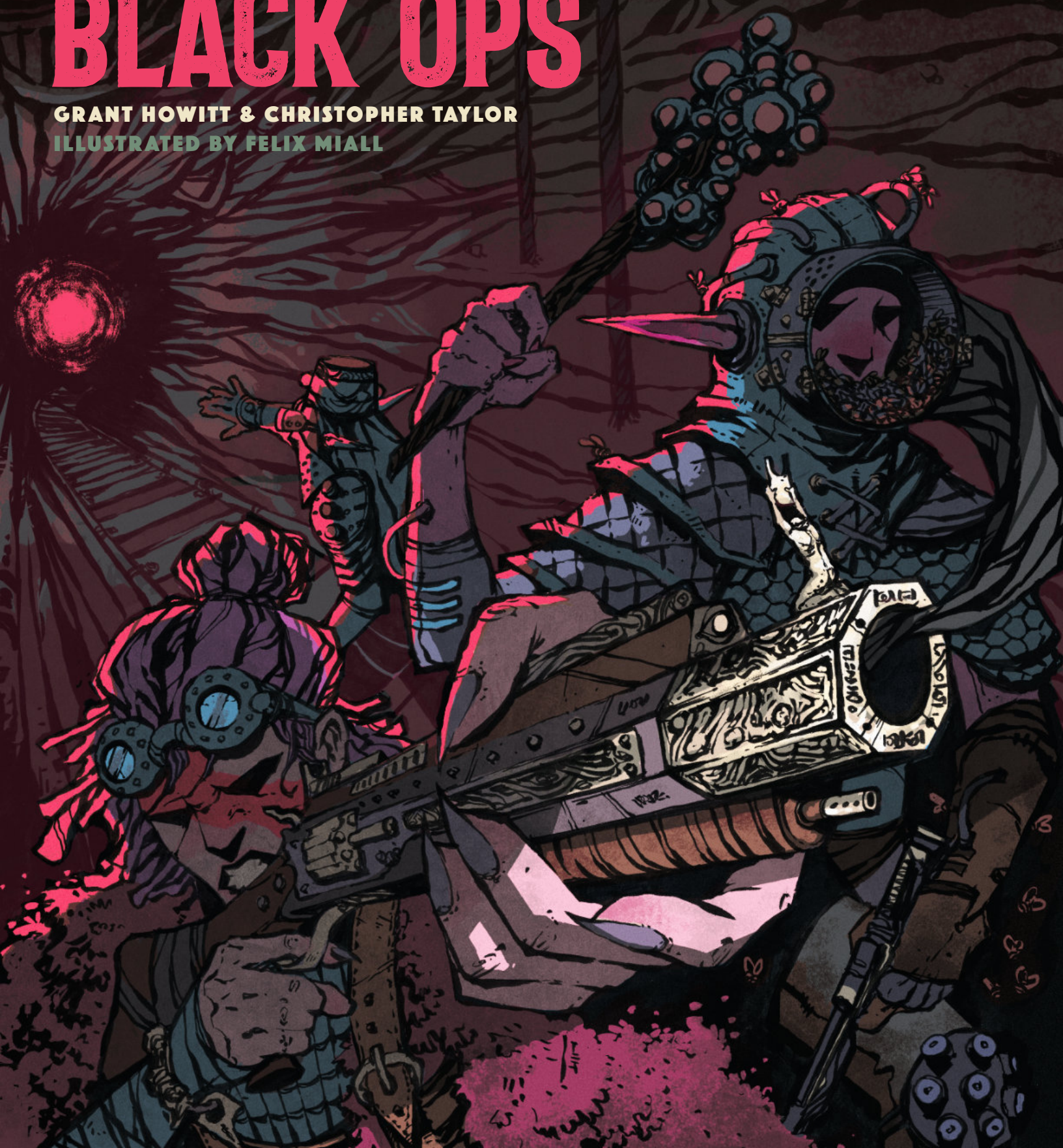


VERMISSIAN BLACK OPS

GRANT HOWITT & CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR
ILLUSTRATED BY FELIX MIAL

HEART
THE CITY
BENEATH



Vermisian Black Ops

Written by Grant Howitt and Christopher Taylor

Illustrated by Felix Miall

Edited by Helen Gould and Mary Hamilton

Layout and design by Minerva McJanda

Produced by Mary Hamilton

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Rowan, Rook and Decard
15 Tufnell Court, Old Ford Road
E3 5JJ, United Kingdom

www.rowanrookanddecard.com

Content warnings: Heart is a horror game, and as such, there are some unpleasant things in the text. These include but are not limited to: violence, drug use, addiction, ghosts, unwanted bodily transformation, and monsters that used to be people. We can assure you that there is no rape or sexual assault in this game.



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INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress (hereafter just “the Ministry”) is a paramilitary cult devoted to the dark elf goddess of secrets, grace and shadows. Their ultimate aim is to overthrow and replace the high elf government of Spire via an extended campaign of sabotage, blackmail and assassination - but at present, they’re making do with destabilising aelfir rule in any way they can.

The bulk of the Ministry is divided into cells who have no contact with each other. These cells are secreted within the city of Spire and tasked with subverting the rule of the aelfir. But you don’t work as part of a cell - you’re too weird, too dangerous and too valuable to be placed in civilised society. Plucked from the depths of the undercity, you have been formed into a team of special operatives and assigned to crucial missions.

Using illegal magic and a barely-understandable cursed mass transit network - the Vermissian - to navigate the city, you emerge from the shadows and strike at the most valuable targets. You are a member of the Throne Division: the Vermissian Black Ops.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS

Vermissian Black Ops uses the *Heart* rules to tell stories of action and horror in the city of Spire. It focuses on the Vermissian - the failed train network that runs through Spire like diseased tissue, spreading arcane fallout throughout the city - which is used to access dangerous or hard-to-reach locations which are valuable to the Ministry.

The tone and content are quite different from the standard *Heart* experience. This isn’t an introspective descent into a shared personal hell to satisfy your hubristic obsession. This is desperate bullets-and-blood combat against an occupying force, using a cursed subway network to attack from unexpected directions. We use the *Heart* rules to tell these stories because they’re focused on combat and travelling through hostile environments.

We’ve done our best to make this a *Heart* sourcebook that you don’t need to read *Spire* to understand, whilst avoiding repeating ourselves or reprinting material. However, given where the game takes place, reading *Spire* will probably help you gain a broader understanding of the factions and locations at play.

This book functions as an expansion for *Heart* because it details the upper-city portions of the Vermissian. Though they’re less cursed and mad than the parts beneath the city, they’re still non-euclidian nightmare mazes of twisted steel and phantom trains where delvers can find adventure, secrets or whatever they’re searching for. You don’t have to work for the Ministry to explore them.

It also functions as an expansion for *Spire* because it details the different lines of the Vermissian, which is in that game too.

ALTERNATIVE RULES

In this section, we'll focus on some tweaks to the core *Heart* rules that allow you to run mission-led games that deal with stealth, combat and paramilitary cults in a cursed transit network.

ADVANCEMENT

Characters on Vermissian Black Ops missions don't advance by hitting beats from their Calling like regular *Heart* characters. They should still have one (there's a reason they went into the undercity) but they will gain advancements by completing missions instead.

Each **minor objective** the characters achieve earns them, appropriately, a **minor advance**; **major objectives** grant **major advances**. You can learn more about mission structure on p. 8.

There's no means of earning **zenith abilities** within this system, mainly because it doesn't fit with the overall tone of the game. Also, since characters all advance at the same time, this would result in every single delver going supernova at once - which might detract from the essential gravitas of the experience.

DOMAINS

In the standard *Heart* game, the Vermissian is (mostly) covered by the **TECHNOLOGY** domain. However, given that roughly half the events in a *Black Ops* game take place in the Vermissian, access to the **TECHNOLOGY** domain might provide an unfair advantage.

So, in *Black Ops* games, the Vermissian comes under every possible domain to offer variety and limit how often you're rolling that extra dice.

CURSED locations are places where the energies of the Heart are especially strong. These are more common in the lower areas of the Vermissian, but even the Loft line isn't completely free of the Heart's presence.

DESOLATE locations are barren, empty and unforgiving. Huge lift shafts are one example, as are the exposed areas of track on the upper Spire.

HAVEN locations are rare in the Vermissian, given the nature of the place (and that it's so close to an actual habitable city) but some people choose - or are forced - to live here.

OCCULT locations feature magic circles (abandoned or active), the theoretical libraries of the Vermissian Sages (i.e. the libraries themselves are theoretical, and all the texts in them cover theoretical topics) and no end of shadowy cults devoted to unearthing hidden knowledge.

RELIGION locations include shrines to the Midden Mistresses of the Vermissian, houses of worship for banned religions and one particularly elaborate solar temple which collected the sun's energy to be funnelled into trains.

TECHNOLOGY locations cover machinery - such as lifts, winches, drawbridges, signal-boxes and turntables - as well as the more practical efforts of the Vermissian Collective.

WARREN locations are plentiful in the Vermissian; it's made of tunnels, after all. Some have collapsed or shrunk over time, and countless maintenance vents and passageways make it hard to predict where or when an ambush might be sprung.

WILD locations are a useful contrast to the iron and galvanics of the rest of the Vermissian - having the occasional tree or deer in there can really spice things up.

HAUNTS AND HEALING

The Ministry provides safehouses, materials, doctors and spiritual guidance to operators between missions. This means that you don't need to worry about using haunts to remove stress and fallout from your character.

