

No Choice Pal

By Alasdair Sinclair

Trailer

Some bonds can't be broken. Forged in mud, under enemy fire, the heart pounding, home just a memory, sharing misery and the frenzy of combat - bonds forged by spilt blood, and stronger than blood. You were a unit of soldiers in Afghanistan then a unit of mercenaries in Central America. You fought men, and the dark creatures that control them. After a decade, with money in the bank, the unit disbanded - each of you trying to go home.

Maybe once you've seen behind the curtain, you can never go home. It's only been a few weeks when the Lt sends you a message, simply "Help". On greyhounds and amtrak, you're rolling into town to do whatever it takes to defeat whoever, or whatever, has him up against the wall.

This adventure is one of investigation, discovery and drama, and would best suit players looking for a hard hitting, plot driven, game session (i.e. more SVU/Criminal Intent than Action/Adventure). Please note that this plot includes some adult themes, although the depth to which these are explored will be left up to the players to decide during play.

System:	Gumshoe (Night's Black Agents)
System Knowledge:	Not Needed
Number of Players:	3-4
Genre:	Murder mystery, Urban Fantasy
Genre Knowledge:	Useful
Role-playing Knowledge:	Preferred
Style:	Procedural
Age / Maturity:	Adult themes
Classification:	R18

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Preface

This is a scenario for Kenneth Hite's *Night's Black Agents*. It was written for the KapCon Scenario Design Contest, which it won in 2014.

I welcome any comments, suggestions or other feedback:

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Acknowledgements

Night's Black Agents was written by Kenneth Hite, using the *GUMSHOE* system by Robin D Laws. Neither had anything to do with this scenario specifically.

Concept consultation: Hamish Cameron & Morgan Davie.

Play-test GM: Sean Broadley.

Play-testers: Stephanie Angus, James Carter, Donna Giltrap, Ruth Harper, Gemma M, Trond Nilsen & Tony Porteus.

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Part 1: Introduction

This scenario is entirely self-contained, although a copy of *Night's Black Agents* is needed to play. The game is a demonstration game taking one session of between 3 and 4 hours.

The Hook

The squad are brought into the scenario by a call for help from their former team leader, Lt Kelvin. They arrive in town to find that he has been murdered, and a substantial sum of money that belongs to the team as a whole is missing.

The Horrible Truth

At first, it appears that Lt Kelvin may have been murdered by a vampire. In fact, he has been murdered by his own brother, to prevent Lt Kelvin from slaying his niece who was recently turned into a vampire.

The Spine

The squad begins the scenario at the first key location, the murder scene. From there, clues lead them to investigate the PussyCat Club, a downtown bar and casino. The bar is owned by Peter Lankila, a vampire. Clues at the club prove the vampire innocent and direct the squad to investigate Lt Kelvin's brother. They track the brother from his home to the motel where he is hiding.

The End

Lt Kelvin's brother is in hiding, but has no ability to either save his daughter or combat the squad. He commits suicide, leaving them to decide what to do with the new vampire.

Part 2: World Concepts

The premise of *Night's Black Agents* is that there is a Vampire conspiracy existing in the same shadowy space as MI6, the CIA, and of organized crime. The game is highly customizable, allowing myriad different combinations of powers and agendas for its Vampires. This scenario is predicated on one of the most basic options available: lone, or nearly lone, predators existing at the periphery of society, akin to other solo hunters such as Dracula.

The world implied by *Night's Black Agents* is one of dense espionage, whose conspiracies form a complex web that the characters progressively untangle. This is too elaborate for a one-session game to express adequately. Options are outlined at the scenario's end for placing the main vampiric antagonist for this scenario in a larger context, but for the purposes of this scenario, the vampire is a singular threat.

The player characters are all ex-military with "special ops" experience. Essentially they were field operatives for Military Intelligence who went into business for themselves a few years ago. This team arrangement is a simple action stereotype, providing few temptations for the scenario to bog down in surveillance or considerations of delicacy. It also provides a group template that lessens temptations for characters to act at cross purposes because while this is a staple of espionage fiction, it is often counter-productive in a demonstration scenario. Their special ops experience provides them with the spy's usual tools and tricks.

While the scenario allows for a straightforward resolution, there are opportunities in each scene for them to use the typical spy skills.

GUMSHOE

The characters have seen plenty of death, but they have never become the completely cynical and hardened killers that would make them comfortable with death and mortality. This game uses the *Burn* settings.

Setting

In a one-shot game it is difficult to convey more than a sketchy outline of a city. There is more than ample opportunity to drop into place evocative detail, but there is little time for untangling intimate city politics or locations; especially those with only a tenuous connection to the story. You could consider the treatment of San Francisco in *The Maltese Falcon*. There have been few, if any complaints, that there are not lingering shots of San Francisco highlights because they are simply not necessary for the story to function. Conversely, the oppressive atmosphere and political

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arrangements of post-war Vienna are crucial to the plot of *The Third Man*, which necessitates expository scenes to explain the situation to both Holly Martin and the audience. *No Choice Pal* is a story that could exist in almost any major city because it is about individuals and hence effort spent on contextualizing it in a location is effort not spent on dramatizing the personalities that drive this scenario.

The scenario was written with the following key assumptions about the city:

- The city had a sizeable financial district.
- Gambling is a controlled activity, but not actually illegal.
- The city has a substantial night life, capable of sustaining multiple clubs.
- There are sleeper suburbs surrounding the city.

Most sizeable cities in the Western world meet these criteria.

If this scenario is being used as the basis for an ongoing story, as outlined in the final section, then you need to take more care over which city you choose, and include more background detail. The scenario probably requires more than a single session to complete this story in that case.

Vampires

While *Night's Black Agents* allows a myriad array of possible Vampire powers and limitations, this scenario uses the most familiar of those, derived from *Dracula*. The rules for these are set out on page 143ff of the core rulebook. The design intent is to allow characters to make use of the vampire's familiar partial invisibility, as outlined in "The Two-way Mirror" on page 131.

