

BOOK OF THE DEAD™

the
World of Darkness



I'M GONNA ASSUME
YOU'VE NEVER BEEN HERE BEFORE.

IT'S ALL RIGHT,
THAT'S TO BE EXPECTED.

NOT MANY
PEOPLE HAVE,
YOU KNOW?

I MEAN... NOT MANY
PEOPLE LIKE YOURSELF.
PEOPLE WITH HEARTBEATS.

EVERYBODY ELSE, THOUGH
— THEY ALL COME HERE.
A LOT OF THEM
ARE STILL AROUND.

YOU KNOW HOW
SOME PEOPLE SAY
THE BEST WAY
TO DEAL WITH AN ENEMY
IS TO OUTLIVE HIM?

This book includes:

The myths and lore of the Underworld,
and the rules for dealing with
supernatural creatures.
A tour of the Underworld itself,
from the Antichthonous Depths to
the Dead Dominions.
Masks, Manifestations, Keys, and
other tricks of the trade for dealing
with the Underworld for Sin-Eaters
and other supernaturalists.

For use with the
World of Darkness Rulebook

THAT'S GOOD ADVICE
MOST OF THE TIME.
BUT RIGHT ABOUT NOW
YOU SHOULD PROBABLY BE HOPING
THAT ALL YOUR WORST ENEMIES
ARE STILL ALIVE.

— RIO FLETCHER, SIN-EATER



78-1-58846-388-1 WW60501 \$29.99US



the World
of Darkness®

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BOOK OF THE DEAD™



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ascent

By John Newman

"Josephine."

The whisper echoed in her mind.

"No one calls me Josephine," she muttered. "Only my mother."

"Josephine."

Jo slowly turned her head to the side, cocking it like a dog that hears its name. She smelled cinnamon and coffee for just a second before the stagnant air of the cavern overpowered it. She cocked her head to the other side and took a deliberate sniff. No coffee. No cinnamon. Only the smells of dust, dirt, and decay filled her nostrils.

"Josephine."

With a start, Jo realized she was standing in front of a hole in the cavern wall. She couldn't remember how long she'd been standing there. The hole was roughly circular and just large enough that she thought she might be able to crawl into it. The soft light of the cavern illuminated several feet of the darkness inside the hole, suggesting the aperture might continue on further. She was sure the voice calling her name was coming from the hole. She put her hands on either side of it to boost herself in, then stopped. Her hands were the pale white of a corpse. Her fingernails were translucent and the skin underneath was the unhealthy purple of a bruise.

"What happened to me?"

Pain exploded in her skull.

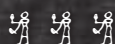
"Flashlight. Check. Canteen," Jo sloshed the water inside the canteen to make sure it was full. "Check. Blade," she reached out a hand and grasped a gleaming straight-razor from nowhere. The ivory of the handle was stained, here and there, with rusty spots the color of dried blood. "And check." A snap of her fingers and the straight-razor disappeared again.

**"NO NEED TO CHECK THAT.
NO NEED TO BRING IT FORTH
WITHOUT FLESH TO CARVE
AND BLOOD TO SPILL"**

As always, when he ("*it, not he,*" her mind insisted) spoke, Jo visualized Mr. White as a short, dumpy man dressed in a white linen suit. A patrician nose jutted aggressively out of the face, above a bushy mustache. Blood-red eyes fixed her with a stern stare.

"Uh huh," she said. "Right." She shoved the flashlight into her backpack and hefted it onto her shoulders.

She took a minute to check out her reflection in the full-length mirror beside the door. Auburn hair was pulled back into a ponytail, secured by several rubber bands. She wore a battered leather jacket over a plain black T-shirt, blue jeans, and scuffed hiking boots. The green of her eyes was momentarily overlaid with shining red.



"I ASSUME THIS
TEDIOUS APPRAISAL
OF YOUR APPEARANCE
INDICATES WE'RE NOT
UNDERTAKING THIS
ADVENTURE ALONE THEN?"

"Nope. Reese is meeting us at the coffee shop. Like I'd really venture down below all by myself."

"HOW TIRESOME"

She could *feel* him (*it*) yawn.

"I THOUGHT WE HAD
SEVERED OUR TIES WITH
THAT IRRITATING BOY.
YOU SHOULD HAVE
LET ME DEAL WITH HIM."

The straight-razor reappeared in her hand. She shook it as though shooing a fly and the blade vanished.

"I think the Harridan might not have approved of that," she said. "We don't need to tangle with that nasty old hag. Reese knows it's over. He's just coming along to help."

"AS YOU THINK BEST."

He (*it*) sounded bored.

She walked out of her apartment, locking the door behind her.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing.

"Mr. White?"

Silence.

"Josephine."

The voice was calling her again.

"Yeah. Right. I'm coming," she said and started to climb into the hole.

She heard a skittering sound behind her and paused to throw a glance over one shoulder. The cavern was lit by iridescent blue fungus that grew in clumps on the ceiling, floor, and walls. The light reflected gently on the surface of a still pond, giving the black waters the appearance of a starry night sky. The cavern was quiet, peaceful, and even tranquil. With a shrug, she resumed climbing into the hole. The passage before her angled ever-so-slightly upwards and she inched her way forward, pulling herself along by her fingers. Soon she was swallowed by the darkness of the passage and the walls seemed to press in on her, reminding her of the weight of stone and earth surrounding her. She fought down her rising panic and continued to inch along. Time passed with agonizing slowness. The passage veered to the right and when she rounded the corner she could see light ahead of her. Excited by the prospect of leaving the tight passage behind, she attempted to increase her pace and the thin fabric of her shroud caught on a rock.

Swearing softly to herself, Jo tugged on the shroud. She had almost worked it free when she heard the sound again, the skittering, coming from the inky black of the passage behind her. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. It sounded like the noise she'd guess a spider would make if it were big enough to make a sound. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. She could picture each hairy leg being picked up and set back down again, each *tck* created when exoskeleton clicked against the stony bottom of the passage. She was mesmerized by the sound, even as a part of her screamed to get away. Seemingly of their own accord, her hands ripped the shroud free from its entanglement. *Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck*. It was right behind her now. She could feel its presence in the passage. Something cold and wet touched her foot. Something dry and horrible caressed her ankle. With a speed born of fear, she squirmed up the passage and out of the hole. The light...

Pain exploded in her skull.



Jo swirled the cinnamon stick through her coffee, inhaling the mixed smells with pleasure.

"My favorite. You remembered."

"Of course," said Reese, shrugging.

He had been waiting outside the coffee shop when she arrived, two cups of coffee and a cinnamon stick resting in a carrier by his boots. Reese was dressed in similar fashion as her. Leather jacket over an old, faded *My Chemical Romance* concert T-shirt, jeans, and a pair of steel-toed work boots. Brown hair fell down to cover one of his green eyes and he impatiently pushed it back. It was a gesture so familiar to her that her heart skipped a beat and she remembered why she'd loved him. Then she remembered all the reasons why she'd left. His possessiveness. His insane jealousies. His violent temper.

"So, where we headed, Josephine?"

"Only my mother calls me Josephine," she said, smiling at him. It was their old joke. "The South Ferry subway station below Battery Park. The good city of New York has been kind enough to leave the Gate in place."

"As if they had a choice," snorted Reese.

In 2005, a construction crew working on the subway station found a 200-year-old stone wall. Historians declared it was part of the original gun batteries from the 17th century that gave the park its name. Further excavations revealed four additional walls and an astonishing amount of historical artifacts. Not long after the discovery, news came along the Twilight Network that the last of the walls uncovered was an Avernian Gate. A low place.

Reese stepped toward the street and hailed a taxi. Traffic was light and soon enough they stood in front of the stairs leading down to the subway. People passed them without a glance, part of the flow of humanity that pulsed in time to the city's heartbeat. She could hear the gleeful yells of children playing in the park over the constant drone of honking horns that gave New York its voice.

"You ready, Persephone?" Reese said.

"Ready as ever, Orpheus," she said and they began the descent.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing.

"Josephine."

She stumbled away from the hole and into a crowd. She bumped into a man who had decorated his shroud with a belt of glistening entrails. He glanced at her and smiled, eyes alight with insanity. His teeth were filed points. Backing away from the specter, she nearly tripped over a woman crawling along the floor, her legs broken and twisted.

"No no no no no no no!" the woman wailed. "Do you see? Do you *fucking* see what you've done!" The woman's shroud was tatters and she ripped a piece free, frantically scrubbing at the place where Jo was standing. "Now it's dirty! Filthy! I keep scrubbing and scrubbing and it won't come clean." She moaned. "What will Ronnie say? What will Ronnie *do*? Move, you dumb bitch!" and she shoved Jo with surprising strength.

The shove sent Jo staggering back against a wall and she took in the sight before her. The walls and floor were covered with raggedly shaped squares of granite, the gray of the stone further darkened by sooty ash. Nailed to the ceiling with yard-long iron spikes were a host of burning figures, the source of light in the hall. As she watched, the figures writhed in agony, sending showers of ash into the crowd like gently falling snow. The people (*ghosts*) seemed barely aware of each other, each individual moving with its own purpose, while avoiding the touch of the others. It was like watching a strange dance. The crowd made little noise beyond the occasional shriek of despair or the whisper of feet sliding across stone.

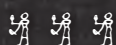
Some, like the crippled woman, repeated the same task over and over. One man repeatedly slashed the air with his hands, as though fighting some invisible enemy. The crowd ducked and swayed out of the reach of his flailings with an odd, unconscious grace. Another man beat his head against a stone wall, took a step, and repeated the motion, making a slow circuit of the hall. No blood flowed from his wounds. Others wound their way in and out of the multitude of exits from the hall, leaving from one archway only to reappear in the next. Jo moved cautiously along the wall, doing her best to avoid touching the people (*ghosts*) that came near her. Beyond one of the archway exits she saw the floor angle upward and she moved toward it.

Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.

She heard the sound over the quiet din of the crowd and whirled round. Something was moving through the crowd, something low to the floor that took care to hide itself behind a screen of moving bodies. Peering through the crowd, she caught a glimpse of something gray and ungainly. She stared. She had forgotten the dance. She paid for her lapse in concentration when a woman walked directly into her as Jo stood, hesitating, in front of the archway.

"Ingrate! Wretch!" The woman slapped her and Jo's head snapped back with the force of the blow. "How dare you stand between me and my goal? After everything I've done for you!" She caught hold of Jo's hair and pulled. "You think you want it more than me? Have it then and be damned!" She turned and, using Jo's hair as a fulcrum, hurled her through the arch.

Pain exploded in her skull.



The overhead lights in the excavation were dim fluorescents, filling the air with a low humming. Inevitably, the bulb nearest the low place flickered, causing the shadows to jump and dance. The Avernian Gate looked no different than the other old stone

walls they had passed, but it exuded a kind of chill that had nothing to do with the ambient temperature of the subway.

"What did you bring?"

"Well," said Jo, setting down her backpack and unzipping it. "I brought red roses to tempt the dead, my first Valentine to open the way and this, of course." She flicked her wrist and the straight-razor appeared in her hand.

She heard a quiet hiss from behind her and ignored it. The Harridan — Reese's own version of Mr. White — never had approved of the memento. Standing before the Gate, Jo sliced the razor across the heel of her palm, wincing at the pain. She smeared her blood on the Valentine ("Will you be Mine?" signed Tommy in blocky crayon lettering), obscuring the grinning armed cherub on the front. She set the Valentine at the base of the Gate and smeared her blood on the wall as well. She felt Mr. White add his (*its*) own offering as a trail of plasm mixed with her blood. Blood, plasm, and card were pulled into the wall, like the fingers of a twitching hand vanishing into quicksand. Cracks formed in the wall in zigzag patterns and the entire thing collapsed with something almost like a sigh. Beyond the hole was darkness that defied the light of the fluorescents. The Gate beckoned.

"Shall we?" she said.

"Ladies first," said Reese.

Stooping to collect a pair of roses, canteen, and flashlight from her backpack, Jo entered through the low place and was almost immediately swallowed by the gloom. She heard Reese step through the Gate behind her and they set off. The tunnel angled ever-so-slightly downward and for the first few minutes nothing could be seen as darkness pressed all around them. Then, abruptly, light appeared at the end of the tunnel. They hurried toward the light and just as she stepped out of the tunnel and into the light, pain exploded in her skull and she heard the sharp report of a fired pistol. The black that followed was darker still.



The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory of the pain. For a moment she stood dumbly in front of the hole, trying to remember what she was doing. She looked through the hole and saw the familiar setting of the South Ferry subway excavation site.

"Josephine."

The voice was coming from a figure standing next to her, just inside the Gate. What looked like a gallon of coffee was spilled on the floor, next to a dozen or so crushed cinnamon sticks. Strange symbols traced in blood surrounded the offerings.

"My love," it (*he*) said.

Pain exploded in her head. The pain in her head subsided, and with it all memory... *no!* She forced herself to remember.

"You shot me," she whispered.

Reese turned his head and in the florescent light of the dig she saw he was wearing a deathmask. A patrician nose jutted out of the deathmask, grotesquely overstated, over a bushy mustache made of bristling steel wool. Long streaks of crimson ran down from the eyeholes and over the paunchy cheeks.

"Mr. White."

"He kept you from me," Reese said. The Harridan cackled under his words. "Don't you see it? This was the only way, the only way we could be together."

"You *killed* me, you bastard!"

"I know it's hard," he said. The Harridan squealed with glee. "I didn't want to do it, but now we can be together." He raised his right hand and in it she saw a wooden statue carved to represent her.

A nude of course. The prick. Jo thought to herself. "It's *hard*? Hard!" She fought the numbness that threatened to overcome her thoughts. "You arrogant motherfucker! Did you really think I left you because of Mr. White? I left you because you were a possessive, violent shit!"

"You're confused," he said in what he meant to be a soothing tone of voice. "That's only to be expected. Don't worry. As soon as I bind you to an anchor we can get you out of here and find you a new body. Then we can be together." He held the statue out in front of him and began to chant in what sounded like Latin.

Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.

The sound echoed along the tunnel, coming from the darkness behind her. Jo backed against the rough stone of the tunnel wall, staring into the black.

Tck-tck-tck-tck-tck.

It was closer now. Reese continued to chant and she was certain he hadn't heard the noise.

She felt herself being drawn toward the statue, her essence being absorbed into it.

Tck-tck-tck.

It stopped. The thing was very near. A giant chitinous claw emerged from the darkness on the end of a ghastly gray limb. The claw snapped around Reese's throat, cutting off the chant. Ichor dripped from claw and limb onto him. Reese's faced grew tight and he dropped the statue to pull ineffectually at the claw.

"Thou shalt not kill."

Jo could hear the Harridan screaming.

"Thou shalt not wake the dead."

Another claw snaked its way out of the gloom and reached *inside* Reese, passing through his flesh like a stick through water.

"Thou shalt not free those that wander these benighted halls."

The claw reemerged holding the squirming form of Reese's soul: a pale ghost clad in

a dingy, white shroud. His body stilled as his soul was extracted, leaving only the shrewd gaze of the Harridan staring out from behind Reese's eyes.

"Three sins to repay"

Reese's ghost burst into flames. His screams were silenced by a twist of the claw. Jo felt the thing's attention turn to her.

*"You have been wronged,
yet I may not free you.
Only flesh may depart this realm."*

The Harridan turned the corners of Reese's mouth up into a wicked smile. Uncertainly, Jo took a step toward the corpse. She reached out a hand to touch the vacant face and her fingers slid through flesh like

the thing's claw had. Another step and she was staring out of Reese's eyes.

"HELLO DEARIE,"

cackled the Harridan. A quick flash of a piebald, withered crone with clumps of greasy white hair.

*"The flesh may depart.
Go as my messenger.
Tell those who would enter
this realm of the wages of sin."*

Jo stepped out of the Gate into the flickering fluorescent light, still accustoming herself (*himself?*) to the feel of Reese's stride. The low place closed behind her with a groan.



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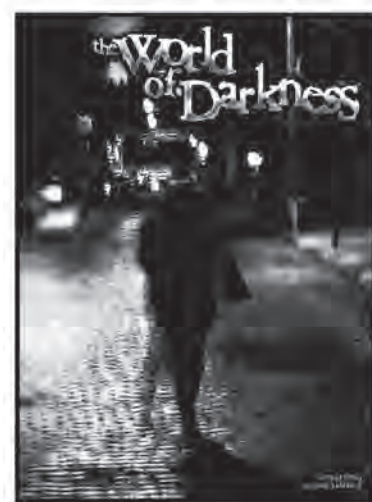
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For Use with
the World of
Darkness® Rulebook



WHITE WOLF PUBLISHING
2075 WEST PARK PLACE BOULEVARD
SUITE G
STONE MOUNTAIN, GA 30087

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PRINTED IN CANADA.



BOOK OF THE™ DEAD

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Introduction: Descent

Well now!
The clock of life stopped
a few minutes ago.
I'm not in the
world any more.
Theology's a serious
thing, hell is
certainly way down —
and heaven's above.
Ecstasy, nightmare,
sleep in a nest of flames.
—Arthur Rimbaud,
“Hellish Night”

The walls yield to you. Granite moves with naught but a whisper. You're in the deep, dark. A coffin handle hangs out of the stone wall. An ancient pillar lays collapsed before you. Somewhere in the distance, the murmur of a river sluggish with pus and infection. All around you, *movement* — the pale bodies of ghosts ducking in and out of shadow. You stumble. You wander. You tumble. Hours turn to days, but no sun shines down here — some tunnels are lit by old paper lanterns lambent with pale red flame, others lay lined with odd configurations of glowing fungus. Someone weeps. A whisper is carried on the charnel winds, carrying promises of unimaginable sins.

Why are you here? A loved one slip off this mortal coil? An old business partner took a ride on the Heart Attack Express and ended up down here with a head full of secrets? Maybe you're a necromancer looking for power, a Sin-Eater in search of the blade that murdered Caesar, or a vampire driven to sup at the syrupy blood oozing from cracks in the ceiling. Maybe you don't even want to be here. Maybe you're lost. Will you ever find the way back? How many unnatural rivers must you cross? With how many ghosts must you barter? You seek potent reward, but the greater the reward, the greater the risk...

This is the Underworld. Welcome to the Great Below.

Beyond the Bound

This book isn't just for those who possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** — yes, that book has a robust appendix on the Underworld, and certainly some portions of this book (the Stygian Key, the Manifestation of the Pit) are useful only to those playing Bound characters.

Still, the Underworld is not restricted to the Bound, and the dark depths possess a great deal of crossover potential. So, in an effort to make this book more useful to those who do not possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, we've transcribed some of the more critical rules and ideas regarding the Underworld right here, right now. (Note, however, that you'll find rules specific to multiple types of “monster” in Chapter Two.)

If you already possess **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, then you're already good to go!

The Map

The map of the Underworld is, in a nutshell, as follows:

- The world of the living is home to “low places,” sometimes called “cenotes,” and more precisely known as “Avernian Gates.” These subterranean locations may not look like a gate, though they're often marked. Here, the wall is thin between the world of the living and the land of the dead. Opening a gate takes one to...
- ... the Autochthonous Depths, sometimes known as the “Upper Reaches.” All ghosts are subject to a kind of gravity: the longer they're here, the deeper they are pulled into the depths. The Upper Reaches are home to ghosts who've been here roughly a century or less. The tunnels here are tighter, maze-like, and often reflect more human cultures (anything from the New York Subway System to the tombs of New Orleans, depending on where one made an ingress). Wander long enough and one will find...

- ... an Underworld river. Underworld rivers are almost like territorial markers. Cross one, and you know you've just crossed a significant threshold. Crossing the first river will take one into...

- ... the Lower Mysteries. It gets a lot stranger down here. Ghosts are older, and madder. Tunnels open wider; while it remains utterly subterranean, imagine a cavern in which a small city could fit, or giant waterfalls of blood, or an old pirate's ship jutting out of the stone wall. Comprising the Lower Mysteries are...

- ... the Dead Dominions, small kingdoms governed by geists, ghosts, Kerberoi, and even the mythical deathlords. Each Dominion is subject to its own Old Laws, and those who break the laws discover that the Kerberoi will find a way to punish the transgressors. The deeper one goes, the more Byzantine and bizarre the Dominions become (and the more Old Laws one must abide by), until one finally reaches...

- ... well, who knows? What lurks beneath the Dead Dominions is subject to mystery. Is it the Abyss? Another world? Absolute oblivion? A land of dreams? None can say, because if anybody's ever made it that deep, they damn sure didn't come back up.

The Look and Feel

As expected, the Underworld is a bleak place — corpse-grays, impenetrable-blacks, jaundiced-whites, earthen-browns. But here's the thing: ghosts deeply thrive on any glimpse of life. As such, the Underworld is also punctuated by *strong* bits of bright color — bright fruits, buzzing neon, glowing fungus, glowing lanterns, swatches of silk, and the like.

Entering the Underworld

Chapter Two details how someone *other* than a Sin-Eater can enter the Underworld.

Navigating Dark Passages

Rules regarding the traversing the subterranean passages can be found on p. 99 of this book.

Death in the Deep

A character who perishes within the Underworld returns to the Avernian Gate from where she entered, appearing on the side of the living world. She is often staggered, gasping for air. She not only loses one Morality dot (or its

equivalent), but she also loses all Willpower points. (Why the loss of Morality? Because "coming back" in this way isn't healthy to the mind — one's ethical human compass will be wildly spinning upon the return, and morally, a character will have "lost her way.")

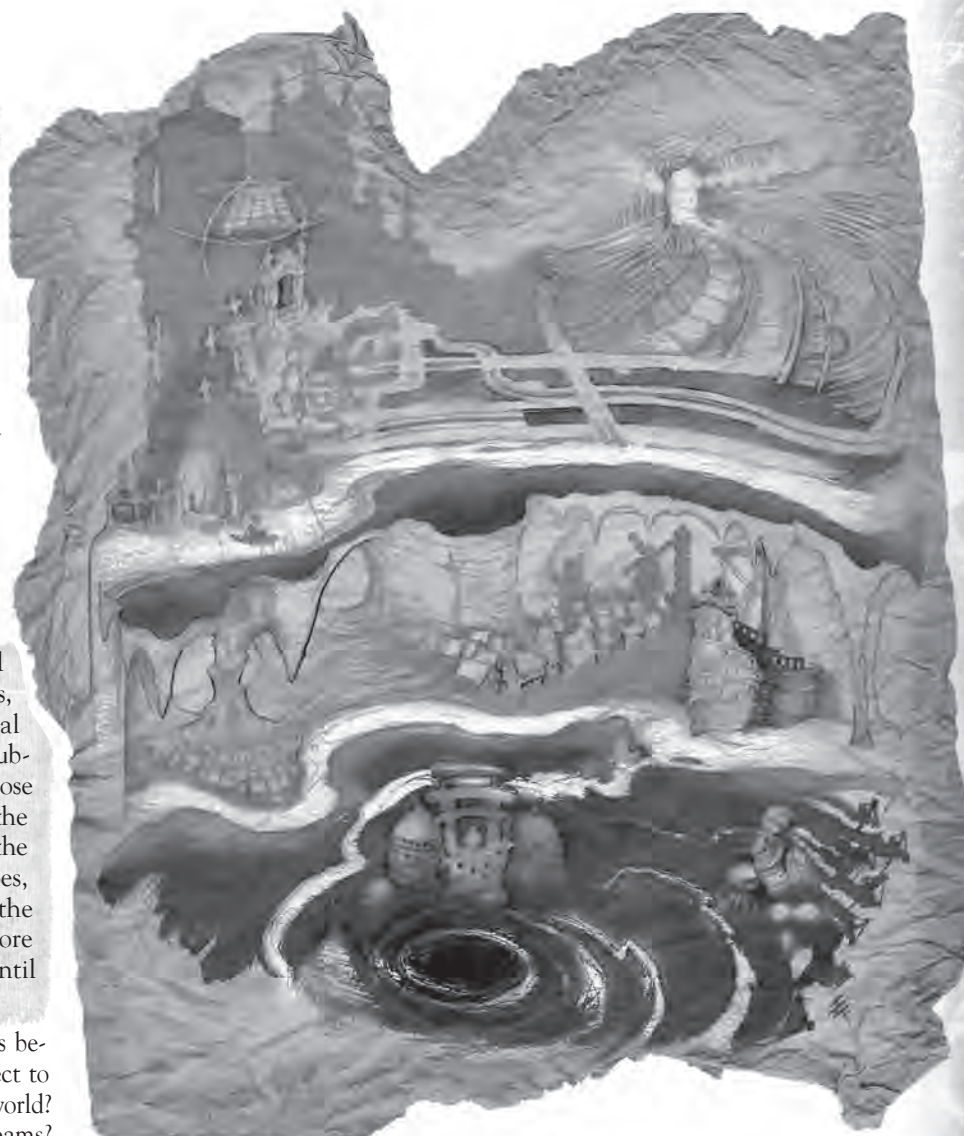
Broken Sanity

The Underworld is a place of horrors and madness from beyond death. It can damage the mind. Any time a character encounters something terribly strange that she's never before witnessed, it may shock her mind. The player should roll the character's Resolve + Composure score. Failure means the character loses a point of Willpower and must flee the scene or encounter. Success indicates that the character loses no Willpower and can persevere.

Any time a character reaches zero Willpower while within the Underworld (regardless of how those points were lost), she gains a phobia based on whatever terrors she encountered during this trip.

Sin Addiction

The Great Below is a place of never-ending sin — it is, in fact, why many monsters come here in the first place: to engage in perversities that cannot be found in the world of the living. Problem is, it can be addicting.



Any time the character engages in her Vice while in the Underworld, she runs the risk of becoming addicted to it. The character's player should roll Resolve + Composure, with a penalty equal to the number of times that character has acted upon her Vice while in the Great Below (maximum -5 penalty). Failure means that for the remainder of the story, the character can no longer regain Willpower through her Vice *unless* she's in the Underworld (she can end this restriction prematurely by spending a full Willpower dot, however). A dramatic failure is worse: the character cannot leave the Underworld of her own volition. She can be dragged out, or can spend a full Willpower dot to shake herself of the fetters of addiction. Success allows her to engage in her Vice without the fear of addiction, and an exceptional success actually grants her a point of Willpower as a result.

Lost Treasures

Another reason that characters come to the Underworld? Because it is a repository of lost and forgotten treasures. The Library at Alexandria? An ancient blood-drinking sword of Vlad Dracul? A legendary changeling token long destroyed by a vengeful True Fae? When lost or destroyed, many objects of legend and potency end up here in the depths.

Crossing Rivers

Crossing any Underworld river cannot be done without aid unless the character is a Sin-Eater (though you may find alternate rules in Chapter Two). One must always solicit the help of the alien Ferryman, who will strike a bargain in order to carry a character across.

Drinking from Rivers

Each Underworld river runs with something that is rarely water: blood, pus, lost memories, scorpions, fire, etc. Consuming the "waters" of such a river often has both risk and reward.

Ghosts

Ghosts — sometimes called "specters" — are the primary inhabitant of the Underworld. Here, they're beholden to the following rules:

- Ghost traits are calculated as normal. However, the older and/or more powerful a ghost is, the more traits that specter is likely to possess. The deeper one goes, the more monstrous and insane the ghosts become.
- Ghosts in the Underworld have no anchors. If a ghost has anchors, it cannot enter the Underworld (though every rule has its exceptions).
- Ghosts do not need to manifest in the Underworld. Twilight is not a viable state of being within the Great Below. Ghosts are already manifest, for all intents and purposes.
- In the Underworld, a ghost doesn't necessarily have the same difficulty communicating with the living as it would in the living world. That being said, some ghosts are still lost in their own minds,

or are subject to such intense habit and ritual that communication is still difficult. Those Underworld ghosts without any manner of communication Numina (such as Ghost Speech) still might have a difficult time communicating properly with a character. Communication may still necessitate a Finesse roll on the part of the ghost, with a -1 penalty per decade the specter has been dead (as per p. 210, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- Some Numina do not work according to design within the bowels of the Underworld. Animal Control doesn't work in the Autochthonous Depths, but it *does* work on the psychopomp "spirits" in the Lower Mysteries (see dictionary, below). Clairvoyance and Possession do not function in the Underworld, as the ghost needn't speak through or possess a living being (and the Great Below is home to few, if any, living beings). Compulsion operates as normal. A ghost can still use Ghost Sign to imprint clandestine messages on forms of media or on objects a Sin-Eater brings into the Underworld. Ghost Speech allows a ghost to communicate freely without a Finesse roll. Magnetic Disruption still functions to affect any appropriate items a character brings into the depths. Phantasm, Telekinesis, and Terrify all work as normal.

- If a character fulfills the unfinished business of a ghost trapped in the Underworld, the ghost is free to leave the Underworld, and actually does so immediately. The ghost literally disincorporates — her flesh unspools from dead bones, her blood spills and turns to dust, and her bones become chalk, which then sweep away on a warm wind. This doesn't appear to be painful, and in fact those who witness such a thing claim the ghosts seem to appear happy or reverent. At this point, the ghost is gone. Without potent and blasphemous magic, the soul may not return to the living world or the Underworld. It has moved on to some unknown reward (which may be Heaven, Hell, or even a serene oblivion).

- Abjurations (pp. 213-214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) still work on ghosts within the Underworld in that it forces them to flee — they do not, however, disincorporate.

- Exorcisms only work in the physical world. They have no place in the Underworld. (In fact, many ghosts exorcised from possession attempts in the living world are sent to, you guessed it, the Underworld.)

- Blessed items work on ghosts in the Underworld just as they do in the living world (p. 214, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- Ghosts regain one point of Corpus per day in the Underworld. Even mundane attacks can damage a ghost's Corpus in the Underworld. A ghost who

loses all Corpus due to bashing or lethal damage acts as if dead — the ghost “dies” and becomes an unmoving corpse. When a day passes and the ghost regains a point of Corpus, however, it returns to the hollow mockery of life it normally possesses. However, doing aggravated damage to the ghost (such as using blessed items, as noted above) can present a far more permanent solution in regards to handling the ghost. If the ghost loses all its Corpus to aggravated damage while in the Underworld, the ghost is utterly destroyed. The shade disincorporates in a howling fit of anguish. This is akin to murder or manslaughter, however, and is a violation of a Sin-Eater’s Synergy 4.

- If a ghost spends or loses all of its Essence within the Underworld, it becomes insubstantial. One can still see the ghost, but its body becomes translucent and physically untouchable. The ghost, however, cannot touch anyone else, nor can it make use of Numina or make any rolls at all. This causes the ghost agony. It cannot again become a substantial creature until it regains Essence.

How to Use This Book

Detailing the breadth — and, particularly, the *depth* — of the Underworld is no easy task. This book attempts to do it in a way that simulates the descent itself. The deeper in the book you go, the deeper you’ll find yourself in the bowels of the deadlands.

The **Prologue: Ascent** and this **Introduction** show you both the promise and the peril of even *considering* a descent into the Underworld. As noted before, with great reward must always come great risk.

Chapter One: Where the Light Still Shines takes a look at the mythology and culture surrounding the Underworld as viewed through the many broken lenses of the World of Darkness’ strange denizens. Glimpses both right and wrong await from the world of the living (or... mostly living).

Chapter Two: Chthonic Cultures discusses the crossover potential of using the Underworld in any World of Darkness game. Herein you’ll find rules regarding the Underworld for many of the monsters: vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings, and even mortal hunters.

Chapter Three: Dark Sympathies offers new tools from the skull-lined toolbox that is the Underworld. Contained in this chapter are new Merits,

Manifestations, Keys, and other tricks for the Bound and beyond.

Chapter Four: The Autochthonous Depths takes us into the so-called Upper Reaches of the Underworld, offering new rules, setting material, and story hooks.

Chapter Five: The Dead Dominions carries us ever-deeper, troublingly so, as we leave the Upper Reaches and enter the truly labyrinthine depths of the Great Below, the place where the strange regions and mad kingdoms of the Lower Mysteries lie — the so-called Dead Dominions, where Kerberoi and deathlords have long staked their claims.

Dictionary of the Deadly Deep

Autochthonous Depths: The highest and most shallow region of the Underworld.

Avernian Gate: Another term for a cenote, specifically one used to travel directly to the Underworld.

cenote: A place where the wall between the living world and the Underworld is naturally weaker.

Dead Dominion: An individual subregion within the Lower Mysteries of the Underworld.

deathlord: One of the legendary rulers of the Underworld; their existence is unproven.

Erebus: A classical term for the Autochthonous Depths.

Great Below: Another term for the Underworld.

Kerberoi: Ancient guardians of the Underworld, bound and dedicated to enforcing the Old Laws or punishing transgressions against them.

Lower Mysteries: The deeper, less accessible portion of the Underworld.

low place: An informal term for a cenote.

ofrendas: Offerings to the dead.

Old Laws, the: A code of rules that governs the Underworld; laws that govern interaction with the dead. Kept by the Kerberoi.

psychopomp: An animal-like spirit found wandering in all parts of the Underworld. They don’t appear to be ghosts, but it’s possible that they’re simply very, very ancient. Their purpose is unclear — some seem concerned with shuttling ghosts from one area of the Underworld to the next.

Tartarus: A classical term for the Lower Mysteries and Dead Dominions.

Underworld, the: The realm of the dead.

Upper Reaches: Another term describing the Autochthonous Depths.



what's old is new again...

the words drift on a lazy summer wind: rain flecks cason's face: he tastes salt water - bitter, briny, fishy: he shakes his head like a dog with an ear infection: eyes open: blinking:

"welcome to the hall of two-truths," said the black kid standing in front of him in a green lantern t-shirt: cason recognized him - kid's name was anton, but really, he went by the name of the dead sailor that sat just beneath the skin: old salt:

"this isn't a hall," cason croaked: "we're outside: on... a roof:"

it was true: dark skies drifted overhead, spitting rain: in the distance, though, cason could see a small town illumined in the rays of the emerging sunlight:

the kid kept talking: "everybody gets judged: righteousness is the way in: tho' he tells you what's up, tells you what deeds you've done: then osiris weighs your soul, see how it shakes out: if it shakes out okay, you get to be okay: if it doesn't shake out so good, then you get extra by admit:" the boy's voice changed to something else, a deep-throated, scratchy hiss, the voice of old salt: "chompity: chomp in the crocodile's mouth:"

cason struggled to stand: whatever they'd drugged him with, it was still in him: his knees wobbled, and he collapsed back to the rough-shod rooftop:

"so i'm here to be judged, then?" cason asked:

the boy shook his head: "naw: not yet: cassie just wants you to know how everything comes out in the wash: we looked at the world, and we judged it like those old gods down in the great below: the world isn't righteous any: more: so the world goes all into admit's mouth:"

"oblivion,"

cason said, pulling himself up, still trembling: "shit:"

"something like that: time's up: world's gone bad: cassie says we send it all down into the dark starting with this town right here: just thought you should know that this is a game-changer: you either on our side, or you one of the poor dudes get tossed down into the deadlands: cassie said you got 24 hours to figure it out: so get figuring:"

the boy hops up on the roof's edge, facing backwards: lightning flashes, and cason can see the mad old sailor's shadow around the boy - a hook for a hand, a tide of brackish water rising, a manny net cast far and wide - and then the boy drops, and is gone:

Chapter One: Where the Light Still Shines

There are few of us who have not sometimes wakened before dawn, either after one of those dreamless nights that make us almost enamored of death, or one of those nights of horror and misshapen joy, when through the chambers of the brain sweep phantoms more terrible than reality itself, and instinct with that vivid life that lurks in all grotesques, and that lends to Gothic art its enduring vitality...

— Oscar Wilde, "The Picture of Dorian Gray"

Humanity's history is tied inextricably to death. It has forever been the great constant. Empires rise and fall, people overcome tyranny or suffer under the hands of conquerors, they love and reproduce and always, they die.

But in most cultures and religions, death is not the end. We do not simply switch off when we die. To some, we move on to another body, another life in a cycle of reincarnation. To others, there exists some great reward, a cloudy paradise locked away behind shining golden gates. Still others believe that when we die, if we die honorably, valiantly, we will be borne off by shield maidens and given a place of honor at an endless feast. But in the end, we all move on when we slip this mortal coil. Dying is not a termination, but a transformation.

Death, like life, is a journey. The act of dying is one stop on that journey, but it is not the end. Since the beginning, our terminology for death has been tied up in that journey. We "pass on," "cross over," or "depart." In Hamlet's famous monologue, Shakespeare called death "the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveler returns." But where do we go? While some stragglers linger on, tied to their anchors and stubbornly refusing to take the next step, others fade and diminish, and are never seen or heard from by mundane eyes again.

What comes after is an obsession. It is the last great mystery. Three questions that all religions or philosophies must answer are: where did we come from? Why are we here? What happens when we die? There are many answers.

Leaving the Body Behind

It is no surprise that our primitive ancestors put a human face on death, that they created a locale, a destination to which the dead may travel. Some concepts are so unfathomable that we have to create an abstraction to even begin to put them into context. When humanity encounters something new, there exists a basic need to categorize it. To fit it into a box we already know what to do with.

The earliest people were baffled by sleep. When a man slept he appeared almost dead. Some spark, some vivifying spirit was surely missing, but where did he go while his body rested? What strange lands did he visit, and why was he never seen outside his body? From the answers to those questions, it wasn't much of a leap to assume that a man's soul simply abandoned his body when he died.

But again, where do they go? Though the answer varies by culture, myth and legend usually posits an actual destination, some fabled land of the dead. It is usually portrayed as being underground. The subterranean lands of Irkalia, Xibalba, and Hades share many common elements, despite being passed down by cultures with little or no contact with one another. Sheol, the great pit. Hell, depicted most often as caverns filled with fire and pain. Neter-Khetet, the divine underground.

More recently, pop culture has presented the afterlife and the Underworld as everything from a quirky avant-garde art gallery awash in neon (*Beetlejuice*) to an underground subway station (*The Matrix: Revolutions*), and even the traditional subterranean kingdom (*Pan's Labyrinth*). Even in this age of reason, the Underworld still holds resonance for us. It remains a great mystery. In the World of Darkness, some of that mystery has been washed away. Some denizens, including Sin-Eaters and necromancers of all stripes in particular, think they know the truth of what happens after death.

Most of them are wrong. The fiery pit, the subway station, the courtly subterranean cavern... all of these places exist, but none of them are the sum total of the Underworld. Each encounter with the Low Places reveals a snapshot, but it is only one piece of the puzzle. There can be no overarching history of the Underworld itself. Each dominion takes on its own characteristics, and each is reflected, albeit incompletely, in the cultures around it.

Sokar, He of Rosetau

From a lecture given by Professor Frank Frey III, PhD:

LECTURE III - EGYPTIAN MYTH

Most of you have at least a passing familiarity with Egyptian myth. Which gods watched over Egyptian souls when they died?

Yes, Osiris. That is correct, as far as the Middle Kingdom is concerned. But before that, the Egyptian Underworld was ruled by a falcon-headed god named *Sokar*. The name, more properly spelled “skr” actually means, “the cleaning of the mouth.” That’s right, the grim reaper is a dental technician. (pause for laughter) Here, I will read the appropriate passage from your textbook:

“In Egyptian metaphysics, the human body consisted of nine parts. The physical body, the *Khat*, was inhabited by an immaterial double, which was the *Ka* or Soul of Sustenance. The body’s shadow was the *Khaibit*, and it too had a counterpart, the *Ba*, or Soul of Mobility, which dwelt in the heart. The heart, which was thought to be the seat of reason, was called *Ab*.

The *Khu* was the spirit-soul, and in the way that the *Ka* sustained the *Khat*, the *Khu*, which was inviolable and self-existent, sustained the *Sahu*, or spirit-body. The *Sahu* entered eternity and dwelt with Sokar, and later Osiris, in the Field of Green. Since the *Ka* and *Ba* were thought to die when offerings ceased to be given to them, it becomes clear as to why the Egyptians made pains to preserve the bodies of their dead.

Appertaining to all these parts was the *Sekhem*, whose meaning is uncertain, but seems to be some expression of power. Each of the gods had his *Sekhem*, and Amon-Re is said to be the *Sekhem* above all others. Behind all the other parts of the soul lay the *Ren*, the true name, which, if forgotten, would surely spell out the extinction of the human soul.”

Now, Sokar’s duty was to separate the *Ka* from the *Khat*, an action which was symbolized in Egyptian culture by opening the mouth and plucking it out. So you see why Sokar got saddled with such an unfortunate name. Interestingly, though the Egyptians spoke of all manner of horrible consequences if the nine pieces of a person were not preserved and prepared in the appropriate manner, we haven’t really seen any ill effects since we abandoned their funerary practices.

Another epithet of Sokar’s was “He of Rosetau.” Rosetau originally referred to a specific tomb near the Sphinx, but eventually came to mean all tombs, which were considered passageways into Neter-Khetet, which means, “divine place underground.”

Even after Osiris took on the job, Sokar was subsumed and considered an aspect of the more popular god. He was still in charge of, possibly, the largest part of the Underworld. Where the Osiris-aspect of Ptah-Sokar-Osiris got the blessed and the important, Sokar was left to shepherd the wicked.

Story Hooks: Among the Shifting Sands

• The Soul of Mobility

When a person dies, the various aspects that make up the whole must be properly laid to rest. If one aspect is not sufficiently appeased, there will be consequences, largely for the dead soul’s chances in the afterlife. But if the *Ba* is not satisfied, those consequences are far worse. The so-called Soul of Mobility animates the body but,

without the higher functions of the *Ab* and the sustenance provided by the *Ka*, the thing that remains is little more than a ravenous ghoul. While some vampires trace their origins to a similar theory, the creatures that have been known to wander the Egyptian desert bear very little resemblance to modern vampires.

Necromancers of every stripe may have special insight into satisfying the *Ba* and putting these creatures to rest,

or indeed, they may be the result of a failed experiment by one of the aforementioned necromancers. The wandering, animate dead that hungers for living flesh appears the world over. This is merely one possible explanation for their existence. If you need a good explanation for why zombies exist — and hey, maybe they occasionally come tumbling out of the Avernian Gates — then this story hook might at least provide an explanation.

- **A Trove of Mementos**

Egyptians filled their tombs with all manner of treasure intended to follow the deceased into the afterlife.

Most of the great tombs have been picked over by scavengers and scholars, but you can be sure that the shifting desert sands have hidden many tombs even into the 21st century. The artifacts within some of these tombs are priceless in the mortal market, but even more important among the Sin-Eaters. Particularly powerful mementos are likely lying abandoned under the dunes, waiting for the right krewe to claim them. Such items might also serve as “power objects” for anybody: werewolves looking for fetishes, vampires looking for slices of lost history, hunters seeking Relics.

GATES OF NOTE: THE GRAND ROSETAU

Rosetau has become a general term for tombs, and it is used among Egyptian Sin-Eaters as a common way to refer to all Avernian Gates. But the original Rosetau is known in modern times as Giza. Its monuments stand mute at the edge of Cairo, where civilization fades into the burning sands of the desert. The sterile light of science has shined for so long in the halls of Giza that it has become more difficult to open the Grand Rosetau, but it is said to be worth it. Some say it merely opens into the deeper recesses of the Underworld, others say it opens directly into a portion of the Underworld that is all but unreachable from other gates, occupied by an old and strange being that claims to be the first Pharaoh (and who is potentially a powerful Kerberos).

Sin-Eaters attempting to open the Grand Rosetau suffer a -5 penalty if they don't perform the proper ceremony. Anyone who wishes to open the gate may do so by performing a full-fledged mummification ceremony on a freshly dead body in the old manner, with one exception — the *Ab*, or heart, must be burned. When the gate opens, the mummy's *Ba* reanimates the body, creating one of the hungry dead. Its first act is to attack the desecrator of its body.



The Descent and Resurrection of Inanna

From En-ghar-kalla, Ancient and Oracle to the Throne:

TO UNDERSTAND LIFE, THE GODDESS INANNA MUST FIRST UNDERSTAND DEATH, SO SHE ABANDONED HEAVEN AND EARTH, AND DESCENDED INTO IRKALLA. SHE ABANDONED THE OFFICE OF EN, ABANDONED THE OFFICE OF LAGAR, AND DESCENDED TO THE UNDERWORLD. SHE TOOK THE SEVEN DIVINE POWERS. SHE COLLECTED THE DIVINE POWERS AND GRASPED THEM IN HER HAND. WITH THE GOOD DIVINE POWERS, SHE SET OUT.

SHE PUT A TURBAN UPON HER HEAD. SHE WORE LAPIS-LAZULI BEADS AROUND HER NECK. SHE PLACED TWIN, EGG-SHAPED BEADS ON HER BREAST AND COVERED HER NAKEDNESS WITH A PALA DRESS, A GARMENT OF LADYSHIP. SHE PLACED MASCARA ON HER EYES AND WORE ARMOR ON HER CHEST. SHE HELD THE LAPIS-LAZULI MEASURING ROD AND LINE IN HER HAND.

INANNA TRAVELLED TOWARDS THE UNDERWORLD WITH HER MINISTER NINSHUBUR TRAVELLING BEHIND HER.

HOLY INANNA SAID TO NINSHUBUR, "COME FORTH MY TRUSTED ADVISOR. I AM GOING TO GIVE YOU INSTRUCTIONS. THESE INSTRUCTIONS MUST BE FOLLOWED."

"ON THIS DAY I WILL DESCEND TO THE UNDERWORLD," SHE SAID. "WHEN I HAVE ARRIVED IN THE UNDERWORLD MAKE A LAMENT FOR ME ON THE RUIN MOUNDS. BEAT THE DRUM FOR ME IN THE SANCTUARY. MAKE THE ROUNDS OF THE HOUSES OF THE GODS FOR ME.

"LACERATE YOUR EYES, NOSE AND EARS FOR ME. LIKE A PAUPER, CLOTHE YOURSELF IN A SINGLE GARMENT AND ALL ALONE SET YOUR FOOT IN THE HOUSE OF ENKI. WHEN YOU HAVE ENTERED THE HOUSE OF ENKI, LAMENT BEFORE HIM: FATHER ENKI, DON'T LET ANYONE KILL YOUR DAUGHTER IN THE UNDERWORLD. DON'T LET YOUR PRECIOUS METAL BE ALLOYED THERE WITH THE DIRT OF THE UNDERWORLD. DON'T LET YOUR PRECIOUS LAPIS-LAZULI BE SPLIT THERE WITH THE MASON'S STONE. DON'T LET YOUNG LADY INANNA BE KILLED IN THE UNDERWORLD.

"FATHER ENKI IS THE ONE WHO WILL RESTORE ME TO LIFE."

WHEN INANNA TRAVELLED ONWARD, HER MINISTER NINSHUBUR TRAVELLED BEHIND HER. INANNA TURNED AND WAVED HER OFF.

"GO NOW, FAITHFUL MINISTER. DO NOT NEGLECT THE INSTRUCTIONS I HAVE GIVEN YOU."

WHEN SHE ARRIVED AT THE TEMPLE OF GANZER, SHE POUNDED AGGRESSIVELY UPON THE GATE TO THE UNDERWORLD.

"OPEN UP! NETI, OPEN UP!" SHE SHOUTED BOLDLY. "I AM ALL ALONE AND I WANT TO COME IN."

NETI, THE CHIEF DOORMAN OF THE UNDERWORLD, ANSWERED HOLY INANNA: "WHO ARE YOU?"

"I AM INANNA, GOING TO THE EAST."

"IF YOU ARE INANNA GOING TO THE EAST, WHY HAVE YOU TRAVELLED TO THE LAND OF NO RETURN? HOW DID YOU SET YOUR HEART ON THE ROAD WHOSE TRAVELER NEVER RETURNS?"

"BECAUSE LORD GUD-GAL-ANA, THE HUSBAND OF MY ELDER SISTER HOLY ERESHKIGAL, HAS DIED. IN ORDER TO HAVE HIS FUNERAL RITES OBSERVED, SHE OFFERS GENEROUS LIBATIONS AT HIS WAKE - THAT IS THE REASON."

NETI, THE CHIEF DOORMAN OF THE UNDERWORLD, ANSWERED HOLY INANNA: "STAY HERE, INANNA. I WILL SPEAK TO MY MISTRESS. I WILL SPEAK TO MY MISTRESS ERESHKIGAL AND TELL HER WHAT YOU HAVE SAID." AND NETI APPROACHED HIS MISTRESS. "MY MISTRESS, THERE IS A LONE GIRL OUTSIDE THE GATE. IT IS INANNA, YOUR SISTER. SHE HAS POUNDED AGGRESSIVELY UPON THE GATE AND SHOUTED BOLDLY FOR ME TO LET HER IN," HE SAID. "SHE IS CLOTHED IN THE PALA DRESS AND WEARS THE LAPIS-LAZULI BEADS AROUND HER NECK. SHE WEARS ARMOR UPON HER CHEST AND MASCARA UPON HER EYES. SHE HAS TWIN BEADS UPON HER BREASTS. SHE HAS TAKEN THE SEVEN DIVINE POWERS AND HOLDS THEM WITHIN HER HAND."

AND ERESHKIGAL PUT HER HAND TO HER LIP AND CONSIDERED THIS CAREFULLY. "NETI, DO NOT NEGLECT THE INSTRUCTIONS I WILL GIVE YOU," SHE SAID. "LOCK THE SEVEN GATES TO THE UNDERWORLD AND OPEN EACH DOORWAY ONE BY ONE. WHEN MY SISTER HAS HAD ALL OF HER CLOTHING REMOVED, TAKE THEM AWAY."

NETI, THE CHIEF DOORMAN OF THE UNDERWORLD, PAID ATTENTION TO THE INSTRUCTIONS OF HIS MISTRESS. HE BOLTED THE SEVEN GATES OF THE UNDERWORLD. THEN HE OPENED EACH OF THE DOORS OF THE PALACE GANZER SEPARATELY. HE SAID TO HOLY INANNA: "COME, INANNA, AND ENTER."

AND WHEN INANNA ENTERED THE TURBAN, HEADGEAR FOR THE OPEN COUNTRY, WAS REMOVED FROM HER HEAD. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED.

"BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD."

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE SECOND GATE, THE SMALL LAPIS-LAZULI BEADS WERE REMOVED FROM HER NECK. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED, ONCE MORE.

"BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD." THE GATEKEEPER REPLIED AGAIN.

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE THIRD GATE, THE TWIN EGG-SHAPED BEADS WERE REMOVED FROM HER BREAST. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED, AND THE DOORMAN REPLIED: "BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD."

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE FOURTH GATE, THE PECTORAL WAS REMOVED FROM HER BREAST. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED, AND AGAIN CAME THE REPLY: "BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD."

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE FIFTH GATE, THE GOLDEN RING WAS REMOVED FROM HER HAND. AGAIN, "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED, AND AGAIN, "BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD." THE DOORMAN REPLIED.

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE SIXTH GATE, THE LAPIS-LAZULI MEASURING ROD AND MEASURING LINE WERE REMOVED FROM HER HAND. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE SAID, AND "BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD." REPLIED THE DOORMAN.

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE SEVENTH GATE, THE PALA DRESS, THE GARMENT OF LADYSHIP, WAS REMOVED FROM HER BODY. "WHAT IS THIS?" SHE ASKED, ONE FINAL TIME, AND "BE SILENT, INANNA, A DIVINE POWER OF THE UNDERWORLD HAS BEEN FULFILLED. INANNA, YOU MUST NOT OPEN YOUR MOUTH AGAINST THE RITES OF THE UNDERWORLD." SAID THE DOORMAN, ONE FINAL TIME.

AS SHE CROUCHED THERE NAKED, THE LAST OF HER CLOTHING WAS TAKEN AWAY. THEN SHE MADE HER SISTER ERESHKIGAL RISE FROM HER THRONE, AND INSTEAD SHE SAT UPON IT. THE ANUNA, THE SEVEN JUDGES, RENDERED THEIR DECISION AGAINST INANNA. THEY LOOKED AT HER - IT WAS THE LOOK OF DEATH. THEY SPOKE TO HER - IT WAS THE SPEECH OF ANGER. THEY SHOUTED AT HER - IT WAS THE SHOUT OF HEAVY GUILT. INANNA WAS TURNED INTO A CORPSE, AND THE CORPSE WAS HUNG ON A HOOK.

AFTER THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS, INANNA'S MINISTER, NINSHUBUR, WHO SPOKE FAIR AND TRUSTWORTHY WORDS, ACTED UPON HER INSTRUCTIONS. SHE DID NOT NEGLECT INANNA'S COMMANDS. SHE MADE A LAMENT FOR INANNA IN HER RUINED HOUSES. SHE LACERATED HER EYES FOR HER, SHE LACERATED HER NOSE. LIKE A PAUPER, SHE CLOTHED HERSELF IN A SINGLE GARMENT AND APPROACHED THE HOUSE OF ENKI ALL ALONE.

WHEN SHE ENTERED THE HOUSE OF ENKI, SHE SPOKE: "FATHER ENKI, DON'T LET ANYONE KILL YOUR DAUGHTER IN THE UNDERWORLD. DON'T LET YOUR PRECIOUS METAL BE ALLOYED THERE WITH THE DIRT OF THE UNDERWORLD. DON'T LET YOUR PRECIOUS LAPIS-LAZULI BE SPLIT THERE WITH THE MASON'S STONE. DON'T LET YOUNG LADY INANNA BE KILLED IN THE UNDERWORLD."

FATHER ENKI ANSWERED NINSHUBUR: "WHAT HAS MY DAUGHTER DONE? SHE HAS ME WORRIED." THUS FATHER ENKI HELPED HER IN THIS MATTER. HE REMOVED SOME DIRT FROM THE TIP OF HIS FINGERNAIL AND CREATED THE KUR-GHARA.

THEN FATHER ENKI SPOKE OUT TO THE KUR-GHARA: "GO AND DIRECT YOUR STEPS TO THE UNDERWORLD. FLUT PAST THE DOOR LIKE A FLY. SLIP THROUGH THE DOOR PIVOTS LIKE A PHANTOM. THE MOTHER WHO GAVE BIRTH, ERESHKIGAL, ON ACCOUNT OF HER CHILDREN, IS LYING THERE. HER HOLY SHOULDERS ARE NOT COVERED BY A LINEN CLOTH. HER BREASTS ARE NOT FULL LIKE A SHAGAN VESSEL. HER NAILS ARE LIKE A PICKAXE UPON HER. THE HAIR ON HER HEAD IS BUNCHED UP AS IF IT WERE LEES."

"SHE WILL OFFER YOU A RIVERFUL OF WATER - DON'T ACCEPT IT," HE CONTINUED. "SHE WILL OFFER YOU A FIELD WITH ITS GRAIN - DON'T ACCEPT IT. BUT SAY TO HER: 'GIVE ME THE CORPSE HANGING ON THE HOOK.' SHE WILL ANSWER: 'THAT IS THE CORPSE OF YOUR QUEEN.' SAY TO HER: 'WHETHER IT IS THAT OF MY KING, WHETHER IT IS THAT OF MY QUEEN, GIVE IT TO ME.' SHE WILL GIVE YOU THE CORPSE HANGING ON THE HOOK. THEN YOU MUST JOIN WITH INANNA. THUS LET INANNA ARISE."

THE KUR-GHARA PAID ATTENTION TO THE INSTRUCTIONS OF ENKI. IT FLUTTED THROUGH THE DOOR LIKE A FLY. IT SLIPPED THROUGH THE DOOR PIVOTS LIKE A PHANTOM. THE MOTHER WHO GAVE BIRTH, ERESHKIGAL, BECAUSE OF HER CHILDREN, WAS LYING THERE. HER HOLY SHOULDERS WERE NOT COVERED BY A LINEN CLOTH. HER BREASTS WERE NOT FULL LIKE A SHAGAN VESSEL. HER NAILS WERE LIKE A PICKAXE UPON HER. THE HAIR ON HER HEAD WAS BUNCHED UP AS IF IT WERE LEES.

"OH, MY HEART," SHE SAID.

THE KUR-GHARA RESPONDED: "YOU ARE TROUBLED, MY MISTRESS. OH, YOUR HEART."

THEN SHE ASKED: "WHO ARE YOU? I TELL YOU FROM MY HEART TO YOUR HEART, FROM MY BODY TO YOUR BODY - IF YOU ARE A GOD I WILL TALK WITH YOU; IF YOU ARE A MORTAL, MAY A DESTINY BE DECREED FOR YOU." IT MADE HER SWEAR THIS BY HEAVEN AND EARTH. THE KUR-GHARA WAS OFFERED A RIVER WITH ITS WATER - IT DID NOT ACCEPT. IT WAS OFFERED A FIELD WITH ITS GRAIN - THE KUR-GHARA DID NOT ACCEPT IT.

"GIVE US THE CORPSE HANGING ON THE HOOK," IT SAID TO HER.

"THE CORPSE IS THAT OF YOUR QUEEN," SAID HOLY ERESHKIGAL.

"WHETHER IT IS THAT OF MY KING OR THAT OF MY QUEEN, GIVE IT TO ME." THE KUR-GHARA WAS GIVEN THE CORPSE HANGING ON THE HOOK, AND IT BECAME ONE WITH HER. AND THUS INANNA AROSE.

BUT AS INANNA WAS ABOUT TO ASCEND FROM THE UNDERWORLD INTO HER SECOND LIFE, THE ANUNA SEIZED HER: "WHO HAS EVER ASCENDED UNSCATHED FROM THE UNDERWORLD? IF INANNA IS TO ASCEND FROM THE UNDERWORLD, LET HER PROVIDE A SUBSTITUTE FOR HERSELF."

