

the COMPANY DOGS

A Werewolf: the Apocalypse supplement by Steven Markley



Pentex hasn't been idle in the wake of the Rite of Adaptation. The megacorporation has capitalized on the Debased phenomena right under the noses of enemy Garou and its dubitable allies, the Black Spiral Dancers. Another head of the Hydra rises in the form of the Company Dogs, a "tribe" of Debased loyal to Pentex alone and not hobbled by the mad spiritualism of the Wyrms. Will the Company Dogs replace the less reliable Spirals and even fomori as Pentex's favored servants? The aftermath of this blasphemy is yet to be seen, but already conflict and subversion riddle the Wyrms' ranks, and things look interesting indeed...

Warning to Players!

While I can't stop you from memorizing every conspiracy and stat block here, you might instead enjoy gradually uncovering what follows through your character. Putting together a bigger picture from hacked emails and sketchy spy reports might be more evocative than reading dry facts, while strange new foes of unknown capabilities may invoke more suspense than a set of familiar game mechanics.

That said, do as you will.

Profane Genesis

AniMeds, incorporated in 1991, was a small veterinary medicine company based out of Chicago that specialized in treating dogs and cats, with an emphasis on antibiotics, anesthetics, and psychopharmaceuticals. They pioneered several advances in the field of animal medicine, including fast-acting sedatives and the first medicines specifically used to treat aggression and behavioral problems in pets. In 1994, the company bought out a struggling surgical instrument and prosthetics company, using its resources and contacts to market bone clamps, steel ball and socket joints for arthritis (a common problem for several dog breeds), catheters and the like to the clinics that bought its medicines. AniMeds was a giant in its field and did well, especially on the East Coast, but profits slumped in the mid-90s as the market became more crowded and AniMeds overextended itself by buying controlling interest in several veterinary clinics and breeder farms. Still, it survived while less diverse companies didn't. AniMeds' future looked promising, and the company had a '97 product line planned for exotic birds and rodents.

Then disaster struck. Since its inception, AniMeds had sponsored kennels, animal shelters and breeders, giving them discounted or donated medicines. This helped cut costs these for small companies, and these savings were passed on to consumers. This wasn't only altruism or a tax write-off: in exchange for these unapproved, low-risk drugs and medical devices, AniMeds clandestinely received regular reports on these products and the animals on which they were used. In effect, the company benefited from the use of thousands of free test subjects. Few questioned the vet clinics that nursed the family pet back to health cheaply... at least, until hundreds of dogs suffered often fatal heart complications in '95 and '96. These were traced back to a steroid used in eight Illinois veterinary clinics to treat infections, a prednisone derivative that had never received FDA approval. AniMeds was implicated in short order, and horrified lawyers and complainants realized the scale of unauthorized animal testing in which the company had engaged. Outraged pet owners filed a class action suit against AniMeds and the veterinarians that gave untested medicine to their pets. Several clinics went under, and AniMeds filed for bankruptcy in 1998 after settling out of court for eight million dollars – perhaps a paltry amount in the world of class actions, but it was more than the struggling company could afford, and especially since few reputable businesses would deal with them now.

Then Aesop Research Company, a subsidiary of Magadon Pharmaceuticals, stepped in and bought out AniMeds in 1998, paying its debts, assimilating its assets and science staff, and even paying the company's owners' legal fees. Nothing more was heard from AniMeds in the public sector.

An Unwholesome Merger

The scientists and business majors that founded AniMeds did so for a variety of reasons. Dr. Julia Melton and Dr. Brian Eames, both doctors in veterinary science, did so out of a genuine desire to help animals. Investor Huang Nygen, pharmacologist Dr. Jason Brill and animal nutritionist Marie Jones were motivated

primarily by the financial opportunity offered by a largely unexplored market. They all were reasonably ethical people and started AniMeds with the best of intentions. However, the temptation to circumvent legal methods of drug and medical device testing was too much. Setting up a laboratory and maintaining animals would be expensive, and companies that engaged in animal testing were under increasing legal scrutiny and restrictions, and often targeted by animal rights activists who engage in public smear campaigns and worse. Circumventing protocol in order to get needed medicines on the market faster and more cheaply seemed like a logical decision. As so often happens, one ethical lapse led to another, and then another, and by the time Magadon got around to acquiring AniMeds all but one of its founders were amoral enough to go along with anything it suggested. Julia Melton hemmed and hawed over the new mission statement, but a convenient car accident prevented her from raising much fuss or blowing whistles. It hurt to lose her expertise, but Karl Chevlovich took her place; while not as talented as Melton, Chevlovich was more of a team player.

The New Mission Statement

The scientists of AniMeds, now reorganized as Project Proteus, would study these fascinating canine mutations Magadon had at its one of its facilities. A few brain-altering chemical treatments rendered Project Proteus members able to observe and work with these animals without succumbing to panic and madness. They were given an obscene budget, their own research team, veterinary staff and security, and a daunting mission: take these creatures and find some way to make them useful.

As you might guess, the "fascinating canine mutations" were Debased. A First Team managed to capture four ferals lurking around an O'Tolley's factory farm in rural Michigan several years ago, which led to Pentex's discovery of Debased. They were kept in Detroit's Project Iliad holding cells, since Pentex didn't really know what else to do with them. More mongrels were rounded up here and there and brought in. The problem was keeping the blasted things contained. The mutts were kept in comfortable cells and well-fed, but there were frequent escape attempts and attacks on staff, and many Stepped Sideways and fled. At Detroit's Iliad facilities there were between three and five mongrels at any given time, who had to be replaced frequently. Pentex knew they had to find some way to contain a stable population of these Garou offshoots if they were going to make use of them. The AniMeds scientists and staff were assigned to Project Proteus, a Special Projects Division subsidiary founded to study the captured mongrels.

Making a Better Debased

In order to fulfill their objectives, Project Proteus had to overcome or circumvent several problems.

Containment: The first thing Project Proteus did was develop a powerful sedative that could affect the incredible metabolisms of the Debased and could be administered routinely –



otherwise, there was no hope of keeping test subjects around. After a few trials (which killed two Debased and sent a third into a permanent coma), Dr. Brill and his team found the optimum formula and dosage. The result, added to their food, created listless and malleable Debased who no longer had the motivation to flee, resist being poked and prodded, or do anything but stare listlessly and sleep. Another compound called Anafaze was developed a year later (with help from a spirit-savvy Project Iliad Bane specialist) that suppressed the spiritual qualities of the Debased, making it impossible for them to enter the Umbra.

Breeding: While sedating dog-blooded was an ideal solution at first, the Project Proteus scientists wanted to create a breeding population of research subjects, and being dosed to the gills on tranquilizers did much to stymie the mutts' libidos. Once Project Proteus obtained seven mutts, they weened them off the sedatives (while keeping them on Anafaze) and began a breeding program headed by Dr. Eames. The metis produced through mating test subjects were disappointing (and disposed of), but the researchers discovered Debased could create more of their kind with normal dogs – though unreliably and with a great deal of pup and mother mortality. Project Proteus researched ways to increase their subjects' fertility and chances of the mothers surviving birth. Though the rate of successful Debased conception never increased significantly (remaining at about one in eight), the project slightly improved the chance for bitches to survive birth.

Debasements: Another problem were debasements. In the early days of the program, Eames found that a few specimens at random were born without debasements or with only minor ones. These Debased were taken and bred with one another, while mutts more severe deficiencies weren't permitted to breed. After several generations of selective breeding (and inbreeding), the scientists managed to establish two Debased bloodlines (or “pedigrees”) that consistently produce young with no overt malformities. One out of three mutts from these pedigrees lines is born with a debasement, but is usually put to sleep immediately.