The scenario can work adequately with any Vampire who can turn mortals, but Vampires that differ significantly from the familiar model require additional exposition from the Director and thinking time from the players as they assimilate the new ground rules. As noted in the discussion of the setting, this is time and effort that could instead be spent on the story.

It may be best to prepare a written summary of the Vampire's key traits, especially if an unfamiliar Vampire mythology is used, in order to minimise the increase in time spent on exposition at the scenario start. (Refer to "Scenario Timing")

Part 3: Scenario Outline

This scenario is loosely based on the film *Get Carter*. It follows the outline of most revenge-based thrillers, such as *Point Blank*, where the characters arrive in town and stir up trouble amongst other miscreants until their specific goal is met.

The player characters arrive in town to meet up with their former commander, Lt Kelvin. They find that he has been murdered and interrupt some goons who're trying to dispose of the evidence. These goons need to be killed or chased off before the scene and body can be properly investigated. The goons work for Peter Lankila, a local casino owner and racketeer. The assumption may be that Lankila killed him, or ordered it to be done.

Investigation of Lankila determines that he is a vampire, and the characters have the option of developing and implementing a plan to destroy him. Their investigations also determine a close relationship between Lankila and Bart Kelvin, the Lieutenant's brother. Bart Kelvin is heavily in debt to the vampire.

This leads them to Lt Kelvin's family, and the same starting point that Kelvin discovered, that his niece, Amelia, has a more personal connection to Lankila. She is at best, his unwilling thrall. In the final encounter, they discover she has been turned.

When Kelvin started asking questions, he didn't like the answers. Bart went to Kelvin's motel with the intention of warning his brother off as he was more afraid of the Vampire than his brother's disapproval. When Kelvin told Bart that Amelia was likely turned and therefore must die, Bart murdered him. The characters must eventually decide whether to follow through, and execute the turned Amelia.

The Mystery-Investigation Complex

This story is a murder mystery: Who murdered Lt Kelvin? There are three main components to any murder investigation, and this is no different: Means, Motive and Opportunity. It is a murder mystery that includes a vampire as a suspect, and the tools available to the characters in their investigation include the tools of espionage.

This section outlines the clues necessary to solve the mystery and where they can be found. The next section outlines the clues' context, the ancillary information to be found in those locations, and the opportunities

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for investigation and tradecraft. The final section outlines some strategies for using the information provided to create a story.

Most of the clues and deductions discussed below are not strictly necessary for successful completion of the scenario. As well as clues as such, the natural progression of the investigation tends to lead toward the right general result, of the vampires being slain and Bart Kelvin confessing to the crime.

Crime Overview

Lt Kelvin asked his brother to join him at his motel very early one morning. Lt Kelvin had been investigating changes he'd observed in his niece and uncovered her close connection with Lankila resulting from Bart's indebtedness, and inability to quit gambling. Bart was suffering from a combination of fear and remorse, on the borderline of paranoia. Lt Kelvin informed Bart of Lankila vampiric nature and that Lankila has been feeding on Amelia, with the intention of turning her. Lt Kelvin tried to reassure his brother that he had experience in slaying such monsters, and Bart interpreted this as including Amelia. When Bart concluded his brother would kill her, he realized he couldn't live with the complete destruction of his only child. He asked Lt Kelvin to run over the evidence, and when Lt Kelvin was seated at the table with the evidence so far accumulated photos, Bart drew a .38 that he owned and shot his brother in the head.

Bart had not planned to commit murder. Immediately afterwards, he realized that the police would not have difficulty building a case against him he was still in severe debt to his brother and there was evidence of his presence at the crime scene. Cursorily searching the room turned up a satchel full of money (around \$50,000) that Kelvin had withdrawn from the team's float as seed money to use to gain entry to the casino. Lt Kelvin's plan did not involve spending the money, just using it as a prop.

Bart then phoned Lankila and told him where Lt Kelvin was staying, and that Lt Kelvin was a professional vampire hunter, and planned to kill Lankila. Unwilling to go there himself during the day, Lankila sent two of his trusted minions to kill Lt Kelvin. Bart knew that Lt Kelvin's squad would be arriving, and that the goons' presence would effectively frame them for Lt Kelvin's murder. The squad would slay Lankila and Bart would escape.

Bart then went home, to where Amelia was sleeping, he bound and gagged her before putting her in the boot of his car, planning to hole up in a motel in a nearby town while he used Lt Kelvin's money to arrange flight abroad.

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Timeline

- 2008 - The stock markets crash and Bart Kelvin's fortune begins eroding
- 2009 - Bart begins borrowing money from Lt Kelvin
- 2011 - Lt Kelvin cuts off financial support to Bart
- 2012 - Amelia Kelvin begins seeing Peter Lankila as a favour to her father
- T-25 days - Lt Kelvin arrives in town and begins asking questions
- T-14 days - Lt Kelvin begins surveillance of Lankila's club
- T-6 days - Lankila begins turning Amelia
- T-4 days - Bart asks for Lt Kelvin's help saving Amelia
- T-2 days - Lt Kelvin sends messages to his team
- T-2 hours - Bart Kelvin arrives at the motel in his car
- T-45 mins - Lt Kelvin tells Bart that Amelia has been turned, and Bart murders Lt Kelvin instead of allowing him to target Amelia
- T-30 mins - Lankila orders his goons to the Best Western Motel
- T-0 - The characters arrive at the agreed meet

Means

Lt Kelvin was killed by a single gunshot to his head from a .38. The weapon was purchased by Lucy Kelvin while she was married to Bart.

Clues

- The murder weapon is on the scene, in a goon's pocket.
- It is an unlikely weapon for a professional killer, and both goons also have 9mm weapons.
- Hand-guns may be registered, or they may not be, depending on which jurisdiction you choose for the game, but even if registered, it is non-trivial to trace gun ownership. The initial presumption is that the gun belonged to the goons.

