

# WINTERNIGHT



Revised and updated for Shadowrun Third Edition & System Failure

# WINTERNIGHT

• This thing turned up on Shadowland about two weeks ago, and I've spent most of the time since then trying to decide whether anything this bizarre might possibly have something to it. Keeping in mind the first lesson of this crazy world - that nothing is impossible- I've decided to post the file, with reservations. This may be nothing but tabloid-screamsheet stuff, the ravings of a madman. Or it may be a desperate attempt by a man slowly losing his mind to warn us about the nice folks who started him down that path. Or anything in between. On the off-chance that there's a grain of truth to this sick story, I offer it to the general Shadowland public. Make of it what you will- and if you find anything at all that might give it some credence, for Ghost'

• Captain Chaos

Transmitted: 22 May 2057 at 06:34:21 (PST)

My life is ashes.

I have betrayed everything I ever believed in. My career is in ruins. My family lies dead by my own hand. All because of Winternight. Because of the monsters, the inhuman fiends who made me KILL KILL MY FAMILY KILL THEM ALL DROWN THEM IN BLOOD DROWNING I'M DROWNING

No. Not inhuman. All too human-in the general sense of the word. They are our own twisted reflections, the dark sides of every race of humanity. If they were truly inhuman, I could not have become one of them so easily.

No matter what it costs me, I will die a free man. With my family gone, with my family gone no one else can be hurt by the disclosures in this file. And I must disclose the truth in all its awful detail, or the whole world will die. I don't know how and I don't know when... they have people working on more different ways of destroying life on Earth than most of us have ever imagined... but they intend it to happen soon. I can't do much to stop it—only shout a warning and hope to God someone hears. If there is a God.





Someone has to believe me. That's the only way I can make up for what I've done. I've done things... terrible things. Some of them I can't remember. Some thing I remember all too AFRAID I'M AFRAID THEY'RE COMING TO KILL ME CAN'T LET THEM FIND ME RUN RUN HIDE HIDE IN THE DARK DIE IN THE DARK

The chip. It's done something to my mind. I have to stop this... have to focus, get all this down, send it where it might do some good. Got to control myself.

Three years ago, I was appointed director of the UCAS Army Special Assets Division. Special assets tracks down, handles and stores weapons of mass destruction. Nuclear weapons, chemical, biological... all the horrible tricks human-kind ever managed to pull out of its collective bag before the Awakening brought us magic as the new tool of choice by which to destroy one another. IN FIRE IN BLOOD IN AGONY THE UNWORTHY WILL PERISH IN THE FLAMES

The fugues are getting worse. I may not have much time left. I remember watching the trucks at the toy company. Toronto, that's where it was. A few people with me... colleagues, friends...

Voices over the headset. Seeing through a cold camera eye. Gray gloves... they kept carrying boxes of toy cars around, wearing heavy gray gloves. I knew what the gloves meant. Shielded gloves. Keep the poison out, the radiation.

How long ago? I can't remember. Did the chip do that, too?

Or have they already gotten to me? Wiped my memory of all but a few fragments... oh God, if You're there, please make that not be true. Make it not be true, God. If I can't tell this story, I can't atone, and then I'm damned BURN IN HELL BURN LIKE THE REST THE WORMS THE ANTS THE VERMIN COWER IN THE DIRT WITH ALL THE REST AND SCREAM WITH THE PAIN OF THE FIRE

Early in 2055, an intelligence analysis crossed my desk. A small toy manufacturer in Toronto had received a small shipment of nuclear material. We placed them under surveillance, hoping to find out who or what was behind them before sweeping in and making arrests. After months of fruitless watching, several pounds of nuclear material arrived hidden in a shipment of plastic resin. We traced the material as far as a warehouse in Nairobi, Kenya—which burned down two days after we confirmed the address. Where the contraband originated prior to Nairobi remained a mystery. I know the answers now, of course—but none of my superiors are likely to believe me. Those that did would be killed instantly by Winternight agents, anyway. KILLED DEAD BLOOD BLOOD EVERYWHERE WHY WON'T YOU STOP SCREAMING STOP STOP STOP

I can't tell anyone in SAD. This is the only way to get the warning out.

They kept changing the boxes. I remember that. The Urban Brawl t-shirts—that was the funniest one. So many trucks, so many little towns... it was cold all the time. New England winter. Always hated winter in upstate New York, Philly, Boston... so damned cold. Our van kept breaking down. None of theirs did. I remember Jake saying it must be magic. Right... a "charge battery" spell.