The reproductive technologists also discovered they could breed mongrels with specific traits by choosing certain dog species with the desired qualities as incubators. The two pedigrees were diversified and coupled with specialized canine stock, eventually creating the Hulks and Skulks in use today.

Medication: All Company Dogs receive regular injections of Anafaze, which cuts them off from the Umbra and has the additional benefit of protecting them from spirit attacks. A cocktail of growth hormones and steroids (OptiPhys v4) has been developed for Company Dogs which increases muscle mass and improves coordination; it also triggers the First Change after it's injected. It has undesirable side effects, however, including increased aggression and reduced fertility. OptiPhys is used exclusively for “field dogs” – those actively employed by Pentex – while breeders are given the standard fertility and nutrition regimens.

Indoctrination: Project Proteus had successfully founded their own Debased population, and (in their estimation) improved on them. The only question was what to do with them. Special Divisions Projects head Harold Zettler had that covered. He assigned Huang Nygen and Marie Jones to the effort to train and educate their Debased, making them into functioning assets for Pentex. Jones graduated college with a business degree, but had minored in child education and psychology; this skills set made her well-suited to molding the minds of young Debased. Meanwhile, Huang outlined the specifics of what the dog-blooded would be taught, with oversight and input from the very highest levels of Pentex. A specialized curriculum was developed for the Company Dogs. In early 2003, the Company Dogs as they exist today were born.

Project Proteus scientists confirmed their suspicions that their test subjects were viable with humans when their Debased successfully impregnated two homeless women abducted for this purpose. The children, now 5 and 6, seem normal – at least, as normal as one can expect from socially isolated kids raised in an institution and constantly subjected to injections, blood tests and random surgical procedures. The children are kept around for observation and tests, but they're proving inconvenient and may be disposed of soon, especially since two researchers have grown attached to them and have even given them names.

Even if they breed true in early adulthood (assuming they're allowed to live that long), Dr. Eames realizes that human-born Debased simply aren't worth the time and money one would have to invest in them, and so is no longer interested in investigating that possibility. Meanwhile, a bitch with the proper diet and hormone injections is able to breed in less than a year and will give birth to the next generation of mutts in three months. In the six years since the oldest child was born, Project Proteus' facility have produced more than a hundred and forty canis field dogs.

Pentex Politics

Francesco still heads Project Iliad, but the Black Spiral Dancer has been kept out of the Project Proteus (PP) loop since its inception, despite his active interest in the project. This is due to the active efforts of the highest-level Pentex execs, including CEO Peter Culliford, Benjamin Rushing (Project Coordination Division), Harold Zettler, Chase Lamont (Information Collection Systems) and James Graystone (Magadon CEO). With Francesco over IL and a growing number of Spirals spreading throughout Pentex, these executives and others felt it wise to limit the Spirals' influence over the megacorp and retain an ace in the hole in case the tribe ever turns on them. It's their desire that PP re-mains entirely free from Spiral influence.

Zettler has placed several moles throughout SPD subdivisions, competent people completely loyal to him. Several are ghouls, bound to the vampire by his blood. Zettler uses them to monitor the activities of those subdivisions, and to subtly influence things when he feels it necessary. PP has been increasingly isolated from the rest of the SPD and other Pentex tentacles, and it's damned near impossible for communications to get in and out except through Zettler's people. When necessary, the old leech taps his people in IL to funnel information and resources to PP.

Francesco isn't stupid. While he hasn't been able to penetrate PP's bureaucratic wall or identify the subversives he knows are in his own subdivision, he's well aware that there's an effort to keep him away from PP and their Debased. He also knows that Company Dog packs have begun to replace Spirals and fomori in several key areas and operations. This frustrates him, but he isn't able to find out anything through official channels – his questions

are stonewalled and his attempts at infiltration stymied, thanks in great part to Lamont's subtle efforts. Francesco has suspicions who's in on the conspiracy (with Zettler drawing most of his ire), but he's yet to try and force the issue. Instead, he's decided to be sneaky too. First, Franklin Rubin of the Finances subdivision has been crowing over Proteus' excessive price tag, and the Spiral publicly backs him in a obvious case of corporate sour grapes. And what Francesco has learned from Scraggs sent to spy on PP's Trenton facility hasn't made him happy at all, namely the soulless propaganda PP's trainers foists upon its dog-blooded.

Those who have blocked Francesco's participation in PP may have made a serious error. The lupus had always been loyal to Pentex, and could have contributed substantially to the Debased project. But their mistrust of Francesco and clumsy politics might force him to choose tribal interests over Pentex's. Plus, Francesco has powerful friends. He has informed his personal hive of his findings, is consolidating his own resources in the SPD, and is reinforcing ties to members of the Consultant camp and other Pentex-loyal Spirals. He has no specific plans right now, but if he's forced to act Francesco can call in a lot of markers within Pentex.

Francesco didn't approach the Spiral community at large with the Company Dog issue, fearing loss of status for working with the very megacorp apparently betraying the tribe. However, he was recently dismayed to discover the tribe at large has somehow found about the Company Dogs on their own, and have already begun to cast suspicious glances in his direction. However, Francesco still has a trump card to play...

The Company Dogs Today

From the very glimmerings of self-awareness, Pentex's Debased are indoctrinated into a prepackaged worldview designed to create the perfect soldier. The virtues of loyalty and service are drilled into the Company Dogs. Their entire lives revolve around Project Proteus and serving their masters – nothing else is important; there *is* nothing else. The needs and desires of all Company Dogs are catered to, and they receive affection, praise and privileges for loyal and competent service. Further, field dogs are given serial numbers and code names, trained extensively in combat and other skill sets useful for the roles they're to serve. Intense friendships form between Company Dogs, which is encouraged by their trainers. However, not towing the company line results in punishment, reduced freedom, and – most damning – peer scorn. There are few failed students.

A defining element of Company Dog education is the lack of it – which is to say, the information they're fed is tightly controlled. Foremost is the effort to keep them from knowledge of spirits, the Umbra, the beliefs of the Black Spiral Dancers, and even the existence of the Wyrms. Dogs that see a lot of field work or that come into contact with Garou (Spirals or otherwise) are debriefed and, if necessary, reeducated. When forbidden knowledge irredeemably corrupts a mongrel, he's quietly terminated, but this is rarely necessary. There's a good reason for this thought control, at least from the Pentex perspective. On the whole, Spirals are rabidly loyal to the Wyrms and its many facets. They work with Pentex because the goals of the tribe and that of the megacorp often coincide – often, but not always. The Wyrms-Garou sometimes refuse to help Pentex or even work against them, and such events are becoming more frequent. Pentex considers Black Spiral Dancers to be powerful but unreliable tools, and blames the tribe's spiri-

tual beliefs and madness. By removing those from the shapeshifter equation, Project Proteus and Pentex believed they could engineer soldiers completely loyal to them.

And looking at the results of their efforts, it looks like they've done just that.

What Company Dogs Do

At a King Breweries distribution plant, a pack of large dogs patrols the grounds, and there hasn't been a break-in since they arrived. A beefy-looking bodyguard flanks Chase Lamont, the brute's glare alone keeping people at bay. Two mysterious First Teams have proven their lethal effectiveness against Garou packs, while new individuals have replaced fomori and Spiral members of other teams. All over Pentex, a new breed of soldier is seeding the ranks, unquestioningly loyal and very effective.

All Company Dogs are the property of Project Proteus, and are ultimately loyal to that subdivision – or more accurately, the people that train and take care of them. However, since 2003 Dogs have been farmed out to ranking Pentex executives, subdivisions or subsidiaries, either singly or by the pack. The Company Dogs have yet to become widely used: there aren't that many of them yet, they carry big price tags if one hasn't the pull to simply requisition them, and they're a recent innovation that's yet to really catch on in the megacorp. However, Company Dogs are steadily becoming more popular as word spreads within Pentex, and if current trends continue their use will soon become commonplace. In some areas they're already edging out fomori and Spirals as favored bodyguards, security teams and First Team operatives.