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Motive

Lt Kelvin was killed in order to save the un-life of Amelia Kelvin. He was killed by his brother, Bart Kelvin.

Clues

- Kelvin's ledger shows Bart was in debt to Lt Kelvin.
- Amelia exhibits sufficient symptoms to suggest the possibility she has been turned.

Opportunity

The pre-dawn meeting between the brothers minimised the chances of anyone seeing Bart leave his house.

Clues

- The motel security cameras show a 2000 Mazda arriving and leaving. The camera is too poor quality to show the driver's identity or licence plates.
- There is no sign of a struggle in Lt Kelvin's rooms, indicating he knew his attacker.
- Bart has no alibi for the time of death.
- Bart telephoned Lankila immediately afterward (either of their phones can provide this clue, as can a digital intrusion of Bart's telephone company's website).

Red Herrings

Lankila

Lt Kelvin was murdered by Peter Lankila acting in pro-active self-defence.

- Lt Kelvin was too experience with Vampires to invite one into his dwelling, and Vampiric protections are still present.

Locations

Best Western Motel

Lt Kelvin was staying in a Best Western motel. This is a fairly generic motel complex, typically several separate buildings build loosely around a central area that contains the offices, a swimming pool, a games area, and a dining area. The blocks are all two storeys, containing 5 units per storey. All units are essentially the same - an open-plan bedroom-cum-kitchen with a small dining table, fridge and hot-plate. The units are built out of tilt-up reinforced concrete. The front wall is almost entirely glazed, and the roof is tiled.

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Lt Kelvin has been staying in the unit nearly a month, so the motel lacks the finishing touches of impersonal corporate comfort. He was not intentionally living light, but he had twenty years of living with only as much as could fit in a large duffel bag, so had few possessions. Kelvin had taken the following precautions:

- Lt Kelvin was wearing a crucifix.
- Wild rose petals are scattered below and garlic bulbs strung above each entrance.

Some evidence that had been collected is laid out on the unit's table. The evidence was intended to persuade Bart Kelvin that Amelia had become Lankila's creature, and that both should be killed. This comprises:

- Photographs of "The PussyCat Club".
- Amelia's High School yearbook that outlines her extensive academic and extra-curricular achievements.
- A university transcript from the last semester showing Amelia failing all subjects.
- A list of unsolved murders that Lt Kelvin attributes to the Vampire. All victims are single with no family in the city and all known to be under financial stress. Kelvin doesn't have detailed police files, but has seen them and summarized the facts:
 - David Patton, 19 year old stock manager at a local burger joint. Last seen renting a suit for a friend's bachelor party that was to include a stop at the PussyCat club. Found dead in his home 2 years ago.
 - Rose Brewton, 35 year old bank cashier. Found at home with slashed wrists 15 months ago. Suspected of petty theft and embezzling, to fund her gambling addiction. Her largest creditor: the PussyCat Club.
 - Martha Ham, 48 year old veterinary nurse, last seen at a restaurant near the club and intending to go there. Found in a dumpster 3 months ago.

There are obviously no photographs of Lankila, since Linea Dracula vampires are invisible to cameras. Of these victims, David Patton is known to Amelia, though she doesn't know Lankila killed him. Rose Brewton is known to Bart from his chapter of Gambler's Anonymous.

Additional information has been concealed in a removable air-vent. Finding the vent requires a Tradecraft spend or a Conceal test difficulty 4.

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- Kelvin's personal accounts ledger stretches back 5 years and can be interpreted with an Accounting spend. Until 2 years ago most of his share was being loaned to "BK". A second point of accounting spend or a point of bureaucracy can correlate the cessation of payments to "BK" with the decline in Amelia's grades.
- The ledgers show that he spent around \$10,000 recently on gear and had around \$50,000 in cash from the team's operating capital. The gear in the second motel is enough to account for the \$10,000; the rest is the money Bart took.

Kelvin has rented a second unit in the same block. He planned to snatch Amelia as she was delivered home this morning and keep her secured in the adjacent unit while her status was determined and medical assistance rendered if applicable. The second room has the same core safeguards as his main room. The next room is where he has stored all of his operational gear:

- A straight jacket.
- An architectural blueprint of "The PussyCat Club".
- Grappling gun and hook.
- Tiny semtex shaped charges suitable for forcing the locks on secure doors.
- A modern hunting crossbow.
- A string of holy water capsules.
- An IV drip setup, and 4 packets of O- blood (his own) in cold storage.

Running the Location

The characters' meeting was scheduled for a chilly dawn. By the time the characters arrive, the Vampire's goons are already on site. They have orders to find out what Lt Kelvin knew, to clean the crime scene of anything that could point back to Lankila or Bart Kelvin, and to dispose of the body.

The goons arrived in a late-model Audi, with a capacious boot, which will soon contain Lt Kelvin's body. They have parked directly outside the unit. They are inside, conducting a search for hidden materials. If left to their own devices to more than 15 minutes they find the ledger. The majority of Kelvin's equipment is in a nearby unit, about which they know nothing. Once they have found the ledger, they put all of Kelvin's materials into a briefcase they've brought and begin cleaning.

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The two goons use the "Bodyguard" stats on p69. Their names are Johnathan Fickes and Karle Hoose, both in their late 30s. Both have been working for Lankila since he set up the PussyCat Club in 2009. They have a long-term association with Lankila and so can't be bribed or threatened effectively, though they are not fanatics who are prepared to die for their boss. In a *Burn* game, fighting the goons requires a stability test for recognising that someone is trying to kill them, and another for killing the goons, refer to p83. This is one of only two combats in the scenario as written, so stability loss should not seriously affect the characters' ability to complete the scenario.