Where did we end up? All I remember is driving endlessly after panel trucks in the cold and blowing snow ICE THE WORLD WILL END IN ICE IN WINTER DARK AND COLD AND DEAD

I remember poor Hauser died. Congenital heart failure. He found out the unmarked van's registration numbers were bogus. Dead a week later.

The final shipment—labeled as a state-of-the-art trideo set with all the accessories—ended up at a private house. I don't remember where. The person renting it was a travel writer and part-time researcher at MIT&T. Nothing about him suggested anything out of the ordinary; he had no record of political involvement, and nothing about any of the datawork that we could find appeared to have been faked. The only odd note about the house or its inhabitant, aside from the arrival of nuclear material, was the heavy magical shielding around the building. None of our agents could penetrate it.

I remember being somewhere very dark and cold. So cold my fingers went stiff. Down... I remember moving down, walking down a slanted floor. No, a passage. Cold, hard rock under my feet. I couldn't stop shivering COLD COLD AND DARK AND DEAD DEAD SMOTHERED SUFFOCATED CLOSED IN OH GOD THE WALLS THE WALLS THEY'RE GOING TO FALL ON ME

Coal mine. I lead the team into a coal mine. It was late... dark... quiet. In an airshaft halfway down a disused passageway almost entirely blocked by rubble from a long-ago collapse, we discovered eight nuclear weapons. They were covered with magical inscriptions inlaid with orichalcum.

•Orichalcum?! They must've been trying to... no. I'm not even going to write that down. It's too fragging scary.  
•Wozzerd

•It's fragging bulldrek. Can you say "nuclear weapon foci?" Can you say "mixing technology and magic—can't be done?"  
•Wiz Kid

•Can you say "cybermancy" There's tech and magic in bed for you. Just because no one's made a magic nuke yet—that we know of—doesn't mean it's impossible.  
•Whisper

•I don't want to think about this.  
•Dancer

•So get off-line.  
•Bung

We arrested 58 suspects, of whom 51 knew nothing about nuclear material or weapons. They knew only that certain anonymous people had paid them good money to drive a truck from Point A to Point B, or to type in a false entry in a shipping manifest. None of them held particularly well-paying jobs. When offered a chance to make a year's salary or better with one simple act, they jumped at it. The remaining seven suspects committed suicide under questioning.



I prepared a report—such as it was—and submitted it to my superior officers. Three days later, in Cincinnati on an inspection tour, I woke to find myself tied to my bed in my hotel room. Four men were in the room with me, one bending over me. He clicked a chip into my datajack, and suddenly I was a god.

ECSTASY PERFECTION POWER STRENGTH JOY RAISE THE GLEAMING SWORD LET IT FALL ON THE ENEMY WATCH THE BLOOD WATCH IT CATCH IT DRINK IT LAUGH AS MY ENEMIES DIE

Absolute power. Absolute certainty. Swinging a gleaming axe at the heads of my enemies. They died in fountains of blood. I laughed. My friends laughed with me. Laughed and danced and drank. We still lived. We were the chosen. The *Einherjar*. We would live forever and ever, Amen.

DARKNESS DEATH COLD PAIN IT HURTS HURTS ALL GONE ALL GONE I'M DYING DYING DEAD DON'T LET ME DIE I WANT TO LIVE I HAVE TO LIVE PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE.

Why does it hurt so much to cry?

The chip was gone. He took it. I fell from Heaven, plunged into the depths of Inferno. Cold, empty, desolate. Someone was whimpering like a whipped dog, blubbering the word “please” over and over until the sound died away into sobbing. When my eyes started burning, I realized the one whimpering was me.

The man who'd given me the chip—he was slender, well-dressed, with dark smooth hair and gold-rimmed glasses—promised me I could have another taste of it if I listened very carefully to what he had to say. I listened. I tried not to breathe too loudly for fear the noise might keep me from hearing his every word.

When he talked, I heard the flutter of bird wings. His shadow on the wall looked like a raven. His hair was just the color of raven feathers. Funny.

He told me about Winternight. Winternight wants to destroy the world so that they can bring to life the old gods of Norse myth. They believe the Awakening has made the world ready for the god's advent—all that remains is the final act of preparation, the creation of Ragnarok.