SO WHEN INANNA LEFT THE UNDERWORLD, SHE WAS RESTRAINED AND SURROUNDED BY HOUNDS ON ALL SIDES. THOSE WHO ACCOMPANIED HER KNEW NO FOOD OR DRINK. THEY ACCEPTED NO PLEASANT GIFTS NOR KNEW THE MARITAL EMBRACE. THEY WERE THE GUARDIANS OF IRKALIA, THE HOLY SARVARA, AND THEY FOLLOWED HER WITH DREAD INTENT.

AFTER INANNA HAD ASCENDED FROM THE UNDERWORLD, NINSHUBUR THREW HERSELF AT HER FEET AT THE DOOR OF THE GANZER. SHE HAD SAT IN THE DUST AND CLOTHED HERSELF IN A FILTHY GARMENT. THE SARVARA SAID TO HOLY INANNA: "INANNA, PROCEED TO YOUR CITY. WE WILL TAKE HER BACK."

"THIS IS MY MINISTER OF FAIR WORDS. SHE DID NOT FORGET MY INSTRUCTIONS. SHE MADE A LAMENT FOR ME ON THE RUIN MOUNDS. SHE LACERATED HER EYES FOR ME, LACERATED HER NOSE FOR ME. LIKE A PAUPER, SHE CLOTHED HERSELF IN A SINGLE GARMENT. SHE VISITED ENKI FOR ME. SHE BROUGHT ME BACK TO LIFE. HOW COULD I TURN HER OVER TO YOU? LET US GO ON."

AND SO THEY DID AND TIME AND AGAIN, INANNA GAVE EXCUSES AND DID NOT ALLOW THE SARVARA TO TAKE THEIR SUBSTITUTE. FINALLY, INANNA REACHED HER HUSBAND, DUMUZID. THE SARVARA REACHED OUT AND TOOK THE KING BY HIS THIGHS.



"THIS IS MY HUSBAND!" SHE SAID. "HOW COULD I TURN HIM OVER TO YOU? LET US GO ON!"

BUT THE SARVARA WERE NOT SHAYED. "YOU COULD HAVE GIVEN US YOUR MINISTER. YET WE WENT ON. YOU COULD HAVE GIVEN US ANY OF THE CITIZENS WE PASSED IN YOUR CITY'S STREETS. YET WE WENT ON. WE SHALL GO NO FURTHER. THIS SHALL BE YOUR SUBSTITUTE." AND THE SARVARA, THE KEEPERS OF THE OLD LAWS TOOK INANNA'S HUSBAND AWAY. INANNA WEPT BITTER TEARS, AND THE KUR-GHARA WITHIN HER OFFERED A PALE SHADOW OF COMFORT. AND INANNA BEGGED HER SISTER TO RETURN HER HUSBAND TO LIFE.

AND ERESHKIGAL DECREED THAT SHE WOULD LET DUMUZID LIVE FOR SIX MONTHS OF THE YEAR AND TAKE INANNA IN HIS PLACE. FOR HALF THE YEAR, INANNA WOULD REMAIN ABOVE, AND HALF THE YEAR SHE WOULD REMAIN BELOW. AND SHE WOULD ONLY SEE HER HUSBAND AS HE PASSED HER AT THE GATES OF GANZER.

Story Hooks: Purity of Inanna

• Breakin' the Law

The Inanna story is a good example of the Underworld and its laws. Thing about the Underworld is, the laws are usually clear — in many ways clearer than the laws of man in the world of the living. One might find laws written on rocks or spoken by a vigilant ghost, one might see the laws on a tattered banner flapping in a non-existent breeze, or on the side of a spectral subway car like an advertisement for submarine sandwiches or checking accounts.

Here's the other thing, though: the laws always have some hook that asks them to be broken. In the story above, part of this is about the *offer* — "I'll offer you slaves and fields and power, and if you accept the offer, the law is broken and what you truly want cannot be claimed." Breaking the laws should always be a convincing option for players and their characters. If the law is, "Don't drink the water," and that's it, then players won't ever have their characters drink the water. But if the law is, "Don't drink the water," and the water happens to provide one who drinks it with visions of deceased loved ones or a powerful vision of pleasure, then the stakes are raised. If the law is about not speaking to ghosts, then *give them reason to speak with ghosts*. The laws are only compelling as a Storytelling tool if there exists an interesting reason to break them in the first place.

The Lyre of Orpheus

Excerpts from a series of letters between Nicolas Frantzetti of the Ordo Dracul and Byron Pierce, Historian of the Orphic Circle:

Of course, we have many legends to tell us what happens after one dies. In Greek legends, as you know, the dead cross one of the five rivers, such as the river Styx, if they can pay the ferryman, Charon. They then descend into Hades past the guardian Cerberus, or more correctly, Kerberos. In some sources, Hades is also called "Tartarus," which literally means "deep place." Other sources separate the two, placing Tartarus below Hades in the mythic geography of Greece.

The queen of Tartarus, Persephone, only spent the winter months in the subterranean vaults with her husband, Hades. For the rest of the year, she lived as a maiden, the daughter of Demeter. Her descent heralded winter, and her return brought fertility and rebirth in the natural cycle. Traditionally it is Demeter's grief at her daughter's absence that causes the barren season, but poetically, the world takes on many of the aspects of the dead while Persephone rules alongside her husband, and only returns to life when they are separated. There exists a certain symmetry here with other stories. Winter is a time where death reigns over the world; we are all confronted with mortality.

I admit to an amount of ignorance here. I have never conversed with a ghost that had been to the Underworld and returned. The few that knew anything told me that it isn't somewhere you come back from. I have to wonder at the number of legends relating trips to and from the Underworld. I know, they are legends. Just... stories.

Of course, so are we.

Odysseus visited those dark lands, along with Theseus, Heracles and, most relevant to our discussions, Orpheus. Each of these visitors returned to the land of the living mostly intact. Likewise, each paid a price for their trip save Heracles, thanks to divine intervention. Odysseus sacrificed a ram and Theseus literally left a part of himself when Heracles freed him. Orpheus paid his way through emotion. He caused each resident of the land of the dead to experience his love for Eurydice and his sadness at her loss.

There is always a price to be paid.

Nicholas

Each one of the things you mention has something in common. The ram's blood, the flesh of Theseus' thighs, and Orpheus' emotions — each is an expression of life. Reminders of what the inhabitants of the Underworld had left behind.

Perhaps that's why ghosts cannot return so easily from the Underworld. They have no life to give.

Another thing to note is that the protagonists of the stories you mention do not enter the Underworld lightly. Odysseus needed information that he could only get from Tiresias, who was dead. Theseus accompanied a friend who wanted to kidnap Persephone and make her his bride. Heracles was tasked with capturing Cerberus as one of his legendary tasks. And Orpheus...

He did it for love. Of all of them, his goal was the most personal, and perhaps the most pathetic — in the word's original meaning. We can all sympathize with the desire to rescue a loved one from beyond the pale. But — likely thanks to his mother, the muse Calliope — Orpheus had the talent and ability to distill that pathos into a beautiful, heart-stirring song. He found the key to unlock the horrible enigma that grips the dead.

When he lost Eurydice, Orpheus went into the Underworld, first gaining Charon's sympathy, then charming Cerberus and softening the hearts of Hades and Persephone. But even that was not enough for them to just give Eurydice up. Orpheus was told not to look back until both parties had returned to the mortal world. Even a gift has strings attached.

Of course he didn't. He reached the sunlight and forgot that she had to reach the living world as well. He turned, and watched her fade into the darkness. In other versions of the story, the sound of her footfalls stopped behind him and he turned to see what was wrong. I find those versions interesting for the implicit cruelty of Hades and Persephone. The gods, like the dead, are so removed from humanity that we cannot predict their actions or their motivations.

Byron

The Orpheus legend parallels stories from many other cultures. Izanami and Izanagi in Japanese myth, Ix Chel and Itzamna from the Mayans, and one of the Nimiipuu legends of Coyote. What makes one myth more valid than the others?

I do feel that it is important to point out that Persephone, according to Empedocles, corresponded to the element of water; "moistening mortal springs with tears." I would disagree that her heart was as hard as you think.

Nicolas

You neglect to mention that Persephone was referred to as "Nertis" in Empedocles' text. Her true name could not be spoken, for she was the "terrible queen of the dead." In her guise as Persephone, Core was hard-hearted in every story but for the Orphean myth.

Here, let's get into what you really need to know. We're leaving the realm of myth and getting into the realm of the practical. Orpheus of Thrace—which may or may not be his name, but it's good enough for our purposes—was obsessed with the Underworld.

More specifically, he was obsessed with avoiding the fate that so often befalls ghosts: I assume, since you refer to speaking with ghosts, that you know what I mean. So often, a shade is lost in the faded echo of their life, repeating the same action over and over. I'm not sure what causes these spirits to degrade. What makes them lose their coherence and forget what they are in favor of and what they were? Is it madness? Literally or metaphorically drinking from some river of Lethe? Or is it a failure of purpose? I personally lean toward the latter, and I think Orpheus did as well.

A mystery cult grew up around him, based on a number of hymns. Interestingly, and perhaps a bit of a paradox, considering what we've already discussed about Persephone and her relationship with Orpheus, she is revered by the Orphics, along with Dionysus.

Specifically, her cyclical existence coincides with early Orphic literature: bone carvings that simply read "Life. Death. Life." All three important beings within the Orphic belief system descended into the Underworld and returned with their faculties intact.

Orphic followers were buried with gold leaves engraved with instructions, reminding the dead what to tell the guardians when they reach the Underworld.

"I am the son of Earth and Starry Heaven. I am thirsty, please give me something to drink from the fountain of Mnemosyne."

Mnemosyne is the river of memory, opposite to Lethe, the river of forgetfulness.

Other gold leaves say, "Now you are dead, and now you are born on this very day, thrice blessed. Tell Persephone that Dionysus himself has redeemed you."

The Orphic scriptures are all about overcoming the traditional limitations of the post-death state. You should understand that, and appreciate it. Aren't you, after all, trying to overcome the drawbacks of your own curse?

Can you blame mortals for seeking an end to the grievous circle of life, death and rebirth? If you could retain your knowledge and power without the intense failings of your kind, wouldn't you?

A Requiem is a sacred song, wouldn't you remove from yours the dissonant chords?

Byron

Story Hooks: Don't Look Back

• The Golden Leaves

Members of an ancient Thracian cult buried their dead with instructions, in the form of golden leaves engraved with explicit reminders intended to counteract the unfortunate amnesia that seems to come over ghosts when they rise.

The leaves detail how to manipulate the guardians of the Underworld into restoring a ghost to its full, living faculties. Some stories suggest that certain leaves even include instructions that would allow a shade to completely separate itself from its dependence on anchors, allowing it

to remain in Twilight indefinitely without the narrow range of action allowed by the nature of its anchor.

Other leaves are a written record of ancient and powerful ceremonies and rites, highly sought after by mages following the path of Moros and Sin-Eaters alike. Among the Sin-Eaters, these ancient leaves also act as Charm mementos.

More recently, a number of Sin-Eaters have taken up the leaves as a method of communication on the Twilight Network. They use the symbol of a golden leaf as a reminder, or a notice to keep an eye out for hidden instructions and information about the local Underworld.

• Into the Labyrinth

Like Orpheus, some people can't give up on their dead loved ones. They search for answers, not to the question of how to move on — instead they look for a way to retrieve their loved one from the other side of death. In fact, that stubborn clinging is the impetus that drives many necromancers... at least, at first.

A trip into the Underworld is fraught with danger, even for Sin-Eaters and powerful necromancers. Undertaking that trip as a defenseless mortal is foolhardy at best, suicidal at worst. But for those who seek to redeem their loved one and return to the light of the mortal world, safety is rarely a consideration. On the rare occasion that a mortal finds her way

into the Underworld with such intent, she starts out with an enormous disadvantage. Many of the Dead Dominions forbid contact between the living and the dead. For a living person to stand among the dead and petition for the freedom of one of their number is an affront to the Old Laws.

No matter how compelling the mortal's case, a price must be paid. A soul for a soul, or an impossible quest. Even given the astronomical odds that the Kerberoi will take pity on two lovers (most Kerberoi don't "do" pity), the price is beyond exorbitant. The lengths a petitioner must go to in order to succeed ensure that second chances such as these are almost never granted.

GATES OF NOTE: SUICIDE FOREST

In Japan, the Aokigahara forest to the west of Tokyo is known as a destination for the desperate and suicidal. Hundreds of people wander into the dense forest (also known as the Sea of Trees) every year, never to be seen again.

Deep in the forest, an Avernian Gate awaits those who seek death. Some Sin-Eaters warn that the gateway is particularly dangerous. They say that many of the despairing souls that wander deep within the forest find their way through the gate and are transformed, their bodies wracked and warped by the vicious shades who call Aokigahara home. The creatures are freed back into the forest where they wander, maddened and ravenous things, drawn to Sin-Eaters who search for the gateway.

Into the Holy City (1202-1204)

Excerpted from the diaries of Lucio de Innocenzio, assistant to Enrico Dandolo, thirty-ninth Doge of Venice, by Vincent Calabria:

February 6, 1202

I wish I could say that our home was quiet, or even bustling in its usual way. But it is not, alas, the Crusaders have come, and they are stranded here. Their funds have run out, and they stand indebted to the city of Venice. Personally, I would pay their considerable debt if I were able, just to have the stink of their steel and their horses gone from our streets.

Across the Adriatic, there is rebellion in the city of Zara. They are shifting their allegiance from our great Republic to the King of Hungary. Zara is a valuable link in our trade route. This must not be allowed to stand!

But my master says that he has a plan, so I must trust in him and hope that everything comes to pass quickly, so that I may sleep at night again.

April 9, 1202

Master Dandolo is a genius! He says he has found a way to get the Crusaders out of our beautiful city before they get too restless, and he has done so in a way that will quell the rebellion in Zara and recoup the amount the Crusaders' debts! I look forward to seeing their backs so I can finally get some peace.

The Crusaders are brash, loud fools who should never have left home. They are a mighty force, but they have the discipline of rowdy, spoiled children. I cannot begin to express how much I despise their presence.

October 18, 1202

I am aboard the Crusaders' ship. My master took the Cross, and is now one of the Crusaders. I fear that he has gone mad. And thanks to him, Venice provided the ships in which we now sail. How I miss my bed in fair Venice.

We are en route to Egypt, but I fear we will not make it. The supply ships have fallen short, and we are in danger of starving before we even reach the shores of that distant country.

I am not a soldier! This is not the life that the good Lord intended for me. The Crusaders have chosen to be shipped around like so much cattle, but I chose to live the stationary, sedentary life of acting as aide to the Doge in order to avoid such unpleasantness!

How will we survive?

November 15, 1202

At last! I was a fool to doubt him. My master convinced the Crusaders to turn and take nearby Zara, crushing the rebellion and reclaiming the city in the name of Venice! We will winter here, and gather our strength before continuing to Egypt.

The Crusaders fought well against the city's defenders. I sleep on solid ground tonight! I cannot wait to see a real bed.

I pray each day for the return of my master's good sense regarding the Crusaders themselves, however. He remains committed to reaching Constantinople and laying siege. Last night, as I led him from meeting to meeting, he told me strange stories about Constantinople, of tombs and saints. He told me that he longed to look upon the great city again. It is unfortunate that he is blind.

I remember when it happened. I had just begun to work for him, still a young man, the year he was sent to Constantinople as the ambassador of Venice. He negotiated for the reconstruction of the Venetian quarter of the city, but talks broke down. As we were making our way to dinner one evening, an assassin ambushed us! Master Dandolo was struck a heavy blow to the back of his head, and he collapsed. I called for help as his blood wet the stones of Byzantium.

Miraculously, he recovered. He was not a young man, even then. Now he is ancient. I wonder how a man so near a century old can even dream of performing the tasks required of a Crusader laying a city to siege. And yet, there he is, waking before I do and remaining so after I have succumbed to sleep.

The Crusade continues. We boarded ships today for the long journey to Byzantium and, if my master and the others can be relied on, the sack of Constantinople. There is a restlessness about my master as we get closer. I assumed that he joined the Crusade to ensure that Zara was taken, but he becomes more irritable and ardent about the fall of Constantinople with each passing day.

I worry that his old heart will give out and I will be abandoned, alone with these armored fools. I fear he is sliding into dementia. Last night, I heard him in his stateroom, arguing with someone. It seemed heated, so I interrupted under the pretense of seeing if my master required anything before I retired for the night. There was nobody else in the room.

April 15, 1204

God help us all.

Two days ago, we attacked Constantinople. The walls and soldiers were weakened by an earlier attempt, and we did the impossible! The Crusaders stormed the city. The first of them into the city, astride his horse, sword drawn and fighting, was my master. A 90-year-old blind man. And yet, his bloodthirst and zeal was the equal of any young man I saw.

The siege is not important right now. The looting and pillaging of the city has become so bad that I hide in a tower already stripped of its valuables, for fear that the Crusaders will mistakenly kill me in their gleeful chaos. It is impossible to walk the streets without staining your boots and robe with the blood of two religions.

Last night, Dandolo came to me from where he had been installed in the Great Palace. He took me into the darkened streets, lit by the still-burning fires of war, and led me to the Hagia Sophia, the beautiful domed cathedral. I repeat, he led me. My master still had the look of a blind man. He held his arms ahead of him, and stared into nothing, but he knew where he was going or he was being led himself. Inside the Hagia Sophia, he turned to me and told me that I had to help him destroy a mural.

A work of art in one of the world's most beautiful churches. I was skeptical. He pressed me, trading on our years of acquaintance. He offered me money. He promised that this would be the last thing he would ever ask of me.

I did it.

The wall crumbled under our blows. I could see Dandolo weakening as we progressed. When the wall was destroyed, we discovered, to my horror, a pit of such blackness that it seemed as if I had discovered the very mouth of Hell itself. Around us were treasures of another age. Strange things engraved with languages I have never seen before.

Dandolo suddenly had the look of a marionette whose strings had been cut. A cold wind whipped out of the pit and in its rush, I heard the skittering of many legs. Above me, the room was black, but there came this feeling of great shape and depth, as if I stood in the shadow of some looming giant. I saw, for a moment, a glittering line that tracked across the room, a single thread of light, and transfixed on that light, a liminal form not physical or spirit, but something else entirely. I knew somehow that the thing trapped on that line was the force that had driven my poor old master, and that their time was over. I rushed to gather up my master's fragile frame and escape before the darkness descended.

Behind me, I heard the beginnings of a great whispering rush of voices. The words were in a plethora of languages, and made no sense strung together as they were. Underneath the gibbering, a strange keening sound began to grow.

I did not look back.

Now, as I write this, my former master seems much weaker. He seems as frail as he should, considering his 90 years. I suppose, I will take the next ship back to Venice and never look upon this foul city again, if I can help it.

Story Hooks: Taking the Cross

• The Hagia Sophia

An Avernian Gate lies in the dark recesses below the Hagia Sophia. Once a great church, then the greatest Mosque of the Ottoman Empire, and now, finally a museum, the Hagia Sophia has weathered the winds of change and still stands as one of the most beautiful buildings in the world.

The deep pit has been hidden here for centuries, since the Turks took the city in the 15th century.

Those aware of the legend whisper that this pit is actually a gateway to Hell, or Sheol. They say that spirits and demons hold sway in the depths. Perhaps, or else it's simply another way into the Underworld. Either way, the lip of the pit is lined with priceless treasures. These mementos are engraved



with a Very Old Language. Some versions of the story even posit that the Holy Grail itself is hidden among the other antiquities. That's ridiculous, of course, but the hoard is real, and full of powerful — or *potentially* powerful — artifacts. Just inside the pit, though, a guardian lies in wait, a vast arachnid thing with a carapace made of darkness and pain. The glimmering, ephemeral strands of its web grasp and pull at spooks and souls alike, and the babbling of its voice is insanity itself,

shot through with prophecy and truth. The items hidden within are bait that the guardian uses to draw in its favored prey: Sin-Eaters, or more to the point, their geists.

The Great Game (1528)

From the journal of the Conquistador Alejandro Ruiz Francisco de Castille, translated by Maria Vargas, University of Mexico:

I stood among the ruins of a great civilization. Not greater than my Spain, by any measure or means, but still great. I saw no sign of the people. The civilization died long before we arrived. Their cities were glorious even in their dilapidated state. The boy who acted as our guide claimed that his people had caused the collapse of this great culture by building greater monuments to their gods. Their favor passed to the Nahuatlaca, and the Mayans never recovered. I reminded the boy of the One True God when he told that story, and he apologized for his heresy. I flogged him to help him remember his place and the place of his people's false gods.

Deep down, I knew that he was right. The God of Christianity was greater than their gods, and now their civilization was beholden to ours. Old gods, and old cultures, must be swept aside to make way for progress and the holy Truth of God. Truth, and the persuading power of our fine Spanish swords and firearms.

Huitzilin, our guide, told us of a curse upon the city, but my men knew that their faith was stronger than any pagan curse, so they began to explore the ruins, looking for relics that would bring glory to Spain. I watched my men with a kind of paternal pride, from a vantage point above the city. Huitzilin stood by. He made no sound when the lash bit into his back. If I can purge his sinful soul of the regrettable and false beliefs of his people, he will be a fine young man.

I first saw him in battle when our expedition was ambushed by Mayan warriors as we crossed into Yucatan. He tells us that he was named after a great hero of his people, and I must say, he fought with a ferocity the equal of the local jaguar and a valor that I admit I found surprising in a non-Spaniard.

As the day wore on, the men gathered the treasure they found, but came across no sign of recent inhabitants. Huitzilin told us that nobody lived here because of the curse. He told me an old — and ridiculous — legend of why the city was abandoned. I will include it here, to record this strange primitive land before we civilized it with our culture and religion, and perhaps to make sense of things.

Once, this city was a great hub of trade and power. Many sacrifices were made on this land to call upon the great favor of the gods. The court *Huitzilil* showed us was where the great warrior-athletes of the city played a sport that he explained in some detail and called the "ball game." The athletes of this city were renowned for their prowess, and word spread that they were the best players of the brutal game. Warrior-athletes from other cities arrived and challenged the local players to matches while merchants from both sides bartered their goods and bet on the games. Each group of warrior-athletes left defeated, their leaders sacrificed to the gods, enriching the reputation and legendry of the city and its warrior-athletes.

Then, one day a group of strange and pale warriors showed up, along with a wise shaman clad in the brightest feathers. The shaman stepped forward, to challenge the city's athletes to a match. The warrior-athletes accepted with no hesitation.

"Send your men to the court," they said, and the shaman just smiled a hideous, black-toothed smile.

"These are not my city's warrior-athletes. These are merely the youngest, most unproven warriors of my city. They were sufficient to guard my journey here and back, but they are not the finest players of the ball game there is. You will have to return with me to our city and our court to play them."

But the warrior-athletes were also the guardians of the city. They were the ones who protected the city from invasion and pillage. The lord of the city knew that accepting the challenge would leave the city weakened against its enemies, but so much of the city's pride was built around the warrior-athletes and their reputation as the best players of the ball game in the world. After great deliberation, he called the warrior-athletes and the shaman together and he told them, "you will go with this shaman and return to his home. There you will defend your city's reputation and show this man why our city is the most blessed of the gods."

The shaman smiled his hideous smile once more and said, "And what if your athletes fail?"

"My athletes cannot fail, they are the greatest in the world! My entire city will crumble before they are defeated."

The shaman bowed. "As you say, great chieftain."

And the men followed the shaman and his warriors out of the city and into the wilderness. They walked for three days, until they reached the entrance of a cave.

"We must travel into the darkness here. The way is very dangerous. If you like, you may forfeit the game and return to your city," said the shaman.

Without hesitation, the warriors refused. "We shall go on, and defeat your best at the ball game."

So the group continued into the darkness of the cave. As they left sunlight behind, the pale warriors did not light torches. The proud warrior-athletes carried the only torches, as though the shaman and his men had no need for light.

As the party moved down the road to the pale men's city, they came upon the river. In the firelight, the water glimmered strangely. One of the warrior-athletes moved close to the bank of the river and they realized that it did not run with water at all, but deadly scorpions!

Again, the shaman smiled at the warrior-athletes and offered to allow them to forfeit the game and return home, and once more, the men refused.

The shaman and his warriors stood back and waited. It was clear that the warrior-athletes had to find their way across without help from their guides. The warriors tested the width of the river of scorpions, and they decided that it was within their extraordinary athletic ability to cross with a great leap. One by one, they each jumped the river, narrowly avoiding the venomous stingers of the scorpions on the far side. When they had crossed, the shaman and his warriors jumped as well, each of them landing nimbly and calmly on the other side.

The next obstacle came soon enough. The party approached another river, this one wider than the last. This river was not flowing with scorpions, but instead ran red with a constant flow of hot blood. Once again, the shaman offered the warrior-athletes a way out, and again they refused. This time, they could not jump across the river and avoid touching the impure blood, for it was too wide.

The warriors were strong, though. They worked together to push a giant rock into the flow of the river, and leapt from one bank to the rock and then from the rock to the other side of the river. The shaman and his warriors followed behind again, and he congratulated the men on their teamwork and strength.

In time, the party encountered another river. This river did not run with water, like the two before it. There were no scorpions. There was no blood. This river ran thick with yellow humours. It was too wide to jump. The pus splashed up and made the rock the men threw in too slippery to jump onto. Once more, the shaman offered to let the warrior-athletes forfeit, and again they refused.

The banks of the river were overflowing with the foul liquid, but the men were agile as well as strong. Each man removed his wrags, and they tied them together into a rope. One member of the team climbed up the cavern wall and found a place to secure the rope. One by one, the men swung across. Once they had crossed, the shaman and his warriors followed, and the shaman congratulated the men on their teamwork and agility.

He told them they were almost to the city of his people. They asked when they would reach the cave's other entrance and the shaman laughed.

"My city is underground, strong and agile warriors. My city is *Xibalba*." Now, this name means nothing to you, for you are from across the sea, but to the warriors, the name *Xibalba* filled them with dread. It is the place of fear, where the dead travel after they die. And the shaman smiled his black-toothed grin and he bowed low. "Shall we continue?"

So they continued. As they came into sight of the city, they saw that the cavern was lit with a green light that seemed to come from the very walls themselves. As the warrior-athletes entered the gates of the city, the citizens of *Xibalba* threw rotten vegetables — bright with colors in this bleak place — and jeered. The men were undefeated. They were heroes. They were not accustomed to such treatment, and it washed away their fear and replaced it with prideful anger.

The warrior-athletes were taken to the court of the great city, but their rivals were not there. The court was empty.

"This is where you shall play," said the shaman, "but you must rest from your journey before the game, if it is to be fair." And the shaman, who the warriors now knew was Seven Death, one of the rulers of the city, called for a servant to take them to their lodgings. Now, since the game was the purpose of their visit, they were not lodged in Cold House, or Jaguar House, or Razor House. They were merely lodged in Dark House, where there was no light.

The warrior-athletes found that their imaginations created terrors enough in the black rooms of Dark House without being put into one of the other houses.

In the morning, a servant arrived to lead the men from Dark House back to the court. Even the green glow of the cavern was like daylight after the unrelenting black inside the house. The men approached the court warily, where the crowd was seated solemnly.

The other team was covered in scars. They stood proud and pale, and did not react at all when the warrior-athletes took their place on the other side of the court. Above them, One Death and Seven Death sat with the other 10 lords of Xibalba.

"You," One Death said. "You are the greatest players of the ball game that the sunlit world can produce?"

The captain of the warrior-athletes stepped forward, "Yes, lord, we are. And we shall win this game."

One Death looked at Seven Death, who said, "They are strong and agile, and they work together well. They are the best that the sunlit world can offer."

"So be it. Let the game begin!" shouted One Death.

The warriors knew they played now for the very fate of their city, for to lose against the rulers of Xibalba was to doom their friends and families. And to forfeit would be worse.

The ball fell between the teams, and the game began. The warrior-athletes played with all their might. Their strong muscles gave their kicks power. Their agility helped them to aim well and dodge their opponents. Their teamwork helped them to keep the ball in the air and away from the other team.

But then the true nature of the Xibalba game revealed itself. The ball sprouted razor-sharp blades, and slashed the legs and chests of the warrior-athletes. Their opponents continued on as if nothing had changed. Blood poured down their pale skin.

As the warrior-athletes weakened, they heard the demon lords of the city laughing. The strength faded from their muscles, and their kicks lost power. Their wounds made them sluggish, and they lost their agility. One by one, they fell, and their teamwork meant nothing.

The chief of their city refused to believe it when Seven Death and his warriors arrived to report the loss of the warrior-athletes. Seven Death clasped, and the warriors produced the heads of the men out of their bags.

"We had a wager," Seven Death said. "You said your city would crumble before your warrior-athletes lost." He spread his arms wide, ruffling out the bright feathers of his raiment. "They have lost. Now your city must fall."

Before the chieftain could answer Seven Death, he felt a pain inside, and he watched as his advisors and guards, and the other citizens of the city fell dead before his eyes.

When the dead prepared for their journey to Xibalba, Seven Death smiled blackly and said, "No. Your people are not welcome in Xibalba. Surely there are too many of you, a whole city full of new citizens?"

"But what shall we do?" asked the chief. "Where shall we go?"

"Nowhere, prideful chief. You are so proud of your city, perhaps you and your people shall remain here." And so they did.

While Huitzil told me this legend, my men claimed treasures from the abandoned houses of the city. They joked and threw rotten fruit through the hoops of the ball game court in the waning light of the day.

As the sun set, I saw them walk out of the houses. I watched from above the city as the pale citizens of the city converged on the courts, and my men. And I heard them, as though they stood at my ear.

"Who are you?" they asked. "These are our treasures, taken from our homes." The pale men and women surrounded my men, and I heard one of my men cry out, before they were gone.

Story Hooks: Where the Dead Walk

• Ghost Towns

Sometimes, in those places that the living forsake, the dead remain. Like maybe the roadhouse in the middle of nowhere that only seems to have country music from the '70s on the jukebox and no working phone to call for roadside assistance. All of the patrons are friendly, but none of them can help you with your car — why don't you just stay for a spell? Or the small town in Colorado that can only be found in a

blizzard, but they're glad to put you up until the storm blows over. The abandoned schoolhouse, where children's laughter can be heard on the playground when the wind is right.

Remember that whenever the dead encounter the living, there is always a toll that must be paid. The bartender of that roadhouse needs a new waitress. The townsfolk just want a nice evening. If things aren't perfect, they have other ways to enjoy themselves. The children need supervision. They need a teacher.

In the case of the Mayan city, the xenophobic and prideful ghosts who dwell there will sacrifice any intruders they find in their ruins after dark, unless those intruders challenge their warrior-athletes to the ball game, and win.

The question here is, why has the Underworld forsaken them? Could they be freed from this world and sent to the Underworld? Do they fear the Underworld like many ghosts do?

- **Playing for Keeps**

We all know the scene. The grim reaper sits on one side of the table, the intrepid ghost on the other. They play for the highest stakes imaginable, at least for the ghost. If the reaper wins, the spirit remains in the Underworld, trapped away from everything he knew. If the ghost wins, he gets one more chance at life, one more go at getting it right. Or, the mortal boy slips into an abandoned house during a storm, hoping to pass the worst in a relatively dry place. But the house is haunted by a pair of strange old men who challenge the boy to a game of cards while they have time to kill. When the old men win, the boy is never seen again.

The dead have a habit of playing games with the living. To some, it's the only thing they know. The gambler's ghost on a train bound for nowhere. A Victorian shade who makes his move on the chess board in the upstairs parlor when nobody is looking. Even the ghost in the machine, still haunting the online game he was addicted to in life. The goal is simple, for most ghosts. They just want a friend. They want someone living to spend time with them. A connection to

GATES OF NOTE: THE NORTHERN HOLLOW

North of town, in the depths of the woods, beyond the briars and across Dead River, there's a stand of withered, blackened trees from a fire over a century ago. A gigantic oak tree once stood majestically in the center of the copse. In its place, a charred husk still looms, hollowed by the flames stoked around it. From its carbonized branches hang the rusted and stained remnants of a length of chain. The tree itself is haunted by the shade of Reggie Nichols, an ex-slave who was lynched here, for daring to share a drink with a white woman.

Local kids dare each other to crawl into the center of the tree and whisper a profane rhyme about Reggie's death. Most of them do it wrong, giggling and playing their games. Rarely though, a bloody and beaten child hides in the hollow of the tree and the combination of fear and spilled life stirs the heart of the tree and the gateway within opens, granting the child a dubious means of escaping his tormenters.



the vital, breathing world of which they are no longer a part. There are those ghosts who want something more, though. A hateful spirit who delights in moving the planchette of the Ouija board, giving spite-filled false answers that drive a wedge between two friends, or rip the last shreds of hope from a young girl's heart. The ghostly boy who wants a friend to play with... one who won't grow up and move away. The two old men from the abandoned house, more nightmares than ghosts, whispering secrets and mysteries over cards and a nice cup of tea before they take you to the basement. Other

ghosts can't move on until they're beaten at a game, or win the game they prepared their whole lives for, only to die just before their big day. In these cases, the circumstances must be reproduced as exactly as possible or the satisfaction is fleeting. It doesn't count. When something turns the game wrong, it can set off a deadly storm of frustration and anger.

The Beast (1765-1767)

From an account by Jacques de Carteret, translated from French by Lucas Deacon:

You must understand, I am a God-fearing man, and I am no coward. My family fought in the Crusades. My ancestor rode with William the Conqueror. My family has never shied away from giving our blood for God or country. I am no different. You must understand.

I was no aristocrat, no pot-bellied noble fit for nothing but the slice of the guillotine. No, I was an old bookslinger by the time of the revolution, screaming "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity!" with the rest of them. When the Great Fear came, I burned title-deeds and fought alongside my brothers.

Years earlier, when I was still a young man, not yet 20 and full of wild blood, I did not turn away from adventure. In the province of Gévaudan, I had heard stories of a vicious, man-eating wolf marauding the countryside. Some even thought it was a werewolf, a man literally transforming into the form of a beast. Can you believe that? But I know better. Those were monsters for a child's fairy tale, and we were enlightened, reasonable men, no? As I said, I was young, and at my liberty, so I set out for the South of France immediately. I packed my musket and my flintlock pistols, intent on saving the countryside from the horrible Beast of Gévaudan.

When I arrived in Clermont-Ferrand, Jean-Charles-Marce Antoine Saumole d'Ennerval and his son Jean-François, the so-called "professional wolf hunters" were already trying to quell the threat. The bounty on wolves was high, so I set about killing the foul creatures. I tell you, quite a few hunters fell in those forests, but not so many of them were taken by wolves' claws. No, they were sent to God on wings made of lead and powder, mistakenly shot by their brothers-in-arms competing for the same bounties.

I noticed, before the d'Ennerval father or son, before the other hunters, that the killings always happened near caverns, so I began to stalk the cave mouths, looking for the creature. The stories told by Portefaix and the other witnesses who had survived attacks by the beast were incredible! They described a beast that was far larger than any wolf I saw in those woods before, during or after the killings stopped. To hear them tell it, the creature must have been infested by parasites, for its neck was covered with scabs and writhing, serpentine things. Nothing in their story – which I must admit I thought was, shall we say, embellished – sounded like a wolf to me. By this time, Jean-Charles Antoine and Jean-François had been dismissed, and replaced by François Antoine, the King's Lieutenant of the Hunt.

And one night, I saw the Beast! The moon was full overhead, round and glowing so that the countryside shone almost as bright as day. The air was humid, but no mist had rolled in yet. As I watched the cave mouth, a queer, cold wind began to blow from within the cavern! Mist poured forth from the cave and then it padded out into the light. Oh, the stories Portefaix and the others told were accurate enough, all right. But accurate in the way one might explain snow accurately to someone who lives in a desert. The words can express the facts, but they cannot express the truth. The thing that stood in the mist under the shining moonlight and sniffed the air was no wolf. I cannot tell you with certainty what it was, no, but I can certainly tell you that. It stood nearly one hundred centimeters high at the shoulder, at least. The things hanging from its neck were writhing, glistening in the cold light of the moon, and a black, viscous liquid seeped and dripped from sores and wounds along its mangy flank. I know what I am saying. I am telling you that there is no way this creature could have been alone. And yet there it was, rushing through the trees, directly at me.

I could not move. I was frozen with fear. But then, a shot rang out!

François and his men shouted as loudly as the musket he had just fired, and the creature veered from its path and ran off into the night. I climbed from my perch, still shaking from my brush with the Beast.

"Alas, I must have missed," he said, with disappointment. But I had seen the creature's neck burst. I had watched, as if time had lurched to a crawl, as the horrible black fluid oozed on a phosphorescent gleam and filled the pits and valleys left by the musket ball as it passed through the creature. I knew then that my bravery would not be enough to stop the beast. Yet still I carried on, joining François's party as they tracked the foul thing across the plains. Near the Abbey des Châtes, our leader yelled out, and took aim. In the shadows of the wood, I saw a large, hunched shape padding forward, its head sniffing at the air. A shot sounded, and with a yelp, the beast collapsed.

Oh, the celebrations were grand. The drink and the women, the shouts of "hero!" It was downright intoxicating. There was only one problem. François had only killed a wolf. It was a large one, I assure you, but it was not the thing I saw loping in the mist. For a few months, everything was fine. I remained in Clormont-Terrand picking up work here and there, keeping a watchful eye on the caverns at night. Everything was calm—until December, at least.

In the depths of winter, two children were mauled in la Basse-joye Saint Mary. The Beast had returned. Of course, it was another beast, not the same one. François Antoine had well and truly killed the creature that had devastated the countryside. Survivors pointed to the dead wolf's scars and said, "yes! That is it, I recognize the map of scars on the creature from when I was running in the other direction!"

I understand, people needed to believe that the beast was gone, and it was more comforting to think that the wolf Antoine had killed was one killer, and this was another. Personally, I would have been more afraid of the sheer number of wolves forsaking their natural instincts and getting a taste for human flesh. I took more comfort in knowing that François had just failed to kill the right beast.

I had made a friend while there, a survivor of the Beast's depredations named Jean Chastel. He was a hunter, like me. A strange man, but he belov'd my drunken confession wherein I described the thing I saw that September night. He told me he had a guardian angel, that it was his purpose to end the creature's reign of terror. I was foolish yet again, and I volunteered to help him in any way I could. Together we went into the woods, and he performed a small benediction on a clearing. He carved strange symbols into the ground, but he prayed to God, so I knew he was no witch. Then he called out for the Beast, and it came! The hideous thing stepped from between the trees and stood at the edge of the clearing. Thick, phlegmy fluid dripped from its maw. Its eyes were rotten and rheumy. Good God, the smell of it! I cannot describe the rank odor that hung to the creature. It was then that I realized... It was dead! Yes, it moved, but the thing that stood before me, with its flopping serpentine mane and sightless eyes, was a corpse. Its flesh was torn and decomposed, stitched together by the same slightly luminous gel that coated its teeth. The entire thing was a patchwork of putrefaction. As my friend took aim with his flintlock, I saw the scars where the creature had torn into his flesh and I knew, too, that nothing could have survived the mauling he received at the Beast's fangs.

After the Beast was dead, I took flight from Jénouvain, back to Paris and a boring, metropolitan life of loafing and respect-à-la-parties. I had... lost my taste for hunting.

Story Hooks: Foul Things Issue Forth

• Stand and Face the Hounds of Hell

Sometimes the gateways to the Underworld drift open at a given time, or when certain conditions are met. And sometimes, things slip out while the watchers aren't watching. They creep along the hidden trails and low places, mindless but cunning, knowing nothing but need. They slide between cracks, looking for something to which to cling. The grasp at something, anything, from the bloated, rotting corpse of a wolf or dog to the gnarled, blackened branches of a lightning-

struck tree. Then, they wait. The specific target of the craving varies from shade to shade, as with any ghost, but it's almost always a bloody affair when they fulfill their need. Their kind of primal urge doesn't lend itself well to subtlety.

When these things haunt an area, it doesn't take long for the bodies to pile up. Killing one creature doesn't stop the rampage, it just frees the specter from its mooring and draws it back toward the gate, where it scratches and whines until the doors reopen and it's playtime all over again.

GATES OF NOTE: THE FORGOTTEN HOTEL

Sometimes, things hide in plain sight. The Pinnacle Hotel was well-known once. In the prohibition era, it was the place to be. In the main rooms, big bands and torch-singers entertained the wealthy elite, but downstairs was where the real action was. Gangsters and flappers, politicians and businessmen rubbed elbows in the popular speakeasy. The Pinnacle greased the right wheels and filled the right pockets, and was never once raided by the teetotalers or the police. Until the night Two-Tone Tony slipped in through the side door and unloaded two Tommy gun drums into the crowd.

The hotel never recovered, and now it's an anonymous brick high-rise, its windows boarded over with long-silvered wood. The hotel is deserted, ignored even by the neighborhood homeless. In the basement though, you can still catch echoes of the interrupted party. Blood still stains the walls and floors, and the side door Tony came through is bricked over. To the right kind of mind, someone fresh from the glory of murder, the door still opens.

Perhaps a coyote stalks the edges of a New Mexico town, its mangy coat slick with the plasm that holds it together. First, family pets disappear, but now a child is gone. Or a hunting lodge deep in the forest draws hunters seeking the ultimate thrill, the unkillable “big one,” a bear that is rumored to have killed nearly every fool willing to chase it. In the slums, a pack of wild dogs scramble through open windows, baying and snarling as they tear apart everyone in the house, spraying slick, greenish fluid as they worry at their victims and shake their putrid muzzles.

- **The Beast Returns**

The famous Beast of Gévaudan stalked its prey in the 1760s, terrifying the countryside and inspiring stories for hundreds of years. But a century before that, nearly 100 victims fell to a creature matching the same description. And nearly 50 years after Jean Chastel put an end to the

second beast, more killings occurred. Perhaps the gateways in Gévaudan only open naturally every 50 years. Or maybe a skinriding specter has its own timetable. When the time is right, the specter awakens and quenches its desire for murder or worse until its host is destroyed, or it fulfills some arcane requirement. Every 32 years an awkward, hateful ghost stalks the streets of the Bronx, expressing some unknowable drive by viciously murdering brunette women on the street. In a small town, the townsfolk whisper that the season is coming, and scurry indoors every 15 years, praying as the thing outside pads across the porch, its claws clicking on the wooden slats. Every year on Devil’s Night, an executed soldier possesses a moldering, headless corpse and rides through North Tarrytown, New York, in search of vengeance on the villagers who killed him centuries ago.

The Angell Street Mourning Society (1897)

From a recollection by Anastasia Wilhelmina Davis, late of the Angell Street Mourning Society, Providence, Rhode Island:

A RECOLLECTION BY ANASTASIA WILHELMINA DAVIS

It all started like it always should. With an ending. My Robert died of the fever on October 6, in the year of our Lord, 1892. I shall always remember the day. I remember every moment of sitting with him as he faded in that horribly musty bed. As he lay there muttering in his delirious and incoherent state, I held his hand and wished for him to return to blessed lucidity even for a moment, so that I might say my final farewell. There were so many things I needed him to know as he passed on. We were good New England Protestants, and the minister stood ready in the hall.

I remember the room’s wallpaper. It had the most curious pattern, lines upon lines like a motley forest of pinstripes! And it was all in the color of sunflowers and mourning, the pale yellow of lemon chiffon pie. It was almost the same yellow as my poor Robert’s jaundiced skin.

Suddenly, he sat up! He looked at me with great urgency, as if he needed to tell me something very important, but his voice, it was gone. He could not but croak, like a frog. I rushed around the room to find him something to write with, but he had not the strength to hold the pen as he had begun to cough violently and all of his attention was diverted to that spasming task.

My poor Robert died without uttering his last words. He left without unburdening his soul. He did not get to sing his last song, as Whitman’s wondrous chant, to welcome death and say his goodbye to me. And he died without allowing me my last words, either.

I mourned, as any good wife would. I wore my dress of matte black Parramatta and crepe for longer than necessary, even! That was, I fear, what first brought me to the attention of Prudence and the rest of the Angell Street ladies. The gossip did follow them like the orphans of St. Agnes’ followed their nun caretaker. I knew of them, of course. What lady of any status in Providence hadn’t heard of Prudence Black, Jocelyn Edwards, and Eva Miller? They were practically scandalous, living together in that ridiculous house after their husbands died, and them so young! They could surely have remarried, though their first marriages were childless, so it was said that they were all barren anyway. Personally, I’ve never given much store to the “clucking of the hens,” as my husband called it.

I saw him, you know. After the funeral, during that dreadful time when everyone insists that you need people, that you'll go absolutely mad without constant company from those closest to you. If there were ever a thing that could ruin an innocent soul and drive them to spill human blood, overly-attentive family members would be it precisely. Without one's family hovering about at all hours, one might actually have time to process the loss rather than simply bottling it away for later, so that one doesn't have to hear incessant comforting blather. While I stood out in the garden on October 14, I heard the piano inside begin to play. Chopin's Prelude in D Flat. I know, because it was one of Robert's favorite pieces, a perfectly horrible thing full of emotion and vigor.

I started to cry, of course. How could someone be so insensitive as to play a song that Robert had loved? I stormed inside to tell my sister to stop playing, but she was still asleep on the couch. (I escaped to the solitude of the garden while she was taking a nap. I can only assume keeping watch over me was an exhausting task.) I hurried down the hall to where the piano stood, and there he was. Robert sat on the mahogany bench just as clear as day. He turned and looked at me angrily, but he could not speak. His mouth formed words, but he uttered no sound.

My sister stirred, and called my name. I looked instinctively, and when I looked back, he was gone. Poor Robert had lost his chance again to pass on whatever message he had. I stayed in the living room, near the piano, for two days. My family began to think I'd gone quite mad, but I needed to see him again.

On the second afternoon, my mother brought Eva Miller, assuming that she might be able to calm my hysterical nerves, since she had also lost her husband. She stood quietly in the room with me while I sat at the piano, trying to puzzle out the melody of Chopin's prelude. If I could play it, perhaps he would return? I was aware of her, but I was not particularly interested in her company.

Her hair hung brazenly, in lush curls that gave her the appearance of a gypsy rather than a lady of society. Dark eyes watched me from beneath languid lids. I could feel them on me, sliding over me in judgment. She was deciding if I was mad. I must admit that, at the time, I did not quite know myself. My mother loitered by the door, hoping to hear our conversation. When we did not speak, she eventually drifted off. Eva moved closer, once she was gone.

"Is that where you saw him?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper. This was unexpected. I tried to mask my reaction. I was surprised and not a little annoyed — was my family spying on me on top of smothering me?

"Saw who?" I returned.

"Robert. And before you ask, of course they didn't tell me that. Imagine the scandal! But I can tell, Anastasia. You're acting precisely as I did after Geoffrey died."

I won't bore you with the details of how she convinced me to meet with the other women of what she called the Angell Street Mourning Society. Suffice it to say that she did, and that my reputation never recovered.

When I went to the house on Angell Street, I didn't know what to expect. Considering our conversations, I suppose I expected flying tables and gauzy ectoplasmic expulsion. There was, a little disappointingly, nothing of the sort.

Prudence was easily the strangest of the "society." She never left the house if she could avoid it, according to Eva. And no wonder! She kept her hair cropped close, like a young girl or a man. She even went about in men's clothing! When I met her, she wore her dead husband's vest and slacks. She gave me a strange look over the rims of her glasses and smiled, more to herself than me. Then she went back to reading her book.

I curtsied.

"Hello, Mrs. Black, I am Anastasia Wilhelmina Davis."

"Eva says you've seen a ghost," she said, blunt as can be. Her accent was quite unidentifiable. It was softened by a vague European lilt. She put the book — Homer's *Odyseia* in Greek — down and stared at me. I swear, she looked as if she wanted to simply slice my head open and pick what she wanted directly out of my brain!

"Eva, you're quite horrible. Get her a chair," she said, and Eva bustled off, blushing. When the chair was provided, and tea was served, she asked me about my experience, and I told her. After tea, she took me to her workshop behind the house.

Prudence Black's workshop was a converted greenhouse, its windows frosted and scratched beyond use. The sunlight within was diffuse, but still gleamed off the scattered pieces of brass, bronze, copper and even some steel. Strange mechanical devices of unknown purpose or utility lay on the tables all around us.

"The lenses in these," she picked up a bulky pair of goggles that looked like they had been modified from a gentleman's driving glasses, "were taken from my husband's corpse." I nearly fainted! "They have seen death, and I think I can harness them to reveal it once again."

She showed me other things in her workshop. Things that harnessed electricity in strange ways, and other devices that made little sense to me, I'm afraid. I was well-educated in the subjects deemed appropriate for a lady. These inventions and gadgets were utterly outside my experience. But I couldn't stop thinking about those goggles. Could they let me finally articulate my goodbyes to Robert? Or would they provide me with yet another chance to nearly achieve closure only to again be unable to communicate?

It was a week before my mother and sister stopped clucking after me like the hens Robert always mentioned. The ladies of the Mourning Society would send me bouquets when they couldn't visit; messages were hidden for me in the language of flowers. Ivy, for friendship. Iris, for faith. Maidenhair, for our secret bond. And flax, for fate. Strange combinations to be sure, but they made their point. Persevere, they said. We are waiting for the right time, but you can count on us, they said.

I found myself fascinated by Prudence Black. Her strange ways were so antithetical to proper society that they created a kind of romance about her. To ignore social mores so fully required a kind of courage I could not even begin to approach. I have always been afraid for my reputation in Providence social circles. It is interesting that impropriety is always punished by the most vulgar of acts.

When Prudence and the others finally came, I made a fool of myself. I babbled and thanked and curtsied until my face turned red from being such an idiot. I found that it wasn't company I despised, it was just my family. I felt like I had been stranded for weeks on a desert island, and I finally spotted sails on the horizon. I suppose I should not have been surprised that they waited for a stormy night, wracked with lightning and claps of thunder. Prudence had a definite penchant for the dramatic.

Prudence slipped the goggles onto my head, and they retreated to the other room. As they left, Eva said, "We're right here, if you need us."

Goggles donned, I went to the piano. But Robert wasn't there. I listened, and I looked around the house, lit by cracks of lightning fracturing the sky. Just as I was about to give up, I heard the door to the basement click shut. The ladies of the society were still in the kitchen, so I approached the basement with a bit of trepidation. What was down there? Just Robert? If Robert was there after his death, as one of the unquiet dead, what other creatures might logically exist? My hand shook as I gripped the cold knob.

I pushed the door open. At the bottom of the stairs, I could see Robert's silhouette, waiting. Behind me, I could hear the others following from a distance as I went down the stairs. In the basement, he walked directly through a bookcase!

"Where did he go?" Prudence asked, putting a hand on my shoulder. I jumped.

"Through that bookcase," I said, my voice shaking a bit. She smiled a crooked, mischievous smile. She approached the bookcase and examined it.

"Oh, did he?" And she overturned the entire thing! Behind the bookcase was a door, which she impetuously flung open. "It connects to your house, Ana. This is brilliant news indeed!"

I stood in shock as they bustled around me. A secret door within my home? And my husband knew about it? The other ladies of the Mourning Society returned with lanterns, and led me into that dark hole. We traveled on foot in the rough-hewn tunnel for nearly an hour, before Prudence called a halt.

"This is it. We've found it." There was awe in her voice. A hush I'd never heard before. But then I saw it, and I understood why. A massive pair of doors made of some wood, silvered with age. The entire edifice was chased in bronze or brass, and it appeared to be mechanical, adorned as it was with gears and pistons. Robert stood in front of it. I could see him, despite the fact I was no longer wearing the goggles. I realized that it had the same look as the occult devices in the workshop behind Prudence's house.

"Your husband built this," I said, and she laughed.

"My father built this. My husband was a ridiculous, obtuse accountant. He would never have had such vision." She grabbed a lever and pulled, forcing a piston to drive a metal rod up through a slot in the ceiling. "Now, we wait."

But it wasn't long. Thunder rumbled above us, and lightning skittered down the rod, bringing the entire apparatus to life! The gateway began to shiver and shake. Gears meshed and pistons pumped. Robert seemed to shimmer and become more and more solid. Eva and Jocelyn gasped — they could see him too!

When the gate opened, I knew that I looked upon the land of the dead. Prudence had a mad look of exultation as she approached the doorway. A cold wind blew from within, and she turned. "I'm going in."

Eva begged her to wait, but she was implacable. Jocelyn was nowhere to be seen. I think the poor dear ran at the first sight of Robert. The last time I saw Prudence was just after she had stepped across the threshold. She called back to us, before she turned out of sight. "Don't worry. I will be back soon!"

But she wasn't. Eva did, after some preparation, lead an expedition, but they never found any trace of her. She was never quite the same, Eva. I think a part of her disappeared with Prudence. I wasn't in any condition to go after her. My Robert was there, and we could finish our unfinished business.

"I have to go," he said. "I want you to know—"

"Wait," I interrupted him. I never would have done that before. "You need to know..."

But he would not be denied.

He said, "I know that you poisoned me."

Adventure Hooks: Things to Do in New England When You're Dead

• The Angell Street Mourning Society

In an innocuous house on Angell Street, a strange coven of women sip their tea and read their books and, when the mood strikes them, summon ghosts and explore the Underworld. The members have changed since Anastasia's time, due to death (natural or not), fading interest or, in at least one case, a vampire's embrace.

They continue their slow compilation of information about ghosts and the dead. As their information grows, they roam further and further afield in search of new tidbits. The senior

members of the society know more about the Underworld than many of the city's younger Sin-Eaters, and they know it. They hold onto their knowledge with a miserly grip, using it as currency, trading one fact at a time in return for new information or parts to fix the strange inventions Prudence left behind.

Davis House remains the chapter house of the society, adopted after the disappearance of Prudence Black, and left to the members in Anastasia's will.

• The Caverns of Providence

According to some sources, a vast labyrinth lies beneath the city of Providence, Rhode Island. Miles of tunnels connect the oldest houses to one another in a knotted warren that reaches all the way to Swan Point Cemetery. In the

cemetery, under the moldering earth pregnant with caskets and corpses, the tunnels terminate at the tomb of Prudence Black, allowing members of the Mourning Society ingress and egress after the cemetery is officially closed for the evening without arousing suspicion or even being seen.

But those tunnels are not safe. Things have taken up residence in the dark. Vampires lurk in the shadows of the “safer” tunnels, but even they don’t brave the depths. They speak of ghosts and inhuman creatures and terrifying hybrid entities that shatter the mind and leave your body an empty husk. In some places, the way is thin and *here* becomes *there* with no signal or sign. You wander the subterranean paths of our world and, without warning, find yourself in the Low Places. And even worse, it can go the other way around. Alien things that used to be ghosts might find their way up through

the bowels of the earth, scraping and clawing their way into a basement connected to the tunnels, waiting in the darkness. Just waiting for someone, something, to open the door.

Rewards can be found down there for those intrepid or foolish enough to seek them. People — human, vampire, and otherwise — have made their homes beneath the mortal world. The ones who watch without participating, soaking up information, gossip and rumors can be bartered with. Or perhaps a vampire, or coterie of vampires, wants to stake their own claim on some subterranean real estate, but their chosen home is already occupied. The thing (or things) calling it home must be negotiated with or driven out. For those who know, deathly merchants slip between the worlds, making deals with Sin-Eaters and necromancers for artifacts and mementos.

GATES OF NOTE: THE TOMB OF PRUDENCE BLACK

In Providence, Rhode Island, in Swan Point Cemetery, there is a mausoleum that catches the eye. It is — unlike the pristine white buildings erected around it — rather a dull slate grey. On the front of the building is a frieze, depicting a montage of mourning motifs, along with figures from world myths and stories associated with death, such as Orpheus and Ophelia. On top of the tomb, a metal spire rises to the sky, attracting lightning during every storm.

When lightning strikes, it channels through the walls into the alcove beneath the crypt, discharging into a strange, wood and brass apparatus called the Acheron Device. The contraption rumbles and glows, sparking and flashing with trapped electricity. Gears mesh and roll and a doorway opens into the Underworld. Prudence disappeared in there. Her tomb stands empty, a monument more than a mausoleum. The current members of the Mourning Society gather in the tomb during thunderstorms, hoping their founder will return with dark secrets or making their own jaunts into the shallow end of the Low Places.

Operation Mimir (2003)

From an e-mail sent by Justin Rollins, Task Force: VALKYRIE geologist assigned to Grants, New Mexico:

Operation Mimir. - Mail

<https://mail.live.com/default/?&=g1857mf=0&xyzSH7GMU2GRYT3>

-----BEGIN PGP SIGNED MESSAGE-----

To: ps78127@tfv.gov
From: jtr081729@tfv.gov
Subject: Operation Mimir

Hash: SHA1

Peter,

Things didn't go so well down in New Mexico. In fact, it was a complete clusterfuck. I know they're sending you recommendations based on our debriefing, but I don't think King's taking this seriously enough. You need to know what happened from someone who was on the ground.

King sent us into the cavern system under standard operational parameters. We were wearing National Guard uniforms and had paperwork identifying us as a detachment with Homeland Security if anyone asked. They didn't, but I want you to know we went by the book.

The op was supposed to be exploration and intelligence gathering only. A cave system was uncovered near Mount Taylor and we were assigned to assess the situation. It was a five-man team, consisting of myself, Navidson,

Ottman, Warner, and Martin. We entered the cavern system without incident. I took geological samples that were consistent with the surrounding Jemez Lineament. Ottman set contingency charges just in case.