Next moves

Any sounds of conflict, such as gunfire or broken furniture, attracts the neighbours' attention, and hence the police. The response time for the police should be long enough for the characters to finish gathering the clues, but not long enough for them to sanitize the crime scene, say 10 or 15 minutes.

If the characters managed to avoid an armed conflict, they may decide to involve the police themselves, but can simply leave the crime scene as is knowing it will be undiscovered for several days.

The PussyCat Club

The PussyCat Club is a mid-range bar and nightclub that has a small casino on its second storey. The building was purpose-built as a nightclub in the 1980s, and is flanked by similar-height buildings. Across the road is a medium-rise car-parking building that Lt Kelvin was intending to use for a rooftop intrusion.

The lower two storeys comprise the club, the upper two storeys are offices that Lankila uses rather than leases. The top storey is a penthouse apartment, which Lankila uses to entertain. The basement is where Lankila sleeps during the day, and he has had an elevator installed that links only the penthouse and the basement while sealing up the other previously existing routes.

The club has external video cameras connected into the interior security office, but the interior is secured exclusively by human operatives. Lankila doesn't wish to raise unnecessary questions among his security staff about why he doesn't show up on the club surveillance cameras.

Lankila keeps two sets of accounts in the offices. One relates to the legitimate businesses of the bar and casinos, the other to his loan-shark

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operations. The second set of accounts shows that Bart Kelvin has been a sometime gambler at Lankila's casino since 2008, but a consistent and major borrower since 2010 when Lt Kelvin cut off financial assistance to his brother. Deeper analysis, such as Bureaucracy or Accounting spends, reveals that substantial credits have been made against Bart's debts that match Amelia's failed university courses and papers.

This latest trouble with the Kelvin family has caused Lankila to think Bart has outlived his usefulness. He plans to kill Bart as soon as Amelia is turned.

The penthouse and the basement both contain photographs of Amelia on display, taken before Lankila began to turn her. Over the past few months as Lankila decided to keep Amelia forever, he has been buying her new clothes and accessories, which are stored in the master bedroom of the penthouse apartment.

There is no sign whatever of the characters' team ledger or their operating capital.

Running the Location

Entry to the casino is not particularly difficult; any character prepared to flash a realistic official ID or front some cash to the staff can gain entry to the Casino during the day. Entering the penthouse is more difficult. The entries into the Penthouse from the elevator and stairs are protected by top-end secure doors including electronic alarm systems. During the day Lankila pays a mortal Bodyguard to guard the entrance to the Penthouse. Bear in mind that Linea Dracula Vampires lose their special advantages during the day, but are not actually prevented from going about during daylight.

Entry to the club at night is even easier since characters can walk in off the street, provided they meet the dress code. Lankila does not manage the day-to-day operations of either the club or casino, that is done by Laura Stephenson. He uses the bar as a hunting ground, looking for victims.

Amelia is obviously not present. It is unlikely that the group will note her absence at this stage in the scenario since there is little concrete information linking her to Lt Kelvin's death. Linea Dracula assigns (made Vampires, as opposed to born Vampires) show up on cameras, but they look tormented. They are thus less easy to categorically identify. If the characters review older security footage, they see that Amelia was usually in the club during operating hours. They, like Kelvin, can be reasonably

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sure from the tormented images on tape that she has been turned - but there will always be doubt on the basis of that evidence alone.

Security is provided by a cadre of humans. If the characters killed the two goons, then Lankila and his staff are on their guard but not aware of any specific threats. If the characters let the goons go, then Lankila has at least their descriptions.

Lankila believes there is a good chance they have snatched Amelia and are keeping her prisoner for some reason. He does not desire conflict with the characters, but he also wants Amelia returned to him. If they killed his henchmen, then he regards them more cautiously. He would like compensation from the characters for the inconvenience to him, but the business percentages make armed conflict with the characters unappealing - he can certainly not profit from it. He is prepared to offer them cash in return for Amelia and after that let bygones be bygones. The characters are likely to be less sanguine about his existence, but there is at least the opportunity of dialogue with Lankila.

Next Moves

Characters who have killed Lankila and searched his dwelling and offices have enough information to conclude that Lankila did not kill Lt Kelvin and did not order his death. At this point, they also know that Bart Kelvin still owed his brother a large sum of money, so at least had motive for the killing.

Bart Kelvin's House

The house is three-storeys and out in the suburbs. It is on a ½ acre lot, and the surrounding homes are similarly impressive. The house was a custom-build, so reflects modern architectural styles for the city. An architecture spend reveals that no significant maintenance has ever been done on the house. Bart does his best to project the appearance of an executive, but it is a very thin disguise indeed these days. The house is locked, but the home alarm and deadbolts are easily bypassed by professionals.

Bart left his house in a hurry. He took a minimum of clothes and supplies from the house, planning to buy whatever he needed en route out of the country. Any serious search of the house can find the following information:

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- One room in the house is set up as a home gym, and the equipment looks well used. There is an exercise diary showing a half-day exercise program. The program is demanding, and seems structured around toning and sculpting a young woman. This was the regime that Lankila required of Amelia in order to meet his physical requirements for her beauty.
- Bart's wardrobe is missing only the bare minimum of casual clothes for a few days away. Hidden in the wardrobe is a small gun safe, which is empty.
- Amelia's wardrobe is missing a larger selection of clothes, but Bart left behind all her exercise clothes and cosmetics.
- Amelia's room and en suite have no mirrors but there are patches on the walls where mirrors would naturally go.
- There are numerous final-demand notices for payment with dates matching those in Lt Kelvin's ledger.

Running the Location

The house is effectively abandoned. This location represents a good opportunity to either expand or contract the scenario running time. If time is short, the scene can be as simple as the characters arriving and being given the core clue and any additional information they want to obtain with spends or tests. Conversely, if the players have blitzed through the scenes at Lankila's lair, or evaded them entirely, this scene can be expanded by adding in other characters. Those who could be at the scene include:

- Policemen, looking for Amelia, listed as missing by Lankila.
- Loan-sharks other than Lankila, looking for Bart to repay loans.
- Agents sent by Lankila to find Bart and/or Amelia.
- Lankila himself looking for Amelia - remember that Linea Dracula vampires are averse to light, but not actually harmed by it.

