

*The challenges faced by MIR are many. As a result, job roles are dynamic in nature to match the ever-changing landscape of isolation and retrieval. The best countermeasure to change is adaptability.*

*As such, all field employees must complete and maintain the following curriculum regardless of designation:*

***Firearms training*** (60 hrs req)  
***Basic first-aid/CPR*** (24 hrs req)  
***Emergency vehicle operations*** (36 hrs req)  
***Self-defense*** (44 hrs req)  
***Domestic violence diffusion*** (12 hrs req)  
***Ethics of the hunt*** (8 hrs req)  
***Investigations*** (45 hrs req)  
***Cultural diversity*** (8 hrs req)  
***Animal keeping*** (50 hrs req)  
***Human relations*** (11 hrs req)  
***Non-lethal weapons*** (12 hrs req)  
***Stress management*** (6 hrs req)  
***Conflict resolution*** (8 hrs req)  
***Computer/information systems*** (8 hrs req)  
***Survival Spanish*** (6 hrs req)

*Any subordinate may undergo reassignment at the discretion of MIR head officers. If a subordinate fails to accept new responsibilities, their employment may be terminated immediately.*

## Chapter 26:

### The Right to Know

The earth was dry when she had begun to dig, but now the grave was filled with rain. The spade disappeared into dark water, returning with heaps of sludge. *“Just drop him in a lake,”* thought Judith. These were Harry’s last words before driving back to headquarters. Judith knew he would resign when he returned to Springfield if Mother Hampton could not convince him otherwise. *She won’t fight for him,* thought Judith. *Not for someone who can’t handle one dead child.*

Harry would have left her with nothing had she not taken aim with her Tazer. He dumped her duffel bag and shovel onto the shoulder, and popped the trunk open for Judith to remove the body herself. She held Riley close as she ventured into the woods, shielding him from branches and whatever else reached for them in the night.

Judith set the boy’s body against a tree before beginning her work. She felt his eyes on her each time lightning lit the sky. Like the throbbing in her joints, she ignored it. When the storm passed, she

used the burgeoning sun for light. By then her police coat was wrapped about her waist-- her collared shirt tied used as a headband to soak up the last of the rain and sweat.

She lowered him into the water. *Riley had little in life, but he'll have this.* Judith placed his shoes atop a tree stump after sealing the ground.

"I'm done being a fool," said Judith standing beside the mound. "I swear this time." The words rung insincere as she muttered them. How many times had she said this? How many sacrifices had she made only to garner defeat? How many birthdays, holidays, and graduations had she lost with her boys? Luke was the only family that still contacted her, sending emails twice a year. She heard nothing this summer, and wasted no hope for winter.

*Don't bother haunting me, Riley; I won't recognize your ghost.* Judith would forget the victims, Fred Doogan and his wife, the benefactor, the Bedlam, her boys, and everything else that made her who she was. She took comfort knowing her disease would also erase last night and the man that made it happen. *Why, Howard? What makes Doogan worth all this?*

Riley's mother had a right to know her child was dead. Judith wondered if this woman still existed as she headed in the direction of the Bedlam Complex. She was guided by a less noble purpose. *The past is what it is, but the future doesn't need Howard Fettel.* She made no excuses; felt no doubt. Her legacy would endure as the woman who killed the leader of the Bedlam. And time would be his only burial.

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Few people traveled the mainland. Those that did stop were unwilling to get close to the complex, and did little talking after Judith told them her destination. During her travels she checked her duffel bag only to find that Harry had given her the wrong one. She lost her background files and fresh clothes, but gained a revolver and six silver bullets wrapped in a pair of slacks. Judith treated herself to a hot shower and a new outfit before arriving at the complex on foot two days after Riley's burial.

Judith crossed the tall grass with her hands above her head, hoping Riley's replacement would recognize it as a sign of surrender. She found no one. The trees may have concealed sharpshooters, but none stood at their stations on the apartment fire escapes. Judith kept her hands up still. *Who knows where Howard stuck all those cameras.* She caught a voice in the distance—rambling and weak. Judith pressed against the reinforced gate for a better listen—she did not expect it to give way.

She thought better of brandishing Harry's revolver, instead she opted to sling the duffel bag against her side and unzipped it part-way. Every sound felt booming in the empty lot, even the clack of her boots against pavement.

The voice became clearer on approach. It was not Howard, just the coarse drone of a man who had been speaking far too long. Judith flattened her back against the bricks of the South building, inching her way to the corner. She peeked out into the courtyard and found rows of Bedlam sitting on the pavement, glancing up at a young man Judith had never seen. He sat at Howard's balcony with a

microphone and an open book like a soothsayer raining news of tomorrow. A pretty boy with a frock of wavy hair—he looked like Ron when they unmasked him at the cemetery. The only sound other than his voice came from her boots.

The young man looked up from his book and froze. Soon the entire complex had turned their attention to Judith. She recognized many faces that day. From the tenderness in their eyes it was evident they recognized her as well.