Instead, at the end of every mission when you return to your safehouse, you can:

- Clear all stress marked against your resistances;
- Remove any **Minor** fallout;
- Reduce all **Major** fallout to **Minor**.

FALLOUT AND RESISTANCES

To reflect the action-orientated tone of *Vermissian Black Ops*, feel free to use the following new fallout results.

COMBAT fallout (generally using Fortune) allows you to model firefights and desperate battles; **MINISTRY** fallout is related to the fact that you're working for a forbidden church that occasionally makes strange demands.

COMBAT

FLANKED. [MINOR, FORTUNE] Your enemies have forced you into a dangerous position, and your cover doesn't provide proper protection. All stress inflicted by your adversaries increases by 1 dice size. When you move to a new position or eliminate all adversaries present, remove this fallout. [Immediate, Ongoing]

ALERT. [MINOR, FORTUNE] Your adversaries know that something's amiss. All attempts at stealth become Risky until the end of the situation. [Ongoing]

REINFORCEMENTS. [MINOR, FORTUNE] Your adversaries raise the alarm and you hear the sound of their allies rushing to support them. You've got about a minute to get out of here before you're surrounded and killed or captured. [Immediate]

NO EXIT. [MINOR, FORTUNE] Your planned exit route is shut off; doors lock, adversaries take up defensive positions, walls and bridges collapse and so on. You're going to need an alternative point of egress. [Immediate]

DRIVEN BACK. [MINOR, MIND] You're panicked, shaken and driven back by fear of being shot and killed. If you're carrying something important or heavy, you drop it; if you're escorting someone, they're on their own. Once you get somewhere safer and catch your breath, remove this fallout. [Immediate, Ongoing]

SUPPRESSED. [MINOR, BLOOD/MIND] Bullets ricochet and thump into the walls around you; you're convinced that you'll die if you stick your head out. All actions become Risky until another character arrives to drag you away or take out the adversary that's threatening you.

FOLLOWED. [MAJOR, FORTUNE] You've been followed into the Vermissian as you attempt to return to base. You'll need to lose (or drive off, or kill) your pursuers before you make contact with the Ministry again.

MINISTRY

COMPROMISED. [MAJOR, FORTUNE] Your actions didn't go unnoticed, and someone important knows what you did - or someone unimportant has evidence they want to share. You need to silence them; kill them if you have to.

SHADOWS FALL. [MAJOR, BLOOD/ECHO] The Hidden Mistress' eye looks upon you, drawn by bloodshed and weird magic. The area is suffused with cloying shadows, and light sources are dimmed or extinguished. The **RANGED** tag is removed from all weapons and abilities, reducing combat to a stumbling, desperate mess of point-blank fire and stabbing - unless the combatants can see in the dark.

SACRIFICE. [MAJOR, SUPPLIES] The Ministry feels that you have drawn too deeply on their resources and demands a sacrifice in return. You must execute a named target in a sacrificial (and awkward) manner to ensure the success of the mission. Once completed, the person who enacted the ritual marks D6 stress to **Mind**, and the Goddess' blessing allows them to roll with mastery for the remainder of the situation. Failure to offer the sacrifice will incur the wrath of the Ministry, and you will not be able to resupply or rest after this mission is complete.

EXTRACTION. [MAJOR, SUPPLIES] New information surfaces: one of the people in the mission area is a Ministry plant, and requires extraction. Failure to do this will incur the wrath of the Ministry, and you will not be able to resupply or rest after this mission is complete.

BURNED. [CRITICAL, MIND/FORTUNE] You've made too many mistakes and have been sold out by the Ministry: whoever's in charge of your operations decided that you're worth more as a sacrifice than an agent. You're given misleading information and sent into a trap. Hopefully you'll be captured and interrogated, therefore spreading misinformation; if not, you'll just be dead and no longer a problem. You might manage to fight your way out and escape, but it's probably not a good idea to go hunting for revenge. (Not that it'll stop you from trying, obviously.)

SHOCK AND AWE. [CRITICAL, FORTUNE] You realise that the Paladins have discovered your base of operations as they hurl solar explosives inside and begin systematically executing everyone they can see. If you're lucky, you might escape; but most likely you'll end up dead.

COMBINING THIS GAME WITH SPIRE

It's possible, and indeed fun, to combine simultaneous games of *Spire* and *Vermissian Black Ops* into a single campaign from multiple perspectives. Players can make a character for both rulesets: their *Spire* characters are a cell of ministers in the city, and their *Vermissian Black Ops* characters are a specialised team of operatives ready to strike at targets that the cell designates.

This doesn't mean that the cell has a hit squad at their beck and call - Ministry protocol is still in effect, and they only dispatch black ops teams on crucial missions. However, this will allow the cell to focus on revolution and subterfuge without doing too much wetwork themselves.



GAMEPLAY

SESSION STRUCTURE

In general, each session will be broken up into three parts:

- An initial delve from somewhere within the Vermissian to reach the intended target.
- A single long situation, or several linked situations, detailing the minor or major objective the team are trying to achieve.
- A delve through the Vermissian to return to base.

OPERATIONS

Play in Operations is divided up into two different parts: **minor objectives** and **major objectives**.

Minor objectives support a **major objective** - they make it possible (or easier) to achieve a team's main aim. Supply runs, stealing valuable resources, extraction of vital personnel, reconnaissance, pre-emptive assassinations and planting evidence can all play into weakening an enemy's defences to prepare for a decisive assault. These are generally the work of a single session.

Major objectives are the crux of an operation - the action on which everything succeeds or fails. Assassination of prominent city officials, industrial sabotage and destruction of important resources are all common goals (see the **OPERATION EXAMPLES** below). The business of completing a major objective should take up several sessions of play, during which the minor objectives are completed and the job itself forms the final session of the arc.

BUILDING AN OPERATION

The Throne Division tasks operatives with determining the fine details of their missions themselves, handing down major objectives expecting good results and few questions.

As such, players are free to outline their objectives both in and out of character. GM, you can guide them through the process using the steps below.

- If you have a **major objective** in mind, share it with the players. If not, ask them what sort of thing they're interested in doing, where they'd like to operate within the city and whose lives they want to ruin.
- Ask them what challenges prevent them from achieving the mission immediately (two or three should do it).
- Determine as a group what they could do to circumvent those challenges to come up with the **minor objectives**.

Alternatively, you can come up with all the objectives yourself. This is a good idea for a one-shot game, as discussed above - but if you create the entire story on your own, the players don't have much of a say in what's going on. You might find that they become unengaged over the course of several sessions.

ONE-SHOTS

There's no time to play out **minor objectives** in a one-shot game! You need to skip straight to the exciting bit. Resolve **minor objectives** with a single roll from any player who took part, and extrapolate the results from there. This will allow players to introduce their characters and get a feel for the tone of the game before the main mission begins. You don't need to worry about stress or fallout from these rolls - only whether they succeed or fail. At your discretion, failed **minor objectives** can increase the difficulty and danger of the **major objective**, but it's more important that they're reflected in the narrative than the mechanics of the game.

For example: The game begins as the operatives leave Throne station and set off for their assassination target: a Mortician in New Heaven who has performed life-extending undying surgery on several of the Ministry's greatest opponents.

The GM asks the characters which of them led the minor objective where they riled up the Charnelites

death-cultists in the area to act as a cover for their advance.

The player in control of the group's Witch suggests that it was her, and makes a **Compel+Religion** check to see how it went. She rolls a 6 - a partial success. The GM narrates that while she did indeed rile up the Charnelites, she pissed off a few of them too, and they know her face.

OPERATION EXAMPLES

Here are some examples of Throne Division operations to inspire you.

Archdeacon Many-the-Seedlings is using his political sway to pass a law requiring blood purity testing for all those who own property in Amaranth. This would out dozens of Ministry operatives in disguise as prominent high elves. Kill him.

The war efforts in Nujab rely on weekly skywhale shipments carrying guns and ammunition from the Sky Docks. Destroy the warmongers' stock as it leaves the port.

The Ministry cell known informally as **The Four** has gone rogue and is selling secrets to the Paladins. Track down and eliminate them in their Pilgrim's Row hideout.

The **Warrior-Poet Sorrow-Seldom-Sings** is a traitor to the aelfir nation and the city of Spire. He has spoken out against the war in Nujab in several public forums, and led retreats that saved the lives of hundreds of drow under his command. He's now under arrest in the Hive, Spire's biggest prison, while the Council works out what to do with him. Break in and get him out alive.

The Ministry has uncovered a secret Paladin training and indoctrination temple within the depths of the Loft line. Acquire explosives and destroy the training facility, preferably with the Paladins still inside it.

A list of active Ministry agents in Spire has turned up in the hands of the **Crimson Vigil**, who are now using it to extort favours from our operatives. Your names are on that list, too. Infiltrate the Vigil's headquarters in Godstreet station and take that list back.

The **Infinite Library** of the University of Divine Magic exists slightly outside the bounds of reality. The librarians have uncovered a new book on the shelves that contains hitherto unknown secrets of demonology. You've got about an hour to get in, get the book and get out before the Special Tactics Unit of the Allied Defence Force send in their best and brightest murder-wizards to collect it.

Archbishop Wynn is almost a decade into the construction of a megacathedral in Ivory Row - but it is actually a vast mechanical device to rupture the Heart Itself so that the aelfir gods can physically manifest in the city, and he's just turned it on. Initial experiments have met with mixed success, but the Vermissian is dying from the strain on the system. Shut down the machine, even if the gods try to stop you.

The lawless undercity of Red Row is on the verge of a full-scale riot, and the Council has sent in the Allied Defence Force to keep the peace. Eliminate the commander of the troops in Red Row, but make it look as though local revolutionary hero Vilham Roque performed the assassination.