On the Road

Bart went straight home and grabbed Amelia. She did not put up much resistance, having had most of her ability to act sapped by her time as Lankila's thrall.

Bart then headed out of town. He picked a random direction, only stopping at night-fall, when he stopped in the first motel that had a vacancy. He paid for a week in advance, and took Amelia out of the trunk of his car. He is ill-equipped to feed her and has no allies that can really help cure her. He is a man without a plan and without much hope.

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Finding Bart is not as difficult as you might think. He has a modern smartphone with a built-in GPS that can be remotely accessed. He is driving his own car, and while he pays for incidentals using the cash he lifted from the motel room, he is required to give his credit card number to the motel as security. An analysis of his financial record shows that the town to which he has fled is one he has never or seldom been to, compared to reasonably frequent trips to other nearby cities.

The motel is similar in structure and arrangement to the motel that began the scenario.

Running the Location

Bart is a desperate man, with no really relevant skills, few resources and not much time. He has holed up with his nearly vampiric daughter and is just about praying for a miracle. He has taken few real precautions, and has essentially no way of defending the room if the characters decide to resolve the situation violently. He is armed with a revolver, with which he has little skill. If the characters attempt to negotiate, he has no really clear idea about what he would want from them other than safe passage for Amelia. If confronted with the truth, he confesses. The scene likely ends with Bart's suicide, leaving the characters the moral decision of what to do with Amelia.

The Police

The time constraints of a 3-hour scenario mean that there may not be sufficient time for a significant police presence. The involvement of the authorities is a constant threat curbing the range of options considered by the characters.

The police are most likely to enter the scenario investigating the murder of Lt Kelvin. When they investigate his life after leaving the military the most plausible theory appears to be that he was killed as a result of his work as a mercenary. They initially interview the family only as a matter of procedure, but if left to their own devices would eventually solve the murder.

The character may try and use the police to find Amelia or Bart by listing them as missing persons. This approach flags Bart's credit card and his location when used to secure him and Amelia a motel room. Using the police in this way requires the creation of a suitable Network Contact, and is a quite efficient way of getting the characters to the final confrontation with Bart.

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Non-Player Characters

Lt Tyrone Kelvin

Murdered by Vampires. He was a major creditor of his brother's, loaning him interest-free money after virtually every one of the team's paydayes. Kelvin carefully tracked the amounts in a ledger of the amounts.

Bart Kelvin

Bart was a shares trader, a good one. He was a classic wheeler-dealer who loved the thrill of the market. When it crashed in 2008 he was left with a small fraction of his projected savings - not enough to maintain his lifestyle. Figuring that his negotiation skills would translate, he began gambling to make up the shortfall. He was successful at first, before he went all-in against Peter Lankila. Lankila waived the debt in exchange for a date with Bart's youngest daughter, Amelia. That still left Bart short on operating capital, so he doubled-down on his gambling strategy. 5 years later, Bart remains a gambling addict, and Amelia is all but the property of Lankila. Bart is barely aware now that the stakes he plays for are insufficient: his home is slowly decaying, and his wife left him years ago, though she was unable to break Lankila's hold on Amelia and take her away.

Gambler's Anonymous

Tracing members of any recovery support group is not easy, since they do not keep formal membership registers or attendance roles. A Human Terrain spend can uncover Bart's semi-regular chapter. Members are reluctant to discuss each other, because to do so betrays the trust necessary for the organization to function. Characters spending two points of a relevant interpersonal investigative ability to get all the information, a single spend gets them whichever piece of information they are interested in:

- Bart has attended meetings for around 2 years, but has confessed that his problem goes back to the crash.
- Bart talks about how his addiction cost him his wife *and daughter*, and at his most maudlin conveys the impression Amelia is dead.
- Other members of GA are unsure how Bart can sustain his addiction at the levels he reports without any obvious financial aid.
- A couple of the more desperate chapter members have disappeared over the past 6 months - the assumption is that they have given up or been arrested, but that seems out of character.

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Amelia Kelvin

The past 2 years has gradually taken a toll on Amelia. At high school she was a cheer leader, Homecoming Queen, and narrowly missed out on being Valedictorian. Now she is dull and listless, drained of life both figuratively and literally. She spends her days watching TV on an Exercycle, rarely leaving the house until evening when she goes to her master. If pressed, she can remember the sequence of events leading to her torpor, but in general conversation she is nearly catatonic.

University

Most universities offer some kind of student accommodation, but the circumstances of Amelia's life mean she does not have housing on campus. She is enrolled for classes, and hence has friends and tutors. They can discuss her decline in much the same terms as Adrian Moore can.

The characters may also create a contact inside the university administration who can provide hard data on Amelia's performance.

Social Media

As a popular and successful student, Amelia has hundreds friends on facebook, and at least a nominal presence on ancillary websites to her high school and university social clubs. Her general presence on these websites began to decline at the same time as she became involved with Lankila. There are no tagged photos of her at all for the last 3 months.

Lucy Lafrenière nee Kelvin nee Pepperell

Bart's ex-wife came from a wealthy family and so was used to a certain lifestyle from an early age. She enjoyed Bart's wealth and the access to high-class social events that wealth generated. When the financial crash began, she wasted no time in filing for divorce. She inveigled nearly half of his cash reserves before moving to the French Riviera in search of fresh game. In the divorce she exchanged any custodial rights to Amelia for a larger share of Bart's money. She married Oliver Lafrenière, wealthy criminal lawyer, in 2011.

