving.
- ...highlighting their characters' strengths and weaknesses.
- ...confronting the problems the Storyteller introduces.
- ...developing their characters' personalities and abilities over time, telling personal stories within the game's overarching narrative.

Everyone is responsible for...

- ...giving other players chances to highlight their characters' abilities and personal stories, whether that's by showing them at their strongest or weakest.
- ...making suggestions about the story and action, while keeping in mind the authority of players over their characters and the responsibility of the Storyteller to occasionally make trouble.

Sources & Inspiration

Hunter: The Vigil is a monster-hunting game where mortals form groups, called "cells" to take back the world from the monsters that slither in the Chronicles of Darkness. Gameplay can be gritty, downright terrifying, or both.

Sources include materials drawn upon for the first edition of **Hunter: The Vigil** and new books, movies, comics, and games to round out the list.

Non-Fiction

Alien Dawn by Colin Wilson is a nonfiction look at all manner of bizarre phenomena and monstrous incursions into our world. Folklore, ghosts, lost time, psychic weirdness, aliens, and monsters all appear in some form or another.

The Science of Vampires by Katherine Ramsland, Ph. D is a deep dive into vampire lore from a scientific perspective. The techniques used in this book can be fuel for science-minded characters and cells.

Parasite Rex by Carl Zimmer is a compelling, easy-to-read book about real parasites: worms, bacteria, and flies. They bore into bellies, bloodstreams, and brains.

The Element Encyclopedia series, written by several authors, offers a wealth of knowledge that covers spirits, psychic phenomena, cults and secret societies, witchcraft, spells, monsters — even birthdays that can be used to build compelling and unique characters with their own personalities.

For urban legends, check out books by Jan Harold Brunvald, who's known for popularizing the term. *London Urban Legends: The Corpse on the Tube and Other Stories* by Scott Wood, *Urban Legends: The As-Complete-As-One-Could-Be Guide to Modern Myths*, by Ngaire E. Genge, and *Encyclopedia of Beasts and Monsters in Myth, Legend and Folklore* by Theresa Bane are also great materials to check out. Reference books on urban legends, often tied to myths and folklore, are also published by small presses and sold in museums. Some introductory books, like *Yokai Attack! The Japanese Monster Survival Guide* written by Hiroko Yoda and Matt Alt, may be found in the comics section or in specialty bookstores, too.

Lastly, several dictionaries can offer new tools to describe strange phenomena. One such reference book is *Weird Words: A Lovecraftian Lexicon*, written by Dan Clore.

Fiction

Stories are a great way to dive into monster hunting through different perspectives.

Modern fantasy and horror are rife with wonderful stories featuring characters who must deal with the supernatural in their own way. *The Dresden Files* series by Jim Butcher, the *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series by Laurel K. Hamilton, and *The Mortal Instruments* by Cassandra Clare each focus on fighting the darkness in their own way. Additional books to check out are *Adventures of a Demon-Hunting Soccer Mom* by Julie Kenner, *Trail of Lightning* by Rebecca Roanhorse, *The Forest of Hands and Teeth* by Carrie Ryan, *The Good House* by Tananarive Due, and *Hunting Monsters* by S.L. Huang.

Resources for The Slasher Chronicle

The Slasher Chronicle (p. XX) taps into the darkest recesses of the human soul, scoops out whatever's there, and exposes it for all to see. Slashers in **Hunter** were first featured in a standalone supplement titled *Slasher*, published in 2008, and are the titular monster for this chronicle.

Want great source material? Read *Goth* by Otsuichi, *Exquisite Corpse* by Poppy Z. Brite, *The Shining Girls* by Lauren Beukes, and *A Killer's Mind* by Mike Omer. Watch *It Follows*, *Bloody Reunion*, *The Slit-Mouthed Woman*, *Nadja*, and *Session 9*. Serial killers can also be found in the Japanese manga series *Death Note*, *Monster*, *Erased*, and several others.

Hellblazer, from DC/Vertigo comics, spawned occult detective John Constantine and inspired a movie, *Constantine*, and a TV series of the same name. Along those same lines, the *Lucifer* TV show, a spin-off from the *Sandman* comics by Neil Gaiman, dives into the L.A. scene with a touch of the infernal. *S.P.O.O.K.S.* from Rosarium Publishing is an investigative comic where the characters unravel modern conspiracy theories — perfect fodder to weave behind the scenes of a chronicle while commenting on race.

The Walking Dead by Robert Kirkman is a stellar example of humans trying like hell to win the unwinnable fight, and the popular TV show of the same name highlights how necessary it is to find *something* to hang on to in our darkest moments.

Of course, no list of monster-hunting comics would be complete without mentioning the *Bureau for Paranormal Research and Defense* or *B.P.R.D.* from Dark Horse Comics.

Films and TV

In addition to previously mentioned shows, *Supernatural* is an American monster-hunting series that aired 15 seasons from 2005 to 2020. As the story swells, brothers Sam and Dean join forces with allied hunters at “The Roadhouse” for several seasons until they join the Men of Letters. This show, while tightly focused on the Winchesters’ perspective, offers story hooks and ways to shape a chronicle around a larger mystery. *The X-Files* is like an ongoing Hunter chronicle, maybe even featuring a pair of Task Force: VALKYRIE hunters.

Monster-hunting movies range from the serious to the comedic and everything in between. *Fallen*, directed by Gregory Hoblin, is about a detective in pursuit of a supernatural serial killer — a demon that jumps from body to body. *Lake Effect* is a movie about hunting the Yeti, perfect for cryptid-themed hunts. *Dog Soldiers* is a spectacular werewolf-hunting movie and *The Babadook* is about a strange, inexplicable creature who terrifies a young, single mother.

Video Games

Yes indeed, games can inspire games. The number of monster-hunting video games is limitless, but some bear special mention: *Alone in the Dark*, *F.E.A.R.*, *Half-Life 1 & 2*, *Silent Hill*, *The Witcher*, and *Monster Hunter* can all serve as inspiration for a cool, action-oriented **Hunter: The Vigil** game.

Chapter One: Flickering Candles

“Light thinks it travels faster than anything but it is wrong. No matter how fast light travels, it finds the darkness has always got there first, and is waiting for it.”

— Terry Pratchett, *Reaper Man*

A hunter stands between the people they want to protect and the monsters threatening their safety. You toe the line, knowing your life is at risk, because you made a vow. Night after night, you step into the darkness to track down the enemy. If you are very lucky, you deal with the threat and tie up loose ends before the sun rises. If you're still in one piece, you'll patch yourself up, get some rest, and prepare for your next hunt — tomorrow, the next night, or the night after that.

You call yourself a “hunter” because you've pledged to uphold the Vigil. You don't get the luxury of a vacation or a day off. The Vigil is a commitment that requires dedication, sheer willpower, and bravery. You, along with your fellow hunters, are taking a stand against the supernatural. Maybe you're convinced one day you'll win the fight. Maybe you're aware you won't. The Vigil doesn't care about how you feel, what you know, or what you stand to lose.

Every secret you glean is another bullet in your gun. Every mystery you unravel makes the enemy vulnerable. It's your job, after all. You are a hunter. You will not back down from a fight, not even when you're staring into the cold, soulless eyes of death itself.

Will you light a candle? Will you be the hunter your friends need you to be? Will you help battle the encroaching darkness and force the shadows to retreat?

Time to find out.

Preparing to Hunt

The Chronicles of Darkness are filled with horrors that lunge at mortals from the shadows, kidnap victims in broad daylight, and plot elaborate schemes to wield power over human societies. Hunters *know* this to be true, because they've had an encounter with the supernatural and somehow, in some way, survived. Now, they've pledged to uphold the Vigil by committing themselves — in body, mind, and heart — to the hunt.

For the Player: A Hunter's Prelude

Every hunter remembers what it was like before they made a commitment to uphold the Vigil. This, in game terms, is called a “prelude.” If this is something you or your group wants to do, you have two options. First, you can play through your prelude by building characters and playing a chronicle with the **Chronicles of Darkness** core rulebook. Second, you can play a prelude in **Hunter** as a tier-one hunter in a cell. Some rules adjustments may be required if you prefer to use this book instead of **Chronicles of Darkness**, so be sure to discuss options with your Storyteller before your chronicle begins.

In **Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition**, hunters are assumed to be competent hunters with a few hunts under their belt. Hunters have also figured out how to team up with others by forming a cell, joining a compact, or pledging membership to a conspiracy. Some hunters might hold status

in their hunter organization or have figured out how to balance the demands of their day job with those of the hunt.

Hunters are different from other mortal characters because the needs of the Vigil often eclipse their foothold in society. The choices a player makes when they create a hunter will reflect how they've dealt with changing priorities while retaining one foot in their day-to-day life. A priest who joins the Long Night might switch parishes to accommodate their erratic schedule. A former celebrity might avoid the limelight until they can figure out how to use their fame to their advantage. A teacher might take a sabbatical, transfer schools, or switch jobs altogether.

While your hunter *could* pack up and abandon their old life, their ties to other people keep them grounded and remind them what they're fighting for. Sacrificing everything to hunt the enemy has a drastic impact on a hunter's psyche, and the fewer connections they have, the harder it is for them to make the right choices.

As you read about hunter society and the types of hunters you can play, think about what life your character led *before* they encountered the supernatural. Were they a programmer who blogged at night about urban legends? Were they a stay-at-home parent who volunteered at the local fire department? What types of hobbies did they have? Did they go to church regularly? Volunteer at an animal shelter? Most people aren't defined by their day job; they are shaped by their actions and role in their community. You'll also be required to identify their connection to the world they're trying to save, so think about who your hunter loves and trusts, too.