ENTERING THE CITY ABOVE

As an operative, you shouldn't go into the Spire outside of your missions. Here are some reasons why:

You're a wanted criminal: a terrorist, a traitor, an enemy of the state. The rewards for information that leads to your capture, interrogation and eventual death are huge. Spire has a vast underclass of desperate, poor drow who'll gladly turn you in for a month's wages.

You're strange. You've spent goddess knows how long in the depths of the Heart, and it's warped you. You might not have noticed (everyone's weird down there, after all) but if you step into the streets of Spire, your additional eyes, technomagical implants, twitchy demeanour and squinting at bright light is going to draw attention. How long has it been since you've seen the sun? Have you ever seen it?

Your weirdness spreads. Your body is riddled with whatever it is that leaks out of the Heart Itself. Within the boundaries of the Vermissian, you wouldn't notice; but if you spend too long in the City Above, the world warps around you as your cursed flesh radiates strange energies. Those too weak, young or elderly to endure your presence will die slowly of illnesses no Spire doctor can treat; the buildings around you will rot and crumble; animals will drop dead in the streets; and light will twist in unsettling ways.

For all these reasons and more, it's a bad idea to spend much time in the city; but if you decide to do so anyway, anything you do there requires a roll to achieve safely. While it is possible to return to the City Above after extended time in the Heart, it requires long periods of adjustment and often medical attention - both of which are outside the scope of this supplement.

If you want to achieve something within the city to support your missions (e.g. planting explosives or equipment, clearing civilians from a combat area, spying on targets or acquiring disguises) it's safer to get your Ministry contacts to do it for you. To this end, each player character is considered to have a bond with the Ministry. Use the rules for **Bond** actions on p. 98 of the *Heart* rulebook to resolve operations they undertake on your behalf.



THRONE DIVISION EQUIPMENT

Costs are listed for use in standard games of Heart; any weapon of D8 or higher cost may be acquired in lieu of a Minor Advance after a mission during resupply as the Ministry issues the equipment as a reward/acquired on the black market.

ARACHNID TINCTURE

COST: D6

Mend Blood D10, Limited 1.

Throne Division Operatives often don't have time to attend to their wounds given the time-sensitive nature of their missions, and to ease their torment, the Ministry have developed the Arachnid Tincture. Lovingly referred to as a "Pocket Spider," partially due to the rumours that it's made by Midwives, this oversized, pressurised syrette is applied directly to the carotid artery and floods the subject's system with a cocktail of pain suppressants, spider blood, sacred mercury and not a small amount of dagger (*Spire*, p. 104) in an effort to get them back on their feet and in fighting shape.

COFFIN-CRAWLER

COST D12

Delve D8, Trusty, Unreliable, Expensive.

What do you do when you need to get through an area of the Vermissian awash with invasive energies – very few of which are understood by modern science – and quickly, to boot? You use a coffin-crawler.

The core of a coffin-crawler is a lead-lined box just slightly smaller than a drow (some use stone for additional protection) that, the Ministry believe, protects the user from most known radiation found within the Vermissian – as well as shielding them from incoming small arms fire. To navigate the unstable, shiting tunnels of the network the box is covered in a mess of spindly legs that judder and lurch in such a way to provide consistent, if uncomfortable, ambulation.

To save space, the designers opted not to include controls inside the device, and instead rely on a trapped arcane intelligence like those found in Automaton of Burden (*Heart*, p. 176) which is taught that the environment around it is unpleasant and that it should attempt to reach its objective in as short a time as possible. Most arcane intelligences are wrangled out of ordinary animal brains; the Ministry, in their hubris, have scavenged psyches from stranger places.

Lashing multiple coffin-crawlers together into a train arrangement is a viable way of providing a team with rapid insertion – often, only the lead crawler is given the intelligence to navigate the Vermissian, and the subsidiary ones are idiots even by arcane intelligence standards.

EXPLOSIVE HAMMER

COST: D6

Kill D10, Piercing, Loud, Dangerous, One-Shot.

The head of this hammer explodes on contact. It is never issued to Throne Division Operatives, and instead fashioned by team members eager to gain an edge over the heavily-armoured and well-equipped aelfir paladins of the Autumn Temple; official Ministry doctrine has banned use of the explosive hammer on operations, and confiscates any discovered in safehouses.

OFFERING BLADE

COST: –

Kill D4, Piercing.

Once per situation, if you end the life of an aelfir with the Offering Blade, you may remove D6 stress from any of your resistances.

Cannot be purchased; granted by the Ministry.

The Goddess thirsts eternal for the blood of the oppressor; you are her sanctified tool, her bloody left hand, and you will bring death to those who would dare stand against you. The Offering Blade is a sacred dagger given to those who prove their faith to the Ministry, and forged in darkness by blinded, captured aelfir smiths – a fitting irony, considering the Ministry's stance on subversion, rather than destruction, of the power structures of Spire.

PURGE CARBINE**COST: D8****Kill D6, Spread, Ranged, One-Shot.**

Affectionately referred to as an Opening Statement by Throne Division Operatives, this weapon uses multiple barrels mounted side-by-side to unleash a short-range barrage of low-velocity rounds over a broad area. It's just the sort of thing to massacre an angry mob of unarmoured assailants in a handful of seconds, which means that people who carry it gain a reputation for being trigger-happy bastards who are okay with firing indiscriminately into crowds.

SMOKE BOMB**COST: D4****Kill D4, Smoke, One-Shot.**

Commonly issued to black ops teams that are expecting to deal with significant ranged opposition, a smoke bomb allows a team to cover their approach by concealing their position. It does conceal their position with a great cloud of smoke, which means that even if their enemies don't know exactly where they are, they know something's up.

THRONE-PATTERN JEZAIL**COST: -****Kill D10, Extreme Range, Conduit, Piercing, Loud, One-Shot. Excellent quality.****Cannot be purchased; granted by the Ministry.**

The Throne-Pattern Jezail fires oversized, over-charged rounds of an unknown substance dug up from an alternate dimension found in a now-lost section of the Vermissian network. There are three of them in existence - one is permanently on display in Throne Station as an object of religious reverence, another is in the possession of an absurdly wealthy aelfir weapons collector, and the third is in active use by multiple Black Ops teams. Before the weapon is fired, each part must be individually consecrated and the user must meditate on the sacred nature of their mission to reclaim Spire from the aelfir; every round is inscribed with tiny, spiralling text that praises the Hidden Mistress and beseeches her to guide the firer's aim.

THRONE PLATE**COST: D8**

Whilst wearing the suit, actions that involve sneaking or moving quickly become Risky. In addition, you gain 6 armour points; these can be spent to negate an equal amount of incoming **Blood** stress. Once you run out of armour points, the suit is too damaged to be of use, and is nothing more than dead weight; taking it off requires a minute or so, and assistance.

The Ministry often eschews heavy armour - it's loud, slow and cumbersome, and unfitting for their general mode of operation. When going toe-to-toe with Paladins, though, a tenth-inch of metal can be the difference between life and death - and that's where Throne Plate comes in.

Built out of materials repurposed from the structure of Throne Station itself, Throne Plate consists of overlapping layers of metal that absorb incoming damage by crumpling and shearing free when struck to dissipate the blow.

WITCH-HUNTER RAILGUN**COST: D10****Kill D6, Reload, Piercing, Ranged, Expensive. Good quality.**

If the target is an accomplished spellcaster, the weapon is **Kill D8**.

This experimental device uses fizzing electromagnets to launch specially-inscribed Vermissian railway spikes at truly frightening velocities. The runes marked on the spikes are designed to wrench a magician's soul from their body and pin it in place, severing their connection to the astral plane - and if that doesn't work, at least they have a foot-long length of metal stuck in them.