Ragnarok is the ultimate war of destruction. Every living thing must die in the battle, so that Winternight's Elect can use the overwhelming power of the sacrificed life-force to transform the world into Midgard and themselves ascend as the new pantheon. Everyone who has ever knowingly aided them, even those not among the Elect, will become gods as well, as a reward for their deed. Not even death will keep them from transcendence.

Nuclear winter. That's one way. Or biowar. All the food crops all over the worlds, dying. Then the rest of us die of starvation. Slowly. Our agony pleases these bloodthirsty gods. The slower we die, the stronger they become. Ebola... was that one of theirs? I can't remember. Probably. They're fiends, I know they have scientists working for them. Would-be gods designing microbes to dissolve innocent flesh into dead nothing. They're monsters.

I'm a monster.

•Crack-brained. Added as a dozen year-old eggs. Absolutely, totally, no-fragging-doubt-about-it crazy. What's this guy slotting?

•Big Daddy

My new friend told me that Winternight wanted me. I would be useful to them, if I was a good boy and did exactly what they told me, I could have the god chip to play with sometimes. That's what he called it—the god chip. Whenever I did a really good job for Winternight, my friend would send me a god chip with a self-destruct. Just enough for one dose then PFFFFT! He promised I could have that if I joined Winternight. Otherwise they'd have to kill me. He looked so sad when he said that—

KILL KILL BLOOD RED RED HAZE EVERYWHERE SCREAMING SOMEONE'S SCREAMING AND WON'T STOP

The recruiter gave me two drones, little plastic ovals that moved on tiny, vectored fans. No distinctive parts or markings—they could have come from anywhere. He said I could contact fellow members using the drones... but only some of them, only the ones he told me to contact. He said he would tell me everything I needed to know, whenever I needed to know it.

When I got back home from Cincinnati, Angelina asked if I was coming down with the flu. I went to bed and stayed there for three whole days, dreaming of being a god.

For the next few... months? Years? It's all so fuzzy in my mind... I got word every so often that certain things needed doing. Certain reports discredited or mislaid, certain connections downplayed, certain people transferred from one assignment to another. Sometimes they sent credsticks, with orders to hire shadowrunners for jobs here and there—datasteals, sabotage. I never saw any of my contacts. They sent instructions via drone, and I sent word of my accomplishments the same way. Sometimes a plastic drone brought me a god chip. I lived for those days.

I destroyed the drones one day. Someone had been talking to me, I remember... soft voices, kind voices, saying I couldn't help it, I wasn't to blame. Addict. What a harsh word... addict. Almost as bad as crazy. Psycho.

Monster. MONSTERS EVERYWHERE KILL THEM ALL SLICE AND DICE THEM WATCH THEM BLEED AND DIE DIE DIE

But I wasn't a monster, not really. That's what the kind voices told me. They gave me strength. Strength to destroy the drones... to write down, later at night, alone in my study, everything I could remember about what Winternight had done to me, The memories came hard... disjointed fragments that I almost couldn't believe were real. Yet I kept on, knowing I was working against time, knowing they would strike me down for my treachery sooner or later.

Then Leslie disappeared.

Poor little girl, gone between school and home one afternoon. Angelina looked at the clock over and over and over. Five. Six. Seven. Eight. No calls. No word. Ten. Call the police Lucius. Now, now, I'm sure she's all right. Things have been a little tense around here lately—she's just acting out a little, that's all. She'll call soon. Just wants to give us a little



fright. Wants a little attention from her old Dad and Mom. Please, Lucius. It's almost twelve. Call the police What kind of father are you?

Angeline called the police at twelve-thirty a.m. I went out to look for Leslie. Got in the car, started driving—

I was standing in a strange hotel room, dizzy and sick, my vision blurred by a terrible headache. Someone was standing behind me, holding my arms. Leslie's body lay on the bed in front of me. Her drying blood soaked the sheets. Only here face was still intact—eyes wide, mouth pulled into a grimace by the fish hooks holding her to the mattress.

On the dresser were two new message drones. A voice told me to pick them up. My friend with the glasses and the chip. He said Leslie's death was punishment for disobedience. If I betrayed them again, Winternight would arrange horrible accidents for the rest of my family. They spared my life only because I was still useful to them. If I ceased to be useful, my son Jamie would be the next to die. Then Elizabeth and Jerry and baby Tommy, then Angeline.

He told me in graphic detail what they had planned for Angeline. I'm glad I can't remember any of it.

