

Introduction

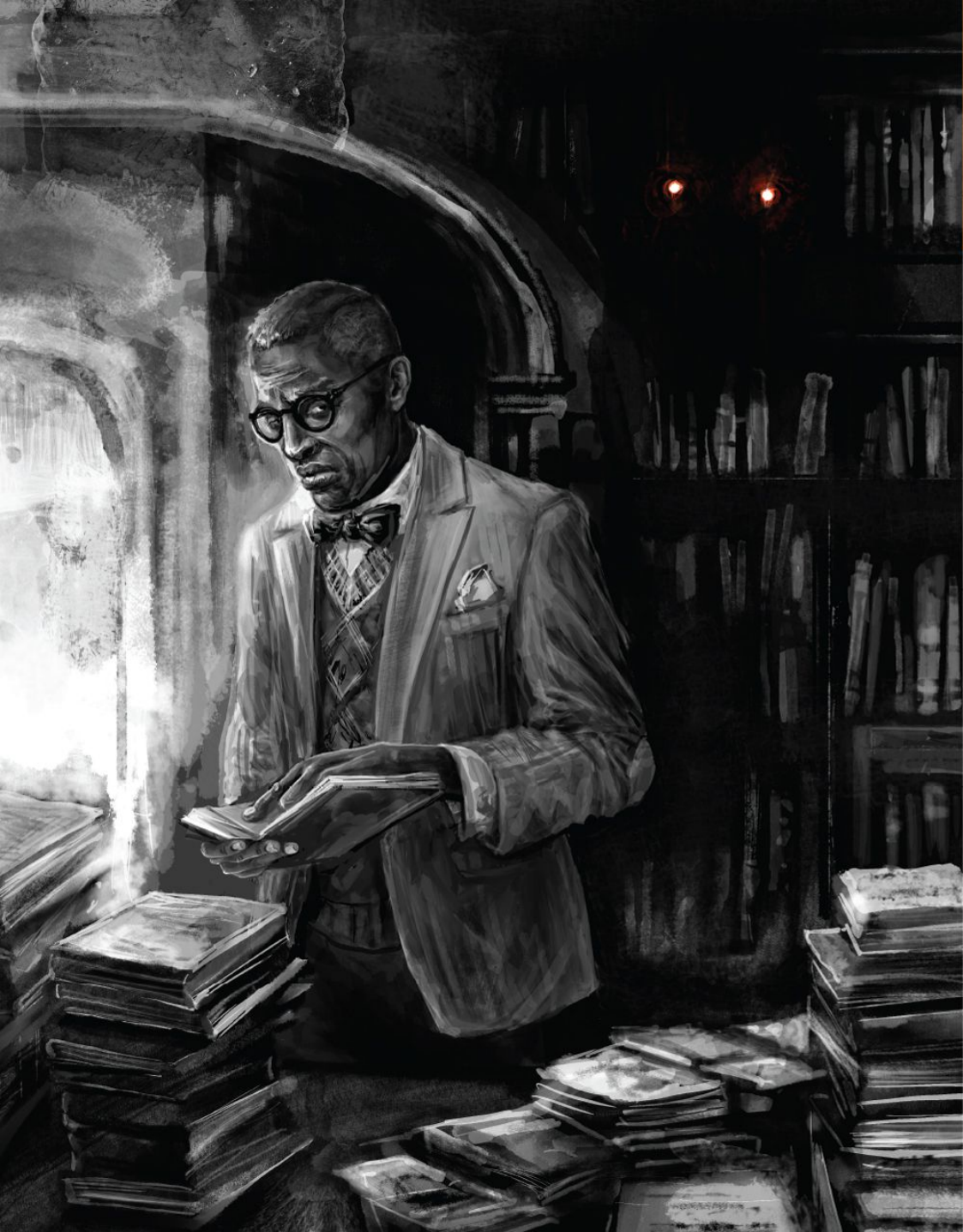
"Knowledge itself is power."