Project Proteus maintains two primary divisions of dog-

blooded: breeders and field dogs. The former are the most important to Proteus, as breeders are where all their mutts come from. Most breeders are studs for the huge number of female dogs bred for that purpose, but some are female Debased. Breeders are well cared-for, and given medical care along with their fertility regimens, but receive no education or training beyond a basic grasp of English. They're never allowed to leave their facilities, but are too docile and pampered to want to anyway.

Field dogs are divided into sentinels and guardians, depending on the degree of interaction they're to have with people. Sentinels are basically super-powered guard dogs, and used to patrol or guard important areas, or are sent to track and eliminate threats. Sentinels are trained extensively in brawling and weapons use, and are taught to speak and understand English; some literacy and vocational education allows them to perform basic tasks like read signs and operate simple devices. They don't communicate much except with their trainers and those they've been assigned to protect; not much time is spent teaching them social niceties or academics. Guardians are educated more extensively and broadly, and "graduate" fully literate and trained in the use of technology, including cell phones, security/surveillance systems, and firearms. They're more culturally adroit than their sentinel counterparts; while few guardians could be described as sophisticated or charming, they've a good grasp of human culture. They blend in easily among humans and can respond appropriately to many social situations. These mutts are typically used as bodyguards, security or personal assistants, and so remain in Homid form most of the time. Guardians are expensive to produce, as more time and training is invested in them, and typically aren't used where sentinels would suffice.

Finally, elites are field dogs that show special potential. They're put through additional combat training, and taught how to use silver weapons, heavy ordinance, gas grenades and other specialized equipment. Most elites are destined for First Teams, either rounding out existing groups (though they're never paired with Black Spiral Dancers) or as members of all-Dog teams. Some elites serve as assassins or bodyguards for important personnel.

Why are Company Dogs slowly supplanting the "classic" Pentex standbys?

Fomori are difficult to produce and their capabilities are unpredictable. While Project Iliad researchers have monster-making down to a science, none of them know exactly what will happen when they create a fomori. Five attempts to merge a certain Bane with a person may create five radically different fomori, with only one or two of them being functional and sane enough to be of use. Debased are much easier to produce. While only one in eight bitches produces a pup that breeds true, Proteus can cheaply produce an inexhaustible number of canine incubators, which are a lot easier to come by than human hosts for Banes. The capabilities of dog-blooded are predictable, with project scientists able to select for desired traits roughly two thirds of the time. Company Dogs are also more powerful than most fomori, with great strength, regeneration, shapeshifting and deadly natural weapons part of the base package. Iliad may lose funding as it becomes clear that Project Proteus' mutts are more efficient and reliable (which would further gall Francesco).

Despite the fact Black Spiral Dancers are more powerful than Company Dogs, with access to Gifts, the Umbra and totem

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Sender: Henry Sweet <hsweet@ArtusUMC.com>
To: Huang Nygen <hnygen@MagNetMail/PP.net>
CC:
Timestamp: 16:27 04/07/02
Subject: RE:RE:Disposal Problem
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> >> I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but you guys are going
> >> to have to find an alternate means of disposing of all these
> >> dogs. We can't do it. Our NJ branch has the means to dispose
> >> of chemicals and HUMAN medical waste. The major problem is
> >> bulk. You guys are producing a half-ton of dead dogs every
> >> month lately. (I've learned not to even ask about stuff like
> >> that.) But there simply isn't a place to dump all that without
> >> attracting attention, and our facility isn't equipped for
> >> that sort of disposal anyway.
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> >> I'm happy to help you find an alternative solution though.
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>
> I fail to see the problem. Simply dig a hole, dump the dogs
> in, and cover it with a layer of dirt. Decomposition should
> take care of the rest. Your job is to take care of problems
> like this. Do so.
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> Thank you.
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> -- Huang Nygen
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1. We don't have big dump trucks to haul around mounds of dead
fucking animals. We use tankers and tractor trailers. If it
can't be processed and pumped into a drum or a steel tank, we
can't dispose of it. Other Artus facilities can, but not us. We
don't have the equipment or the budget to upgrade right now.
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2. It surprises me just how many of you pencil-pushers think we
just dump waste in a big hole. It doesn't work that way. If it
was that simple you wouldn't need SPECIALISTS LIKE US. We have
to find places that won't be found easily, and mass graves are
one of those things that doesn't escape casual scrutiny. Also
while decomp takes care of flesh, it leaves bones behind. If
anyone runs across as many bones as you guys make, dog or not,
I can promise you there will be all sorts of questions and
attention that might be lead to any of us.
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3. I know my job. Been doing it for 16 years. You're welcome.
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At first I was willing to try to help you out, but I really
don't like your attitude. Figure it out yourself. My honorable
suggestion? Grab a pair of chopsticks and dig in.
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boons, Company Dogs are quickly becoming favored within Pentex. Spirals bend knee to their tribe and chaotic spiritual forces, while the Dogs follow orders and are only loyal to Project Proteus and whoever they're told to obey. This isn't to say all Spirals are unreliable or are being ostracized from Pentex *en masse*. Some Spirals not only cooperate with Pentex but are employed by its subsidiaries. Push comes to shove, many (such as the Consultants) will choose their stock options and company cars over their tribe, but this doesn't describe the majority of Dancers associated with the megacorp. So while the loyalties of any given Spiral may be in question, Company Dogs are a known factor and so more reliable. However, following unfortunate events at a failed South Carolina Endron facility, several Spirals have either quit their jobs or are acting erratically, and most of these positions (like middle management or technical roles) are ones Company Dogs can't fill.

The use of Company Dogs is the beginning of a recent trend, not a drastic restructuring of the Pentex roster. They've only been in use since mid-2003, after all. There are still far more either fomori or Spirals in the megacorp's employ than Debased. But that may change by the start of the next decade unless something slows or reverses the Company Dogs' growing popularity.

Problems

Pentex's home-grown mongrels are doing swimmingly in many regards. Debased production has exceeded estimates made at the onset of the project. The Company Dogs are loyal and competent, and there have been no significant incidents of rebellion and only three desertions (and two of the renegades were recaptured and put to sleep). Not everything is rosy for Project Proteus and their Debased progeny, however. Several problems and bugs have cropped up, either with the Company Dogs themselves or Proteus policies.

Proteus Issues

The lack of a Project Proteus representative on the Board of Directors is conspicuous, and this limits the subdivision's influence despite the powerful people backing it. This was a calculated attempt by Zettler and others to keep Proteus as low-key as possible and not attract attention to it. Stepping lightly around Francesco is a lost cause at this point, though, and Franklin Rubin is looking to cut much of the project's budget (see below). Supporters are considering installing a director for Proteus, with Huang Nygen the leading candidate. He's uncharismatic and arrogant, however, and the more politic Karl Chevlovich is pushing hard for the position. But Pentex's political gears move slowly, and any appointment might be years away – giving scorned Francesco more time to undermine Proteus and pragmatic Rubin to chip away at its bloated budget.