First the tunnel narrowed until we had to crawl single-file, then it expanded into a huge vault, where I, again, found consistent results. I'm attaching some of the photographs we recovered from Navidson's camera. Standard, high-silica flows which, while odd compared to the high-pumice content in other composite cones, is perfectly within the norm at Mount Taylor.

The strangeness started as we went deeper. I started seeing traces of basalt and then the Cretaceous black shale around the time that Warner's instruments malfunctioned. The ambient temperature was around 30-40 degrees Fahrenheit, based on our own estimates. Warner's instruments were registering 1342 degrees. At those temperatures, the rock would have been molten, and lava would have been flowing through the vault.

The temperature measurements continued to be erratic, one minute registering abnormally high temperatures, the next minute reporting absurdly low temps. To our physical senses, the ambient temperature did not waver. Eventually, Warner's instruments stopped working entirely.

We all wore standard issue radiation and volatile gas detection equipment, but they became useless too. Each device reported different results. We still had radio contact with King for the moment, and he ordered us to continue despite our malfunctioning equipment.

We lost contact almost immediately after that. Ottman made the command decision to turn back, but we couldn't. The passage we had just entered through was gone. It wasn't a cave-in. It just wasn't there. The shale was smooth and showed every sign that it had been that way for at least 65 million years. We had no choice but to continue on and hope for a vent or other passage back to the surface.

As we went down, we heard an echoing, rushing sound. We discovered a subterranean river, but we didn't have any scuba gear with us, so we chose to explore further. We crossed the river by way of a natural bridging, where the water ran under the rock.

The temperature began to drop further. It definitely went below freezing. There were icicles hanging from the ceiling, and icy patches on the ground. Warner slipped on one of the patches, and slashed his arm on a small ledge. While Martin was bandaging that up, Navidson saw the first of them.

Ahead, just at the edge of our light's range, he spotted movement. We went defensive. Ottman and Navidson took point while Warner and I took up the rear. As we entered the next vault, our electric lights gave out. But not before we saw them.

The room was full of people. People in ragged, archaic clothing, wearing clothing consistent with the indigenous tribes of the area. They all stood around a massive obsidian monolith. They turned to look at us and then, like I said, our lights went out.

We popped glowsticks and lit flares. No surprise, but our night vision gear was malfunctioning too. Navidson spoke up, trying to explain that we were lost. They beckoned to him, to all of us, and he approached. Ottman kept his rifle trained on the crowd. He yelled for Navidson to wait.

They devoured him. They pounced as one and pulled him to the ground in front of the monolith. Ottman started firing into the mob, but there were too many. We pulled back. The last thing I saw of Navidson was one of them, a boy, holding his face steady as he tore at Navidson's cheek with his teeth. Ottman threw a grenade into the crowd and dragged me back through the walk-through. When the grenade went off, there was a shattering sound, followed by an enormous crash. The smoke cleared, and I saw a piece of the monolith, a jagged shard of smoking obsidian, lying near the entrance to the vault. I grabbed it. I'm still performing tests on it.

The passage was cramped enough that we figured we could hold at least for a little while. We were wrong. They ignored our bullets and Warner was the next down.

We retreated back to where the passage had closed... I can't explain it. Geologically, it makes no sense. The passage was back, and we could hear King squawking from the radio. We evacuated, and Ottman blew the contingency charges as soon as we were clear.

It was a mistake. We all felt it. The explosives broke something. Ever since we left, I've seen them. On the side of the road. At the end of the hall. They're free now. But King won't listen to me; he tells me to go play with my rocks. That's why I need your help, Peter. We freed them from that cave, and we have to find a way to put them back.

Justin



-----END PGP SIGNED MESSAGE-----

-----BEGIN PGP SIGNATURE-----Version: GnuPG v1.4.6 (MingW32)jID8DBQFFzTkiCMEe9B/8oqER-
AqWfAJ9AEbgr3OvW6Xt0aXGavJCf0ydT1QCfRS0/EnYiNJC91aX5gHNICBx01RI==OHeH-----
END PGP SIGNATURE-----

Story Hooks: Beneath the Skin

• Back Into the Mountain

Something is cracked and broken. Mount Taylor is sacred to the Navajo as *Tsoodzil*, or Turquoise Mountain, but when the expedition from Task Force: VALKYRIE (a government-sanctioned group of monster hunters) went in, they shattered something, freeing shades trapped beneath the mantle of the dormant volcano. Now they spread out as far as Grants, southwest of the mountain. To quiet them and stop other things from escaping the fractured gateway to the Underworld, someone has to repair the monolith, or find another way to close the rift.

• Sweeping Up

Of course, repairing the monolith won't necessarily imprison the escaped shades again. Hunting them down and appeasing, capturing, or destroying them is no small task. And who knows why they were imprisoned there? Perhaps they broke the Old Laws, and the Kerberoi punished them. Or they were cultists worshipping some heretical god in life... or after death. Maybe the freed ghosts aren't even the worst of it. The vault could have been accessible hundreds of years ago, acting as a temple for some dark religion before the followers were trapped by the thing inside the monolith — which is now free itself.

GATES OF NOTE: THE WHITE TOWER

In Tampa, Florida, there is a white tower, standing alone in the middle of the ghetto. Its parapets offer a view of dilapidated houses and failing department stores. Officially the Seminole Heights Water Tower, it stands along the Hillsborough River, on an unlikely patch of vegetation, a refuge of nature in the midst of the urban sprawl. Faded signs advertise projects ranging from a drive-in theater to the White Tower Business Park, but nothing is ever completed. Deaths mar each attempt at construction, and eventually the peeling signs become the only sign that anything was ever planned in the first place.

The local Sin-Eaters know that once a month, the tower itself becomes a gateway, allowing passage to the Underworld for those with the means or determination to cross the threshold. At other times, the local krewes use the tower as a point of reference or meeting place. Sometimes they even organize carnivals in the swath of forest below the tower, using manifestations to conceal their presence from cops and junkies outside the ragged chain-link fence.

The Black Gate

From a manifesto given to a krewe of Sin-Eaters in Tampa, Florida:



The Glorious Church of the Unified Spirit



This is not all there is. You know it as well as I do, you feel it in your bones. There is more to this world, but we cannot see it. We are not allowed. Things tickle the edges of your consciousness every day. That movement in the corner of your eye. The light you know you turned off.

We are told by science that there is no afterlife. So-called "rational thought" tells us that spirits do not exist. But I say that when you see and feel something, it must exist. We have all seen things that we cannot explain through the lens of science. It is no longer enough to explain it away as coincidence or chance. I am

here to tell you that it is neither of those things. Your loved ones, my loved ones, they remain on this earth even after they have been expelled from their physical, fleshy bodies.

Though they have been freed from the confines of the flesh, they still long to care for us, to teach us the things they have learned on the other side. It is so important to them that they remain close to us instead of moving on to their final rewards. And yet, so many of us choose to ignore them. So many of us pretend that they don't exist. Can you go on like this if there's even a chance that your loved ones are trying to help you?

Do Not Waste Their Sacrifice! We must open ourselves to their teachings. We here at the Glorious Church of the Unified Spirit want to help you to open yourself to the unification of the spirit possible, so you can give voice to your loved ones and learn the lessons they want to teach you. Reach across the divide between life and death and tell them all the things you never got to say, and learn all the things they never got to show you.

The Shining Ones Adore Us. Your loved ones have become shining lights, leading us forward to a world where there are no boundaries between life and death. They want to tear down the walls and eradicate illness and hatred. Sickness and violence will no longer matter when the line between them and us has been wiped away.



Angels are Among Us. The lucky ones who have unified their spirit with one of the shining ones are out there. They are angels; messengers from beyond sent to teach us how to achieve the same unification! Only once we become like them can we truly shepherd humanity onto the next step of evolution. Together, the members of the Glorious Church of the Unified Spirit will find them and learn from them.

Act Today! Join the Glorious Church of the Unified Spirit and learn how much of our world you're really missing. Reach out with confident hands to throw aside the shackles of life without success. Gain the edge you need to compete in today's economy by learning the secrets of those who came before!

You need to know. The church is not what it seems. They're not just new-age nut-jobs setting up spooky little money trees in their cubicles. They go by another name: the Black Gate. Keep an eye out. They think you're their gods, and they want to make themselves a proper sacrifice to you. But they think they need to take as many others with them as they can before they do it. Watch your backs. What do you think they'll do when they realize you're not gods?

Story Hooks: The Black Gate

• Worshippers of the Bound

Once they have been initiated into the Black Gate, members are taught about the Bound as if they are the ultimate expression of what they may become. To them, a Sin-Eater is a nearly perfect expression of their goals: a seamless, symbiotic relationship between a ghost and a physical host. Many members spend their lives trying to become Sin-Eaters. Most of them are missing a few key ingredients, however. They are not mediums or psychics, nor are they infused by deathly energy. They just don't have what it takes to attract a geist. It's not their fault, of course: most Sin-Eaters don't know how they attracted their partner. But that doesn't stop the cultists of the Black Gate from trying to transform themselves by bargaining with ghosts, giving themselves up for possession and worse, or (for those with the most dangerous kind of incomplete knowledge) even trying to orchestrate elaborate near-death experiences to attract a ghost at the critical moment. Worse, their belief system is such that they often try to help others free themselves from their limited mortal state at the same time,

with or without their cooperation. A Black Gate cultist may cause a large pile-up on the freeway. Another may gather his friends or family and "free" them, one by one, before killing himself. Another cultist may secret a bomb in the bag under his chair in a mall food court, blowing himself and everyone near him into oblivion. Each of them leaves a sigil, reversed as in Tarot symbology, burned into a piece of paper. It's a symbol that means "shattering" in the Old Tongue, along with a rambling note filled with death imagery.

There's something darkly tempting about the idea that the Black Gate worships Sin-Eaters. It's an ego trip to know that someone thinks you're special, and all too easy to fall into the trap of letting it go to your head. But when the atrocities above are done in your name — to please you — how do you extricate yourself? The sorts of people who advance into the upper echelons of the Black Gate are not the type to take it lightly when their "angel" isn't having fun anymore. A Sin-Eater may be the object of their adoration, but that can turn into a prison (or worse) quickly when the Sin-Eater doesn't live up to

the cult's expectations. When normal people who ignore the existence of ghosts and ignorantly prefer to live are reviled, how much worse is the Sin-Eater who values life over death and squanders the gifts they've been given by the "Shining Ones?"

Note that it's just as likely that members of the Black Gate worship *other* supernatural creatures — vampires, dead, have a lot of power. Changelings are capable of disappearing from this world into a mad world of thorns and everlasting beauty. Hunters of the Lucifuge lineage have the Devil's Own Blood pumping through their hearts. All of these might end up as targets for Black Gate worship if the story permits.

• Hunting the Black Gate

The Black Gate commits acts that might easily draw a hunter cell into conflict. That they do them in the name of Sin-Eaters is particularly unfortunate, especially if a krewe of Bound is investigating the cult at the same time as a hunter cell. Strife between a cell and a krewe might give the cultists time to react they might not have otherwise had or, to complicate matters further, might alert them to the presence of angels among them, leading them to specifically target friends of the hunters, the hunters themselves or other people the Sin-Eaters know in order to "impress them." If captured by the hunters, the cultists might proudly swear their allegiance to the krewe, creating another layer of antagonism between the two groups.

GATES OF NOTE: THE TELLER LABYRINTH

Albert Teller, a philanthropist and businessman, once said, "All life is a maze, and those who succeed are the ones who refuse to follow the path. They go through the dead-ends and over the walls. They blaze new trails." Those words, his guiding principle, were the fuel of his success. True to his word, he blazed new trails in every industry he touched. And when his home was built, he had a labyrinth erected as a reminder. He laughed with reporters and biographers, and pointed to the moss-covered stone maze. He challenged them to solve it. Some of them followed his advice, they climbed the walls and reached the center. Others accidentally discovered the truth.

Albert Teller was a necromancer. His keen business insight was, in reality, a canny collection of spectral advisors. The labyrinth itself was built at the request of those advisors, its configuration an elaborate sigil, a spell of opening. Those who solve the ridiculous complex maze often come out the other side, into the labyrinthine whorls of an Underworld dominion.

The Red Masque (2009)

A story told by Zita Vargas and transcribed by Joey Cavanagh, members of the Bronx Saints Krewe:

I've seen some fucked up shit.

You've been in the deeps, right? I hate that place. If you can't trust the roads to go where the hell they say they're going, you can't trust anything, am I right? Yeah, yeah, yeah, I know, the normal rules don't apply. Knowing that's a small fucking comfort when you're watching entire tunnels change direction right in front of you.

It's not so much that the rules don't apply down there as it is that those Underworld pendejos walk right up to the rules and beat them down, then do a goddamn dance on their heads. It ain't right, Joey.

You should've been there. All the sets were there. I saw krewes from as far out as New Jersey, the poor bastards. Gianni asked us to go represent the Saints. I saw the Gravediggers and the Sisters, you know, those crazy bitches from up in Tarrytown? Teknival, Hudson's Heroes... You picked a great time to skip town.

Right, first thing's first. Ellis popped the gate up in Woodlawn, you know the one? We went in there. I let his crazy ass lead the way, right, and Lee took the rear. It wasn't the same. It hasn't been the same, since those sandhogs blew into the old tunnel. But that's why we were going in the first place.

You could feel it, even the spooks were spooked. They know the shit's hitting the fan in the Big Apple. It's not the same. There were more of them watching us, but none of them spoke to me. Normally, you can't shut them up, right? I guess it could have been Ellis. Did you notice he has a spoon braided into his hair now? Crazy.

So we slipped past without the normal panhandling for favors, that was nice. I don't know whose idea the Red Masque was, but it must have been a spook. Any of us would have had the sense to throw a warehouse party instead of putting it way down in a subbasement of hell. I guess we're less likely to get prying eyes, and it gives the ghosts a chance to play, but really? It's like throwing a rave in a rest home. Ghosts are fucking boring. All they do is talk about where they went wrong, or who they need to reach, or why they need revenge... They definitely don't know how to party.

Or so I thought! When we got there, shit was already in full swing. You ever been to Mardi Gras? Or down in Mexico during Dia De Los Muertos? I'm not kidding, man. It was balls out. Gianni made us take these masks. He told me we had to wear them, but doesn't that defeat the purpose of representing, if we're hiding our identities? Don't worry, he said, it's part of the Law during the Red Masque. So yeah, we wore our masks, and so did everyone else. But everyone had their colors and shit on, so you knew who everyone was, yeah? Didn't make any sense to me.

It was pretty done up for being Below. Strings of Christmas lights were wrapped up all around the place, hanging from the bony piping... someone made a weird, like, art sculpture in the center of the party. I didn't realize until I got closer that it was a pile of construction helmets and barricades.

The ghosts I saw there were way more interesting than the garden variety you see up here. More dangerous, too, I'm betting. One of them had more teeth than all the people in the neighborhood put together. Oh, and the other krewes were showing color like you wouldn't believe! The Mambo's Boys had so much bling on, Lee had to snag Ellis' collar to keep his ass in line. I've never seen so many mementos in one place.

The shit the sandhogs let loose may have brought us together, but the krewes were treating it like a giant carnival. It was interesting to see. I know the Mambo doesn't get along with the Sisters, but they were buddy-fucking-buddy in there. Really, they were talking like there wasn't a beef at all. Like they didn't even know each other, and I finally got it. The masks are an excuse! We can dump the bullshit at the door and just pretend we don't know who people are.

There was music. Real rag and bone, raw stuff. Like, you take everything about a song and peel it back until all you have left is the punch, the emotion of it... That's the shit they were playing.

Like primal jazz or something. Lots of bartering between the sets, trading bling and other stuff, I guess. I wasn't paying attention. The flow was actually kind of nice. Lee let Ellis do a little talking, but you could see he was waiting to apologize for him again.

Nobody took their mask off. Probably a good thing, because we could tell they were watching. Didn't see them, of course, but you know when they let something like this happen, they're keeping a close eye on it.

Everybody talked about the shit the sandhogs let out, but nobody knew what it was. Looks like it's hurting spooks too, rotting their green glowy like some kinda spook leprosy. It's the plague man, I'm telling you. 'Cept this time it's the Green Death.

Story Hooks: Caucus and Contagion

• The Sandhogs' Folly

For the last 40 years, New York City has been undertaking the largest public works project in the Western Hemisphere, building a third water tunnel to augment the city's water supply. The urban miners who work on this vast project are called "sandhogs." They've been an integral part of New York's infrastructure since the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge. They spend their time 40 meters below the streets of the city, spelunking in subway tunnels and sewers, making new tunnels of concrete and steel to expand the vast labyrinth beneath New York. And they see things. Most of them don't talk about it, but if you spend enough time poking around in the dark, you're bound to find *something*.

While blasting under the Bronx, the sandhogs did just that. They uncovered an old subway tunnel, sealed off in the '30s after a tragic accident, and missing from city maps. Officially, a pocket of gas was released. But the eight miners working the demolition weren't the only victims of whatever really happened. Those who deal with ghosts have noticed a... deterioration. Something's out there, and spooks who come in contact with it are never the same. It could be a creature, an ecto-phagic thing that thrives on the plasm that fuels ghosts and Sin-Eaters alike. It could be something weirder, a spiritual virus or plague, what Zita called the Green Death. But if it affects ghosts? What might it do to a *geist*?

This breach happened in the Bronx. But a similar breach could occur anywhere mankind plumbs the depths of a city's underbelly. Perhaps water table erosion causes a sinkhole in a Miami neighborhood built on an old burial site, or a storm topples government built flood

protection in Louisiana, smashing through the walls of an aboveground cemetery. Or an old bomb testing site is uncovered for evaluation way out in the middle of Fucking Nowhere, Nevada.

• Underworld Gatherings

Many of the Underworld's Dead Dominions have laws against interactions between the living and the dead. Necromancers and even Sin-Eaters still count as the living, and the Kerberoi don't often make exceptions when they enforce the Old Laws. But sometimes, when the time is right, a ceremony or gathering may be permitted. The laws aren't relaxed in these cases so much as traded for alternate ones. During the period of the Red Masque, for example, any living being attending the gathering *must* remain masked. The dead need not follow the same rule, but they often do their best to alter their appearance anyway.

Such gatherings vary from dominion to dominion. In Cobán, the shades host an ancient Mayan ball game match every five years. In Tokyo, the ghosts of the White Lotus Dominion forbid drinking from the waters of their Underworld except for one day a year, when the cherry blossoms fall from the trees. On that day, they hold a tea ceremony where Sin-Eaters may drink of teas brewed in the normally forbidden water. Some Sin-Eaters grouse that the Laws were made to be broken. The byzantine, non-intuitive rules that govern the Underworld seem as if they were created to be purposefully difficult to follow. On first glance, the rules may even seem contradictory, leading one to be broken in the name of upholding another. In some cases, that may be true, but in most cases, human intuition and reason simply isn't compatible with the alien nature of the beings that created these laws, or the laws were created so long ago that the reason for their existence has been lost even to the oldest ghosts.



my dearest bartholomew,

i have no explanation for what i witnessed last night, and i set down here the events as best i can recall them: if you can explain to me what i saw, i will be forever grateful: i barely slept yesterday, the beast inside me howling in fear, trying to force me awake as though under constant threat: tonight, i could scarcely calm down enough to attract a vessel, and the blood tasted thin and weak: whatever i saw, i cannot name it, and i cannot keep it from my mind:

you may recall from my last letter that the coterie sometimes known as the "knights" (for their choice of haven, and nothing more, i assure you) had brokered a deal with a local representative of the invictus: they wished to find the origins of a goblet they had found, apparently carved from onyx or some other black stone: the invictus in question was a shadow named persu, and although he is apparently a well-respected figure in occult circles, the kindred of our city did not have anything to say about him: because my mentor knew about the meeting, he asked me to accompany persu, simply in the interest of avoiding having one of us in a room of dragons and no other witnesses:

the knights arrived with the goblet, and persu held it aloft as though in rapture: he whispered in french, and apparently none of the dragons understood it, but your tutelage served me well: what he whispered was this: "finally, after so many years, i can go back."

with that, he turned and flung the goblet against a wall: and, god as my witness, the wall crumbled away, revealing a dark, stony hallway: persu walked through that gate, never looking back, while the knights stood there, stunned: he rounded a bend, and we could no longer see him, but the gate stayed open: and then one of the knights, a succubus called violet gray, followed him, impulsive wench that she is: and her coterie chased after her:

i walked only to the mouth of the cave, and i listened: and the sounds i heard, bartholomew: my god: the wailing, the roars, the waves - waves: as though an ocean lay beneath the city - and the screams of the tortured:

i left, and returned tonight, before beginning this letter to you: the cavern is gone, and no one has seen persu or the knights in the week since that night: please, please, bartholomew, tell me this was some trick that persu employed: tell me that gate is not real:

yours,
andrea

Chapter Two: Chthonic Cultures

Nothing is eternal. The supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness might consider themselves immortal. Vampires sometimes refer to themselves as such, or do so in a backhanded way by calling living people “mortals.” Werewolves, mages, and even changelings are decidedly mortal, but they possess powers and vitality beyond that of ordinary folk, and might think that puts them above the Reaper’s touch.

Nonsense. By and by, everything ends. The Avernian Gates yawn wide and souls find their way to the Underworld. And, likewise, members of all of these supernatural “races” might find a reason to visit the Underworld before death gives them one.

This chapter discusses the Underworld from the perspective of the denizens of the World of Darkness, taking into account vampires, werewolves, mages, Prometheans, changelings, and hunters (Sin-Eaters’ take on the Underworld, of course, is provided in detail in **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**). We consider the specific powers and proclivities of these beings, and provide players and Storytellers with means of ingress, challenges and goals, and systems for how these beings function in the Great Below.

More weight.

— Last words of Giles
Corey, farmer and accused
witch, while being crushed
with stones, 1692

Entering the Underworld

The Avernian Gates, the low places, can open for anyone. Sin-Eaters can open them by dint of their connection with death, and that makes the arrogant of their number think that the Underworld is their special playground. This isn’t the case, however — the Underworld belongs to no one and everyone. All are welcome, provided they can find the key. Below are some methods of entering the Underworld open to any character, no matter how the supernatural does or does not touch her. How many of these methods work is, of course, up to the Storyteller.

Tagging Along

Once an Avernian Gate is open, it remains so for a short period of time. How long depends on how it was opened — perhaps a few minutes, perhaps as much as a month. During that time, anyone can wander into the Underworld (and, likewise, other things can wander out). A Storyteller wishing to run a story involving the Underworld, but with a troupe that lacks the ability to open its own Avernian Gate, might make use of this tactic.

For instance, a hunter cell might pursue an enemy into the gate, and then find itself trapped or lost. Tracking down the being they were chasing might represent their only way out. Likewise, this kind of story might make for an interesting group prelude for a game of **Geist** — the characters blunder through an open gate and only get out when they bond with geists and become Sin-Eaters.

This story works in the other direction, too — a group of characters might find an open gate and recognize what it is. Do they keep an eye on it, making sure no one is lost to the Underworld (a cabal of mages might well take on this responsibility) or that nothing escapes that could harm the people in the area (vampires or werewolves might take this task for various reasons)?

Keys

Avernian Gates can be opened with keys, provided one knows the proper key to use. A “key” is sometimes a physical item, but just as often, a character can open an Avernian Gate by touching it when his heart is heavy with genuine sorrow or within 24 hours of committing murder.

THE DENIZENS OF THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

In the interest of giving a little context to readers who haven't purchased all of the previous World of Darkness games, this sidebar presents some of the important terms for these games.

Vampire: The Requiem: Vampires refer to themselves as *Kindred*. All vampires belong to one of five different *clans*, which determine what supernatural powers they wield and some of their weaknesses. Many vampires also belong to *covenants*, organizations that fill the roles of religions, political parties, and secret societies. Vampires band together into small groups called *coteries*, which might form along lines of clan, covenant, or simple acquaintance.

Werewolf: The Forsaken: Werewolves are born to human parents, but undergo a First Change some time during their lives, at which point they discover their savage heritage. Werewolves refer to themselves as *Ura-tha* in their own language, or sometimes as *Forsaken* (those who ally themselves with Luna, the spirit of the moon) or *Pure* (brutal, vicious werewolves who make war on their lunar cousins). Forsaken werewolves take social roles called *auspices*, based on what phase of the moon they first Changed under, and many join *tribes* that provide training and support. The basic unit of werewolf existence, though, is the *pack*.

Mage: The Awakening: Mages are human beings who Awaken to mystical Supernal Realms and work their arcane powers through a connection to these places. Every mage walks a *Path*, depending on which Realm to which she Awakened, and some join one of five *orders*, ancient fellowships that stretch back to a forgotten city of antiquity. A group of mages is called a *cabal*, while a local organization, usually composed of multiple cabals, is called a *Consilium*.

Promethean: The Created: Prometheans, sometimes called the Created, are living beings made of unliving flesh. Like the Golem of Hebrew legend or like Dr. Frankenstein's monster, these creatures are powerful, despised by humanity, and extremely rare. This is well, because Prometheans bring out the worst in people. Close proximity to Prometheans makes others suspicious, angry, jealous, and spiteful — and all of this ill will is focused squarely on the Promethean. Each Promethean walks a Pilgrimage, hoping to find the secret of Mortality, and sometimes these beings are lucky enough to find others of their kind and band together into a *throng*. Prometheans descend from one of several *Lineages*, based on the first of that particular “family” to gain sentence. A Promethean's approach to his Pilgrimage is called a *Refinement*, and this approach can (and usually does) change several times before the creature finds Mortality.

Changeling: The Lost: Changelings are people stolen by the Others, the Good Folk, the beings from Arcadia. These hapless souls, sometimes called the *Lost*, have made their back to the lands of their birth. Changelings are physically transformed by their time in captivity, taking on a *seeming* that informs their appearance and some of their magical capability. Changelings arrange themselves in feudal *Courts*, named after the seasons of the year and based roughly on mystical and political outlook. Some live in fear that their tormentors will return. Others swear that if the “Good Folk” come for them, they will be ready. Most changelings come together into *motleys*, both for companionship and mutual protection.

Hunter: The Vigil: Hunters are human beings who have chosen or been chosen to protect humanity from the supernatural. Hunters are often obsessive and zealous, and over time can even appear quite insane (provided they survive their avocation long enough). Some hunters belong to *compacts* or *conspiracies*, organizations that can provide access to weapons, training, and personnel to facilitate the Vigil. Some hunters band together into local groups, called *cells*, scrounging whatever they can. And some face the darkness alone.

Keys range from extremely broad (any woman of childbearing age can open the gate) to narrow (to open the gate, one must find the body of a man that never took a wife, remove his left index finger, grind into powder, mix the powder with 100-year-old brandy, and share the brandy with two mortal enemies). Some Avernian Gates have more than one key, and some have multiple keys with various permutations. For example, in the bomb cellar of a tiny Nevada town waits the Geiger Gate (so named because the area near the town was used for nuclear testing). During the winter months, anyone holding a Geiger counter can open the gate. During the summer, however, the gate only opens at noon on days when the temperature outside crests 110 degrees Fahrenheit.

Finding and Using Keys

While the Twilight Network has a fairly extensive list of existing Avernian Gates, Sin-Eaters don't usually care about keys unless they are so easy to enact that anyone could do it. Since Sin-Eaters can open low places without keys, they don't need to keep such lists (some do, of course, but only as a hobby or a personal point of interest). Other factions in the World of Darkness, however, take a keen interest in how to open gateways to the Underworld, whether or not they ever plan on doing so. Below are some suggestions for places that curious characters might look:

- A vampiric scholar of the Ordo Dracul has spent centuries researching ghosts and where they go once destroyed or "sent onward." In his travels, he has taken copious notes on exorcisms, hauntings, and other ghostly phenomena, and this includes occasional Underworld-related occurrences. Hidden in his journals are the locations and keys of several gates up and down the Pacific coastline. Of course, he guards this information jealously.
- A pack of werewolves called the Ramblers accidentally opened an Avernian Gate in Toronto when they drenched a particular wall in the blood of an enemy. Intrigued, they entered the Underworld, but managed to escape before anything too serious happened to them. They won't share this information with just anyone, but it just takes a bragging contest and a bottle of whiskey to get them talking.
- An order of mages called the Mysterium has extensive files on the Underworld. The files aren't entirely accurate, of course, since the Awakened don't have a completely clear idea what the Underworld is (most of them seem to think it is a subsection of Stygia; see p. 60). Depending on which files or records a character gets hold of, though, he might find a map marking various gates, a cipher detailing keys, or the recorded testimonial of a mage attempting to open one. Of course, getting those records without being a member of the Mysterium is nigh-impossible, but mages are human, and not immune to bribery, threats, or seduction.

- He wanders the American Southwest, though his name refers to a specific city. Known as the Ghost of Galveston, he's been searching for 200 years for someone tough enough to kill him and send him to the River of Death. In that time, he's had offers from beings he can't identify to open gateways that would lead to this river, and he remembers what he's been told almost flawlessly. He might share his knowledge, but this Promethean, older and more powerful than many of his kind ever become, is bitter, spiteful, and dangerous, and wants nothing more than a fight to the death — *his* death.

- The Lost know a few things about gateways, having been dragged through at least one. The notion that Avernian Gates have keys isn't so strange, and members of their Autumn Court, fascinated as they are by magic of all types, might have collected legends about "ways to visit the dead." In fact, one could supposedly encounter the fae of this Court at gatherings held once a year, at the autumnal equinox, where they remember the dead and share information about matters of the soul. Keys to low places would certainly count, but getting an invitation to this gathering is no mean feat.

- It's one thing to kill demons when they invade God's Earth, but the Malleus Maleficarum also wants to prevent living people from making deals with demons. That means keeping them out of Hell. Knowing how gateways to Hell open is important in keeping them closed, and so contacting a member of the organization with the idea to enter the Underworld probably results in misinformation and scrutiny. But if the tables could be turned on the Witches' Hammer, they might be forced or persuaded to share a real method of ingress.

Gatekeepers

Some people can open any Avernian Gate in the world with a touch and a quick whisper. It's strange, but it's true. They might go their whole lives without knowing about this gift, or they might accidentally discover it while still very young, depending on circumstance. Either way, such talents are highly valued, and a gatekeeper willing to sell her services can fetch a high price indeed.

Where does this gift come from? It's too rare to draw any real conclusions. Some Sin-Eaters speculate that a child conceived by or with a Sin-Eater who had recently been to the Underworld might be a gatekeeper. Others claim that children conceived *while* in the Underworld have the gift, or that seventh sons of seventh sons (or some other significantly occult birth ordering) might produce a gatekeeper. Curses or blessings from deathlords in human form, eating food from the Underworld that has been brought back to the world of the living, and being responsible for a certain number of deaths before the onset of puberty (one? ten? fifty? More?) are also possible triggers.

Gatekeepers have little else to link them, except their dreams. All gatekeepers dream of the Underworld. The dream changes from night to night, and the Underworld is so vast that the dreams seldom repeat. A gatekeeper might dream of a given Dominion and its Laws, of Kerberoi and their weaknesses, of travelers to the Underworld and their experiences, or of the ghosts that dwell there. Some gatekeepers hate these dreams and take drugs to avoid remembering them, others use the dreams as inspiration for art or poetry. Others just don't care — dreams are dreams, and the waking world is where one has to live one's life.

New Merit: Gatekeeper (••••)

Prerequisite: Mortal. A gatekeeper that experiences the Awakening, the First Change, or the Embrace loses this Merit, as does a character taken by the True Fae. **Hunter: The Vigil** characters can have this Merit at the Storyteller's discretion. Sin-Eaters cannot possess this Merit, though of course they can already open Avernian Gates.

Effect: The character can open Avernian Gates. All that is required is that she touches the gate, and the player expends a point of Willpower. The gateway remains open for a number of minutes equal to the character's Morality. This Merit doesn't enable the character to detect Avernian Gates; for that, she would need the Unseen Sense Merit, with a focus on ghosts or other death-related phenomena (see p. 109 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Drawback: If word of the character's talents gets out, she can expect various supernatural factions to want her enslaved or dead in very short order.

Available at character creation only.

Graveyards

Every graveyard in the world contains at least one entrance to the Underworld. This isn't a widely known fact, not even among Sin-Eaters, because Graveyard Gates aren't the same as Avernian Gates. Sin-Eaters can't open them easily, and have difficulty detecting them. But they're there just the same, waiting for the chance to admit luckless souls to join the ranks of the unquiet dead. Graveyard Gates have a degree of sentience, it seems, and they are hostile to the living. They aren't intelligent per se, but they have will and desire, and that desire is for death. They don't necessarily want to see any particular living person die. Causing death, for them, is about physics.

Consider the human ear. The middle ear (the space "behind" the eardrum, moving toward the center of the head) is connected to the throat via two canals called Eustachian tubes. As anyone who has ever had a bad cold knows, congestion in the nasal passages can block these tubs, causing pain in the ears and throat. Changes in outside pressure (such as the ones that occur in ascent or

descent in an airplane) can also alter middle ear pressure, causing pain, though swallowing once or twice is enough to alleviate it. An ear infection can make it impossible to equalize the pressure, causing terrible pain, until the pressure is relieved — sometimes by rupturing the eardrum to give the pressure somewhere to go.

Now, imagine the Underworld as having vastly different spiritual "pressure" than the world of the living. This relative pressure varies; places associated with death are more like the Underworld, whereas places associated with life, abundance or discovery, and knowledge are closer to the living world. Graveyards are by definition heavily associated with death, but the presence of living people alters that association, relieving the pressure. Graveyard Gates are right in the middle of this exchange, and they "feel" the alteration of pressure as the death-resonance of the living world changes. A massive funeral results in an outpouring of emotion. The energies of the area become similar to the Underworld for a short time, but then three weeks go by with only a few visitors. Groundskeepers go about their duties with little thought to death or those interred at the graveyard (it's just a job, after all). The pressure changes again, and with every shift, the Graveyard Gates feel the difference. In an attempt to normalize the pressure, they attempt to raise the level of "death" around them — and a good way to do that is to suck people into the Underworld, where they will almost certainly perish.

They aren't intelligent, though, and they don't have any control over what a person does once through the Gate. The more "alive" someone is, the more easily they can open a Graveyard Gate, but such beings have a harder time *finding* them. The reverse is also true; dead or undead beings can sniff out Graveyard Gates easily, but have a difficult time forcing them open.

Appearance

Graveyard Gates can appear anywhere within a cemetery. It might be the gate that admits visitors, the door of a mausoleum, the door to the groundskeeper's shack, or any unmarked grave currently on the grounds. If the physical structure of the gate is destroyed, the gate moves elsewhere, but every place of burial rites has a Graveyard Gate. Note that a mass grave or some other makeshift place of interment *might* have such a gate if two criteria are fulfilled. First, the dead must be remembered. Someone must say a few words of remembrance over the graves. A guilt-ridden soldier praying over the corpses of dead civilians, or a serial killer whose murderous ritual includes repeating the names of his victims over their shallow graves, fulfills this requirement. Second, something in the area must suffice to serve as a doorway. An archway, a literal door, a big hole in the ground, a mirror — anything big enough for a person to fit through works. If all such apertures are removed from the area, the Graveyard Gate vanishes until some other structure appears there (this would include someone driving a car onto the "graveyard").

Detection

Beings with strong sympathetic ties to death have an easier time sensing the presence of Graveyard Gates, though they don't always know what they are sensing. When a character comes within 10 feet of a Graveyard Gate, the Storyteller should ask for a reflexive Wits + Occult roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character experiences nothing. In addition, any mystical senses the character possesses rebel against seeing the gate and shut down. Apply a -3 penalty on any supernatural sensation or detection power for the rest of the day. This does not apply to magic or powers that boost mundane senses (such as Auspex 1), only those that grant extra-normal senses — examples include any power that allows aura sight, Mage Sight spells, Kenning, and any power that allows the character to see beings in Twilight.

Failure: The character senses nothing.

Success: The character feels a cold chill from the general direction of the Gate (which has to be within 10 feet, remember). At this point, the character can begin trying to home in on this feeling — the player can make this detection roll as an extended action (once per minute, five successes required).

Exceptional Success: The character instinctively knows the source of the cold chill, but doesn't gain any insight into the gate's nature or how to open it (see "Opening Graveyard Gates," below).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+5	Character is undead (vampire, revenant, zombie, etc. — note that Prometheans are <i>not</i> undead and do not receive this bonus)
+4	Character is a necromancer (Moros mage or other character with some innate facility for magic involving death; mages of other Paths do not count)
+3	Character has a strong connection to death (Gravewright changeling, Bone Shadow werewolf, mage with at least three dots in the Death Arcanum, Osiran Promethean, Sin-Eater, etc.)
+2	Character is a mortal with the Unseen Sense Merit (ghosts/death)
+1	Character has had a near-death experience (Sin-Eaters do not receive this bonus, as they receive the more potent one above)
+1	Character can see into Twilight

+1	Character uses a power that makes her more sensitive to death-energies (Mage Sight using the Death Arcanum, the Ghost Sight Gift, etc.)
-2	Character is alive (Prometheans <i>do</i> incur this penalty, as do Sin-Eaters)
-2	Character has some strong sympathetic connection to life (Thyrus mage, Flowering changeling, etc.)
-3	Character is an Obrimos mage

Opening Graveyard Gates

Graveyard Gates *want* to be open, and so opening one is more a matter of *allowing* it to open than convincing it. Graveyard Gates would remain open permanently if they could (and rumor has it that some do). Once a character has identified the aperture that comprises a Graveyard Gate, she can attempt to open it.

Graveyard Gates are not Avernian Gates, and so they do not have keys (that said, Avernian Gates *do* sometimes show up in graveyards, and such gates *do* have keys — it's easy to see why Graveyard Gates aren't usually recognized as a separate phenomenon). Instead, they have to be asked or commanded to open. The would-be traveler must shed a drop of living blood. Vampire blood does not count, nor does the strange alchemical substance that Prometheans call "blood." Likewise, some changelings no longer have blood, per se (Elementals especially), and so may have to find an outside source to open a Graveyard Gate. Such characters can spill another being's blood to pay the price, however.

Once the blood-price has been paid, the character must ask for admittance. The language and the choice of words are unimportant. Characters with a strong connection to life have an easier time of this, as though their presence forces the gate open (think about magnets and how two magnets can repel each other).

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Presence + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character punctures the Graveyard Gate, and the result is a kind of depressurization. The Underworld rushes into the living world, freeing any creature, ghost, or traveler within a half-mile radius of the Graveyard Gate. Ghosts thus expelled remain in Twilight, and are considered anchored to the graveyard containing the gate. Other creatures can do as they please once freed. The gate slams shut and remains sealed for 24 hours.

Failure: The gate does not open, and any further attempt to open it incurs a cumulative -2 penalty.

Success: The gate opens and remains open for a number of hours equal to the successes roll.

Exceptional Success: No further effect beyond the longer duration.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	Character has a strong connection to life (Flowering changeling, mage with at least three dots in Life Arcanum, Promethean following Aurum or Ferrum, etc.)
+2	Character is an Obrimos mage
+1	Character is alive
+1	Character has never attended a funeral or seen someone die
-3	Character has some strong sympathetic connection to death (see above)
-3	Character is a Moros mage

True Love (or Hate)

One of the most famous Underworld travelers of all time was Orpheus. He braved the journey into the Kingdom of the Dead in order to bring back his prematurely deceased bride, Eurydice. He failed, of course, but that was because he broke the rules, and it's overlooking a larger issue anyway — how did he get to the Underworld in the first place?

Orpheus, if he ever actually existed, might have been a mage, and mages have method of ingress at their disposal (see p. 61). He might have been a Promethean — in fact, one of the five Lineages of Prometheans sometimes claims him as a progenitor (more commonly, they are called Ulgans, but some of the Riven do refer to themselves as Orpheans). And, of course, he might just have been a man, preternaturally gifted at music and possessed of a love so true and pure that it allowed him to find his bride, no matter where she was.

Emotion this intense isn't common by any means, but it is possible to love (or hate) someone so strongly that death doesn't provide a barrier. If the intended has left a ghost behind, this emotion simply leads to the ghost (provided the still-living member of the relationship isn't an anchor already). For a ghost taken to the Underworld, though, love (or hate) can guide the way.

This method of ingress doesn't require much in the way of game systems. The seeker instinctively finds an Avernian Gate, touches it, and watches it open. He walks through the Underworld knowing exactly where he is going, even if he can't explain it should someone ask. When he reaches his intended target, though, he is still subject to whatever Old Laws might be in place. Orpheus actually had it easy — the Law said that he could take any one person back and reverse her death, provided he didn't look at her until he was among the living again. He faltered, or perhaps was tempted, and turned. In so doing, he lost his love forever.

Other Dominions might have stricter laws, and nothing says that taking a deceased soul out of the Underworld has any positive result (after all, even if you *do* get her to the surface, she's still a ghost). But maybe the journey through the Underworld gives the grieving lover time to realize that she *is* gone. Maybe the character who just wants to see his immortal enemy suffer sees enough of the Great Below to realize that his enemy is suffering (depending on the Dominion in question, of course).

Or, maybe nothing will dim the seeker's passion, and he has already made arrangements with all sorts of unsavory beings to implant his lover's soul into a new body once he gets her home. Any of these possibilities can fuel a story, regardless of whether or not the seeker is a player-controlled character.

(You can find more on the "rescue motif" later in this book, on p. 109.)

Botched Exorcism

The **World of Darkness Rulebook** presents rules for exorcising ghosts (p. 214). For dealing with low-powered ghosts, this system (and the consequences for failure) works well. However, when attempting to exorcise a more powerful ghost, or, worse, a being that *looks* like a ghost but isn't, Storytellers might consider using the following option.

A botched exorcism can open a gateway into the Underworld, but not the same kind of aperture as an Avernian Gate. This gate is more a yawning maw, a vortex that sucks whatever happens to be nearby into it and then immediately closes. The would-be exorcist and any assistants wind up on the same plane of existence as the ghost that they just attempted to banish, and that ghost is probably out for blood.

Quite apart from that immediate concern, though, a vortex to the Underworld can drop the characters almost anywhere. The geography of the end point in the Underworld in no way corresponds to the origin point in the living world. Unfortunate people sucked into the Underworld this way are, therefore, in a dire situation, and most never find their way out again.

Systems

The possibility of being sucked into the Underworld alters the system for exorcisms a bit. Instead of losing a point of Willpower if the ghost rolls more successes on the contested roll, the Storyteller places one die in a special pool (preferably in front of the players, with no explanation as to what it is for). The exorcist, should his player best the ghost on a subsequent roll, can *choose* either to remove one die from this pool or strip the ghost's Willpower as usual. Once the target number is reached (by either side), the exorcist's player rolls Resolve + Occult with a penalty equal to the dice set aside.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A vortex to the Underworld opens, dropping everyone in the immediate area (or everyone involved in the exorcism, at the Storyteller's discretion) into one of the Lower Mysteries.

Failure: The vortex opens as above, but it drops the characters into the Autochthonous Depths.

Success: The character succeeds in keeping the vortex from opening, but suffers some form of permanent physical alteration as a result of beholding the Underworld. His hair might turn white, he might lose sight in one eye, or he might lose feeling in his left hand.

Exceptional Success: The vortex never has a chance to open, and the character suffers no ill effect.

The player must also make this Resolve + Occult roll if he rolls a dramatic failure at any point in the exorcism.

Vampires and the Underworld

Any discussion of vampires eventually includes wordplay involving the words “life” or “death.” Vampires are not alive, after all. Becoming one of them requires that the vital spark of life is snuffed out. But for all that, they aren’t dead, not in the sense that the ghostly inhabitants of the Underworld are. And that puts vampires into some distinctly strange places where the Great Below is concerned.

Vampires operate by a fairly strict set of rules in the living world. They sleep during the daylight hours, they subsist on nothing but blood, they burn in the sunlight, and their hunger cannot be denied. Just as the restless dead must conform to Old Laws while in the Dominions, the Kindred have their own observances. And yet, as with the Old Laws, the vampire’s strictures can be broken. With supreme effort, a vampire *can* eat or remain awake. He *can* resist the sunlight, at least for a time. And while the Beast within has a loud voice, the vampire can ignore it. Is the living world, then, a kind of Underworld for the undead?

A vampire experiences an inner calm as soon as she sets foot inside an Avernian Gate. The Beast ceases its constant struggle against the Man, and the two sides of the vampire instead look out at the immensity of the Great Below. Here is a world with no blood of its own. The only life in the Underworld is a memory, and the vampire must learn to feed on this life if he is to survive here.

Systems

Feeding

The Underworld has no (permanent) living inhabitants, and vampires cannot feed upon ghosts. This means that the Kindred lack an easy means to obtain blood. They don’t burn through as quickly (see below). Vampires require Vitae to power Disciplines, heal damage, and augment Physical Attributes, however, and this means they do need to find a way to feed.

One possible method is the River of Blood (Qiq-ol-Mal). Vampires can drink their fill from this river, and they incur neither the bonus to Physical actions nor the penalty to Mental ones from drinking of the river’s bounty. Of course, finding this river isn’t necessarily easy, even if a particular vampire knows of its existence.

Another possibility is for vampires to drink the blood that sometimes trickles down into the Underworld. This blood is just as nourishing as mortal blood, if unpleasantly cold, but it flows slowly. A vampire needs to stand in one place for at least 10 minutes to collect one point of Vitae, and the Storyteller is perfectly justified in asking for a Stamina + Composure roll to stand there for hours under a stalactite, mouth open.

For a vampire to replenish his Vitae pool in the Underworld (without visiting Qiq-ol-Mal), he must learn to feed on life in a more ephemeral form than blood. Ghosts hold on to the memory of life, the last vestiges of the vital spark of existence. If they were to let this spark go, they would vanish entirely. Vampires can, with appropriate effort, feed upon ghosts and consume this spark. Learning to do it is an extended action, during which the vampire observes the Underworld and its inhabitants, conversing with or listening to ghosts and discovering the tiny veins of life hidden in the drab world around them. The dice pool for this action is Intelligence + Occult. Each roll requires eight hours of observation, and five successes are required. Once the character has learned to feed in the Underworld, he may do so at will. If the character is willing to invest his will in the process, he can even make limited use of this knowledge when he again returns to the world of the living (see the Ghost Eater Merit, below).

Those few vampires who have learned to feed on the denizens of the Underworld sometimes wonder why their physiology adapts to it so easily. Kindred who have committed diablerie aren’t quite so mystified.

The usual rules for biting and feeding apply normally, but the player must also spend a point of Willpower and make a reflexive Presence + Occult roll. If this roll fails, the vampire gains no nourishment from the ghost. If it succeeds, the character can take the ghost’s Essence as though it were blood.

New Merit: Ghost Eater (•••)

Effect: The character can draw sustenance from ghosts even outside of the Underworld. While she doesn’t retain the ability simply to walk up to a ghost and feed from it, she can claim Vitae from ghosts under certain circumstances.

This Merit requires that the character has learned to feed from ghosts in the Underworld as described above. When the character learns to feed in the Underworld, the player may at any point after that (provided the character is still in the Underworld) expend the experience points necessary to purchase this Merit (12 points). Thereafter, the character can touch a ghost’s anchor and steal Essence from the ghost, one point per turn, just as if the vampire was feeding on blood. Onlookers see the vampire’s eyes glow a faint blue color, and the anchor shudders slightly under her touch.

Ghosts can sense when their anchors are being violated thus, and are free to defend them as they see fit. This makes ghost-eating a risky form of feeding. Also, this Merit doesn’t help a vampire *find* a ghost’s anchor (though nothing stops her from touching everything in a given haunted area trying to find it). But since ghosts regain Essence by remaining



near their anchors, a vampire with this Merit that discovers an anchor or brings one to her Haven has a potentially unlimited supply of Vitae, and no mortals have to die.

Drawback: Of course, everything comes with a price. A vampire that feeds exclusively on Essence gradually loses the ability to feed on anything else. If the Kindred consumes Essence for a number of months equal to her Humanity, and feeds on blood less than once a week on average, she loses the ability to take nourishment from blood. She can only gain Vitae from Essences. Vampires to whom this happens usually either amass a collection of anchors, or flee to the Underworld for good.

Sleep and Torpor

“Day” and “night” are meaningless in the Underworld. Vampires do not need to spend blood to awaken in the evening, and they do not need to resist daysleep. A vampire *can* enter torpor in the Underworld, either voluntarily or through injury or starvation.

Disciplines

Most Disciplines work normally in the Underworld. As ghosts are solid in the Underworld, they can be affected by Disciplines such as Majesty and Dominate as if they were mortals (using Resistance in place of a mortal’s Resolve or Composure, should that become relevant).

The Animalism Discipline does not function on psychopomps taking the form of animals, nor does it work on animalistic ghosts or Kerberoi.

Using The Spirit’s Touch in the Underworld is risky. The Underworld holds traces of memories and resonances from thousands — maybe millions — of ghosts and their desperate desires. All uses of this Discipline suffer a -3 penalty, and a dramatic failure indicates that the character’s mind is awash in sensory input. The vampire’s player must immediately check for Röttschreck (three successes necessary).

Twilight Project does not function in the Underworld. The vampire simply cannot project her senses out of her body. It simply feels impossible, like a mortal attempting to fly by jumping into the air.

The Summoning power works on ghosts in the Underworld, but cannot be used on them if the vampire is in the living world.

Mortal Fear has no effect on ghosts or other Underworld beings.

A vampire using Mask of Tranquility has less chance of being mistaken for a ghost (see Laws, below). Likewise, Aspect of the Predator increases this chance.

It is possible that Theban Sorcery or Crúac rituals exist that allow vampires to open Avernian Gates. The particulars of these rituals are up to the Storyteller, but they should probably be high-level (four or five dots) and require extensive investigation and research to uncover. Casting them improperly might drop the vampire directly into a particular Dominion.

Laws

Vampires fall into an odd “gray area” in many Dominions, because they are neither alive nor dead. They aren’t ghosts, and so Old Laws concerning ghosts don’t apply, but they are certainly not living beings, and so *those* Laws don’t apply, either. That doesn’t mean a vampire can act with impunity in such Dominions, though. The Laws (and thus the Kerberoi) perceive the Kindred as either living or dead, and react to infractions accordingly.

Upon entering a Dominion with no laws concerning the undead, the vampire’s player rolls Humanity.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Kerberoi recognize the vampire for what he is — an anomaly, an aberration with no place in the Dominion. They immediately hunt down and attempt to eject the vampire. If the vampire attempts to return, the player suffers a -5 modifier to the Humanity roll.

Failure: The Dominion treats the vampire as a ghost. If the vampire leaves and returns, the player suffers a -3 to the Humanity roll.

Success: The Dominion perceives the vampire as a living person, and treats him accordingly. If the vampire leaves and returns, the player makes the Humanity roll with no modifiers other than the ones indicated below.

Exceptional Success: The vampire can *choose* whether to be perceived as a ghost or a living person. Switching between the two is simply a matter of activating the blush of life; the player spends one Vitae point (see p. 156 of **Vampire: The Requiem**).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-3	Vampire is using Aspect of the Predator (Protean 1)
-1	Vampire’s Vitae pool is less than half full
+2	Vampire is using Mask of Tranquility

Note that some Dominions do have Laws concerning vampires, and in such Dominions, this roll does not apply.

Risks and Rewards

A coterie of vampires in the Underworld has nothing to fear from sunlight. Vampires do not suffer the daysleep here, either (see Systems, above), and so a vampire in the Underworld can theoretically remain indefinitely. A vampire with the means might choose to enter the Underworld before going into torpor, reasoning that his body will be safe from hungry young Kindred. Given that the Great Below isn’t very accessible in general, and certainly not to vampires, this is a fairly safe bet.

Vampires might also come to appreciate the same temptations that Sin-Eaters do. Just as sex and food are more satisfying in the Underworld, so is blood. A vampire who learns to feed on ghosts (see above) tastes the sweetest blood

he ever will, but this carries the same risk of addiction as any of the other sins one might experience in the Underworld.

The Kindred might also come to the Underworld to make contact with a particular ghost. Maybe the vampire wishes for redemption, and feels that only by obtaining forgiveness for past murders can he be absolved. Maybe the vampire believes the spirit of her sire lurks in the Great Below, and needs her help to unlock a certain Theban Sorcery ritual. Maybe the vampire misses the company of his centuries-dead wife.

Of course, the Underworld is not without its risks to the Kindred. In addition to the usual concerns (violent ghosts, vicious Kerberoi, being enslaved in a Dominion), a vampire’s Beast acclimates to the Underworld quickly. When the vampire tries to leave the Underworld, he might find that his Beast rebels, trying to keep him Below. In game terms, when a vampire attempts to return to the land of the living, the player checks for frenzy (apply -2 if the vampire has fed upon a ghost, -4 if the character has become addicted to the experience). If the vampire enters frenzy, the Beast forces him to flee as far into the Underworld as he can, in hopes of getting lost there forever.

Story Hooks

• **The Hermit:** A vampire has carved out his own “house” near the River of Blood, and has dwelt there comfortably for centuries. He speaks with travelers and ghosts, shares what wisdom he has accumulated, and attempts to further his own understanding of the undead condition. Why did he choose to remain here in the Great Below? What is he running from? He might have enemies in the living world who would pay handsomely for reports of his whereabouts (and a method of reaching him). He might also have incapacitated these enemies and suspended them on chains in the River of Blood. He may even be a kind of jailor for a small, but extremely powerful sect of vampires — the most truly heinous offenders among the Kindred are given to him for imprisonment. Who lies chained beneath the clotted surface of the River of Blood, then?

• **The Spring:** A coterie of vampires has discovered an Avernian Gate that leads directly to the bank of the River of Blood. This particular gate has a simple key — it opens when an exsanguinated corpse is placed before it. From the Underworld, the gate requires no special effort to open, and the vampires have taken it upon themselves to keep the gate open permanently by stationing one of their number inside at all times. They sell access to the River of Blood to the other vampires of the region, and are quickly climbing in influence and notoriety. Of course, this could all spiral out of control quickly if some Underworld creature escapes, or if a more powerful and more ambitious vampire destroys the coterie and takes control of the gate.

• **The Apollinaire:** Rumors among the vampires of New Orleans (and other cities with a large population that practices *vodoun*) tell of a bloodline called the Apollinaire, also known as the Gatekeepers of Ghede. Reportedly, for one night a year, these vampires must take over the job of Ghede, the *loa* who watches over the barrier between the living world and the Great Below. Whether or not this is true, the Apollinaire do demonstrate power over gateways in general. If the Storyteller decides that the bargain between the bloodline and Ghede has any basis in fact, then on the one night a year that the bloodline takes up the *loa*'s burden (the date varies), any member of the bloodline can open any Avernian Gate with a gesture. The Apollinaire dedicate their efforts on this night, however, to keeping the dead and the living to their respective sides of the gates, meaning that they might be involved in chasing down ghosts and returning them to the Underworld... or chasing down errant vampires or Sin-Eaters and returning them to the living world.

(The Apollinaire are described in detail in **Ancient Bloodlines**, but in brief, they are a Ventrue bloodline with roots in Haiti. They all give up their left eyes in tribute to Ghede.)

Werewolves and the Underworld

Werewolves are hunters, first and last. The hunt ends when the quarry is caught (and often killed). Many werewolves, then, find the notion of pursuing an already-dead foe into the Great Below unpalatable, maybe even dishonorable. That isn't a universally held view, though, and sometimes packs of werewolves enter the Great Below to track down a target they have already killed. Sometimes they go hunting for the bizarre "spirits" of the Underworld. And sometimes, they enter Avernian Gates by mistake, thinking that the low places are verges leading into the Shadow.

The Uratha can enter the Shadow easily; all they need to do is find a locus and will themselves to step across. This familiarity with the spirit world doesn't necessarily translate to comfort — the Shadow is only slightly less dangerous to werewolves than it is to mortals. But since werewolves are, themselves, half spirit, they feel at least somewhat at home in the Shadow. A werewolf who travels to the Underworld probably expects much the same feeling. She couldn't be more wrong.

Werewolves are not human and their souls are already spoken for. Whatever happens to a werewolf's spirit upon death, it doesn't descend into the Great Below. While a werewolf might have legitimate reasons to enter the Underworld, she feels a palpable sense of dread during her journey

there. Some werewolves, members of the Bone Shadows tribe especially, might be able to ignore that feeling and give in to curiosity, but sooner or later the werewolf can no longer overlook the truth: *I don't belong here*.

Over time, that knowledge can drive a werewolf mad. Much of a werewolf's moral center, after all, is bound up in her spirit and flesh halves being in harmony.

Systems

Entry

For the most part, werewolves are limited to using Avernian Gates (with proper keys), but they have two other options. First, gateways between the Shadow and the Underworld exist, and since the Uratha can step into the spirit world, they have at least the possibility of finding such gates. Second, a rite exists that allows entry into the Great Below, though the price is high.

A gateway between the Shadow and the Underworld always forms in a place saturated with the essence of death. Graveyards and other burial grounds, occasionally, but just as often a battlefield or another place in which people have actually died hosts the gate. Werewolves usually see these gates as nothing more than entrances to spirit-caverns, and the Autochthonous Depths as just another part of the Shadow. It isn't until they get deeper into the Underworld that they realize the truth — this is something new, and many of the rules to which they are accustomed don't apply here.