Peter Lankila

Lankila is a young vampire. He is only a few years older than he appears - somewhere in his late 30s or early 40s. He does not have the vast network of personal supports and contacts that some of his fellow monsters can boast. That is part of his value to the conspiracy (see "Conspyramid" below), while helping to ensure he has the necessary freedom of action to run his deadly game (see "Conspyramid" below). He is still young enough to

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more-or-less try and live like a human being. He dresses in the latest fashion, and his clothes are all tailor-made.

Lankila desired Amelia when he first saw her, and with her father's problems, saw an easy way to get her. Bart has proved to be more expensive than Peter originally calculated, but when Amelia is turned, Bart will be disposable.

Adrian Moore

Adrian went to high school with Amelia, where he had a crush on her. He fell uncomfortably into the role of male confidant, while concealing his true feelings for her. He is in love with Amelia, perhaps a little dangerously so.

Amelia told him 2 years ago that her dad has asked her to have dinner with business colleague of his. Once Bart explained the financial complications for declining, she agreed though she wasn't happy about it. Afterwards, she claimed to have had an okay time but could not be drawn on details. Over the following 18 months she became increasingly withdrawn, breaking off all contact around 6 months ago. Rationalizing to himself that he was simply concerned for her wellbeing, Adrian began to check up on her by driving past her house and by visiting the club.

He has become aware of the effects of Amelia's slavery, but has no idea how or why she has become so lifeless. He is investigating in parallel to the player characters, which mostly involves what is essentially stalking. The characters become aware of his presence at the periphery of their activities if they take even moderate precautions to determine whether they or Lankila are being followed or observed.

Depending on their attitude and aptitude, he can be anything from an obstructive nuisance to a clear signpost toward the next step in a sensible investigation. In either case, he is a somewhat pathetic figure.

Groups who are labouring their investigations may not have time to encounter Adrian in more than a cursory way.

Laura Stephenson

The club manager began her career as a dancer before moving sideways into gambling. She was a croupier who was promoted to being a pit boss and then manager. She has always worked for the Lowell family (refer "Conspyramid", below), and her role at the PussyCat Club was part of their condition for investing in the enterprise. She is not aware of Lankila's true nature,

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only that the Lowell organization's top tiers seem disproportionately interested in him.

Part 4: Facilitation Notes

This is a procedural game that leads the characters to discover terrible secrets about a family. While there is a fight with a Vampire in the middle of the adventure, the game's emotional climax is the confrontation with Amelia and Bart Kelvin.

Scenario Timing

This scenario takes around 3 hours to complete. Use the following as guidelines for scene length:

System introduction, world concepts	10 minutes
Assign character sheets, introduce characters	15 minutes
Opening scenes of characters arriving in town	5 minutes
Kelvin's Motel Room - Fight with goons	15 minutes
- Investigate room	25 minutes
Bart Kelvin's House	15 minutes
The PussyCat Club - Case the joint	10 minutes
- Infiltration	15 minutes
- Slay Lankila	20 minutes
Interrogate Adrian	10 minutes
Final confrontation with Bart Kelvin	20 minutes

This leaves the characters a bit under half an hour for scheming and equipping.

Character Introduction

Reconstitute the following key ideas into an introductory narration for the scenario:

- After tours in Afghanistan, Lt Kelvin and his squad got honourable discharges and went into business for themselves in Central and South American Banana Republics.
- For the last decade they have mostly handled "Grey Ops" - security work and kidnap rescues.

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- One of their last jobs was to rescue a kidnapped girl, but they were too late and the girl had been killed.
- They tracked the kidnappers down and discovered their leader was a Vampire, who they successfully killed.
- After the revelation that Vampires are real they decided to take a vacation and figure out their next move.
- They have been living their lives and spending their money for nearly a month.

Two days ago, each received a message from Lt Kelvin, saying he was in trouble - the worst kind - and needed their help ASAP

The Investigation

This scenario is quite simple in structure. The characters are dropped into a short action scene with a large cache of information. There are two main locations they can go next, plus any ancillary locales that provide NPC support or equipment. It is likely they will make two visits to each, one to scout it out and one to engage in the action there. Once they have explored both locations, they have enough information to travel to the final location, where they confront Bart and Amelia, and arbitrate their fates. Unless characters go to both the Kelvin house and the Vampire's lair, they won't have all of the information they need to fully understand how events have unfolded, but they should have sufficient motivation to chase Bart, and the plot can be delivered in a villainous monologue.

The scenario begins with the characters unaware of the Kelvin family's troubles. They are aware that their platoon leader has been killed, and they are given a pretty substantial lead to follow - the goons sent by Lankila. It is relatively easy for the characters to track the goons back to their Vampiric boss, and once he is eliminated they may regard their task as complete. Their initial motivation is revenge for the death of their leader, but this can become submerged in their broader mission of eliminating the undead.

The opposite can happen too. Once the characters have driven off or killed the Vampire's henchmen, they have access to a lot of information that implicates Bart Kelvin directly. Some groups may decide that they needn't do anything about the Vampire. Completely removing the Vampire from the scenario will mean that the game becomes quite short. If the characters do nothing to approach Lankila, then it is necessary for him to approach them. From the opening scene he will know of their involvement, and he will suspect that they are involved in taking Amelia from him. He reasons that

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they are a far more credible force for kidnapping her than the broken and ineffectual Bart. In that case, he has every motivation to try and eliminate the characters in order to recover his property from them.

To an extent, both of these incomplete approaches arise from players not becoming fully engaged in the scenario, and the role of the director is to motivate the characters to engage in the other half of the scenario.

Part 5: Variations on a Theme

Pre-generated Player Characters

The player characters are all ex-military. They have operated primarily as military assets, but have accumulated useful skills in the pursuit of their specialty contracting services. The characters each fulfil a classic action archetype.

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Justine Cantrell

Team Role: Bang-and-burn

Key concepts: Soldier of Fortune, No Limits Player, Agent Provocateur.