“Stop moving,” said the young man. “Everyone meet back here later.”

The crowd was slow to disperse. She had hoped to find Howard among them, instead, she found an intricately tattooed girl—a tight little thing with a Mohawk and sunglasses barking orders at armed guards.

“I said put your hands up!” said the girl. “Let them remove the bag.”

Judith complied. “I’m not here to cause problems. Just have some loose ends to tie up.” A full-blood slid his free hand down her pockets, through her hair, and between her legs. He looked back at the girl with a nod and handed her the duffel bag.

“You waltz in with just a bag?” said the girl.

“I’ve cradled most of the people here when they had no one else,” said Judith. “I trust they still know me.”

“And a silver revolver?”

“For the ones that don’t know me.” Judith looked her up and down. “I don’t believe we’ve met.”

The sunglasses did not hide the girl’s displeasure.

“Is Howard available? We have business.”

“Howard Fettel is dead,” said the girl. “Your business is with Mr. Bully.” The girl turned to reveal the young man at the front door of the North building. He motioned for them to come over.

What the hell kinda game is this, Howard?

“He’s ready for you,” said the girl. She addressed the guards. “Conserve your rounds. If she acts up, snap her neck.”

The suite was not what Judith remembered. Howard’s manic trash piles were replaced by obnoxious Southwestern fare.

The girl gave Mr. Bully the bag and whispered in his ear. She looked more agitated as he shook his head.

"She walked right in with silver bullets. You know who's supposed to be guarding the gate today, right?"

"I'll talk to Marcelo later," said Bully.

"We need to address this—."

"I'll address it when I don't have a thousand other problems running through my brain. Did you do what I asked?"

"I didn't find him yet."

"Then don't come back 'til you do."

The girl shoved the bag into his chest before storming out.

Bully focused on Judith. "I'm supposed to hang you for bringing in silver. You'd better have a good story."

"I came here earlier in the week for Howard's help," said Judith. "May I ask how he died?"

"No questions—not until I know who you are and why you're here."

"MIR Officer Judith Klove. I came to tell Riley's family of his passing."

"May I ask how *he* died?"

"Howard sent us to take Riley to a doctor up North that didn't exist. Next thing we know a vigilante group shoots up our car."

"I see. You should speak with Andora as soon as you can."

"And which one is Andora?" said Judith as she stepped towards the balcony.

"Don't go out there!" said Mr. Bully. "They'll think it's time to start up again, and I'm not ready to go back out there." He called over a guard and ordered him to bring Andora to the suite.

"How long have you been reading to them?" said Judith.

"Going on five hours now."

"How long do you plan to keep going?"

He stood silent, fiddling with the trim of an old cowboy hat he plucked from the table. He looked up at her like he did in the courtyard. She noticed a contrast between his eyes—one colored exhaustion; the other regret. Before he could answer, a woman was ushered in.

"Andy," said Dan. "Officer Klove has something to tell you about Riley."

Judith took her hand in hers. She could see Andora's eyes had begun to well. Judith squeezed her hand softly, and Andora squeezed back. "Bring over one of those chairs, Bully."

Judith guided her to sit down. "Andora, I'm sorry... your son is dead."

Andora began to breath heavy as she turned to face Bully. "How?"

"Vigilantes, like the ones we saw in Flint."

"We should have killed them," said Andora, "but you made us run away."

"It couldn't have been the same men," said Judith. "It happened up in the U.P. more than two-hundred miles north of here. Riley told us he had lots of siblings. Would you like me to be with you when you tell them?"

Andora pulled her hand away. "Riley was the only one I loved. The rest are Howard's."

"You don't mean that."

"No one even told me he was being taken away. You think we're too stupid to take care of ourselves, like we don't know better. But I would have stopped it. I know better than to leave this place." Andora stood up from her chair. "I can't be in this room anymore!"

"Escort her back to her apartment and stay with her," said Bully.

Judith grabbed the chair Andora was using and sat down at the table near the balcony. She rubbed her eyes with both hands.

"I think we can both do with a drink," said Bully.

*It's not even noon yet.* "What'd you got?"

"Bourbon and Bourbon." Bully put two wine glasses on the table and poured. He filled them to the brim. He lifted his glass. "To Riley and Howard," said Bully. Judith tapped her glass to his, spilling the excess out onto their hands. Judith drank half before putting it down.

You never answered my question about Howard."

"He died at the Canadian border on his way to Alaska. We don't know how exactly, but I hear the border guards are particularly vicious to our kind."

*Good thing Howard has a private jet to bypass the border completely.* Judith drank deep into her glass.

"I take it you lost a man, too?" said Bully.

"What makes you say that?"

"You kept saying 'us' not too long ago—a deputy maybe?"

"He ain't dead, but yeah, I lost a man. Not much of a man, truth be told. You know he didn't even help with...can I get another?"