Shadow-gateways don't have keys, and often take the form of caves or pits. Sometimes death-spirits guard them and try to repel Uratha, but usually this means that other werewolves have already been here and set up these guards. Spirits, in general, are happy to let werewolves blunder into the Great Below.

Rite of the Shadowed Hunt (••••)

This rite allows a werewolf to open a gateway into the Underworld. While the rite isn't the special province of any one tribe or lodge, the Lodge of Death (a group of Bone Shadows dedicated to studying the mysteries of death; see Story Hooks, below) is the only one that uses it with any regularity. The rite is called "the Shadowed Hunt" because of the way many werewolves feel about hunting already-dead prey; it's an uncomfortable, murky practice, tantamount to admitting that the job wasn't done right the first time. Sometimes, though, it's necessary.

Performing the Rite: This rite can only be performed at an Avernian Gate, or at a locus with an appropriately death-like resonance. The ritemaster stands before the gate or locus, and makes an offering to Death Wolf. This offering must involve a living sacrifice, but any living creature, even a mouse, will do. The werewolf then draws the First Tongue sigils for "death" and "crossing" in the victim's blood, and sits in silence until the gate opens.

Dice Pool: Harmony

Action: Extended (20 successes needed; each roll requires one minute of meditation)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The gateway does not open, but Luna takes offense that Her children are attempting to seek the Underworld. She makes her displeasure apparent, but the specifics vary by the phase of the moon. Under a new moon, the ritemaster is struck blind. Under a crescent moon, the ritemaster can use no Gifts. Under the half moon, the ritemaster loses favor with all spirits, including his pack totem, if any (-3 to all spirit interactions and forfeiture of totem benefits). Under the gibbous moon, the ritemaster suffers horrifying nightmares whenever he sleeps, regaining no Willpower from rest. These effects all last until the moon phase changes. Under a full moon, however, Luna takes a more direct approach — Lunes immediately attack the ritemaster and any other assembled werewolves, and only cease when the werewolves flee.

Failure: No successes are added to the total.

Success: Successes are added to the total. If the player reaches 20 successes, the gateway opens to the Underworld, and remains open for one hour per dot of the ritemaster's Harmony. It cannot be closed early, and once open it admits anyone to the Underworld.

Exceptional Success: Considerable successes are added to the total. If the ritemaster concludes the rite with an exceptional success, Luna sees the rite in progress but

acknowledges that it must be so. She sends a Lune to watch the gate and make sure no one but the pack members (and any allies they designate) enter it.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Ritemaster is a Bone Shadow
+3	Ritemaster kills a human being as part of the rite
-1	Ritemaster kills an animal for the rite
-2	Ritemaster kills a small animal (rodent or small bird) for the rite
-5	Ritemaster kills a wolf for the rite (this also requires a degeneration check at Harmony 6; roll 3 dice)

Hunting

Although their laws forbid it, werewolves can, and sometimes do, eat people. Doing so enables them to quickly fill their Essences pools, but it also risks degeneration and censure from their fellows. In the Underworld, any kind of sin is more satisfying, and that includes hunting down and ripping apart a “human being.” The fact that the only people a werewolf is likely to find in the Great Below are ghosts doesn't change anything.



A werewolf can consume a ghost, taking one point of the ghost's Essence for every Health level of lethal damage he inflicts with the intent of eating the Corpus. Eating ghosts still risks degeneration (roll two dice), but it also carries the risk of addiction, just as indulging any sin in the Underworld does.

Ghosts do not suffer from Lunacy.

Werewolves don't have an easy way to regain Essence in the Underworld. Rather, they do, but it involves eating ghosts, which is a sure way to degenerate quickly. Since Luna's light doesn't shine here, werewolves can't regain Essence from seeing their auspice moon. Likewise, the lack of true spirits makes the Blessing of the Spirit Hunt rite hard to perform, and the Underworld has no loci from which to draw energy. A pack of werewolves stuck in the Underworld might have to resort to ghost consumption to stay empowered.

Renown

No moonlight shines in the Underworld, and Lunes — the spirit servants of Mother Moon — aren't welcome here. This doesn't mean that werewolves cannot gain Renown for actions performed in the Underworld, simply that the Lunes aren't able to see and judge these actions. The Rite of the Spirit Brand does not function in the Underworld, and for a werewolf to gain Renown after a jaunt in the spirit world, the character must find a Lune of the appropriate Choir and plead his case. This probably requires a Manipulation + Expression roll, with modifiers based on how much the werewolf's pack backs him up, whether he has a reputation for honesty (or lying), and whether he brings some kind of trophy to prove that what happened Below really did happen. In any event, if the werewolf fails to convince the Lune, the character can still attempt to gain Renown, but the ritemaster performing the Rite of the Spirit Brand suffers a -3 modifier to the roll.

Gifts

Gifts are exactly that — blessings bestowed upon werewolves by spirits. As such, they function in the Underworld just as they do in the world of the living, with a few exceptions and considerations.

Some Gifts, such as Read Spirit, work by allowing a dialogue between the werewolf and a spirit. Lunes are not permitted to enter the Underworld, and as such, these Gifts fail the werewolf here.

Two-World Eyes has no effect in the Underworld — the character is too far removed from the Shadow to see into it. The only exception is that if the character is near a Shadow-gateway (that is, a portal into the Shadow from the Underworld), this Gift reveals it.

Death Sight allows a character to see Avernian Gates in the living world. The werewolf might not know what she is looking at, of course, unless she has seen or heard of such apertures before (the Storyteller might allow an Intelligence + Occult roll with a -3 penalty to see if she has). Avernian Gates shimmer slightly when viewed with this Gift.

Elemental Gifts have no effect on the Rivers of Death.

The Spirit Pack Gift suffers a -5 penalty in the Underworld, as the werewolf's howl has to carry so much farther to summon the Wolf-Brothers.

If one member of a pack is in the Underworld, and another member (in the living world) uses the Pack Awareness Gift, the werewolf in the Underworld registers as both doing whatever she is presently doing and as "dead."

The Echo Dream Gift suffers the same penalties listed for The Spirit's Touch (p. 55).

The Skin-Stealing Gift does not work on ghosts.

The Speak with Beasts Gift does not work on psychopomps, nor does Beast Ride.

Ward of Spirit Slumber works on ghosts normally.

Rites

Rites that involve summoning spirits or direct spiritual involve suffer a -5 penalty and, for extended-action rites, add five successes to the target number. Calling spirits to the Underworld is difficult. Calling Lunes to the Underworld is impossible, and any rite that involves doing so automatically fails.

The Banish Human rite cannot be used to expel a human being from the Underworld.

The Funeral Rite refills all participants' Willpower pools if performed in the Underworld.

Banish Spirit and Bind Spirit cannot be used on ghosts, and neither can the summoning rites (Call Gaffling and Call Jagglng). Call Human, however, *can* summon a ghost in the Underworld. Likewise, Bind Human works on ghosts in the Underworld.

Rites that alter the spirit world (such as Fortify the Border Marches and Drawing Down the Shadow) do not function in the Underworld.

Totems

Pack totems can accompany werewolves into the Underworld, and provide their normal benefits (Lunes cannot, but werewolves don't take Lunes as pack totems anyway). The totem becomes solid as soon as it enters the Underworld, and remains so for the duration of the journey. Totems of a more abstract or ephemeral nature (conceptual spirits, or spirits of fog or wind) must anchor themselves to an object or a living being in order to enter the Underworld. If a totem is "killed" in the Underworld, it disincorporates, and cannot reform until the pack has returned to the living world or died.

Harmony

Separated from Luna, the Uratha grow steadily uneasy in the Underworld. Sooner or later, this distance from their spiritual mother wears on them. A Forsaken werewolf can spend a number of days in the Underworld equal to twice his Harmony. After that, the player must make a degeneration check (roll three dice). If the roll fails and the werewolf loses a dot of Harmony, the clock "resets," and the werewolf has days equal to his new Harmony x 2 before he risks degeneration again. If he succeeds, he only has a single day before he runs this risk.

As Harmony falls, the werewolf may accrue derangements or compulsions as usual. In the Underworld, though, these compulsions take the form of aversion to the living world. The werewolf's spiritual nature becomes attuned to the Great Below. If a werewolf's Harmony drops below 5 *as a result of extended time in the Underworld*, the player must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll for the werewolf to leave the Underworld. If the werewolf loses his last dot of Harmony while in the Underworld, he becomes unable to leave under his own power. Rumor has it that some of the more fearsome Kerberoi were never ghosts, but had a more savage pedigree.

The above rules only apply to Forsaken werewolves; Pure werewolves, lacking a connection to the moon, can stay in the Underworld as long as they wish.

Laws

Unless a Dominion has Laws that specifically mention werewolves, they count as human beings for the purposes of infractions.

Risks and Rewards

Entering the Underworld carries the same risks for werewolves as for any living creature. It also carries the possibility of losing all Harmony and becoming a Broken Soul, doomed to wander the Underworld forever, lost to Luna.

Werewolves might use the Underworld as a way to find the weakness of a particularly unpleasant foe, by asking those it has already killed. Werewolves who wish to understand the nature of human death and afterlife might be interested in exploring the Underworld, as might Uratha who simply want to make a name for themselves. Since gaining Renown for deeds done in the Underworld is difficult, of course, this last motive might lead to disappointment when the pack emerges into the land of the living and the Lunes have no idea what the Uratha have been up to.

It's also possible to find fetishes and other items of interest in the Underworld. Normally, a fetish is an object with a spirit bound into it, but some Uratha trade stories of secret rites that enable a werewolf to create fetishes from human ghosts. Might these rites also work on geists? And if so, do the items they create eventually tumble into the Underworld if left unattended?

Story Hooks

- **The Lost Pack:** The story goes that a pack of werewolves chased a creature they thought was a man Claimed by a death-spirit (more probably a Sin-Eater) into an Avernian Gate. Lost in the maze of caverns and tunnels, they slowly degenerated until they didn't *want* to leave. They roam the tunnels now, occasionally entering Dominions until being expelled, attacking and devouring anyone they find. Their pack totem, a spirit of preemptive action in the form of a black-and-white serpent, follows them, hoping for someone to either drive them out of the Underworld or kill them so it can finally be free.

- **Desperation:** The pack's totem has fled into the Underworld. Originally a spirit of hunting and stealth, the pack's endless penchant for killing has driven it beyond its reason. It searches out the ghost of a soldier who, after accidentally killing a family in the Middle East, put his gun in his mouth. The two spirits merge. When the pack finds them, they are a mottled, ectoplasmic pupa. What will emerge from this mass, and what will it want to do to the pack?

- **The Lodge of Death:** Werewolves form secret societies called *lodges*, usually brought together by a specific philosophy and a totem spirit. One of these societies, open only to members of the Bone Shadows tribe, is called the Lodge of Death. These werewolves seek to uncover the mysteries of death, and this, of course, leads them to the Underworld more frequently than other werewolves. Rumor has it that their lodge totem, the Spirit of the Ashes of the Dead, makes them immune to the degeneration that most werewolves in the Underworld face. If this is true, then what houses and Dominions might these werewolves have carved out, and what reception might a Sin-Eater or another Underworld traveler find there?

(The Lodge of Death is described in full in **Lodges: The Faithful**.)

Mages and the Underworld

The Awakened face an interesting paradox in the Underworld. They are capable of magic beyond the comprehension of most other beings, even beings so strange and powerful as Sin-Eaters. Many mages can speak with ghosts with a simple spell, and some can even banish them or place them into the bodies of the dead. In the Underworld, a mage with the right knowledge can live like a king.

But mages are mortal, and *all* mortals die. The Underworld is a constant reminder of this, and a willworker who enters the Great Below is at as much risk as anyone else.

Stygia

The Kingdom of Crypts, the Abode of Shades, and the home of the Watchtower of the Lead Coin — if Stygia isn't a Dominion of the Underworld, it sounds like it should be. Mages cannot reach Stygia (or any Supernal Realm) after Awakening, but those Moros who have entered the Underworld wonder if Stygia is connected in any way.

The answer is up to the Storyteller, of course. It's possible that the Supernal Realm of Stygia is a kind of Platonic ideal of death and the afterlife, perhaps reflective of the

Underworld (or is it vice versa?), but in no way connected. As such, while a mage might find parts of the Underworld similar to the Kingdom of Crypts, he has no way to return to Stygia from the Great Below.

Another possibility, though, is that they *are* connected. Stygia, like the other Supernal Realms, contains a Watchtower constructed by an ancient and godlike mage called an Oracle. What if Stygia was, at one point, one of the Lower Mysteries? Perhaps this Oracle, wielding a mastery over the power of Death the likes of which has not been seen since, walled off Stygia and constructed his Watchtower there? This would mean that the “shades” of Stygia were, at one point, human ghosts, but over time their individual personalities have been worn away by the Laws of the Realm, until all that remains is some idealized notion of what a “shade” should be.

The Old Laws in Stygia, then, are what enables the soul of a mage to appear there and Awaken to the Watchtower. Every Moros that Awakens to Stygia remembers a river running through the Realm — is this one of the Rivers of Death? If so, it might be possible to figure out which one and trace the River to the Realm... but what then? The Laws might prohibit anyone from entering except during an Awakening. And even if a mortal (such as a Sin-Eater) managed to breach the walls surrounding Stygia, what would he do there? Sign the Watchtower? Attempt to break down the walls, exposing the Supernal to the rest of the Underworld? Fell the Watchtower of the Lead Coin, thus reducing every Necromancer on the planet to a state of Sleep (and probably madness)?

Systems

Magic

Most of the Arcana work normally in the Underworld. Awakened magic works by drawing down the natural laws of the Supernal Realms and imposing them upon the Fallen World, but such magic does require that a given Arcanum’s purview be represented. Put another way, an environment completely devoid of matter, if such a thing were possible, would render the Matter Arcanum nearly useless not because it wouldn’t work, but because there would be nothing for it to work on. Similar principles are at work in the Underworld, as discussed below.

Death: For the most part, the Death Arcanum works normally, but it is easier to use in the Underworld. All Death spells receive a +1 modifier in the Underworld. In addition, the mage may use factors in Death spells as though her rating was one dot higher. For instance, the Death spell “Suppress Other’s Life” could be used at sensory range at Death 4, rather than Death 5. This bonus does *not* increase the mage’s rating in Death for the purposes of what spells she can cast, only in applying factors.

Also, spells that deal with Twilight (Touch of the Grave, Twilight Shift) do not work in the Underworld.

A mage can open an Avernian Gate with a Perfecting Death spell (Death 3), regardless of whether she knows the key. Opening a gateway into the Underworld without an existing Avernian Gate requires a Making Death spell (Death 5).

Fate: Works normally, and can be used to affect the Old Laws of Dominions (see below).

Forces: Works normally. Spells that allow reception of radio waves and the like obviously have little utility in the Underworld.

Life: The beings in the Underworld, for the most part, are not alive and cannot be affected by this Arcanum. Mages can use Life spells on themselves or other living travelers, but Life cannot be used to affect the environment.

Matter: Works normally.

Mind: Works normally, except that spells like Beast Control do not function on psychopomps.

Prime: Works normally.

Space: It is possible to scry for a ghost in the Underworld, subject to the usual modifiers to sympathetic magic. If the mage is not in the Underworld, she can only scry for the ghost if she is also a Master of Death. Teleportation within the Underworld works normally, but opening portals to the living world is, again, only possible for Masters of Death. Other than that, the Arcanum works normally.

Spirit: This Arcanum has little utility in the Underworld. The beings there aren’t spirits, after all, and as such aren’t subject to these spells. A mage can use spells like Coaxing the Spirits on objects that he brings with him, but spells meant to summon spirits to the Underworld are automatically considered vulgar in aspect and suffer a -5 penalty.

Time: Works normally, except that Postcognition spells encounter the same penalties and difficulties as The Spirit’s Touch (p. 55).

MAGIC AND GEISTS

Mages can use their Arcana to affect geists, but since these beings are hybrids of spirits and ghosts, a mage needs to be proficient in both to affect the creature. A spell meant to affect a ghost or spirit can affect a geist if the mage has the requisite level of *both* Arcana.

For example, a mage wishing to use the Harm Spirit spell on a geist (p. 249 of **Mage: The Awakening**) needs Spirit 3 *and* Death 3 in order to do so. All other systems remain the same.

Laws

Unless the Old Laws of a given Dominion mention mages specifically, they are considered living beings under those Laws. It is possible, however, for a practitioner of Fate to circumvent those Laws, at least temporarily. Using the Alter Oath spell (Fate 3), the mage can attempt to break one of the Old Laws without attracting notice. This imposes a -10 penalty on the spell, however.

The mage can also use the Fabricate Fortune (also Fate 3) to avoid notice after she has already broken one of the Old Laws. In this case, the Resistance of the responding Kerberoi is subtracted from the mage's casting pool.

Finally, a mage can use Death 3 to alter herself so as to appear dead for the purposes of a Dominion's Laws. If she wishes to use this tactic, it must be done *before* she enters the Dominion.

Risks and Rewards

The rewards for venturing into the Underworld can be great for mages. They can discover the treasures of lost souls and civilizations, if they enter the right Dominions. They can bottle the waters (substances, anyway) of the Rivers of Death for study, and they can interview and interrogate ghosts from long-gone cultures. It's even possible that the shades of the Awakened are here somewhere, able to share rites and other magical knowledge with them. In game terms, the Underworld can be a goldmine of Arcane Experience.

As for risks, the usual caveats apply. A mage can lose her life here, or become addicted to any of the manifestations of her Vice. She could become enslaved in one of the Lower Mysteries, or become lost and starve to death. And that sort of fate is the perhaps the greatest risk that a mage takes in entering the Great Below.

Mages are *mortal*. No matter what they do, no matter how much power they accrue, everything passes away. They are exactly the same as the Sleepers that surround them in one very important arena — they are impermanent. It might not seem like much, but for a person who can cross a continent in a single step, call down fire from the sky, or reorder a person's mind to her liking, the realization that she is not only going to die, but going to *fade away* can be sanity-wrecking.

Story Hooks

- **Awakening, Interrupted:** A young man in the midst of an accidental Underworld journey Awakened, but as his soul was coming back to his body, it became trapped in one of the Dominions. His body is comatose, but a mage would be able to sense the tethers between it and the soul using Mage Sight (Fate, Spirit, Life, even Prime) and trace them. If the soul could be freed, it would immediately join with the body again — but do the characters care enough to do so? And what kind of person is this man, anyway? Why did he get stuck in a Dominion? Do the inhabitants know something the characters don't?

- **All Hallow's Eve:** A Death spell goes horribly wrong, and every Avernian and Graveyard Gate for miles flies open at dusk and remains so until the following sunrise. Ghosts and other Underworld beings walk the earth, some possessing the bodies of the dead, others going about their business as though the living world is just an extension of the Autochthonous Depths. Is there a way to reverse the process, or must each gate be closed manually? And who did this in the first place? Was it, in fact, an accident?

- **The Singers in Silence:** As mages grow in power, they learn to reshape their souls and *become* magic, rather than just wielding it. Different manners of reshaping souls are called *Legacies*, and Awakened society has developed and discovered many, both benevolent and actively malevolent. One of these Legacies is called the Singers in Silence, and mages belonging to the Legacy take the role of mourners and foretellers of death, like the Banshees of Irish legend. Their ability to know how Death interacts with a given person or place makes them ideally suited to seek out Underworld refugees and Avernian Gates. Once they enter the Underworld, in fact, they might discover that their songs allow them control over the ghostly inhabitants. What kingdoms might a Singer in Silence build among the Autochthonous Depths? (The Singers in Silence are described in detail in the *Mysterium* sourcebook.)

Prometheans and the Underworld

The Created aren't numerous enough for many commonalities. They seek Mortality, and they do so by trial and error. They have their methods for approaching the Pilgrimage, but their greatest hindrance is that the world at large, and everyone in it, seems to hate them. In the Underworld, however, much of that hatred seems to die.

Ghosts are not affected by Disquiet, and that means that while a ghost might be intrigued, frightened, or angered by a Promethean, none of those emotions stem from the Promethean's supernatural heritage. A Promethean might find, then, that the Underworld is a safe haven from a world that rejects him.

The Journey to the River

Prometheans can enter the Underworld through Avernian Gates, but they also have one unique way of reaching the Great Below — death. When a Promethean dies for the first time, the Divine Fire inside him flares up, returning him to life within 24 hours of the death he suffered. The rules for this resurrection (found on pp. 162-163 of **Promethean: The Created**) state that when Prometheans suffer damage that upgrades existing lethal wounds to aggravated, their limbs and body may be destroyed and that resurrection does not heal those wounds. Since that would lead to limbless Promethean characters, however, consider the following optional system:

When Prometheans die and have a way to dodge death (either the Resurrection Bestowment or the Azoth flare, which, remember, only works once), they awaken on the shores of one of the Rivers of Death (Cocytus or Lethe are good choices, but any of the Rivers work). The Promethean is whole, regardless of whether or not he lost limbs to the damage that killed him. In order to remain whole when he returns to the world of the living, though, the character must come to terms with what happened. He must come to understand why he died and what he could have done differently, and realize how this event fits in to his greater Pilgrimage.

This is resolved through a combination of roleplaying and game mechanics. The character can sit on the banks of the River and silently contemplate these questions (perhaps thinking out loud as the player talks through what happened with the Storyteller, or perhaps the player writes out the monologue during the downtime), or a psychopomp or a passing ghost might provide the character with a partner for a dialogue. In either case, as the character is engaged in this reflection, the player makes some dice rolls:

Dice Pool: Humanity

Action: Extended (each roll requires 30 minutes of reflection; the target number is [5 x the number of limbs lost or destroyed])

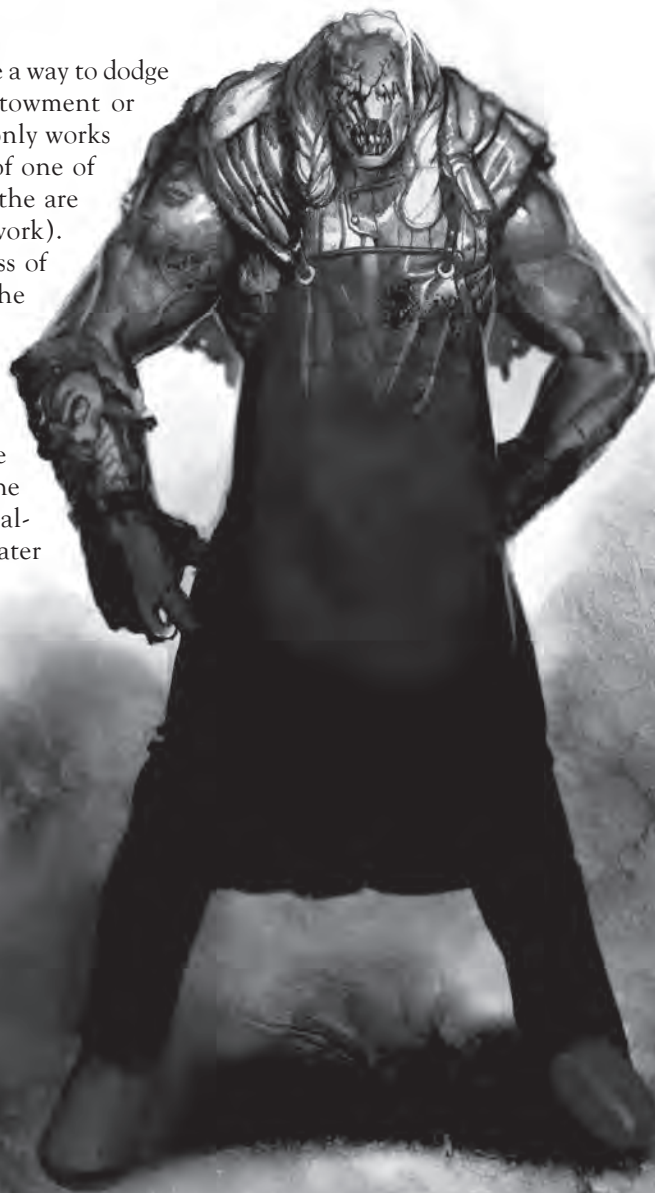
Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character resurrects immediately. Any unhealed damage remains, meaning that the character may have lost limbs.

Failure: No successes are added to the total.

Success: Successes are added to the total. When the player reaches the target number, the character resurrects with full use of his limbs.

Exceptional Success: Considerable successes are added to the total. If the player reaches the target number with five extra successes, the character comes to an important revelation about his death and what it means. The character gains three Vitriol upon resurrecting.



Systems

Bestowments & Transmutations

Unholy Strength, Unholy Stamina, Revivification, and Mesmerizing Appearance work normally in the Underworld. Ephemeral Flesh has no effect in the Underworld.

Since ghosts and other Underworld inhabitants do not suffer Disquiet, powers that would instill Disquiet (such as Rabid Rage and Scapegoat) do not function on them.

All other Transmutations work normally.

Wastelands

Prometheans do create Wastelands in the Underworld, but the effect is more gradual. A character must spend three days in a given location to create a stage-one Wasteland, after which all times for creating Wastelands are doubled (two weeks to progress to stage two, and so on). The inhabitants

of the Underworld are unlikely to be forgiving of creatures polluting their homeland, but the Underworld is so vast that it might be possible for a Promethean to find a tunnel that no one ever uses and stay there for months.

Laws

Prometheans are not undead, but from the perspective of the Underworld, they aren't "alive," either. As such, they are subject to some of the same gray areas as vampires when entering Dominions. Unlike vampires, however, Prometheans are *never* truly considered human. Upon entering a Dominion, the Promethean's player must check to see how it affects him.

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Humanity – Azoth

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Dominion's Laws "read" the character as a weak ghost, and depending on the realm in question, more powerful beings might immediately seek to enslave the character.

Failure: The Dominion's Laws see the character as a ghost, and treat him accordingly.

Success: The Dominion's Laws see the Promethean as something new and unknown. Dominions react in different ways to such strangeness. One Dominion might bar the character entry, another might ignore him until he violates one of the Laws. The Promethean might even be summoned to the ruler of the Dominion for an evaluation of what he is and how he fits into the scheme of the place.

Exceptional Success: The Dominion doesn't register the character at all. As long as he violates no Laws, he is invisible to the Kerberoi of the place. If he *does* violate the Laws, the best he can hope for is expulsion.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
-2	Character is an Ulgan or a Nepri
-1	Character is not an Ulgan but knows the Ephemeral Flesh Bestowment

Risks and Rewards

In addition to the usual risks of the Underworld, Prometheans run the risk of being enslaved. Not dead or truly alive, they are, to many inhabitants of the Underworld, little more than automatons. Attaching one to a wall on a long chain and using him to guard a passageway doesn't even occur to them as slavery — this glorified zombie was never human, and therefore has no memories or anchors to make him a true person.

As for rewards, the Underworld can obviously be a source of milestones for learning about how humans view death, sin, guilt, and fear. In addition, a Promethean who can find a secluded place in the Underworld has a superb spot to go to the wastes. Finally, Prometheans might appreciate the ability to talk to people (or shades of people) without engendering Disquiet.

Story Hooks

• **The Burning Gate:** In Appletown, Pennsylvania, a fire has been burning in the underground coal mines for over a decade. Who started the fire? A creature called Verney claims to have done it, but he also claims to be the actual Frankenstein's Monster, so perhaps he isn't the most trustworthy person in the world. In any event, he says he set the fire as part of a bargain with an angel. What kind of angel would want to render a town unlivable, or set a fire that will, in all probability, never burn out? Might it have something to do with the Avernian Gate that leads from the tunnels below Appletown to a part of the Underworld that even the most powerful ghosts fear to enter?

• **Never Coming Out:** A Promethean slipped into the Underworld through an Avernian Gate some years back, slithered into a tiny crevice in the Autochthonous Depths, and refused to come out. She's waiting, she says, for a revelation that will lead her to the New Dawn, but what she's doing is poisoning the Underworld around her. Thus far, no ghost has been able to dislodge her and, unthinkable, the walls have started to grow fragile. A Sin-Eater or other Underworld traveler seeing this might well search for a similar creature, someone who can talk this being down.

• **The Refinement of Silver:** All Prometheans follow a Refinement, but one of them, known as *Argentum*, advocates investigation of the supernatural as a means of relating to and understanding humanity. Followers of this Refinement, called "Mystics," see the Underworld as a goldmine of knowledge and enlightenment. How does a human being change when he *becomes* the supernatural? How much of a person can be stripped away before only the soul is left? The Mystics would love the answers to these questions, and many of them can summon, repel, and even mimic ghosts in order to answer them.

(The Refinement of Silver appears in full detail in *Magnum Opus*.)

Changelings and the Underworld

The refugees from Arcadia have already fought through one otherworldly labyrinth. Entering another one, especially one that doesn't conform to any of the rules to which they are accustomed, is the last thing many changelings would want to do. But sometimes, of course, changelings aren't given a choice. A gate opens, either from the living world or from the Hedge,

and admits the Lost into the Great Below. And once there, they learn something that can give them and all of the ilk hope.

Everything dies. The Gentry aren't immortal. The Underworld, in some secret, unseen Dominion, perhaps, holds a special place for every last one of the Others. They *can* die. They *can* suffer. And among those few changelings who have glimpsed the truth, there burns a spark of hope that they might be there to see it.

Systems

Entry

Changelings can use Avernian Gates in the usual manner. Rumors also persist that a clause exists, known chiefly to Darklings, which allows a changeling to open a gateway directly into the Underworld (see sidebar).

Beyond these methods, changelings sometimes find low places in the Hedge. These always take the form of crypts, mausoleums, gibbets, gallows, and other markers of death. Changelings can feel a chill wind coming from the gates, and when they approach, they can feel that the gate leads out of the Hedge. Unfortunately, unless the changeling is aware of the Underworld, she isn't likely to realize the gate leads anywhere but back to the human world and wind up in a totally unfamiliar place (which is, arguably, still less dangerous than the Hedge).

Contracts

Contracts of Dream: Pathfinder is of no benefit in the Underworld. Ghosts do not dream, so Cobblethought doesn't work on them. Dreamsteps *can* be used to escape the Underworld, provided that someone near the changeling is dreaming.

Contracts of Darkness: All Contracts of Darkness receive a +1 modifier in the Underworld.

Contracts of Fang and Talon: Psychopomps are not considered animals for the purposes of these clauses or their catches.

The Hedge

Changelings cannot open gateways from the Underworld into the Hedge. Attempts to do so simply fail, and the doorway remains only a doorway.

The Death Clause

Upon entering the Underworld for the first time, a changeling feels as though she has taken part in a powerful pledge. The player rolls Clarity at this point (Darklings receive a +2 modifier).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character is blind to the Death Clause, and does not enjoy its benefits, even if it is later explained to her. Something about her, perhaps something she did during her Durance, exempts her.

Failure: The character does not perceive the Death Clause, and cannot take advantage of the benefit until he does. The player can make the Clarity roll once per day in the Underworld.

Success: The character immediately becomes aware of the Death Clause, but the benefits must be discovered by investigation (probably talking to other changelings, or delving deep into the Underworld to learn the truth).

Exceptional Success: The character immediately understands the Death Clause in full, including all benefits.

The Death Clause is, as the name suggests, an ancient agreement between Faerie and the Underworld. The Gentry agreed they would be mortal, but that Death would not come for them until certain conditions were fulfilled. Every member of the Gentry, like so many other things fae, has a condition or a weapon that can fell him. Of course, since the Gentry choose their own methods of demise, these conditions are absurdly obscure, but they are all *possible*. Just knowing this gives the Lost a great deal of hope.

OPENING THE BLACK GATE

Cost: 2 Glamour, 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Stamina + Wyr

Action: Extended (five successes; each roll represents one turn)

Catch: The clause is invoked at midnight in a mausoleum, and the changeling invokes the laws of hospitality while the clause is in effect.

If the changeling succeeds, he opens a gateway to the Underworld that remains open for one night. On an exceptional success, the gateway lasts for a lunar month, but cannot be closed early. On a dramatic failure, the gateway is one way — those who enter must find another way out.

This clause is the fifth-dot power of the Contracts of Shade and Spirit, which appears in the **Changeling: The Lost** supplement **Winter Masques**. The other clauses deal with ghosts, though not the Underworld.

The Death Clause has benefits for changelings as well, though. A changeling that buys into the Clause (which costs a *dot* of Willpower) “purchases” one death. The character can die once and return to life in the Underworld, in a special cavern in the Autochthonous Depths. This does leave the character with the problem of finding her way back to the living world, but she is alive. The player can buy back the dot of Willpower with eight experience points, and a changeling can only ever take advantage of the Death Clause once.

Laws

Changelings count as living beings for the purposes of the Old Laws of Dominions. In addition, changelings with Clarity 7 or higher must roll to avoid degeneration if they violate one of the Old Laws (roll three dice).

Risks and Rewards

In addition to the usual risks of the Underworld, changelings risk their sanity in the Great Below to a greater degree than other characters. The trauma of finding themselves back in an unearthly maze with no obvious way out calls to mind the abduction and Durance. As such, rolls to avoid derangements stemming from mental trauma in the Underworld suffer a -1 modifier.

The rewards of venturing to the Underworld, of course, include the Death Clause and its associated benefits. Also, changelings often find that being around ghosts, so pure in their emotions, helps them to harvest Glamour once they reach Earth again. If a changeling indulges in her Vice in the Underworld, she can purchase a dot of the Harvest (Emotions) Merit for half price (purchasing the third dot, then, would cost three experience points, not six).

Story Hooks

- **The Underground Railroad:** A group of changelings, mostly Darklings, has discovered a trod leading from deep in the Hedge through the Underworld and out an Avernian Gate. They plan to set up a Hollow near the Hedge-Gate, and assist new changelings in escaping. The problem with this is that changelings need to find their own way back to Earth, using their memories of their lives, otherwise they might become unfocused and truly Lost when they get home.

- **The Death Clause, Expanded:** A Wizened changeling belonging to the Autumn Court is looking to find a way to allow non-changelings to buy into the Death Clause. His working theory is that if someone dies in the Underworld, that sacrifice can be employed to allow *anyone* the luxury of a death. Is he right? If he is, he'll sell that secret to the richest and most powerful people he can find... but first, he needs guinea pigs.

- **The Eternal Echoes:** As mentioned, changelings usually find their way back to Earth by relying on their memories to guide them. This is one reason that changelings abducted centuries ago don't return — the world they knew is gone, and they *have* no star to lead them on. The Eternal Echoes are changelings who collect stories, memories, and secrets, so that nothing will be forgotten. Surely, the chance to venture into the Underworld and speak with the shades of people representing eras long gone would be too much to resist?

(The Eternal Echoes are detailed in *Lords of Summer*.)

Hunters and the Underworld

Hunters, for the most part, interact with the Underworld just as normal human beings do. A cell of hunters might enter the Underworld in pursuit of a fleeing monster, in pursuit of forbidden knowledge, or out of sheer bad luck. In any event, a **Hunter** story set in the Great Below should serve to remind such characters that normally, the only way they would see all of this is by dying.

Systems

Tactics

Tactics work normally in the Underworld, provided the cell has the equipment and the space to make them function.

Endowments

Endowments work normally in the Underworld, taking into account that powers that would normally perceive or interact with beings in Twilight don't function (meaning that Twilight Familiars manifest while in the Underworld). Likewise, using Etheric Rounds on ghosts in the Underworld is a waste of resources, since normal bullets work just as well.

Risks and Rewards

A hunter takes the usual risks when entering the Underworld. Depending on the beliefs of the hunter, he might risk much more. The Underworld is not Hell, nor is it Purgatory or any other mythological place — it is simply the Great Below, and it encompasses more traditions than most zealots would be comfortable with. A hunter seeing the multiplicity of the Underworld might lose his faith and his zeal, and those are dangerous deficits on the Hunt.

By the same token, though, a hunter might gain knowledge that comforts him. Yes, the Underworld is horrific in places, but it exists, and people don't just fade away. Some part of them remains alive and cogent, even after the body



has crumbled. While the Underworld probably raises more questions than it answers, a hunter who sees it might take some solace in these dark tunnels.

Story Hooks

- **The Reaper:** A slasher — a term for a serial killer apparently imbued with a degree of supernatural power — has discovered how to open Avernian Gates. When his palms are painted with the blood of a victim, he can open any such doorway, leaving behind only bloody handprints. He has constructed a map of all of these gates within miles, and people are disappearing, with only the handprints to mark their passing. Of course, their ghosts might eventually hunt the slasher down in the Underworld, but for now, he is killing with impunity and using the Underworld to dodge the authorities.

- **The Pit:** A cell of hunters discovered an Avernian Gate in the form of a well. The key, they learned, was that it would open if a guilty person stood atop it in

fear. The cell has since rigged the well with a collapsible door, and is developing a Tactic in which they herd their prey on top of it. All monsters are “guilty,” after all, so the trick is making the monster afraid, and then the gate does the rest, sending the creature to the Hell it richly deserves. Of course, the Underworld is not Hell, and nor is it impossible to escape.

- **The Keepers of the Source:** One compact of hunters, founded by a psychic who objected to witches robbing the “Earth Mother” of her natural energy, made its early career dowsing for subterranean flows of magic. They never discovered the Underworld — until now. The Keepers are always on the lookout for a way to get the monsters to leave the Earth Mother the hell alone. By altering the flow of magical energy so that a witch draws up the death-taint of the Underworld instead, they figure they can teach such sorcerers by punishment. They have no idea *how* to go about this yet, but they have some interesting leads.

(The Keepers of the Source are described in detail in *Witch Finders*.)



she doesn't realize it and wouldn't believe it,
but cassie has gone bug-fuck nuts.

she thinks she's doing the right thing;
bad people so often do.

she sits on the lip of the fountain
in the middle of the town square.
she bites her thumb and pops
in a little of the blood,
and then tosses in a ring
affixed to an old knucklebone
- a talisman she chipped
out of the moldwater bridge gate
about 20 miles south of here.

she thinks for a while,
while she cups the cool water
from the fountain and washes her arms
with it. as she marks her arms with ochre,
she thinks of the house fire,
she thinks of her dying mother,
she thinks of all the deaths
done at her hands.

she speaks aloud,
"they've all been righteous."

she knows that these
will be righteous, too.
she sees the knucklebone and ring
turn red, soaking up the blood.
she takes them and pops them in her mouth,
a bitter pill, and swallows it.
it feels like it's tearing her esophagus
as it tumbles into her empty stomach.

she wonders,
"when will it happ-"
and then it happens.
the howling winds of the underworld.
the smell of death.
the cries of a thousand specters.
specks of light.
the odor of rotting banana
and moldy bread.
hands reach out through her
- skeleton hands, pale hands,
ghost hands. they pour from her
- she is no longer cassie, not now.
she is just a doorway,
a silhouette, a wide open shadow.
she crashes the gates, and laughs.
the world has been
found wanting.



Chapter Three: Dark Sympathies

The Underworld yields dark secrets to those who plumb its depths. Sin-Eaters gain the most from studying the lands beyond death — a geist hails from the Underworld, and can research strange new abilities when it returns. A Sin-Eater would do well to remember that all power has a price, and that goes double in the Underworld. No ghost will give up secrets without wanting something and he'll try to get every scrap he can. Down in the Lower Mysteries, every ghost claims to have something that a traveler might want, as long as they take him at his word.

Ceremonies

All ceremonies rely on a Bound's deep connection to the Underworld. Those presented in this section are little rituals of life and death, using a Sin-Eater's very presence to bridge the gap. Most of these ceremonies aren't exactly common knowledge; those rated four dots or above are very rare, and finding a teacher isn't an easy task at all. Some ghosts — and some Sin-Eaters — tell tales of libraries containing books full of ceremonies, lost down deep in the Underworld, but nobody's yet come back with concrete evidence (see the *Athenaeum*, p. 172).

Cigarette Dawn (•)

Some places and times have an air of melancholy. Watching the sun rise over an old mining town, or sitting with a thermos of coffee in a graveyard and waiting for time to pass. A few places — those around the gates to the Underworld — kindle a special kind of melancholy, an aura that a Sin-Eater can capitalize on to ask one of the living a sensitive question about someone who has died. Sharing a cigarette, the Sin-Eater can ask things that most people could never get away with.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater must meet with his companion within 20 yards of an Avernian Gate. She opens a fresh packet of cigarettes and taps the bottom until one juts up above the rest. She has to place that one filter-side down back in the pack — that smoke's for the dead man. She offers the first cigarette to her companion, takes one, and then lights both from the same lighter without letting it go out. Only after both parties have taken their first drag is either allowed to speak. Some of the Bound use a version of this ceremony with strong drink replacing tobacco, as long as the spirit is right for the area and her companion: dark rum's good in the Caribbean, while most Scotsmen won't refuse a single malt whisky. The important thing is the Sin-Eater bringing the indulgence, and both parties partaking in silence.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence

Action: Extended (3 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every turn.

"I'd hate to die twice.
It's so boring."

—Last words of
Richard Fenyman

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something the Sin-Eater says offends her companion. He might accuse her of disrespecting the dead, or just refuse to talk, but any Presence rolls made against him suffer a -3 modifier.

Failure: The moment doesn't ever really get that special, and the Sin-Eater forges no real connection.

Success: Noises seem to retreat, and the light plays with the smoke in interesting patterns. Tinged with melancholy, the Sin-Eater's companion wants to tell his story. The Sin-Eater can ask three questions about someone that her companion knows who is now dead, and he will answer as truthfully as he can.

Exceptional Success: Something seems to click between the Sin-Eater and her companion. Until the end of the scene, she gains a +1 bonus to all Empathy, Persuasion, and Socialize rolls made when talking to him.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The dead man died exactly a month ago
+1	The Sin-Eater uses this ceremony as dawn breaks
-1	The Sin-Eater has never spoken to her companion before
-2	Either the Sin-Eater or her companion doesn't usually smoke

One Last Song (•)

Sometimes, someone's going to die and there's nothing a Sin-Eater can do about it. She can't stop it, but she can make dying a whole lot easier. For one hour, the Sin-Eater's in complete control. She can make her companion comfortable, help him settle his affairs, or just take him dancing one last time.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater and her companion need to be alone to work this ceremony. She pricks her finger, and smears a single drop of blood upon a key — some Sin-Eaters keep an ornate key just for this ceremony, whilst others use whatever comes to hand. She threads that key onto a chain, and secures the chain around her companion's neck, tying it closed with two hairs plucked from his head. The target of this ceremony must wear the key around his neck; if he takes it off for even a moment, he dies instantly. While he can be around any number of people, the Sin-Eater has to be nearby — and when the hour is over, she must be the one to take the key from his lifeless body. If anyone else takes the key, the victim returns as a ghost with that person as an anchor. (Note that this does not work on victims who are not poised to die. It only works on the dying.)

Dice Pool: Psyche + Composure

Action: Extended (3 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every minute.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The chain snaps, and the world takes umbrage with one of the Bound changing the flow of life and death. She's forced to watch as her companion dies immediately, and the Sin-Eater loses a point of Willpower.

Failure: The Underworld is hungry for another death and refuses to hear the Sin-Eater's plea.

Success: The Sin-Eater's companion has one hour to live. At the end of that time, he will die in a manner befitting the Threshold that's already claimed him. The ceremony heals any damage, illness, or lingering wounds. A paralyzed man can walk again, though someone born blind won't be able to see. He also ignores the effects of any derangements.

Exceptional Success: For the final hour, the victim is healed to his physical prime. Even if he were born blind or deaf, he can see and hear perfectly.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Victim has a pre-existing terminal condition
-1	Victim's death will be by nature
-2	Victim's death will be by deprivation

Faces in the Smoke (••)

Smoke can be a lot of things. A curl here, a wisp there, and all of a sudden people see a face. A Sin-Eater can use this ceremony to make that face real — a ghost can show its face through the smoke. The ghost knows people can see it, and all of a sudden it has a chance to do something. One lunges, lashing out with claws of solid smoke. Another whispers terrible secrets about the Underworld to its murderer. The Bound, standing as advocate for the dead, just smiles and puffs away on a pipe, waiting for the next person who deserves to see a dead man.

Performing the Ceremony: The primary component for this ceremony is a whole lot of tobacco, mixed with a stone stolen from the Underworld, ground into dust. As it burns, the dust infuses plasm into the smoke, making it tangible to ghosts in Twilight. Most Sin-Eaters who make use of this ceremony affect large wooden pipes, or start smoking fat hand-rolled cigars, though in a pinch enough smoke can be made by throwing a pouch of the tobacco and dust mixture into a fire. She draws thick lines in ash on her forehead and the backs of her hands when she's ready to call on the dead. She inhales the smoke in three deep breaths, before exhaling a huge lungful of smoke in a single cloud that drifts around the ghost.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (4 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 30 seconds.



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Something catches in the Sin-Eater's throat, and she starts to choke. Her coughing fit inflicts a -2 penalty to all actions until the end of her next turn, and she can't apply her Defense against attacks for a similar time.

Failure: The smoke might get in her witnesses' eyes, but it doesn't have any other effects.

Success: The smoke, thick with plasm, reveals the image of a ghost. It doesn't move through the space occupied by the ghost, instead it moves around the normally insubstantial body. The ghost can directly contact the physical world for one turn. Even though it can affect physical beings, the ghost is still in Twilight and can't be touched by anyone. If the ghost doesn't want to touch anyone, it can last for up to a minute, in which time it can speak and be heard without resorting to Numina. Once its time is up, the ghost vanishes. This ceremony doesn't allow the Sin-Eater to control the ghost in question.

Exceptional Success: Lingering in the smoke, the ghost can affect the world for longer than before. One choosing to act can take two actions, and one who wishes to speak has three minutes.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Smoke is from tobacco produced without additives
-1	Sin-Eater is stood in strong light.

-2

Smoke comes from a fire, rather than the Sin-Eater

Message from Beyond (••)

A telephone rings in the same room as you, but nobody else hears it. You pick it up, and a man tells you he knows you murdered your husband. He describes how you did it. He describes how you hid the body. He tells you how you got away with it. Then he says, in your husband's voice, "But I still love you." You've just received a Message from Beyond. Hope that it's the last one you get.

A Sin-Eater who creates a Message from Beyond is often acting as the advocate or envoy of the ghost who creates the message. Traditionally, such a Message was in the form of a letters written in the dead man's handwriting and sealed with wax. Modern advances in technology mean that the Message can take a range of forms, including a handwritten letter, an e-mail, a phone call, or even an online video.

Performing the Ceremony: The Bound using this ceremony needs the means to create the Message. He then symbolically makes it useless for anyone — but usable by a ghost — by removing the batteries from a cellphone, cutting a computer's power cord, removing the ink from a pen, and so on. Next, he paints sigils over the means — on the envelope, or on the controls of a device. He gives the items to a ghost in the Underworld, or leaves

them within easy reach of a ghost in Twilight, though the items can take longer to charge. The ghost must be alone when creating the Message. Once it's done, the Message is delivered immediately — a letter materializes in the right mailbox, an e-mail bypasses any spam filters, and a link to an online video shows up on every Web site until the victim clicks on it.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Manipulation

Action: Extended (4 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 2 minutes

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater crafts the wrong sigils. The Message seeks out the wrong recipient.

Failure: The Message doesn't get through.

Success: The ghost's Message is delivered to its intended recipient at the end of the scene. Only the target can see the Message, to avoid the wrong person finding it. If using audio or video, the ghost's voice and image come through clear enough to be perfectly identifiable. The items used for this ceremony are good for creating just one Message.

Exceptional Success: The Sin-Eater has a significant part in the connection between ghost and recipient. He receives a copy of the Message that destroys itself at the end of the scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Person contacted is or was an anchor for the ghost
+1	Ghost is in the Autochthonous Depths
-1	Ghost is in Twilight
-2	Ghost is in the Lower Mysteries

Funerary Tools (•••)

Many rulers tried to take their immense wealth with them beyond death. Egyptian pharaohs believed that grave-goods, buried with them, would join them in the afterlife to ensure the ruler had everything he needed. Flint daggers and jet ornaments buried with people in the Neolithic and Bronze ages were thought to travel to the afterlife. A Sin-Eater can use this ceremony to charge an object with plasm before destroying it, leaving the item's ghost in Twilight — or sending it straight to the Underworld. Many Sin-Eaters use this to re-unite ghosts with their prized possessions, for example allowing a saxophonist to play from beyond the grave.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater sets the item he wants to send into Twilight on the ground, and pours a circle of salt around it. She paints symbols for the elements of the Underworld on four skulls — not

necessarily human skulls; any animal larger than a housecat will do. One skull sits at each cardinal point, looking inwards at the item. Finally, the Sin-Eater places a candle on top of each skull and lights each one in turn. He lights a bundle of birch twigs, and tosses them into the circle. The flames consume the item, leaving only its ghost behind.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (5 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The flames leap high, setting the Sin-Eater's clothes on fire. The fire is the size of a torch (one point per turn) and as hot as a torch (+1 damage). The item is destroyed.

Failure: The item is destroyed, but it doesn't appear in Twilight.

Success: Flames consume the item until only its ghost remains. The item appears in Twilight, and can be held and used by Twilight beings. All damage to the item is repaired. The Sin-Eater can hold and carry the item without entering Twilight as long as she keeps hold of a handful of ashes from the fire. When she hands the item over, she loses any residual control over it. If she keeps hold of the ashes while she enters the Underworld, the item appears in her hands in the Autochthonous Depths. The ghostly item created is permanent.

Exceptional Success: The item's ghost works perfectly, better than it ever could in life. If used as part of an action, its bonus is increased by 1.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Object is naturally flammable
-1	Object relies on chemical reactions to function
-3	Object relies on electricity to function

Moment of Absolution (•••)

The Kiss of Absolution is the kind of ceremony some Sin-Eaters couldn't care less about and others would happily kill to know, for it can resolve the deepest mystery of a ghost's existence — precisely *why* a ghost is anchored to a particular person, place, or object. A specter might not remember what's so important about an old pen, or may not recognize a child that anchors it to the world. This ceremony allows a Sin-Eater to intervene on the ghost's behalf, studying the link between ghost and anchor to discover the truth. The ghost can only be a part of this ceremony once, and when she knows how to resolve an anchor, she has to do all that she can to resolve it.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater sits with the ghost in a darkened space. If the anchor is an object, he must hold it in his hands. If it's a place, he has to be there. If it's a person, he needs a small piece of the person — a lock of hair, or some fingernail clippings. He carves odd sigils into a candle with a knife, before lighting it. Staring into the flame, the Sin-Eater holds the anchor before him while whispering the ghost's name. She in turn focuses on the anchor as no more than an object, not something that directly relates to her. By denying her connection, the ghost confirms it exists. The Sin-Eater hears the truth whispered in the ghost's voice and sees clues in the shadows of the candle's light.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Wits

Action: Extended (5 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater sees something, but it bears no relation to the truth. The Storyteller should give the player the same information as for a success, but it has no relation to the anchor used.

Failure: The tie between a ghost and her anchor remains inscrutable.

Success: Flickering in the shadows, the Sin-Eater knows the truth. The Storyteller should tell his player precisely why the object is an anchor for the ghost — not just that it meant something to her pre-mortem, but *why* it did. For example, the Sin-Eater would know that a knife is important to a ghost because it killed her, or because she used it to fend off a rabid dog. The Storyteller should give clues in her explanation as to how the ghost can resolve the anchor.

Exceptional Success: One fact gives everything away. The Sin-Eater knows precisely what links the ghost and her anchor, and he also knows what must be done to resolve the anchor.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Ceremony is performed in a room with no other light, including moonlight
-1	Sin-Eater has never dealt with the ghost before
-2	Ghost has never seen the anchor before

Danse Macabre (••••)

Since the late medieval period, artists and composers have created *danse macabre*, works that remind those who experience them that death comes for everyone. Emperor and peasant child, king and

beautiful girl, it doesn't matter. Everyone dies. These paintings, plays, and compositions reminded people of their own mortality among the horrors of the 14th century. A Sin-Eater can lead a twisted kind of *danse macabre*: an actual dance that ties their souls in a sympathetic bond with the Great Below. Those who die soon after attending the dance become ghosts without anchors in the Underworld, forever denied final peace. Some Sin-Eaters work this ceremony as penance for crossing a Kerberos, using it to harvest fresh souls for its Dominion.

Performing the Ceremony: The ceremony must take place in a room large enough for everyone present to dance, with any furniture cleared away. The first piece of music should be slow and mournful — Camille Saint-Saëns *Danse Macabre* is by far the most common choice — and following pieces must build on the theme. The Sin-Eater leads the dance dressed in decaying black finery, wearing a plain white mask over his face. He takes the role of Death, and must dance with everyone present for at least five minutes each. While some Sin-Eaters have attempted to update the music used for the ceremony, they have to be very careful to keep the mood somber, focusing on the inevitable mortality of everyone present. If they don't, the magic of the ceremony is lost.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Presence

Action: Extended (6 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 15 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The dance forges too close a connection with the Underworld. One of the participants will die before the end of the story. She will return as a ghost, with the location of the dance as her only anchor.

Failure: The Sin-Eater finds herself out of step with the energies of death; no effect occurs.

Success: The dance forces each person present to confront their own mortality. Anyone who attends the dance comes away spooked, worried that death will claim them soon. All participants gain the avoidance derangement (mild) until the end of the story.

If a dancer dies before the end of the story, she will return as a ghost, but without anchors. She appears in the Autochthonous Depths, without any anchors and unsure of what has just happened. Until the end of the story, the Sin-Eater can spend a point of Willpower when in the Underworld and locate anyone who has died under the effect of this ceremony as an instant action.

Exceptional Success: The dance resonates with the Underworld, filling the Sin-Eater with spectral energy. He regains one point of plasm.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Each dancer has a partner with whom she shares a connection
+1	People dress appropriately for the ball
-1	Dancers don't know each other
-2	More than six participants (not including the Sin-Eater)

Ghost Drinker (••••)

Some Sin-Eaters aren't happy with just locking a ghost up or decanting it into a bottle. After all, even the greatest monster can have its uses. Rather than just unleashing a trapped ghost — and going to all the trouble of imprisoning it once again when the deed is done — this ceremony allows the Sin-Eater to consume part of a ghost's being while leaving it trapped within the container. When he “drinks the ghost” — an act named for Sin-Eaters who consume ghosts locked within wine or soda bottles — he can take its strength or its knowledge.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater needs to find a ghost captured with the Spectral Captivity ceremony (**Geist: The Sin-Eaters** p. 168) — not necessarily one that the Sin-Eater has captured himself — and carry it with him into the Underworld. The Sin-Eater makes a small hole in the container, less than a quarter-inch in diameter, and pours in a cup of fluid from one of the Underworld rivers. He presses his thumb over the hole, gives the bottle a good shake, and knocks the contents back. The resulting liquid is cloying and heavy, like drinking bitter molasses, and each use of the ceremony only provides one mouthful of fluid. Enough liquid remains to seal the hole, which the Sin-Eater must sanctify with a drop of his own blood. If he doesn't, the container remains unsealed and the ghost can escape. A Sin-Eater can only attempt to consume a ghost once. Attempting to use it twice on the same ghost only produces foul, brackish water — which leaves the container unsealed.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (6 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 30 seconds.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Sin-Eater chokes on the fluid, spitting it out, and hasn't a chance to plug the hole. The ghost escapes captivity, and cannot be bound or controlled until the next sunrise.

Failure: The ghost slips down, but the Sin-Eater can't swallow the full draught in one. He gains no benefit from the ceremony, but can't use it on the same ghost again.

Success: The Sin-Eater can drink either the ghost's knowledge or its power. If he chooses to drink for *knowledge*,

the player can ask the Storyteller one yes-or-no question for each dot of the ghost's Power. The Storyteller must answer those questions truthfully. If the Sin-Eater drinks for power, he adds half of the ghost's related Attributes (rounded down) to his Physical Attributes: Power to Strength, Finesse to Dexterity, and Resistance to Stamina. His enhanced Attributes last for five minutes per dot of Psyche.