The Bottom Dollar

It's hard to take issue with Project Proteus' productivity, but it carries a high price tag. Project Proteus has exceeded its annual budget almost every year since its inception, despite the fact that its budget is increased regularly to reflect past expenditures. The money the project consumes increases exponentially, and has cost Pentex 53 billion dollars so far. Even an evil multinational megacorp-



oration doesn't spend that sort of money frivolously, and Franklin Rubin, Finance Subdivision Director, has been bitching about it for the last decade. Rushing's and Zettler's attempts to mollify Rubin have had little success. The books check out: there doesn't seem to be graft or other financial malfeasance, simply an underestimation of the growing cost of Company Dog health care, pharmaceuticals, food, lodging and training. Rubin is pushing for budget cutbacks and a move to a profit-based model for Project Proteus. The project seems to be a glowing success (certainly by its own estimation), and now that Company Dogs are being rented out for several hundred grand apiece it's high time for the subdivision to start pulling its weight. Despite his personal approval of Proteus and the vocal protests of the project's numerous supporters, Culliford may comply with Rubin's recommendations.

Francesco of Iliad backs Rubin for his own reasons, but Rubin doesn't really care to have the monster's support. He's studiously avoided the vicious internal politics of Pentex since he took his position and is intent on continuing to do so. His considerations appear entirely fiscal, making Rubin possibly the least duplicitous Pentex executive ever.

Spiritual Handicaps

Most Company Dogs have no contact at all with the Umbra or spirits, and those that do are conditioned to treat any spiritual manifestations as threats to be avoided or destroyed. They have no Gifts, rites, or identity outside the militaristic culture spoon-fed them by their trainers. They're easily blindsided by Umbral ambushes and spirits. And while trained to cooperate and use military tactics, Dog packs fail to operate with the intuitive unity Pentex observes in Spirals and Garou opponents. The Company Dogs' extensive training, chemical augmentation, and equipment (including Phase Channels and Umbra-sensing devices) may mitigate these shortcomings, but ultimately Proteus mutts are crippled for being denied their spiritual birthing.

This is no secret to Pentex and Project Proteus trainers, who deliberately cut their mongrels off from the spirit world and tightly regulate what little contact they do have. They see this as a necessary sacrifice, and feel it's too great a risk to expose Company Dogs to things that might subvert their loyalty and attention. And when spiritual resources are necessary, Pentex still has Black Spiral Dancers that work with them (though fewer of them lately). It remains to be seen if Pentex's gamble pays off.

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Sender: Marie Jones <mkjones@MagNetMail/PP.net>
To: Huang Nygen <hnygen@MagNetMail/PP.net>
CC:
Timestamp: 09:06 01/24/03
Subject: Preliminary Findings For Product K9A
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After extensive testing of Product K9A on both baselines and
mutables, here's what I've found. Detailed report of effects
of K9A on test populations and the control group, grouped by
symptoms and percentage of K9A included in diet, is included
in the .pdf attachment.
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I strongly recommend that Product K9A be used as a nutritional
supplement, to be no more than 20% of total food consumed for
baselines and 25% of total food consumed for mutables, and
that K9A not be used as a staple food product. This is a
little disappointing: it only mitigates instead of solves
disposal problems (as we'll produce far more byproducts than
we'll ever use for consumables), and we must still acquire
grain, animal byproducts and other ingredients to manufacture
food for our animals. However, we can make use of much of our
byproducts, and if we purchase grain from affiliated growers
perhaps some of the remainder can be composted. So while we
may not recycle all of our dogs, we can at least use some of
them.
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Physical and psychological problems accompany consumption of
Product K9A, with the severity of problems increasing with
amount consumed. This includes parasite infestation, anemia,
diarrhea, vomiting, compromised immune system, and erratic
behavior including increased aggression. Physical side effects
on baselines is more pronounced than in mutables. Incidence
of these side effects decreases to less than 3% when K9A is
reduced to my recommended percentage for total food intake (20%
for baselines, 25% for mutables). No change in control group.
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Psychological Issues

The Spirals' volatile madness and unpredictability is a big part of the reason the Company Dogs were created in the first place, but few understand the hidden problems with which these dog-blooded struggle. Most don't have much personality, with individuality and spontaneity inexorably driven out of them with brain-wash—er, conditioning and training. Even guardians extensively trained in human interpersonal skills don't talk much and make poor conversation partners. This isn't considered a weakness to people who see the Dogs as tools rather than thinking creatures, but out with independent thinking go initiative and basic empathy—yes, the classic management problem. Field dogs are so geared toward servitude that they're prone to be listless and depressed until given orders. Those on missions stick strictly to their orders, and find it difficult to respond to situations for which they weren't prepped. A sentinel assigned to guard a warehouse has no problem taking down intruders or using an extinguisher to put out fires, but what if her current handler is the one stealing documents in the middle of the night, or a ghost or Bane starts screwing with her? Unforeseen calamities or unknown phenomena can cause Company Dogs to react with inaction, frenzy or even catatonia, depending on how freaked out the poor beast is. Trainers and mission specialists try to prepare their mutts for as many contingencies as possible, but it's impossible to cover everything that can happen in the World of Darkness. Still, everyone considers the Dogs' servile natures far more of an asset than a liability, and so there are no plans to change anything.

Hormonal and brain chemical changes induced by OptiPhys v4 cause aggression, restlessness, an increased (and often violent) sex drive, and other erratic behavior. There's no easy way to fix these problems, save spaying or neutering to correct sexual behavior (this has already been discussed by Proteus researchers, and is a possibility in the near future). Sedatives reduce hostility, but make field dogs sluggish and oblivious to their surroundings. Traditional behavior modification therapy has yielded disappointing results. This is yet another thing Project Proteus has filed under “oh well”, as they see the root cause of the problem but are too fond of their way of doing things to fix it.

And let's not forget the psychological quirks and compulsions Debased have just from being what they are. Company Dogs are no less prone to these, but they usually don't interfere with what they do. Pentex caters to these behaviors unless they prove to be problematic, finding it less trouble than trying to actually correcting them. A mutt that digs or chews everything in sight is allowed to except when it causes property damage. However, one that defecates everywhere or barks nonstop is kept in isolation and remote shock-collared until he learns to sublimate his urges. If that fails, that doggy is put down. There's always more where he came from, after all.

Pentex's Relations With Spirals

While Company Dogs have begun replacing Black Spiral Dancers in certain key areas— notably security and paramilitary operations— this is a gradual process and wouldn't have sent up any red flags in the tribe except for recent events, especially since most of those given their walking papers don't know who (or what) their replacements are. Pentex created the Dogs as an alternative to the mad tribe after being burnt too many times, but it desperately doesn't want to alienate such powerful and valuable allies. The fiasco of March '07 revealed Pentex's previously hidden hand to the Spirals, however, and further undermined the company's deteriorating relationship with the tribe.

It was lousy luck on everyone's part. (Except for maybe Gaia.) Endron was constructing a waste oil processing facility on the South Carolina coast, far from known Spiral territories. Fearing interference from Garou, but without nearby Spirals to call on, plant project manager Myron Butler leased the elite Dog Company pack Unit FD-A13, nicknamed the Wraith Hounds, from Project Proteus. The silver-toting pack had experience facing Garou, and were given the orders to kill any werewolves that showed up. However, one of the on-site engineers was a Spiral Kinfolk well aware of his relations' spiritual proclivities, and he had similar concerns about the facility. He placed a call to his cousin in northern Florida, and within two days the Weeping Wounds pack arrived, taking it upon themselves to make sure Endron's new Bane playground was safe from Gaia's meddlers. They also hoped to establish themselves in South Carolina and away from their crowded hive, and perhaps pave the way for establishing a new hive in the area.

Predictably, the Dancers were quickly detected by the already present Wraith Hounds. Following orders, the Debased opened fire on the surprised werewolves, who counterattacked. When the bloodbath was over everyone was dead except a single wounded Spiral, who beat tail back to his hive as quick as he could. And as luck would have it, a Gaian Garou pack sabotaged the facility and forced its closure later that very week.

Needless to say, a lot of people (and people-like *things*) were very unhappy.

