

The following is an excerpt from *The Collectors: The Burning House*, a roleplaying game by Thomas MacKay. Copyright © 2001, all rights reserved. *The Collectors* is a supernatural mystery setting in which the players portray demons sent to the mortal realm to collect souls owed to Hell.

The complete text is available for purchase from Rogue Publishing at www.roguepublishing.com.

What is a Collector?

This kind of question gets veteran collectors all philosophical—but the basics are quite simple. A collector is a demon with a very specific job: collecting due souls. Collectors find themselves incarnated in the human world with human identities, and various tools necessary to find the soul in question and to take it to “Processing,” an infernal office that shunts the souls to Hell. Outside of the demon at Processing (the “Receiving Officer”), collectors have a network of their fellow collectors and other infernal resources to help them accomplish their job. Their human identities are, moreover, real enough that they have human resources too: friends, contacts, jobs, and even an income. The collector is like a deep spy who, by all accounts, is a full member of society—he just has this special *job*.

Collectors are usually incarnated in pairs. Hell apparently finds this works well for the same reason you find cops in pairs: collectors can watch and support each other. A fellow collector can also help keep you from slipping, should you start to think that you might actually *be* human. Been known to happen.

You do find single collectors from time to time. It was more common years ago. Sometimes, too, collectors lose their partners but keep on the job. Sometimes collectors will appear in larger groups, but that’s the exception, in all likelihood because the soul in question is *really* important.

Don’t Send Me Back

The key motivator for most collectors when it comes to doing the job well and without hesitation is that they do not want to go back to Hell. Since they don’t exactly *remember* Hell this might seem a bit odd, but in a way it makes perfect sense.

Hell is like a very unpleasant memory. They don’t remember anything with lucidity; but they know that this is something traumatic and they don’t want to deal with it *ever again*. Not remembering something clearly, not *really knowing* something, is no impediment to fearing it. In

fact, the fear can become intensified. Collectors “know” Hell by a gut feeling and traumatic flashes of memory—screaming, sobbing, blood, fire, oppressive light and bleak dark—but that’s all, and that’s all they *want* to know.

All this would be meaningless, though, without The Chair, the CEO, the big Devil himself. The lack of a clear memory of Hell extends to this Power. Collectors call the Power “He” and “The Chair” but the sense of this being is as indistinct as it is ominous. The Chair is who put the collectors in the world and can take them out. The Chair is responsible for the whole organization of collectors and other demons, an organization that operates with grim efficiency in the mortal world, preying on desolate feelings, loss, and pain, and helping to perpetuate them. The Chair is the most visceral authority the collector feels. If an ardent Christian fears sin because she feels God looking over her, or a child fears a spilled drink because of a parent’s wrath, or a man is paralyzed by fears of the collective opinion of his culture or his peers—well, amplify this. This is the Chair. This is not just the power of bad opinion, of acceptance or the lack thereof, and this is not even the power of punishment or death. It is eternity of the most intense desolation and suffering, where a complete loss of hope meets the most abject loneliness and the burden of having gone terribly, terribly wrong.

No surprise then that collectors will not be so moved by the “small” concerns of their clients (the souls they collect) or other human beings who suffer because of what they do. They couldn’t possibly understand.

As a kind of psychological defense mechanism, the whole hellish enterprise is treated as a mass corporate venture. The Home Office, The Chair, Processing, Collectors, Clients and Contracts—all this language is a buffer against the unapproachable reality of this work. Even muttering “Hell” or “Satan” will give a collector a shiver. Making like it is a big company with jobs allows one to fit the whole big picture into something more manageable and banal.

Some of the best evil gets done that way.