Exceptional Success: The ghost loses part of itself to the Sin-Eater. Upon its release, it suffers a -2 modifier to all rolls until the end of the scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Ghost is contained in a wine or soda bottle
-1	Ghost is trapped in a space larger than Size 3
-2	Ghost is contained in a space larger than Size 7

Crash the Gates (•••••)

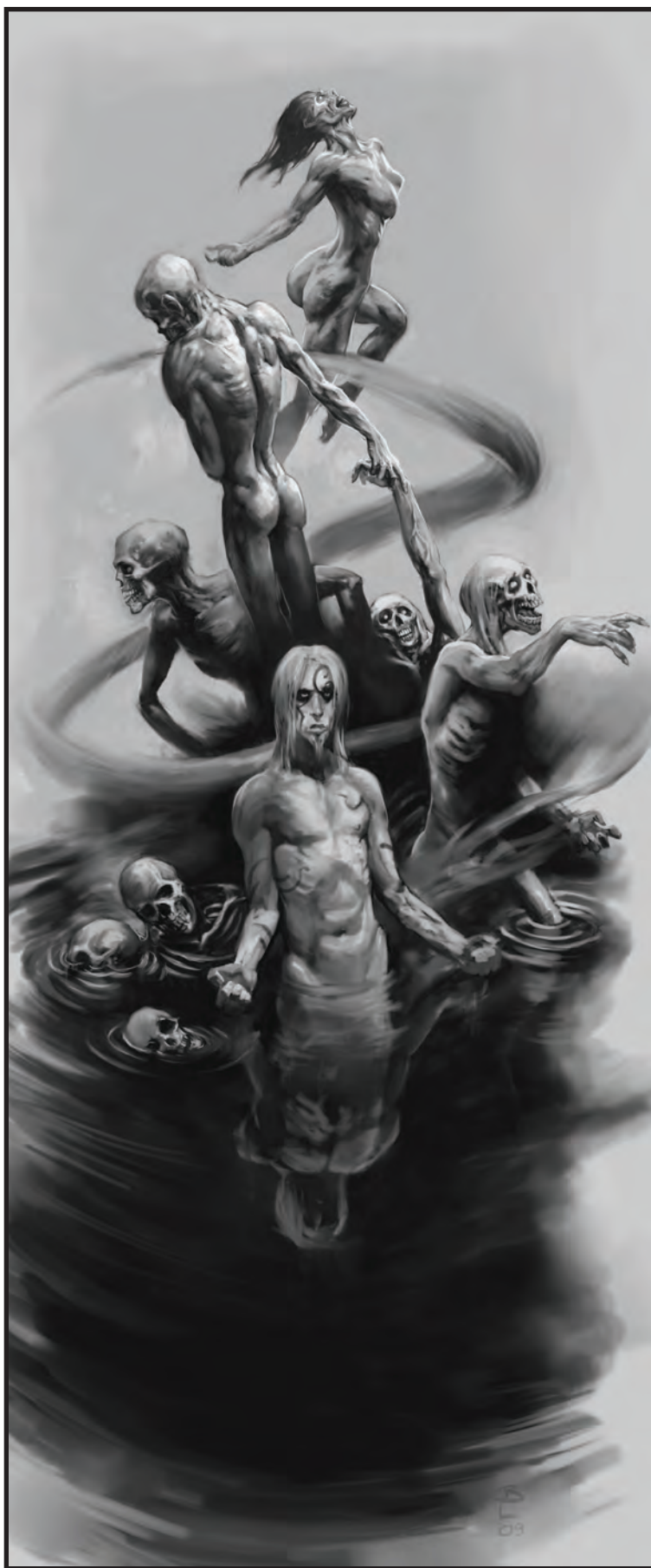
To some among the Bound, the idea that life is just for the living is a sickening thought. People exist after death, never again to know the touch of a lover's hand or the warm kiss of sunlight on skin, but the living take everything for granted. A Sin-Eater can redress that balance, breaking the barriers between the living world and the Underworld, allowing the horrors beyond death to meet the living face to face. The Sin-Eater transforms himself into a temporary Avernian Gate, allowing anything that's dead to re-enter the world of the living — and the living to enter the Underworld. He has no control over whatever passes through him, and can't control whereabouts in the Autochthonous Depths to which his portal opens, but if he's using this ceremony then he probably doesn't care. The gateway is only temporary, but the ghosts remain after it closes, anchored to where the Sin-Eater stood. That anchor fades over time, sending those ghosts who haven't latched on to a new target back into the Underworld.

Performing the Ceremony: The Sin-Eater needs one special ingredient for this ceremony: a chip of stone or other inorganic material taken from an Avernian Gate. He must fully submerge himself in clean water, then he paints sigils on his body in ochre, similar to those used to create a gateway. He paints a different symbol on the stone, and leaves it to steep in a shallow pool of blood. Once the stone has turned deep red, he can swallow it to open the gateway. A particularly painful variant of this ceremony exists in which the Sin-Eater carves the sigils into his body with a sharp knife, though the idea of repeated self-harm is beyond the pale for most Sin-Eaters.

Dice Pool: Psyche + Stamina

Action: Extended (7 successes required)

Time Increment: The Sin-Eater can roll for this ceremony once every 10 minutes



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The stone channels some of the Underworld's twisted energies directly into the Sin-Eater's body. He suffers two points of aggravated damage.

Failure: The ceremony does nothing.

Success: The Sin-Eater transforms his body into an open Avernian Gate, connecting to a random point in the Autochthonous Depths. Ghosts in the Underworld can sense the Gate and flock through, emerging in the physical world in Twilight. The Gate will let people cross through in both directions, but the random opening point means a living person will likely be lost forever. The Sin-Eater appears as a full-sized silhouette of his normal self, through which people can see the realm on the other side. In the Great Below he's a human-shaped door into a world of color and sound and smells. In the physical world, he's a yawning hole in reality leading to a terrifying underground maze. The Sin-Eater can move in this form, but his Speed is halved.

The Gate remains open for one minute per point of Psyche before slamming shut. Any ghost that crossed through gains the Sin-Eater's location when the ceremony ends as an anchor, allowing it to remain in the physical world and manifest in front of people. That anchor fades to nothing at the end of the scene, dumping the ghost back into the Underworld.

Exceptional Success: The ghosts streaming through the Sin-Eater gain his location as an anchor until the next sunrise.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+3	The Sin-Eater carves the sigils into his body (taking two points of lethal damage)
+2	The stone was taken from an open Avernian Gate
+1	The Sin-Eater uses fresh human blood to steep the stone
-1	The Sin-Eater uses fresh animal blood
-1	Character's Synergy is 4 or 5
-2	The Sin-Eater uses blood that isn't freshly spilled
-3	Character's Synergy is 3 or below

The Stygian Key

The Stygian Key is one of the stranger mysteries of the Underworld. While other Keys tap into blood as the river of life to commune with the dead, the Stygian Key taps in to the essence of Death itself. It's the Key of ultimate endings; possessing it grants a Sin-Eater power over death and decay. While modern occultists claim that "death" is often a symbol of transition and change, that's spin applied by the living to help them sleep at night. Death is the End, the line between a living, breathing person and a lump of broken meat on a mortuary slab. The only real change is that between a vital, creative being and a ghost formed of memories and regrets.

Manifestations unlocked with the Stygian Key grant influence over death, decay, and rot. Not just the death of living things, but the death of sensation through means such as darkness, silence, and blindness; the death of the future by inflicting sterility; the death of enjoyment thanks to depression and kindling feelings like *la petite mort*, the little death felt after sex. Unlocking a Manifestation with the Stygian Key invokes the *lex talionis*: an eye for an eye, and a death for a death. The Sin-Eater has to kill a living thing. Most use small animals like mice that are readily available from pet stores and are small enough to hide in a pocket. A larger sacrifice does offer more power to the Sin-Eater, but carries risks of its own — not least of which is the involvement of mundane authorities. The Size of the creature equals the bonus gained to the roll to a maximum of +5 dice.

Unlike other Keys, a Sin-Eater has to seek out the Stygian Key. If he wants the dangerous knowledge of the dead, he has to find it for himself. Earning the Key changes his geist in subtle but noticeable ways, and those with the Stygian Key can recognize each other by perceiving the scars of the Underworld. Those changes also prevent the Key being shared between members of a krew — knowing the nature of death is an intensely personal thing that cannot be shared.

A Sin-Eater must learn the Stygian Key by studying the Underworld itself. She must cross at least three of the Rivers, taking a draught of the "waters" of each along with her each time. The Sin-Eater then has to entreat a creature of the lands of death to teach him. Ghosts can't perform that service; instead they have to seek out one of the Kerberoi, a creature that has no memory of the living world. The Kerberos imparts secret knowledge to the Sin-Eater and her geist, but that's like receiving the ingredients for a meal rather than a cooked dish. To cook the dish — to make use of the Stygian Key — the Sin-Eater has to return to the living world and sacrifice part of herself. She might give up her memory of her first husband, scar her face, or deliberately cut into her own muscles. That sacrifice costs her one dot from an Attribute of her choice. The damage will heal, but only over time; she does not recover the lost dot until the end of the *next* story.

The Stygian Boneyard

Skill: Medicine

Area of Effect: 20 yards per activation success

The plasm permeating the Stygian Boneyard grips those living people who cross its boundaries with the certain knowledge of their own mortality. Someone within the Boneyard knows with absolute clarity that she is going to die. Many people, when faced with this information, start to focus on the negative aspects of their lives, those bad habits that bring the last breath ever closer.

As an instant action costing 1 plasm, the Sin-Eater can force one person within the Boneyard to indulge her Vice. If that person does not do so by the end of the scene, she loses a point of Willpower. The Sin-Eater can affect only one person each time he unlocks this Boneyard.

Stygian Boneyard ••: The character can force the closeness of Death on a number of people in the Boneyard equal to her Psyche. The Sin-Eater cannot affect the same person twice within the same Boneyard, and each person affected takes a separate action.

Stygian Boneyard •••: The Bound can drain the fires of life out of the surrounding area. Material objects suffer a month's wear in a matter of hours and everyone who passes through the area picks up a stubborn head cold. Anyone who passes through the Boneyard must roll Stamina + Resolve as a reflexive action. On a failure, the person suffers a point of bashing damage that refuses to heal for a week. A dramatic failure inflicts a -1 penalty to all Mental rolls for the week as illness fogs the victim's mind. Objects that remain in the area for the duration of the Boneyard lose one point of Durability. The Sin-Eater can also access a pool of extra plasm equal to the activation successes for as long as he remains within the Boneyard. This plasm only lasts while the Bound remains within the Stygian Boneyard. If she uses it to power any Manifestations with a lasting duration, they all end along when this Manifestation ends.

Stygian Boneyard ••••: The plasm permeating the Stygian Boneyard actively decays material objects and ages people by years at a time. As an instant action, the Sin-Eater can affect a person or object in the Boneyard. His player rolls (Wits + Medicine + activation successes) - target's Durability or Stamina. The target suffers one point of lethal damage or loses one point of Structure per success. On an exceptional success, an object permanently reduces its equipment modifier by one, and a person suffers a -1 penalty to all rolls until the end of the scene. This power costs 2 plasm. If the Sin-Eater's Boneyard is in an area suffering the second stage of a Promethean's Wasteland, this power costs no plasm.

Stygian Boneyard •••••: The essence of death so permeates the Stygian Boneyard that a Sin-Eater can create a temporary Avernian Gateway in the Boneyard — for as long as it remains Manifested. Creating the gateway is an extended action with a dice pool of Wits + Medicine + activation successes requiring 10 successes, with each roll representing 15 minutes of concentration. The character

has to signify a doorway to be the actual location of the gate, which must exist within the Boneyard. If the roll is successful, anyone can open the gate, and once created the Sin-Eater can't seal the gate unless he also dissipates the Stygian Boneyard. An exceptional success allows the character to open the gate without spending any plasm. This power costs 2 plasm and 1 Willpower.

The Stygian Caul

Skill: Medicine

Unlocking the Stygian Caul infuses the Sin-Eater's body with the essence of death, numbing her to external distractions and giving her a clarity that most people will never experience. Manifesting this Caul reduces all penalties to Mental rolls that she suffers by an amount equal to the activation successes, though this cannot turn a penalty into a bonus. Being detached makes it harder for the Sin-Eater to fully apply herself. Spending a point of Willpower to bolster an action only adds two dice, rather than three.

Stygian Caul ••: The Sin-Eater's pulse stops, and her flesh grows cold and waxy like that of a dead man. She can spend a point of plasm as an instant action to gain all the benefits of being a walking corpse for the duration of the Caul: she takes bashing damage from firearms rather than lethal; she suffers no damage from extremes of temperature and pressure; most non-supernatural diseases, drugs, and poisons have no effect. Further, electricity doesn't cause her damage, though a continuous source still requires a Strength roll to break away. Finally, she doesn't fall unconscious when she takes her final point of bashing damage.

Stygian Caul •••: At this level, the Sin-Eater enhances her ability to endure all manner of hardship when in her corpse-form. Her nerves deaden and though her bones may break, rigor mortis in her muscles holds them in place. By spending a point of plasm as a reflexive action, she can add her activation successes to her Stamina (but not derived values such as Health) for the duration of the Caul.

Stygian Caul ••••: The Sin-Eater no longer notices as her muscles tear and bones snap. She ignores mere physical damage, even when it would kill a normal person. In her corpse-form, the Sin-Eater adds her activation successes to her Health, never rolls for unconsciousness due to damage, and suffers no wound penalties. She can voluntarily take a point of bashing damage to fit through any gap large enough to take her head. Finally, her capacity to survive damage is greatly increased.

Stygian Caul •••••: The Sin-Eater channels the essence of death itself, becoming a physical bridge between the Underworld and the living world. She can voluntarily act as an anchor for any ghost she can perceive, though she must spend a point of plasm to do so. She can do this even when in the Lower Mysteries, providing one way for any ghost to visit the living world — assuming she makes it back herself. She remains an anchor for a week, after which her connection to the ghost is lost.

The Stygian Curse

Skill: Medicine

Each death inflicted by the Stygian Curse is a little one, but over time they can build up into an inevitable wall of depression, lethargy, and even suicide. A quiet family man discovers he can no longer have children. His wife says she doesn't mind, but he knows the truth — she wanted another baby that he can't provide. He can see that look in her eyes, that combination of pity and regret. Every time he puts his all into something, it leaves him drained worse than if he'd just run a marathon. His last vestiges of energy slip away. And on the third day of waking up without knowing why, he sees the Sin-Eater out of the corner of his eye, someone he'd nearly run over a week before, and she says "Don't do that again."

The Stygian Curse causes the victim's relationships to decay. He can make enemies fine, but trying to make friends — or keep the ones he has — is harder, as people take what he says the wrong way and read subtexts into his statements that he never intends. Any Empathy, Persuasion, or Socialize rolls suffer a penalty equal to the activation successes.

Stygian Curse ••: This power of the Stygian Curse removes both the desire for and the ability to enjoy any form of sexual activity. This is an instant action with a dice pool of (Intelligence + Medicine + activation successes) contested by the target's Resolve + Psyche. On a success, the victim is unable to become sexually aroused for the duration of the curse, and can't produce offspring (though unborn children are unaffected). Apply the activation successes as a penalty to all Social rolls made against people who would otherwise find him attractive. An exceptional success sees the victim unable to produce offspring for one week per activation success beyond the Curse's duration. This power costs 1 plasm.

Stygian Curse •••: *La petite mort*, the "little death" is a period of inability and fatigue that strikes after the highs of an orgasm accompanied by a powerful sense of melancholy and regret. The Sin-Eater can kindle that same depression after the victim pushes himself in any situation. The Sin-Eater spends a point of plasm, and the player rolls (Intelligence + Medicine + activation successes) – target's Resolve as an instant action. On a success, each time the victim spends a point of Willpower to enhance his dice pool he suffers a -2 modifier to any other rolls for the remainder of the scene. On an exceptional success, that penalty lasts for the full duration of the Curse. A dramatic failure restores a point of Willpower to the target after his next successful roll.

Stygian Curse ••••: People cross the street rather than walking near the victim of this Curse, and when they must talk to him — whether they're selling him coffee or delivering his newspaper — they do so with thinly-veiled disgust. The Sin-Eater's player spends 2 plasm and rolls Intelligence + Medicine + activation successes as a contested action against the target's Resolve + Psyche. If successful,

the victim cannot spend Willpower for the duration of the Curse, whether to enhance a dice pool or activate a supernatural power. An exceptional success causes the victim to lose a point of Willpower at the start of each scene that he suffers the Curse. Conversely, a dramatic failure restores the target to full Willpower.

Stygian Curse •••••: The apex power of the Stygian Curse drives its victim to suicide as he becomes painfully aware he will be alone forever. If the victim survives his suicide attempt, the Curse ends immediately and the Sin-Eater cannot affect the victim with the Stygian Curse again. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm, and her player rolls Intelligence + Medicine + activation successes in a contested action against the target's Resolve + Composure + Psyche. If successful, the victim attempts to take his own life in some fashion — maybe cutting his throat with a hunting knife, or knocking back an overdose with half a bottle of Jack Daniels. Work out a dice pool using the victim's own traits, along with bonuses for equipment or weaponry — a hunting knife uses the victim's Strength + Weaponry + 1, while an overdose is Intelligence + Medicine + a variable modifier depending on what drugs are available. The Sin-Eater's player rolls that dice pool and the victim takes one point of lethal damage per success. On an exceptional success, the dice pool does damage as a Killing Blow (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 168).

The Stygian Marionette

Skill: Medicine

While the Stillness Marionette allows a Sin-Eater a measure of gross control over a dead body, it pales in comparison with the control offered by the Stygian Marionette. The Bound can project her consciousness directly into a dead body, using that body as if it were her own.

Stygian Marionette •: The Sin-Eater forces her geist into a dead body, taking her consciousness along with it. She has to touch the body for the transfer to take place, spending a point of plasm to activate the Manifestation. While she's inhabiting a dead man's form, her own body is vulnerable to harm — but not possession. The body she wishes to take can't have died more than one week before she uses this power.

When controlling a body, the Sin-Eater uses her own Mental and Social Attributes and Skills, the body's Physical Attributes and Size, and the *lower* of each value for Physical Skills. Without some form of disguise, she suffers a -5 modifier to all Presence rolls. On the other hand, the Sin-Eater has an entirely new face, new fingerprints, and even new DNA. While she's in her new body, the Sin-Eater can use Manifestations as normal, but cannot spend plasm to absorb damage. Her new body doesn't heal naturally at all. She can't leverage other benefits of inhabiting a dead body (such as reduced damage from firearms) unless she also manifests the Stygian Caul.

Example: Emil Horner takes over the body of Robin Moore, a SWAT cop killed by a renegade ghost. In Officer Moore's body, Emil can still use his Social and Mental Attributes and Skills (with a -5 modifier to his Presence), but he uses the cop's Physical Attributes — not a bad thing, as the officer was a pretty buff guy. Moving on to Physical Skills, the cop had Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Firearms 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 2. Emil has Athletics 2, Drive 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 3. Unfortunately, that leaves Emil with just Athletics 2 and Stealth 1.

Stygian Marionette ••: Wounds on the Sin-Eater's new body close to mere scars — even the deep cuts from an autopsy knit together for the duration of her possession. This is also the only way that the Sin-Eater can heal her stolen body. By spending a point of plasm, the Sin-Eater can reduce the penalty to Presence rolls to -1, rather than -5. She can also heal by forcing her plasm through the new body. As an instant action, she spends a point of plasm and her player rolls Manipulation + Medicine + activation successes. She can heal one point of lethal damage or two points of bashing damage per success.

Stygian Marionette •••: The Sin-Eater can tap in to the muscle memory of her stolen body, accessing reflexes she never knew she had — and enforcing her own trained ability over the dead flesh. By spending an extra point of plasm when activating the Marionette, the Sin-Eater can use the *higher* rating of each Physical Skill, rather than the lower. If both the body and the Sin-Eater possess the same Skill, that Skill gains the 9-again benefit. If she takes a Skill straight from the body that she does not normally possess she loses the 10-again quality.

Example: Emil Horner takes over Officer Moore's body again, but he's had time to learn. He spends an additional point of plasm when activating the Stygian Marionette. The cop had Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Firearms 3, Stealth 1, Weaponry 2. Emil has Athletics 2, Drive 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 3. Combined, he has Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Larceny 3, and Stealth 3. Because his body and mind aren't in perfect alignment, Emil's player can't re-roll 10s on Brawl and Firearms rolls. On the other hand, any Athletics and Stealth rolls become 9-again.

Stygian Marionette ••••: The Sin-Eater can spend 1 Willpower when activating the Marionette to remain in her new shell for up to a week. She can shift her consciousness between bodies with a successful Manipulation + Medicine roll, though whichever body she isn't using falls into a death-like state and is unable to take any actions. She becomes aware if her own body takes damage, and if it takes enough to kill her, the Manifestation ends immediately as she has to claw herself back from the brink. Both bodies share the protection from possession; once a Sin-Eater has made her claim it is inviolate for as long as her plasm links the two bodies.

Stygian Marionette •••••: Rather than inhabiting one body or the other, the Sin-Eater and her geist work in concert so both bodies can act at the same time. Once she's established possession of another body, the Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and rolls Manipulation + Medicine + activation successes as an instant action. On a success, the Sin-Eater's normal body and her inhabited body are both conscious and capable of acting at the same time. The two have to remain within 20 yards of each other. Each body can perform instant or extended actions independent of the other. In combat, both act on the same Initiative. The cognitive dissonance of working four pairs of hands at the same time takes its toll, and the Sin-Eater suffers a -2 modifier to any Wits rolls, and halves her Defense in both bodies. The stress of this power is such that the character can't use the Stygian Marionette until she gets a full eight hours' sleep. An exceptional success allows the Sin-Eater to act without a penalty to Wits rolls, but Defense is still halved. A dramatic failure instead calls a nearby ghost into the body affected by the Stygian Marionette.

The Stygian Oracle

Skill: Medicine

The Stygian Oracle calls upon the combined knowledge of the dead to bolster a Sin-Eater's understanding of the world. With the basic power of this Manifestation, the Sin-Eater can trawl the collective knowledge of every ghost, searching for that one little secret that unlocks whatever mystery has confounded her. For the duration of the scene, she can add her activation successes to her dice pool for any extended Academics or Occult actions, and can understand a number of languages equal to her activation successes.

Stygian Oracle •••: With this Oracle, a Sin-Eater's connection to the Underworld is never truly broken. Even when not Manifesting the Stygian Oracle, the Bound hears whispers in the back of her mind. She gains the benefits of the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit at all times. A character who already possesses the Merit gains the 8-again quality on the Intelligence + Wits roll to recall something. When the Stygian Oracle is active, the Sin-Eater adds her activation successes to the Merit's dice pool.

Stygian Oracle ••••: The Sin-Eater can add her activation successes to all Academics and Occult rolls. When the Oracle is active, she knows all languages ever spoken or written by man, from ancient Sumerian to the languages of lost Polynesian tribes. Even when not using the Oracle, the Sin-Eater knows a number of languages equal to her Oracle dots, in addition to any languages purchased as Merits.

Stygian Oracle •••••: Nobody knows the Underworld like a ghost, and the Stygian Oracle grants a Sin-Eater the knowledge of all the dead. This strange familiarity brings useful shortcuts through the twisting tunnels that wind through the Autochthonous Depths and Lower Mysteries — though some lead to nothing but danger and ruin. When using the Stygian Oracle, the Sin-Eater can spend 1 plasm as a reflexive action to add her activation successes to the dice pool to navigate

the Underworld (see "Navigating Dark Passages," p. 267 of **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** for more details). If she instead spends a point of Willpower along with the , she reduces the extended action to travel between two rivers, or between a river and an Avernian Gate, to an instant action. Any failure on this roll is treated as a dramatic failure, as the Sin-Eater follows bad directions straight into a hazardous location.

Stygian Oracle •••••: As the Sin-Eater's awareness grows, she can draw directly on the Skills of the dead. While she couldn't gain occult knowledge from Aleister Crowley's ghost, she can tap into the general understanding of every occultist who has died and entered the Underworld. When Manifesting the Oracle, the Sin-Eater can spend 1 plasm as a reflexive action to enhance her Skills. Her player can add a number of dots equal to the character's Oracle rating + activation successes, but these must all be in the same category (Mental, Physical, or Social). No Skill can be raised to more than four dots in this fashion. Any Skills that the character doesn't normally possess become unreliable: any dice pool using that Skill loses the 10-again quality and 1s subtract successes. The dots granted by this power last until the end of the scene.

Example: *Genevieve was a socialite before she became a Sin-Eater, but that's not going to help her against a gang of ghosts who want her head after a deal gone wrong. They've stolen the bodies of some construction workers, and they want to hurt her. Focusing, she calls on the reflexes and muscle memory of 10 generations of fighters through the Stygian Oracle. She has two activation successes, and Oracle 5, giving her seven points to distribute. She spends three to increase her existing Athletics 1 to 4, in case she needs to run, and spends the remaining four on raising her Brawl from 0 to 4 dots, (though any Brawl rolls won't benefit from 10-again). Smiling, she turns to face her assailants.*

The Stygian Rage

Skill: Medicine

The Stygian Rage is anything but subtle. Even at low levels the geist putrefies flesh and weakens bones, and can easily disfigure the Bound's victim. At higher levels, the Sin-Eater can leave his victims fully aware but caged in a prison of dead flesh. Due to the ugly wounds inflicted, every successful attack using the Stygian Rage applies a -1 modifier to the victim's Social rolls until the damage is healed.

Stygian Rage •••: The Sin-Eater can infect his foe with a necrotizing virus that spreads out from one point to consume her body. Instead of applying the damage from the Rage all at once, the victim takes one point of continuous lethal damage over a number of turns equal to the activation successes (see "Continuous Damage," **World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 167). Until she heals the damage from this power, the victim also has a -1 penalty to all Dexterity rolls.

Stygian Rage ••••: Corrupt plasm rots the target's muscles, leaving her weak. Only later will she notice the strange crawling lumps under her skin where the maggots are consuming her dead meat. The Sin-Eater must spend an extra point of plasm when Manifesting the Stygian Rage to activate this power. Instead of dealing damage normally, the Sin-Eater's player divides the

damage dealt across the victim's Physical Attributes in any way she sees fit. The victim's body regrows the dead flesh at a rate equivalent to healing lethal damage (see "Attribute Damage," *World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 167).

Stygian Rage ••••: The Sin-Eater can inflict terrible infections that eat the victim's flesh from within. As a reflexive action, the Sin-Eater can spend 1 plasm when activating Stigmata Rage ••. If she does, the power deals two points of damage per turn, rather than one.

Stygian Rage •••••: Even though the physical trauma heals over time, the victim is scarred for life. The Sin-Eater spends two extra points of plasm and a point of Willpower when unleashing the Stygian Rage. The damage dealt is aggravated instead of lethal. If the victim takes even a single point of damage, she permanently loses one point of Presence. This point does not heal over time, and her maximum Presence score is lowered by one (hence a normal person cannot have a Presence score above 4 after being a victim of this power). Only supernatural healing can restore the loss. Using this power repeatedly against the same target doesn't cause further loss of Presence.

The Stygian Shroud

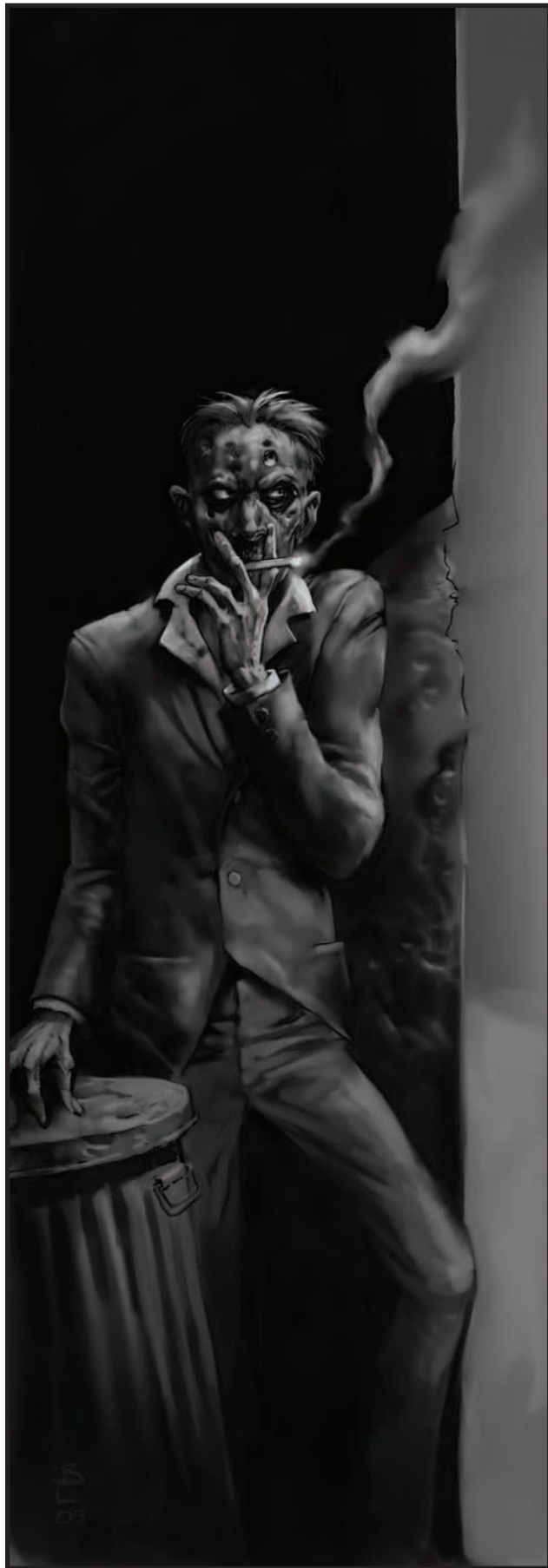
Skill: Medicine

The Stygian Key is the Key of death and decay, and as such only protects the Sin-Eater as long as it can pass the injury on to others. Whenever an attack does no damage to the Sin-Eater, the nearest character — whether friend or foe — is attacked with a dice pool equal to the activation successes. This supernatural attack ignores Defense (but not armor) and deals the same type of damage as the attack that would have hurt the Sin-Eater. The Sin-Eater has no control over who her Shroud attacks, short of getting up close and personal with those who wish her harm.

Stygian Shroud ••: As the Bound's understanding of death grows, so too does her ability to avoid it. With the Stygian Shroud active, she is always aware when people intend to harm her, and her geist can even redirect a sniper's bullet or an assassin's knife. When the character dons the Stygian Shroud, any attacks that would normally deal a Killing Blow to the character are instead treated as normal attacks. This includes Killing Blows granted by Merits or supernatural powers. This ability is always active when the character dons the Stygian Shroud.

Stygian Shroud •••: Whenever the Sin-Eater could apply her Defense against an attack, she can redirect that attack through her Shroud. Fists and knives strike someone other than their intended target, but bullets still find their mark. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm as a reflexive action, and the attack instead strikes the nearest character to her. The new target of this power still receives the benefit of his Defense.

Stygian Shroud ••••: The Sin-Eater can choose the victim of his Shroud's wrath. She must touch the intended victim, but her geist will lash out at whoever she has marked. To do so, the player spends 2 plasm and rolls *Dexterity + Medicine + activation successes – target's Defense* as an



instant action. If her roll is a dramatic failure, the victim gains armor equal to the Shroud's activation successes. On a success, any time the Stygian Shroud would affect the "nearest character" it instead affects the victim of this power. The victim remains marked for one turn per success.

Stygian Shroud •••••: Tendrils of darkness lash out from the Sin-Eater's body, lashing out at those who harm her. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and her player rolls Resolve + Medicine + activation successes as an instant action. If the roll is successful, every time someone deals damage to the Sin-Eater, her geist attacks that person with a dice pool equal to the damage taken + activation successes, ignoring Defense and armor. This attack always deals lethal damage, and anyone harmed by it also loses a point of Willpower. This power lasts until the Sin-Eater dismisses the Shroud. If the player rolls an exceptional success, the Sin-Eater regains a point of Willpower every time she damages someone with this power.

Manifestation: The Pit

Attribute: Composure

Pain. Fear. Rage. *Hate*. A lot of people think these feelings have something to do with death. They couldn't be more wrong. The Underworld has no emotion of its own, because death doesn't care. You could be a pauper in the Mumbai slums or the richest man in history, but when you die, that's it: you're dead. The only real emotion in the Underworld comes from its denizens: ghosts remember what it was like to be alive and chances are any ghost you ask would give everything to experience that once again.

According to some old ghosts, the Underworld wasn't always that way. But the past isn't the present, and right now the Underworld is a place that ultimately does not care about the universe and isn't about to start. The cursed plasm that gives shape to the never-ending tunnels and caverns isn't something that a sensible Sin-Eater should mess with.

Then again, sensible Sin-Eaters don't Manifest the Pit.

Every ability that the Pit gives requires a Sin-Eater to take in some of that cursed, corrupt plasm and fold it into his geist, absorbing a tiny part of the uncaring world beyond. Doing so, she can unlock powers that make her foes understand not that the universe is out to get them, but that the universe will never know they existed. The Passion Pit kills long-term relationships in favor of short term flings, and encourages people to ignore their noble callings, focusing on simple pleasures. The Primeval Pit shows the natural world's disdain for the victim's ongoing existence through whipping branches and howling beasts.

The Pit allows the Sin-Eater to remove an aspect of his victim. The specific Key used to unlock the Pit determines what is removed.

- **Cold Wind Pit:** The Sin-Eater can take away the warmth in his victim's heart or his ability to breathe. *Key Skill:* Occult

- **Grave-Dirt Pit:** The Sin-Eater removes the victim's ability to trust the ground he walks on. *Key Skill:* Occult

- **Industrial Pit:** Man-made objects ignore the victim's existence, and can turn against him. *Key Skill:* Crafts

- **Passion Pit:** The Sin-Eater warps his foe's mind, stealing her ability to concentrate. *Key Skill:* Empathy

- **Phantasmal Pit:** The Sin-Eater conjures visions of a world where the victim does not exist and things are better for his loved ones. *Key Skill:* Persuasion

- **Primeval Pit:** The Sin-Eater instills plants and animals with a malevolence towards the Pit's victim, culminating in resurrecting a beast that hunts the victim. *Key Skill:* Survival

- **Pyre Flame Pit:** The Sin-Eater steals light and heat from his victim. *Key Skill:* Occult

- **Stigmata:** The Sin-Eater dulls the fire within the victim's blood, enables ghosts to manifest around the victim, and even kills his blood's ability to clot. *Key Skill:* Occult

- **Stillness:** The Sin-Eater can dull her victim's senses, and even remove him from the perceptions of other people. *Key Skill:* Subterfuge

- **Stygian Pit:** The Sin-Eater can consume ghosts, sending her geist out in their form — or wearing it over her own skin. *Key Skill:* Medicine

- **Tear-Stained Pit:** The Sin-Eater stops the victim gaining sustenance from water, and can even desiccate his victims. *Key Skill:* Occult

A Sin-Eater stains his soul every time he unlocks a Pit, the plasm brushing close against his soul. Just unlocking a Pit is a sin against Synergy 7. The Sin-Eater is forcing a piece of the Underworld into the living world, bringing the energies of death to those who aren't yet ready for them. A Sin-Eater who wants to remain in tune with his geist and with the world should stay away from this Manifestation.

He also can't channel the plasm generated through his Archetype into the Pit — it needs energy drawn from the Underworld. To that end, he has to be within one yard of an Avernian Gate per dot of Psyche to use an Archetypal Manifestation, though the gate doesn't have to be open at the time.

Pit Activation

Cost: 1 plasm

Dice Pool: Composure + (Key Skill) + Pit rating – lower of target's Resolve and Composure

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Underworld turns on the Sin-Eater, burrowing into his soul and his geist both. The Sin-Eater loses a point of Willpower, and must roll for degeneration as though he'd committed a sin with a Synergy threshold of 4.

Failure: The corrupt energies of the Underworld do not yield to the Sin-Eater's command.

Success: The Sin-Eater draws the cursed plasm of the Underworld through his geist and unleashes it against his target. In addition to the main effects of the Pit when unlocked with a specific Key, the target subtracts the Sin-Eater's activation successes from all Composure rolls (to a maximum penalty of -5).

Exceptional Success: The dark tendrils of the Underworld linger, latching into the target's mind. She loses a point of Willpower, in addition to the other effects of this Manifestation.

Unless otherwise noted, the effects of the Pit last until the end of the scene, though the Sin-Eater can end them before if he chooses.

The Elemental Pits

Skill: Occult

The Sin-Eater infuses the victim with cursed plasm, hindering his interaction with one of the four classical elements. Note that each Key must be acquired separately.

The Cold Wind Pit

The Cold Wind Pit blows right through the victim as though he weren't there, chilling his bones and numbing his soul. Initially, this Manifestation chills its victim like walking through a snowstorm in a thin shirt. While it doesn't have a physical reaction beyond raising gooseflesh, the victim gets a creeping feeling of isolation. He feels that he's alone in the world, and making connections with other people is harder. He suffers the activation successes as a penalty to Persuasion and Socialize rolls, rather than to Composure.

Cold Wind Pit ••: The chill lingers in the victim's heart. The Cold Wind Pit lasts until the victim next sleeps, rather than until the end of the scene.

Cold Wind Pit •••: The Sin-Eater can convince the winds to ignore his victim entirely. He can gasp for breath all he likes, but he can't breathe. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and her player rolls (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Stamina as an instant action. The victim cannot breathe for one minute per success. The length of time a victim can hold his breath is based on his Stamina; see "Holding Breath" on p. 49 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The victim panics as he focuses on breathing and suffers a -2 penalty on all rolls until the end of the scene.

Cold Wind Pit ••••: The Cold Wind Pit fills the victim's soul with numbing cold. Everyone else sees him, and might even approach him, but he can't bring himself to respond. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower and rolls (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Composure. Every time the victim fails a Presence or Manipulation roll, the result is treated as a Dramatic Failure. This effect lasts until the end of the scene.

Cold Wind Pit •••••: When using Cold Wind Pit •••, the Sin-Eater can withhold air for much longer. Add the Pit activation successes to the successes rolled for this power to determine the length of time the victim is without air. Any damage suffered as a result of this power is dealt to the victim's Composure rather than her Health (see "Attribute Damage" on p. 167 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

The Grave-Dirt Pit

The Grave-Dirt Pit is more than just a figurative title. Beyond bogging his target down in mud or striking him with crippling vertigo, the signature ability of this Pit is the ability to bury its victim alive. The basic power of the Grave-Dirt Pit causes the ground to shift and slide beneath the victim's feet. Whenever she tries to run, or moves more than half her Speed in one turn in combat, she must succeed at a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics or be knocked down (see "Knockdown," **World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 168).

The following modifiers apply to both the activation roll and to rolls for subsidiary powers based on where the victim is standing:

Modifier	Situation
+2	The victim is standing on boggy earth or mud.
+1	The victim is standing on loose earth or soil.
+1	The victim is underground.
+0	The victim is standing on rock or hard-packed earth.
-1	The victim is standing on asphalt or concrete at ground level.
-1	For each story the victim is above ground.
-2	The victim is standing on metal or ceramic.
-4	The victim is not standing on anything — falling through the air, or floating in water.

Grave-Dirt Pit ••: The victim of this power can't keep her feet, but she suffers crippling dizziness and vertigo when she's above ground level. The Sin-Eater rolls Composure + Occult + activation successes in a contended action with the target's Composure + Psyche. If successful, the victim can't balance, and suffers a -1 penalty to Dexterity rolls for every story (roughly three yards) above ground, to a maximum of -5. The victim can't turn this penalty into a bonus by going underground.

Grave-Dirt Pit •••: The victim starts to sink into the ground, and has to fight if she wants to move. The ground reacts to her struggle, becoming thick like molasses as she thrashes around. As an instant action, the Sin-Eater can spend a point of plasm to reduce the victim's Speed to just her Strength. She also suffers the Pit's activation successes as a penalty to all Ath-

letics rolls, and if she suffers a dramatic failure on any Athletics roll, the victim takes two points of bashing damage.

Grave-Dirt Pit ••••: In addition to the dizzying effects inflicted by Grave-Dirt Pit ••, the victim is also overcome with nausea. She suffers two points of bashing damage, and can't take any actions or apply her Defense until the end of her next turn.

Grave-Dirt Pit •••••: This Manifestation buries its victim alive. The ground under her feet becomes insubstantial and she falls through six feet of earth and rock with no way to climb back up. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and rolls (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Stamina as an instant action. If successful, the victim takes two points of bashing damage as she falls into the ground. She remains there for one turn per success, during which time she can't breathe. She counts as being in combat for the purposes of holding her breath (see "Holding Breath," *World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 49). If she suffers any lethal damage from suffocation she also loses a point of Stamina until she can heal the damage. When this power ends, the victim is returned to ground level.

If the victim is on the second floor or higher up, she falls through the floor and doesn't stop until she's six feet under. She suffers one additional point of bashing damage for every story fallen, until she's on the ninth floor or higher, at which point she hits terminal velocity. See p. 179 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for more information on falling damage, but note that the victim cannot make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to break her fall.

The Pyre-Flame Pit

Fire does not give light or heat to a victim of the Pyre-Flame Pit, but it's more than happy to burn him. A victim struck with the Pyre-Flame Pit is cold even on a balmy summer's day, and can't get warm from a flame. He could be stood in the middle of a towering inferno and still be shivering with cold. Ultimately, this still penalizes his Composure — the victim can still see the flames, after all.

Pyre-Flame Pit ••: The victim now can't draw warmth from any source of heat, rather than just fire. He won't notice that a surface is hot — whether he grabs the handle of a hot pan, or slips in to a scalding hot bath. Apply the activation successes as a penalty to all Wits + Composure rolls to notice that a surface is hot.

Pyre-Flame Pit •••: At this level of power, the victim can't see any indications that a surface is hot, though the Pit isn't powerful enough to steal the light of the sun. His blindness includes flames, the glow of hot metal, or steam and bubbles rising in boiling water. The victim must spend a point of Willpower to roll Wits + Composure to notice that an object is hot, and the roll is penalized by Pyre-Flame Pit ••. In situations where the only light comes from flames, the victim is effectively blind (see "Fighting Blind" on p. 166 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Pyre-Flame Pit ••••: The dark plasm of the Underworld infuses the victim's clothing, making it more likely to burn. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm, and her player rolls (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Defense. On a success, if the victim takes any damage from

a weapon that would normally set his clothes alight on an exceptional success, like a flamethrower, then a success is enough to set them burning. Attacking someone with a cigarette lighter or other small source of flame is a case of trying to touch someone (*World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 157), with a -2 modifier for the difficulty of touching with a flame. A success on that roll starts a fire the size of a torch and as hot as a candle, and the fire burns for one turn per success.

Pyre-Flame Pit •••••: The Sin-Eater can spend an extra point of plasm when activating Pyre-Flame Pit ••••. If he does, then any resulting fire is at least the size of a torch, and as hot as a chemical fire.

The Tear-Stained Pit

Water does not slake the thirst of someone inflicted with the Tear-Stained Pit, though it's more than happy to drown her. This Pit removes the vital spark from any water the victim drinks, leaving it tasting dry and brackish. Though she's still able to drink water to live when inflicted with the basic version of this Pit, she feels thirsty all the time. She only suffers half the activation successes as a penalty to her Composure (round fractions down), but the Tear-Stained Pit lasts for one day per activation success.

Tear-Stained Pit ••: The Sin-Eater can spend an extra point of plasm when activating the Pit to stop the victim gaining sustenance from water while suffering under the Pit. However much she drinks, she still suffers from the effects of dehydration (see "Deprivation," *World of Darkness Rulebook* p. 175) as though she has had no water for the duration.

Tear-Stained Pit •••: Water shows its dislike for the victim, forcing itself down her nose and throat even when she's doing her best not to breathe. The victim halves her Stamina when working out how long she can hold her breath when immersed in water. When drowning (though not suffocating), she suffers two points of lethal damage per turn, rather than one.

Tear-Stained Pit ••••: The geist actively forces the water out of the Sin-Eater's victim, drying out her body to an unnatural degree. This is an instant action costing 2 plasm and 1 Willpower, and requires a roll of (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Stamina. If successful, the victim loses one point of a Physical Attribute per success. The Sin-Eater's player determines which Attributes are affected. This damage heals at the same rate as lethal damage. An exceptional success permanently reduces the victim's Speed by 1, while a dramatic failure heals the victim's rightmost two Health boxes.

Tear-Stained Pit •••••: At this level, the damage dealt by Tear-Stained Pit •••• takes even longer to heal. All lost Attribute dots heal at the same rate as aggravated damage.

The Industrial Pit

The Industrial Pit forces man-made objects to refuse the victim's existence. He can type for as long as he likes on a computer, but it won't save his documents or send an e-mail. His car won't start — or pulls away only to ignore his hand on the wheel.

The Sin-Eater's player doesn't use the normal Anachro-tech modifiers (*Geist: The Sin-Eaters* p. 111) when activating the Industrial Pit. Instead, the victim suffers a penalty

to his Composure equal to the Anachrotech modifier of the newest device he uses over the course of a scene. This penalty can change throughout the scene, but a character who only uses technology from before 1940 does not receive a bonus. The Industrial Pit lasts until the next sunset.

Example: *Danny's pissed off a Sin-Eater who retaliated with the Industrial Pit. She figured that him being an auto mechanic would make for all kinds of fun. Most of the stuff Danny's using came into common use in the 1960s, so he suffers a -1 modifier to his Composure as his tools turn against him. Thinking that something's going wrong, he tries to call his boss from his brand new cellphone. His Composure modifier increases to -5 until the end of the scene. Next scene, he only starts suffering a penalty when he uses a technological device.*

Industrial Pit ••: No matter what he tries, the victim of the Industrial Pit can't convince machines to obey his command. This power targets one item used by someone under the influence of the Industrial Pit that the Sin-Eater can see, and that isn't larger than (Size 5 +1 for each activation success). The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm as an instant action and her player rolls Composure + Crafts + activation successes. On a success, the victim is reduced to a chance die on all rolls involving the object for the remainder of the scene.

Industrial Pit •••: The Sin-Eater can force a ghost into a machine used by a victim of the Industrial Pit, much as it can possess a human being. The ghost can control the machine as though it were using it. The ghost doesn't become anchored to the device, and destroying the item has no effect on the ghost. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm, and her player rolls Presence + Crafts + activation successes contested by the ghost's Resistance. Anachrotech modifiers apply to this power as normal, and the item must have been used by a victim of the Industrial Pit within the same scene.

On a success, the ghost is bound into the item until the end of the scene. It can do anything the item can reasonably do, though it can't move the item itself unless it possesses Numina that would allow it to do so. Most actions can be resolved by using the ghost's Power + Finesse in place of an Attribute + Skill roll. The ghost can only use Numina that normally affect items on the item in which it is trapped. Numina that affect people or animals only work against someone who actually touches the item. The ghost remains in the device until the end of the scene.

Industrial Pit ••••: The Sin-Eater can use Industrial Pit •• against a single item of Size 10 (with +2 per activation success). Alternatively, she can jinx a number of items equal to her Psyche as long as the total Size of all the items affected is less than her maximum.

Industrial Pit •••••: The Industrial Key is the main way with which a Sin-Eater can interface her geist with the workings of the world. Governments, banks, and corporations all forget that the victim of this power has ever existed. For all that this power can devastate a member of Western society, it's not easy to pull off, especially against someone well-connected. The Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm as an instant action and his player rolls Manipulation + Crafts + activation successes, contested by the victim's Resolve + Psyche. Apply the following modifiers to the victim's pool, based on his Social Merits:

Modifier	Situation
+3	Character has a Mentor in a large company or government department.
+2	Character has Status ••• or higher in a large company or government department.
+2	Character has Contacts •••• or higher.
+2	Character has Resources ••• or higher.
+1	Per dot of Fame character possesses.
+1	Character has Contacts in corporate or business circles.
+1	Character has Status •• or lower in a large company or government department.
+1	Character has Status •••• or higher in another organization.
+1	Character has Allies ••• or higher.
-1	Character has no dots in Allies or Contacts.
-1	Character has no dots in Status or Resources.
-1	Character has no dots in Fame or Mentor

If the Sin-Eater is successful, the victim's credit cards and IDs all come up as cancelled, his driver's license becomes invalid, his car's flagged as stolen, his cellphone and Internet connections are cut off, and his home is repossessed. He loses the benefits of all his Social Merits except Inspiring and Striking Looks. Any attempts to prove that he still exists suffer a -5 penalty. The effects of this power last for a whole week, after which the victim is free to pick up the pieces.

The Passion Pit

Skill: Empathy

The Passion Pit turns a character's own emotions against him, infusing those passions with the diseased plasm of the Underworld. His thoughts and emotions turn against him, and prevent him from concentrating. The basic effect of the Passion Pit affects Composure as normal.

Passion Pit ••: The victim's thoughts twist into tortuous knots. While simple actions like firing a gun or answering a direct question come easy, focusing beyond a couple of seconds becomes nearly impossible. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm as an instant action, and her player rolls (Composure + Empathy + activation successes – target's Resolve).

For every success rolled, the victim suffers a cumulative -1 penalty to each roll of his next extended action, up to a maximum penalty of -5. That is, his first roll suffers a -1 penalty, the second a -2 penalty, and so on until the penalty equals the

number of successes rolled for this power. On an exceptional success, the affected action cannot extend beyond five rolls at all.

Passion Pit •••: The essence of the Underworld twists every noble intention, warping the victim's actions into something far darker. When he looks back on what he has actually done, he may be shocked at what really happened. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and her player rolls Composure + Empathy + activation successes, contested by the victim's Resolve + Psyche. On a success, the next time the victim attempts an action that would channel his Virtue, he only regains 1 Willpower and suffers a -3 penalty to any applicable dice pools. After that, the victim can't use either Virtue or Vice until the next chapter. On a dramatic failure, the victim can indulge his Vice this scene and receive the benefit of channeling his virtue instead.

Passion Pit ••••: A victim of this power can feel his mind working against him. Unable to think straight for more than a second at a time, almost anything he does is doomed to failure. The Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm and her player rolls (Composure + Empathy + activation successes) – victim's Resolve. If successful, the victim reduces every dice pool for instant or extended actions to a chance die (reflexive actions are not affected). One action is affected per success rolled.

Passion Pit •••••: The tainted plasm unleashed by Passion Pit •••• works into the victim's mind, burrowing deep. In order to take an action while this power is active, the victim must spend a Willpower point. Her dice pools are still reduced to a chance die.

The Phantasmal Pit

Skill: Persuasion

The visions created by the Phantasmal Pit depict a world where the victim died many years ago and nobody cares. Each vision presents itself as a real, probable outcome; the way things will be rather than the way things could be.

To start with, the visions created by the Phantasmal Pit just leave the victim shaken. The Bound can't use this power against his intended target if the target is in combat or otherwise engaged in stressful activity, and must touch his intended target in order to activate the Pit.

Phantasmal Pit ••: The visions produced by the Phantasmal Pit can inflict terrible psychological problems. A Sin-Eater can spur his foes to fixate on their failings, fall into a terrible depression, or react to things that don't exist. As an instant action, the Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and his player rolls Composure + Persuasion + activation successes contested by the victim's Resolve + Composure + Psyche. If the Sin-Eater succeeds, he can choose a mild derangement to inflict on his victim for the scene, and the victim can't roll Resolve + Composure to resist the derangement's onset.

Phantasmal Pit •••: Overwhelmingly, the power of the Underworld is the power to break down the lines between what is real and what is not. Someone affected by this power has no concept of the difference between fantasy and reality; what she imagines is just as real as what exists. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and rolls Composure + Persuasion + activation successes versus the victim's Resolve + Composure + Psyche in

a contested action. If successful, the victim starts to hallucinate. She suffers a -2 penalty to all Social rolls due to her unpredictable behavior, and reacts to anyone who confronts her with threatening or aggressive language accordingly: either she runs like hell, or she tries to attack them. The victim can spend a point of Willpower to become lucid for a minute.

Phantasmal Pit ••••: At this level of power, the geist can instead inflict a severe derangement when using Phantasmal Pit ••, though the Sin-Eater must spend an extra point of plasm when unlocking the Manifestation.

Phantasmal Pit •••••: Some of the most powerful visions produced by the Phantasmal Pit strip away the delusion that one person's life matters. Buffeted by visions of how the world would be a better place if she had never been born, the victim understands that the world would actually be a better place without her. The Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm and his player rolls (Composure + Persuasion + activation successes) – target's Resolve. If successful, the Sin-Eater's player can inflict one point of damage to the victim's Presence or Manipulation per success rolled. The lost Attributes return as if the victim were healing lethal damage. On an exceptional success, she also loses one point from each ranked Social Merit she possesses (Allies, Contacts, Fame, Mentor, Retainer, and Status). These lost points return after a week.

The Primeval Pit

Skill: Animal Ken

Shadows in the firelight. Eyes glinting just beyond the mouth of the cave. Wind rushing through the leaves of ancient trees, back when the world was young. The Primeval Pit stirs those feelings in the hearts of men once more. Even someone who's lived in a city all his life understands the cold, dark loneliness that comes from being alone in a hostile world. The predators haven't gone away; they're just better at hiding.

At base, the Primal Pit sparks fear within its victim's heart. In an urban area, even a small town, the Pit works as normal. If the victim is surrounded by wilderness — no streetlights, buildings, or even cultivated fields — the Sin-Eater has an easier time unlocking the Manifestation. Her activation roll gains the 8-again quality.

Primeval Pit ••: Well-trod paths through the wilderness normally bow to the feet of man. Not so for a victim of the Primal Pit. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and her player rolls (Composure + Animal Ken + activation successes) – target's Stamina as an instant action. If her roll is successful, branches, roots, and undergrowth catch at the victim's legs and pull his feet out from under him. Reduce the victim's Speed by two for each success rolled. If this reduces his Speed to 0, he's immobilized. This penalty lasts for the duration of the Pit, or until the victim first steps onto a man-made surface, whichever comes first. On an exceptional success, the victim takes a point of bashing damage from the plants. Conversely, a dramatic failure increases the victim's Speed by the activation successes.

Primeval Pit ●●●: The geist can tweak the victim's sense of isolation. He knows that the only way to be safe from the dark is to find more people, to huddle together in the light and hope the darkness fades. The Sin-Eater can spend an extra point of plasm when activating the Pit. If she does, the victim must move towards the nearest group of 10 or more people. If there's nobody else around, he heads for somewhere that's likely to have people around — towards the nearest building or road. He must spend a point of Willpower in order to take any other action.

Primeval Pit ●●●●: Most people don't know what it feels like to be hunted. Those few who survive contact with feral creatures of the night — werewolves especially—have an inkling of that fear. The Sin-Eater can let loose a terrifying shriek that only a victim of the Primeval Pit can hear, tapping directly into the fear of being a prey animal once more. This costs 1 plasm, and the Sin-Eater's player rolls Presence + Animal Ken + activation successes contested by the victim's Resolve + Psyche. If the Sin-Eater succeeds, the victim has a hard time doing anything but running in fear. He suffers a penalty to all actions that don't involve running in abject terror equal to half of (10 – his Willpower), rounding any fractions up. If the victim's Willpower is less than 5, he blanks the events from his memory. An exceptional success on the roll turns the Sin-Eater's next Intimidation roll into a rote action, as others hear her howl.

Primeval Pit ●●●●●: Unlocking the final Manifestation of the Primeval Pit summons the ghost of a once-dead predator and gives it physical form so that it can hunt the victim down. The Sin-Eater must spend 3 plasm to summon the beast.

The undead predator takes the form of a carnivorous animal, though the created body is obviously dead — visible bones show through rotting flesh. The beast has the normal Traits for the beast of that chosen type. The Sin-Eater's player can "spend" his activation successes to raise one of the animal's Physical Attributes by one, increase its Size by one, or add one point of armor.

The beast does not suffer wound penalties, unconsciousness, or bleeding. The only way to stop it attacking is to fill its last Health box with aggravated damage. Worse, bullets only deal bashing damage to the animal, though the creature takes aggravated damage from fire. The animal operates under a simple set of instructions: it can only move towards its target, who must be a victim of the Primeval Pit, or towards another living being in the same direction. If there's a living creature within range, the creature can attempt to kill it, but it will only chase after its target.

The summoned beast lasts for the duration of the Primeval Pit. If the Sin-Eater spends a Willpower point when activating this power, the beast instead lasts until the next sunrise.



The Stigmata Pit

Skill: Occult

Blood is the river of life that flows to the ashen plain of death. The Stigmata Pit calls to the blood of its victim, altering its flow. The initial power of the Stigmata Pit calms the victim's blood; he doesn't get riled up and has a hard time bringing himself to do anything. Even when he manages to act, he's not quick about it. The activation successes apply as a direct penalty to both his Speed and Initiative, not his Composure.

Stigmata Pit ••: Using the blood as a tie to the dead, a Sin-Eater can weaken the boundary between living and dead around a victim of the Stigmata Pit. The Sin-Eater must shed some of the victim's blood to use this power — enough to deal a point of lethal damage. The Sin-Eater's player rolls (Composure + Occult + activation successes) – target's Composure. If successful, any ghost with an anchor within five yards of the target gains a bonus to all rolls to manifest equal to the successes rolled to activate this power, until the end of the scene. The victim doesn't count as a mortal witness for the purposes of working out cumulative manifestation penalties. See "Manifestations," **World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 210, for more information. On an exceptional success, a ghost that fails to manifest does not lose a point of Willpower, while a dramatic failure applies a -3 dice penalty to any ghost attempting to manifest.

Stigmata Pit •••: The lethargy of the Stigmata Pit spreads to the victim's mind as well. If the Sin-Eater spends a point of plasm when activating the Pit, the victim suffers the activation successes as a penalty to all Wits-based rolls in addition to Speed and Initiative.

Stigmata Pit ••••: The Sin-Eater can call ghosts to his victim. By spending an extra point of plasm when activating Stigmata Pit ••, any ghost within 20 yards of the victim can manifest as though it had an anchor. Any ghosts within a hundred yards know that there's something special about the target, and will probably head towards him.

Stigmata Pit •••••: Many Sin-Eaters focus on the ties between blood and the dead. Others focus on the blood pumping through the veins of the living. The Sin-Eater urges tainted plasm deep into her victim's heart, removing the body's ability to clot. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and her player rolls Composure + Occult + activation successes contested by the target's Stamina + Psyche. If successful, the victim's blood refuses to coagulate. Each attack made against the victim deals a point of bashing damage in addition to other effects. This damage manifests even if the attacker rolls no successes. If the victim fills his rightmost Health box, even with bashing damage, he suffers an additional point of bashing damage each minute as he bleeds to death internally. Any Medicine rolls made to heal the victim suffer a -3 penalty. Every time that a vampire would suffer bashing damage as a result of this power, he instead loses a point of Vitae as it leaks out of his system and pools under his skin.

