

# MAGE Noir

The War? I remember the war. Kid, if you have to ask which one, you weren't in it. When we got back after saving the world, we found that America had changed. Women were working in factories while men skulked in corners and hid from their pasts. Technology had leapt forward while simple values were left behind. It was like the whole damned country had Awakened while we were gone.

This book includes:

- A brief historical look at America in the 1940s, from an Awakened perspective.
- Player and Storyteller advice on chronicles set in this time period.
- A Storytelling Adventure System story, complete with a pre-generated cabal.

Nothing's been the same since.

— Hard-Boiled, Thyrus of the Thirteenth Question legacy



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MAGE  
THE AWAKENING



# War Widow

Rick leaned on a lamppost and tilted his hat down over his eyes. There was no sunlight, so the gesture seemed calculated to avoid seeing the tears of the woman in front of him. She turned away from his apparent indifference, trailing a swirl of early twilight fog in her wake. As soon as she left the circle of yellow light cast by the streetlight, Ferryman stepped out of the shadows nearby. His arms folded across his chest and his posture ramrod-straight, he waited for Rick to speak.

"They're stealing her dead husband's pension. That's all she's got to live on now that he's gone—her and the kid. Twenty years old, and they're stealing all she's got." Rick pushed off of the lamppost, face obscured under the shadow of his brim.

"Is she really your sister, Rick?" Ferryman asked, expressionless but not unmoved. Even if he'd tried to sound sympathetic, it wouldn't have worked; his eyes were too dead for that.

"She thinks she is. Isn't that all that matters?"

"I'll look out for her. I know what she's going through." Rosie had heard the story and volunteered at the first sign the Widow Merchant was in physical danger. Now she sat in her husband's farm truck and held on to the steering wheel with white knuckles. Girl like this didn't belong in a quiet middle-class neighborhood. Of course, neither did the black coupe parked across from the Merchant's address. She slid out of the truck and moved lightly to the coupe, peeking in the window. The license mounted on the steering column told her everything she needed to know about the registered owner: Malone. Howard M. Malone. His filthy resonance was all over the car.

She gripped her husband's dog tags, slipping them off of her neck and kept them clutched in her fist as she crept up to the house. The slimy ~~guy~~ hadn't even bothered to close the door behind them. They couldn't hear her walk into the house; she muffled the sound as she went.

"Mr. Malone told you just what would happen if you went looking for help, Mrs. Merchant. And he's a man of his word." One of the heavies slapped the widow hard enough that she staggered backward, red staining her cheek immediately. One hand went to steady herself; the other rose to her cheek. The second man grabbed her by the shoulders.

"That's no way to treat a lady, boys. Why don't you two pick on someone your own size?" The men turned on short, steady Rosie. They both looked her over, from her smart short hair to the pants she'd never gotten over wearing from her factory days.

"You wanna dress like a man, cupcake? Well that's just how I'll treat you." The more aggressive of the two hauled back for a haymaker and tried to slug her. When he hit her in the jaw, he recoiled like he'd tried to punch a brick wall.

"That's not how you throw a punch, Bruno. This is how you throw a punch." She tightened her little fist around the tags and slammed the guy hard enough in the gut that blood trickled out of his nose. That was about when thug number two entered the scrap, with similar results.

Less than three minutes later both men were rushing each other out the door. Rosie wiped blood from the corner of her mouth and slid the dogtags back around her neck. When she turned, she found herself nose to nose with the widow.

"I don't know how I can ever thank you." Before Rosie could answer, they were kissing, and neither of them could be sure who started it.

A hot second later, the widow broke away, panting. "I, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to, I mean, it's just, what would my family say?"

"Nothing, if you don't tell them." Rosie reached up to the widow's lips and wiped the blood off of them. "You don't have to be alone tonight."



Nightingale hung up the phone behind the bar and leaned heavily on it. "That was Rosie," she told the rest of the cabal. "It's Malone's boys alright. She cleared two of them out, but she's going to sit on the widow tonight in case they bring back reinforcements. Options?" She pushed off the bar and clicked on a radio. Glen Miller started to swing, and she tapped her foot along in time.

"Malone's not afraid to use dirty tricks; he's even got some nasty spirits working for him. He's out and proud and happy to abuse people with his power as well as his magic. He's not going to back down easy." Malone was the worst sort to Clown's way of thinking: an Awakened Objectivist with a small criminal enterprise at his fingertips. He started sketching on a bar napkin what his mind's eye told him the spirits in cahoots with Malone would look like. Jung would have been proud.

Rick smirked without humor and poured himself another snoot of whiskey from the bottle Nightingale left on the bar for him. "If he's not going to go easy, he's going to have to go hard."

"So where's he vulnerable? He's hurting a lot of people—he's got to have enemies, and he's got to have soft spots." Nightingale took the bottle away and set it on the bar back, lightly dancing along to the tinny big band coming through the radio.

"A man doesn't step over the dead that often without making a few dead of his own. I guess I'll go shake up some of the fellas on the other side and see what they have to say." Ferryman hadn't sat down, but loomed behind the other two men across from Nightingale. His squared shoulders, meant to make him look taller, only made him look uncomfortably stiff. Even the sweetheart's gentle movements behind the bar didn't soften his expression. He turned on point and marched out of the Chats with purpose.