I drove straight home, like they told me to. I knew they'd be watching Angeline was crying in the bedroom. She didn't stop for a long time.

I went to my study. My notes were gone. They'd taken everything. But they didn't know what I knew. I knew how to fight them. To battle monsters, I must become one.

- Classic signs of a psychotic break. I'm surprised the doc treating his chip addiction didn't see the signs and intervene.
- Headshrinker

Earlier this evening, I killed my family. I shot them all, quickly and cleanly. Winternight won't have them. Then I came here and made this file. They thought they got everything, but they didn't. They didn't get my mind. Not all of it. I remember enough to damn them all, if someone listens and then goes looking in the right places. It's all I can do to stop the monsters now.

After I finish this post, several kilos of C-12 plastique will destroy this terminal and kill me. Winternight won't have me either. And they won't have this file. My warning will go straight to Shadowland. Someone please, please heed it and do something. Everything I've said is true. I'm not crazy. I'm not. Winternight exist, and they will kill everything unless you stop them. Stop them. Stop them.

- I heard about this guy. Brigadier General Lucius Harding—killed his own family, bombed the Pentagon, if someone could make him crazy enough to do that with a chip...
- Muckrat

- You buy this bulldrek? The paranoid ravings of a certified fruitcake who butchered his own family? If he'd said "the Devil made me do it," would you believe that too?
- Pretty Polly

• I thought that's what he was saying. These Winternight slots sound pretty devilish to me.

• Wild Man

• If they exist.

• Eponine

• I've heard rumors about a new chip on the streets that sounds an awful lot like Harding's god chip. They call it a berserker chip, and it makes you into an unstoppable killing machine. Triggers all the violent impulses in the brain and makes you like it. As I understand it, these things don't work quite like your usual BTL. Instead of replacing the user's sensory input with the stuff coded on the chip, the berserker amplifies the id, ego and endocrine responses. It converts pain to pleasure, and sets up a strong feed back loop to the pleasure centers. I've heard it mutes fear responses as well.

Thought it was leaked experimental miltech. A meek little wageslave could use one to chip herself into a frenzy and go on a rampage, hacking at everyone within reach until someone puts a bullet through her brain. If Harding got ahold of something like that and it fragged up his brain, the violence of the experience might well account for all those weird lapses into blood-and-death ranting.

• Lazarus

• Doesn't prove a bunch of destroy-the-world nuts gave him the chip, though. Maybe he got it from his friendly neighborhood dealer.

• Pretty Polly

• Anybody notice how many news stories there've been recently about lab break-ins? All over the world. I've seen at least five in the past couple of months. Maybe there's something to this.

• Bitbert

• Oh, right. "Prize orangutan snatched from Northwestern University's Animal Research Department by outraged animal lovers. Note left behind says, 'Non-sentient primates are people too.'" This is evidence of a conspiracy to destroy the world and create Valhalla in its place?

• D.Bunker

• Not the orangutan story, you slot. The other ones. Like the chemical plant in Seattle whose warehouses got broken into a month or so back—just one can of poison the newsies wouldn't or couldn't name got lifted. Or the two-bit subsidiary of Shiawase outside Sapporo that lost a whole slew of reports on test cures for cold viruses. Somebody even raided a Saeder-Krupp outfit somewhere of the North Sea coast. The place wasn't much more than a dumping ground for unpleasant industrial dreck—like leftover nuclear material. No one's sure exactly what or how much went missing, because the place kept sloppy records. Poisonous chemicals, nuke stuff, viral research—anyone starting to see a pattern yet?

• Bitbert





◦ HEY! I did some digging and found out something weird about that S-K facility. The previous exec in charge of running whatever the frag gets done there contributed a drekload of cred to the New Frontiers Foundation before capping himself too. New Frontiers goes around to school districts in poor neighborhoods in Europe and America, promising scholarships to bright-but-poor kids with an aptitude for science. The first crop of high school graduates have already gone to college as bioscience and physics majors, with corp contracts kicking in the minute they get the fancy letters after their names.

◦ Muskrat

◦ Which corps?

◦ Eponine

◦ All of the Big Eight, plus about half a dozen smaller ones I've never heard of, probably Eurocorps.

◦ Muskrat

◦ So Mr. Piddy-Drek Saeder-Krupp exec has a smidgen of social conscience. So what?

◦ Tin Lizzie

◦ Lize, Lizzie... since when does any corp exec exhibit social conscience? Ever? Once you earn over a certain amount of cred working for a corp, you have your conscience surgically removed. It's in their contracts somewhere. Trust me—there's an ulterior motive here.