THE VERMISSIAN, BY LINE

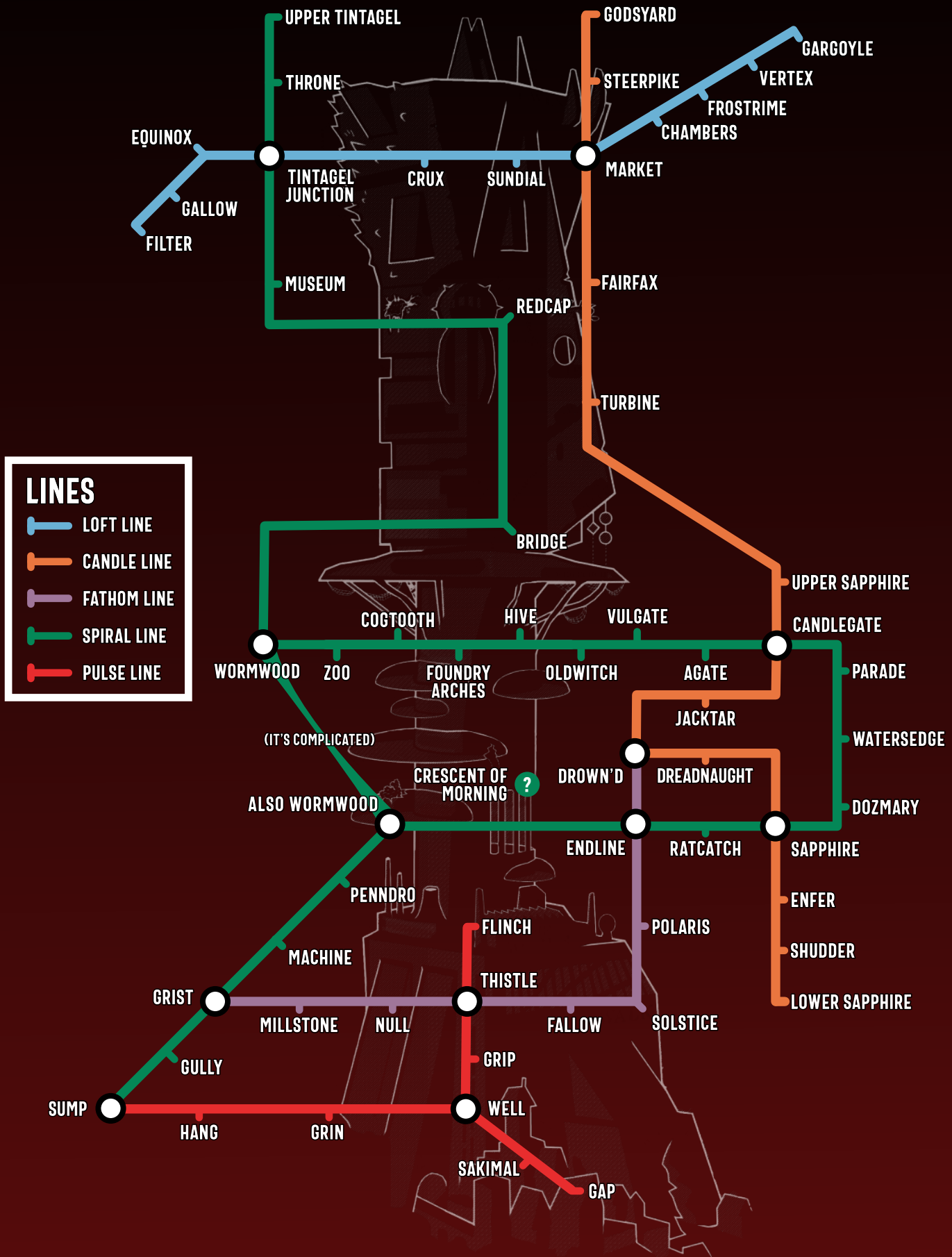
The Vermissian is broken up into five distinct lines:

- the ramshackle **Candle Line** that runs the length of the city from top to bottom;
- the submerged **Fathom line** which served the lower city;
- the twisting and unpredictable **Spiral line** in the middle city;
- the aelfir-only **Loft line** on top of Spire; and
- the nightmarish **Pulse line** that connects the network to the Heart Itself.

On the following pages you will find a breakdown of each line. These have been split out into targets within the city of Spire to which the line provides access and the challenges and features that await operatives who attempt to traverse it. However, as with the core *Heart* book, you should make the world your own and invent your own locations, features and even entire lines. After all, the Vermissian is riddled with the same warping energy that makes the Heart so changeable.



APPROXIMATE MAP OF THE VERMISSIAN NETWORK



WELCOME TO...



THE CANDLE LINE

DEFAULT STRESS: D4

The Candle line was constructed as a cheap and cheerful means of ferrying tourists and off-duty workers to the entertainment districts of the North Docks - so it wasn't built to last. Today, some inhabitants of Spire use the crumbling vertical tunnels as an out-of-the-way (if dangerous) smuggling route that runs the length of the city. Others simply pitch their garbage and waste water down it.

ATMOSPHERE (D10)

1. Slimy green mould and lichen covering every surface
2. The echoing cackle and scattered light of angler toads
3. Ankle-deep water swirling in strange patterns
4. Malak smugglers with dimmed lanterns, visible in the distance
5. Crumbling stone and jagged metal makes traversal dangerous
6. Pigshit, chewed-up bone shards and the sound of squealing hogs
7. Huge, rusted, inactive machinery
8. Wooden platforms lashed onto corroded iron supports
9. Adverts for affordable mid-Spire housing
10. Reeks like a sewer, because it is one

GODSYARD

MARKET

TURBINE

STEERPIKE

FAIRFAX

NEW HEAVEN

The topmost level of Spire is a maze of Towers of Silence: exposed platforms where carrion birds pick at the flesh and bones of the dead, as is tradition in the city. Missions to steal corpses and interrogate them posthumously are more common than the Morticians who run the place would like. There's plenty of bad blood between them and the Ministry as a result.

PILGRIM'S WALK

A ramshackle fire hazard that houses more churches per square foot than any other district in Spire. The area is renowned for con-artist priests selling get-holy-quick schemes and suspiciously affordable relics to easy marks from the lower city. The Ministry maintains multiple safe-houses here, as the sheer weight of worship acts as a sort of smokescreen, and black ops teams are sometimes sent in to eliminate rogue agents.

AGGRESSIVE FAUNA

The Candle line contains some of the most dangerous animals in the upper city; many of them escaped from the Spire Zoo before it was permanently shut down in the Year of Seven Devils. Most infamous among them are the angler toads: great warty creatures the size of fat dogs that sprout bioluminescent antennae from their skulls to lure in their prey. Angler toads are famously disagreeable and will try to eat animals (or people) several times their size, so they're not widely-used as light sources. They don't pose a serious threat to experienced delvers, but their cackling calls and scattered light can attract unwanted attention.

MINISTER FALSTADT'S TERRITORY

Falstadt joined the Ministry in an attempt to make a name for themselves. It didn't work, and after trying to sell sensitive information to an obvious Ministry plant, they were hung out to dry by their former employers. They went into hiding (badly) within the Vermissian about a year ago, and are convinced by their paranoid delusions that anyone who approaches their hideout is their old Magister coming to kill them. Their actual old Magister, Vaunt, has long since forgotten that Falstadt existed and didn't know their name to begin with.

The tunnels around Falstadt's safehouse are riddled with tripwires, pit-traps, improvised explosives, barbed snares and broken glass. Goddess knows how they've survived this long (or whether they're already dead at the centre).

BONE WARDS

The streets of New Heaven, far atop Spire, are a battleground. Two rival death cults - the ancient city-sanctioned Morticians and the refugee Charnelites - fight for control of funerary rites. When one side gains some ground via quiet assassination and aggressive foreclosure, it loses the same amount due to hyena attacks and charismatic sermons. The conflict has been underway for the last thirty years, and shows no sign of slowing.

With space at such a premium, some of the Charnelite cultists have expanded their operations into the creaking tunnels of the Loft Line. Bone Wards, where the bodies of the dead are stored after their bones have been picked clean by vultures and corvids on the Towers of Silence, are common sights when navigating the up-Spire Vermissian. These are sacred spaces, and the Carrion-Priests will release packs of blessed hyenas to ensure their sanctity. More than one group of operatives have limped battered and bleeding into combat after attempting a "quick" shortcut through the Bone Wards - or simply not come back at all.

Worse: occasionally, the bones of the faithful will rise up in a serpentine amalgam around a mad-eyed Carrion-Priest and snake after intruders, hungry to give the Charnel Lord his due. But only occasionally.

UPPER SAPPHIRE**JACKTAR****DREADNAUGHT****ENFER****CANDLEGATE****DROWN'D****SAPPHIRE****LOWER SAPPHIRE**

THE WORKS

A smoky knot of factories, workshops and cheap living quarters in the centre of Spire, and a hotbed of revolutionary activity. The angry drow that live and work here provide no end of operatives for the Ministry, and the printing presses are key in producing the news sheets that can sway hearts and minds. The guns and ammunition produced in the Works arm the Allied Defence Force in Far Nujab. Winning the drawn-out war is crucial to the aelfir, and each year they throw more resources into the conflict to maintain their position.

THE NORTH DOCKS

The river docks of Spire are the domain of the Knights of the North Docks: a once-proud order of drow warriors, sworn to defend traders and travellers, who have fallen into internecine conflict and racketeering since the aelfir colonised the city. The Knights have control over the waterways in and out of the city, and are in high demand as Ministry assets - assets who occasionally need rescuing, reminding of their loyalties or a quiet execution.

QUESTING KNIGHTS

The more powerful and respected a Knight of the North Docks becomes, the more quests they are expected to embark upon. Quests usually consist of simple acts of service to their lord, such as extortion, leg-breaking or pulling particularly dangerous bartending shifts. However, occasionally they will descend into the Vermissian in search of glory by slaying dangerous beasts and claiming valuable relics - or by communing with the spirit of their patron, St Benaferas, in his legendary chthonic pub. Dangerously drunk and egging one another on to greater heights of achievement, gangs of knights in quarter-plate roam the damp tunnels of the network around the North Docks. They can pose a threat to delvers, who may be mistaken for a fell beast or dark knight worthy of defeating in single (or not-so-single) combat.

WRENCH CADAVER'S WORKHOUSE

Wrench Cadaver is an unscrupulous factory owner in the Works (and by all accounts a total bastard) who saw and took the opportunity to expand his operations into disused Vermissian tunnels. The sprawling workhouse specialises in manufacturing clockwork, gears, springs and other metalwork of a decent to low grade - but that's not why the Ministry are interested in it. Thanks to the weird energies of the Vermissian infecting the metal, every item produced from Cadaver's factory will scythe clean through ghosts and disincorporate their earthly forms, making them excellent anti-spectral weapons. More than one operative has saved their skin by smashing in the head of an attacking ghost with a Cadaver-brand carriage clock.

GOBLIN MARKETS

The Blue Docks of Spire boast finery from all over the world; Polaris Market, on the outskirts of the Vermissian, offers clandestine forbidden trade to the highest bidder. The Goblin Markets of the Candle Line are the collected run-off of every other market and souk in the city: a disorganised heap of junk traders, smugglers, destitute wizards and absolute shysters.