Who your character was prior to becoming a hunter doesn't negatively impact their ability to uphold the Vigil. In **Hunter: The Vigil Second Edition**, *anyone* can be a hunter — there are no barriers or entrance exams preventing someone from tracking down the supernatural. All you need to become a hunter is the willingness to take a stand knowing your fight never ends.

Hunter Backgrounds

Hunters are people who pay their bills, buy groceries, and maintain their apartments. The Vigil is expensive to maintain, because most hunters aren't being rewarded for eliminating a threat. After all, the people they're fighting to protect don't believe monsters are real. Most hunters know that upholding the Vigil is often costly. Sometimes, even a "thank you" can be hard to come by.

Many hunters join a compact or conspiracy to collect a paycheck or benefit from a pool of shared resources. Despite this, most hunters still have day jobs where they collect a salary and remain tied to the people they're trying like hell to protect. Listed here are 10 sample recommendations you can use to create a hunter. Each job offers a way to make money and a potential benefit that can be used to study, track, or capture the enemy.

When reviewing professions, think about what type of character and game you want to play. Your hunter's day job might influence which hunter organization you choose. A compact like The Union, for example, would be thrilled to have a mechanic on hand, whereas the conspiracy Council of Bones may be more inclined to welcome a freelancer or occultist into their ranks.

Academic: People who work in academia often have access to papers, books, peer research, and relics others may not. Depending upon what job the hunter has, they may be able to spend time away acquiring new materials for an archive or take a sabbatical.

Business Professional: White-collar workers who show up from nine to five may not have the flexibility other jobs do but can be great for a steady paycheck and office gossip. Often, stellar

business professionals are chosen by compacts because of their ability to navigate office politics and their expertise in their chosen field.

Criminal: From gang members to petty thugs, con artists, and thieves, hunters sometimes begrudgingly look to criminals to help them out in a pinch. Being a criminal in **Hunter** can be challenging in a cell of do-gooders, however, so be sure to talk to your group beforehand.

Detective: Investigative skills are crucial to the hunt, and detectives have a knack for tracking down leads and opening cold cases for information. Police detectives also have an “in” with law enforcement, while independent detectives have more freedom to get the job done.

Doctor: Medical professionals are crucial in **Hunter**, because they can provide medical treatment without forcing hunters to fill out paperwork that might raise eyebrows. Doctors are also familiar with what it means to pledge their lives to the greater good, via the Hippocratic Oath.

Freelancer: The benefit of being a freelancer is a flexible schedule and the ability to work from anywhere, at any time. The downsides range from getting paid on time to finding fulfilling assignments. Freelancers can be great hunters because networking is part of their day job, so they know how to ask the right questions when needed.

Journalist: Journalists come in a variety of shapes and sizes and write everything from gut-wrenching feel-good articles to hard-hitting features. Some may work at newspapers, while others blog from home to cover the news from day to day. Their value is often measured by how many connections they have — and how much they can spin the truth.

Mechanic: Every hunter has equipment that will break down sooner or later. A gun gets jammed, a car’s brakes go bad, a two-way radio is on the fritz. Mechanics can operate out of a garage or vehicle they own or rent. Some mechanics might even work at an old junkyard — the perfect place to set up a command center when needed or find dated parts.

Occultist: Modern occultists, in a post-new-age world, tend to linger on forums and in private channels discussing auspicious signs, strange phenomena, and tools of the trade. Usually, occultists don’t “just” uncover the secrets of the supernatural; this, however, is the exception rather than the rule. When choosing an occultist, think of them as an “expert” in their area of study.

Religious Leader: Faith is important in the world of **Hunter**. All hunters, whether they’re religious, spiritual, or atheist, believe in *something*. The religious leader has a deep connection to their faith and the community they serve. Practitioners include imams, ministers, priests, shamans, rabbis, shepherds, and many more.

Scientist: Scientists are familiar with the unexplained. Their purpose is to test, research, hypothesize, and study what they don’t know in their field, whether that’s figuring out ways to increase the production of grain or identifying the reason why a cryptid’s blood was green. Scientists also ground the hunt in analysis and, often, find inventive weaknesses a monster might possess.

Want to get started playing **Hunter**? If you prefer to play in a tierone chronicle, flip to Chapter 3: Character Creation on p. XX. Additional professional backgrounds are listed on p. XX.

Not sure just yet? Read on for a brief overview of equipment followed by cells, compacts, and conspiracies. Then, check out tier-two and tier-three hunter organizations in Chapter 2: Compacts and Conspiracies on p. XX.

Tools and Equipment

Combat-heavy **Hunter** chronicles force hunters to think creatively and improvise with the tools and equipment they have on hand. Whether they're stocking up on tripwires or not, hunters typically have an array of weapons they'll use to threaten or kill the enemy.

Hunters require access to weapons to uphold the Vigil. How many guns, knives, and bullets they acquire from night to night will depend upon what resources they can safely tap into without fear of being caught or arrested. A hunter who owns a gun range will have more armaments than someone who works part time at one, for example. If that part timer gets reported, a cop isn't going to buy a wild story that they're only trying to kill a *thing* with glistening fangs and sharp claws.

Many hunters join a compact or conspiracy because they realize hunter organizations have more weapons than they could acquire or maintain on their own. Often, members don't realize that the access to greater resources comes with a price: Hunters are expected to perform according to the needs of their group. When they do, they gain status. When they don't? Every move they make is put under scrutiny. For this reason, some hunters avoid having anyone look over their shoulder, and partner with other cells or individual hunters who have what they need.

Savvy hunters partner with others to improvise equipment, build traps, and scope out sites to locate the entrances and exits. Some rely heavily on their professional background — especially if they're a member of law enforcement, freelance security, or the military — to plan an ambush. Others possess encyclopedic knowledge of the supernatural and help pinpoint a monster's strengths and weaknesses. Lone hunters who favor a gun over a book often find they're not as effective as groups of hunters who share knowledge, resources, and tactics. Groups of hunters, called "cells" in hunter society, excel because their burdens and costs are shared among members.

Experienced hunters know the difference between winning and losing isn't a well-timed bullet — it's information. Data, firsthand accounts, and lore can be gleaned from books in the library or online, but also through a hunter's social network. Sometimes, having a friend in an unusual place, like an independent bookstore, university department, or even a church rectory, helps a hunter cover their bases and ensure they're not just searching for intel on the internet all day, every day. Other times, these networks aren't tucked away in a business, university, or house of worship. Regular customers in a coffee house might know more than they're letting on about a businessman who never takes off his sunglasses. A knitting circle might gossip about what really happened to the mayor that fateful night. A co-ed basketball team that plays in the park might shiver whenever *that* human-seeming creature walks by.

In addition to weapons and information, hunters often work with occultists and collectors who specialize in the supernatural. This aspect of the hunt can generate more frustration than facts, because occult materials are often rife with dated perspectives, myths and folklore, conspiracy theories, and disinformation. If a hunter can get past the 27 different versions of how to perform an exorcism, they might find the one that works. Once they know a demon can be affected by an exorcism, then it's just a matter of time before a cell finds the right one.

Hunter Society

Hunters often start fighting monsters because someone they knew got hurt and they want payback. At some point, they'll decide whether they *can* commit to the Vigil. Once they do, there's no going back. Once you pledge to uphold the Vigil, you will always be a hunter.

Hunters often whisper that the Vigil isn't just a promise — it's a curse that tears you up inside and spits your heart out. If you're not careful, if you don't remember to celebrate the small wins and forget your losses as best you can, you could lose yourself to the hunt. Every back alley, basement, or cemetery you see becomes a potential battleground where you'll fight the enemy. If not this night, you grimly think, it'll only be a matter of time before you will.

The emotional burden of upholding the Vigil is not something hunters can easily bear, because they must keep their job a secret. Humankind is either unaware or intentionally ignorant of the horrors that surround, threaten, and prey upon them. What's more, hunters are often the first suspects in a sketchy murder investigation. That unusual bite mark? Can't be supernatural. There must be an explanation, after all.

Most people either won't believe monsters are real or don't want to know they are. At least, not until they encounter the supernatural and they're willing to accept the truth. Hunters don't have the luxury of being skeptics. They know the enemy is real, they understand most people won't call them heroes or realize somebody saved their lives, and they hunt monsters anyway. Often, hunters feel more comfortable in the company of other hunters because they don't have to hide this part of their lives.

The global community of hunters forms a society that is split into three types of groups: cells, compacts, and conspiracies. In **Hunter** terms, each aspect of society is its own tier or style of gameplay. As a rule of thumb, the higher the tier, the more resources and knowledge of the supernatural the players will have — in addition to a greater emphasis on conspiracy-related politics and a higher threat level.

Tier One: Hunter Cells

A hunter cell is a small unit of likeminded hunters who fight together night after night. Typically, three to five hunters pool their resources and expertise for the benefit of the cell.

All hunters fight in a cell, but not every cell is considered a tier-one group. A tier-one cell operates on a local level, with limited knowledge of the supernatural. Usually, a cell watches out for other people in their neighborhood and patrols each night to ensure no monsters infringe on their turf. That does not mean cells are restricted to hunting the enemy in a small area. A cell might investigate a sighting in a different town, track a monster from their suburb to a bigger city, or take a road trip to research a cold case.

At tier one, chronicles tend to be grittier and more immediate. One cell can't possibly possess the resources required to eliminate every monster. What they do have, however, is the mobility to deal with emergencies and immediate threats. Their view of hunter society, the supernatural, and the Vigil is limited by what they encounter firsthand as a group. Sometimes, this means a cell will be forced to make the tough call no one else wants to. Do they set a trapped monster on fire knowing there are witnesses nearby? Or, do they let that human-seeming fake go free until nobody's watching?