On a dramatic failure, the Pit corrupts the plasm in the Sin-Eater's bloodstream, inflicting a -2 penalty to all rolls and removing his Defense until the end of his next turn. An exceptional success turns that pain on to the victim, who suffers double the normal wound penalties. Characters who don't normally suffer wound penalties instead suffer the normal penalties.

The Stillness Pit

Skill: Stealth

Insidiously, the Stillness Pit robs its victims of their own senses, overlaying the muted sensory impressions of the Underworld on the otherwise bright and vibrant world. She can identify things by smell, but it's like she's breathing through a scarf. Food and drink taste of little more than ash and filthy water. Sounds and colors have their vibrancy stolen, and touching anything's like grasping it through a ball of cotton wool. The basic power of the Stillness Pit affects the victim's Perception rolls, as well as his Composure.

Stillness Pit ••: The Sin-Eater can spend an extra point of plasm when manifesting the Pit in order to cloud her victim's senses further. All Perception rolls and rolls to react to surprise are reduced to a chance die for the duration of the Pit. The victim can't spend Willpower to increase his dice pool. This penalty applies to Skill-Based Perception as well as the standard Wits + Composure roll to notice things.

Stillness Pit •••: Lots of people go through life wanting other people to notice them. This ability kills the victim's voice and image, leaving him invisible and robbing him of the spotlight — or saving a victim of abuse from his attacker's sight. The Sin-Eater spends one point of plasm, and her player rolls Composure + Stealth + activation successes contested by the target's Resolve + Psyche, though if the target is willing the roll is uncontested. If the Sin-Eater succeeds, the victim is rendered invisible and inaudible to people in the physical world for the duration of the Pit. Any attempt to draw people's attention automatically fails. Anyone who can perceive ghosts in Twilight can still see the victim. On a dramatic failure, the victim becomes more noticeable, gaining a +1 bonus to all Presence rolls until the end of the scene.

Stillness Pit ••••: The Sin-Eater removes the one thing that most people take for granted: their ability to touch things. While barriers still bar her victim's progress, a Sin-Eater can leave him unable to pick up a pen or hold his wife. The Sin-Eater spends 2 plasm and her player rolls Composure + Stealth + activation successes contested by the victim's Stamina + Psyche. On a success, the victim can't pick up or hold anything until the end of the scene; he can lean on a wall or sit on a chair, but can't change his clothes or lift so much as a feather. He can spend a point of Willpower to hold an item for one turn. The victim can't be touched by physical objects in return, including fists and bullets. Any actions that involve touching or striking the victim automatically fail.

Stillness Pit •••••: Someone who falls foul of a master of the Stillness Pit walks through the world without anyone encountering him. Invisible and untouchable, all he can do is watch people walk by, trapped in his own personal hell.

This power costs 3 plasm and 1 Willpower and replaces the activation roll for the Stillness Pit with a contested roll of Composure + Stealth + Pit rating contested by the target's Resolve + Stamina + Psyche. If the Sin-Eater succeeds, she inflicts every power of the Stillness Pit in one outpouring of twisted plasm. For Stillness Pit ••• and ••••, the Sin-Eater is assumed to have rolled a success. The power so unlocked lasts until the next sunrise, rather than the end of the scene. On an exceptional success, the Sin-Eater regains the point of Willpower spent to activate the Pit, in addition to the normal effects of an exceptional success.

The Stygian Pit

Skill: Medicine

The Stygian Key channels the energy of the Underworld towards a ghost rather than a mortal, corrupting the ghost's Corpus with raw entropic plasm. The Sin-Eater can use the Stygian Pit against any ghost he's aware of within 10 yards per point of Psyche. The activation successes are applied as a penalty against rolls made with the ghost's Resistance, rather than its Composure. The ghost applies its Resistance to the activation roll in place of a physical being's Resolve or Composure.

A ghost must be in Twilight for the Stygian Pit to affect it. A Bound attempting this Manifestation on a ghost in the Underworld suffers one point of aggravated damage as the dark energies twist back upon him.

Stygian Pit ••: The Sin-Eater can drain the power from a ghost as his geist consuming its Corpus, drawing it back along the bond between the two and using it to channel the energies of the Underworld. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and her player rolls Composure + Medicine + activation successes versus the target's Finesse + Resistance as an extended and contested action, requiring successes equal to the ghost's Corpus and with each roll representing 30 seconds. If the Sin-Eater is successful, her geist consumes the ghost's Corpus, effectively eating the ghost. She can store one extra point of plasm for every two dots of Corpus (round fractions up). Effects that return all lost plasm also fill this unholy reserve.

At the end of the scene, the ghost's essence fades into the Underworld. She re-forms in the Autochthonous Depths with full Corpus and with no further negative effects from the Pit. She still has her anchors (if she had any to begin with), but must find an Avernian Gate in order to return to the physical world.

Stygian Pit •••: The Sin-Eater can project her geist into Twilight wearing the stolen Corpus of a ghost. A character can only use this Manifestation after having successfully used Stygian Pit ••, and can only take on the form of that ghost. The Sin-Eater spends 1 plasm and her player rolls Composure + Medicine + activation successes as an instant action. The geist manifests in Twilight, looking exactly like the affected ghost. It can act independently of the Sin-Eater, but uses his Attributes and Skills rather than gaining the ghost's Attributes. The geist can Manifest as normal in the presence of the ghost's

anchors, but cannot use any Numina that the ghost had. Accessing the memories of a ghost for specific information requires a reflexive Intelligence + Wits roll. The Sin-Eater and geist can act independently, but if both act on the same turn they each suffer a -2 modifier to any actions. The geist can remain in ghostly form for one turn per success, or until the end of the scene if the player rolls an exceptional success.

Stygian Pit ••••: Having stolen the form of a ghost, a Sin-Eater can wear that ghost's form. While some Sin-Eaters just use this power as a useful disguise, some less scrupulous Bound track down the ghost's living anchors. A character can only use this Manifestation after having successfully used Stygian Pit ••, and can only take on the form of that ghost. The Sin-Eater spends 3 plasm, and her player rolls Composure + Medicine + activation successes. If the Sin-Eater possesses the Stygian Caul at ••• or more, he gains a +2 bonus to her dice pool. If successful, the Sin-Eater takes on the outward appearance of the ghost, and can access specific memories by rolling Intelligence + Wits as a reflexive action. The Sin-Eater does not possess his victim's Numina, and must instead use Manifestations to replicate their effects. The Sin-Eater automatically knows the location and nature of each of the ghost's anchors as a reflexive action. The Sin-Eater can manifest the stolen ghost's form for five minutes per success, or until the end of the scene if the player rolls an exceptional success.

Anyone who knew the ghost when she was alive must make a Resolve + Composure roll. Failure indicates that she gains a temporary Derangement until the end of the scene.

Stygian Pit •••••: Mastery over the Stygian Pit allows a Sin-Eater to use all of the Pit's powers in the Underworld. Also, he can affect Kerberoi, psychopomps, and other things native to the lands of the dead as well as ghosts. He can't turn the Pit against beings normally resident in the living world, including humans, vampires, and Prometheans. Using the Pit against something that isn't a ghost costs an extra point of plasm.

Merits

Some live their whole lives touched by death, while others attain their affinity with the dead only after decades of study. This section outlines a range of new Merits for characters who are a greater sympathy with Underworld. As always, the prerequisites for these Merits must be met by a character's traits in human form, without using any supernatural powers: a werewolf can't shapeshift into a form with enhanced Dexterity in order to purchase a Merit that required it.

Unless specified in a Merit's description, all Merits in this section are available to any character in the **World of Darkness**, whether Sin-Eater, werewolf, normal human, or something else.

Friends Amongst the Dead

Some of the Social Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** bear some consideration, especially with the possibility of contacts among the dead, or a ghostly mentor looking out for a character. Rather than including new Merits to cover these situations, a little tweak to existing ones works just as well. This section focuses on Sin-Eaters, as they're the group most likely to possess such Merits, but similar considerations apply to any character.

Allies: The Allies Merit can apply to ghosts just as it can to humans. Allies (Local Ghosts) mostly applies to those ghosts that still have anchors, and thus aren't confined to the Underworld. That way, an ally among the dead can be of great use to a character — but bear in mind that even more than a living person, a dead ally *will* ask favors of the Sin-Eater in return, whether something's threatening his anchors or he's just lonely one evening. If only one member of the krewe possesses this Merit, the other characters might resent her for focusing too much on her ghostly accomplice, rather than doing what the krewe needs her to.

A character may even have allies among ghosts in the Autochthonous Depths, though more than one or two dots should require a damn good explanation. In that case, her allies won't show up as often — most Sin-Eaters don't spend a lot of time in the Underworld if they can help it — but when they do, the insider knowledge they provide can be the difference between life and death for the whole krewe.

In any case, Allies among the dead must mean something to the character. If a ghost hasn't moved on, why hasn't she helped him out if he means that much to her? Or is he the only thing left of her fiancé, and she can't bear to let him go again? In the Autochthonous Depths, a Sin-Eater has to pass through the same areas fairly regularly to stand a good chance of meeting the same ghost more than once. What did the ghost do for him that the Sin-Eater is willing to take such risks?

Contacts: Mundane Contacts can clue a Sin-Eater in to a lot of things, but Contacts among local ghosts gives him access to a grapevine that most people don't even know exists. Indeed, in some more remote areas, ghosts can be a vital part of the Twilight Network, and it's up to those Sin-Eaters who can get in touch with the Network to share what they learn. A network of Contacts among ghosts in the Autochthonous Depths is also possible, but that's a separate group to those still capable of entering the material world. A Sin-Eater who maintains a network in the Underworld has to pay out larger bribes to make up for his lack of contact. A brave, foolhardy, or powerful Sin-Eater might even spend so long in the Lower Mysteries that he could amass a network of Contacts among the ghosts of a particular Dead Dominion. To do so, he has to spend an awful lot of time in the Dominion building his network, so it probably isn't appropriate for a starting character.

Mentor: The person with a ghost watching over her like a guardian angel is a staple of fiction. Any character can have a ghostly mentor, just the same as a human mentor. A ghostly Mentor probably doesn't have the social influence of other patrons, but she makes up for that with centuries of experience, or being able to whisper just the right words at the right time. Plus, someone who watches over you who can actually be there to do just that — without anyone else noticing — is a serious upside.

Humans, along with vampires and other supernatural creatures, probably don't consider the extent of a ghostly mentor's machinations. In addition to hatching plans that can take decades or centuries to come to fruition, a ghost that acts as a mentor to people likely sees everyone it meets as little more than a pawn in its grand plan. Sin-Eaters know just how much trouble an old ghost can be, so it's rare that one shows a willingness to submit to a ghost's plans — certainly, a Sin-Eater needs a good explanation for a four- or five-dot mentor, above and beyond the explanation for a ghost that

MORE MERITS, MORE MERITS

Between this book and others, the range of Merits available to characters is broad enough that the seven points given at character creation can feel overly restrictive. Some groups may prefer to create characters who start with more Merits than the **World of Darkness Rulebook** recommends. The easiest way to do that is to increase the number of Merit dots available to starting characters: ten dots allow for a surprising amount of freedom compared to just seven. If the group is creating supernatural creatures, the Storyteller should place an upper limit on how much a character's key supernatural trait can be raised with Merit dots, unless he wants some characters tied close to the world and others who are eldritch powerhouses.

Alternatively, if the group believes that all its characters should be tied together by a common Merit, the Storyteller should just give it that Merit for free — otherwise, he's effectively cutting down on the number of Merit dots available. For groups where some players feel constrained by the amount of starting Merits while others find seven dots is just fine, the Advanced Characters optional rule on p. 35 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** may be the best option. Thirty-five experience points should give everyone enough of an edge while allowing characters to increase more than just Merits. As always, the Storyteller and the group should work together to decide what makes the game fun.

she hasn't helped move on. Ghosts who cannot travel to the physical world from the Underworld don't make good mentors at all.

Retainer: Human necromancers and those Sin-Eaters who take an interest in binding the dead may have a ghostly retainer, though it's not exactly common. Most ghosts are beings of habit and memory, and one who remains enough of a free agent to be a useful retainer — that is, she doesn't require constant instruction through Manifestations or magic — has little reason to wait hand and foot on a living person. Short of magical compulsion, a Sin-Eater needs a compelling reason to keep a ghost around as a companion or servant. Even if he can justify keeping her, she'll still have to argue her case to her krewes, and they probably won't be too happy at having a ghost hanging around. A few krewes might like the idea, and could try recruiting ghostly followers of their own — or abusing another Sin-Eater's retainer without her knowledge.

Mental Merits

Barrister (••••)

Prerequisite: Politics •••

Effect: The Lower Mysteries thrive on the Old Laws, and you're a natural at comprehending legal systems. While the Kerberoi who enforce them know when someone breaks the law, you've got a decent sense for just when you can push the very edges, obeying the letter of the law but not the spirit without drawing undue attention. Better, you know precisely when it's best to get the hell out of Dodge. Once you know all of the Old Laws that apply in a particular Dominion, you can work out ways to push the edges. You can only do this once in each Dead Dominion.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Politics - the number of Old Laws (max -5)

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character thinks he's found a loophole, but he's wrong. The first time he takes an action that isn't clearly allowed by the Old Laws, the Dominion's Kerberos knows precisely where he is.

Failure: The Old Laws are cast in stone, and your character can't think his way around them.

Success: Your character knows how and when to push his luck. You can take one action that would normally contravene the spirit but not the letter of the Old Laws without the Kerberos knowing; for example, you can't get around spilling blood on entering a Dominion that requires it, but unless the Law is very specific you don't need to spill your own blood.

Exceptional Success: Your character has a sudden flash of insight. You can pick two actions, rather than one.

Dead Reckoning (•)

Effect: Something about the Underworld resonates with the character's way of thinking. Maybe he's more at home around the dead than the living — common among pathologists, undertakers, and Indian mahar corpse handlers — or she feels a natural aptitude for life below ground, without the uncaring stars hanging over his head. In the caverns and tunnels of the Underworld, forever cut off from the living world, you've got a damn fine sense of direction. Your character gains the 8-again quality on all rolls to navigate the Underworld (see "Navigating Dark Passages," p. 99 of this book).

Drawback: Navigating without a roof over your head is just that little bit less reliable. Whenever you roll Survival to navigate above ground, do not re-roll 10s.

Mythologist (•••)

Prerequisite: Occult •• with a specialty in "Underworld Lore" or similar

Effect: Your character has studied the mythology of death in all manner of cultures. She knows the tales and the legends, and she's been to more than one site that inspired myths of the lands beyond death. While the Underworld takes impressions from the death-myths found in several cultures, it's not truly a product of any. Even so, the details your character can recall from mythology can sometimes come in very handy, offering a +3 bonus to dice rolls made to decipher the enigmas of the Underworld ("That looks like a doorway into Mictlan. If we're lucky, we might get some assistance navigating from Xolotl"). This cannot help with navigation, but it might offer a Social bonus on dealing with a Ferryman or a Kerberos, a Mental bonus on solving a riddle or a mystery related to the Underworld (such as the riddles put forth as a means to enter the Athenaeum on p. 172), or a Physical roll to help a character survive off the mythic "bounties" available in the Great Below.

Physical Merits

Beacon of Life (•••)

Prerequisite: Mortal (non-supernatural); Occult ••

Effect: Your character has a powerful attachment to living her life for as long as she can, and enough esoteric knowledge to instinctively ward off malevolent influences. To the eyes of the dead she shines like a beacon, burning with a light so bright that some ghosts have a harder time affecting him. Your character adds her Occult dots to her resistance roll against any Numina, as she subconsciously wards herself against the power of the Underworld. This extends to Manifestations unlocked by the Stygian Key.

Only mortal, mundane characters can possess this Merit. The pivotal moment of becoming — or being changed into — a supernatural creature eliminates it.

Available at character creation only.

Spelunker (• to •••••)

Prerequisite: Dexterity ••• and Athletics •••

Effect: Your character has spent a lot of time caving, pot-holing, and otherwise twisting his body through tight places, a skill-set that comes in damn handy in the twisting tunnels and tight caverns of the Underworld. Note that though this Merit is of a lot of use in the Underworld, it's just as applicable to cavers who haven't encountered the supernatural world in any way.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special athletic maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. So, your character can't have "Free Climb" until he has "Squeeze Through." The maneuvers and their effects are detailed below, most of which are based on the Athletics Skill.

Sure Footed (•): Your character has spent enough time underground to get a feel for caves, allowing him to act on instinct in enclosed spaces. When moving through tight spaces, your character can ignore penalties to his Speed due to hazardous terrain up to his rating in the Spelunking Merit. In addition, rolls to retain balance in an enclosed area gain the 9-again quality.

Cave Sense (••): Your character's been underground long enough that she can supplement her sight with the feel of air currents and pressure. This doesn't replace normal sight, but can come in handy as a backup to a flashlight. If the character operates with some source of light underground, she can ignore all penalties due to darkness if she has a moment to gather her senses. In combat, she doesn't

have that time but she's still at an advantage. Halve any penalties for acting in darkness.

Squeeze Through (•••): Your character can fit through very small openings without losing speed. He can squeeze through openings as though his Size were two lower than it actually is. **Drawback:** When scurrying through narrow tunnels, your character cannot move faster than half his Speed unless he takes a point of lethal damage.

Free Climb (••••): Assuming your character has even basic equipment, she can climb up almost any surface. She can't go faster than most people, but she can pick out natural handholds if she takes a moment, and thus is a lot less likely to fall.

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Wits + Athletics

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character thinks a hand-hold is stable right until it crumbles under her hand. Her next Strength + Athletics roll to climb the surface is reduced to a chance die.

Failure: Your character can't pick out any useful details of the rock in front of her.

Success: Your character identifies a number of useful hand-holds and alternate routes. She adds the number of successes on this roll as a bonus to her Strength + Athletics rolls (maximum +5) to climb the surface. She can make one climbing roll per dot in the Spelunking Merit before she loses this benefit.



Exceptional Success: Your character identifies a faster route than is immediately apparent. Her next Strength + Athletics roll covers 15 feet rather than 10.

Born to the Cave (•••••): Your character is so adapted to moving around in cramped spaces that people wonder if he wasn't born underground. He can see perfectly normally if there's even the slightest glimmer of light, and can climb rough cavern walls and narrow chimneys at his normal Speed without having to make a roll. If the surface is taxing enough that an Athletics roll to climb it would normally suffer a penalty, he has to roll as normal. If he's attacked when climbing underground, his unpredictable movement doubles his Defense. **Drawback:** Your character isn't best suited to life above ground, without walls on either side and a roof far above. She gains no benefit from any level of this Merit when she's not underground, and suffers a -1 penalty to Athletics rolls to climb in the open air.

Social Merits

Death-Touched (•• or ••••)

Prerequisite: Sin-Eater

Effect: Something has stained your character's soul. Perhaps her geist has always borne the inky stain of death upon its corpus. Maybe something about your character's death caused the stain, tainting her geist along with it. However she gained the mark, your character connects with ghosts on a level that few others will ever manage.

With the two-dot version of this Merit, your character gets a +1 modifier to all Presence or Manipulation rolls when dealing with ghosts in a non-confrontational manner. The four-dot version indicates that ghosts sometimes have a hard time remembering that you're not already dead; your character gains a +2 modifier.

This Merit normally only affects dealings with ghosts in the Underworld. Purchasing an extra dot in the Merit allows you to apply the modifier against all ghosts, wherever they may be.

Drawback: The more your character is touched by death, the more ghosts will treat her as one of their own. Ghosts actively seek her out, believing a physical body no barrier to communing with a kindred spirit. Your Other characters who can perceive ghosts will know that *something's* odd about your character from all the attention she's getting.

Medium (••• or •••••)

Prerequisite: Mortal (non-supernatural); Resolve ••

Effects: A medium is a character who can see and hear ghosts. As opposed to characters who possess a sixth sense in the presence of the unquiet dead, she can see the dead clearly — and may have a hard time telling them apart from the living. If she keeps her wits about her, she can turn her sight into a blessing. More often, mediums treat their ability as a curse.

A character with the three-dot version of this Merit is an unwilling medium. When she's under stress, she can see ghosts in Twilight. Precisely what counts as stress is up to the Storyteller, but taking an action that's reduced to a chance die, or having to spend a point of Willpower to hold off a negative condition both certainly count. She can see ghosts in Twilight for the remainder of the scene. She doesn't count as a mortal for the purposes of penalizing a ghost's attempt to manifest (see Manifestations on p. 210 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for more information). Your character might not even realize that someone else is a ghost, until he does something supernatural.

The five-dot version of this Merit offers more control over your character's ability. She's also closer to the Underworld; if she purchases the Unseen Sense Merit with regards to ghosts (**World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 109) it counts as a two-dot Merit.

A medium who undergoes a near-death experience — or who actually dies but is brought back — has a better than average chance of returning with a geist bound to her soul. Her connection to the Underworld is so strong that few geists can resist the chance.

Action: Instant

Dice Pool: Resolve + Occult

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character can see ghosts all right, and can until the end of the scene. She can't stop seeing them, and any ghost she can see is aware that she can see him. They gain a +1 modifier to any Numina that they use against her.

Failure: Despite focusing, she can't contact the dead.

Success: Your character can see and hear the dead until the end of the scene, or until she chooses to end her vision. She doesn't count as a mortal for the purposes of penalizing a ghost's attempt to manifest, and can negate the manifestation penalties of a number of people up to her Resolve by reflexively spending a point of Willpower.

Exceptional Success: Your character can pick out a specific ghost from all those around, and "tune out" all others, only dealing with the ghost of her choice.

Only mortal, mundane characters can possess this Merit. The pivotal moment of becoming — or being changed into — a being with supernatural powers eliminates it.

Stranger Things Besides

Not everything touched by the Underworld is so easy to categorize. Deathly energies can twist anything. For all that the world's occultists and supernatural experts know each object is unique. Nobody creates one of these items; it just appears one day — along with the certain knowledge of how to unlock its strange power. For this reason, the following items must be acquired during the course of a story rather than being bought with Merit dots.

The Key

Keys, chains, locks — these are all images that go hand in hand with death. A number of rituals exist that create Skeleton Keys, items which allow the bearer to unlock any door, just as death can bypass all barriers. Other creatures can empower specific keys that unlock conceptual barriers — a Touchstone that unlocks the Gauntlet between the worlds of flesh and spirit, or the Keys a Sin-Eater uses to manifest his geist. This specific key, referred to in some texts as the “Key to Sedlec” or the “Under Key” but mostly known only as “the Key,” can unlock a person’s perceptions.

The Key is an old iron key about four inches long. One end is looped, with three links of a chain hanging off it. The odd design of the blade end actively fights attempts to focus on it, even when studying photographs rather than the key itself. Just visible along the shaft is the Latin word “VIDEO.” To make use of the Key, its user simply inserts it into her left eye and turns it counterclockwise. While it’s lodged in her eye, it unlocks an intimate comprehension of ghosts, to a point where she can command the dead. To relinquish the Key, she has to twist it back around before withdrawing. If she doesn’t — or if someone tries taking it by force — pulling it out also pulls out her eyeball.

Lots of people know about the Key. The FBI’s Vanguard serial killer task force has records of Darren Jacob, the Keyhole Killer. He was a madman who drilled a hole through each of his victim’s *ajna chakras*, the “third eye” in front of the pineal gland, and inserted the key into their brain. He murdered six people in July, 1998, and later claimed under interrogation that he could “open their minds to the real nature of life and death.” The Keyhole Killer is currently on Death Row in Pennsylvania after a jury dismissed his plea of not guilty by reason of insanity.

Some packs of werewolves know about the Key. Uratha of the Bone Shadows, especially the Lodge of Death, will happily kill to find and use it. The Lodge of Scrolls would rather study it from afar, having seen the effects it can have on humans. One pack in Laos had members from each Lodge. Upon discovering that one of their Wolf-Blooded contacts had found the Key, the pack fell at each other’s throats. Only two members survived, and by the time the pack had buried its dead, the Wolf-Blooded — and the Key — was nowhere to be found.

Several magical conspiracies want to get their hands on the Key. The Mysterium believe that it’s related to the Supernal Realm of Stygia. Some Moros mages go further, claiming that The Key is a fragment chipped off the Watchtower of the Lead Coin itself. Others point to its ability to alter minds, even those of ghosts, to link it with Pandemonium — but wherever it comes from, they want to find it. Likewise, the Guardians of the Veil would dearly love to track the Key down to keep it out of the hands of anyone else, but it always slips through their fingers. A shadowy conspiracy known as the Aegis Kai Doru wants the Key for similar reasons — and face similar problems.

Activating the Key

A character wanting to use the Key must insert it into her left eye at the same time as she spends a point of Willpower. Inserting the Key and turning it halfway deals a point of lethal damage that does not heal while it remains inside her eye.

The character can attempt to remove the Key herself without twisting it back to neutral. She has to spend a point of Willpower and suffers two points of lethal damage — and loses vision in one eye — as the Key removes her eyeball. Someone else can grab it in combat, requiring a called shot to the eyes. If her opponent succeeds, he tears the Key from her eye, dealing two extra points of lethal damage and destroying her eye.

While the Key is in her eye, the character can perceive ghosts that are in a state of Twilight, though not other Twilight beings like spirits. She also sees the web of connections, longing, and needs that allows each ghost to remain in the living world. She can command ghosts, and they are powerless to resist.

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Intimidation versus ghost’s Resistance

Action: Contested; resistance is reflexive

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ghost ignores the character’s command. She cannot attempt to use this ability on the same ghost again until the end of the scene.

Failure: The ghost need not obey the character’s command.

Success: The ghost does whatever the character tells her to, as long as it isn’t actively self-destructive.

Exceptional Success: The character gains a +1 bonus on her next Intimidation roll made against any ghost.

Whether there’s any benefit to other uses of the Key — such as inserting it into the brain through the *ajna chakra* like the Keyhole Killer — is left up to the Storyteller. His diary, currently in the Vanguard evidence locker, indicates that he believes using the Key like he did placed the ghosts of his victims under his permanent command. Nobody else has reported hearing of the Key being used in a similar situation. If the diary is true, the killer would have to sacrifice a point of permanent Willpower, but the ghost would remain under his command until he died or it was banished to the Underworld.

The Photographs

Photographs can make the dead live again in the minds of those who see them. A picture of a man lying dead on a morgue slab stirs a whole different memory in his friends and family to a photograph taken a day earlier of him sat in his favorite bar with a beer in hand and a smile on his face. Photographs — especially instant photographs, long since superseded by cellphone cameras — capture the spirit of a moment. That’s especially true with this set of five Polaroid photographs, wrapped in an old black bandanna. Everyone

who encounters them comes away changed. Different groups and conspiracies know them by different names, but to the world at large they're just the Photographs.

Each one of the Photographs is a Polaroid photograph, slightly faded and at least 30 years old. Initially, each shows a fairly unremarkable scene featuring a young boy — looking to be no more than seven years old — at play. He's wearing a red T-shirt and blue jeans. What looks at a glance to be some sort of title written on the bottom in dark red pen is, on closer study, a group of symbols that don't appear in any known alphabet written in old blood. Anyone holding a complete set of the Photographs can use them to see the future. He writes the full name of someone he knows on the back of one photo in a mixture of blue ink and tears. He must then bundle all the photographs up, wrapping them inside the bandanna, and leave them somewhere where no sunlight can touch them for 24 hours. If he takes them out before then, the pictures show him visions of his own death, and his ongoing life as a ghost. If he leaves them for the full 24 hours, the photographs show the future of the person specified: five snapshots from her life that illustrate the events leading up to her death.

Occultists among the undead are fascinated by the Photographs — not only can one discover the eventual fate of a rival or enemy, the Photographs show his death in some detail. Beyond that thirst for knowledge, some vampires among the Circle of the Crone focus on the child in the red T-shirt. Who was he, and what happened to tie photographs of him to the Underworld? A whispered rumor hints that a Milanese occultist known only as the Lucifuge knows who he was, but she isn't saying.

Some changelings know of the Photographs. One, a member of the Bishopric of Blackbirds, spent five months using them to divine how other changelings would die and using his considerable influence to change that outcome. He never wrote his own name, and so was entirely unprepared when his Fetch came for him. Claims that his Fetch wore a red T-shirt and blue jeans when it came for him remain unsubstantiated for now.

Only one Promethean, a Frankenstein following the Refinement of Lead, has ever had the chance to use the Photographs. Rather than focusing on someone else, she believed that discovering the nature of her death would be part of her Pilgrimage. The first four showed the deaths of each body that donated a part to her new form. The last one displayed her own death, but she took heart: rather than a patchwork creature, she was a living person in the Photograph. She has not yet gained mortality, but seeing her eventual fate has given her a measure of fatalistic hope.

Activating the Photographs

A character wanting to use the Photographs must spend a point of Willpower when she writes her target's full name — known to mages as a True Name — on the back of one photograph. The name must be that of a living person who the character has already met. Using the Photographs requires no other actions or expenditure; it's enough that they're wrapped in the bandanna and left in a dark place.

If she takes them out too early, she will see her death, and her eventual fate beyond — and it's never a nice fate. Maybe she'll end up slave to a sadistic Kerberos, or a thrall to a Sin-Eater, or maybe she'll never enter the Underworld in favor of eternal torment. Whatever the case, she loses two Willpower points and suffers from a severe bout of depression (as the Melancholia derangement) until the end of the story, if not longer.

Otherwise, she sees five iconic images that show the time leading to her subject's death. Even after she loses the Photographs, the images linger in her mind. The Storyteller should let her know when something she saw in the Photographs is coming true. She gains a +2 bonus to any roll where her foreknowledge would benefit her taking action to save — or damn — her target.



those first few seconds past the door
were what many of them hated the most:
crawling along through pitch blackness,
hands sliding along slime-slick walls.
if you were lucky, it was just stone.
sometimes it was a vast wall of bones,
warped and cracked by some ancient conflagration
so they wove together like a reed basket.
one time he swore the tunnel
was made of unbreathing human hearts.

eyes screwed shut (not that it made any difference,
but somehow it seemed psychologically empowering),
many inched his way through the darkness
that seemed to be not so much
an absence of light as a presence of blackness,
carefully testing for pitfalls.
the ground underfoot was slippery
with what felt like liquefied flesh,

and the last thing he needed
was a broken ankle down here.
a part of him found it perversely amusing that he
now had enough experience
to recognize liquefied flesh:
slippery from blood-slippery or slime-
slippery or god knew what else,
but a larger part of him
just wanted to be done with this trip.

a subtle change in the quality of the still,
stagnant air told many he was through,
and he opened his eyes, blinking to acclimate
himself to the dim light of phosphorescent fungi
- and immediately he wished he hadn't.
the tunnel opened directly onto a tall,
sheer cliff overlooking a vast cavern
so large that the walls and ceiling
were lost in shadow; one more step
and he would have plummeted to the bottom
of the rock face at least 30 feet below.
sprawled across the cavern's floor
was the enormous figure of a man
carved out of the stone, 50 feet tall,
his body twisted and bent in a death pious.

this wasn't good. many knew this place -
corpse-town, the locals called it,
and they avoided it like the plague.
word on the network was sin-eaters who went
through corpse-town never came out again.

the specters down below hadn't seen him yet;
if the gate was still open, he had a chance.
many prayed a silent prayer and began to inch
away from the ledge. as one, every ghost in corpse-town lifted its gaze,
transfixing many as though he had
shouted the old father into a bullhorn.
one of the shades raised an accusatory finger,
and from a hundred dead throats, the citizens of corpse-town began to scream.

Chapter Four: The Autochthonous Depths

Lower than the low places, beyond the Avernian Gates but before the dread rivers lie the Autochthonous Depths. Brushing up against the land of the living at odd, non-Euclidean angles, the Depths are where most still-living (or mostly living) beings conduct their business in the Great Below. Sin-Eaters are here, to be sure, but necromancers plumb the Depths for lost occult lore or hidden paths to realms of death more pure and esoteric. Werewolves seek the bans of dread spirits born long ago when the world was young. Changelings extract oaths of service from the dead and hope that perhaps their Keepers cannot find them in this cold and lifeless place (they're wrong). Even hapless mortals, be they hunters of the things that lurk in the shadows or luckless innocents, can find their way here.

And then of course, you have the dead. Banished to this cold and lightless place by the loss of their anchors, the shades of the Autochthonous Depths are sometimes helpful, sometimes hateful — but all want something from those who still walk in the sunlight.

Culture Bleed

The Autochthonous Depths have an unusual relationship with the land of the living. Where the Dead Dominions are bizarre, sometimes alien realms ruled over by deathlords and Kerberoi, the Depths hover closer to the world of mortals; echoes of religion, of culture (specifically “death culture”) and sometimes even geography can be found throughout the realm. Debate still rages over whether the Underworld reflects the living world or the living world has glimpsed the Underworld and molded its own culture accordingly. Not surprisingly, evidence can be found suggesting either possibility. Or both. Or neither.

Besides being closest to the living world in terms of iconography and construction, the Depths are also closer metaphysically: not only do most Avernian Gates open into its caverns, the metaphysical “gravity” of death is

TWO BRIEF NOTES

First: Throughout this chapter, “the living,” that is, corporeal beings who dwell in the mortal world, are contrasted with “the dead,” ghosts trapped in the Underworld. For the sake of brevity, “the living” refers to *all* characters who dwell in the land of the living, even those who are, technically speaking, not alive (like vampires and other corporeal undead).

Second: You'll note that we sometimes use the “Upper Reaches” as a secondary name for the Autochthonous Depths, or sometimes just, “the Reaches.”

Thy throne is fix'd in
Hade's dismal plains,
distant, unknown to rest,
where darkness reigns;
Where, destitute of breath,
pale spectres dwell, in
endless, dire, inexorable hell.

—Orphic Hymn to Pluto,
translated by
Thomas Taylor

at its weakest here. It takes a while for the Underworld to really lay hold of a ghost in the Autochthonous Depths and pull it inexorably deeper into the Great Below. In other words, most of the shades found eking out an existence in the Reaches are, at most, a couple of centuries old. Every once in a while, an ancient shade finds a way, through sacrifice or sorcery or sheer, mad willpower, to cling to the Depths and resist the call of the Deep Dominions, but those are rare enough to be legendary figures.

This hodgepodge of metaphysical similarity and comparatively “young” ghosts gives the Autochthonous Depths a kind of familiarity that is, if not precisely comforting, at least better than the mind-bending nature of the deeper reaches. Most occultists who interact with the Underworld in some fashion are only familiar with this region of the Underworld; in fact, outside of Sin-Eaters and the most powerful of necromancers, not many people know that the Underworld is more than what can be found in the Upper Reaches. To journey to the Underworld at all is a rare and remarkable feat; to travel beyond the hellish rivers to realms where dead god-kings reign and whole cities are carved out of bone and basalt is unthinkable.

Deus ex Mortis

What happens after we die has always been a chief concern of earthly religion. Whether it's eternal salvation, damnation, reincarnation, or perfect oneness with all of creation, human beings have always questioned what lies beyond. While they aren't precisely the definitive answer to that question, the Upper Reaches seems to have informed human belief throughout much of history. It is, perhaps, telling that many of the oldest recorded ideas of an afterlife (the Greek Hades, Hebrew Sheol, and Sumerian Irkalla, for example) depict a gray and hopeless realm deep underground where the dead wait interminably for... something. Even those ancient faiths that offered some hope of eventual paradise (such as the Aztec journey to Mictlan or the Egyptian paradise of Aaru) depict it as the culmination of a long and arduous journey. The idea that all good souls, or at least, all good souls of a particular faith, are destined to ascend to eternal paradise is a comparatively recent one.

Foundations, Not Reflections

Were those early faiths shaped by shamanic visions of the Underworld, or by ancient sorcerer-priests stumbling upon Avernian Gates at the dawn of time? Perhaps. Some suggest that the Autochthonous Depths are psychoactive, and that they echo the religious elements living humans associate with the Underworld, but this theory fails to explain why, for example, the Upper Reaches below Baghdad still echo Irkalla, despite the fact that the region has been Islamic for well over a thousand years and had not been Sumerian for three thousand years before that. If human belief shaped the Underworld, surely the Depths of Europe and the Middle East would be almost universally Abrahamic in tone, and similar cultural blocs would display similar religious symbolism around the world.

This correlation isn't perfect, nor is it absolute: human religions are not based on accurate and detailed understandings of the Underworld, but on fragmented glimpses endlessly interpreted and passed down through the generations. Common elements are interpreted differently by different cultures, and what one society considers an element of vital import might be little more than background noise to another. A Norse shaman encounters ghosts who died of sickness and old age, and when he awakens he tells his brethren that only those who die heroically in battle will pass on to Valhalla. In Palenque, a priest lying near-death in the grip of a deathly fever finds himself on the banks of the River of Scorpions, and when he returns to the world of the living he brings with him the “truth” of what lies beyond this world.

The shaman does not travel far enough to see the River of Scorpions, and the priest does not assume that the absence of ghosts of a particular Threshold means that some of the dead journey elsewhere. Even if both men had visited the same “geographical” region of the Upper Reaches (which is entirely possible; the Underworld's geography does not correlate to the mortal world's), their differing experiences and assumptions create vastly different images of the Underworld.

Navigating Dark Passages

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival

Action: Instant or extended (if extended, assume that each roll is equal to a half-hour worth of wandering, with a target number set by the Storyteller based on the difficulty of the journey; see below for more information)

Most of the passageways through the Underworld are not linear — it is a tangle of branching walkways and tunnels, of old crumbling stairways and ladders forged of lead and bone. Some passages are dark, unlit but for the occasional pocket of glowing fungus or for a lost wandering specter (as ghosts often give off a faint luminescence here in the Great Below). Other passages are well-lit, featuring skulls whose eye sockets glow with candle-flame or searing coals, a crooked procession of lanterns, or even buzzing neon. Traversing these passages is not easy. It's possible to get turned around or even entirely lost, and losing one's way in a subterranean netherworld full of hungry ghosts has obvious consequences. Moreover, feeling one's way through pitch darkness can have a psychological effect, too. A Storyteller may ask for a Resolve + Composure roll at some point to see if the character can continue on. Those with phobias against night or darkness are especially vulnerable.

This roll can be instant or extended depending on its purpose. If the character is looking for something relatively close to the Avernian Gate or is traveling a path she has already traveled in the past, an instant roll is all that's required. Alternately, protracted journeys may necessitate an extended roll. A large collection of successes may be necessary, depending on exactly how “deep” the character needs to go. If the journey is still within the Autochthonous Depths, it's likely that the successes necessary is between five and fifteen, but assume that each river that needs to be crossed (see “Rivers,” p. 102) adds a minimum of five successes to the total. The deeper one goes, the more rivers one must cross, which means all the



more successes end up being required. Storytellers, remember that extended rolls don't just need to be a dull dice-rolling exercise. Each roll can be punctuated by encounters with ghosts, character drama, or other events that bring suspense to the action. If the character fails two rolls in a row, assume that the character is now lost in the Underworld.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character stumbles across some manner of Underworld hazard: a hungry specter on the hunt for plasm, a misstep that leads to a twisted or broken ankle, the character succumbs to intense fear, and so forth. This hazard causes one hour's worth of lost time in addition to any other effects the Storyteller deems appropriate.

Failure: The character fails to accumulate successes. Two failures in a row means the character is now lost.

Success: The character accumulates successes. Once the target number is achieved, the character reaches his intended destination within the Underworld. This doesn't necessarily mean the character finds what he's looking for, but it at least gets him to his destination.

Exceptional Success: The character gains an intuitive understanding of the Underworld. Her next roll made to navigate the dark passages gains +2 dice.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	Passage is well-lit
+2	Character possesses the Direction Sense Merit
+1 to +3	Character is using a map
-1 to -3	Character suffers distractions (penalty based on severity)
-3	Passage is utterly dark

Corporeal Eschatology

Catacombs. Winding, lightless tunnels guarded by fierce beasts. Rivers and gates. These are the elements mortal religion commonly ascribes to its underworlds, and small wonder, given their prevalence in the Great Below itself. The Rivers of the Underworld are described in **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, on p. 268, but the Autochthonous Depths are more than just caves and rivers. The following can serve as "set pieces" for scenes in the Underworld, as obstacles explorers must overcome, and story hooks around which entire plots can be built.

Gates

You come across it in a narrow, cramped tunnel sloping inexorably downward: a massive gate of rusted metal barbs, lashed together with bone and sinew. It looks as though it could fall apart at any moment, but even the strongest effort cannot budge it a single inch. A single metal hook, crusted with gore and plasm, projects from the center of the gate.

According to Sumerian mythology, when the goddess Ishtar descended into the Underworld, she had to pass through seven gates (see this passage on p. 19 in Chapter One). At each gate, she had to sacrifice an article of clothing until, when she came at last to the throne room of Ereshkigal the queen of the Underworld, she was naked. The myths are partially right. The gates exist, blocking passageways in the Depths, preventing passage to the Lower Mysteries in much the same manner as the rivers. Unlike the rivers, though, to pass through a gate requires not raw necrotic power or the aid of a Ferryman. Passing through a gate requires *sacrifice*, and that sacrifice is harsher than the loss of mere garments.

The nature of the sacrifice is always the same: he who wishes to pass must remove one of his own limbs (hands, arms, feet, legs; offering one's head is not considered wise) or internal organs and make of it an "offering." This offering might be presented in various ways: one gate has a rusted metal hook upon which the limb must be impaled, another is guarded by a savage, dog-like creature that tears the proffered limb off (such guardians are not real creatures per se, they are merely part of the gate itself). Still another simply melts flesh and bone away with no discernible cause. The price is high, and yet thanks to the peculiar laws of the Underworld, not so high as to be unpayable.

Sacrificing a limb or an organ, regardless of how much damage such a loss would usually inflict, causes only a single point of lethal damage. This damage cannot be negated, reduced, or healed by any means. While the character remains in the Underworld, the lost limb is "replaced" by one made of plasm; in effect, the character's own ghost partially manifests around the missing flesh. (When a Sin-Eater

performs this sacrifice, her limbs are "replaced" by those of her geist.) The wound is painful, but not debilitatingly so, and the character suffers none of the attendant blood loss or catastrophic organ failure one would associate with such a loss. Once the sacrifice is made, the gate opens and remains open for one minute.

Crossing through a gate has the same effect as crossing a river: it leads the character deeper into the Underworld, out of the Autochthonous Depths and into the Lower Mysteries. The key difference is that the Psyche requirement for crossing rivers (see **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, p. 269) does not apply. That means that, barring negotiating with a dread boatman for passage across the river, passing through the gates is the only way to proceed into the Lower Mysteries for Sin-Eaters with low Psyche (or other characters who lack that Trait altogether).

Crossing *back* through a gate (i.e. heading from the Lower Mysteries back toward the Upper Reaches) is a simpler matter — provided the character left a sacrifice at that gate on the way down. The sacrificing character simply retrieves his own limb (removing it from the hook, wrenching it from the hound's maw, etc.) and places it back on his body. The limb reattaches, and the lethal wound received from the sacrifice downgrades to bashing. As before, the gate remains open for one minute. It is possible for another traveler to happen upon a sacrifice and steal it, thereby stranding its owner in the Underworld. Removing a sacrifice not your own requires a Resolve + Psyche roll (supernatural beings with a Supernatural Advantage other than Psyche do *not* add that Trait to the roll). Powerful death-related magic can also wrest a sacrifice from the gate if the power deals with manipulating souls (for example, the Death •• "Soul Jar" spell).

STORY HOOKS: CRASH THE GATES

- Fun fact: while a gate is open, anyone can pass through it in either direction. That includes ghosts who, lacking a Psyche Trait, cannot cross the rivers once they've been pulled into the Lower Mysteries. It also includes things from the depths of the Great Below — things that should never be allowed to return to the world of men. Such things often crouch on the far side of the gates, waiting for unsuspecting travelers to come through. Sometimes they offer promises of wealth and power in exchange for passage, sometimes they slip past undetected, and sometimes they attack. One gate at a time, they make their way closer and closer to the land of the quick.
- Some Underworld explorers say the gates don't always lead to the same place. They say the gate opens somewhere deeper in the Underworld, but *how much* deeper depends on what you sacrifice. A hand maybe gets you just across the border to the Lower Mysteries. An entire arm takes you into one of the deeper Dead Dominions. And a heart... well, a heart, they say, can take you to the threshold of the deathlords' palaces. The problem is finding your way *back*.
- Opening a gate requires a sacrifice of blood. Not plasm, not ghostly *ichor*, but actual, honest-to-god *blood*. Leaving chunks of yourself hanging on hooks in the land of the dead is a risky enough proposition even by itself, even before the possibility of someone stealing your sacrifice to gain a sympathetic connection to you. To mitigate this risk, some mages employ "canary keys." Sleepers — usually street children who won't be missed, magically conditioned for obedience — brought into the Great Below to open gates without risk to their "owners."

If the character has *not* sacrificed at this particular gate, or if his sacrifice was stolen, it cannot be opened from the deeper side. An alternate path must be found, or else someone on the opposite side must be coerced into sacrificing one of his own limbs. Gates always open from the “shallower” side (i.e. the side closest to the Autochthonous Depths).

As long as the character takes the same path out of the Depths that he took going in, he should end up reattached to all his limbs and come out with little more than livid deathmarks around his limbs. Sometimes, though, the original path isn’t an option: maybe the character got lost in the Lower Mysteries, or had to flee from a wrathful Kerberos, or the like. Should a character leave the Underworld *without* retrieving a sacrificed limb, the full trauma of the injury immediately comes crashing down on him. Losing a limb inflicts five points of lethal damage (cumulative per limb; a character who sacrificed his entire right arm suffers ten points of lethal damage; five for the hand and five for the rest of the arm) and causes the character to begin bleeding as though his Health track was filled with lethal damage. A lost organ is usually fatal. This damage, unlike the initial sacrifice damage, can be resisted and healed if the character is able.

Use of the gates has one upside: as long as the character remains in the Underworld, he gains a +1 bonus on rolls to activate supernatural powers related to death (such as Manifestations, Disciplines, or Death spells) per limb sacrificed.

Rivers

The Rivers of the Underworld, as attested in many ancient religions, are places of transition, demarcating the borders between regions of the Underworld. Countless rivers run through the Great Below, and attempts to map their flows are difficult at best — they appear to either exist

in many places at once, or to be so vast as to reach every part of the Underworld. Drinking from these strange and ill-fated waterways can bring miraculous effects — or it can be as deadly as drinking poison. (Sometimes both!)

Like with gates, the rivers serve as the boundaries of the Autochthonous Depths: once a traveler crosses one of them, he has passed out of the Upper Reaches and into the Lower Mysteries. Crossing further rivers always leads deeper into the Mysteries; it’s a curious fact of the geography of the Underworld that one generally crosses the same rivers going *out* as one crossed going *in*, even if one takes a different route.

Crossing the Rivers unaided is difficult for Sin-Eaters and nigh-impossible for anyone else: only those with the Psyche Trait can cross a river under their own power. Even then, the process is difficult: in order to cross the first river he comes to (i.e. to leave the Autochthonous Depths), a traveler must have a Psyche of at least 1. Each river after the first requires one *additional* point of Psyche. (Crossing the same river in opposite directions does not increase the Psyche requirement.) This crossing “on foot” can manifest in a number of ways, depending on the Sin-Eater and his attendant geist: a deeply religious Sin-Eater might part the waters like Moses parting the Red Sea, while another simply floats a foot above the surface or constructs a bridge out of ambient plasm; in any case, the crossing works for that individual only: the waters rush in behind him, the bridge fades into nonexistence as he passes, etc.

Boatmen, like Charon out of Greek myth, wait at most river crossings and are more than willing to ferry passengers across — for a price. Some still ask for the traditional two coins (which must have been buried with someone; pocket change won’t serve), while others demand mementos, favors, or other, more esoteric payments. For example boatmen, see **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** p. 277.

PLAYING THE PSYCHOPOMP

Sin-Eaters can serve as guides across the rivers, leading those less-capable than themselves across. In order to serve as a Ferryman, the Sin-Eater must spend one point of plasm per point of difference between his passenger’s Psyche and the Psyche requirement of the river. If the passenger does not have a Psyche score at all (e.g. an ordinary mortal or a ghost), the Sin-Eater must also pay 1 Willpower. The Sin-Eater must remain in physical contact with the passenger for the duration of the crossing, or else the passenger falls into the river and is borne away by the swift currents, only to wash up somewhere else in the Great Below.

Furthermore, this cost must be paid for *each* river crossing in *either* direction, even to re-cross a river on the way back to the land of the living.

Example: *Manny Ofrenda and his krewa have been paid by a sorcerer to find the shade of a long-dead wizard who possesses valuable secrets. The group consists of Manny, Ella, Cassie, and their sorcerer client. They’ve crossed three rivers already when they come to the banks of the Cocytus. None of them wants to risk being in debt to a boatman, so Cassie, whose Psyche is 6, will guide the others across. Manny has a Psyche of four, so he crosses just fine on his own (he’ll need a guide at the next crossing, though). Ella’s Psyche is only two, and the mage doesn’t have a Psyche Trait, so Cassie must spend two plasm to help Ella across and four plasm plus one Willpower to bring the sorcerer over. She’d better be sure to replenish her Willpower and her plasm soon; if she can’t pay the cost to bring Ella and the mage back across, they’ll be left behind.*

No one has ever counted an exact tally of the Underworld's rivers — indeed, it may be a futile effort, as there might well be an infinite number of them. Some Underworld explorers count certain waterways as distinct rivers, while others name those same streams as tributaries of greater rivers. Following are some examples of Underworld rivers; additional ones may be found in **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** on p. 269.

- **The River of Amber (Eriadnos):** According to myth, when Phaeton, the son of Helios the sun-god, tried to drive his father's chariot, he lost control of the vehicle and had to be struck down by Zeus' thunderbolts lest he burn the world to ash. Mortally wounded, he fell into this river to die, and the force of the impact diverted the river into the Underworld. The river flows thick and golden, like a river of tree sap (said to be the tears of Phaeton's sisters, who were turned into trees in their grief). Drinking from the river blesses a character with the glory and majesty of the sun god: he receives a +2 bonus on all Social rolls made to awe, impress, or seduce that lasts for 12 hours. However, for the same duration, his Vice is replaced with Pride, and whenever he has an opportunity to indulge that Vice, he must succeed on a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll if he wishes to resist the urge.

- **The River of Fate (Urdarbrunnr):** According to legend, this river originates beneath the roots of the World-Tree, and around it gather the norns (those Norse governesses of fate) to shape the lives of men. Its waters flow cold, swift, and pure — when coming to its banks, many travelers believe it to be merely a dry riverbed, so clear and silent are the waters. Drinking from the icy waters gives one a blinding flash of insight into two future moments of their destiny: one of great victory, and another of great defeat. The drinker may treat one successful action made within twelve hours after drinking from the river as a rote action, allowing him to reroll any failed dice. However, at the Storyteller's discretion, one failed action made within that same time period is automatically treated as a dramatic failure.

- **The River of Ice (Hvergelmir):** Said to be the source of all cold rivers in the world, this river flows from somewhere deep in the heart of the Underworld where, some say, the end of all things awaits. The waters of the river are sluggish and thickly-packed with ice flows the size of large cars. Reaching the liquid portion of the river without getting your limbs crushed is difficult, but a chunk of ice can be broken off a floe and sucked on like a hard candy. The ice lasts far longer in the mouth than ice should, about eight hours. As long as the character keeps the ice in his mouth, he is immune to the ill effects of cold weather and downgrades



any lethal cold damage (as from a magic spell, for example) to bashing. In addition, he does not show up on thermal-imaging devices.

- **The River of Gold (Pishon):** In many cultures, the god of the Underworld is also the god of material wealth and the treasures of the earth. This river is perhaps emblematic of that: although it is not actually a river of molten gold as it appears, its waters have a lustrous, golden sheen to them, and occasional glimpses of the bottom seem to reveal ancient treasures scattered across the riverbed. A character who drinks from the river immediately receives the Resources Merit at three dots, or adds three dots to those he already possesses (maximum 5). These resources might come in the form of a sudden upswing in a stock portfolio, an unexpected inheritance, or the like — but the cause is always related to someone's death. Three months after drinking from the river, the character loses *four* dots of Resources (if this would take him below zero, he goes badly into debt and acquires the Flaw: Destitute).

- **The River of Life (Anahita):** This river is exceptionally elusive, and many believe it to be the domain of myth. According to one legend, it is the last river that still flows from the heavens down into the sullied, sinful world. Where it passes through the Underworld, it purifies the realm of the dead: within sight of its banks, ghosts are calm and rational as they were in life, and the addictive indulgence of Vice (see p. 124) is suppressed. Supposedly, drinking from the Anahita can instantly cure all wounds a living being is suffering, or even return one of the dead to true life. However, the legend *also* says that the waters of the Anahita are finite, and that with every drink the waters recede a little more. When the purifying river runs dry, they say, the corruption of this fallen world will consume it, and all will collapse into the Great Below.

Tableaux

Sisyphus eternally pushing his boulder. The throne room of the Lords of Xibalba. The hellish torments of a Hieronymus Bosch painting. The Underworld is more than just endless tunnels, rivers, and gates populated by wandering specters. Tucked away within its winding tunnels and labyrinthine catacombs, one sometimes comes across a grisly tableau, a scene of death and futility that can be at once shocking and if the wisdom of the Great Below is heeded, strangely uplifting.

A tableau is defined by three things: its participants, its repetition, and its imagery. While many strange sights and stranger beings lurk in the Underworld, tableaux always share these three things:

- **Participants:** A tableau is never an empty scene, a still-life horror show for the viewer to come upon. The dead must be a part of it; it is, in essence, a passion play for the unquiet dead. A grisly, blood-soaked inquisitorial dungeon by itself is not a tableau (although such sights exist in the Underworld and are certainly shocking in their own right); one in which shades

endlessly and mindlessly strap themselves into the implements of torture and ravage their own plasmic bodies just might. The participants of a tableau are always victims, or else any punishment is self-inflicted: Sisyphus rolls his boulder up the hill, watches it roll back down, and then pushes it up again not because chattering imps with pitchforks and whips goad him to it, but because that is what he does.

- **Repetition:** Tableaux are never one-time-only occurrences. Some are enacted continuously, without any end in sight (a wailing figure crucified against a wet limestone wall), some repeat at regular intervals (every hour, two ghosts dressed like Wild West gunfighters square off at the crossroads; sometimes one is victorious, other times his opponent is), but all follow some sort of repeating pattern and will not end unless some outside force intervenes. The participants may change as ghosts move on to the next world or fall into the Lower Mysteries, but it takes the intervention of the living to actually stop one.

- **Imagery:** If tableaux were nothing but random expressions of bizarre depravity, that would almost be easy to rationalize. The Underworld is an aberrant thing, and death can be cruel and capricious. What most Underworld explorers find disturbing is that tableaux appear to have a *point*. If one studies it long enough, one can recognize a kind of “moral.” Each tableau is associated with a Vice (as a warning against over-indulging that Vice) or a Virtue (as a warning against shirking that Virtue, or sometimes against espousing it falsely). If tableaux exist to actively exult Virtues, no one has reported them.

Effects of a Tableau

A tableau is a shocking sight, and as with other shocking sights in the Underworld, when a character first sees a tableau, the player must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll or lose a point of Willpower and flee the scene. The player must make this roll each time the character encounters a tableau associated with a new Virtue or Vice: once she's rolled for a Lust tableau, for instance, she no longer risks her sanity when she encounters another Lust tableau.

Assuming the character doesn't flee, she may study the tableau to determine its “moral.” This is an extended Wits + Composure roll, with each roll representing a minute. Five successes are needed to internalize the moral. If the character fails any roll, she gains a mild derangement (or upgrades a mild one to a severe one) that lasts until she leaves the Underworld. (Characters are also free to interpret the moral on their own — but no mechanical insight is gained.)

A character can only internalize one tableau at a time; if she studies another tableau before making use of the insight she achieved (see below), the new tableau replaces the old. The insight gleaned from a tableau must be used within one day per point of the viewer's Morality, or the memory fades and the insight is lost.

After internalizing a tableau, the next time the character is presented with an opportunity to indulge the Virtue or Vice represented by the tableau, she may choose one of the following effects:

- Regain Willpower as though she had fulfilled her own Virtue (or Vice), and even if she has already indulged within the time limit (within the same scene for Vice or within the same chapter for Virtue). If the tableau's Virtue or Vice was the same as the character's and she has not yet indulged within the time limit, she regains an additional point of Willpower (two points for indulging her Vice, or all Willpower plus one temporary point that lasts for 24 hours for indulging her Virtue).

- Add +3 dice to *all* rolls related to indulging that Virtue or Vice (e.g. attack rolls for indulging Wrath, Expression rolls to cheer up friends for indulging Hope, etc.). The bonus applies only to actions related to this particular indulgence, not all actions in the scene. A character that indulges Wrath by pummeling a recalcitrant ghost gets the bonus to attack that particular shade, but not the three others that attack him later in the scene.

- Treat a *single* roll related to indulging the Virtue or Vice as a rote action (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134).

Ending a Tableau

Many Underworld explorers, especially Sin-Eaters, want to step in and end the suffering experienced by the shades trapped in a tableau. This is a daunting prospect, as tableaux aren't enforced by any outside agency that can be thwarted or destroyed. The ghostly participants must be convinced to move on, much as they might resolve their anchors and pass on to whatever awaits them. Communicating with a ghost involved in a tableau is nigh-impossible, however; they just don't respond to anyone outside the tableau. In order to communicate with the participants, an explorer must become one herself.