On the Endron end of things, both Myron Butler and the engineer that placed the call to his Spiral relatives were both let go; the latter has since gone missing. More firings followed as blame was shifted down the bureaucratic hierarchy. Project Proteus management then demanded \$5.5 million in compensation from Endron for gross negligence resulting in the loss of their property. Endron now finds it next to impossible to retain Company Dogs for any purpose, and will until this matter is resolved to Proteus' satisfaction (which may be quite a while, due to a lack of courts that hear cases like this). Pentex had hoped this would be an isolated case and wouldn't affect relations with the Spirals, but things didn't turn out that way.

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Sender: Huang Nygen <hnygen@MagNetMail/PP.net>
To: Proteus Mailing List <[*]@MagNetMail/PP.net>
CC:
Timestamp: 14:22 11/21/05
Subject: Terminology
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I request that you people refrain from using facetious terminology and making other unprofessional references on official project memos and on bulletin boards. These terms are passing into general circulation, which causes confusion among new researchers and is annoying. Department animals are not to be referred to as "dogboys". OptiPhys is not "juicer juice". There is no coalition here that I am aware of, and we certainly do not work for them. There will be no further mention of using Project Odyssey to give our animals psionics. And field animals are not to be told they are "hunting DBs". This is a work environment, not Star Wars or some comic book, where I assume you picked up these terms.
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Thank you.
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-- Huang Nygen
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The surviving Weeping Wound told his hive what happened, and they told allies at other hives, who passed the tale along to others. Soon, Black Spiral Dancers all over the U.S. knew that Pentex had dog-blooded soldiers that had not only replaced them, but were under orders to fire at Spirals! This is of course a misunderstanding, and doesn't reflect the opinion of all Dancers; some isolated hives simply haven't caught wind of the event, while other Spirals want to find out more before drawing any conclusions. But the Wyrms' tribe isn't exactly renowned for its rationality or patience (nor are Garou in general, really), and about half of North America's Black Spirals, and a solid majority in the Southeastern U.S., now either won't work with the megacorp or demand high

concessions for doing so.

Some Spirals in the employ of Pentex subsidiaries are taking flack from their hardliner tribemates, and/or pressed for what they know about the Company Dogs. Many of these employees are genuinely surprised and have no idea the Dogs even exist, and have no ability to find out anything about them (but this just makes them look guilty of covering for their employers). Subsidiary-employed Spirals generally choose their tribe over Pentex, and either quit their jobs or become moles. But some, especially if they have weak ties to their local hives, gravitate toward their company and further neglect their tribal obligations. If they're lucky and have good money they can find social refuge among the Consultants, though the camp is elitist and snubs blue-collar Spirals.



Achilles' Heel

If Project Proteus gets everything it wants for Christmas – it's given the budget it needs, it wins representation on the Board of Directors, and that damned Francesco stops meddling – it may soon be a moot point anyway. This is because Project Proteus has put all its tainted eggs in one basket, and all it would take is a disaster (such as the sort engineered by eager Monkeywrenchers) to bring the whole thing messily crashing down.

There's only one Project Proteus facility, tucked away in an unassuming industrial park in Trenton, New Jersey (or wherever Storytellers see fit to put it). Pentex recognizes this vulnerability, and the installation's location and procedures are kept top secret. There were plans to open two more Project Proteus facilities before 2010 at the projected cost of \$2 billion, but this is now unlikely in the face of Rubin's looming budget cuts. If anyone were to somehow find out about this installation and eliminate it, it would almost guarantee the end of Project Proteus. Not that it would be easy to come by this information, and actually taking down such a well-defended facility would be a herculean task, but the payoff would be great.

Keeping Project Proteus' single facility a secret is a top priority. This didn't keep Francesco from finding out about it, but no one knows that. This is Francesco's ace in the hole – one that, if played right, could lay low his rivals within Pentex and buy him a lot of respect among Black Spiral Dancers (something he's lacking lately). It would also virtually guarantee the end of his career and a multi-million dollar contract on his head, so the clever lupus is biding his time and trying to resolve things politically while he still can. He'll only reveal the location of the Project Proteus facility to his tribemates once he has nothing left to lose – i.e., he's forced from power, and/or relations between the Spirals and Pentex degenerate irrevocably.

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Systems

Characteristics

Regardless of pedigree or role, all Company Dogs have certain things in common. While still Debased, Pentex's eugenics and treatments program has created something truly a breed apart. Use the standard characteristics for dog-blooded characters, and add the following.

- Thanks to meticulous and ruthless selective breeding, all Company Dogs either have no debasements or manifest only minor ones that escape scrutiny. Deformed specimens are put to sleep just after birth.
- Pentex's Debased retain the regeneration and healing benefits of their Garou ascendants. However, the steroids and other drugs the mutts are injected with take their toll on their health and immune systems. Against infections and diseases, Company Dogs only resist with half their Stamina (round fractions up). Those few that make it to advanced age (which field dogs rarely do) often develop chronic ailments like dietary issues and brittle bones, but don't suffer long before being put down.
- Another side effect of constant steroid injections is a short temper; field Company Dogs only require three successes on a Rage roll to frenzy.
- Due to their Anafaze treatments, Company Dogs have weak Gnosis and can't enter or sense the Umbra, though the anti-spiritual properties of the drug protects the Dogs from spiritual influence. Increase by 1 the difficulty of Gifts and Charms that directly target the bodies or minds of these mongrels; this defense doesn't apply against incidental effects. A spirit would find it hard to possess or control a Dog's body, but could cause a nearby fire to erupt and burn the mutt with no penalty. The Storyteller is the final arbiter on how this advantage applies or doesn't.
- All Company Dogs are Wyrms-tainted, due to all the tainted chemicals coursing through their systems. They know nothing of the Wyrms and don't serve it consciously, though they certainly do its work in the employ of Pentex.

Pedigrees

Project Proteus has developed two varieties, or pedigrees, of Debased: Formula One and Formula Two, but the slang "Hulks" and "Skulks" has been adopted by all but the most nomenclature-conscious scientists. Other pedigrees are currently in development, but Hulks and Skulks are the only ones that have been "perfected" and fit to be used in the field. Hulks are warriors rippling with muscle and mass, while the stealthy Skulks are smaller and quicker. Though interbreeding the pedigrees is possible, this creates a hybrid that evens out the parent lines' physical extremes. For this reason, Proteus reproductive technologists keep the lines separate; after all, a lot of effort was made to select for the pedigrees' traits.

Hulk (Formula One)

Hulks are Pentex's musclebound brutes, just as strong and mean as Garou. They're typically employed as sentinels, though guardian Hulks make ideal bodyguards, being imposing enough to scare off troublemakers. Their Canis forms resemble a mix of different large dog breeds, with Rottweiler, Mastiff and Pit Bull Terrier the most prominent; the Homid form is tall, muscular and bull-necked. A Hulk's imposing Crinos stands right at 8' tall, and advances the other forms' thick build and power.

Glabro	Crinos	Hispo	Canis
Str +2	Str +4	Str +3	Str +2
Dex -	Dex +1	Dex +2	Dex +2
Sta +1	Sta +2	Sta +2	Sta +1
Man -1	Man -3	Man -3	Man -3
App -1	App 0	App -	App -

Skulk (Formula Two)

Skulks are smaller than Hulks, but markedly quicker and more agile. They're capable combatants, fighting with a grace their brute counterparts lack. They're well-suited to stealth and reconnaissance, making them ideal guard dogs and trackers. Skulks of advanced age often develop arthritis and other joint problems early in life, but few field dogs live long enough to worry about that. A Skulk's Homid form is slender and on the short side of average, while his breed shape is a mutt with distinct Pit Bull and Doberman features. The lithe Crinos form stands about 7', with musculature more wiry than bulky.