◦ Auntie Social

◦ Brain drain, maybe? If these Winternight skags are real, and they want to destroy the planet in all kinds of neat and interesting ways, they could use a few good scientific minds. Get 'em while they're young, and you can train 'em up to do all kinds of horrible things for you without batting an eyelash. With a few years' worth of investment, they've got themselves a pool of bright, educated, amoral flunkies to come up with breakthroughs in biowarfare, nuke physics, or any other potentially destructive branch of scientific research you can name.

◦ Lazarus

◦ They plan *that* long term? Man, we're in deep drek.

◦ Dancer

◦ Did this guy Harding say he hired runners for these Winternight freaks? Did I read that right?

◦ Jack-in-the-Green

◦ One more reason to check out your Johnson. Try before you buy, chum.

◦ Miz Liz

◦ Oh, like you'd be able to dig that keep. If Winternight has covered its tracks so well that no one's ever heard of it until now, they certainly have the talent to keep their connections to their Johnsons butted. Any one of us could've taken on a job for them without ever knowing it.

◦ Wild Man

◦ Why is anyone even taking this seriously? Winternight's not real! It's just this sicko general's version of the boogiemán. If they really existed, somebody would have heard something by now.

◦ Pretty Polly.

◦ Maybe we have, and just don't realize it. Anybody notice the rise in terrorist incidents over the past ten years? All kinds of groups crawling out of the woodwork. Tsunami in Japan, Armageddon in the Mideast, Red Tide in Central Europe—awful similar imagery, neh? Destruction sweeping the world. What if they're all different branches of the same organization dedicated to sparking worldwide war?

◦ Bitbert

◦ The "guy with the chip" Harding keeps talking about... that really bugs me. I had a run-in once with a Raven shaman—a toxic, a real twisted slot. When I assensed him, I saw the same weird bird-shadow thing that Harding described. If this Winternight bunch has toxics working for them...

◦ Casper

◦ Raven imagery would make sense (insofar as any of this makes sense) seeing as ravens figure pretty highly in Norse mythology.

◦ Auntie Social

◦ Oh, man... I just figured something out and I DON'T LIKE IT! Some chummers and me tangled with some really bad customers in Salish last summer—don't ask for the details, I don't want to talk about it. But four of the slags we went up against were toxic shamans. Four of 'em. Working together! Raven, Wolf and a couple I couldn't identify. Think about that for a minute.

Anybody shaking yet?

◦ Jack-in-the-Green

◦ Toxics aren't known for working together. They're all too psycho to work with anybody. They'd kill each other over who got to be Top Spellslinger inside of three seconds. Lucky thing, too. That's the only drek that's saved us from some major bad mojo... oh, drek.

◦ Eponine

◦ Exactly.

◦ Jack-in-the-Green



## GAME INFORMATION

The preceding fiction was originally presented as a chapter of the now-out of print sourcebook *Threats for Shadowrun, Second Edition*, and it features the first mention in the Sixth World of the secretive apocalyptic cult known as Winternight.

Through the years, the cult has resurfaced to make small but memorable appearances in various books, most notably *The Messenger* adventure in the *Wake of the Comet* set and the Shadowrun novel *Ragnarok*, but the seeds to the plans that are soon to bear fruit have been planted in veiled references in *Shadows of Europe* and *State of the Art: 2064* (after all Winternight is nothing if not secretive).

Winternight plays a significant role in the events described in the source/campaign book *System Failure* and as such we thought we'd offer fans, who might not possess the original *Threats* sourcebook, a glimpse at the inner workings and methods of this dangerous and twisted cult. The nature of its beliefs, its origin and true agenda, as well as its masterplan for the Sixth World are revealed in *System Failure*—and what follows are additional elements that might prove useful for gamemasters wanting to pave the way for the fateful events of 2064.

The following information has been updated from the material in *Threats* to reflect some of the changes to the setting and rules between the original release and the material currently part of **Shadowrun, Third Edition** canon.

## HARBINGERS OF RAGNAROK

In Norse mythology, Ragnarok is the great, world-spanning battle that will destroy the old, bloodthirsty Norse gods (the *Aesir*) and usher in a new golden era of peace and enlightenment. The Winternight cult gives this tale a twist—they believe Ragnarok has yet to happen and they are the Elect, the *Einherjar* of legend—chosen from the hallowed ranks of great warriors to fight besides the gods in the final battle. By facilitating Armageddon and ascending to their birthright, the survivors of that great, final conflict will have earned their place in the pantheon of the world reborn in flames and devastation.