Entering a tableau is as easy as stepping into the scene with the conscious desire to become part

of it — she must voluntarily inflict upon herself whatever suffering the participants enact on themselves, no matter how gruesome. Once she is part of the scene, she can interact with the ghosts, try to find out why they feel they must punish themselves like this and what can be done to get them to move on. Just like resolving a ghost's anchors, no game mechanics solution exists here; ending a tableau should be the basis of an entire story arc, not a simple extended action.

In order to truly end a tableau, *all* participating spirits must be resolved. If even one remains a part of a tableau, eventually new participants will drift in, and the whole thing will start all over again. Convincing a ghost to leave a tableau counts as helping the ghost “move on” for Sin-Eaters (i.e. doing so earns them a point of plasm).

The Sisyphean Ordeal (Sloth)

The tunnel ahead has collapsed, the way forward buried beneath tons of dirt and rock. Three ghosts, gaunt and emaciated, their forms caked with filth, claw listlessly at the cave-in, bloodied fingernails vainly shoveling the earth aside. For every handful they move away, more sifts down from the cavern's ceiling.

This tableau is a classic in Underworld imagery: pointless, grueling manual labor with no end and no reason. This particular manifestation involves digging out a cave-in, but similar ordeals might involve filling a huge but leaky cauldron with water and trying to carry it up a hill, endless drudgery on a necrotic assembly line, or organizing a library whose shelves constantly shift and collapse. To enter this tableau, one need merely begin digging with one's bare hands: the character suffers one point of bashing damage every five minutes as the rocks and earth bruise and cut her hands. Resolving this tableau might involve convincing a participant that his family farm didn't fail because he was unwilling to put in the work to make it succeed, or helping a mother realize that she isn't to blame for her daughter's drunk-driving death because the mother didn't drive out to pick her up from the party.

WHENCE, AND TO WHAT PURPOSE?

The Underworld is not hell. No demons oversee the tortures, and sinners reside here as surely as saints. So what creates a tableau, and why? Many theories are bandied about, but the one that seems to make the most sense is that tableaux are the Underworld's reaction to the guilt borne by its dead inhabitants, made manifest by the weight of numbers.

Ghosts are strange creatures with strange habits — they sometimes engage in bizarre, repetitive behaviors, some of which involve self-mutilation based on the belief that they *should* be in hell. A single ghost acting in such a fashion is just one more denizen of the Great Below, but when multiple shades, all feeling guilty for the same sin, congregate, the aggregate weight of their pathos congeals into something solid, a grisly scene of torture they truly believe they deserve.



The Congregation for the Doctrine of the False Faith (Faith)

The passage opens into a vast, high-ceilinged vault, like a great cathedral. The walls have been worked in styles reminiscent of a dozen different faiths: the Islamic crescent rises above a bas relief crucifixion, and images of Vishnu dance with the Great Beast of Revelation. The shades here all appear to be engaged in some twisted mockery of worship. In a row of pews, a ghostly choir sings hymns in voices so hoarse as to be little more than a hissing croak. Others perform the Islamic Salah endlessly, until their foreheads are raw and bleeding. Ascetics starve themselves to the point of death — save that death will not come for them a second time.

This tableau serves as a warning to those who would profess faith falsely, whether for personal gain or merely to avoid ostracism. The self-destructive repetition of the worship rituals speaks to the hollowness of empty gestures bereft of meaning. As the description suggests, these tableaux are egalitarian, and might bear mockeries of any faith. Entering such a tableau requires a character to come to the pulpit (or some equivalent structure) and preach to the dead; although this spares him the agonies the “faithful” endure, he finds his mind assaulted by strange, apocalyptic visions and terrible voices. He gains a derangement of the Storyteller’s choice that lasts until he leaves the Underworld. Resolving the tableau might, obviously, involve helping the dead to find their faith again, but it might just as easily necessitate convincing a ghost to admit to being an atheist and stop pretending.

The House of Crimson Indulgence (Temperance)

The rough stone of the cavern walls gives way to elegantly-worked marbles, the floor smooth and shining and strewn with carpets. Long, low couches are scattered about the chamber, where ghosts indulge in base desires both mundane and extravagant. Here, a couple fucks one another with mechanical, rote efficiency, their eyes hollow and passionless. There, another lies insensate, drooling and twitching with a needle in his arm. In the shadowed corner, a man kills another man every minute. Each time, the death is more intricate and excruciating than the last, and each time, the victim rises up to be slain again.

Human beings are base creatures, ruled by impulse and desire — and yet, paradoxically, indulging those vices without restraint leads to ennui and jaded passions. This tableau reminds its participants that self restraint is the mark of virtue and wisdom. Sadly, many see this tableau not as an object lesson in Morality, but instead as a smörgåsbord of earthly delights. Entering the tableau is as easy as indulging, but this carries a risk even greater than normal: the player must roll Resolve + Composure to avoid her character becoming addicted to the sinful nature of the Underworld as described on p. 124. She must make this roll even if it isn’t the character’s Vice being indulged (e.g. a Glutton having sex with a succubus-ghost, or a Wrathful character partaking of exotic drugs). If the character’s Vice and the indulgence match (e.g. the Glutton gorging on funerary feasts or the Wrathful man carving up a ghost with spectral knives), this roll is made at a -2 penalty.

In the Presence of the Dead

While the Underworld itself is not psychoactive, mortal culture and religion *does* bleed through in one important aspect: the ghosts themselves. To continue the example of the Depths below Baghdad, while the Depths themselves might resemble Irkalla, with tunnels barred by bloody gates that open only when travelers sacrifice a piece of their own flesh, the ghosts in the area are almost certainly Muslims, since any ghost old enough to have practiced the beliefs of the ancient Sumerian religion would have been long since dragged down into the Lower Mysteries, and their beliefs in life and the funerary practices performed for them shape the “society” of the Underworld. They might believe they reside in Barzakh (a sort of “waiting area” where the dead lie in a cold sleep until Judgment Day arrives), and as such they spend most of their time slumbering, reminiscing on their lives in preparation for the Day of Judgment. Whether that behavior is compelled by the Underworld itself or is merely the ghosts’ reconciliation of its fate with the beliefs it held in life is difficult to determine.

These cultural elements carry over into the shades of the dead themselves, quite independent of the predominant religion of the region — and for those thinking that religion is the primary defining aspect of “death culture,” consider: both Mexico City and Boston are predominantly Catholic, and yet more than the miles between them are the differences between the Day of the Dead and a Southie’s wake at the local Irish bar. Customs like these trickle over into the Underworld in the form of grave goods, funerary echoes, and the behavior and beliefs of the dead themselves.

Grave Goods

These days, not too many cultures still adhere to the idea that goods buried with the dead would join them in their journey to the afterlife. The days of kings buried with treasures and provisions for their journeys are long gone — and for the dead, that’s unfortunate, because it happens to be true. Objects interred (or cremated, or left with the body) with the dead sometimes create a ghostly “double” that appears on the ghost’s person when it arrives in the Underworld. The double is identical to the physical object, and seems curiously immune to the entropy that usually permeates the Great Below.

Not all objects left in a coffin come across in this manner — usually it has to be something owned by the deceased, or something of great personal significance (either literally or symbolically). A wedding ring might cross over with its owner’s spirit, but the earrings she was buried wearing probably don’t, unless they were important to her. A best friend’s favorite book isn’t owned by the deceased, nor is it particularly important to her in itself — she always found the author rather dry — but

as a symbol of her friendship, it has the weight to carry over. In cultures that make offerings for the dead (such as the Day of the Dead feasts, or the Chinese practice of burning joss paper), the item needn’t even be interred with the deceased; the offerings simply appear in the Underworld, somewhere near the ghost to which the offering was made.

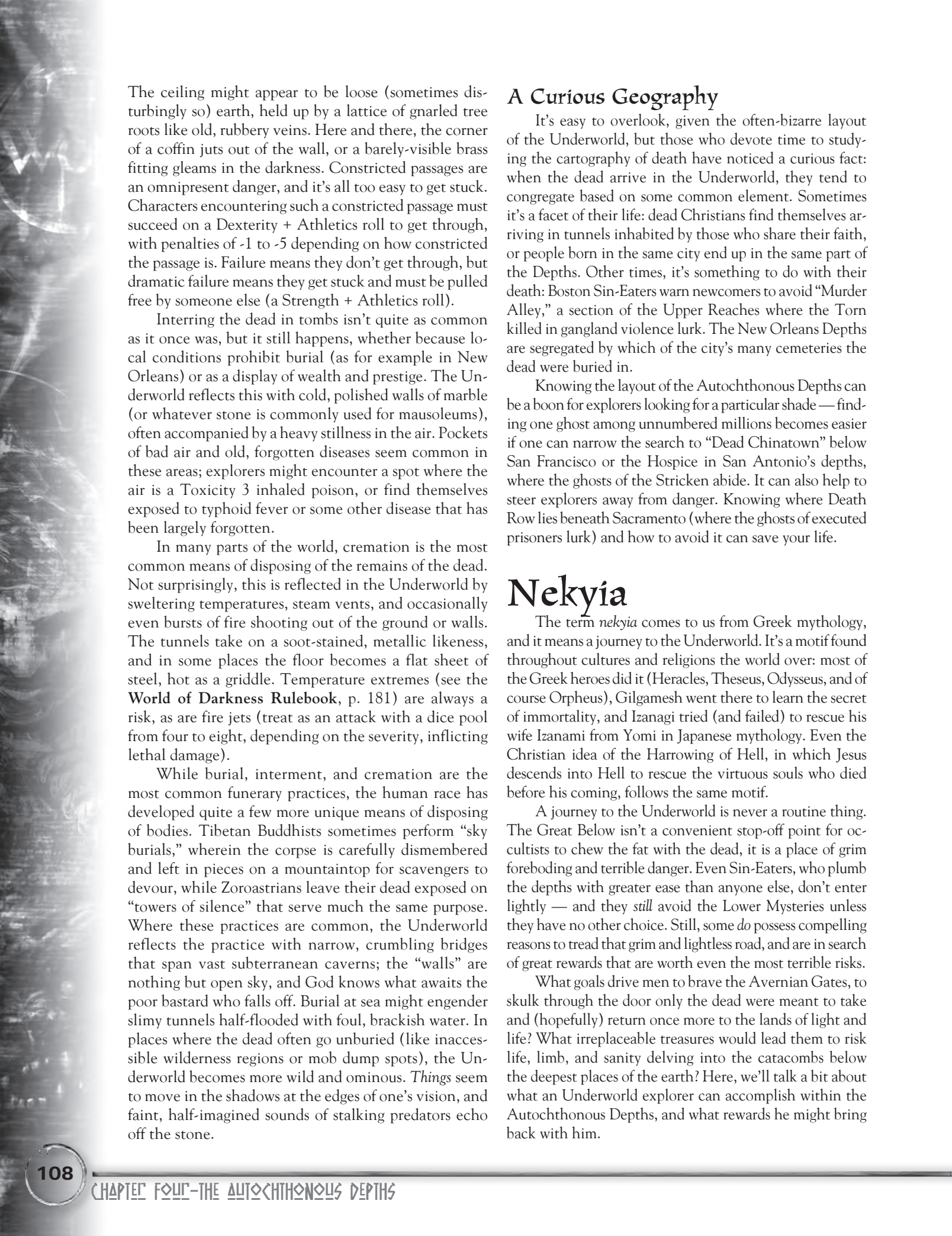
These *ofrendas* (the term most often used by Underworld explorers) are rarely useful objects in and of themselves; people aren’t buried with swords and longboats anymore, so they’re more likely to be pieces of jewelry or similar small, personal tokens. Despite this, they are hotly-coveted commodities among the dead (and amongst those who exalt the dead, such as some Sin-Eaters). For many ghosts trapped in the Underworld, *ofrendas* are the only glimpses of the living world they’re permitted, and for the ghosts of the Autochthonous Depths, young enough to yearn for their lost lives, those reminders can be powerful things. Once per chapter, a ghost may look on an *ofrenda* and regain a point of Essence as though it had been remembered by the living (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208). The *ofrenda* in question need not be the ghost’s own. Many ghosts will go to great lengths to acquire *ofrendas*, and some will even “stake out” places where they most often cross over.

Ofrendas are useful to living explorers as well. An *ofrenda* belonging to a specific ghost counts as one of that ghost’s anchors for magical purposes (e.g. determining occult sympathy), even if the physical object is not an anchor (and ghosts in the Underworld are generally without anchors; that’s, in fact, why they’re here and not in the world of the living). An *ofrenda* taken out of the Underworld (a dangerous proposition; most ghosts will fight violently to keep them) acts as a charm memento (see **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** p. 195), and a Sin-Eater may use the Fetter’s Binding ceremony to bind a ghost into an *ofrenda* as though it were one of the ghost’s anchors. Turning the *ofrenda* into a Fetter overrides its properties as a charm.

Funerary Echoes

They say that the journey is more important than the destination, and in some respects, at least, that’s true of the journey to the Underworld as well. The manner in which the dead are interred carries over into the Great Below, shaping its geography and its environment. A single individual’s funeral doesn’t have much impact, but like silt washed along a river, eventually the weight of numbers can create a sweeping impact on the Autochthonous Depths as a whole. Particularly in places where a single funerary practice is common, the very caves and tunnels of the Great Below become omnipresent reminders of death.

Where the dead are buried, the tunnels take on a tight, claustrophobic feel, pressing in close on all sides.



The ceiling might appear to be loose (sometimes disturbingly so) earth, held up by a lattice of gnarled tree roots like old, rubbery veins. Here and there, the corner of a coffin juts out of the wall, or a barely-visible brass fitting gleams in the darkness. Constricted passages are an omnipresent danger, and it's all too easy to get stuck. Characters encountering such a constricted passage must succeed on a Dexterity + Athletics roll to get through, with penalties of -1 to -5 depending on how constricted the passage is. Failure means they don't get through, but dramatic failure means they get stuck and must be pulled free by someone else (a Strength + Athletics roll).

Interring the dead in tombs isn't quite as common as it once was, but it still happens, whether because local conditions prohibit burial (as for example in New Orleans) or as a display of wealth and prestige. The Underworld reflects this with cold, polished walls of marble (or whatever stone is commonly used for mausoleums), often accompanied by a heavy stillness in the air. Pockets of bad air and old, forgotten diseases seem common in these areas; explorers might encounter a spot where the air is a Toxicity 3 inhaled poison, or find themselves exposed to typhoid fever or some other disease that has been largely forgotten.

In many parts of the world, cremation is the most common means of disposing of the remains of the dead. Not surprisingly, this is reflected in the Underworld by sweltering temperatures, steam vents, and occasionally even bursts of fire shooting out of the ground or walls. The tunnels take on a soot-stained, metallic likeness, and in some places the floor becomes a flat sheet of steel, hot as a griddle. Temperature extremes (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 181) are always a risk, as are fire jets (treat as an attack with a dice pool from four to eight, depending on the severity, inflicting lethal damage).

While burial, interment, and cremation are the most common funerary practices, the human race has developed quite a few more unique means of disposing of bodies. Tibetan Buddhists sometimes perform "sky burials," wherein the corpse is carefully dismembered and left in pieces on a mountaintop for scavengers to devour, while Zoroastrians leave their dead exposed on "towers of silence" that serve much the same purpose. Where these practices are common, the Underworld reflects the practice with narrow, crumbling bridges that span vast subterranean caverns; the "walls" are nothing but open sky, and God knows what awaits the poor bastard who falls off. Burial at sea might engender slimy tunnels half-flooded with foul, brackish water. In places where the dead often go unburied (like inaccessible wilderness regions or mob dump spots), the Underworld becomes more wild and ominous. *Things* seem to move in the shadows at the edges of one's vision, and faint, half-imagined sounds of stalking predators echo off the stone.

A Curious Geography

It's easy to overlook, given the often-bizarre layout of the Underworld, but those who devote time to studying the cartography of death have noticed a curious fact: when the dead arrive in the Underworld, they tend to congregate based on some common element. Sometimes it's a facet of their life: dead Christians find themselves arriving in tunnels inhabited by those who share their faith, or people born in the same city end up in the same part of the Depths. Other times, it's something to do with their death: Boston Sin-Eaters warn newcomers to avoid "Murder Alley," a section of the Upper Reaches where the Torn killed in gangland violence lurk. The New Orleans Depths are segregated by which of the city's many cemeteries the dead were buried in.

Knowing the layout of the Autochthonous Depths can be a boon for explorers looking for a particular shade — finding one ghost among unnumbered millions becomes easier if one can narrow the search to "Dead Chinatown" below San Francisco or the Hospice in San Antonio's depths, where the ghosts of the Stricken abide. It can also help to steer explorers away from danger. Knowing where Death Row lies beneath Sacramento (where the ghosts of executed prisoners lurk) and how to avoid it can save your life.

Nekyia

The term *nekylia* comes to us from Greek mythology, and it means a journey to the Underworld. It's a motif found throughout cultures and religions the world over: most of the Greek heroes did it (Heracles, Theseus, Odysseus, and of course Orpheus), Gilgamesh went there to learn the secret of immortality, and Izanagi tried (and failed) to rescue his wife Izanami from Yomi in Japanese mythology. Even the Christian idea of the Harrowing of Hell, in which Jesus descends into Hell to rescue the virtuous souls who died before his coming, follows the same motif.

A journey to the Underworld is never a routine thing. The Great Below isn't a convenient stop-off point for occultists to chew the fat with the dead, it is a place of grim foreboding and terrible danger. Even Sin-Eaters, who plumb the depths with greater ease than anyone else, don't enter lightly — and they *still* avoid the Lower Mysteries unless they have no other choice. Still, some *do* possess compelling reasons to tread that grim and lightless road, and are in search of great rewards that are worth even the most terrible risks.

What goals drive men to brave the Avernian Gates, to skulk through the door only the dead were meant to take and (hopefully) return once more to the lands of light and life? What irreplaceable treasures would lead them to risk life, limb, and sanity delving into the catacombs below the deepest places of the earth? Here, we'll talk a bit about what an Underworld explorer can accomplish within the Autochthonous Depths, and what rewards he might bring back with him.

Rescue

It's the oldest story in the book: (literally — just about the oldest extant story of a journey to the Underworld is Ishtar's descent to rescue her lover Tammuz) someone has died before their time, and a living man or woman must walk the lightless path into the Great Below to bring them home again. Anthropologists will tell you that this is nothing more than a fable to explain human mortality, or a metaphor for the turning of the seasons. The anthropologists are wrong.

Rescuing a shade from the Underworld is a difficult process, and it isn't nearly as straightforward as some myths would have you believe. It's not enough to journey into the Upper Reaches (to say nothing of the Lower Mysteries), find the ghost of the victim, and bring her back to the Avernian Gate. Remember, ghosts go to the Underworld when they have no more anchors to hold them to the living world: a ghost brought to an Avernian Gate without anchors quite simply cannot cross the threshold, any more than a living man can lift himself off the ground with his own hands.

Supernatural beings, of course, have ways around these problems. Necromancers and Sin-Eaters can bind a ghost to a new anchor, werewolf shamans can craft fetishes to carry the soul beyond the threshold, and powerful wizards might simply craft a new body out of whole cloth and lay the ghost to rest inside it. But what of ordinary mortals? Is there room for the story of a man, his wife taken from him in the flower of her youth, who finds an ancient map and a promise inked in blood? What about a mother descending into the Depths to rescue the child she couldn't protect in life?

As with so many things in the Great Below, the answer is “Yes, but at a price.” The Underworld follows its own arcane laws, and sometimes those laws are less like the laws of physics and more like contractual law. Loopholes can be exploited, deals can be made (but with *whom?*) — but life does not come cheap, and death drives a hard bargain.

Breaking the Law

Without recourse to supernatural powers (which themselves are likely to have their own costs), a would-be rescuer must discover a way to bypass the Underworld's laws if he wants to get anywhere in his quest. Some of these secrets are rooted in mythology, others are occult secrets recorded in only a few ancient, moldering tomes. Just *finding* one of these loopholes (especially for an ordi-

nary mortal uninitiated into the mysteries of the occult) is likely a story unto itself; at the bare minimum it's a research task (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55) using Intelligence + Occult.

- As suggested by the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, if a living person (depending on who you ask, “living” might or might not include things like vampires and Prometheans) leads a ghost out of the Autochthonous Depths to an Avernian Gate without ever *once* looking back at the ghost, then the shade may leave the Underworld (and no, standing at an Avernian Gate and conjuring the ghost with your back turned doesn't count). What appears to actually happen is that this act of profound faith and devotion imprints on the ghost, causing his rescuer to become a new anchor. What Orpheus never got to find out (and would have been gravely disappointed if he had) is that this loophole doesn't bring the dead back to life, it just lets the ghost return to the world of the living.

- For those willing to brave the even greater dangers of the Lower Mysteries, an old legend says passing through seven gates (or in some versions of the story, crossing seven rivers) and then returning to the Upper Reaches grants a traveler the right to take one of the dead back to the land of the living. Some stories say the ghost returns to full life and health, but some versions tell darker tales. The patchwork monsters called Prometheans say that the process creates a *thing* much like them, a soulless construct of ectoplasm and false flesh that blights the land around it and will never know peace until it finds a way to transcend its sorry state.

- Anyone willing to travel to the Underworld to rescue someone's soul is probably willing to lay down her life to accomplish it. Pity the Underworld doesn't seem to much care for that trade. For the Underworld to give up its secrets, it needs something more: the Threshold of the sacrifice must align with the Threshold of the dead, perhaps, or the victim must resonate with the shade to be freed. Moreover, the Underworld *never* trades on a one-to-one ratio: a man seeking to rescue his wife who died of snakebite must poison 13 people. A woman who just wants her little girl back must give that selfsame tragedy to seven other mothers: one for every year of her daughter's life.

WHAT ABOUT THE LOWER MYSTERIES?

It's theoretically possible to rescue a soul from the Lower Mysteries, although it's exponentially more complex. Even if taking a ghost from one of the Dead Dominions doesn't violate the Old Laws, the Kerberoi seem to have an unerring sense for when someone is trying to rescue a shade from their realm, and will pursue the would-be Orpheus to the ends of the earth.

We discuss the rescue cycle here, in the chapter devoted to the Autochthonous Depths, simply because the motivation for the rescue is usually personal, and unless the would-be rescuer waited more than a century to make the attempt (which, granted, isn't totally implausible), the rescue likely plays out in the Upper Reaches.

• They say that if you bring a corpse into the Underworld with you, and if you lay it out in its coffin down there in the dark with a graveside feast or an offering of a freshly-killed heart or maybe a golden scarab bathed in the blood of a virgin martyr, then the ghost of its owner will come a-calling. Ghosts don't like to be reminded that they're dead, though, so you have to move quick, but they say you can wrestle that ghost right back into its body and it will sit right up, just as alive as you please. The only trouble is, you have to sew the poor bastard's mouth and eyes shut, or the ghost will fly right out again when you get to the living world.

• Sometimes the "rescue" isn't about bringing someone *out*, it's about stopping someone from going *in*. Maybe thanks to some form of precognition, a woman sees the unexpected tragedy that will befall her brother next week. Maybe it's nothing more than inevitability at work: a man stands outside his son's hospital room, watching the boy slip away from him. If he steps into that room, the germs he carries will kill the boy. If you look in the right old book, you can find the loophole: take a picture of the one who is going to die, take a picture of somebody else, and take them both into the Underworld. Burn both pictures at a crossroads and scatter the ashes, and fate changes. The one who would have lived dies, and the one who would have died lives.

Risks and Rewards

Even apart from the dread cost that might have to be paid to save a life, plenty of risks come along with bringing someone out of the Underworld. While the Great Below *does* make ghosts more cognizant and self-aware than their counterparts in the land of the living, they can still be petulant or irrational, prone to violent outbursts or potentially fatal distractions. The ghost in question might have been sucked into a tableau, or lost deep in the tunnels, miles away from the nearest Avernian Gate. And then, of course, one must worry about the dead. If word should get out that someone has a way to bring the dead back to life (or even just get them out of the Underworld), that person

can expect to be mobbed by shades desperate to be brought along. Some of them won't take no for an answer.

The rewards, of course, are obvious. A lost loved one restored, a second chance, a wrong redressed. Still... sometimes the resurrection doesn't go *quite* as smoothly as one hoped. The dead man returns just slightly *off* — maybe he starts eating rare steaks when he used to be a vegetarian, or he has to be reminded of his son's name. Sometimes it's more than that: the woman feels as though the Great Below is lurking behind her, drawing ever closer — and the only thing that can keep it away is an ever-increasing body count.

Then again, sometimes the dead come back to life just perfectly. What can you do except roll the dice?

Knowledge

The dead bear many secrets. Some are trifling — a man leaves his lucky pocket watch at a diner by mistake, and dies in a car accident on his way home. Some matter only to those whom the secret concerns — a woman takes to her grave the fact that her husband is not the father of her child. Some could even change the course of history — somewhere in the Autochthonous Depths, *someone* knows the truth behind the John F. Kennedy assassination.

Pursuing the secrets of the grave can be a risky proposition: quite apart from the dangers presented by the Underworld, many ghosts are ill-inclined to share their knowledge with the living — at least, not without getting something in return. It's not that the dead are particularly secretive, but for many of them, knowledge is the only thing with which they have to barter. Conversely, most realize that knowledge is one of the only things that can be of use to them. The ghost of a father who died before his daughter's graduation desperately wishes to see her cross that stage, and for a description (or better still, a photograph) of the event, he might be more inclined to pass on what he knows. A prideful spirit who, in life, built a business empire that stretched across the globe is frantic

LIFE FOR LIFE

One thing the Underworld understands is the value of a trade. Whether literal deathlords and Horsemen exist to be supplicated, or whether the trade is simply balancing the scales of an uncaring, clockwork universe (a... machine-god, if you will) is a topic hotly debated by occultists and Underworld explorers, but the fact remains that the Great Below seems more than happy to shuffle fate around. It's rarely as easy as "my life for hers," of course, as the rumors and loopholes below can attest.

OTHER RESCUES

This section focuses most heavily on the mythic idea of restoring the dead to life because, well, it's a powerful myth. It's not the *only* kind of rescue story, of course: living mortals, even supernatural beings can become lost down there, and might need friends to come fish them out. Or the rescue might not involve revivification at all: finding a shade trapped in the Underworld and helping it resolve its story and move on is just as much a rescue.

for any news of his company's stock prices, and he's *always* willing to make a deal.

Information Directory

If you're lucky, finding the ghost who has your information is easy (well, as easy as *anything* involving the Great Below can be). If you want to know who killed a woman in a locked room with no witnesses, you just step through an Avernian Gate, summon her ghost right there on the threshold (you *do* know some little bit of magic to conjure ghosts, right?), and ask your questions. Easy, right?

Well, maybe, but it's seldom that straightforward. Most of the time, if you know a particular shade's name, you can figure out a magic ritual that will summon it from wherever it might be. Sin-Eaters, for example, have an innate knack for this thanks to their connection with the Underworld, and mages with Death •• and Space •• can enact a sympathetic spell that can conjure a ghost. Werewolves and vampires likewise have (or can easily develop) rituals of their own capable of such a feat. The only rule that applies is that ghosts cannot be summoned across a "border." For example, a ghost lurking in the Upper Reaches cannot be summoned to the land of the living, while a ghost three rivers "deep" can only be summoned by one who has crossed three rivers herself.

What happens when an explorer can't access a summoning ritual? Or worse yet, what if the explorer simply doesn't know the name (or even the identity) of the ghost he wants? Conjuring up that murder victim becomes a lot harder if her killer burned her so badly the police are unable to identify her, and while it's certainly likely that *some* ghost knows the whole story behind the Kennedy assassination, where do you start? Maybe Oswald's down there, but was he really in on it? How do you find a dead man who doesn't want to be found?

Tracking a Ghost in the Great Below

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Investigation

Action: Extended (each roll represents one half-hour of searching; the number of successes required is equal to the number of years the ghost has been dead)

When an Underworld explorer needs to find a particular ghost within the twisting labyrinth of the Great Below and doesn't have a form of sorcery to call the ghost to her, she pretty much has to do the legwork herself. She wanders the tunnels, interrogating the dead she finds, hoping for a lead. The dead see much, and most are happy to help... for a price. Obviously, given the sheer size and scope of the Underworld, this is a chancy prospect at best — starting from somewhere "close" to where the ghost died helps, but even then it can be an arduous process, and finding a shade dead more than a decade or so is a daunting task.

To use this action, the character must actually wander the Underworld in search of her quarry; simply standing in one spot and interrogating any ghost who merely happens by is grossly inefficient (increase the time per roll to three hours). If the searcher takes a break from her canvassing (say, to return to the mortal world to sleep or eat), she can pick up the trail again at a later date, but for every eight hours that pass without actively following leads, she loses one success from her accumulated total as the trail goes cold. The Storyteller should call for Navigating Dark Passages (see p. 99) rolls coinciding with the investigation, as it's all too easy to get so wrapped up in following the trail that you lose sight of where the hell you are.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A spiteful ghost leads the character astray, or she misinterprets a specter's words and ends up haring off on a wild-goose chase. In addition to wasting an hour of her time, she suffers a -2 penalty to subsequent rolls until she accumulates five additional successes.

Failure: No progress is made; the ghosts in this part of the Underworld haven't heard of the shade the explorer is seeking.

STORY HOOK (OPERATION: MNEMOSYNE)

Plenty of occultists are also conspiracy nuts, and some of them see the Underworld as a way to get the truth about the big mysteries of the last century: Kennedy (both of them), Marilyn, Roswell, Princess Di. Some even spend their time looking for the ghosts of Tupac or Elvis, as though not finding them somehow proves these men are still alive.

One Sin-Eater krewé, the Secret History out of Philadelphia, have always been about the idea of uncovering conspiracy theories with the help of the dead. What they've found, though, is that throughout the Autochthonous Depths, ghosts of key players in these theories are just... gone. Not "gone" in the sense of "we can't find them" or "gone" in the sense of "resolved their anchors and moved on," just *gone*.

The krewé has spoken to several specters who claim to have seen and spoken with the ghosts of Robert Kennedy, Henri Paul, and Mac Brazel, but when the History tried to find them, they were violently attacked by shades dressed in black suits and fedoras, with "weird auras, like they were alive and dead at the same time." When one of the krewé tried to scan the "ghost's" mind, all she got was a massive psychic backlash and the phrase "Project: ORPHEUS."

Success: The explorer makes progress toward finding her subject.

Exceptional Success: Extraordinary progress is made, and a ghostly informant gives the character one piece of information about the target that the explorer didn't know. Using this information in a conversation with the target, once it's found, gives a +2 bonus on all Social rolls made against the ghost for the duration of the scene.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The investigator actually has a part (fist-sized or larger) of the ghost's original corpse. A cup of the ghost's ashes can work if the body had been destroyed.
+2	The investigator begins her search from an Avernian Gate within five miles of where the ghost died
+1	Per each pint of blood (human or animal) or piece of food offered as an ofrenda to ghosts along the trail. Each individual ofrenda can add a +1 bonus to one roll.
+1	Per each item of personal significance from the ghost's former life (driver's license, diary, Polaroid, etc.)
+1	The investigator knows the ghost's full true name
-1	The investigator only knows some of the ghost's true name
-2	The investigator begins her search from an Avernian Gate between five and fifteen miles of where the ghost died
-1 to -5	The investigator is not looking for a specific ghost, but only one meeting a particular criteria. Penalty is based on specificity of requirement. (e.g. "a ghost that can teach me astrology" is -1 or "a ghost who witnessed the attempted assassination of Adolph Hitler" is -5)
-3	The investigator doesn't know any part of the ghost's name
-3	The investigator offers no ofrendas in exchange for information
-4	The investigator begins her search from an Avernian Gate more than 15 miles from where the ghost died
-5	The investigator knows very little about the ghost (e.g. nothing more than the circumstances and location of death or a vague physical description)

Tutelage of the Dead

Ancient cultures communed with the spirits of their ancestors to learn their wisdom. Necromancers conjure up the dead to glean their knowledge. Indeed, though popular culture has hijacked the word to describe those who command the dead, the word "necromancy" actually comes from the Greek roots *nekrós* ("dead") and *maneteía* ("divination"): literally, gaining knowledge from the dead. But why go to all this trouble, why put your life at risk when surely mortal tutelage can be found? Especially in this day and age, when the Internet can provide step-by-step instruction for anything from rebuilding an engine to picking up women, why would anyone risk a descent into the Underworld to learn at the feet of the unquiet dead?

Leaving aside the obvious cases where only a dead man possesses the knowledge in question, the wisdom of the dead has *power*. Tutelage in the Underworld is faster and easier to master than learning from a living patron. Precisely why this should be is just one of the mysteries of the Great Below; some suggest that ghosts are manifestations of pure Psyche and, unfettered by flesh, they are able to pass knowledge directly from the core of their being to the core of another's. Others claim that time flows strangely in the Underworld, and that the speed of learning is merely an illusion. Whatever the case, a living character who journeys to the Underworld to receive teaching from a ghost (as opposed to simply unearthing some piece of information), may choose one of the following benefits:

- He may subtract one from the experience point multiplier of a Trait (for example, learning a Skill costs [new dots × 2] instead of [new dots × 3] experience points). This reduced cost applies to however many dots the ghost agrees to teach — higher levels of mastery, of course, require grander payment. Flat experience costs (such as buying Skill Specialties or lost Willpower dots) have the cost reduced by one experience point. This tutelage cannot reduce the multiplier for a Trait to less than one or the cost of a flat-cost Trait to less than one.
- He may learn one or more levels of a Skill instantly, without the normal downtime required. For example, it takes a normal person eight years of grueling study to become a doctor (representing the purchase of several dots of Academics, Medicine, and Science, along with attendant Skill Specialties). A character learning from a ghost, however, could instantly jump from one dot in Medicine to four dots, provided he has saved up the 27 experience points that buying three dots of Medicine costs.
- He may "trade in" Willpower dots, representing the ghost unlocking his inner ability at the cost of focus. Each sacrificed dot of Willpower nets him eight experience points, which may be applied to any trait the ghost can teach. He cannot drop below a Willpower rating of one with this sacrifice.

Ghosts can teach any Skill or Specialty they possessed in life, as well as any Attribute. They can teach Merits if they possessed the Merit in life and if the Merit represents something that can be taught. Fighting Style Merits, for example, can be taught, but Resources have to be earned in some fashion. Ghosts cannot teach Manifestations, but geists can. Other supernatural powers are up to the Storyteller: a ghost might be able to teach a mage the Death Arcanum, but probably can't teach a werewolf Gifts.

Risks and Rewards

Much as with an Underworld rescue, the reward in this case is the accomplishment of the task itself: the traveler learns some secret, hidden fact, or engages a ghost to tutor him in some field or another.

The risks, apart from the obvious risks of traveling the Underworld in search of a teacher, lie in the price the ghost demands for its knowledge. Sometimes it's fairly innocuous: the ghost wants a photograph of his daughter, or wants to hear her favorite song one more time. Sometimes the cost is high, but ultimately benign: a feast dedicated to the ghost's memory four times a year for the next five years, or a rare and expensive antique the ghost coveted in life. Sometimes, especially for valuable or dangerous knowledge, the cost is gruesome: a sacrifice of blood, or a car accident engineered to occur at the same intersection where the ghost died.

The most dangerous are the costs that *seem* innocent, but actually lead to gruesome tragedy: the ghost asks that a certain symbol be spray-painted on a downtown overpass, and the symbol (actually the tag of a gang from across town) sets off a bloody turf war that kills 13 young men. A letter written to an old lover, the mother of the specter's child, seems harmless enough, but when the lover's husband (the ghost's former partner) sees it, he flies into a rage and murders his wife and the child he thought was his own. The wise Underworld explorer does her research carefully before agreeing to a ghost's terms for *anything*.

Cartography

The Underworld is a vast, possibly even infinite realm, but unlike some of the other strange places that border the World of Darkness, its tunnels and passages are fixed and immutable. Some say the Underworld grows just a little bit with every ghost that enters, while others say its size was fixed at the instant of creation and that when it fills up, the world will end. It's hard to say, given that even the most complete and encyclopedic library of maps of the Great Below, owned by a group of Mysterium mages in Venice, only cover an area of approximately 12,000 square miles, roughly the size of Maryland. Conservative estimates suggest that this might amount to as much as one-half of one percent of the total size of just the Autochthonous Depths.

All of that is just a fancy way of saying that mapping the Great Below can be a great (if occasionally life- and sanity-threatening) way for a group of explorers to earn some money, favors, or occult trinkets. Even in places like New York, where an abnormally high number of Avernian Gates can be found and where, not coincidentally, quite a few Underworld explorers make their homes, only about 25% of the local Upper Reaches have actually been mapped, and of those 25%, only about half is freely circulated; the rest is hoarded by various Sin-Eater krewes, vampiric covenants, and werewolf packs. New maps, especially from proven, reliable cartographers, are as good as currency.

Creating a Map

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Survival

Action: Extended (each roll represents one half-hour of mapping; three to nine successes required per mile mapped)

This action is similar to, but distinct from, the "Navigating Dark Passages" rules presented on p. 99. Most cartographic groups have one or more navigators and a cartographer who maps the Great Below as they travel. Trying to create a map after the fact is much more difficult; see the suggested modifiers, below.

Unlike many extended actions, mapping is an open-ended exercise; no fixed number of successes is required to create a map. Rather, at the outset of the action, the cartographer must decide how detailed he wants the map to be (in game terms, what equipment bonus the map will provide when used to navigate the Underworld). The level of detail represents how many successes are required to map one mile of tunnels (or one square mile of open cavern). A +1 map is little more than a rough sketch; distances are not to scale and navigation is generally done by counting intersections rather than measuring distances. Only large and dangerous landmarks are noted, and their locations are approximate (six successes per mile). The +2 maps are more precise; distances are closer to scale, individual bends and twists in the caverns are noted, and notable but not necessarily hazardous landmarks are noted (six successes per mile). The +3 maps are professional or near-professional level, boasting accurate scale, precise tunnel dimensions, and even minor landmarks (nine successes per mile).

As long as the character continues exploring, he can continue mapping. Until recently, the ability to carry drawing materials limited the effective size of Underworld maps, but with the advent of personal computers and digital mapping, a well-equipped team can spend weeks in the Depths, mapping hundreds of miles at once.

Since failure can result in a flawed map, the Storyteller might wish to make these rolls on behalf of the character.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character makes a significant error in the map (he misses a branch-off or puts a landmark in the wrong place). All successes for the current mile's worth of mapping are lost, and unless those successes are re-accumulated, using the map to navigate carries a -3 equipment penalty.

Failure: The character makes no progress toward mapping a mile's worth of tunnels. If he moves on without accumulating the necessary successes, the final map will carry a -1 equipment penalty.

Success: Progress is made toward completing the map.

Exceptional Success: Rapid progress is made toward creating the map.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+5	Surveying equipment is used (however, this increases the time per roll to two hours)
+3	The mapper, or someone in his group, rolled an exceptional success on a navigation roll for the same time period.
+1	The mapper has successfully navigated this section of tunnels before.
-1	The mapper has no navigator or has failed a navigation roll for this section.
-2	The mapper is drawing the map from memory. Apply this penalty once per hour since the journey was made.
-3	The mapper or his navigator rolled a dramatic failure on a navigation roll for this section.

Risks and Rewards

As already suggested, the rewards for mapping out the Underworld are manifold: selling the maps can net a group some quick cash or the favor of other Underworld explorers. Building a reputation as skilled cartographers translates into status and possibly political capital, and then, of course, keeping the map for oneself means your next sojourn is less likely to end in getting lost and slowly starving to death.

Aimlessly wandering the Underworld is dangerous enough as it is, but mappers have a tendency to end up learning the locations of things that others don't want known. Maybe they mark a map with what they think is a previously unknown Avernian Gate that turns out to be the private domain of a cabal of mages, or maybe they map out a cavernous banquet hall where a krewe of Sin-Eaters holds its darkest and most secret rites. In any case, if news gets out that they've put such a secret to paper, the erstwhile cartographers might find themselves the targets of supernatural hit squads seeking to make sure the information stays buried.

Psychopomp (and Circumstance)

Up until now, we've discussed personal motivations for journeying to the Underworld: rescuing a loved one, learning something, mapping the dark tunnels for personal gain. Sometimes, though, an experienced Underworld explorer is approached to serve as a guide and protector for another. Sin-Eaters, with their innate connection to the energy of death, are the one's most commonly approached for this service, but anyone who makes a name for themselves in the occult underground might find themselves approached. Most often, the client is another occultist, or even a supernatural being, but sometimes even ordinary mortals, believers in the hidden world, find their way to a Sin-Eater krewe or a cabal of so-called "necronauts."

No hard and fast rules exist for serving as someone's guide into the Underworld; this is the sort of thing that should be played out as a part of the story. Obviously, navigating dark passages is going to be a necessity, and depending on *why* the client wants to travel the Great Below, finding a ghost or bargaining with one might also factor in.

You can't find a "blue book" of accepted prices for performing a service like this: some do it gratis, seeing it as their duty to reconcile the living and the dead, while others charge inordinate prices, either out of self-motivated greed or a desire to discourage the foolish from taking that dread journey. Nonetheless, the following suggestions can be used as baselines, especially if the tables are turned and the troupe's characters find themselves seeking a Storyteller character as a guide instead of the other way around.

- A brief sojourn into the Upper Reaches, or summoning a ghost from the threshold of an Avernian Gate, is worth monetary compensation roughly equivalent to an item that costs Resources •••. A significant, but not illegal favor (helping raise funds to renovate an old cemetery, granting the guide free access to a property the client owns, etc.) or a minor illegal one (making a minor legal infraction disappear, offering insider stock tips) is also appropriate, as is a minor supernatural gift (a mystic item equivalent to one Merit dot value, such as a fetish, reliquary, or memento).

- Tracking down a specific ghost in the Underworld might be worth anywhere from a Resources ••• to Resources ••••• item, depending on how deep the ghost is. Major favors that fall within the bounds of the law (pushing for new zoning legislation or representing the guide in court *pro bono*, for example), and significant illegal ones (stopping a police investigation, lying under oath, etc.) are roughly equivalent, and more potent supernatural gifts (two-dot magical items or the casting of a long-term, beneficial spell) might also be accepted.

- Bringing a shade back to the land of the living is inordinately expensive, mainly because any guide skilled enough to pull it off probably knows how dangerous it is. A prospective client should be prepared to pay in the millions of dollars or perform truly dangerous, illegal favors like wiping out the guide's enemies or procuring illegal and morally-questionable ritual components. Supernatural aid should be significant: a three- or four-dot item, extensive information (the kind that breaks codes of secrecy) about another occult group, and so on.

- Most guides refuse to lead inexperienced explorers beyond the Autochthonous Depths. The Upper Reaches are quite dangerous enough; the sheer number of ways an inexperienced explorer can fuck up and get himself (and his guide) killed in the Dead Dominions is usually enough to make the answer a firm "no way in hell."

Risks and Rewards

Monetary rewards are nothing to sneeze at; plenty of Underworld explorers would be happy to not have to deal with the hassle of a day job, and the favors and mystical compensation can be quite useful, too. Some psychopomps use their actions to fulfill their Virtue (and for some, it's their Vice).

Not everyone who comes to an Underworld explorer with a request is being honest about their intentions. A woman tells a sob story about the husband she loved and just wants to see him one last time — in fact, he's her partner in crime and she wants to know where he hid the loot from their last heist. A boy, teary-eyed, tells how he only wants to bring his father back to watch over him — the "father" is a deranged cult leader bent on fulfilling his own self-created prophecy of death and rebirth; the boy is one of his loyal true believers. Even if the client is honest, bringing some inexperienced fresh meat into the Great Below can lead to all manner of catastrophe: offended ghosts, broken Old Laws, Vice addiction, and God knows what else.

Murder Most Foul

It's not hard to get away with murder in this day and age. Despite what TV detective dramas would have you believe, if you just pick a victim you have no connection to at all and make sure no witnesses are left behind, you stand a pretty good chance of getting away scot-free. All that "trace evidence" the crime scene shows wax rhapsodic about does jack shit if they never pick you to compare it to.

It is, however, much harder to get away with killing someone you have *reason* to kill. Motive is the first thing the cops look for, and when they have a direction to start looking in, they're damn persistent. Since most

occult societies in the World of Darkness have stringent rules about not exposing themselves to the world at large, blood feuds can become a risky proposition. Luckily, even the best CSI units can't plumb the Underworld, and it's a hell of a lot more likely for a missing persons case to go cold than it is for an honest-to-God murder. Those who know the Avernian Gates sometimes use this to their advantage: sometimes they hit their victim in the mortal world and then drag the corpse to the Great Below for "burial," sometimes they do the deed in the Underworld itself so the crime scene itself can never even be found, let alone analyzed. It's very nearly the perfect crime, right?

Well, no, not really.

Risks versus Rewards

"Getting away with murder" is a pretty compelling reward for most people, but there can be additional benefits depending on who the victim is: maybe dragging him to the Underworld lets a vengeful ghost have her due, or maybe his death pulls double duty as a gate-opening sacrifice or a blood offering to a summoned shade.

The risks, however, are downright insidious, and can very easily come back to bite the killer in the ass. First of all, mortals slain in the Underworld don't *stay* there, at least not in the flesh. The corpse sinks into the earth and is seemingly swallowed up by the Underworld — but sometime between three days and a week later, the body appears just outside the nearest Avernian Gate. Perversely, the Underworld seems to hold onto the body until its return to the mortal world has the potential to do the most damage. Like the telltale heart, its return seems calculated to guarantee that the murderer will face justice.

More dangerous still is the act of dumping a dead body in the Underworld. Flesh is not meant to be in that grim place, and with good reason: leaving a dead human body in the Great Below is like leaving a Ferrari parked in a bad neighborhood with the doors locked and the keys in the ignition. Any ghost who comes across the body may take possession of it, even if the shade lacks the Corpse Ride Numen. Sometimes the walking dead remains trapped in the Underworld until the ghost eventually tires of it and discards the flesh, at which point some other ghost might snatch it up. Eventually, the abomination might find an Avernian Gate and return to the lands of the living where, driven by strange hungers and memories of the pleasures of the flesh, it commits unspeakable acts over and over again, until it is finally put down.

The only way to prevent a corpse disposed of in the Underworld from returning to the land of the living is to cut it into at least eight equally-sized pieces and submerge the pieces in an Underworld river (a dangerous task in its own right).



THE VENGEFUL DEAD

Sometimes it isn't just any ghost that snags a body dumped into the Underworld. Sometimes the ghost who used to own the corpse finds its body once again and comes home to roost. When that happens, the process creates a nigh-unkillable revenant whose only desire is to find its killer and tear him limb from limb. Perhaps the act of murder creates a kind of sympathetic connection, or perhaps the Underworld just enjoys seeing the scales balanced, but the revenant always knows where the nearest Avernian Gate lies, and it also knows where to find its killer as long as both are in the same realm (e.g. the Underworld, the mortal realm, the Shadow, etc.)

In addition to their unerring sense of direction, revenants have all the Traits they possessed in life, plus the following:

- **Hard to Kill:** Revenants suffer only a single point of bashing damage from any attack that hits them, no matter how many successes were rolled or whether the attack normally inflicts bashing or lethal damage. Attacks that inflict aggravated damage inflict their full, normal damage. Revenants do not suffer wound penalties and are never knocked out by having their Health track filled with bashing or lethal damage.
- **Grim Purpose:** Against the person who actually killed it, the revenant receives the 8-again rule on all attacks. Against anyone directly interfering with its vengeance, it receives the 9-again rule.
- **Numina:** The revenant can use any Numina it possessed as a ghost, substituting the highest of its Strength, Intelligence, or Presence in place of Power; the highest of Dexterity, Wits, or Manipulation as its Finesse, and the highest of its Stamina, Resolve, or Composure in place of Resistance.
- **Not Long For This World:** A revenant has one lunar month in which to track down and slay its killer. If it does so, it moves on to whatever awaits ghosts beyond the Underworld. If it fails to do so, or is destroyed, the ghost is ejected and sent screaming back to the Underworld.

Shelter

Actually living in the Underworld isn't exactly a good idea — staying too long in that grim place is damaging to the soul and psyche alike, to say nothing of the dangers of mad ghosts, tunnel collapses, and other environmental hazards. Sometimes, though, when the heat is on in the mortal realm, it's advisable to have a secure bolt-hole your enemies can't find. For some, that means a "campsite" in the Underworld, usually a hard-to-find little cavern off a side tunnel not too far from an Avernian Gate. The food found in the Underworld provides no nourishment (though it can provide Sin-Eaters with plasm, as described on p. 261 of **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**), so the prospective camper must bring his own supplies with him. In the Autochthonous Depths, a simple warding spell is usually sufficient to keep the ghosts away, but bringing along some *ofrendas* just in case isn't a bad idea either.

Risks and Rewards

While all of the supernatural beings that lurk in the World of Darkness *can* enter and explore the Underworld in some fashion, comparatively few actually do. Sin-Eaters, of course, have the easiest time of it, but even they recognize the danger and don't poke around the Great Below idly. Thus, having a reasonably secure bolt-hole down there can be an effective way to vanish for a while until the heat dies down.

The downside, of course, is that figuring out when it's safe to go back up — it takes extraordinarily potent magic to pierce the border between the two realms, so unless you have spies who can cross the Avernian Gates and report, you might end up going home while the heat is still on — or you might stay in the Depths until everybody has forgotten you, and come back to find your territory divvied up by your rivals and all your influence gone to dust.

The Dead Who Do Not Sleep

The Autochthonous Depths would be dangerous enough if they were uninhabited: the treacherous footing, the darkness, the bad air, and so forth. Unfortunately, those are by no means the only dangers an Underworld explorer must face. The dead are here, the dead are restless, and the dead are *hungry*. The remainder of this chapter describes several antagonists a troupe might encounter in the Upper Reaches. Many are themselves the restless dead, but a few are living beings trapped within the tunnels with other Underworld explorers, or even stranger things. Although each one is presented as a distinct character, you can think of them as exemplars of a general class of shade — plenty of succubus ghosts beside Norma Jean lurk in the grottoes of the Great Below, for example, and the Family Man isn't the only example of an unbound geist.

The Last Word Killer

"Shh. Come on now, this will go a lot easier if you just say it. It's only one word, and then this can all be over."

Virtue: Hope — Everything he does, Jacob does out of the belief that he'll see his daughter alive and whole again when his goal is accomplished.

Vice: Greed — Jacob wants his daughter back, and he doesn't care who has to suffer to get her. He hasn't even considered how she'd feel about her daddy killing 39 people with a straight razor.

Background: Jacob Henderson went a little crazy when his daughter died, they say. Who could blame him? Not six months after his lovely wife was struck down by pancreatic cancer, his little girl was hit by a drunk driver on her way home from school. She lingered on in agony for a week before her little heart finally gave out. Something like that would drive anyone crazy.

The wrongful death suit gave Jacob enough money to quit his job and withdraw into himself, but that wasn't enough for him. He became convinced his daughter was still out there, calling to him in his dreams. He blew through the settlement money on psychics and mediums, but none of them were the real deal, and Jacob grew increasingly desperate. Finally, just as he was about to lose all hope, Jacob found a book in an old second-hand bookstore. It was a real antique, printed sometime in the 1700s, and according to the frontispiece it was a translation of a cuneiform tablet five thousand years old. It was, the book said, a spellbook for those who dealt with the hungry dead. It included rituals of summoning and banishment, and keys to opening the Avernian Gates that led to the Underworld — even a spell for the raising of the dead. Jacob bought the book on the spot, and that night under the blind eye of the new moon, he opened an Avernian Gate and found his daughter on the other side.

Stunned and elated to have found the truth at last, Jacob set about enacting the ritual of resurrection from the book, despite its grim and terrible cost: this isn't just some spell one can recite over an altar, maybe make a sacrifice to some ancient god, and be done with it. No, each word of the incantation, every single one, must be spoken by the last breath of a dying man.

The invocation is 37 words long. Thus far, Jacob has killed seven individuals, but two died before he could make them speak their words. One victim managed to escape, and it was from his account of the killer's actions that the media has dubbed Jacob the "Last Word Killer."

Description: Jacob Henderson is a gaunt, sallow-faced man of about 40, though he looks a fair bit older than he is. His hair is a nearly colorless brownish-gray, and his eyes are a shade of pale gray that almost matches his skin tone exactly. When he's encountered in the Underworld, it's easy to mistake him for a ghost. His clothes are frayed and tattered, and he carries the blood-stained straight razor with which he kills his victims.

Storytelling Hints: The unspeakable tragedy of losing both his wife and his daughter drove Jacob quite mad. The subsequent torture and murder of seven people has pushed him far past the brink of Morality. He will not stop until he is killed or he succeeds in resurrecting his daughter — no

amount of reasoning or appeals to decency can sway him. When he isn't stalking living victims in the mortal world, he spends his time in the Underworld with his daughter's ghost — where, strangely, the dead seem to ignore him completely. He has a small campsite with a store of food and water, and he has brought several of his daughter's favorite toys through the Avernian Gate for her to play with.

The Last Word Killer

Real Name: Jacob Henderson

Undertaking: Avenger

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 2, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 1, Occult (Sumerian Rituals) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Stealth 4, Weaponry (Straight Razor) 5

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Persuasion (Threat of Torture) 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Damnable Certainty, Telltale Murder 2, Weaponry Monomaniac

Willpower: 6

Morality: 0

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 7

Talent: Working the Room — Jacob does not lose Defense when he is attacked by multiple opponents in the same turn.

Frailty: Nothing But the Mission — If Jacob wishes to ignore a potential target and do something else (say, sabotage the brakes on a character's car), the Storyteller must roll Jacob's Resolve + Composure as a reflexive action. Failure means that Jacob *must* go after an available target instead.

Derangement: Aversion — Jacob will not kill females younger than himself, as they remind him of his daughter.

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Brawl	0(B)	—	2	
Straight Razor	0(L)	—	9	8-again, bleeding

Bleeding: When Jacob inflicts a killing blow with his straight razor (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168), the victim suffers one point of lethal damage per minute as though her last Health box were marked with an X. If the character already has a lethal wound in her rightmost Health box, she takes two lethal wounds per minute until stabilized.



JACOB THE SLASHER

The Last Word Killer is a slasher, a specific type of supernatural (or near-supernatural) serial killer inspired by horror films like *Halloween* and *Nightmare on Elm Street*. If you don't have access to **World of Darkness: Slasher**, a brief summary of Jacob's Merits follows:

- **Damnable Certainty:** When Jacob kills someone in order to progress the spell that will bring his daughter back to life, he regains a point of Willpower.
- **Telltale Murder:** When Jacob kills someone, he may create a scene such that the crime scene reveals a single statement to any investigator who earns at least one success on a Wits + Investigation roll. This statement is invariably that the victim's last words were important somehow.
- **Weaponry Monomaniac:** Jacob gains the 8-again property on attacks with his straight razor, but he can never leave the weapon behind. If he is ever forcibly separated from it, he gains the obsession derangement until he gets it back.

The Howling Dead

<A piercing, mad shriek>

Virtue: Fortitude — The Howling Dead endure. Driven by their mindless fury, they do not stop for anything.

Vice: Gluttony — The Hungry Dead consume everything they encounter in the Depths: *Ofrendas*, ghosts, even explorers from the land of the living.

Background: Ghosts aren't exactly the sanest of creatures at the best of times. Even a rational individual, possessed of all her mental faculties, can become monomaniacal or develop odd tics when she shuffles off the mortal coil. Most can still be dealt with — but then you have the Howling Dead. Theories abound on what creates them. Some believe they are the ghosts of those suffering from mental illness, driven even more mad by the grave. Others believe they are those who died in such horrific agony that anything of their rational, human selves was shattered irreparably. An even bigger mystery is what causes them to swarm: for swarm they do, sometimes in mobs of a dozen, sometimes in hordes of a hundred or more. Some Underworld explorers have claimed to witness vast swarms of thousands of these mad, shrieking ghosts, pouring through the tunnels and devouring everything before them. Thankfully, those reports remain unconfirmed.

Description: The Howling Dead as a collective resemble nothing so much as a vast, softly-luminescent crowd, moving as one like a flock of sparrows. They always run — even when no prey has been sighted, they are endlessly on the mood, driven by whatever madness infects them. Individually, they are as varied as they are horrific: some resemble zombies right

out of a horror film, torn bodies missing limbs, leaking blood and other fluids from horrific wounds. Others resemble strange hybrids of men and deep-sea life, all pale, rubbery skin and sightless eyes above a mouth full of needle-sharp teeth.

Storytelling Hints: The Howling Dead, unless encountered in small swarms, are almost more of a terrain hazard than a true antagonist. They are tireless, implacable, and numerous — most Underworld explorers can do little other than avoid them or, at best, block off their route with mystical wards long enough to (hopefully) effect an escape from the Underworld.