Shoppers can buy anything here, assuming it's in stock where you'd expect it to be - which isn't likely. Reliable suppliers are few and far between, and the constant back-stabbing and theft means that even establishments who have the stock often want to lie low until the heat from their latest betrayal dies down. The traders themselves usually don't know where the market will be tomorrow (all Goblin Markets move daily to avoid the attention of the authorities), but if you're patient and you keep an eye out, you can discreetly purchase almost anything.

WELCOME TO...

THE FATHOM LINE

OUR LADY OF THE UNDERGROUND

Buried within the depths of the Fathom Line, this ramshackle cathedral has been hammered together from spare train parts, carriage siding, stolen church walls and industrial chains. Within, a sect of renegade Vermissian Sages worship the train network as a goddess. Some even drink the greasy runoff from the walls and claim it sends them into a divine trance, revealing the hidden pathways that surround them. They regard black ops teams as trespassing on sacred land, and while they don't have the capacity to tackle them head-on, they will spit curses and oaths of damnation from the shadows until they leave. They will gladly gang up on a single operative - perhaps a wounded one - and drag them into their church to be sacrificed on the rusted engine-block altar.

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

A dark and blighted place, the Fathom Line was beset with disasters even before the Vermissian Event. It was prone to flooding, breakdowns, loose hexes and ghost plagues, and was famously regarded as cursed by the inhabitants of Spire. Today, the line is riddled with black magic, unquiet spirits and pallid gutterkin. It is shunned even by the Vermissian Sages, who have largely decided that there's nothing of use to be found there.

ATMOSPHERE (D10)

1. Ectoplasm clinging to the ceiling, unusually cold
2. Gutterkin prayer circle around a stolen altar
3. Graveyard manifested in the tunnel; dirt crumbling beneath your feet
4. Ghostly echoes of trains and platform announcements
5. Water drips upward and spells out curses on the roof
6. Thousands of tiny holes in spiralling patterns that whistle in the wind
7. Evidence of cult warfare - magical residue, the reek of spireblack smoke, blood
8. Your voice echoes before you speak, not after
9. Abandoned shrine to a rival goddess
10. Lost wanderer, scared out of their mind

CANNIBALS

The Ministry are, officially, allied with the cannibals of Grist - but not every ghoul got the message, and there are rogue elements within every organisation. In the rickety tunnels that criss-cross the area's rooftops, operatives should be wary not to attract the attention of flesh-eaters looking to prove themselves in the eyes of their peers by taking down a serious opponent.

SHADOWY CULTS

There are fewer places less observed within the city of Spire than the Fathom line, and the Ministry takes advantage of this. The line is riddled with hideouts, stashes of supplies and access routes to illegal temples of Our Hidden Mistress. Unfortunately, almost every other secret church or rebel organisation in Spire has had the same idea. It's quite common to find that a location you thought was secure has not only been cleaned out, but completely taken over by a rival cult.

The groups active within the Fathom line include, but are not limited to: the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress, the Vermissian Collective, the Crimson Vigil, the New Anarchs, the Void Glorious, the Liberate! Newspaper, the Aelfir Church of the First Gods, the Hungry Deep, an unnamed collection of carrion-priests that worship maggots and bacteria, the Unseelie Court and the Council for Drow Emancipation.

GHOSTS

Something about the structural make-up of the Fathom line - and the thousands of luckless workers who died during its construction - makes the place a veritable magnet for the unquiet dead. The Ministry recommends that any operatives making use of it should pick up resources that will allow them to fight or evade the attentions of phantoms: lacrimal salt, portable warding circles, ghostbane pollen and so on. For more details on fighting ghosts, see *Heart*, p. 187.

THE GUTTER GALLERY

In this disused water storage facility, the mad gutterkin spirit medium Bullthroat has spent the last decade covering the walls in spiralling murals, depicting the lives (and eventual deaths) of the many ghosts they have spoken with. The art style is rustic to say the least, and the poetry is so filthy it would make a hardened delver blush - but it forms a useful record of everyone who died with unfinished business in the surrounding area.

SKULL ORCHARDS

Someone's been collecting skulls - a lot of skulls. Thousands of them are stacked atop each other in unstable cairns, attended to by ghoulish priests who clamber across the ceiling like spiders. If you knock down one pile, the odds are good that hundreds more will collapse in a domino effect that will bury you in the dead and alert everything nearby to your presence.

MILLSTONE

THISTLE

SOLSTICE

ENDLINE

GRIST

NULL

FALLOW

POLARIS

DROWN'D

GRIST

A famously grim neighbourhood within Derelictus where gaunt cannibals under the semi-divine rule of King Teeth rule the streets. The Ministry brokered a deal with Teeth for safe passage through the district for their operatives, and so must uphold their end of the bargain on occasion. It's bloody work, and looked down upon by self-respecting operatives.

DERELICTUS

The grimmest, lowest-rent district in all of Spire, Derelictus is renowned for poverty and dilapidation. The black ops division has little interest in the area, aside from sending strike teams to extract valuable magicians and cultists whose interests have seen them flee the upper city for fear of discovery by the authorities.

RED ROW

The criminal undercity of Red Row is home to thousands of vagabonds, scoundrels, ne'er-do-wells and thieves, alongside some of the finest entertainment in the city. On occasion, when the Ministry's business overlaps with that of the lower-city crime lords, black ops teams are sent in to remove the opposition with scalpel-like precision.

WELCOME TO...

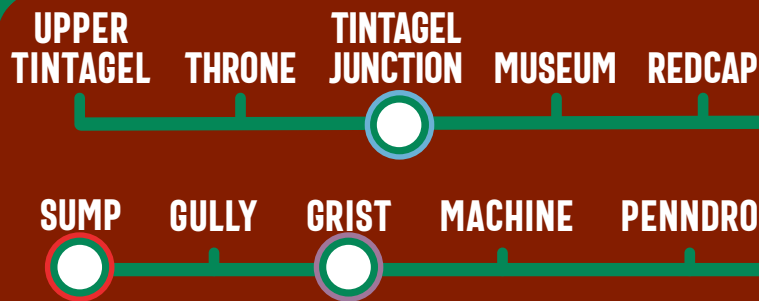
THE SPIRAL LINE

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

The Spiral line was the most technologically and magically advanced portion of the Vermissian, using a wide variety of mechanoarcane techniques (mainly as a show of power from the aelfir owners of the company). Since the Vermissian Event, the malfunctioning machinery and the spells within it make the Spiral line one of the least predictable sections in a very unpredictable network.

ATMOSPHERE (D10)

1. Faded pro-aelfir propaganda posters on a disused public walkway
2. Unstable pivoting platforms
3. Thick glass viewing ports showing thrumming blue energy
4. Vending machine graveyard
5. Abandoned surgical table for machine implantation
6. Warren of cramped parallel tunnels for servants' trains
7. Glitching terrain flickering in and out of reality
8. Subway map updated and corrected by several, increasingly mad, people
9. (Seemingly) never-ending staircase
10. Invasive briars of thorned heartsbloom rose bushes



THE HIVE

Spire's foremost prison, and home to dissidents, terrorists, traitors and enemies of the state that are too valuable to kill straight away. In the central section, the cells are rigged to drop hundreds of feet into the ground should the prisoners prove too dangerous to control. The Ministry has only managed to rescue a handful of operatives from within its walls.

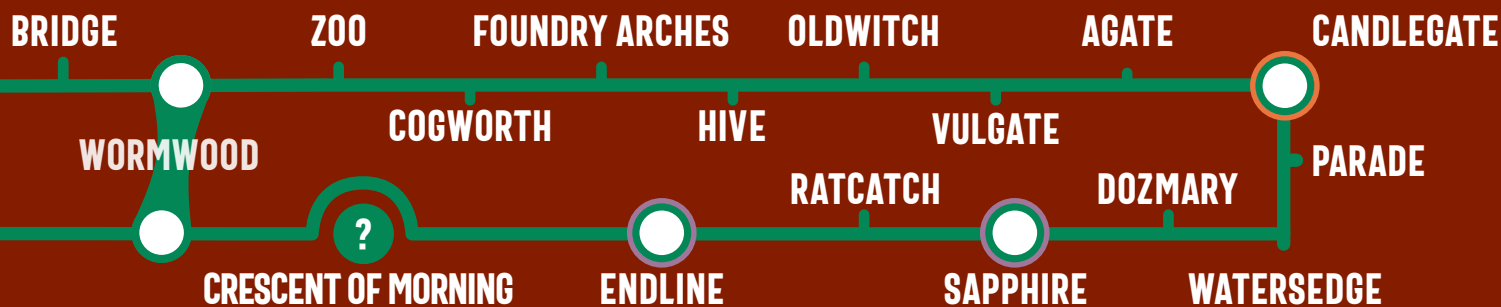
LOST AND FOUND

The Lost and Found office for the entirety of the Vermissian was constructed in Sump station. To make sure that it worked, the engineers hijacked the resonant energy of the network to metaphysically attract all mislaid items to the help desk. It worked rather too well. The station actively sought out items of value that it felt were "lost," which meant that a vast quantity of stolen goods arrived within the first few months of operation. The office eventually had to shut following several catastrophic administrative disasters.

Since the Vermissian Incident, the magic powering the office has grown more powerful and hungry thanks to a lack of maintenance. It draws in lost people (most often the dissolute and desperate, the hopeless addicts and self-sabotagers, the unfortunate and mad; but on occasion just relatively sane well-off people who happened to lose their way) and keeps them there. If you lost something within the network, odds are that it'll eventually turn up here; but getting it back from the washed-up caretakers of the office will be a challenge.