With no one to answer to, a tier-one cell calls the shots. If hunters have a falling out, then the cell falls apart, and they must look for a new one or abandon the Vigil knowing what's out there. Most well-populated cities contain dozens of hunter cells that protect the streets when no one else is watching. A cell can become so fixated on dealing with "its" problem, it often operates without knowing another cell is tracking a different monster just one block over.

Each cell's mobility is hampered by the larger pattern of supernatural activity they cannot see. Their lack of knowledge and resources hurts them where it counts. Many cells form, fight, and then fall apart within months if they're not careful. The physical risks hunters take pale in comparison to the psychological and emotional toll on their psyche, which often results in behavioral quirks or unhealthy habits that, if left untended, can lead to trauma and self-harm. Some hunters are aware of the risks and become obsessed with self-discipline to reduce the Vigil's heavy toll.

While outsiders may not notice why a hunter always sits near an exit or why they make sure their phone is charged and handy, those closest to them will eventually notice any change in their behavior. Unless hunters are extremely careful, their personal relationships may become strained or even broken. Some worried family members might even call a doctor or therapist on their behalf, and unwittingly share details hunters prefer to keep secret. Sometimes, cells can also draw unwanted attention from local law enforcement, rival cells, or rogue hunters just by scoping out a haunt, too.

Hunters who survive multiple confrontations with the enemy will sometimes take a break and put the Vigil on pause. They know what novice hunters don't: When you're always fighting, you sometimes forget who you're fighting for. Hunters who return to their everyday lives, hoping to forget what horrors they've faced, have a hard time readjusting simply because they know that peace is an illusion. There are more monsters emerging from the shadows than hunters realize, and their ignorance is not bliss — it's deadly. The Vigil once required dedicated hunters, but now? When the stakes are higher? Every hunter has a part to play in the fight against the supernatural. Members of tier-one cells know that better than most, because when a fight breaks out on their turf, they're the first hunters at the scene.

Forming a Cell

A typical hunter cell is composed of three to five people. New cells often draw less-experienced hunters who are just starting to learn about the supernatural. Cell creation typically occurs when:

- A veteran hunter is actively recruiting other hunters to fight a specific threat.
- One or more veteran hunters have left an existing cell.
- A worried neighbor, friend, or loved one asks for help without realizing what they're up against.
- A hunter seeks peers to replace fallen or missing friends and rebuild their cell.
- A member of law enforcement seeks outside help to close a case.
- A family who lost a loved one decides to hunt together.
- A hunter (or cell) wants to pass on what they've learned.
- An existing group (gang, patrol, team, etc.) accidentally crosses paths with the enemy.

The size and composition of a cell can fluctuate over time for multiple reasons. Some hunters have obligations to their family or career they can't ignore. Other members leave after they're seriously injured to piece themselves back together. More than a few hunters have unfinished business they must deal with before it's too late. Absences in a cell used to operating with four people can be catastrophic; one fewer expert shot, driver, or medic leaves a hole the cell must try to fill. Most cells are always on the lookout for other likely recruits.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The primary strength of a hunter cell is its size — with only a handful of members, the team is stealthy and agile, able to react to changing situations quickly, take action, then blend back into the crowd. If they are careful and keep their numbers small, cells can operate invisibly for a very long time, avoiding notice until they are ready to strike. By drawing on the individual skills and resources of their members and using their wits, the cell is self-contained, self-reliant and, with time and experience, can become extremely effective. Some cells can survive for years simply because they learned how to pick the right people, plan their hunts, and when to walk away.

A cell's small size is also its number one drawback. Its operations are limited to the availability, resources and skills of its members, and it's difficult to replace losses quickly. The members of the cell have no one to turn to in a crisis except one another, and no safety net in the event things go catastrophically wrong. These shortcomings are the primary factor in driving hunters to band together when possible by taking on hunts with other cells, or by joining a compact or conspiracy.

Tier Two: Hunter Compacts

Many hunter compacts take shape by starting out as a collection of isolated cells that come together to pursue the Vigil on a larger scale. Cells facing a common enemy or an increased threat level across vast distances often pool their knowledge and resources for a shared purpose. Over time, an elaborate network of contacts forms to support their goal. Greater numbers and more resources often lead hunters to more success on the streets. Before long, multiple cells are given orders to ensure they're not tripping over each other and they're more effective on the hunt. Together, these cells form a compact.

A tier-two chronicle broadens the scope of the hunt to cover more ground, offer more resources, and explore a greater view of the supernatural to reveal patterns or predict the enemy's behavior. Hunter compacts are more capable than a single cell because they have a longer reach; a compact tends to operate in a major metropolitan area or entire region and has the means to keep their operations running smoothly and their hunters well-equipped. Most compacts, like SWORN, the Union, and Null Mysteriis, have set up localized chapters in different parts of the world, as well as private forums and chatrooms to facilitate communication.

Keeping the Vigil Secret in an Internet Age

Chat rooms, private work groups, email, forums, etc. have proven to be effective tools for cells, compacts, and conspiracies. Not only do they help facilitate communication, privacy-related apps can help hunters retain some peace of mind. Unfortunately, some hunters forget that. An email can be copied and posted. A file can be downloaded and shared. An anonymous query from a worried victim could have been sent by the enemy.

Despite the likelihood that a hunter's data will be leaked, most groups don't worry about the occasional file share. Fortunately, the internet is rife with misinformation and hunters often joke that undeniable proof of the supernatural is just a few search terms away. Savvy hunters are extremely careful not to share anything they wouldn't want repeated online, while others are too paranoid to conduct hunter business in a public forum. Most groups ensure that at least one member of their cell, compact, or conspiracy knows how to protect their identities and data lest they fall into the enemy's claws.

Larger cities and metropolitan areas offer many opportunities for compacts to set up shop. Most compacts place a representative or cell in a city that doesn't have a satellite office to ensure they're receiving reports of supernatural activity in that area. These hunters are free to form alliances with other compact members and chip in when necessary. Sometimes, a compact member might even lend a hand to a cell without ever revealing which organization they're working for.

While rivalries, turf wars, and bitter feuds do affect hunters in their communities, most compacts discourage disagreements. Hunters understand this in theory, but have a hard time wrapping their minds around conflicting orders during a hunt. Null Mysteriis wants to keep that werecrocodile alive, while The Union doesn't. The Loyalists of Thule steer clear of that person who seems possessed, while The Long Night wants to perform an exorcism they're not sure will work. When the stakes are high and tension increases, hunters often bicker. If they're not very, very careful, the enemy will pick up on their differences and use them to their advantage.

Philosophical disagreements aside, hunter compacts have what many new hunters need: resources, lore, and skilled veterans who've spent more time in the field than their other members have. Experienced hunters prefer the camaraderie of other hunters, and compact sub-groups provide a framework to connect with other, likeminded hunters. Though cells don't always have to be compact-centric, many hunters find it's easier to hunt monsters when your cellmates have the same view of the Code or answer to the same authority. Cells don't get to make decisions the same way a tier-two group might. Sometimes, a cell is ordered to grab extra supplies, free a kidnapped hunter, help another friendly cell, retrieve a Bygone, etc.

Still, hunters know organization leaders have a plan to which they're not always privy. Tier-two hunters are far less concerned about hidden agendas than tier-three hunters, however. Compacts might want to explore a new area or expose a group of monsters, but they're not big or powerful enough to treat the supernatural as their plaything. For security reasons, most compacts prefer their agendas to remain secret, and sometimes that doesn't sit well with other hunters — but not because they've changed their minds about the enemy. Though hunters treat the monsters as “them” and people as “us,” people still abuse power, commit crimes, and hurt others. When someone steps out of line, leaves, or is thrown out of the compact, members want to know what happened — especially if that someone turns out to be the enemy.

Hunter compacts don't have the same longevity conspiracies do, but last far longer than an individual cell or alliance. The main reason they don't stick around is because compacts aren't thinking long term. Most tier-two groups don't plan their futures, simply because they don't have time to. For every enemy they put down, two more pop up. For every hunter they lose, more time must be spent recruiting and training their replacement. Additionally, they must deal with group politics, cell dynamics, economic downturns, and a host of other problems.

Forming a Compact

Hunter compacts are often formed out of necessity. There is no minimum or maximum number of cells required to form or maintain a compact. If a new compact is created with two cells, however, the hunters should be expected to handle threats in a larger region while recruiting more cells to join their ranks. Compacts typically boast between 50 and 200 members.

Unlike cells, compacts typically recruit members with a few hunts under their belt. While new hunters can join a compact, they don't have a grip on how they feel about other hunters. After all, there's nothing worse than joining a compact and getting stuck hunting with people you can't stand.

Compacts form when:

- A group of hunters from different cells band together to fight a specific threat.
- A group of hunters splits off from another compact for ideological reasons.
- A community or organization needs more hunters than it currently has.
- Tier-one cells hunt together on a regular basis.
- Tier-one cells start pooling their resources together.
- Hunters in an existing organization or community decide to formalize their activities.
- Hunters attracted to a specific philosophy or spiritual belief want to apply those precepts to the Vigil.

The compact's approach to the Vigil is often a deciding factor for new members, and it's one that shouldn't be ignored. Compact leaders are aware of this, too, and occasionally allow hunters to shadow existing cells for the purposes of recruitment. Sometimes, the more secretive compacts, like the Loyalists of Thule and Null Mysteriis, will help in a fight to gauge whether or not hunters have what it takes to join them.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths of joining a compact are the money, information, and ammunition it provides and the hunters who'll pitch in when needed. While compacts don't have infinite resources, they give gear, finances, medical assistance, and lore to their hunters. Some have deep connections to law enforcement and political figures and will leverage those relationships should a hunter face jail time. Most own or rent a safe house hunters can use when they're on the run, and help cells connect with one another if they need help or have to lay low.