Age: 37

Justine was an okay student. She played for the school football team as a wing. She was frequently in trouble both at school and with her coach for her overly adult lifestyle - smoking, drinking and attending parties until late. More than a few people were surprised that she finished high school with ordinary grades - neither good, nor bad. For the next year she hitch-hiked her way across the continent, working odd jobs when she could and stealing when she couldn't.

She surprised everyone again by signing up for the Army on her 20th birthday. She got assigned to the engineering corps, where she learned the essentials of basic building and demolition.

She managed to avoid too many disciplinary actions, but she was not considered a good prospect for promotion. After 5 years, she was transferred to Lt Kelvin's "mobile response" team, where she served for 2 years before the unit was honourably discharged.

Drive: Thrill-Seeker. Justine signed up in search of adventure, and was a major proponent going into business after demobilization. The squad's grey ops were rarely sufficiently exciting for her.

Trust: Kelsey 3, Alexis 1

Stability 8, Health 10

Architecture 1, Bullshit Detector 1, Cop Talk 1, Criminology 1, Cryptography 1, Electronic Surveillance 1, Flattery 1, Interrogation 1, Law 1, Military Science 2, Negotiation 1, Notice 3, Occult Studies 1, Outdoor Survival 1, Streetwise 1, Tradecraft 2, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 1, Vampirology 1

Athletics 5, Conceal 6, Cover 10, Driving 3, Explosive Devices 8, Filch 3, **Gambling 8**, Hand-to-hand 5, Infiltration 3, Network 15, Preparedness 5, Sense Trouble 5, Shooting 6, Weapons 3

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Roberta Xavier

Team Role: Face

Key concepts: Chameleonic, Charismatic, Chaotic.

Age: 34

Roberta was born to rich parents and went to the best schools. She was a talented actress at school and went to college aiming to major in Literature and Theatre. Unfortunately her parents had made their money through less than legal means, and when their taxes were audited they were bankrupted. Roberta found herself with no practical skills, no cash for living expenses, and an unexpected student loan. She was forced to drop out and join the army.

To her surprise, Roberta fitted right in. She found herself able to adapt to the lifestyle and language of her fellow grunts. Her facility with languages and great work ethic saw her promoted to corporal with astonishing quickness. She was transferred to Logistics, where Lt Kelvin scooped her up for his "mobile response" team.

Drive: Comradeship. Roberta is fiercely loyal to her team.

Trust: Justine 3, Kelsey 1

Stability 8, Health 8

Archaeology 1, Art History 1, Bullshit Detector 1, Bureaucracy 1, Cop Talk 1, Criminology 1, Flattery 1, Flirting 1, Forgery 1, High Society 1, Human Terrain 1, Interrogation 1, Intimidation 1, Languages 2, Military Science 1, Negotiation 1, Notice 1, Outdoor Survival 1, Reassurance 1, Research 1, Streetwise 1

Athletics 2, Conceal 5, Cover 10, Digital Intrusion 5, **Disguise 8**, Filch 4, Hand-to-hand 1, Infiltration 5, Medic 5, Network 15, Sense Trouble 8, Shooting 3, Shrink 8, Surveillance 8

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Alexis Cooper

Team Role: Fixer

Key concepts: Planner, Well Connected, Versatile.

Age: 40

From a young age, Alexis was motivated by the spirit of capitalist enterprise. Alexis' first enterprise was a Lemonade stand during the summer, and the money from that was invested in trading cards. That was a lucrative trade, allowing in turn the purchase of his older cousin's services in acquiring adult magazines and alcohol. By the time high-school was over, Alexis had a tidy sum of money in the bank, some bruises from transactions gone badly, and no idea what the next big thing would be.

Alexis looked at the options for a budding entrepreneur, and decided the most efficient route to wealth was to get the army to pay for a real education. The army's bureaucratic system proved to be the perfect venue for a wheeler-dealer, and Alexis was quickly in the thick of deals and arrangements. Alexis barely noticed the years go by, before being recruited by Lt Kelvin for his mobile response unit.

Drive: Restoration. Alexis was at a loose end during the team's hiatus. If profit and connections can be made here, the team could get back into the game, this time with a purpose.

Trust: Kelsey 1, Roberta 3

Stability 10, Health 8

Accounting 1, Architecture 1, Art History 1, Astronomy 1, Bureaucracy 1, Chemistry 1, Cryptography 1, Data Recovery 1, Electronic Surveillance 1, Forensic Pathology 1, Forgery 1, High Society 1, History 1, Human Terrain 1, Languages 1, Law 1, Negotiation 1, Notice 1, Occult Studies 1, Pharmacy 1, Tradecraft 1, Traffic Analysis 1

Athletics 3, Cover 10, Digital Intrusion 8, Driving 8, Filch 8, Gambling 4, Mechanics 8, Medic 4, Network 15, **Preparedness 8**, Shooting 3, Surveillance 6

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Kelsey Richardson

Team Role: Muscle

Key Concepts: Tough, Subtle, Humorous

Age: 33

Kelsey was a poor student from a poor neighbourhood, whose main recreation was the struggle for territory and survival. Kelsey fit right in, a perfect "product of the system". This upbringing was not without some benefits, as Kelsey both developed a prophylactic toughness, and an ironic disposition that could cut as well as deflect. While not preferring fists to words, fighting was just a part of the necessary survival package.

When Kelsey contemplated the available career options, nothing was appealing. The gangs were always hiring, but job not to say life security was not available. With the right mix of skill and ruthless ambition, it is entirely possible to rule a little domain, but only by sleeping with one eye open for both the cops and rivals. The service industry was almost as rapacious - a lifetime of cleaning hotels or standing at a check out. Instead, Kelsey went West and joined the army. Extreme bravery under fire offset the difficulties with authority, but it was clear that Kelsey and the army would never see eye-to-eye. It was pure chance that as the resignation was processed, Lt Kelvin was looking for a sharp-eyed recruit for a trip to South America to do the things Kelsey was good at.