SWITCH PLATES

These great iron discs were designed to accommodate an entire subway train, rotate each carriage to face the direction and orientation that the operator chose, and send them on their way to serve the city. Now they spin and grind of their own volition, helped along by groups of Signal-box Cultists (*Heart*, p. 196) who attempt to scry meaning from the wildly-spinning innards and interlocking patterns painted on the surface. The many connecting tunnels make switch plates an excellent waypoint on delves, but the unpredictable machinery and mad attendants make actually using them a challenge.



IVORY ROW

A tumbledown warren of interlinked mansions, abandoned parks and owners desperately clinging onto the last vestiges of their respectability, Ivory Row houses a handful of important aelfir (and a lot of unimportant ones, too). The few movers and shakers that remain are common targets for Ministry subversion, and black ops teams are called upon to neutralise their private security forces.

ALSO:

- The North Docks (p. 12)
- Pilgrim's Walk (p. 12)
- The Works (p. 12)

WORMWOOD

Wormwood station was the pinnacle of the Spiral line's technological achievements: a station that existed in two places at once, allowing instant travel between them. On some maps of the city, Wormwood is shown as being in both the upper Spire and the undercity - this is not an inaccuracy. Unfortunately, Wormwood couldn't limit itself to only appearing in two simultaneous locations. It began to appear (and disappear) all over the network: suddenly flickering into view, replacing other stations, manifesting in the path of trains and growing organically in unconnected vents.

When traversing the Spiral line, there is a decent risk that Wormwood station will make an appearance. If you're lucky, you'll see it coming (or you'll arrive after it has manifested). If you're unlucky, the floor beneath you will stutter and glitch out of sync with reality as Wormwood suddenly exists in the same space as the one you were in.

PTOLEMY BAY'S DOMAIN

Ptolemy Bay (*Spire*, p. 127) is one of the most prolific and successful arms dealers in the city. In an effort to more efficiently distribute weapons from his headquarters in the Works, he has carved out a portion of the Vermissian for his own purposes. Ptolemy established security checkpoints, brought in dissolute wizards from up-Spire to reinforce the warding rituals, and destroyed any nightmare creatures that dared show their faces (or whatever they have instead of faces) with sheer weight of fire.

He now seems to have reached a stand-off with the Vermissian. He can't advance any further, and the weirdness of the place clusters and roils at the edges of his mystical barriers. He allows passage through the "safe zone," as he calls it, for a price; and his guards are famously bribable, should you wish to know who else has come through in recent memory.

THE CRESCENT OF MORNING

The aelfir engineers of the Spiral line realised that it was impossible to build a transit system that was completely free of breakdowns, malfunctions and accidents. Instead, they magically arranged for every problem on the line to take place in a single station, freeing up the rest of the network for efficient travel. That station is The Crescent of Morning, and it has been off-limits to everyone but specially-trained and shielded personnel since it was (cautiously) opened in the Year of Winter Ascendant.

Inside the triple-locked vault doors and crumbling wards, The Crescent of Morning is a perpetual accident: a rolling health and safety violation, an eternal sequence of misfortune and bad luck that is theorised to make the remainder of the network navigable. Many parts of it have been on fire ever since it was opened over a century ago. The area around the station is surprisingly safe and stable, but most people still give it a wide berth just in case.

WELCOME TO...



THE LOFT LINE

AUTUMNAL VAULTS

There are certain practices which even aelfir balk at; the artless hounding and murder of drow for religious purposes is one of them. The masked devotees of the Harvest Church do their ceremonial reaping in private, drugging luckless dark elves with narcotics before throwing them into the Vermissian and hunting them down with wicked, curved blades. The so-called Autumnal Vaults are a loose collection of sanctified murder-corridors, altars to Brother Autumn and the gory remains of dozens, if not hundreds, of sacrifices.

DEFAULT STRESS: D8

The Loft Line rings around and through the upper Spire. It is a twisting maze of wrought-iron decoration, stained-glass advertisements for century-old products and incongruous, dilapidated luxury.

Of all the lines in Spire, this is the hardest to enter, as it provides access to Amaranth, the Solar Basilica and the Council Chambers themselves. The aelfir in charge have made sure that they're as well-protected as possible.

ATMOSPHERE (D10)

1. Creaky, unstable and ancient
2. Rushing wind so loud you can barely hear yourself think
3. Rusted and dilapidated art deco features
4. Frozen due to magical overspill
5. Carpeted viewing platforms and informational brass plaques abound
6. Flocks of escaped messenger-hummingbirds, most of them dead
7. Stained-glass windows look out on a false sky
8. Exposed, windswept, hanging off the side of the city
9. Sweltering hot due to a poorly-maintained heat vent
10. Bashed-through, suggesting a secret smuggling route

THE BRIDGE

One of the rare exposed areas of the Vermissian, this rickety stretch of line extends alongside the nailed-on district of Perch on the side of the city. The curious whistling caused by the wind rushing through the tunnels drives skywhales into a blind frenzy, so anyone approaching on one from this side of the city must plug the beast's massive ears or risk smashing into the side of Spire.



THE SOLAR BASILICA

A vast complex of interlinked cathedrals to the high elven gods, stretching across an entire district. Public squares and altars thronged by pilgrims hide dozens of private aelfir-only worship rooms. At the centre of the structure, an exposed crystal absorbs sunlight to power Amaranth's climate control and many other aelfir miracles. The batteries in which the magic is stored are well-guarded, but would be immensely useful to the Ministry.

AMARANTH

An aelfir district kept below freezing by magical coolant systems, featuring acres of absurd luxury, alien aesthetics and unspeakable cruelty in the name of art and hedonism. Like the Council chambers, the Black Guard are present here, but not in such great numbers. Missions here include abducting or assassinating prominent aelfir, stealing valuable artefacts and general terror attacks.

THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS

The seat of power in Spire, and the ultimate target for the Ministry. Hugely difficult to break into (Dangerous, with wards and counter-hexes inflicting D8 stress on a failure) and protected by Black Guard troopers.

ALSO:

- New Heaven (p. 14).

THE POET'S REPRISE

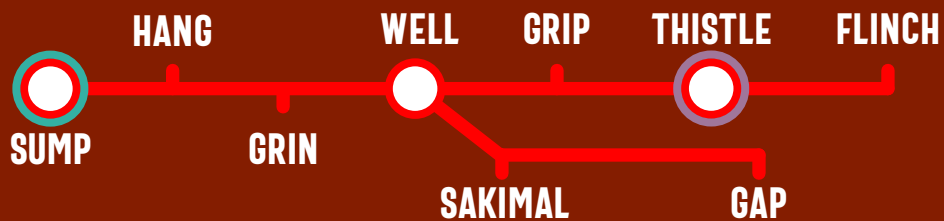
Aelfir fashion and society moves in patterns inscrutable to even the aelfir themselves. The latest trend is Vermissian-Chic, and the Poet's Reprise caters to an eager crowd of cursed subway enthusiasts. The lower areas of this fashionable bar are merely train-themed; but the private upper floor extends fully into the Vermissian with a flagrant disregard for public health and safety. The clientele watch elaborate magical performances that take advantage of the thin reality in the place.

VAULT 86

The nondescript Vault 86 is curiously absent from all official records that detail the original composition of the Vermissian. This is because the Autumn Church quietly excised all proof of it from the world with an extensive cover-up campaign and several illegal rituals. The vault houses ten Paladins with their weapons and armour, basking in the protective light of a fading sun and ready to strike anywhere in Spire at the slightest notice by marching through the occult dangers of the Vermissian.

No member of the Ministry has ever seen Vault 86. Its existence is theoretical, extrapolated from Paladin response times and the ghosts of old architectural records in the Sepulchral Stacks of the Grand Vermissian Library.

YOU ARE NOT WELCOME IN...



THE HEART

The Pulse line spirals down underneath the city and into the Heart. Thanks to the thin reality in the City Beneath, it has spread out into patterns that were not intended by the original architects. As such, almost any location referenced in *Heart* can conceivably be reached from the Pulse line, but getting there will be far from straightforward. The Ministry has expressed interest in these locations:

- Redcap Grove, an overgrown den of black-market druids (*Heart*, p. 140)
- The Temple of the Moon Beneath, a prominent heretic church (*Heart*, p. 141)
- The Tower, a successful experiment in acoustic mind control (*Heart*, p. 144)
- Ghorryn, a den of conspiracy theorists who might be onto something (*Heart*, p. 147)
- Hallow, home of the Witch cult (*Heart*, p. 149)
- Trypogenesis Chamber, portal to the megaconsciousness of the Hive (*Heart*, p. 156)
- Papilious Both, a warren of secret-hoarding moths (*Heart*, p. 166)
- Any of the Eight Heavens, the afterlives of the various peoples of the Spire (*Heart*, p. 168)

THE PULSE LINE

DEFAULT STRESS: D6

Descending into the depths of the undercity, the Pulse line was connected to the Heart Itself. This caused the Vermissian Incident and pitched the entire network into a state of unreal nightmare. Each year, the insidious otherworldly radiation creeps further up the tunnels and vents, infecting the City Above with the sticky crimson of the City Beneath.