Compacts do tend to be picky, however, and will often favor cells over a lone hunter. Some also care about their members' loyalty and activities outside of the hunt. The Union, for example, doesn't peer into their hunters' lives provided they show up when called. The Long Night won't double check to make sure their hunters show up to church every Sunday, either, but unlike The Union they expect their hunters to represent their faith. Some hunters feel a compact's expectations are a strength, because they have an authority to whom they report. Others see their oversight as a weakness, and often resent criticism — especially if they're asking for help to clean up a monster's mess.

Most hunters rely on compacts for more information about the supernatural. Lore, whether that's gained from experience, books, and footage or not, is crucial to knowing where to fire and when.

Hunters are acutely aware that cells who get cocky wind up missing or dead, and often need verified data drawn from painstaking research. Compacts understand how valuable good intel can be, but they struggle to sift fact from fiction. Many supernatural creatures are described as urban legends, fairy tales, or myths because most people don't know (or refuse to believe) they're real.

The lack of factual details to which hunters have access is a problem for cells, compacts, and conspiracies. Hunters have a challenging time classifying monsters, because they're not sure of the best way to do that. Are all living and undead blood drinkers vampires? Are all shapeshifters a type of werecreature? Once they answer those questions, hunters must figure out how many types there are, their strengths and weaknesses, and where they live. The second a cell encounters a monster whose attributes and behavior don't add up to what they already know, they question the facts they've gathered. At best, hunters are guessing how to confront the supernatural. When they win, they cheer. When they lose, their compact helps them pick up the pieces.

Compacts do possess a weakness: their size. The more members they have, the greater the risks. Information leaks. Identities can be shared. A poorly executed hunt can cause casualties and property damage. Hunters can go rogue. Worse: some monsters can pretend to be hunters. When these problems combine, they can expose a compact's existence and get it mislabeled as a threat to the very people they're trying to save. Every time a cell gets arrested or disbands because their loved ones were slaughtered by the enemy, Network Zero sends out a reminder: Yes, we still believe the supernatural should be exposed. Just don't forget to watch your back, too.

Though compacts don't suffer the same bureaucratic nightmares conspiracies do, they are run by people who often disagree. Those arguments often start small. Maybe a cell shouldn't have been given that much ammo. Maybe they should've told a hunter more about the slasher they were tracking down. Maybe they should close ranks and stop recruiting members for a while. If they're not careful, bickering can negatively impact the group. Some hunters will abandon their compact and join a different one or worse — resort to sabotage. Others might form a new faction within the compact, rally other members to take a side, or wage an internal war.

Compacts also suffer from a lack of communication and camaraderie. Their operations are spread out over a larger area, and no leaders can possibly know what their members are doing from night to night. While the Vigil demands sacrifice, hunters still have lives. They still possess wants and needs that eclipse hunting monsters. Sometimes, hunters want to have a say in how their compact approaches the Vigil, raises funds, treats its members, and archives its information. Compacts, like any other human-led organization, change over time for different reasons. Just like any corporate stooge or politician, members can abuse their power, resort to corruption, or execute secret agendas that hurt the compact and its role in the Vigil.

Tier Three: Hunter Conspiracies

Hunter conspiracies are influential and well-financed hunter organizations capable of challenging the world's monsters on an even footing. Many are far older than any existing compact, and surviving conspiracies tend to be longer-lived than any other hunter group. While cells operate on the ground and compacts in the shadows, conspiracies move behind the scenes to install members in foreign and domestic governments to keep one eye on politics and the other on the supernatural. In general, conspiracies know the most about the supernatural denizens who linger in the world, but even so, they don't know everything.

Conspiracy leaders pride themselves on their organizations' legacies. What a conspiracy believes is worthy of remembering differs from group to group. The Ascending Ones prize their ingenuity to adapt ancient traditions to a changing world. The Children of the Seventh Generation are grateful they aren't following in the footsteps of their infernal ancestor. The Council of Bones holds ceremonies to honor the dead they've helped. While their perspective helps shape the conspiracy's approach to its members, it also speaks to what each conspiracy values. The Ascending Ones value the ability to remain self-sufficient, the Lucifuge cares what its hunters do from night to night, and the Council of Bones concerns itself with dead victims to set things right.

Tier-three groups regard the supernatural as a tool that can be wielded against the enemy. Each conspiracy has its own methods, secrets, Endowments, and hands-on resources to better equip hunters — or so they tell themselves. While compacts care most about hunting monsters and helping humanity, conspiracies possess long-term agendas. Each conspiracy wants *something*. The Cheiron Group blends capitalism with monster hunting. The Malleus Maleficarum judges who is and isn't an "agent of darkness" — including mortals. Task Force: VALKYRIE patriotically fights for all Americans to keep them safe from ENEs.

The Cheiron Group Exposed

Recently, hunters have begun to realize conspiracies often intentionally keep their members — and each other — in the dark as much as possible. One such conspiracy is the Cheiron Group who, up until a few years ago, was believed to have been founded in Europe in 1904. While Edward Barrett did own a small pharmaceutical company and *did* operate under the Cheiron Group name, the conspiracy has been using different aliases for centuries. One of these aliases, the Acheron Shipping & Trading Guild, operated under that company moniker for well over 300 years. This revelation has led other hunters to wonder what *else* the Cheiron Group is hiding, and if other conspiracies have used the same tactic to obscure their presence over time.

While compacts tend to focus on eliminating threats, conspiracies do so much more. Hunters are tasked to carry out short-term missions like acquiring resources, pursuing an enemy, or researching a location. Long-term goals entail spying; public relations; forming relationships with political, commercial, and community leaders; and sourcing funds for expensive equipment. Often, conspiracies expect hunters to remain obedient. Hunters might be told to spy on specific targets, unaware to whom (or what) they're listening; some are even ordered to infiltrate other cells in the spirit of friendly competition.

Of course, hunters do ask questions. Conspiracies skirt the law as much as they can, because they prioritize their activities in the name of the Vigil. Sometimes, the law makes hunting monsters that much harder. If a conspiracy can't access a private library they *know* belonged to a vampire, their hunters are forced to break in and steal books. If they can't sway an up-and-coming politician to their point of view, they might blackmail or bribe that senator to get their way.

Should hunters start asking questions, they quickly realize conspiracies are far from the upstanding, innocent groups they'll profess to be.

Forming a Conspiracy

Hunter conspiracies take months, if not years, to form. Their operations require more funding than compacts do because wealth takes time to accumulate. Conspiracies boast their membership is high, but numbers can fluctuate from as little as 500 to as high as 10,000 hunters worldwide. Those figures include personnel who never step out into the field and are only marginally aware of what threats hunters face.

Most conspiracies are careful to not assign all available hunters to investigate known encounters and prioritize cases to ensure they're not taxing members and exposing their operation to the enemy. For this reason, approximately 100 to 300 hunters are assigned to active cases worldwide from night to night. When they're not in the field tracking down a monster, conspiracy members spend their nights on the investigative aspects of the hunt or performing tasks to improve and maintain their status within the conspiracy.

Typically, a conspiracy forms when:

- A powerful financial, religious, or political organization creates one.
- A compact significantly expands their operations.
- The remnants of several compacts are reformed to become a conspiracy.
- A once-defunct conspiracy is revived.
- Multiple cells knowledgeable about the supernatural band together.

The creation of a conspiracy can follow the same trajectory a large corporation with satellite offices does — but not always. Unlike most conglomerates, hunter conspiracies operate in the shadows. Some, like the Cheiron Group, Ascending Ones, Task Force: VALKYRIE, and Malleus Maleficarum, benefit from having one or more public faces. The Lucifuge and Council of Bones don't have that luxury, however, and recognize that puts them at greater risk of exposure.

A public face offers many benefits and some drawbacks depending upon the group's financial needs. Most conspiracies require a stream of income to benefit hunters and keep the lights on. When a conspiracy doesn't have regular funding, members are often stuck footing the bill. For some hunters, that's not a problem because their weapons of choice are their supernatural gifts and they've partnered with other cellmates who do have access to more resources.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Most strengths conspiracies offer are tangible: medical services, intellectual assets, safe houses, connections, etc. Increased threat levels often demand greater firepower; when a city is in danger, conspiracies offer capable, well-equipped hunters who can make the difference between winning and losing. Their longevity, on the other hand, is both a strength and a weakness. The longer a conspiracy exists, the more lore they tend to accumulate. Conspiracies, however, are rife with flaws because they are extremely slow to change. Leadership takes a long time to discuss new approaches because they understand policy adjustments have long-term ramifications. Members, on the other hand, don't always understand why a simple request generates multiple meetings and endless discussions.

Uncertainty among members is rampant, because hunters eventually see themselves as a cog in a greater wheel. The sense of camaraderie with fellow members tends to become muted or downplayed, and small wins are barely acknowledged. Conspiracies want to see results, and they

favor outcomes that benefit their overall goal. After all, the advantages they gift their operatives, in the form of Endowments, aren't free. Hunters are expected to use their Endowments to uphold the Vigil and their edicts regardless of threat level. Most hunters know this, too, and usually join a group based on what it offers. A hunter who's more interested in using cutting-edge munitions than holy rites is likely to join Task Force: VALKYRIE instead of Malleus Maleficarum. What's more: Members forget Endowments are not guaranteed to work, and often affect them physically and psychologically.