To accomplish its ends, Winternight uses a far-reaching network of cells and pawns, to stockpile nukes, collect and create unique magical items and commit carefully planned atrocities among other activities. To achieve their goal of global Armageddon, they are absolutely ruthless, relentless, shameless and very, very clever. Though they forge covert alliances under many guises to forward this agenda, ultimately the only thing they want from those outside their organization is those others' deaths.

Winternight is exceptionally subtle and secretive. Player characters drawn into its web of intrigue and deception will not be aware of the true nature of the cult before they come into direct contact with it; and so the level of violence to which the group subscribes, when the characters encounter violence, will come as a complete shock. Winternight willingly and casually kills family members, takes hostages, blows up buildings and commits blackmail to get its way. Any scenario involving Winternight should fill the players with dread: Winternight makes nightmares come true.

## USING WINTERNIGHT

Until 2064 almost no one outside the inner circle of the cult knew anything about the group's true leaders or their location. Winternight's members are organized into cells, each cell consisting of 3 to 20 members. Only the cell leaders may initiate contact with one another and with the cell members. They do so through message drones, typically small, commercially available types (see *Drones* below). Winternight is constantly recruiting new talent, using tactics ranging from simple bribery and offers of camaraderie, to extortion, threats, blackmail and fiendishly subtle psycho-plots.

This organizational style makes it nearly impossible to track down and eliminate all of Winternight, but an individual cell makes a formidable yet manageable opponent for the typical Shadowrun team. Cell members can range from individuals above all suspicion highly-placed in corporate organizations (for example, accountants funneling money to Winternight or its fronts and operations) to street-level Viking gangers. Players can make contact with Winternight agents nearly anywhere using dozens of false guises and pretenses.

Larger cells are employed as strike teams to destroy both hard and soft targets or just cause trouble. The makeup of such combat cells often resembles a shadowrunning team or a small mercenary unit, and will include at least a toxic shaman or twisted Norse magician/Idol follower (typically worshipping a dark aspect of his patron deity). Except for a core few believers—the *Einherjar*—members of these teams almost never know they are working for Winternight. Other small, covert cells specialize in disguising accidents, poisonings and other, subtler methods of elimination as random violence, suicides or the actions of other groups (sometimes erstwhile allies).

Much of Winternight's equipment is built without serial or registration numbers on standard assembly lines, then classified as over-runs and shipped to dummy companies and warehouses where the cells can retrieve the equipment as needed. Winternight maintains hundreds of these impromptu arsenals all over the world. Winternight obtains its message and combat drones, vital to all its operations, from the same types of sources (see *Rules*).

Though it uses computers and high-technology systems for numerous purposes Winternight refuses to use the Matrix, convinced that the worldwide communications network is the design of Loki, the trickster god of Norse mythology. They view the Matrix as a tool of its great enemy, a tool of deception, illusion and a spying. Potential Winternight fronts may be identified by their complete lack of Matrix connections.

Most of the magicians in Winternight belong to cells pursuing specific technological goals. Like scientists affiliated with the group a number of them are sleeper agents in major corporations. Their cells are designing and building the tools Winternight will use to bring about Armageddon. Their first priority is the acquisition of nuclear weapons by any means necessary—a goal they have been pursuing for decades with terrifying success—, followed by mystical research into making these devices into something even more dangerous. Other tech cells concentrate their efforts on drilling mine shafts into geological faults all over the world, placing bombs and carving



runes into the shifting plates to ensure that the transformation of the world is complete. Winternight is also researching alternate and obscure weapons of mass destruction, such as cryogenic supercritical nuclear masses, subatomic dimensional linkages, necromantic transformation rituals, nuclear resonance triggers for tectonic shifts and even a plan for weapons that would cause frost-like cell damage or huge fires to sweep the earth bringing about a global winter without a single nuke.

Aware that other powerful and secretive groups and entities in the world, as well as megacorporations and most governments, would be hostile to their plans, Winternight's survival in this shadowy war relies on the fact that no one can find them to stop them. To maintain the organization's secrecy, most true Winternight *Einherjar* carry suicide devices ranging from cranial bombs to poisons to tattooed Anchored-spells to bound spirits whose services include killing captured agents.