ATMOSPHERE (D10)

1. Fleshy walls that quiver in time with a distant heartbeat
2. Tunnels constricting and expanding with a sickening groan
3. Bone-flowers, so thin as to be translucent, growing from the ceiling
4. Non-standard gravity
5. Heartsblood enclave, distrustful of outsiders
6. Animals with rusted replacement limbs scraping along the ground
7. Ravenous gutterkin hiding behind every corner
8. Resonant crystals jutting through the iron walls
9. Witch cult territory marked by gory runes and wards
10. Thick circular windows showing an alien sky outside

The Pulse line (and many of the stations on it) is detailed extensively in the *Heart core book*,

please refer to that for any information you require.

GROUPS AND FACTIONS

THE PALADINS

"This world is ripe with sin, and we shall reap a terrible and wondrous harvest."

A glorious army of sanctified killers, the Paladins are the military arm of the Solar Church in Spire. Their mission is the absolute destruction of every heretical cult on their territory, with the Ministry as their foremost opponent.

The Paladins strike against Ministry assets like thunderbolts. Magically-crafted explosives detonate within structures, dazzling and burning those within with blazing sunlight; while the occupants are unable to retaliate, the Paladins smash windows and kick down doors before opening fire with military-grade weaponry. Their trademark golden armour (which is mostly made from steel) can turn aside bullets and blades alike, and they are protected by the prayers of mad-eyed priests and valuable sacrifices. They are, all told, one of the worst problems that a Minister can have.

THE SOLAR PANTHEON

The Solar Pantheon is made up of four gods, each tied to a particular time of day and year. Sister Spring is a patron of art, beauty and sunrises; Father Summer is a god of plenty and boisterous noonday celebrations; Brother Autumn is a sunset god of endings and blood; and Mother Winter is a midnight artisan and scholar.

On paper, the aelfir worship them all equally; but in practice, the death-cult of Brother Autumn has been pushed out of favour due to the rise of arcane surgeries that indefinitely extend a person's life. The Paladins, sworn to Autumn above all others, have found themselves underfunded and unpopular; the Ministry is entirely in support of this.

What's more, they too use the Vermissian to navigate Spire. With the right equipment and rituals, it's the fastest and least visible way to get from one place to another. Hidden behind magical wards and locked vault doors, staging posts for Paladins are dotted throughout the train network. Should a black ops team get

pinned down by enemy fire or take too long to achieve their mission, the odds of a reprisal strike increase with every minute. More than one team of beleaguered operators returning from a mission has blundered into a squad of gold-armoured killers en route to something else entirely.

Thankfully for the Ministry, there are less than a hundred Paladins in active service, and they can't be everywhere at once (yet; maybe the Vermissian could provide a way). Current Ministry doctrine is to stay the hell out of their way, and in extreme circumstances, launch a preemptive attack against a staging post to reduce the chances of Paladins ruining a mission.

PALADIN OF THE AUTUMN CHURCH

NAMES: Brother Pierce-the-Brow-with-Wisdom, Sister Westward-March-the-Faithful, Souvain Thousand-Feathers-Bleeding

DESCRIPTORS: Shining like the sun in absolute darkness; Intoning prayers to their reaper god under their breath as they reload; Shrugging off small-arms fire

MOTIVATION: To destroy the Ministry of Our Hidden Mistress and look good doing it

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 9

PROTECTION: 2 in battle, 1 if you catch them unawares

RESOURCES: Paladin uniform (D10, Haven - D6 if it's covered in blood and bullet holes); high-quality ammunition (D8, Technology)

EQUIPMENT: Finely-balanced shortsword (Kill D6, Brutal) and clip-fed pistol (Kill D6, Piercing, Ranged, Expensive) or Custom legrand rifle (Kill D8, Piercing, Ranged, Expensive)

DOMAINS: Religion

SPECIAL: If the Paladins take you by surprise, they will lob an explosive towards you that detonates with solar energy. Anyone nearby must pass an **Endure+Religion** check; on a failure, they mark D6 stress to Blood as they're blinded, deafened and wrong-footed. Due to their subterranean ancestry, dark elf characters mark D8 stress rather than D6.

PALADIN FORSWORN

These gaunt, heavily-armoured fighters use the above Paladin stats but have protection 3, resistance 11 and carry blessed swords that inflict (Kill D8, Brutal) damage in their hands (Kill D8, Tiring in anyone else's). They are part of a sect that gives up the pleasures of the flesh to better serve their lord. To an aelfir, anti-hedonism is strange, and the Forsworn are viewed with extreme suspicion.

PALADIN CAPTAIN

The best and brightest in the Harvest Church, Captains are fighters par excellence and fiercely devoted to their bloody mission. They have Resistance 13 and are Dangerous if they get the drop on you, thanks to a variety of blessings and wards placed upon them by vassal sun-priests. Captains often find themselves promoted as a celebrity of sorts, with the Autumn Church using them as poster children for their cause. If you see a Captain, odds are you've already heard of them and could relatively easily find out who they're dating.

DUSK PRIEST

NAMES: Subdeacon Victory's-Last-Glimmer, Underbishop Crimson-on-Ivory, Solar Acolyte who has forsaken their name until they ascend

DESCRIPTORS: Slitting the throat of an ox to bless an assault; Surrounded by a storm of auburn leaves; Executing a fallen, grievously-wounded Paladin

MOTIVATION: To bring the blessing of Brother Autumn, the reaping god of endings, upon the inhabitants of the world

DIFFICULTY: Standard

RESISTANCE: 6

PROTECTION: 1

RESOURCES: Solar incense (D6, Religion); Solar Pantheon relics (D8, Religion, Beacon)

EQUIPMENT: Harvest scythe (Kill D6, Brutal, Tiring)

DOMAINS: Religion

SPECIAL: If a Dusk Priest sings sacred hymnals over a Paladin squad, the protection of all squad members (aside from the priest) increases by 1; if they're silenced, their protection is reduced to its standard level.

THE MINISTRY OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS

"We are her Temple Sinister, her bloody left hand! We are her knife in the dark! We are vengeance!"

A sacred crusade cloaked in shadow; an invisible war against an implacable foe. The Ministry has sworn to destabilise, subvert and eventually destroy the systems of high elven rule in the city of Spire, and they have the weight of a forbidden goddess behind them. To ensure secrecy, the organisation is divided up into many cells of agents: the ministers. They are under the control of senior agents known as magisters, who in turn are under the control of inscrutable exarchs. No-one within the Ministry has more than the barest understanding of operations beyond their own actions.

Most people in the city view them as religious extremists at best and unstable terrorists at worst - the aelfir have set up extensive propaganda campaigns against them in Spire's many newspapers, most notably the Torch. Despite their best efforts, not all of their operations are successful, and innocent people often get caught in the crossfire. Those within the Ministry have made their peace with selling their lives for the cause, but their friends and families haven't.

Though public opinion is against them, the Ministry is one of the more successful revolutionary fronts in the city. Their bold tactics and recruitment of unstable individuals from every part of drow society have paid off, and funding from interested parties in Aliquam (and rogue elements of the aelfir governing body) have allowed them to extend their operations into the Vermissian. This gives them the capacity to strike almost anywhere in the city.

The official name for the black ops section of the Ministry - one of the official names, anyway - is the Throne Division, as the headquarters of the department has been set up in the Spiral line station of the same name. Throne station is within the Desteran palace that housed the central drow government of Spire until the aelfir invaded, and it's from here that the Ministry launches devastating attacks against their many and varied enemies.

The Throne Division is watched over by the implacable and mysterious Exarch Ventrix: a small-statured and terrifyingly intense drow whose skin is covered in alchemical and arcane tattoos (which many theorise are what's keeping her alive).

MOTIVATIONS

There are four general reasons why you'd decide to throw your lot in with the Ministry:

- **BROKE.** They pay well and they mean business; and maybe you got kicked out of the military and no-one else would employ you. You could do a few black ops jobs for the Ministry and retire, assuming they don't send someone else after you to tie up loose ends.
- **PROUD.** You're convinced that you're the best and you like to live your life on the edge. The only stuff dangerous and exciting enough for you is working for an illegal cult destabilising the government.
- **COMPROMISED.** They've got something on you - something big. Rather than have it come out and destroy your life (and the lives of those close to you) you're working for them.
- **ZEALOUS.** You are prepared to give your life in service of the Ministry's goals. You loathe the aelfir and all they stand for; you are a holy warrior on a righteous crusade to destroy those who have enslaved your people and destroyed your culture.

In reality, you're probably a bit of all four. Even if you weren't compromised to begin with, the act of working for the Ministry gives them something to use against you.

THE SPIRAL COUNCIL

"We've received word from the front that the Dust territory has once again fallen into gnollish hands. I'm proposing we instigate a demonic incursion to mitigate the losses; total projected allied casualties would number in the low thousands. All those in favour?"

The Spiral Council, hereafter just "the Council," are the rulers of Spire. Sitting atop a massive bureaucratic pyramid of administrators, civil servants and lackeys, these seven individuals are some of the most powerful people in the city. It is they who fuel the war in the south and throw innocent enlisted drow into the meatgrinder that is the Nujabian foothills; it is they who oversee the list of banned religions and practices, erasing the history of the dark elves; and it is they who will pay for their sins at the hands of zealous ministers.

At present, the council members are as follows; they are aelfir unless stated otherwise.

- **Archdeacon Many-the-Seedlings**, unspeakably beautiful cleric of the Solar Church, with secret dreams of fierce ethnic cleansing through the Harvest cult of Brother Autumn.
- **Councilman Drynn**, a human spymaster, who carries a shard of aetherically-resonant crystal in his brain; it broadens his perceptions and is driving him mad.
- **Lord Errin Jubilant-the-Devoted**, a staunch traditionalist, who has nonetheless been infiltrated by an interdimensional blood-song parasite called The Vyskant and is quietly ushering in their arrival.
- **Madame Fey-Aranyen**, a token dark elf member of the council who cannot support her fellow drow past empty gestures and meaningless platitudes.
- **Lady Grendelmyn Stars-Softly-Shine**, who is surprisingly straight-laced for an aelfir; except that she is allied with the cult of the Spire Ascendant, who wish to awaken the City Above as a god.
- **Lord Veq Light-Through-Splintered-Glass**, an old-school businessman with deep connections to the criminal elements in Spire's undercity.