Lastly, conspiracies should be treated as large and powerful organizations that are buried in layers of red tape. Members rarely encounter a conspiracy's leader and when they do, it's usually for a serious reason. Operatives are expected to fulfill the conspiracy's missions to the letter, and when they don't carry out their orders, they may suffer unforeseen consequences. To many conspiracies, an individual hunter's life is not as important as the integrity of their organization. When a conspiracy decides between rescuing a kidnapped hunter or capturing a monster they've been desperate to track, they prioritize the hunt — and members have to suck it up or deal with the fallout.

History of the Hunt

For as long as there have been monsters, there have been hunters. The history, and often the names, of hunter compacts have been lost to time for various reasons. Sometimes, a short-lived hunter compact will form out of necessity to deal with a terrifying and unusual threat that wipes out half its members. Other times, a hunter compact suffers simply because their very existence intimidates politicians and citizens who either don't know the supernatural is real or have been infiltrated by monsters who want to keep their presence a secret.

The Vigil is not a modern concept. Monsters have prowled in the shadows since time immemorial preying on mortals. Brave and desperate people have walked out of the protective ring of firelight to pursue what lurks in the darkness. Some die. Many go mad. But someone else always picks up the torch because they want to fight. They *must*. The Vigil is not an exclusive pledge that can only be upheld by the rich and powerful. Hunters can be heroes, criminals, or *both*. The Vigil doesn't care who a hunter was before. It exists because wherever there are people, there are supernatural predators, and the hunters who stand between *them* and *us*.

Tier-one hunters who work in cells are often fighting a losing battle, because they suffer from a lack of information and resources that other hunters do not. Still, the one thing cells often rely on is their experiences and the archived materials of other hunters. Sometimes, a journal is passed down from one generation to the next, or a grieving best friend will receive the codes to a locked computer in the mail. Of all the groups, tier-one hunters have the mobility to slip in and grab a notebook, file, etc. without anyone noticing them, because other members of hunter society tend to pay attention to the bigger fish.

Tier-two hunters start to understand the costs of the hunt when they research the history of their selected groups, or compacts. Some compacts, such as the Keepers of the Weave or the Scarlet Watch, are relics of the past that reflect hunters who are caught between hunting monsters and living their lives in an uncertain world. Most, however, survive for 100 or 200 years, because they form to deal with an immediate threat. Over time, as the compact's needs, resources, and efficacy changes, membership wanes and the group's rallying cry falls to a whisper. The Barrett Commission, for example, was founded in the 1790s to prevent vampires from infiltrating the U.S. government — right up until they lost their funding and were reassigned to other agencies.

Tier-three hunters claim they know how widespread the threats are, but they face different challenges in their long-lived groups, called conspiracies. Though they do understand the supernatural is not a local or regional phenomenon, tier-three hunters are subject to the bureaucracy and needs of their chosen conspiracy. Many conspiracies have been forged from a political body, like Task Force: VALKRYIE and the Vanguard Serial Crimes Unit, or a religious organization, like Malleus Maleficarum or the Knights of Saint George.

The One and the Many

Most hunters don't like to boast about fighting monsters, because the more they think about that writhing mass of worms and venomous fangs, the more they'll want to write about it. Still, quite a few hunters have sat down to write their magnum opuses over the years. To date, however, not one manuscript has ever been published. Of course, other hunters will blame the lack of "leaks" on a secret cabal of warlocks who've targeted hunters or a cluster of vampires. Few dare to whisper an infamous rumor: The supernatural never set eyes on a single autobiography thanks to the work of a subversive hunter called the One.

No one — not VASCU's psychics or the Circle of Bones' mediums — knows the identity of the One. Some hunters suspect the One is a group of hunters who believe the Vigil should be kept secret at all costs. Unlike a compact or conspiracy, the One doesn't have a hierarchy and can't bestow benefits on its members — because there aren't any. Others think the One is either a single hunter who upholds the Vigil by themselves or acts as a supernatural mole to ensure the truth doesn't get shared publicly. Either way, hunters are curious how the Vigil has been upheld for this long and the truth of their identities hasn't been broadcast to the enemy. Some fear it already has.

Most of the time, conspiracies outlast cells and compacts not because they possess more wealth, but because the organizations touch different locations around the world. Should the conspiracy suffer great losses, as the Council of Bones has time and time again, its members regroup and fall silent until they're strong enough to emerge and hunt. And, unlike compacts, conspiracies actively maintain their secrecy to protect the identity of their hunters and ensure their organization isn't exposed to the supernatural. Despite this, the history of most conspiracies is uneven at best, because no hunter has lived long enough to accurately document their pasts.

Every member of hunter society knows their greatest weakness is their mortality. Unlike long-lived creatures of darkness, a hunter's short life expectancy affects their physical, mental, and emotional prowess in battle. Most hunt monsters out in the field until they're no longer able to, and a hunter's last battle could be anywhere from five years to 20 — but often not much more than that.

Recently, hunters have speculated their need for secrecy is affecting their success rate, and are allying with historians, archivists, and students of the occult to piece together a more accurate history and to identify all known and unknown groups. Despite this, most hunters are fully aware hunter society may be older, larger, and more widespread than they ever thought possible. Unfortunately, getting access to ancient scrolls and texts isn't always easy and dead-language experts who don't ask questions are hard to come by. Several hunters are concerned the evidence

hunters leave behind puts future hunters at risk, even if that means new recruits wrongfully assume the Vigil's long and storied history is concentrated in western countries.

Still, if evidence of the Vigil is scarce in the modern world, it's all-but vanished from the ancient. Some stories continue to linger, leading many hunters to wonder just how much lore has been intentionally erased or lost during the passage of time.

The Nibiru

Some hunter historians claim that the earliest evidence of the Vigil can be found on tablets recovered from the Lost Library of Ashurbanipal, an Assyrian library that predates the Library of Alexandria. These tablets describe the first hunter — Marduk — and his cell, the army of the Nibiru. Though others believe Marduk was a Babylonian deity, hunter historians are convinced that his mission, to recover the Tablet of Destinies, was predestined. After all, they say, Marduk was a holy and righteous son of Ea. It was only a matter of time before Marduk would fulfill his destiny by attacking the monstrous goddess Tiamat and her ally, the god-king Qingu, who was using the Tablet of Destinies to command her armies.

Hunter historians downplay why Marduk was hunting Qingu and Tiamat, and often focus on the Nibiru and their unflinching loyalty. Not one of the Nibiru had a divine birthright or purpose like Marduk did, and yet they fought alongside him anyway. The tablets tell the story of how Marduk fought Tiamat and was so vicious her body tore in half when he slayed her. When her corpse split in two, Marduk unwittingly released scores of terrifying enemies: scorpion-men, howling dragons, the undead, and demons. Of course, Marduk and the Nibiru had no chance of killing all of Tiamat's children. A handful of hunter historians believe this is the reason why hunters must battle the forces of darkness today.

The majority of hunters scoff at the idea that the Vigil exists to rectify a Babylonian god's mistake. Most laugh when a superstitious hunter whispers about the Nibiru in hallowed tones and point to similar myths, like the story of Pandora's Box, as more "proof" that one of their ancestors is probably responsible for unleashing the denizens of the supernatural into the world.

Hunter societies are filled with tall tales and too-good-to-be-true stories cooked up to inspire and add a certain gravitas to the Vigil and to their legacy. It is not uncommon for friends and family members to hunt together, and occasionally they point to the lore of the ancients or a common ancestor to prove their worth.

Aves Minerva

Hunters can be found in almost every ancient civilization, including ancient Rome, simply because the enemy has lived alongside humankind from the very beginning. Rome had been besieged by monsters since it was first founded near the Tiber River by the brothers Romulus and Remus in 753 BCE. Its long and storied history, stretching from village to republic to empire, is filled with inexplicable terrors ranging from the undead to skin-stealing owl women.

Despite its might, Rome's mighty armies weren't enough to fight monsters both home and abroad. Its push to expand into foreign territories was bloody and violent, and the scores of peoples Rome attacked did not go quietly into the night. While its armies were commanded to conquest and subjugate occupied countries, Roman citizens struggled to battle fierce enemies that were more terrifying than a barbarian from Gaul and turned to its gods for help.

Some hunter historians believe that cells formed from cults devoted to a specific god or goddess. Desperate for help, worshippers would flock to the temples asking for divine intervention. Eventually, worshippers tired of waiting for the gods and pledged to protect their neighborhood — with their deity’s blessing, of course. These hunters would then form a cell to patrol the streets of Rome. The Aves Minerva, hunters dedicated to the Etruscan-turned-Roman warrior goddess, was one such cell that fought to protect the homes on Aventine Hill.

Specific references to the Aves Minerva are scarce, and hunter historians often use poetic license to piece fragments together to infer their deeds. The Aves Minerva, or Birds of Minerva, were rumored to protect Rome from the cannibal Cacus, the god-child of Vulcan who lived beneath Aventine Hill in a labyrinthine cave, who’d nail dismembered body parts to doors in the neighborhood. Modern hunters think Cacus wasn’t a god at all, but a former soldier turned slasher who terrorized Rome because his bloodlust was insatiable. After all, what Roman emperor would allow the story of a monstrous soldier who attacked fellow Romans to circulate broadly? Instead, turn the soldier into a supernatural creature, and publicly thank the Aves Minerva for eliminating the threat. Then, suggest the hunters drag a trussed-up corpse down to the Forum Boarium (cattle market) to proudly display their hunting trophy.