"What's got his head so full of steam?" Clown asked Rick.

Rick shrugged. "Taking money from dead soldiers?"

"What doesn't give him a head full of steam?" Nightingale asked sadly. As she watched the door shut behind him, she stopped dancing.

Late night in the Bureau of Veteran Affairs was deserted. That didn't stop Ferryman from letting himself in; it just meant no one would be around to hear or see anything that transpired. And that was okay with him.

He worked his way through a filing cabinet until he came up on the file for Corporal William "Willy" Merchant. A hundred voices cried out to him from the files there. In many cases the file was only thing left of a dead soldier whose body couldn't even be recovered for a real burial.

Ferryman gripped the bullet that had killed him in his pocket, and read through the file. "You here, Willy?"

"I miss my wife." The ghost moaned. "I miss my wife." He was barely more than an echo now.

"I know you do, Corporal, but I need you to try and focus. We need to stop the man that's robbing your wife blind."

"I miss her, I miss her."

He was nearly too far gone to be of any help. Ferryman sighed and rubbed his bullet between thumb and forefinger, the rifling along its length nearly smooth from handling. "This man Malone, he sent some bullets to your house. Where your wife and kid are. Those men were going to hurt her. She's in danger, Willy. I need you to try and focus here. I need your help."

Ferryman felt a chill behind him. When he turned, an ephemeral doughboy with a hole straight through his forehead saluted. "Reporting for duty, sir!"

"Thatta boy, Corporal. Thatta boy."

After another phone call, Nightingale had grabbed her coat and left the Chats in a hurry. "I'm going to find Clown. This is going down tonight! Meet me by the pier in two hours." She threw on her wrap as she hurried to the door. "And Rick, try not to drink me out of house and home while I'm gone?"

Rick shook his head and wobbled a little on the bar stool, staring down at his empty shot glass.

"Clown's wrong about the where and when. Circus isn't at the pier," he said to no one. "But isn't that always the way." He got up, picked his hat up off the bar, and wandered out behind Nightingale but headed in the opposite direction. The Pier would have to wait. He let his feet point him where he needed to go. "I'm on my way, Mrs. Merchant, just like I told you. I'll set this right." Right place, right time? That was old Rick.

So long as "right" meant trouble.



"But Ferryman says..." Clown cut Nightingale off with a wave of his hand.

"You told me what he said, bird. I heard you. A wave of the dead moving in. Catastrophic. Impossible show of supernatural violence. I heard you. It's all about timing."

She sneered. "Don't you talk to me like that, Clown. Don't you get like that with me." She put her hands on her hips and cowed him with a look.

"You're right, you're right. I'm sorry. It sounded better in my head anyway." He sat on a wooden pier and dug a knife into his hand, dripping blood onto the back of the ratty paperback he always carried. The drops absorbed into the cover and an image of Malone's Fate manifested in the air above the book. Like a Dorothy Tanning painting, it was vivid but hard to explain.

"I will be violence of the most ghastly sort." The concept told Clown, who nodded. "But you will be wrong about my place in time as well as in space." The image vanished and Nightingale looked to the urban shaman with her pretty face twisted up in confusion.

"What in the heck does that mean?" She tapped her foot impatiently, and in time to some old USO favorite.

"It means we have to hoof it sister. I thought it was here and in two hours. That means anywhere but here and probably right now."

You can't trail ghosts, exactly, but Ferryman knew where they were going after his energetic exchange with the dead Corporal. Things had been happening on the Other Side: preparations to give Malone what was coming to him. The fact that the dead overheard the lingering threat to Merchant's wife and figured that was where to catch up to him was all the information they needed. They were on the march, and Ferryman wasn't inclined to stop them.

Clown and Nightingale were climbing out of her car as Ferryman pulled up. "Has it started yet?" she asked in a hurry.

"Can't say. We can't stop it, so all we can do is try to contain the fallout." Ferryman replied, moving to the house with purpose.

"That poor woman." Nightingale hurried after.

"Anyone seen Rick?" Clown asked.

The other two shook their heads when a woman screamed.

Three fifths of the Lamppost Cabal pushed into the quite suburban house in time to see Rosie get splashed with blood. The manifestation of two dozen dead men had flashed into existence just long enough to pull Malone and his two armed goons in half before they could riddle the two women full of bullets. Duty done, the ghosts were gone.

"Well that's a fine 'how do you do,'" Rosie said, wiping her face. "I killed the lights getting out of the window. No one could have seen it."

Ferryman grimly went about gathering the body parts onto a rug to dispose of it. Rosie shrugged away Nightingale's fussing and went to get a mop and bucket for the blood on the walls and floor.

"This is what we are," Clown said quietly. "A clean-up crew."

Ferryman gave him a look as he tossed an arm onto the pile. "Quit the philosophy will you, and grab that foot next to you?"

"Where's Mrs. Merchant? Did she see all of this?" Nightingale asked Rosie as she stepped back in from the kitchen.

"I... I don't know. She was here with me just before it happened."

"She decided to have a nap in the closet." Rick said, stepping out of said closet with a white handkerchief and a bottle in his hand. "She'll sleep it off and never know what happened."

"You sure she's not your sister, Rick?" Clown asked for a second time.

"She's a war widow, Clown. She's everybody's sister." Rick answered, tucking the handkerchief away in his jacket.

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