## RULES

Winternight combines unique uses of several elements of the Shadowrun world: toxic shamans and corrupt Norse magicians, simsense chips and drones.

## NORSE MAGICIANS AND TOXIC SHAMANS

Though the Winternight creed is based on ideas from Norse mythology, it counts an unusually high number of magicians from a variety of traditions and backgrounds—however, all subscribe to the apocalyptic beliefs of the cult and consequently follow a toxic or corrupt path.

The two main traditions represented are Norse neo-pagans (mostly in Europe) and toxic shamans (most common in North America) though the group also numbers a smattering of Twisted Way berserker adepts and Corrupt magicians of various beliefs compatible with Winternight's ideals.

Most of the Norse magicians are *gode* (priest), *gydje* (priestess) or simply a *ganner* (sorcerer) dedicated to the dark forces embodied in a bloody and perverted aspect of one of the Norse deities—Odin as the Dark War God, Thor as the Bloodthirsty Warrior, or Tyr as the Hand of Vengeance. More details and information on Norse Magicians see *State of the Art: 2064* (p.109-110 and 122) and *Magic in the Shadows* (p.26). For roleplaying purposes these twisted neo-pagan magicians are mentally similar to Avenger toxic shamans, although their rituals and magic as well as the spirits they invoke will simply be darker versions of normal nature magic. In Europe, Winternight uses the pantheistic Aesir cults and thriving Viking ganger scene as principal recruiting grounds for magical talent, but it also has well-concealed links to Hermetic magical groups such as the Order of Thule (*State of the Art: 2064*, p. 116) and the magofascist Verband für Volkische Zauberek (aka Runenthing).

The strong necromantic cast to most of Winternight's activities ensures that shamans affiliated with the cult will be twisted and toxic in the truest sense of the terms. In North America, and to a lesser extent Europe and Asia, toxic shamans make up the bulk of Winternight's magical might, and given the inspiration in Norse mythology, it's unsurprising that the group numbers several toxic Raven, Bear and Wolf

shamans—all totemic animals revered in Scandinavian legend. Raven and Bear shamans in the cult tend to follow the path of the Avenger, and trickster Ravens are the driving influence behind many dark plots and the cult's shadowy alliances with local neo-luddite and deep green movements. Toxic Wolf shamans on the other hand are almost always mostly Poisoners, blood-soaked berserkers fiercely committed to destruction and loyal to the goal Winternight represents—inspired by the great wolf Fenrir who seeks the end of all things.

Thor-devoted *gode* and Wolf shamans will be the ones most often in direct confrontations, participating in battles or providing magical support for strike cells and are more likely active opponents shadowrunners might encounter in the field.

## Toxic Potency

When using a Winternight group that contains multiple toxic shamans or corrupted Norse magicians—that's right, Winternight's indoctrination seems to be able to get them to work together—simulate this gestalt of evil by pooling their Toxic Potency (*Magic in the Shadows*, p.123-124). This allows the gamemaster to reassign shared Potency to each participating shaman according to the requirements of the story. For example, during a Combat Turn some characters may receive no Potency dice, while a single shaman may call on the entire group's Potency. This advantage carries a few restrictions. A gamemaster can only combine the Potency of members of the same Winternight cell (which doubles as their dedicated magical group). If a shaman contributing to the shared Potency dies, immediately subtract his or her Potency from the total. To reallocate Potency dice among the members, all contributors must be within line of site of each other on the same plane (physical or astral). These shared Potency dice may only be reassigned a number of times each day equal to the highest Toxic Potency rating of the group.

## GOD CHIPS AND BERSERKER CHIPS

One of Winternight many tools is its use of a fiendish variation on BTL moodchips (*Cannon Companion*, p. 66). Normal BTL chips override the user's senses and replace that input with data from the chip be it with spiked emotion feeds or a range of enhanced emotional stimuli. Usually such chips amplify the user's id, ego and endocrine responses in tandem with the emotional track. Winternight's special version of the standard chip does all of the above—specifically generating a wave of euphoria and ecstasy, delusions of divinity and grandeur, uninhibiting the behavior and moral centers of the brain and spiking violent responses—but also feeds the user subliminal indoctrination, selective hallucinatory feedback to reinforce the delusion of divinity and programmed compulsions.

Singularly addictive (see *Cannon Companion*, p. 65-66 for the rules and effects of BTL and moodchip addiction), God chips are used mainly to hook targeted individuals and turn them into Winternight's willing pawns. It is also used internally as a reward for worthy *Einherjar*.