Other Roman hunter cells existed alongside the Aves Minerva to deal with werewolves, the undead, vampires, and ghosts. Some cells who worshipped Quirinus were formed for political reasons. Eventually, these cells were commandeered by the Roman senate, given an official-sounding name and became one of the first western compacts. The Ordo de Quirinus was a secretive compact that was ordered to follow the armies of Rome into foreign lands. Their mission was simple: Destroy inexplicable threats. With the blessing of Rome, the Ordo de Quirinus killed everything and anything in their path and hunted the dog-headed Cynocephali, the long-headed-and-toothed Macrocephali, and the shadow-footed Skiapodes to extinction alongside witches, warlocks, and resistance fighters who did not exhibit any signs of supernatural gifts.

Some hunters point to the Ordo de Quirinus as an example of what not to do. Unlike the armies of Rome, hunters don’t think of themselves as genocidal; they are simply people fighting to prevent the enemy from attacking humankind. No matter what decisions a hunter makes, whether that’s to treat monsters as part of the natural order or not, they believe what they’re doing will keep people safe.

No wonder it’s easy for a hunter to justify their actions from night to night. It’s far more difficult to think about who they’re attacking and, perhaps most importantly, *why* that enemy had to die.

Scenes of the Forbidden

While the Roman armies marched to conquer and colonize, the Xianyun tribe left their homes in northwestern China to reclaim sacred lands from their sworn enemies. The Xianyun wreaked havoc on Western Zhou and its capital city, Haojing, before continuing south. Following this devastation, the spring and autumn period blossomed from the ashes to build the great Eastern Zhou empire, while the Xianyun’s legend continued to spread.

Claiming to be descended from two white dogs, the Xianyun carried a sacred relic — a white hound — with them wherever (and whenever) they traveled. Their beliefs in the white hound were popular among many, inspiring poets and artisans to paint violent tales of their attacks on hand scrolls. Over the course of a few seasons, the stories of the Xianyun morphed from a simple

tribe into half-man, half-wolf creatures, and the rumor that they were werewolves reached the ears of the Zhou court. Fearing there was some truth to the tales, an unnamed court official sought out the hand scrolls and destroyed all but one. The last hand scroll, which historians now refer to as Scenes of the Forbidden, depicted the Xianyun protecting a giant werewolf.

Court documents indicate that a small group of hunters, accompanied by a court academic, was sent to explore the Tian Shan Mountains to find and capture the wolf. Myths speak of the hunters' heroic deeds, and how they did manage to track down the giant wolf. When they discovered the white wolf could predict the date and cause of a supplicant's death, however, they abandoned its side and left the cryptid to its fate.

The wolf was grateful for their wisdom and told each hunter how they'd die: one by fire, one by blood, one by silver, and two from grief. On their way back to King Ping's court in Wangcheng, the cell was ambushed by a necromancer who turned one of the hunters into a zombie. To stop it, the dead hunter was lit on fire, and its body burned to ash. The next morning, the hunters found one of their cellmates had died from heartbreak, and couldn't live knowing their lover had been killed, revived, and brutally murdered once more.

With three hunters left, the cell grew paranoid, and traveled all day. Just as the sun fell below the horizon, the remaining hunters found an abandoned shack they believed was unoccupied. It wasn't, and a vampire snatched one of the hunters and fled into the night. The next morning, a pair of disheartened hunters set out for another day's worth of travel, and before reaching the next town the duo was attacked by a werewolf. Only one hunter escaped injury-free.

Just before the final hunter reached the city, however, they were attacked by a werewolf — their former cellmate — and were forced to kill them with the only remaining weapon they had left: a ceremonial knife adorned with silver and jade. That night, the last remaining hunter told their story but then took their own life, unable to cope with the guilt of surviving such horrors.

While the truth remains elusive and lost to time, Emperor Ming of the Han dynasty did comment that thousands, if not millions, of people still paid tribute to Xianyang's great wolf. Modern hunters tend to gloss over the folkloric aspects of the story without realizing that the lesson buried deep within the Scenes of the Forbidden has nothing to do with how the hunters died, but how they lived, and the choice they made after encountering the wolf.

Incomplete Histories

Modern hunter archivists have pieced together an uneven history of compacts and conspiracies using what they can find in the written record. They've recently discovered there are more gaps in the historical record than they first realized. In the past, hunters often used flowery language or code when describing the Vigil in written correspondence; others relied on urban legends, fairytale retellings, and oral histories to share information in a colorful way. The lack of a historical record is sobering to many hunters who want to know if a cell, compact, or conspiracy encountered the enemy before, what methods they used to hunt, and what failures they suffered. These hunters are beginning to wonder if the Vigil should be kept secret but aren't willing to risk expose hunter society to a public that includes human-seeming enemies.

Hunter historians disagree on many aspects of the Vigil's history and are often conflicted when attempting to reconstruct a timeline of compact formation. Sometimes, a cell is referred to as a compact or conspiracy and vice versa when it doesn't make sense to do so. Take, for example, the Ahl al-Jabal, which formed during the medieval Crusades to hunt vampires. While it's

commonly accepted that the Ahl al-Jabal did continue to fight monsters well into the 15th century, no one knows if the group is still active in the Middle East. If the rumors are true, it's possible that modern Ahl al-Jabal hunters are upholding the traditions of the oldest surviving compact in the world today. Hunter historians argue that modern hunters may have simply adopted the name and reformed a compact that hunts bloodsuckers. Others think Ahl al-Jabal wasn't a compact at all, but a cell of skilled soldiers who hunted on horseback.

The Bear Lodge is another group that shows how murky a compact's history can be. Some archivists speculate its founders may be related to members of Les Voyageurs who learned to hunt werewolves after the official group disbanded in the early 18th century. Though the Bear Lodge has since collapsed in modern times, active hunters have continued to uphold the Vigil by joining other compacts like Ashwood Abbey. Those hunters remember what the Bear Lodge was like when it existed, and unless a hunter historian is willing to find and interview surviving members, what they remember will eventually fade.

Unfortunately, the modern era and uneven support from ruling bodies has caused many specialized hunter organizations to rise, fall, or be subsumed into other organizations. In American politics, several government-sanctioned groups have been absorbed, disbanded, or reorganized. Both the vampire-centric Barrett Commission and the witch-focused Division Six have been dissolved and active members were reassigned to Task Force: VALKYRIE. The Merrick Institute, on the other hand, was not able to survive a private congressional inquiry, and its activities were immediately halted. All that remains on the books is Task Force: VALKYRIE, and only time will tell if TFV falls apart or expands to include other allied government forces.

Recently, some hunters have begun to actively erase and target hunter organizations who "do not hunt in an exemplary manner." Rumors have begun to circulate that a new group — perhaps a global conspiracy — of hunters is forming to ensure that hunters uphold the Vigil to hunt, capture, and otherwise deal with supernatural threats. Some hunters worry that members of the Promethean Brotherhood, Ashwood Abbey, the Cheiron Group, and the Faithful of Shulpae have forgotten which side they're supposed to be on. Of course, other hunters point fingers at the morally righteous members of the Long Night, Los Angelitos, and the demon-hunting conspiracies Utopia Now and the Knights of Saint Adrian as the main culprits.

Archiving the Hunt

Tracking down the historical record of compacts and conspiracies has been challenging for historians who are not members of a given group. Often, hunters look to the publicly available body of artistic works for evidence of the supernatural and the Vigil. On rare occasions, some groups (namely the Circle of Bones and the Aegis Kai Doru) will purchase texts, scrolls, tablets, and archived materials from third parties, hoping to find the evidence they need.

Though ancient literature doesn't always speak of hunters and horrors unseen, some key pieces of linguistic artistry and occult books have survived — only to be copied, mistranslated, or sold to other hunters. Other texts, like the *Thet Oera Linda Bok*, have been widely denounced as fake. Surviving lore is of great value to many hunters, however, and many groups actively collect private letters and journals knowing that these, too, can also be fabricated by their enemies or be thinly veiled tools used for political or religious propaganda.

One of the earliest surviving texts is the 11th-century work *Ghayat Al-Hakim*, a handbook for astrological magic. Written in Arabic, members of Null Mysteriis point to this text as the source

of the scientific method and, when used in conjunction with the lunar cycles, can accurately predict the behavior of werewolves and other creatures of the night. Of course, other hunters scoff at the text's usefulness in the modern era. Other literary works, like the ever-popular *One Thousand and One Nights*, not only prove monsters have always existed — hunters have, too. What could an ancient archive teach modern hunters they don't already know?

Several conspiracies including the Circle of Bones, Aegis Kai Doru, Ascending Ones, and now-disbanded Five Roses Empire have all tried (and failed) to convince modern hunters they should not automatically discard or reject the distant past's relics and literature. Unfortunately, most hunters don't have the resources required to study Sumerian cuneiforms, Mayan glyphs, or Akkadian, not to mention the hundreds of other languages that have fallen into disuse. Despite what scholars might profess, investigating the supernatural requires modern hunters to spend at least half their time in the field. Still, some historians point to the lessons learned in western literature, and often speculate what else might be found should they compare notes with other scholars worldwide.

Often, supernatural-themed literature blends myth, folklore, spirituality, and social mores of the era. While it can be hard to pinpoint whether the true monster is a metaphor or a real creature, in many cases stories do hold a grain of truth. Take, for example, the Old English epic poem about Beowulf, the Scandinavian hero. Beowulf is noted for the destruction of the legendary monster Grendel (and that monster's mother), and theologians have often postured the epic poem has overt Christian themes. However, many hunters believe the poem, like the tablets of Marduk's battle with Tiamat, proves hunter society has coincided with the rise and fall of many civilizations.