"Certainly." Bully refilled her glass. "You were saying?"

"The vigilantes left Riley in a bad way. My deputy didn't even help me remove the body from the trunk to bury him. I had to pull Riley out in pieces like I was gathering firewood. I'll drink to losing my man."

Bully lowered his glass.

"Did I upset you?"

"I was just thinking about Riley and some other people we lost this week. Life's been hard, but I think we've put ourselves in a good position to rebuild. I don't want to lose any more people—not a single one."

"What's your name, son?"

"Danny, or Dan, or Daniel—It doesn't matter."

"I don't know how you got here, Dan, or why you're running the show, but you can't keep everyone alive. Better men have tried. I've tried. It's real easy to think you're doing alright now, but what about when the full moon comes and you got to make some real decisions? Do you even know the holding capacity of your bunkers?"

"I figured a couple hundred."

"Fifty. You got about a hundred children running around this complex. Which ones do you want to keep alive?"

"I'll build more bunkers."

"Not enough time or resources. Here's what I'd do: fill the bunkers with your youngest, healthiest kids. They tend to wander off after transformation and most don't know how to hunt yet. Stick your elderly in their apartments and bar the doors. They won't get moving unless something agitates them real good. Everyone else gets spaced out in the courtyard and, well...you hope for the best."

"What would you do about low food supplies?"

"Rip up the basketball court and see if crops take in that soil." Judith took another deep sip. "Or plant on the rooftops. This place can be self-sustaining. I used to tell that to Howard. Maybe you'll listen."

"So what did you need Howard's help for?" said Dan.

"We were tracking someone very dangerous. Does the name Fred Doogan mean anything to you?"

"You think he's still in the area?"

"You sound nervous."

"I got his wife pregnant."

*Well hello, Mr. Bully. "Things are finally starting to take shape. Doogan marries a wolf, she cheats on him with you, he sneaks rot powder into the Bedlam supply to get his revenge..."*

"That's crazy! Gator would never do that. Besides, the rot powder happened before he found out about me and Char."

*This makes total sense. I needed Fred alive, Howard wanted him dead. Why else would Howard send me so far off course? Unless he knows something I don't. Can you take me to Howard's surveillance room? I need to review any footage made in the last two weeks."*

"What surveillance room?"

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"I thought this was a broom closet," said Dan. He used a power drill and bolt cutters to remove the column of locks from the door. He pushed the door open to reveal a wall of screens flickering in the dark. Dan examined each one with his mouth ajar in disbelief. "It's everyone," said Dan. "Howard was watching everyone."

"You expected any less from a paranoid demagogue?" said Judith.

"Where do we even start?"

"Let me look through these tapes while you pry open that file cabinet." Judith perused a stack of tapes—each one cleanly labeled with the day, time, and area. Dan shedded the lock of each drawer while Judith loaded tapes into a VCR. *Monday night—right after I left with Riley.*

The video was grainy and compressed, but she could make out Howard in the courtyard. He stood there alone, watching something off camera with his binoculars.

"He has files on everyone too!" said Dan. He opened a file labeled "Dan Bully." Beneath it was a file three times as thick labeled "Frederick 'Gator' Doogan." Judith picked it up and scanned the documents. Howard's intel was more in-depth than MIR's database could ever dream of being. *Gator has family in Illinois. That's a damn good place to start.*

"Something's happening," said Dan pointing at the monitor. "Look."

Howard is finally joined by another man. They exchanged words.

"It's the Warg!" said Dan.

"The *who*?"

"Keep watching."

A limo pulled up next to the North building. Howard was assisted into the back seat while a cello case was slowly loaded into the trunk.

"The Warg's cello is still in his room," said Dan. "What's inside of that case?"

"I want to know what they were waiting for. What direction were they facing...east?" Judith found a tape labeled "Militia Camp" and loaded it into the machine. She fast forwarded to the timestamp of the last tape. There were five men waiting in the tall grass. They faced west, and then they turned with the movement of flashing lights racing down the road in the distance.

"That's us," said Judith.

One of the vigilantes held a radio to his mouth and promptly fashioned it to his belt. The men got into a sedan and followed the squad car with their lights off.

*He used us as bait to sneak out, thought Judith. It was never about finding Doogan.*

Judith returned to Gator's file. *Born in Louisiana, Doogan spent most of his life with his mother in Southern Illinois. After a litany of charges for petty theft, he would eventually marry Charlene Doogan...born Charlene Fettel.*

"Charlene was inside that cello case!" said Dan. "That's why no one saw her leave!"

"Charlene Doogan is Howard's daughter!?"

"And she's pregnant with my children."

"Do you know the location of the commune?"

"Howard never said. I think he still held onto the hope that Gator would return."

"Those are your children!"

"And I'm trapped here, left to clean up Howard's mess."

"I won't let Howard get away with any more of this," said Judith. "Give me one week, and I'll get you to the commune myself."