A variation on the "God chip" is the "berserker chip" Winternight gives its strike cells. This stripped down variant feeds the user a spiked emotional track which overwhelming







BTL	Duration	Rating/Code	Tolerance	Edge	Fix Factor
God (Rating 6)	5 minutes	5M/3P	2	5/10	1 week
<b>Effects:</b> Euphoria, divine ecstasy, uninhibits moral centers of the brain, fuels violent urges.					
<b>Negative side-effects:</b> highly addictive, user becomes prone to schizophrenic fugues and paranoia.					
BTL	Duration	Rating/Code	Tolerance	Edge	Fix Factor
Berserker (Rating 5)	2d6 minutes	3M/3P	2	2/10	1 week
<b>Effects:</b> Berserker bloodlust as Wolf shaman (SR3 p. XX). +2 Str, +2 Qui, +1 Will and +1D6 Init. Also dampens all pain from Physical or Stun damage for duration of effect					
<b>Negative side-effects:</b> -3 to Int (to a minimum of 1) during effect					

aggressive urges, converts pain to pleasure and establishes a strong feedback loop to the pleasure centers of the brain. In addition, the chip mutes all fear and flight responses, and often imprints compulsions such as a psychotic desire to kill. No one knows for sure where Winternight acquired the baseline emotive track used for this chip either, but it is assumed it is the combined imprints of several deranged and violent individuals—it is hard to believe a single individual could be the source.

A variety of berserker chips exist, based on the same template, but customized for specific missions, each with a slight variation in effect. A few have even been released to the world and copied to stir up trouble amongst the underworld and gang culture; they are particularly popular among go-gangers in North America and the roving Viking gangs of the Scandinavia Union. A few sophisticated versions of the chips exist, which contain skill sets, allowing users with skillwires, to use these chips as skillsofts—making them almost personafixes.

All Winternight chips have built in timer option (*Cannon Companion*, p. 68) and are only good for a certain number of uses. For God chip addiction mechanics refer to the Substance Abuse rules in *Man & Machine* (p.108) and the table below for the various ratings.

## DRONES

Winternight makes extensive use of drone vehicles in a variety of roles. Small, autonomous message drones (Pilot 4) provide the essential links between the various cells of the organization through a double-blind delivery system. The first cell programs the drone with several drop points and signals for each drop. The first cell ships the drones to the second cell, whose leader programs a second chip with the locations and signals of where messages are to be left on his end. Both chips are sealed into the machine, which is fitted with an anti-tampering system (Rating 5) which will self-destruct if tampered with. Because of Winternight's aversion to the Matrix, it also uses message drones to send money between cells in the form

of certified credsticks. All these courier drones will self-destruct if they are intercepted, tampered with, if a drop point is tampered with, or upon command by a rigger with the appropriate codes. Typical drones used in this role include variants of the Microskimmer I and II, Arachnoid minidrone or a stripped down Eireann-Tir Prospero)

When Winternight's goals require a massive combat punch, drones equipped with heavy weapons supplemented by spirit support represent the tool of choice, as Winternight considers a single rigger controlling several drones less of a security risk than a team of people. All Winternight drones are modified to contain several thermite charges set to destroy any part of the drone that could be traced back to the organization. In a combat situation, the drone controller's deck must transmit a "safe" signal to the drones on his subscription list once every minute. If the drones do not receive this signal, the Pilot 5 autosoft automatically takes over and automatically goes into "Alpha Strike Mode" which puts them beyond the rigger's control, and immediately discharges all remaining ammunition at the nearest recognized target before self-destructing. Such combat drones also self-destruct if they run out of ammunition, fuel, or are disabled, if they are tampered with between missions, or upon receiving a signal from their rigger.

The combat drones most commonly used in such operations are Dobermans and Roto-Drones (and their equivalents) for indoor operations and Steel Lynxes, Dalmatians and Wandjinas, but all drones are extensively modified beyond specs (the gamemaster is free to modify such drones to provide an appropriate level of opposition to the player characters). Winternight prefers to equip them with medium and heavy machineguns, assault cannons, and rocket launcher racks. They may employ APDS ammo if a hard target warrants the extra firepower. In such operations Winternight almost always applies extreme prejudice and attempts to eliminate all survivors and destroy as much property as they can to camouflage their real goals.