Of course, most hunters know the Vigil demands secrecy and that comes with a price. The names of many heroes and heroines throughout history have been intentionally erased. Hunter scholars who are searching for traces of cells, compacts, and conspiracies in the historical record are careful not to jump to conclusions, but know they're often searching for evidence that doesn't directly tie to hunter activity. Despite the challenges they face, new historic compacts and conspiracies are being discovered all the time. These include hunter groups from pre-Colombian Mesoamerican civilizations, all-female Celtic hunters called the Ban-Gaisgedaig, and several Japanese groups active during the Edo period, namely the Ama-San and Bijin, among others.

Shifting Perspectives

Hunter scholars who study the enemy know that definitions change over time, and popular references in one century can mean something very different in another. When the Age of Reason replaced a prominent belief in witchcraft and the supernatural, hunters leaned on scientists like Anthonid Cornelis Oudemans for answers. Witches and warlocks were reclassified as psychics and werewolves were simply undiscovered species of *homo erectus*. All denizens of the supernatural were explained through the lens of science, and the word "magic" became associated with antiquity.

Oudemans, a reputable 19th-century biologist and director of the Royal Zoological Gardens in The Hague, was a hunter who attempted to expose the supernatural using his scientific knowledge. Unfortunately for Oudemans, his goal backfired and his first brush with the supernatural led to an unhealthy obsession and a failure to cope with a changing world.

Oudemans claimed he encountered a sea serpent and quickly became obsessed with hunting the creature of folklore. Ignoring his fellow hunters' advice, Oudemans published his findings in *The Great Sea Serpents of the World* (1892). The book was unpopular among members of the scientific community but was well received by a Victorian audience hungry for more penny dreadfuls. Oudemans was convinced his peers would recognize his brilliant discoveries and tried to present his findings at a conference. Shortly afterward, Oudemans was forced to resign his position and his credibility was never restored.

Of course, Oudemans is not the only notable 19th-century biologist turned hunter. The German naturalist Amalie Dietrich, known for her studies in Australia, and the Czech botanist and paleontologist, Josephine Ettel Kablick, both made strides in their discoveries of cryptids that are now believed to be extinct. Still, while scientific discoveries did prevail during that time period, several occultists and spiritualists grabbed the public eye.

Despite the popularity of groups such as the Order of the Golden Dawn and spiritualists like the suffragette Laura Cuppy and the medium Emma Hardinge Britten, the general public eventually favored science and technology over “superstitious” belief. Hunter organizations founded in the 19th and 20th centuries reflect this cultural shift and, whenever disinformation needs to be spread, most often the supernatural is regulated to oddities in weather patterns; alien abductions, sightings, and landings; or other urban legends that fall well within the range of what may be true versus what can't be believed.

Modern Methods

In modern times, most cells, compacts, and conspiracies collate, store, and share their own data for their members' use. The information each group carries is unique to that organization's needs. The Lucifuge, for example, is rumored to have an archive containing the names and histories of every hunter who has joined their conspiracy since its inception. Even stranger, rumors persist that this archive also includes clandestinely gathered samples of every member's hair, blood, and uniquely personal articles that include things like family photos, an art project from elementary school, and the desiccated ear of a beloved family pet. No member of the Lucifuge has ever confirmed the existence of this archive, which is believed to be stored beneath Mount Hermon's Syrian peaks, where Jesus was reportedly tempted by the devil.

Most compacts, including The Union, Null Mysteriis, and Network Zero, grant members access to their archive after they've been welcomed into their ranks. Unfortunately, new hunters struggle with the secretive nature of their groups. They don't see why it's important to keep their information secret because they believe a well-informed hunter has a better chance in battle than one who's kept in the dark. SWORN takes a different approach, however, and prefers to give hands-on training to members to teach them how to deal with monsters. Both the Long Night and the Loyalists of Thule aren't secretive, per se, but they are careful to hand out knowledge because they're both uniquely aware that the denizens of the supernatural — and the greater threats pulling their minions' strings — have eyes and ears everywhere.

While cells and compacts tend to share materials freely, conspiracies have a reputation for doling out intel on a need-to-know basis. Hunters suspect this allows the conspiracies to spot infiltrators when they pop up from time to time, and point to the groups' longevity as proof that erring on the side of paranoia is sometimes warranted. Still, rumors abound. Task Force: VALKYRIE reportedly uses highly encoded computer databases to keep track of its members' training and assignment history, the Circle of Bones has been known to send ghosts to “spy” on cells out in

the field, the Cheiron Group often encourages regional supervisors to assess its members' activities, and the Ascending Ones may have cells whose sole purpose is to monitor the reagents, rare ingredients, and formulas provided to its members.

More recently, compacts and conspiracies have started to reassess the value of printed and digital materials for non-members. Several groups, including Network Zero and Task Force: VALKYRIE, use publications to calm a wary public or to placate determined conspiracy theorists. Unfortunately, these efforts have caused an unintended side effect: New hunters who treat these materials as evidence aren't sure how to tell fact from fiction, either.

Hunters are often given information with a friendly warning: "Sure, this intel could help you take down the enemy. But it might also get you killed." Many hunter groups don't always share their findings until they've verified their data will be effective during a hunt. Unfortunately, when it comes to the enemy, there's no such thing as a guarantee.

Chapter Two: Compacts & Conspiracies

“Know your enemy and know yourself, and you can fight a hundred battles without disaster.”

— Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

Hunters who’ve seen their fair share of pitchfork-wielding scarecrows, green-skinned kappas, and spooky hitchhikers grimly acknowledge a painful truth: There is no such thing as a world without monsters. Tier-one hunters struggle with this knowledge more than most because, deep down, they pay a higher price to fight. Not only are they shouldering the emotional and psychological burdens of the hunt in one cell, they aren’t fighting alongside other hunters who could help tip the odds in the cell’s favor.

While a tier-one hunter is capable, their hunts tend to be tightly focused because they don’t have the luxury of time. When a cell gets a whiff something’s wrong, they drop everything to save an innocent life. The reasons a tier-one cell hunts are often personal, and they’re not afraid to bloody their knuckles when they need to. Their willingness to do what needs to be done costs them dearly, however, because guarding the Vigil’s secrets requires them to tread carefully when dealing with their coworkers, friends, family, and lovers.

Some hunters can’t balance the needs of the hunt with their daily lives and withdraw from the people they love to protect them from getting hurt. Most, however, understand those connections prevent hunters from falling into the darkness. Some hunters become so bitter and jaded they avoid forming attachments because it’s easier; these cells almost always forget what they’re fighting for, and eventually turn into monsters themselves.

Often, a cell’s lack of connections and resources leads to more challenging and often deadlier hunts. There’s been more than a few tragic cases where two cells were hunting the same monster and didn’t realize it, not until it was too late. The high costs of hunting with a small group almost always means someone they know, at some point, will die. Some cells disband, some throw themselves even harder into the hunt, and the rest? They team up.

Tier Two: Compacts

Compacts are regional groups filled with multiple cells who swap intel, stories, even ammo. The difference between a tier-one and tier-two group is scope: Compacts glimpse the bigger picture and are just beginning to understand the extent of the hunt. Tier-two hunters have a little breathing room, because they trust their compact has their backs. In exchange for membership in the organization, cells gain access to knowledge and so much more. Often, joining a compact is an act of validation, because a cell’s instincts are finally confirmed: Monsters aren’t a new phenomenon, and all those bedtime stories they heard as a kid are probably real.

Hunting is dangerous, and while compacts provide hunters with camaraderie, resources, information, and status, they can’t guarantee their members will be safe. Compacts can, however, help hunters shoulder the burden of loneliness by giving them a higher purpose within their organizations. Compacts form for similar-but-different reasons and are shaped by a common purpose, view of the Code, or shared experience. These hunter organizations ensure hunters remain grounded and offer them a sense of community. No longer do hunters track monsters whenever a cell’s leader makes the call; compacts often shape and coordinate the hunt, giving hunters a leg up in the fight.

When tier-two hunters want to learn more about the Vigil, they often turn to their compacts for guidance. Unfortunately, the history of compacts is filled with holes. As far as most hunters can tell, most compacts fold within 100 years but can survive for 200 to 300 if they're lucky. Unlike many monsters, hunters are mortal and can only fight so long; when they stop hunting, if they're still alive, they mentor and recruit — but it's hard to replenish their ranks. Some compacts, like Network Zero, struggle to stay on top of technology, while other organizations are decimated by monsters or infiltrators. Other compacts such as the Keepers of the Weave, Les Voyageurs, and the Scarlet Watch were caught between hunting monsters and living their lives in an uncertain, often turbulent world.

In this chapter, several compacts are presented from which hunters may choose. Each compact possesses different layers of status for hunters; the higher the status, the more ingrained in a compact's structure a hunter is. These compacts are:

- **Long Night:** Christian hunters who believe the surge in monster activity is a sign of the end times, and they're now fighting in the Tribulation War, p. XX.
- **Loyalists of Thule:** Occultists and German descendants from the Thule Society who are in debt to humanity and uphold the Vigil to serve others, p. XX.
- **Network Zero:** Savvy hunters who use technology, photographs, and film to warn people by revealing the truth that monsters are real, p. XX.
- **Null Mysteriis:** Scientists who research the paranormal and selectively share their findings to combat the supernatural, p. XX.
- **SWORN:** Indigenous hunters living in urban areas who defend and help local communities from predatory human and supernatural monsters, p. XX.
- **The Union:** Blue-collar hunters who band together to stop the supernatural from infringing on their home turf, p. XX.