Drive: Nowhere Else To Go. While the career of a mercenary has created a comfortable slush fund, it hasn't provided Kelsey with any marketable skills for a civilian profession.

Trust: Alexis 3, Justine 1

Stability 8, Health 10

Architecture 1, Bullshit Detector 1, Cryptography 1, Diagnosis 1, Flirting 1, Human Terrain 1, Interrogation 1, Intimidation 1, Languages 1, Military Science 2, Negotiation 1, Notice 3, Outdoor Survival 1, Photography 1, Reassurance 1, Streetwise 1, Tradecraft 1, Traffic Analysis 1, Urban Survival 1,

Athletics 8, Cover 10, Driving 5, Hand-to-hand 8, Infiltration 5, Medic 5, Network 15, **Sense Trouble 8**, Shooting 8, Surveillance 5, Weapons 8

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Player-created Characters

The scenario can be adapted for any kind of intelligence-affiliated team. The scenario can function almost exactly as written with any group of characters who share an NPC whose death would motivate them to action.

It is possible to cut out Lt Kelvin entirely by making Bart and Amelia the relatives of one or more player characters. Obviously in this arrangement, the adventure begins with them discovering the anomalies in Amelia's behaviour over recent past, and it is difficult to fit that additional investigation into a single-session format.

Conspyramid

Action in a longer *Night's Black Agents* game is driven by the characters' interactions with the Conspyramid. This outlines the conspiracy of which Peter Lankila is just a part. In the morally-bankrupt world of "No Choice Pal" there are no noble ideals or worthwhile nation-states to infiltrate. The game inserts the characters between two larger conspiracies, and Peter Lankila represents the connecting point.

The Lowell Family

The Lowell Family is the leading local criminal power, the last major criminal enterprise that remains free from Vampiric Control. They have a legitimate front as local corporate magnates (choose an industry based on your city), but their legitimate activities exist as a cover for drugs and human trafficking. They have been the criminal leaders for the past 25 years, after a protracted and bloody conflict with the Vampire conspiracy's puppets, which is ongoing to this day.

The Lowells have survived their struggle with the Vampires through absolute discipline. They demand, and receive, total loyalty from their criminal serfs and ruthlessly suppress any insurrection. They believe that the only security is blood, and so all their captains are married to Lowell descendants, with Lowell children. Therefore infiltrating their ranks is extremely difficult.

This is where Peter Lankila enters. He has been groomed by his branch of the Linea Dracula clan to infiltrate their leadership in order to deal the killing blow to the organization. He has made quick progress through their ranks, but despite his access to the leadership he has not made his attack. Lankila, like most Vampires, is dominated and controlled by his progenitors, yet longs for freedom - a freedom the Lowells might provide. He made a deal with the Lowells that appeared to be meeting the Vampiric

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Cabal's needs. The PussyCat Club, which is an excellent money-laundering venue. They installed a manager they trusted to keep an eye on him, and report back to the family.

The Kelvins' family troubles have likely resulted in Lankila's death. The Lowells will initially perceive this as a setback in their struggle against the Vampires, and can always represent it that way to the squad regardless of the truth. Once Lankila cannot personally oversee the club and its activities, the full extent of the secret backing of the Linea Dracula Clan becomes apparent to the Lowells. The player characters represent a potential asset to the Lowells, who want to use their expertise to strike back at their opponents and who perceive the characters as owing them their lives, since they have interfered with the Lowell money laundering operation to some extent.

The Lowells are not likely to find the characters especially tractable, but once a major criminal organization decides that you owe them, it means either paying up or going to war. In effect, this treats the characters as a "Yojimbo" asset in their Vampyrism response to the Linea Dracula Clan, and the characters themselves are similar to "Double Agents" within the Lowell power structure. The Lowell family wishes to use the characters to make a "Hard Feint" against the Vampires, probably aiming for Zoe Sidorova, whose loss would de-couple the vampire leadership from their horde of mortal instruments.

Once the characters are at least superficially integrated into the Lowell organization, the Lowells begin to try and use them as criminal muscle as well as assassins of the supernatural. The characters need to figure out how to take the Lowell family apart from the inside without gifting their territory and power to the Linea Dracula.

Tier 4 [family head] - Philippa Lowell

Tier 3 [direct descendants of Philippa] - Carla Lowell [corporate head], Avery Lowell [drugs], Craig Lowell [human traffic]

Tier 2 [captains] - Andre Lowell [corporate], Peter Lankila [de facto, laundering], Jason Lowell [supply routes], Craig Lowell Jr [procurement]

Linea Dracula Clan

The Linea Dracula have always been few in numbers. A small number of them have ruled the city's underworld since the city was in its infancy. The organization's top tier have been taken a little by surprise by the

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rapidity of the city's growth over the 20th century, creating a shortage in hands-on management capability. This has reached a critical juncture in the last 25 years, allowing a major independent rival organization to emerge on the scene.

Lankila's death as a result of the Kelvin family troubles is a setback for the vampires. They have no quick replacement for Peter Lankila in their overall structure, so must face creating Vampire Assigns instead of true Linea Dracula blood. Recruiting from outside this branch of the Linea Dracula would betray their weakness.

This has put the characters on the Vampires' radar. The characters are a wild card - they are not law enforcement and they are not criminals. The Vampires need to gather information about the characters before exacting their revenge, so their first move is to "Shadow Agent".

Tier 6 [prince of the city] - Chaborz Desheriyev

Tier 5 [founding elders] - Polla Aslakhanov, Timur Ibragimov

Tier 4 [family heads] - Darija Ivanović, Aija Lankila

Tier 3 [deputies] - Stepan Karpela, Mieczysława Ostrowska,

Tier 2 [young bloods] - Peter Lankila, Teresa Tikhonova [mortal], Zoe Sidorova

Tier 1 [mortals] - Gulnaz Yefremova, Allen Mills, Michael Montgomery, Samantha Vuik