- **Captain Wander-the-Lost**, a Warrior-Poet addicted to blue: a human-made drug that floods users with a cathartic wave of chemical grief.

Each has their own aims (and allegiances) but, as a whole, they work to uphold the status quo and reinforce the aelfir's hold over Spire. Killing them is difficult and perhaps pointless, as there is no end of equally despicable replacements waiting in the wings. The Ministry must locate and compromise a suitable alternative candidate, fund their rise through the ranks of the government and then place them in an ideal position to take a seat on the council.

The Council is protected by the Black Guard of Amaranth: elite warriors specially selected from the ranks of the Allied Defence Force who are paid exorbitantly for their services. There are also countless wards, counter-spying magic, retaliatory hexes and a well-established intelligence network. Taking on the Council is no small undertaking.

BLACK GUARD OF AMARANTH

NAMES: Ybyssmette, Varellian, Desteria (they only use surnames)

DESCRIPTORS: Standing perfectly motionless for days at a time to guard a particular chamber; Shielding an aelfir with their body; Laying down suppressing fire to cover the approach of halberdiers

MOTIVATION: To protect the Council - and to a lesser extent, every other aelfir inhabitant of Amaranth

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 3

RESOURCES: ID papers (D10, Haven, Niche)

EQUIPMENT: Ebony-stocked repeating shotguns (Kill D8, Spread, Unreliable); Wide-bladed halberds (Kill D8, Tiring)

DOMAINS: Haven

BLACK GUARD AEGIS

The best of the best. These soldiers are brain-washed with aelfir music that speeds their reaction times, dulls pain and discomfort and ensures a zealous loyalty. They use Black Guard stats, but their difficulty is **Dangerous**.

COUNCIL MEMBER

What follows are generic rules for each Council Member; individual abilities and quirks are listed in the **SPECIAL** section of this stat block. For the sake of an exciting climax to your story, we've assumed that each Council Member is quite good at fighting (thanks to blessings, magic, training or drugs) - if you'd rather have something less dramatic and more stark, give them **Resistance 3** and have them be easily killed.

DIFFICULTY: Risky

RESISTANCE: 10

PROTECTION: 2

RESOURCES: Jewels and assorted finery (D10, Haven)

EQUIPMENT: Master-crafted weapon (Kill D8)

DOMAINS: Haven

SPECIAL:**ARCHDEACON MANY-THE-SEEDLINGS:**

Autumnal magic means that all **Blood** stress suffered by player characters in his presence is increased by one dice size.

COUNCILMAN DRYNN: Drynn's intelligence network and brain-shard means that he always knows you're coming and cannot be surprised. If you're lucky, he'll be too mad to counteract your attack.

LORD ERRIN JUBILANT-THE-DEVOTED: If you suffer Major **Blood** or **Echo** fallout whilst fighting Lord Errin, in addition to whatever effects the GM determines, you have become infected with the interdimensional Vys parasite. Errin will re-grow himself from your flesh unless he is painfully excised.

MADAME FEY-ARANYEN: The adoration for madame Fey-Aranyen amongst the populace of Spire is so strong that, should she mark stress, crowds of bystanders will blindly and zealously rush to her defence. After the first successful attack against her, all stress marked against her is halved as people offer up their lives to save hers.

LADY GRENDELMYN STARS-SOFTLY-SHINE: Stars-Softly-Shine conjures the walls around her into spikes and traps with her Spire Ascendant magics, giving her weapon the **Brutal** and **Piercing** tags when she wields it in combat.

LORD VEQ LIGHT-THROUGH-SPLINTERED-GLASS: Lord Veq has wired the room you fight him in to explode upon his death or incapacitation; roll **Evade+Occult** or mark D10 stress to **Blood** when he's reduced to **Resistance 0**.

CAPTAIN WANDER-THE-LOST: Wander-the-Lost's Warrior-Poet training gives them **Protection 4** and **Dangerous** difficulty; weeping, they sing unearthly songs that warp the world around them as they fight.

THE VERMISSIAN COLLECTIVE

"All that can be known, is."

The Vermissian Collective, as it is known, is a loosely-organised group of scholars and explorers who plumb the depths of the forbidden train network in search of knowledge strewn across multiple dimensions and parallel timelines.

Sages form the academic backbone of the organisation, many of whom have been exiled from polite society thanks to controversial ideologies. They are supported and protected by the mysterious gadoliv (a sect of sworn protectors of libraries) and Vermissian Knights, who dress themselves in experimental armour to weather the dangers that lurk in the unpredictable tunnels. Within the hidden territory of the Vermissian, they collate and guard the historical secrets of the drow peoples of the world, which the aelfir would much rather see destroyed.

In general they maintain peace with the Ministry - their aims are broadly similar, after all. However, the Collective seeks to achieve their goals in a far less militarised manner. While the Sages will share information with the Ministry and Knights will act as guides to spec ops teams, the two groups will occasionally come to blows over territory or resources.

CADOLIV**NAMES:** Aubinet, D'Encre, Podedapiyae**DESCRIPTORS:** Wrapping their scarred skin in strips of paper inscribed with warding texts; Feeding fruit to a messenger-bat hanging from their wrist; Absent-mindedly eating spare books**MOTIVATION:** To protect the information stored in the Vermissian Vault and those who collect it**DIFFICULTY:** Standard, but see below**RESISTANCE:** 8**PROTECTION:** 1**RESOURCES:** Books of inscrutable writing they believe is in code (D6, Occult)**EQUIPMENT:** Punch daggers (Kill D6, Piercing, Unreliable)**DOMAINS:** Occult, Technology**SPECIAL:** When Gadoliv attack, they do so by shifting the Vermissian around them with spells and machine-keys that allow them to ambush from hiding. The first action made by each player character against them in a situation is **Risky**.**FALLOUT:** REARRANGED. [Minor, Fortune] The Gadoliv retreat, but the delvers realise that the Vermissian has changed during the encounter. Add D8 resistance to the current delve as they attempt to navigate the strange, hostile environment. [Immediate]**GUTTERKIN***"What don't you understand, big man? Give us your food and your map and we won't cut you. Do something upcity, we come at you thousands!"*

"Gutterkin" is a derogatory Spire term for goblins, kobolds, trash fairies, toadgirls and crowboys - any diminutive humanoid who doesn't quite fit into society. The gutterkin form an under-underclass in the city: they're not at all seen in the mid-Spire and above, are rare in the lower city, and only really show their faces in the undercity districts of Red Row and Derelictus. However, gutterkin flourish in the Vermissian.

Some gutterkin are able to hold a conversation

in the local language, but most only understand about 500 words and struggle to follow complex instructions or hold advanced concepts in their heads. This means they struggle to find work (or even understand the notion) and generally rely on scavenging, theft, pack-hunting and light robbery to survive. Individually, a gutterkin is no threat to a seasoned delver; but en masse, they can overwhelm an injured or weakened target in seconds.

GUTTERKIN MOB

This stat block represents a gang of about a dozen gutterkin working as a team. A standard scavenging party will be made up of three or so teams.

NAMES: Skint, Biglot, Ord, Grub, Haslock, Fegg**DESCRIPTORS:** A goblin with terrible facial hair; a psoriasis-addled kobold; a sort of dogboy**MOTIVATION:** To kill you without dying themselves, then eat you and steal your things**DIFFICULTY:** Standard**RESISTANCE:** 8 (most of them will run away once their mates start dying)**PROTECTION:** 0**RESOURCES:** Filthy gewgaws, worthless trinkets, the knife they're all sharing (D4, Haven)**EQUIPMENT:** Claws, rusted knives, fish-hooks, chair legs (Kill D6, Degrading)**DOMAINS:** Warren**SPECIAL:** Weapons with the **Spread** tag increase their stress dice by 1 step when used against a gutterkin mob.**FALLOUT:** SURPRISE! [Minor, Fortune] The gutterkin have set a trap: a big rock positioned above head-height, a pit full of shit-caked spikes, a length of metal under tension with broken glass and used needles tied to it and so on. The next time a player character marks stress as a result of attacking the gutterkin, the gutterkin retaliate with a (Kill D8, Brutal, Piercing) weapon.

MIND THE GAP

DROWN'D

ENDLINE

POLARIS

SOLSTICE

FALLOW

THISTLE

NULL

MILLSTONE

GRIST

FROM THE DEPTHS OF THE CURSED MASS TRANSIT NETWORK KNOWN AS THE VERMISSIAN, THE MINISTRY OF OUR HIDDEN MISTRESS WAGES A SHADOW WAR AGAINST THEIR CRUEL HIGH ELF OVERLORDS.

You are part of the Throne Division: cells of black ops paramilitary assets drawn from the people of the Heart. You undertake vital missions in support of the Ministry's cause, using the miles of twisting tunnels to move secretly through the city.

This sourcebook for the *Heart* RPG contains expanded and alternative rules for sending your undercity delvers on dangerous missions for the dark elf revolutionary front. You'll also find information on the factions that make the Vermissian their home, a guide to building operations and a line-by-line breakdown of the network.

A copy of *Heart: The City Beneath* is required to use this book.