In addition to these compacts, Storytellers can create new hunter organizations with the rules on p. XX, using the Scottish thrill-seeking Ashwood Abbey as an example. A new, Hong-Kong-based compact of detectives and police officers, Nine Stars, is found on p. XX in the Slasher Chronicle.

Is There Such a Thing as Dual Membership?

While hunters may have enjoyed the benefits of joining more than one compact or conspiracy in the past, the brutal demands of the hunt coupled with a spreading paranoia have all but made dual membership impossible. Hunter organizations are clamping down on outsiders who don't fall in line with their ideology in some fashion, and while this has caused a lot of members to question their loyalties, it has decreased incidents of rogue hunters, cancer cells, and supernatural infiltrators.

This approach, however, has also led to an unfortunate side effect: While compacts and conspiracies want allied hunters to work with them, they are also wary of divulging their secrets to unknown or new hunters in their corner of society. Organizational leaders blame their anxiety on past transgressions and the uptick in supernatural activity, but most hunters understand why they're distrustful. Anyone, at any time, can become a hunter — and joining every group that approaches them

is a bad idea. Sure, some people need to find where they “fit” in hunter society, but building trust requires a lot of time and commitment.

Tier Three: Conspiracies

If cells are local and compacts are regional, conspiracies are globally active, complex organizations that provide hunters with a purpose. Unlike tier-two compacts, tier-three hunters do more than hunt monsters; their roles aren’t always dedicated to capturing and eliminating threats. Conspiracies can trace their members back decades, if not centuries, and they have an awareness of the supernatural tier-one and tier-two hunters only dream of.

Hunter conspiracies represent an interconnected global network of groups that not only know monsters are real but have decided *how* they want to deal with them. These conspiracies range from legacy organizations like the Cheiron Group to newer groups such as Task Force: VALKYRIE. Hunters who join a conspiracy benefit from the well-documented experiences of hunters who preceded them, enjoy more resources to use on the hunt, and often work toward a clearly defined purpose.

Most conspiracies have smaller, regional factions that function similarly to a compact. Due to most conspiracies’ size, tier-three hunters often deal with more bureaucracy and disagreements. While a conspiracy might claim their method is the best way to deal with monsters, all the philosophies in the world don’t matter when a life is on the line.

Motivated by a deeper desire, conspiracies add a layer of storytelling to a **Hunter** chronicle that intersects with the advantages and disadvantages of not only knowing the supernatural is real, but also understanding more about its denizens than most hunters.

Conspiracies introduced in this chapter are:

- **Ascending Ones:** Spiritual and practical alchemists who use rare elixirs to deal with the supernatural, p. XX.
- **The Cheiron Group:** Corporate-minded hunters who experiment on monsters and modify their bodies with supernatural flesh, p. XX.
- **Council of Bones:** Scholars, archivists, and occultists who serve the living by contacting ghosts and spirits, p. XX.
- **The Lucifuge:** Children of the Seventh Generation who claim to be descended from Lucifer, pledged to fight evil and drive the darkness back, p. XX.
- **Malleus Maleficarum:** Devout Catholics, blessed by the Pope, who serve the Church by upholding the Vigil, p. XX.
- **Task Force: VALKYRIE:** U.S. government agents who use high-tech armaments to identify and kill monsters, p. XX.

In addition to these conspiracies, Storytellers can create new global organizations with the rules found on p. XX using the relic-wielding Aegis Kai Doru hunters as an example. A new slasher-based conspiracy, VASCU is found on p. XX. Each conspiracy also offers hunters the chance to wield the powers and resources at their disposal to round out their hunts. These special abilities, called Endowments, follow at the end of the chapter beginning on p. XX.

Endowments

For tier-three hunters, Endowments are the difference between winning and losing the fight against the supernatural. While not always inherently supernatural, Endowments are powerful tools that imbue a hunter with the ability to deal with the supernatural on their level — but that kind of power always comes with a price. Endowments represent both the learned power and institutional wisdom of an entire conspiracy, and the struggle to maintain a Code while still protecting the ones who are the most important to the hunter.

Conspiracy leaders encourage their hunters to acquire Endowments and are willing to risk hunters leaving their hallowed halls with that knowledge if it means the monsters in the dark have a deadly opponent. Endowments themselves are a dangerous gamble, but the conspiracies are willing to take risks despite any backlash that may come crashing down upon them or their members. With the seemingly endless stream of monsters on the move, the risk is more than worth it.

The cache of supernatural relics, potions, rituals, and spells, when combined with stockpiles of armaments and psychic abilities, is far more than the average hunter dreams about. Sometimes these abilities are accepted as a gift from the heavens, while other times they're wielded as a shield to force the darkness back into the shadows. Whatever the methodology, Endowments mark their wielders in some way and, like the Vigil, it's not something you can un-see.

The Endowments provided in this book are some of the bread-and-butter Endowments used by their respective conspiracies. These are the ones that most hunters in a conspiracy will know or learn over time, but we also include rules for making your own using select Relics from the Aegis Kai Doru in Chapter Eight: Storytelling on p. XX.

Conspiracy-related Endowments include:

- **Advanced Armory:** Task Force: VALKYRIE, p. XX.
- **Benediction:** Malleus Maleficarum, p. XX.
- **Castigation:** The Lucifuge, p. XX.
- **Elixir:** The Ascending Ones, p. XX.
- **Perispiritism:** Council of Bones, p. XX.
- **Teleformatics:** VASCU, see the Slasher Chronicle on p. XX.
- **Thaumatechnology:** The Cheiron Group, p. XX.

Using Endowments

Each conspiracy has access to a completely unique set of powers. While they may look similar in structure, how they function is vastly different. One may look as mundane as high-powered weapons while another is literally fueled by the hunter's demonic blood.

How a hunter gains access to his Endowments, how he activates them, and what kind of backlash comes from using them is defined in each individual Endowment. For our purposes though, Endowments are distinctly supernatural powers and using them creates some internal conflict for the hunter who is bound by a Code to defeat monsters. This isn't to say that hunters view using Endowments as Code violations, otherwise only the most unscrupulous hunter would use them. But it does mean that using them often or choosing to use an Endowment instead of a mundane

solution is a conscious choice the hunter makes, and she justifies it however she can. This is where Touchstones come in handy, as she uses these people to remind her why she is different from the monsters she hunts.

Hunters are not supernatural, but the Endowments they use are. As such, they can be used by any hunter regardless of their physical abilities. There is, however, a cost to using them. Sometimes the toll of using these powers shows itself in the way of a backlash. Particularly powerful or overtly supernatural Endowments have a backlash listed for each use. Some Endowments have a baked-in backlash that isn't specific to the individual powers.

Against the Supernatural

Hunters fight the supernatural. They fight against the creatures of the night and to protect the ones they love. Every now and then, they might fight another hunter, or a mortal in thrall of a monster, but they reserve their most dangerous Endowments for the creatures themselves.

Some Endowments are contested or resisted. The dice pools listed are for use against normal mortals and monsters alike. But some monsters have a better ability to resist powers. If a monster has a Supernatural Tolerance rating (see p. XX), then it applies that rating as normal to Contested rolls against a power. Additionally, sometimes an Endowment's powers will directly oppose a monster's power (or another Endowment). For example, a Lucifuge who commands a demon to attack a child of the Seventh Generation who can *also* command demons may find themselves in opposition, and a hunter who uses an Endowment to see the hidden may come into direct conflict with a monster that has a Dread Power that makes it invisible.

When this happens, there is a Clash of Wills. All characters using conflicting powers enter a contested roll-off, each using a pool based on her type. Hunters use their Highest Resistance Attribute + Occult, while Monsters use their Potency + their Dread Power rating. Supernatural creatures without Dread Powers, such as those found in other Chronicles of Darkness games, use different rolls depending on what they are. Ties reroll until one player has accrued more successes than all others. The effect invoked by that player's character wins out and resolves as usual, while all others fail. Victory of one power in a clash does not mean the immediate cancellation of the others, save in cases where only one power can possibly endure.

Characters may spend Willpower to bolster the contested roll, but only if they are physically present and aware that powers are clashing. Certain powers, such as those with exceptionally long durations, are more enduring in a clash. Night-long effects add one die to the clash roll, weeklong effects add two, month-long effects three, and effects that last a year or longer add four.

Gaining Endowments

You may purchase Endowments related to the conspiracy of which your character is a member. She must have at least one dot in the correct conspiracy Status Merit (p. XX) to purchase new Endowments. Each hunter begins the game with two Endowments at character creation. Purchasing a new Endowment costs three Experiences each. Some Endowments are collections of powers, which are rated one through five (such as Elixir, Benediction, and Advanced Armory). In this case, when you purchase an Endowment, you gain a dot rating in that collection. This purchase still gives you an individual Endowment, but it might also serve another purpose such as dictating how many items you can carry, or how powerful your Endowment is.

A hunter can only learn Endowments from the conspiracy to which she currently belongs. If she leaves a conspiracy and joins another, she does not lose the Endowments she gained in the old conspiracy but cannot learn new Endowments from her past organization. The only exception to this is if the hunter belonged to Task Force: VALKYRIE, as they no longer have access to the armory when they leave, and even if they take equipment with them, they are likely to run out of ammunition. Using Endowments from a past organization may cause that group to come asking questions. Conspiracies might allow the risk of a hunter running off with their secrets, but that doesn't mean they don't act to prevent a hunter from doing so. Lucifuge who leave the conspiracy are particularly at risk for their past to come hunting them down. A hunter who leaves a conspiracy and chooses to lose her Endowments — or has to, in the case of TFV — benefits from the Sanctity of Merits rule, which allows her to regain her spent Experiences on the Endowments to spend elsewhere on her sheet, or on new Endowments from a new conspiracy.