-Francis Bacon

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

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

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





WELCOME!

Chapter One: Orientation

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

-Michel Foucault

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

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

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

Chapter Two:

Burlington College

"There is an excitement about having nightmares."

-Betsey Johnson

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

A Burlington Chronicle

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

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

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

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

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

History

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

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

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

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

Chapter Three:

Keen Campus

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

-Steve Jobs,

Stanford University 2005 commencement address

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

A Keen Chronicle

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

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

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

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

History

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

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

Let's Stay Connected

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

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

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



Chapter Four:

Bellium University and the Pleiades

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

-Bellium University's motto, translated from Latin.

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

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

BELLIUM UNIVERSITY AND THE PLEIADES



Chapter Five:

Stonecrop Fine Arts Institute

"Andelbeere fram fæger."
[Beauty from monstrosity]

-Stonecrop's motto, translated from Old English.

Long ago, the Stonecrop Institute watched over and guarded against Fair Folk activity in the north of England, but that mission is long forgotten. The nearby Fair Folk present a threat — but nowhere near the most pressing one.

The masters long ago turned to ancient magics of blood and sacrifice to keep the fey creatures at bay, weaving them into the works of art they and the students create. Good art takes blood, sweat, and tears, and Stonecrop takes that saying literally. The sorcerers' rituals poison the earth and produce monsters from the woods and moors that prey on students and local people alike — the ones who aren't sacrificed in the name of sorcerous art.

Chapter Six:

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship

"The Cardinal is at his wit's end-it is true that he had not far to go."

-Lord Byron

Those looking at history from outside academia think that it's all concrete information. Names and dates are hard evidence of what has come before. Any historian says otherwise. Sources lie or are mistaken; professors advance pet theories and new information comes to light. There's a lot of pressure within the academic world to keep digging even on widely accepted ideas. It's unsurprising that researchers, teachers and other scholars might need a harmless way to blow off a little steam.

The Cardinal Quill Fellowship began as a social club to let people have fun with the skill they've spent years developing. For most members, it's an excuse to tell tall tales about a fictional person in a historical manner while ordering drinks at the nearby pub. Like so many other harmless institutions, however, it's been co-opted by monsters. A handful of vampires are using the very bright people to root out secrets in the dark. These secrets give bloodthirsty undead more power and control.

THE CARDINAL QUILL FELLOWSHIP

Chapter Seven:

The Gourmand Society



Regarding the puma: "remarkably like veal in its taste."

-Charles Darwin, *The Voyage of the Beagle*

The Gourmand Society has its roots in the British Empire at the height of its power and cavalier conquest and consumption of other cultures. The sorcerers sitting at the society's top table are the pinnacle of imperial greed and selfishness, though they've now spread far beyond Britain's borders. Their primary goal is to extend their own lives forever, which they do through the consumption of mummified remains stolen from tombs in Egypt, South America, and wherever else they can obtain their precious mummia. Whenever they obtain such a prize, the society comes together for a grand, celebratory banquet.

Chapter Eight:

Academic Locations

"The exquisite art of idleness, one of the most important things any university can teach."

-Oscar Wilde

Leaving high school, moving on to an institution you chose, and spreading your wings is an important rite of passage for many young adults all over the world. However, just as their conservative, concerned parents always told them, being out in the big, wide world isn't safe.

Prospective students choose between vocational schools, colleges that cater to undergraduate education and sometimes, associate degrees or diplomas; and universities catering to those seeking graduate-level courses. Vocational schools train students for a profession. Some colleges and universities are famous for a specific field or discipline, such as a university dedicated to the humanities, a school entirely focused on fine art, or a college fast-tracking students into brilliant tech careers. They all offer different moods and settings for a **Hunter: The Reckoning** game, and they're all presented here in a range of locations you can drop into your chronicle when the Cell visits campus.