Glabro	Crinos	Hispo	Canis
Str +1	Str +3	Str +2	Str -
Dex +1	Dex +2	Dex +3	Dex +3
Sta +1	Sta +2	Sta +2	Sta +1
Man -1	Man -3	Man -3	Man -3
App -1	App 0	App -	App -

Sample Characters

There's not a lot of variety to be found here. You won't find the developed personalities and motivations in Company Dogs that you will among the Vanguard of Sirius or feral Debased, or much in the way of nuanced opinions on others. Trainers and handlers tell the Company Dogs all they need to know, whose lives revolve around doing what they're told. Still, this lack of individuality makes the Dogs no less effective at what they do – in fact, Pentex is quite happy with that arrangement. For what the Company Dogs might think about that, read this paragraph again.

Statistics for non-Homid forms depend on pedigree; just apply the stat blocks provided just above. The Backgrounds section hasn't been left out, it simply doesn't apply – Company Dogs get everything they need from whoever gives them orders. Game effects of Anafaze and OptiPhys v4 are included where applicable, for convenience.

Breeder

Imagine a big fat dog that sometimes turns into a flabby person, but usually too lazy to bother. Breeders are soft and weak from a starchy, high-fat diet, and are given daily sedatives to make them easier to handle. They eat, sleep and screw, and that's about it. They never leave the facility they're born in. If you can bring yourself to kill something so pathetic, a breeder should be a cake-walk for any character able to break into such a well-guarded area... or for a Kinfolk tag-along with a golf club, for that matter.

Storytellers should use the pedigree form Attribute adjustments for other forms, but shave a dot off the highest modifier (Str for Hulks, Dex for Skulks); breeders aren't injected with OptiPhys.

Breed: Canis

Nature/Demeanor: Follower

Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1, Charisma

1, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 2, Intelligence 1, Wits 2.

Abilities: Crap 2, Eat 3, Linguistics 1 (English, spoken only), Sleep (spec. Soundly) 5, Whine 2.

Advantages: Rage 1, Gnosis 2, Willpower 2.

Equipment: A pillow and some blankets, and a tray of food.

Sentinel

These “guard dogs” are the most common field mutts, and are increasingly likely to be placed at facilities where Pentex wants to protect property and/or expects trouble from ecoterrorists or saboteurs. While elites are usually dispatched to areas where Garou interference is likely, sentinels are no slouches and can present lethal resistance. They typically patrol outside and are good trackers. Sentinels work in pairs or groups of three spread over a wide area, and are smart enough to use tactics – as well bay loudly or radio HQ when they sense trouble.

Breed: Canis

Nature/Demeanor: Follower

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 1, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 1 (physical clues only), Linguistics 1 (English), Melee 1, Primal-Urge 1, Stealth 2, Survival 1

Advantages: Rage 3, Gnosis 1, Willpower 3.

Equipment: Not much. A handy CB radio for emergencies, and spare clothes tucked away somewhere handy for when taking Homid form is necessary.

Other: +1 difficulty to directly affect with Gifts or spirit Charms; 3+ Rage roll success to frenzy.

Guardian

Company Dog guardians are basically sentinels that are given basic people skills. They serve Pentex as security guards and bodyguards, and so remain in Homid form for extended periods. Rage is a little lower than that of sentinels, so the mutt doesn't freak out the “normals” so much. Guardians usually patrol in-door areas, or are assigned to protect individuals. They're more likely to work alone than sentinels, but will sound the alarm the second they detect trouble.

Breed: Canis

Nature/Demeanor: Follower

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3.

Abilities: Alertness 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1 (English), Melee 2, Primal-Urge 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1 (for spotting suspicious behavior)

Advantages: Rage 2, Gnosis 2, Willpower 4.

Equipment: Shift-Flex suit worn under security guard uniform, loaded pistol and clips, pepper spray, billy club, flashlight, and personal radio or CB unit. Guards assigned to critical areas or important people carry a clip of silver bullets, just in case.

Other: +1 difficulty to directly affect with Gifts or spirit Charms; 3+ Rage roll success to frenzy.

Elite

Company Dog elites are extensively trained to handle Garou or anything else they come across. They're fearless and unafraid to die for their missions. While some have been inserted

into existing First Teams (though none with current Spiral members), most elites are members of all-Company Dog groups. Elites are among the most effective weapons Pentex has at its disposal.

Breed: Canis

Nature/Demeanor: Follower

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 4.

Abilities: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 3, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Investigation 2, Linguistics 1 (English), Melee 3, Occult 1 (just enough info to recognize threats), Primal-Urge 1, Stealth 2

Advantages: Rage 4, Gnosis 2, Willpower 6.

Equipment: Reinforced Shift-Flex armor, personal radio, human clothing, assault rifle with standard and silver clips, silver-plated hunting knife. At least one member of a mongrel-only First Team will have a Realm Channel and a set of Power Goggles or an Umbrascopes. Elites carry anything else their higher-ups (and the Storyteller) feel they need for the mission at hand, like mustard gas grenades or Baleflamers.

Other: +1 difficulty to directly affect with Gifts or spirit Charms; 3+ Rage roll success to frenzy, Shift-Flex Armor offers +2 soak.

Because of the small gene pool from which Company Dogs hail, they have a certain uniformity of appearance. In their Homid forms, they're all Caucasians with olive complexions, dark brown or black hair, blue or gray eyes, receding chins and high foreheads. Height and build differences exist between the pedigrees, but this is the extent of the diversity. The Canis forms have gray or dull tan fur, slightly darker in Skulks than in Hulks; both pedigrees display a heavy Pit Bull Terrier strain. So a Skulk looks like not only his litter mates, but a lot like every other Skulk, and though shorter and thinner he bears more than a passing resemblance to Hulks.

It's pretty creepy seeing all these new people spread around Pentex that look so much alike, especially when two or more are seen together. This has caused several cases of mistaken identity (“Hey, aren't you the security guard from the Avalon plant?”) and inspires rumors and nervous jokes about clones, spies with alternate identities and the like.

This concerns Project Proteus scientists, who don't want their minions to be identifiable on site. But introducing diversity into the pedigrees' gene pools by introducing new breeders dilutes the offspring's desired traits and results in debasements. So the current policy is to continue inbreeding the pedigrees and retain their “quality”, at least until another option presents itself.

Equipment

Pentex spares little expense in creating and training their Company Dogs, and follows up on their investment by providing field dogs everything they need to get their jobs done, namely a nasty array of weapons and offensive devices. Debased are already deadly, but a chemically augmented specimen with combat training, silver weapons, Sarin gas, big guns and the like is a true terror. Company Dogs in the field, especially elites, may be assigned any equipment their superiors feel they need, including special items for First Teams (see **Book of the Wyrms** for information on these). In the interests of maintaining secrecy and saving money, equipment is always retrieved from fallen Company Dogs, either by packmates or “cleanup teams” that come behind them.

Included in this selection are Phase Channel implants, as well as Umbrascopes and Power Goggles. This may not seem very

in keeping with Pentex's policy of spiritual ignorance. However, to do their jobs effectively, Company Dogs must be able to detect and confront Garou traveling through the Umbra and other spiritual threats. Some amount of contamination is inevitable. Pentex expertly manages their servants' perceptions and access, setting the context for all interactions with spiritual phenomena. The spirit world and its myriad manifestations are presented as universally alien and hostile, and field dogs are told nothing more than what they need to know to fight or contain them. A Company Dog enters the Umbra with a specific objective, usually eliminating a threat or reconnaissance, and returns to the physical world as soon as possible; the use of Phase Channels is painful and confusing, and thanks to the propaganda they're fed Dogs are scared of the Umbra and anything in it. Company Dogs have no idea the spirit world should be second nature to them and they've been denied their natural ability to enter it, and they never will if Pentex has its way.

Phase Channel

Phase Channels are flat, oval devices about the size of a cell phone implanted beneath the skin of a Company Dog, in the area right under the solar plexus. Flexible plastic tubes lead from the device into major veins, and a large button adorns the side of the device facing out. The Phase Channel is hidden in a "stable" area that doesn't change much between transformations, and is expertly configured to account for form changes. The item has no effect on the Dog until activated, which requires him to slap the device hard enough to depress the button on the top.

Activating a Phase Channel simultaneously injects two compounds into the Debased: one temporarily suppresses the Anafaze in his system, and the second (a fomoral derivative) triggers brief but intense hallucinations. The sum effect forces an immediate Gnosis roll for the mutt to Step Sideways, but with a +2 bonus to his die pool (giving him a total of four dice); the character is at +1 to all difficulties for the two turns after using the Phase Channel from disorientation. To cross back to the physical world, the Company Dog must activate the Phase Channel again. A Phase Channel can hold up four doses of each compound; "refilling" the device requires a minor surgical procedure.

If it needs to be said, Company Dogs have no idea that Phase Channels actually stimulate their innate ability to enter the Umbra. As far as they know, the implant itself holds that power. They're not too prone to reflect on such matters anyway.

Phase Channels are expensive (right at a million apiece) and have to be surgically implanted and maintained. Thus, they're only given to elites or other Debased routinely sent to deal with spiritual threats. These devices are always retrieved from the bodies of fallen Company Dogs, and Pentex will spare little expense in retrieving one that's been taken.

Banes are Pentex's most valuable spiritual asset, used to create fomori, taint products and defend against Umbral incursions by enemy Garou. Giving Company Dogs a crash course in cosmology isn't viable, so they have to be handled carefully to keep them from destroying allied spirits. It helps field mutts can't even sense spirits, much less affect them. This means Banes on the other side of the Gauntlet can caper right under the Dogs' noses with the latter none the wiser. Also, Bane-infested areas tend to be relatively secure from enemy spirits and Garou, which means field dogs equipped with Power Goggles or Umbrasopes don't need to be sent to those areas; having their patrols overlap Bane-controlled areas would be redundant and increase the chance for wasteful conflict. Instead, Company Dogs able to sense and enter the Umbra are sent to secure vulnerable areas where Banes aren't present. But Banes wander (and so do some Debased), and some of both have been lost in the resulting conflicts. No big loss, though – there seems to be no shortage of Banes out there, and mongrels are replaced easily enough.

Shift-Flex

In the earliest days of Project Proteus, one thing that hindered Company Dogs' future introduction to the wider world of Pentex was that their clothes didn't shift with them. So Huang Nygen commissioned textile engineers and chemists from Textylez Incorporated (a Pentex subsidiary) to create something that could. Five years and three million dollars later, the result is Shift-Flex technology, which now sees daily use by Company Dogs.

Shift-Flex material comes in several varieties. The basic version is a layered multi-polymer blend that looks and functions like spandex, but thicker and more resistant to punctures or tears. The material breathes and isn't too uncomfortable in hot weather; a variation is being developed that's insulated to retain body heat in the cold. It can be made in any color, but Project Proteus has only commissioned flat black so far. The main benefit of Shift-Flex (and why it cost so much to develop) is its tensile strength and elasticity. The material can accommodate the sudden changes in mass and morphology associated with shapeshifting, able to stretch up to 300% and contract 50%, and return to its normal shape after long periods of extension. Assuming the wearer takes care of the outfit (and doesn't get into many fights), a Shift-Flex suit can last through two years of routine use before showing signs of wear. Even with active use (including combat), the material can withstand a fair amount of abuse.

Suits made from Shift-Flex are modular, allowing factory fabricators to replace parts of a damaged suit; this is expensive, but far more cost-effective than replacing an entire outfit. Suits come in three configurations. The basic version is a form-fitting body suit covering the wearer's upper legs and torso, while another version takes the form of half-shorts. Elastic belts and straps are provided with both, while an optional bandoleer comes with the basic model; these can be adorned with holsters, pouches or whatever the wearer might need. Company Dog guardians wear basic Shift-Flex suits under their clothing, while sentinels expecting to assume Homid form wear just the shorts. The suits look unusual, reminding one of something superheroes or high-tech ninja might wear, so Dogs wear clothes over them. Still, even funny-looking costumes are preferable to public nudity, so not much is said if a Dog has to run around thus clad after an emergency shapechange – that's the main purpose of the outfit, after all.

The third Shift-Flex suit, the armored model, is the most expensive and only worn by elites or field dogs expecting a serious fight. The suit's material is thicker and has a grid of reinforced silk cables running throughout the material. Further, quarter inch-thick plates are distributed strategically over the surface of the suit: the

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chest, stomach, outside thigh and calves, shoulders and elbows. These plates are a hard polymer blend, semi-flexible and resistant to impact (including ballistics). The plates are situated to provide the wearer the maximum possible protection without interfering with shapeshifting. The hard plates can be removed (or ripped away, blasted, bitten off or whatever) without destroying the suit, but re-attaching the piece requires the outfit to be sent back to the factory. (In game terms, Shift-Flex Armor grants its wearer a +2 bonus to soak rolls against all forms of damage; this soak bonus decreases to +1 if enough armor plates are removed.)

If a Company Dog uses a Phase Channel to enter the Umbra, his Shift-Flex suit doesn't travel with him; it remains where he left the physical world. All field dogs are trained to retrieve their outfits upon returning to the physical world.

Wouldn't Dedicated Items Be Simpler?

Yes. In outfitting their troops with Shift-Flex, Pentex seems to have gone through a lot of effort and expense to reinvent the wheel. Their creation, while novel, isn't nearly as effective as the Rite of Talisman Dedication for what it does. However, consider the Pentex perspective. Those responsible for educating and training Company Dogs feel allowing them access to even one rite would open a whole can of worms (and the Wyrms!) they'd rather not deal with. Even knowing rites exist (much less performing them) would expand the mutts' perspectives, and open them to a spiritual world Pentex desperately wants the Dogs to be unaware of. It might be inconvenient to work around the clothing issue and other Company Dog shortcomings, but it's worth it to keep them secure from spiritual forces that might confuse and suborn them.

Company Dogs in Your Chronicle

Claw Fodder

Some enemies are there to trade blows with player characters until one or the other falls down, and Company Dogs serve that purpose well. There's not much else they're good for. These won't be the guys that infiltrate caerns, subtly attempt to corrupt Garou, or mastermind devious plans that keep players paranoid and second-guessing everything. They just follow orders: kill X, protect Y from intrusion, defend Z from attack, and the like.

Despite their lack of nuance, Storytellers should realize just how dangerous Company Dogs can be before dumping a few packs of them on their hapless players. They're physically superior to most other Debased, and a match for many Garou. Elites are typically outfitted with silver weapons and Umbral technology, as well as other lethal toys, and sentinels and guardians are sometimes given such items if there's a good chance they'll encounter Garou. While not mindless, Company Dogs are fanatical and willing to die fighting. There's no reasoning with them or hoping to sway them to the right side, and the best thing werewolves can do is to kill them. For all their ignorance and other faults, Company Dogs are damned good at what they do.

How Much Do the Garou Know?

Not enough. Several packs and a few individuals have encountered Company Dogs since they've been active, and have lived to tell about it. Spies and Monkeywrencher hackers have picked up bits and pieces of the project. What they all know, collectively, isn't a complete picture of Project Proteus or the Company Dogs (or even close to it), but it would be enough to hinder Proteus and Pentex. But the Garou Nation has no central fact-checking database and intelligence distribution network (despite the Glass Walkers' best efforts). What they have is word of mouth, poor organization and entirely too much sore feelings between its myriad groups. What a Bostonian sept knows about Proteus can't benefit a Michigan Fenrir pack fending off Company Dog elites. Werewolves' enemies have long prospered from this divisiveness, and the new Wyrms minions on the block are no different.

The terms "Company Dogs" or "Project Proteus" mean nothing to most Garou. Werewolves that encounter field dogs typically assume they're decrepit Black Spiral Dancers or Debased working with that tribe. None know the Company Dogs are catalysts for worsening relations between Pentex and the Spirals, as this isn't the sort of thing discussed in company memos left where inquisitive Gaians can find them. Even the concept of Pentex as a

monolithic, multinational entity is unknown to most Garou, and most consider its known subsidiaries to be independent and unrelated corporations.

The mountain of ignorance Garou must scale to even find out about any of this may seem insurmountable, but certain characters (namely of the player variety) have a knack for finding out the right information at the right time. Clever Storytellers can have player characters overhear conversations, stumble upon a Company Dog-Black Spiral Dancer skirmish, etc. Resist the temptation to make things too easy for the characters or to lead them around by the nose – either the tidbits you give them prompt them to find out more, or they don't and they pay later for their inattentiveness. In no case should you simply lay everything about the Company Dogs out on the table for lazy players. Pentex has gone through no small trouble to make sure their dealings remain secret, and they'd be *very* unhappy with you were they to find out you're too loose with their business.

A Sirius Grudge

The Vanguard of Sirius vs. the Company Dogs seems like the Debased deathmatch made in Heaven, and the two groups complement one other well on many levels. However, there's not been much contact between them so far. In late 2004, a Vanguard pack directed against Good House operations in Missouri faced Company Dog elites, retained to prevent Garou interference; the Vanguard were slain, so word of this new threat never reached the ears of the Masters. Since its reformation the Vanguard has consolidated in the southern half of the U.S., especially the Southwest, and the tribe doesn't have continental presence it once did; meanwhile, the only Company Dog facility is in New Jersey, and not very many packs are exported to distant states. Unless either group expands its holdings, it looks like conflicts between them will be infrequent at best.

Of course, it doesn't have to be this way. Feel free to put Sirius septs or Company Dog facilities wherever you want them, or to concoct reasons for groups to travel and encounter one another. A four-way free-for-all between Garou, Spirals, Company Dogs and the Vanguard does have a certain wicked appeal.

The One That Got Away

Maybe you smelled this little plot hook when I first dropped it. Company Dogs are under a great deal of scrutiny, and

the few that got skittish and tried to escape Proteus' clutches were immediately detected and dealt with... all except for one. A single Dog slipped her leash and is out there, somewhere; we'll arbitrarily call her "Sally." Pentex has no idea where Sally is and what she's doing, but they'd be very interested to know.

And I certainly won't tell you. This is one of those wild cards Storytellers can play with. But I'll start the wheels spinning for you.

Why? Worth considering are Sally's motivations for running away. It can be as simple as being fed up with being bossed around, shock-collared and continually subjected to injections and tests. Another possibility is outrage – Proteus steers their servants away from such abstracts as ethics and morals, but a shred of conscience can remain latent and undetected in a Company Dog until triggered by the death of a beloved packmate, abuse, or some other event. While none but Sally may ever know her reasons for beating tail, they'll determine the sort of choices she makes later – some amoral monster full of spite for her once-masters won't likely ally herself with a Gaian sept, and might well rediscover herself dancing the Black Spiral.

How? Despite the slavish loyalty of 99% of their Company Dogs, Pentex keeps a tight leash on them. Getting away can't have been easy, but obviously it's not impossible. Sally can be the sole surviving member of a First Team, or a guardian or sentinel that deserted her post one night. It's unlikely a breeder would have the motivation or wherewithal to escape, but anything is possible. Sally might have had help from the inside: a sympathetic researcher who saw something special in her and wanted her to get away, a Spiral who plans to use or convert the mutt, or a mysterious individual with abstruse motivations but with some future role to play.

Where? The World of Darkness isn't a safe place for anyone, especially a sheltered mongrel with no allies, no resources and no understanding of just how awful and dangerous it is out there. It's possible Sally ran across something that killed her or is content to eke out a sustenance-level existence in some forgotten corner of the world, but that wouldn't make much story fodder, so let's consider other options. Black Spiral Dancers would certainly take her in, if no other reason for the information on Project Proteus they can pump out of her. Gaian Garou would find the information Sally provides even more valuable, but they're extremely unlikely to simply invite some Wyrms-tainted Debased into a caern and ask her to chat for a spell. There are other options, however. Sally might have founded her own feral pack, and uses her own combat training to turn her packmates into an effective fighting force. The Vanguard of Sirius may be good at detecting infiltrators, but if Sally's conversion to the tribe was genuine she wouldn't have been detected as one, especially since some Sirius septs aren't as ardent about screening for taint as they should be. Any number of other individuals or supernatural agencies would be interested in co-opting or using a Company Dog deserter (like the mysterious insider that enabled the escape), and the Storyteller is free to be creative here.

Other Considerations: OptiPhys v4, Anafaze and the

other chemical enhancements Pentex gives its Debased might be addictive and/or cause bad withdrawal symptoms. This gives Sally a short shelf life as a free agent, though a raging junkie shapeshifter can cause a lot of damage during that time – to Pentex, a Garou pack, a small town, or whatever. Assuming Sally kicks the sauce and manages to stick around for a while, whoever hosts the mongrel can expect visits from First Teams intent on killing the deserter and her new friends. Pentex would have to be handle things more carefully if Spirals were her adopters – or perhaps not, if things go badly and the Spirals refuse to cooperate.

Dark Conspiracy

Things could be better for poor Pentex right now. The creation of their new super-soldiers has provoked internal conflicts and has created the potential for a Spiral rebellion against the company. Unless something happens to better the situation, it'll probably continue to worsen until Francesco leaves or is forced from his position at Iliad while the Black Spiral Dancers violently divorce themselves from Pentex. Even now there are signs Pentex and the Spirals are quietly polarizing. Dancers and their known Kinfolk are being turned down for subsidiary jobs for which they're qualified; those already employed by the megacorp are passed up for promotions and their activities closely monitored. In Colorado, a King Brewery is hit twice in a single month by saboteurs, while previously friendly Spirals simply ignore pleas for aid. Equipment requests by an Alabama Spiral pack is denied; the items end up stolen a week later, and the werewolves (of course) deny involvement. Lines are being drawn, and even those that have no ideological stake in the Spiral-Pentex conflict are being drawn in as favors are called in and resources are reassessed.

It goes without saying that anything bad for Pentex and the Spirals is potentially good for Gaia. A saboteur that uncovers the internal cracks within the Wyrms monolith might help things along in whatever small way they can. This can also backfire badly, as people don't appreciate being maneuvered into conflicts, especially by their enemies. This approach might offer players with a flair for Machiavellian corporate politics a chance to shine.

Of course, the witless Company Dogs are caught in the middle of this brewing shitstorm. They have the most to lose in all this, yet are entirely unaware of the greater conflict forming around them. They just do what they're told: go here, guard this, attack that. They're possibly the least evils in a legion of Wyrms-tainted monsters: though they clearly work for the bad guys, they never had a choice in the matter. They're doomed to be pawns, pure and simple, directed at the behest of their uncaring Pentex masters. Assuming Proteus falls and the Dogs survive, they'll either be left to fend for themselves (and die), or they'll be adopted by the Spirals or other malefic Wyrms forces that will use them just as heartlessly as Pentex did. Short of some sort of miracle, there is no happy ending for them. The best anyone can offer these dangerous creatures is a quick death.