HOWLING DEAD SWARMS

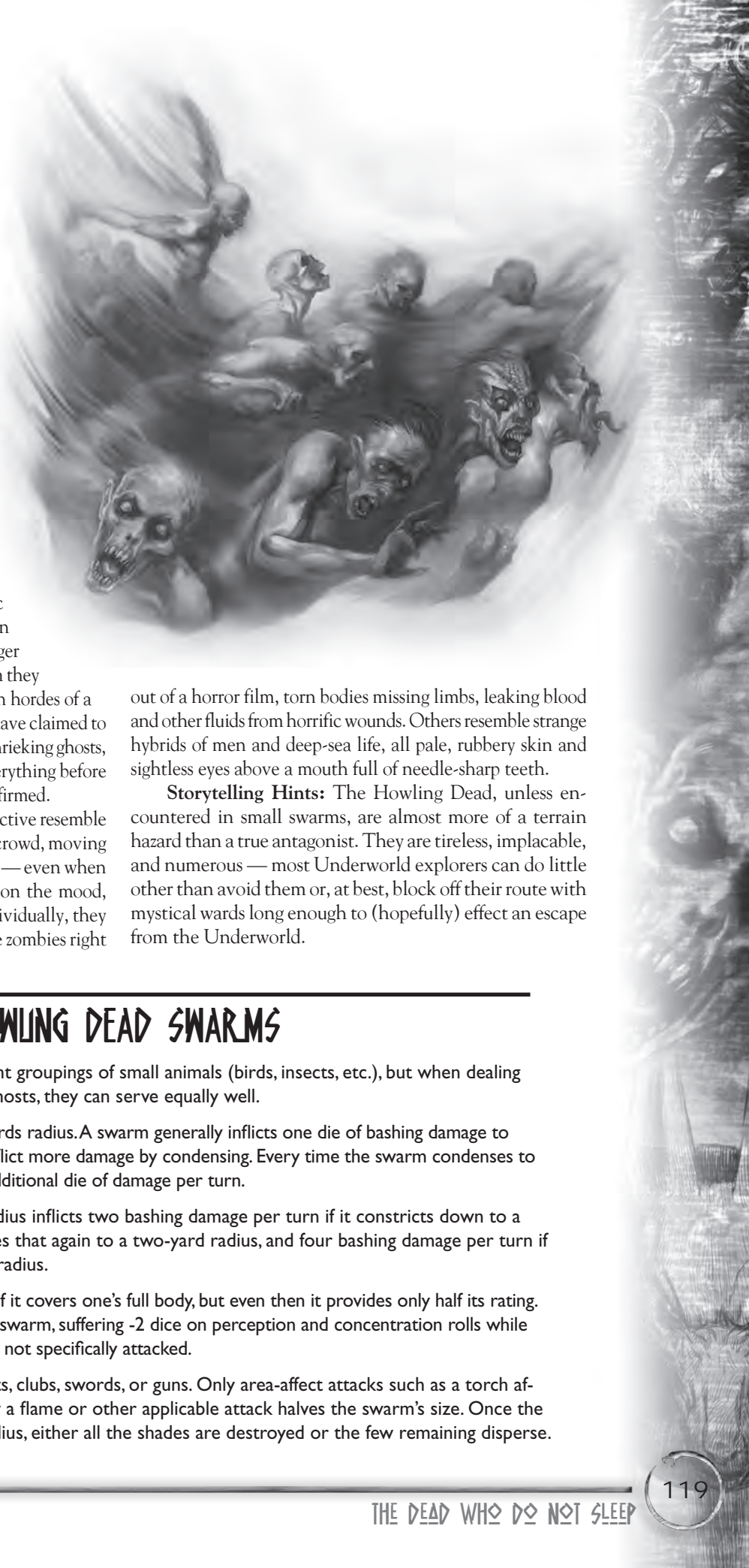
Ordinarily, swarms are used to represent groupings of small animals (birds, insects, etc.), but when dealing with a vast horde of ravening zombie-ghosts, they can serve equally well.

Swarms are measured by their size in yards radius. A swarm generally inflicts one die of bashing damage to anyone within its radius. A swarm can inflict more damage by condensing. Every time the swarm condenses to cover half of its full area, it inflicts one additional die of damage per turn.

Therefore, a swarm of eight yards in radius inflicts two bashing damage per turn if it constricts down to a four-yard radius, three bashing if it halves that again to a two-yard radius, and four bashing damage per turn if it condenses itself down to a one-yard radius.

Armor is effective against a swarm only if it covers one's full body, but even then it provides only half its rating. In addition, targets are distracted by the swarm, suffering -2 dice on perception and concentration rolls while they are within the radius, even if they're not specifically attacked.

The swarm cannot be attacked with fists, clubs, swords, or guns. Only area-affect attacks such as a torch affect it. Each point of damage inflicted by a flame or other applicable attack halves the swarm's size. Once the swarm is reduced below a one-yard radius, either all the shades are destroyed or the few remaining disperse.



The Howling Dead

Note: The following statistics are for an individual Howling Dead, such as might be encountered in a small group or (rarely) alone. For vast hordes of the creatures, see the sidebar below.

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 1, Resistance 4

Willpower: 10

Morality: 0

Initiative: 5

Defense: 6

Speed: 17

Size: 5

Corpus: 9

Essence: 10

Numina: Banshee Wail, (7 dice), Consume Offering, Ghost-Eater, Terrify (7 dice)

The Family Man

"It's not good for families to be apart. This is for the best, don't you agree?"

Virtue: Charity — the Family Man truly believes a family is better off together in the Underworld than separated by the veil of death.

HOWLING DEAD NUMINA

Banshee Wail: The ghost creates an earsplitting scream that deafens anyone nearby. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. Anyone within 20 yards of the ghost must succeed on a Resolve + Stamina roll — the number of successes gained or be stunned for one turn (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 167). Characters that are stunned by the wail also suffer a -3 penalty to any Perception checks that rely on hearing for the remainder of the scene.

Consume Offering: The ghost can regain sustenance from consuming food and drink brought down into the Underworld, whether by a Sin-Eater directly, or through a Day of the Dead-style ceremony. Similarly, the ghost can sup on the blood that sometimes trickles down from stalactites, or from the waters of the Underworld's myriad rivers. When the ghost consumes any of these, roll Power + Finesse. Each success translates to one point of regained Essence. The ghost may only perform this once per day (a day being a 24-hour period within the Underworld, given that no sun ever rises on this subterranean realm).

Ghost-Eater: When making a successful attack against another ghost, the Howling Dead automatically siphons a number of Essence equal to the damage inflicted. This Essence is removed from the target's pool and added directly to the Howling Dead's pool.

THE FAMILY MAN'S NUMINA

Concealment: The Family Man is able to create a fog, summon shadows, or whip up a dust storm to create concealment in an area, which it typically uses to cause traffic accidents due to poor visibility. The geist spends a point of Essence per level of concealment (barely, partially, or substantially, or fully concealed; see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 162) and rolls Power + Finesse. Each success extends the effect up to one yard from the geist. The effect lasts up to a scene. Remember that the geist suffers penalties to its ranged attacks as well while in cover.

Hallucinations: This Numen allows the Family Man to create an illusion. The geist spends a point of Essence and pictures the illusion it wants to create in its mind. This may be a sight, sound, or even a person meant to interact with the target. The Family Man makes a contested Power + Finesse versus the subject's Wits + Composure + Supernatural Advantage roll. For each success the geist rolls in excess of the target, the illusion affects one of the subject's senses. The illusion is utterly compelling, but if the vision does something notably unusual the Storyteller may allow the target a Resolve + Composure roll to realize that his senses are lying to him.

Left-Handed Spanner: This Numen temporarily disables a specific technological object, such as a cell phone, computer, or an automobile engine. The malfunction has no apparent external cause. In truth, the geist using the Numen has overloaded the object with spiritual energy, thus causing its breakdown. The geist expends a point of Essence and focuses on the object to disable it. The object ceases to work for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. Valid pieces of technology that can be overcome include anything manufactured by industrial means with at least three separate parts; a gun is valid, but a hinge or syringe is not. The object cannot be larger than the geist, but a discernible part of a complex machine may also be targeted. A geist could affect the engine of a car, for example, but not the entire automobile.

Vice: Envy — Deep down, the Family Man enjoys the grief that comes when a ghost sees the shades of his beloved family join him in the Underworld. That grief is, after all, in its nature.

Background: It had a family once; it's certain of that much, even if it can't remember their faces any more. It remembers the importance of the family unit, remembers how, if the home is broken, something awful happens. It doesn't remember *what*, but it remembers that it's bad. And most of all, it remembers how much it missed its family, and how it wished someone could have brought them together again. And so, in its infinite kindness, it brings other families back together. It hurts for a little while, but then everything is so much better. The dead never say "thank you," but that's all right. For the Family Man, the expression on their faces is thanks enough.

The Family Man is a rather unusually specific geist: a geist of the grief that comes when a family is separated by a premature death: a child dies in a car accident and her parents split up, the grief too much for their relationship. A father dies, leaving his children without a provider or a protector. These are inexcusable tragedies in its eyes, and it knows the only way to heal the wounds is to bring the family together again — in the Underworld.

Description: The Family Man resembles nothing so much as the archetypal '50s sitcom dad: sweater-vest over shirt and tie, sharply-pressed slacks, horn-rimmed glassed, and a corn cob pipe. The only difference is its face: most of the time, it's a theatrical Tragedy mask. Only when it brings a family together again does it change, briefly, to the face of Comedy. It speaks in hoarse, sobbing whispers, telling of the pain of loss and separation and how much better everything will be when the family is together again.

Storytelling Hints: Family Man spends most of its time lurking in the Autochthonous Depths, seeking ghosts who left families behind in the land of the living. It tries to engage them in conversation (though its faculties are limited, and all it can really talk about is how good the family is and how bad it is to be apart from them) until the ghost agrees that it wishes it could be with its family again. Once this wish is expressed, the Family Man returns to the lands above to begin its grim work. Using its Numina, it engineers situations calculated to kill the ghost's family. It has improved at this with practice: it now knows that it must make the deaths sufficiently unexpected and brutal to guarantee that the family become ghosts. Mass car accidents are its favorite method, but should that prove unfeasible it might try poisoning a family meal or causing a gas leak in the house. If all else fails, the Family Man has been known to possess a violent criminal and steer him into a "botched robbery leading to multiple homicides" scenario.



The Family Man

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 8, Resistance 4

Willpower: 7

Initiative: 11

Defense: 8

Speed: 15

Size: 5

Corpus: 9

Essence: 14

Psyche: 3

Threshold: The Silent

Key: Industrial 4

Numina: Concealment (11 dice), Hallucinations (11 dice), Left-Handed Spanner, Possession (11 dice), Telekinesis (11 dice)

The Banished

"You son of a bitch, I wasn't finished yet!"

Virtue: Temperance — Cullen is patient and careful when choosing his victims, and almost never kills on impulse.

Vice: Pride — Despite the nature of his gruesome crimes, Cullen's choice of victims was always about power, not sex. He needs to feel better than everyone else around him.

Background: The natural order of things (if such a term can even be applied to the Depths) is that a ghost lingers in the land of the living until all of its anchors are lost. Only then is it pulled down, down into the icy



embrace of the Underworld. Sometimes, though, the natural order is defied, and the ghost is banished to the Underworld by outside agents — mortal exorcists, perhaps, or Sin-Eaters under the mistaken belief that destroying a ghost's anchors allows it to move on.

Steve Earl Cullen was a very bad man in life. He hurt little animals as a boy, and when those stopped being satisfying he moved up to hurting little girls. The great state of Texas managed to convict him for three, but the investigators are sure he was responsible for at least four more. Still, three dead little girls is more than enough to warrant the death penalty in Texas, and at midnight on May 14, 2004, Steve Earl Cullen had a needle stuck in his arm. His last words were "But I ain't finished yet." Evidently he wasn't — it took an hour and fifty-seven minutes for his heart to finally stop.

Even after death, Cullen wasn't finished yet. His ghost rose up, bound to the shack in the woods where he took his victims, to the rusty old merry-go-round at the playground where he hunted, and to the shallow, unmarked grave where his last victim, the one the police never found, was buried. He killed four more girls before anybody realized what was happening, and a group of occultists came together to stop him. They tore down the merry-go-round with crowbars and wrenches, they burned down his killing shack — and they even found the remains of little Meredith Baxter and saw to it that she was properly buried in consecrated earth. The murderous ghost, deprived of his anchors, was flung screaming into the Underworld.

WHO BANISHED STEVE EARL CULLEN?

The identities — even the very nature — of the group that drove Cullen into the Underworld are left deliberately vague, so you can tailor them to your own chronicle. If you're running **Geist**, for example, Cullen might have been banished by a Sin-Eater krewé and thus has special reason to hate the Bound. Likewise, it could just as easily have been a mage cabal, a hunter cell, or even the troupe's characters themselves (this last option works especially well if the characters didn't know about the Underworld when they exorcised Cullen and assumed that destroying his anchors destroyed him for good).

STEVE EARL CULLEN'S NUMINA

Dement: This power assaults a person's mind with a cavalcade of nightmarish imagery, breaking down the victim's sanity in the process. Such images are often personal and culled from the target's own memory. The ghost doesn't itself control these images, and in fact doesn't know what they are — thus, it's probably the victim's own mind that draws up the mental torture. The ghost can, however, use some of its own memory and history to affect the victim, thus furthering the visions of terror.

Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse versus the target's Intelligence + Composure. Success indicates that the victim gains a mild derangement (choice of the ghost) for a number of days equal to the successes gained over the victim.

Dissembling Guise: This Numen draws on the memories of a manifested ghost's target to give it the features of a loved one that has passed on. Spend a point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse. With success, the manifested ghost takes on the appearance of a dead friend or family member of the target to all who view it. This false countenance carries a subtle compulsion that exploits the emotions of the target, making him unwilling to harm (or countenance harm being done to) the ghost or the ghost's anchor. The target may spend a point of Willpower to overcome this effect for one turn or can roll Resolve + Composure - the number of successes gained on the Numen roll to negate the effect completely.

But Steve Earl Cullen isn't done yet.

Description: Middle-aged and flabby, Cullen's ghost looks much like the man himself did in life: balding, with a terrible comb-over, dressed in a frayed and stained wife beater and canvas work pants. He wears those oversized, tinted glasses you only ever see on mug shots of sex offenders, and his mouth never quite seems to close all the way. He speaks in a high-pitched, almost child-like voice except when he's hurting people — then his voice becomes deep and cruel and strong.

Storytelling Hints: Cullen's ghost roams the tunnels of the Underworld, searching for new victims. Most of the time, he comes up empty — for whatever reason, not a lot of children leave ghosts behind in the Underworld. He still remembers the men and women who banished him to this cold, dark place where no one will play with him, and over the years his hate has grown immeasurably and broadened in scope to apply to *anyone* who still walks in the land of the living. He isn't the sort to go for a frenzied assault; direct confrontation was never his thing (that's part of the reason he targeted children in life). He is, however, happy to play the part of the friendly, helpful guide, then lead his "new friends" into one of the many hazards of the Underworld. Only when he is in a position of dominance, or if someone tries to take one of his "playmates" away, will Cullen act directly against adults.

Steve Earl Cullen

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 2

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 17

Size: 5

Corpus: 7

Essence: 10

Numina: Compulsion (7 dice), Dement (7 dice), Dissembling Guise (7 dice)

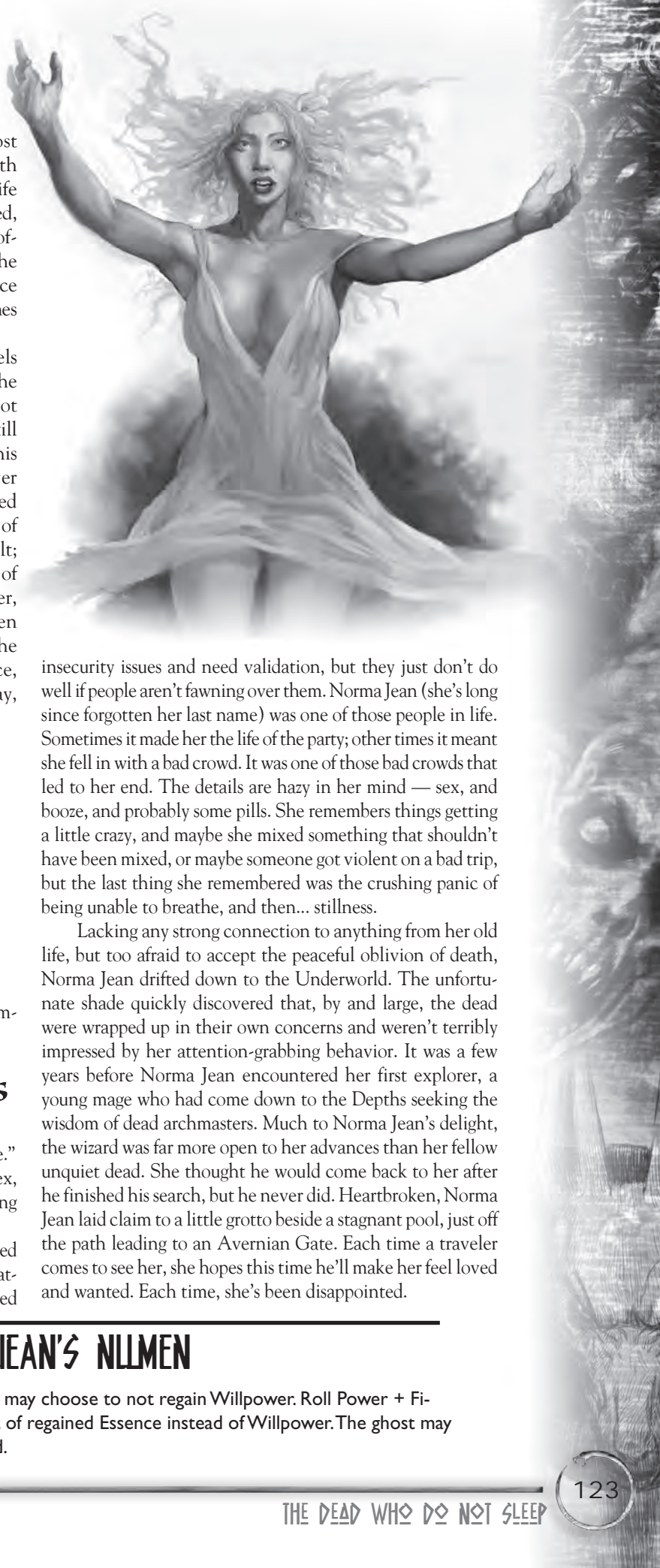
Norma Jean, The Succubus

"Please.... I just don't want to be alone."

Virtue: Hope — "Maybe *this* time he'll really love me."

Vice: Gluttony — For Norma Jean, it's not about sex, it's about that feeling of being loved and wanted. It's a feeling she just can't ever get enough of.

Background: Some people, for whatever reason, just need to be the center of attention. Maybe they're overcompensating for a chilly family life, maybe they're battling deep-seated



insecurity issues and need validation, but they just don't do well if people aren't fawning over them. Norma Jean (she's long since forgotten her last name) was one of those people in life. Sometimes it made her the life of the party; other times it meant she fell in with a bad crowd. It was one of those bad crowds that led to her end. The details are hazy in her mind — sex, and booze, and probably some pills. She remembers things getting a little crazy, and maybe she mixed something that shouldn't have been mixed, or maybe someone got violent on a bad trip, but the last thing she remembered was the crushing panic of being unable to breathe, and then... stillness.

Lacking any strong connection to anything from her old life, but too afraid to accept the peaceful oblivion of death, Norma Jean drifted down to the Underworld. The unfortunate shade quickly discovered that, by and large, the dead were wrapped up in their own concerns and weren't terribly impressed by her attention-grabbing behavior. It was a few years before Norma Jean encountered her first explorer, a young mage who had come down to the Depths seeking the wisdom of dead archmasters. Much to Norma Jean's delight, the wizard was far more open to her advances than her fellow unquiet dead. She thought he would come back to her after he finished his search, but he never did. Heartbroken, Norma Jean laid claim to a little grotto beside a stagnant pool, just off the path leading to an Avernian Gate. Each time a traveler comes to see her, she hopes this time he'll make her feel loved and wanted. Each time, she's been disappointed.

NORMA JEAN'S NUMEN

Sin Feeder: When the ghost engages in its Vice, it may choose to not regain Willpower. Roll Power + Finesse, instead. Each success translates to one point of regained Essence instead of Willpower. The ghost may only perform this Numen once per 24-hour period.

Description: Norma Jean was a pretty girl in life, and death has only added a haunting, ethereal quality to her. Though the color has faded from her skin and hair, she retains the generous curves and mischievous smile that made her popular with the boys in her living days. Her wispy, pale hair always seems to be floating, like she's underwater, and her form gives off a faint, greenish-white light.

Storytelling Hints: Norma Jean isn't so much an antagonist as a temptation. She isn't violent (although if she's rejected especially cruelly she might lash out), nor does she have some sinister agenda; she just wants people to love her and make her feel good about herself. Sympathetic characters might very well be disposed to help her move on, while less-philanthropic characters might just see her as an opportunity to indulge in consequence-free sex (the fact that, technically, she's dead is just an added turn-on for some people). Either way, she's very persistent, and more than willing to use her charm and her Numina to convince attractive male characters to spend some time with her — which can be hazardous, given the addictive nature of sin in the Great Below.

Norma Jean

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

Willpower: 7

Morality: 6

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 16

Size: 5

Corpus: 8

Essence: 10

Numina: Banshee Wail (6 dice), Harrow (6 dice), Sin Feeder (6 dice)

The Traveler

"Please help me; they won't let me cross."

Virtue: Faith — Although he has no way of knowing whether the account he found in the library is true or not, the Traveler is willing to risk it on faith.

Vice: Greed — The Traveler is utterly unconcerned with the consequences of his desires for anyone other than himself.

Background: Some ghosts accept their descent into the Underworld with, if not quite grace, then at least with a quiet resignation. Not so the Traveler — his last anchor (the blood-stained boat propeller that killed him after he fell overboard) was melted down for scrap a dozen year ago, and all he's ever wanted since was to get back. At first, he tried to "piggyback" on Underworld explorers he came across, using pleading, trickery, and sometimes outright threats to make them bring him back to the surface. Each time, he failed — either the explorers bested him, or they lacked the occult prowess to forge him a new anchor. Once, he even managed to possess a mortal occultist and make a mad dash for the Avernian Gate. Before he'd been back in the land of the quick for more than an hour, he was spotted by a Sin-Eater and forced out of "his" body and back to the Underworld. That brief taste of freedom was more than enough to steel his resolve.

Possession and trickery are flawed tactics — the Traveler sees that now. But in the deepest caverns of the Autochthonous Depths, he has found a new way. The

VICE AND THE UNDERWORLD

Any time a character engages in her Vice while in the Underworld, she runs the risk of becoming addicted to it. The character's player should roll Resolve + Composure, with a penalty equal to the number of times that character has acted upon her Vice while in the Great Below (maximum -5 penalty). Failure means that for the remainder of the story, the character can no longer regain Willpower through her Vice *unless* she's in the Underworld (she can end this restriction prematurely by spending a full Willpower dot, however). A dramatic failure is worse: the character cannot leave the Underworld of her own volition. She is trapped by her own desire, unwilling and unable to leave the source of pleasure so damningly short-lived. She can be dragged out by others, or can spend a full Willpower dot to shake herself of the fetters of addiction. Success allows her to engage in her Vice without the fear of addiction, and an exceptional success actually grants her a point of Willpower as a result.

THE TRAVELER'S NUMEN

One Step Behind: This Numen allows the ghost to bind a bit of itself to the target, creating a temporary living anchor. The ghost spends three Essence and rolls Power + Finesse versus the Resolve + Supernatural Advantage of its target. If the ghost wins the contest, the target becomes a living anchor for the duration of the scene. The ghost may extend the effect of the Numen by spending a point of Essence at the end of the scene and for every hour that passes thereafter. Ghosts can make this effect permanent by investing a point of corpus into the bond. This permanently reduces the corpus of the ghost by one (and some Sin-Eaters claim this was how the first geists were born). Once formed, only an exorcism can sever the bond between a ghost and its target. Ghosts may only have one living fetter at a time.



remnants of an old library lie there, in a forgotten cave by the banks of the Phlogiston. Within that library is a book, and within the book is described a door, deep in the Lower Mysteries, which leads to a place that is *not* a place. A ghost who crosses that threshold can take on a mantle of power, the book says, becoming something very like unto a god. The Traveler thinks that sounds like a good start.

Description: He is a hodgepodge image of just about every itinerant you can think of: trucker's hat, sailor's pea coat, sturdy cowboy boots. His clothing is worn and dusty, road-stained and obviously lived in (well, at some point anyways). His back is scored by long, horizontal slashes, tearing cleanly through coat, shirt, and ephemeral flesh alike.

Storytelling Hints: The Traveler, as **Geist** players might have already guessed, is a ghost on his way to transforming into a geist. He has the occult knowledge, he knows the way to the transformative door, the only things stopping him are the rivers. Lacking a **Psyche** score, he cannot cross of his own volition, and for reasons unknown to him, the Ferryman refuse to accept his payment to carry him across. He lurks beside the Phlogiston, endlessly waiting, hoping to find a living visitor who will carry him into the Lower Mysteries and bring him to the door.

The Traveler isn't actively malicious, but he certainly doesn't care about the well-being of his guides. He is more than happy to lie about or understate the dangers on the path if he thinks it would dissuade them from proceeding, and he really doesn't care one bit about whether or not they can find their way home once he makes it to the door. If his guides want his help on the road back, well, they're more than welcome to become the first worshipers of the Traveling God.

The Traveler

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 3

Willpower: 7

Morality: 4

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 16

Size: 5

Corpus: 8

Essence: 10

Numina: One Step Behind, Possession (6 dice)

The Harrower

"And when I ascend from the depths, I shall lead the captives in my wake, and I shall receive gifts even from the rebellious men."

Virtue: Faith — Raymond is guided by his belief in God and his desire to carry out what he perceives to be his destiny.

Vice: Pride — Raymond is so convinced of his own divinity that he refuses to accept any other explanation for his resurrection.

Background: Most Sin-Eaters focus their attentions on helping the dead to move on, or else on keeping the living and the dead separate. Not so Raymond Santos. A devout Catholic his entire life, after he was killed in a house fire he was offered a second chance at life by what he believed to be an angel. Seeing the obvious parallels between himself and the resurrection of his Messiah, Raymond came to believe that he was the Second Coming, and that the dead trapped in the Underworld are trapped there because they have been waiting for him to come and redeem them. Just as Christ descended into Hell after the Crucifixion and brought forth the virtuous dead who came before him, Raymond believes that the End of Days cannot properly commence until he has freed the dead from the Underworld — not by resolving their stories and letting them pass on, but by leading them bodily out of the Great Below and up into Heaven.

Other Sin-Eaters have tried to reason with him, but Raymond listens only to the voice of his fiery angel, whom he calls Anunciación. The angel tells him not to listen to the heretics, nor to sway from his course. Those who wish to see the dead remain trapped in their prison are at best deluded and at worst servants of the Adversary. Raymond is not a violent man by nature, but if pushed too far, well, even Jesus had His wrathful moments.

Description: Raymond is a slim Hispanic man in his early thirties. He dresses simply, typically in plain T-shirts, cargo pants, and sandals. Since his return from death, he has grown out his hair and beard in a style that mimics the popular Western depiction of Christ. His skin is pale from lack of sunshine, and he has the hollow-cheeked look of an ascetic. Sometimes, especially while ministering to the dead, he wears a crown of dead, thorny vines, braided into a simple circlet.

Storytelling Hints: Raymond might seem little more than a harmless nut at first — deluded as to the nature of the Event and his attendant geist, perhaps, but ultimately harmless. That initial impression belies the lengths he's willing to go to in order to achieve his divine goal: he's already tried simply

leading the dead out of the Depths with no success, and he's made several forays deeper into the Lower Mysteries in search of a solution that can bring about his work. He's happy to accept help from others, but anyone who questions his teachings or his divinity is liable to be re-educated, forcefully.

Raymond Santos

Archetype: Pilgrim

Threshold: The Prey

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 2, Crafts 2, Occult (Eschatology) 2, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Drive (Trucks) 2, Firearms 1, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression (Scripture Recitation) 3, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 5

Merits: Ceremonies 3, Common Sense,

Holistic Awareness, Meditative Mind, Memento (Crown of Thorns) 1

Willpower: 7

Synergy: 6

Initiative: 5

Speed: 9

Defense: 2

Health: 8

Psyche: 2

Manifestations: Boneyard 2, Caul 3, Oracle 4, Shroud 2

Keys: Pyre-Flame 2, Passion 2, Stigmatic 4, Stillness 1

Ceremonies: Pass On, plasmic Manifestation

Plasm/Per Turn: 18/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Brawl	0(B)	N/A	2
Pistol	2(L)	20/40/80	5

The False Ferryman

"Sure, I can take you across. No problem."

Virtue: Prudence — Xolotl gauges his marks carefully and only offers passage to those it deems worthy (and unsuspecting)

Vice: Sloth — Xolotl wants the benefits of serving the Leviathan (whatever those might be in its twisted mind), but only wants to put forth the bare minimum of effort to receive it.

Background: No one really knows who or what the Ferryman are — they stand on the banks of the rivers, waiting for custom, and seldom speak beyond the offering of their service and the naming of their price. Somehow, they're able to cross the rivers, despite having no Psyche of their own, and moreover, they can carry others across with them. The prevailing theory is that each Ferryman's boat is a potent memento, and that if one could wrest it from the Ferryman's grasp, one could sail the waterways of the Underworld freely.

That may be true, or it may be nonsense, but what can be proven (although sadly, often too late to do any good) is that the Ferryman are not all-powerful or omniscient, and at some river crossings, false Ferryman berth their rafts, offering to carry travelers to the far shore only to steal their offerings and abscond. For most, this is a one-time deal (or at least, one time per crossing); the dead are not so easily fooled, and they are inclined to wrath.

More insidious than these morbid tricksters, though, is the false Ferryman that calls itself Xolotl, after the dog-faced psycho-



THE CROWN OF THORNS

Charm, The Torn (Death By Violence), Stigmatic Key

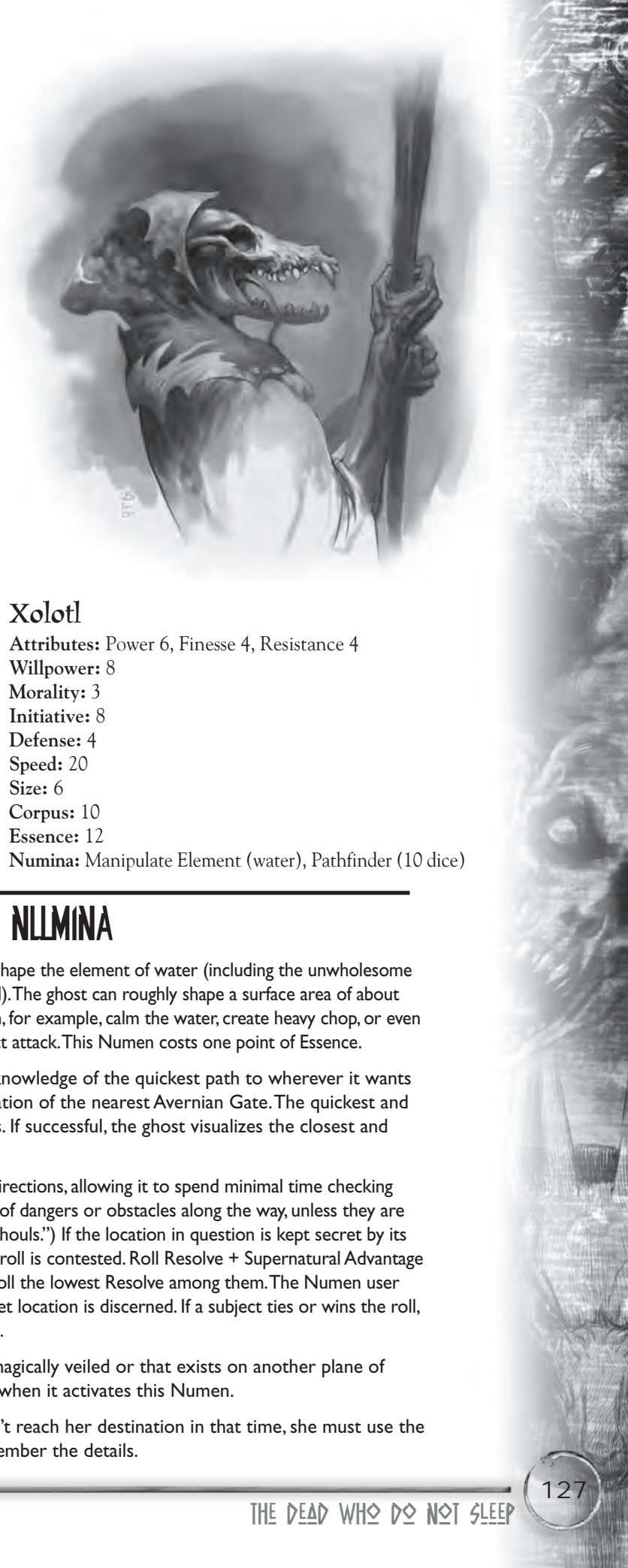
The crown of thorns has been an enduring symbol of suffering for nearly two thousand years. Ever since the Romans crowned Christ "Rex Iudaeorum," it has been a symbol of martyrdom, and this particular incarnation of it is no different. This crown of thorns memento is not the original, of course, but rather comes from a particularly vicious hate crime against a young gay man in Oklahoma. It carries the resonance of the Torn, and has been dedicated to the Stigmatic Key — in addition, anyone donning the crown suffers one point of lethal damage, but gains the benefit of the 8-again rule on any Empathy rolls.

pomp of the Aztecs. It makes its berth on the banks of the fetid Acheron, and its prices are quite reasonable, especially for the living: only a morsel of meat or a single red carnation. If a traveler is suspicious to be ferried across the River of Woe so cheaply, it's no wonder: Xolotl is not a boatman at all, merely an imposter in the service (or perhaps worship) of Leviathan, the Kerberos guardian of the Ocean of Fragments (see p. 194). The false Ferryman loads its passengers into its little boat of reeds and poles out onto the river — and when the near shore is out of sight, it capsizes the boat, plunging the travelers into the icy waters and sweeping them downstream, where eventually they are deposited in the Ocean of Fragments itself. Xolotl, meanwhile, simply rights its boat and poles back to the shore, its future customers none the wiser.

Description: Xolotl resembles a tall, skeletal humanoid figure with a dog's skull for a head. Its feet face the wrong way, lending it an awkward, backward-leaning stance when it's at rest. Whether it was once male or female is completely impossible to determine; even its voice is little more than an androgynous, sepulchral whisper.

Storytelling Hints: Once Xolotl has its victims on the boat, not much can be done to stop it — the boat is small, and any attempt to stop the Ferryman from capsizing it is likely to swamp the craft anyway. Astute characters might recognize that something fishy is going on before getting on the boat, while those who are duped might well, assuming they survive the Ocean of Fragments, come back looking for revenge.

Exactly why Xolotl does what it does remains a mystery. It might be that the ghost is bound to the service of Leviathan (perhaps in payment for breaking one of the Old Laws of the Ocean of Fragments), or perhaps it merely worships the vast and terrifying entity as a sort of chthonian god, and sees sacrificing travelers on the waterways as its holy duty.



Xolotl

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 4, Resistance 4

Willpower: 8

Morality: 3

Initiative: 8

Defense: 4

Speed: 20

Size: 6

Corpus: 10

Essence: 12

Numina: Manipulate Element (water), Pathfinder (10 dice)

XOLOTL'S NUMINA

Manipulate Element: The ghost can move, morph, and shape the element of water (including the unwholesome substances that flow through the rivers of the Underworld). The ghost can roughly shape a surface area of about 100 square feet or a volume of roughly 40 cubic feet. It can, for example, calm the water, create heavy chop, or even form a small vortex. This Numen cannot be used as a direct attack. This Numen costs one point of Essence.

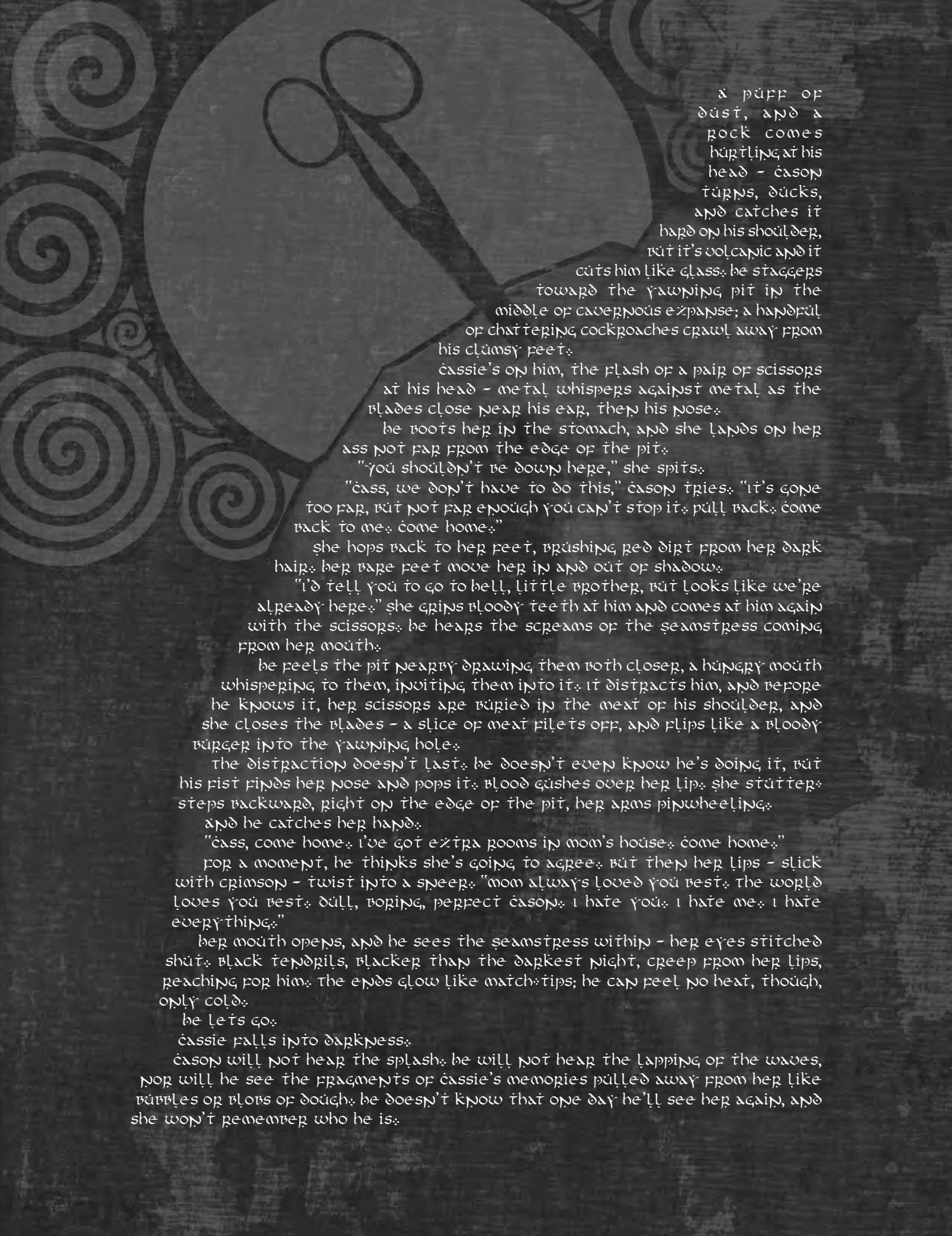
Pathfinder: The ghost with this Numen draws forth knowledge of the quickest path to wherever it wants to go, be it the quickest way back to its den or the location of the nearest Avernian Gate. The quickest and most efficient path isn't always the safest, but so it goes. If successful, the ghost visualizes the closest and most efficient route to the location it desires.

The information is stored in its mind as a precise set of directions, allowing it to spend minimal time checking for landmarks. This Numen does not reveal the presence of dangers or obstacles along the way, unless they are specific landmarks. ("Turn left at the garden of shrieking ghouls.") If the location in question is kept secret by its owner (such as a secret path to the Lower Reaches), the roll is contested. Roll Resolve + Supernatural Advantage for the subject. If the place is shared by multiple people, roll the lowest Resolve among them. The Numen user must be in the physical presence of someone whose secret location is discerned. If a subject ties or wins the roll, he cannot be subjected to this Numen again for 24 hours.

This Numen cannot locate the path to a place that is magically veiled or that exists on another plane of existence, other than the plane that the ghost inhabits when it activates this Numen.

The Numen's effects last for a scene. If the spirit doesn't reach her destination in that time, she must use the Numen again, or make a Power roll to attempt to remember the details.





a puff of
dust, and a
rock comes
hurtling at his
head - cason
turns, ducks,
and catches it
hard on his shoulder,
but it's volcanic and it
cuts him like glass. he staggers
toward the yawning pit in the
middle of cavernous expanse; a handful
of chattering cockroaches crawl away from
his clumsy feet.

cassie's on him, the flash of a pair of scissors
at his head - metal whispers against metal as the
blades close near his ear, then his nose.

he roots her in the stomach, and she lands on her
ass not far from the edge of the pit.

"you shouldn't be down here," she spits.

"cass, we don't have to do this," cason tries. "it's gone
too far, but not far enough you can't stop it. pull back. come
back to me. come home."

she hops back to her feet, brushing red dirt from her dark
hair. her bare feet move her in and out of shadow.

"i'd tell you to go to hell, little brother, but looks like we're
already here." she grips bloody teeth at him and comes at him again
with the scissors. he hears the screams of the seamstress coming
from her mouth.

he feels the pit nearby drawing them both closer, a hungry mouth
whispering to them, inviting them into it. it distracts him, and before
he knows it, her scissors are buried in the meat of his shoulder, and
she closes the blades - a slice of meat flies off, and flips like a bloody
burger into the yawning hole.

the distraction doesn't last. he doesn't even know he's doing it, but
his fist finds her nose and pops it. blood gushes over her lip. she stutters
backward, right on the edge of the pit, her arms pirwheeling.
and he catches her hand.

"cass, come home. i've got extra rooms in mom's house. come home."

for a moment, he thinks she's going to agree. but then her lips - slick
with crimson - twist into a sneer. "mom always loved you best. the world
loves you best. dull, boring, perfect cason. i hate you. i hate me. i hate
everything."

her mouth opens, and he sees the seamstress within - her eyes stitched
shut. black tendrils, blacker than the darkest night, creep from her lips,
reaching for him. the ends glow like matchtips; he can feel no heat, though,
only cold.

he lets go.

cassie falls into darkness.

cason will not hear the splash. he will not hear the lapping of the waves,
nor will he see the fragments of cassie's memories pulled away from her like
bubbles or blobs of dough. he doesn't know that one day he'll see her again, and
she won't remember who he is.

Chapter Five: The Dead Dominions

Crossing over that first river — wading across a slog of pus, or pushing a pole-boat across an angry tide of scorpions — is an act of crossing the threshold, whereupon a character takes his first steps into the subterranean labyrinth that is the Lower Mysteries.

Down there, one finds a wider, madder place — insane topography paired with hard-to-parse cartography. Ancient temples sit over mass graves. Statues of forgotten Kerberoi stand crumbled over a narrow channel. A dead tree thrusts up out of the ground, its roots forming a constricting tunnel, its dead boughs acting as home to a number of tiny moths, each with wings glowing green. Vast chasms may await, as do endless pits, dormant volcanoes, and blasted cities.

The deeper one goes, the stranger it gets. The Old Laws pile up. The ghosts become less and less human. The way out is harder to find while the way down is all too easy to see.

The Lay of the Land

The Lower Mysteries are arranged in a series of little fiefdoms and realms — the domains of lunatic ghosts, geists, deathlords, and Kerberoi. Tracts of tunnel and tomb and cavern connect these so-called “Dead Dominions.” Moving from one Dominion to the next (not that it’s a linear progression, not at all) may take hours, or it may take months. It’s like a galaxy of mysterious places carved into the deepest earth, a vast network of glorious potential and endless peril.

This Chapter

This chapter details a number of the Dead Dominions one may find down in the depths of the Lower Mysteries — this chapter is in fact arranged like much of this book, in that the further you read, the deeper you go.

Each Dominion listed is arranged thus:

First, you’ll get a general sense of how to get there (how long the journey might take, any notable landmarks for the trip) as well as a general description of the realm, followed by a discussion of the Old Laws that permeate this particular Dead Dominion (and any rules or ramifications of using those Old Laws).

After that, you’ll find a more particular discussion of the geography of the realm, with significant features listed separately.

Each Dominion is also complete with a discussion on “risk and reward,” meaning, why would one come here, and what perils would the character face in pursuing the goal in such a realm? One of the primary ideas throughout this book is that the Underworld is host to many rewards — the deeper one goes, the bigger the rewards often become. However, the bigger the reward, the bigger the risk to claim that reward.

Finally, you’ll find a handful of antagonists in the realm. Most are “bit players,” and are given brief descriptions and just a quick handful of stats (three, actually) from which you can distill a character sheet. Each has a Power, Finesse, and Resistance trait, from which you can distill their necessary advantages (see “Ghost Traits,” p. 208, *World of Darkness Rulebook*). Each Dominion, however, also comes with one or more “primary antagonist” that characters are likely to face while in that specific domain.

**“I listen then, but with
thirsty ear, for the
witching melody of bugles
blowing reveille, of far
drums beating the long
roll. In my dreams, I hear
again the crash of guns,
the rattle of musketry, the
strange, mournful mutter
of the battlefield.”**

**—the last words of General
Douglas MacArthur**

DEAD MAN'S HAND

A collection of lost souls, vagabonds, and outlaws make their home in the bones of an ancient and long-abandoned Dominion. Like the Underworld's version of a tide pool, stragglers, wanderers, and vagrants wash up here but rarely leave. This motley collection has slowly built a way of life in their little niche of the Underworld. A way station along the path to the Lower Mysteries, Dead Man's Hand offers respite and danger in equal measure.

Getting There

It's said you don't go looking for Dead Man's Hand; it comes looking for you. Most folks stumble across the realm on their way to lower climes and, in fact, the most reliable way to find the Dominion is to get lost. Upon crossing any of the great Underworld rivers, any failure or consecutive failure on an extended roll to navigate the twisted underground catacombs *could* lead to Dead Man's Hand.

Actively looking for Dead Man's Hand based on name or reputation alone incurs a -5 penalty; with reliable directions the best roll will still be at a -4 penalty. Technically, a failure on this roll counts as getting lost, but therein lurks one of the fantastic ironies of discovering the Dead Man's Hand — just when you think you're truly and totally fucked, you hear the murmur of voices or see the distant specks of light.

Description

Nobody knows what the Dominion was used for before the Death Valley krewe stumbled across the realm and settled it. Its original purpose has been lost to time and tide; now it acts as a way station and home for lost souls both literal and figurative. Many never leave Dead Man's Hand, kept here by choice or by necessity. Maybe if they leave they'll be held accountable for crimes committed elsewhere or by renegeing on a deal they're stuck here in servitude. The reasons to stay are outnumbered only by the myriad of paths leading here.

Just as travelers lose all hope that they'll ever find the way back to the surface, a path stands revealed. Was it there before? It leads deeper underground, with sounds and smells filtering up from it to tease the senses. Any sign of civilization in the Underground is a welcome one so the traveler takes a chance — it's not as if she could get any more lost. It's not long before she rounds a sharp dogleg in the path and is surprised to see how the pathway opens and brightens dramatically.

Entering through the cave mouth, the landscape sprawls over the horizon, immediately giving first-time visitor a sense of the enormity of Dead Man's Hand. Various chasms, ridges, rises, and valleys disappear beyond sight. The ceiling is so high in some places that it's easy to forget the whole place is underground. Red sand covers everything and tends to find its way into every nook and cranny blowing into town on lazy spindrifts coming from deeper within the Dominion. The populated areas are lit by torch and candle but the Dominion as a whole has an eerie red glow that seems to come specifically from the powdery sand. Yet, for all the depth and breadth of the Dominion, only the tiniest fraction — crowded around the yawning ingress — is inhabited.

Most of the action is up front in the safest and most populated portion of the realm: a rickety town crowded around the mouth of the monstrous cavern. This community has sprung up in a manner reminiscent of Wild West boom towns (explaining how it got the name "Boom Town"). Beyond the edge of the makeshift urban sprawl, two large crevasses form a natural border around the area. (This feature has earned the title "The Devil's Crack" thanks to some crass smartass.)

A few intrepid individuals have explored beyond these ridges but most don't come back and those that do aren't keen on going back out. The only two who have had any long-term success mapping the Dominion are Mort and Carl, members of the erstwhile Death Valley krewe. They and the handful of other adventurers have reported coyotemen — half-rotten carrion eaters — roaming the red sands beyond the natural border formed by various ridges and cracks. They appear too sapient to be psychopomps but are more feral than the most depraved specters. What they are and how much of a threat they pose is an ongoing question. Otherwise it's a wasteland, earning the title No Man's Land among the locals. Rumors persist of fallen towers, broken walls, and parapets jutting out of crimson dunes. Spurring questions such as: what used to reside here, what happened to them, and is there any chance of them returning? Mort and Carl are quick to dismiss such talk but the fear lingers; doubly so ever since someone found Susana (a founding member of the Death Valley krewe) murdered out by the Devil's Crack. Whether founded or not, the resultant wave of paranoia and suspicion caused the town to post volunteers along a handful of makeshift stick-and-stone watchtowers ringing the area.

Boom Town

When most spirits speak of Dead Man's Hand they're not referring to the vast plain of rock and sand. Rather, they mean Boom Town, the collection of lean-tos and shanties centered on the saloon-style capital building called Aces and Eights. Stragglers, wanderers, and lost souls gather here hoping for mutual protection or simply their piece of the pie. Here anchorless ghosts and other denizens of the Underworld seek to build something better: an actual *community*. Of course, that's just a rose-tinted description of this collection of opportunists hitching their wagons together in the hope that predators and bullies will pick off the guys further out, but the sentiment remains true.

Most folks won't start any trouble that isn't started with them. Boom Town offers the best deal they feel they're going to get, so why ruin it? However, as the town grows larger the cracks and shadows become more plentiful and a certain criminal element has made Boom Town their home. Violence and theft have fast become a daily reality in the alleys and crannies between "streets." Gabriel — *de facto* Kerberos, mayor, and proprietor of Boom Town — and his erstwhile krewe do their best to maintain peace but the settlement has grown too large too quickly and good help is hard to find among the spectral driftwood that washes up on their shore.

Whaddya Need, Man?

Dead Man's Hand has a reputation of being a place where anything can be bought, bartered, or sold. Any number of hired hands, secrets, or illicit items can be procured within the cavernous corpse of this Dead Dominion. Dead Man's Hand plays host to all manner of solicitors, hawkers, and shady dealers in slipshod shacks or peaking out of lean-tos. Curios, stolen *ofrendas*, pawned items with fresh bloodstains, and other questionable fare are on display just waiting for an offer to be made. If a Sin-Eater sees something she likes that isn't apparently for sale, she should make an offer. *Everything* is for sale in Dead Man's Hand. Various specters, ghosts, and stranger denizens have set up haphazard blocks lined with various "booths" and mats forming something of an open-air market. Signs hang over some doors offering services from facilitating vices to carrying burdens for those with *ofrendas* or any other currency to offer.

Aces and Eights Saloon

Towering a full two stories above the rest of Boom Town is the undeniable capital of the land and the Dominion's namesake. The Aces and Eights Saloon started as a couple of cots and a meal of pooled *ofrendas*. Now it's grown into a civic center, capital building, way station, inn, and bar. When the Death Valley krewe arrived, its members were at a crossroads, lost in more ways than one. Gabriel looked around at the vast, empty Dominion and saw a sprawling vista of opportunity to recreate himself. That night, sitting around a barrel fire he and the krewe agreed to forsake the surface world and carve out their niche here. That was 20 years ago. Now Aces and Eights stands where that promise was made and the rest of Boom Town rippled slowly outward.

The architecture of the place looks as if it was thrown together by a tiding of magpies. Aces and Eights is composed of trash and salvage scavenged from as far up as the surface world and as far down as the Lower Mysteries. The floor goes from wooden pallets to particle board to a piece of tin roof and back again. Chairs range from metal folding chairs to airplane seats to fallen stalactites found in the caverns and upended for a place to rest. The walls are lined with anything not structurally useful labeled loosely as "art." Yet between the krewe and a few deceased engineers and artisans it's remarkably sturdy and homey.

Aces and Eights is all things. It is a bar, selling scavenged and collected *ofrendas* to transients and locals. It is an inn, renting beds safe from the threats of the open Underworld to those passing through. It is the social and civic center of Boom Town where everyone gathers to meet, tell stories, keep company, and air their grievances. It is a capital, where Gabriel and the remaining krewe meet to discuss ongoing business and the state of the Dominion.

If you want to find someone, the saloon is as good a place as any to start. It's just as good a place to survey the colorful cast that comprises Boom Town. Lalorna the whore, the silently ominous El Diablo, Re-Pete the Stutterer, Mort, Carl, the Jawless Priest, and a hundred others are in and out each day.

The Old Laws

The laws of Dead Man's Hand have been in place since before the Death Valley krewe arrived and yet remain eerily appropriate to its current use. Both laws are posted upon wooden signs at the entrance of the Dominion and throughout. They can be found written above the bar, etched into the wooden wall of the make-shift outhouses, posted at any number of the stores and curios that have sprung up around the town. Everywhere one goes the watchwords of Dead Man's Hand are writ large so no one forgets. Punishments vary; most often transgressors will find their name on the Do Not Deal list — a chalkboard above the bar within the saloon. Severe transgressions need more severe punishment and that includes hanging (not that it really kills anyone but it sure is uncomfortable and more than a little embarrassing), banishment, and ultimately calling upon the guards of Lowgate or selling their names to the Sibitti of the Forge (more information on these Dominions can be found later in this chapter).

Your Word Is Your Bond

Any promise, deal, or agreement made within Dead Man's Hand is binding. Signed, sealed, and delivered, words quite literally are bonds. If a Sin-Eater makes a deal within Dead Man's Hand, she'd better do good by it. Breaking the letter of an agreement outside the Dominion isn't going to protect her either. Gabriel may not have time to chase down every broken promise but the next time she returns to Dead Man's Hand she can expect her name to be up on the Do Not Deal list posted above the bar or worse, a posse waiting for her.

What Isn't Claimed Is Claimable

If it doesn't have anyone's name on it, it's there for the taking. This can be tricky, it's not like some mystical property law is going to protect some poor soul's stuff if he moves on for a few days or takes his eyes off it for too long. The bigger Boom Town gets, the harder this law is to enforce. Unfortunately, having and holding the item in question is the best way to prove it's yours. If you can't protect it, don't grow attached to it. However, Gabriel is no dummy and has an increasingly keen sense for truth within Dead Man's Hand. If he *can* help he *will* because he knows this place is only a day away from total anarchy. Any semblance of control and order is critical.

Geography

Aces and Eights is the large saloon-styled meeting place in the center of Boom Town. As the primary landmark, the name carried over in a tongue and cheek way to the rest of the Dominion: Dead Man's Hand. By most accounts the only thing out in the badlands of No Man's Land is sand and hard earth, but this Dominion is far older than Gabriel and his krew and remnants of whatever kingdom came before may await discovery. Other interesting sites in and out of town are detailed below.

Zócalo

What started as a campfire and an idea has now become a two-story metropolis of crates, sheds, lean-tos, and shanties. The main street leading from the Dominion mouth to the saloon acts as an open-air market and town square collectively dubbed the zócalo. This is where town-wide announcements may be heard, shouted from the second story balcony — ever since the population has grown too large to all fit within the saloon. It smells of offal and sand, underscored by the sickly sweet scents of rotting fruit and decay. Many successful entrepreneurs have set up shop on this main thoroughway, peddling their more legitimate wares right on the street.

The Black Bazaar

For the not-so legitimate goods and services, one only has to travel two streets away from the zócalo. In a covered alley lit by the occasional lantern and the ever-present red glow lies the Black Bazaar. Here, the less desirable elements carve out their way of life, peddling flesh, vice, and murder. A burgeoning mafia of the dead has formed like a cancer under Boom Town. Gabriel is aware of them but provided they follow the Old Laws he's unable to rouse enough force to excise them. Here, less scrupulous shoppers can purchase anything from slaves to contracts on someone's unlife.

Dead Man's Fingers

About a half-mile outside of Boom Town, a pair of chasms create a natural boundary separating the town from the rest of the Dominion known locally as the Devil's Crack. Deep within these cracks, a series of tributaries and pools have formed said to be fed from every known Underworld river. Whether this is literally true remains to be seen but the various "fingers" do share characteristics with the better known rivers. Drinking or



collecting water from these expansive pools has the same effect as the river they most resemble (see *Underworld Rivers*, **Geist: the Sin-Eaters** pp. 268-271, or in this book, p. 102). Getting to them and back is the real trick. Groups will have to travel the treacherous, broken path down to the bottom of the monstrous crevasse. Extended Strength + Athletics rolls will be required needing at least 20 successes to get down. Even more may be required to get back up depending on how the intrepid soul collects and secures their bounty. Detailed rules for climbing can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 64-65.

No Man's Land

Outside of Boom Town and sprawling out beyond the horizon is a vast track of crevasses, stone mesas, and sand known as No Man's Land. According to Dead Man's Hand's own explorers, Mort and Carl, nothing out there is worth getting. No resources lay beyond Dead Man's Fingers, just a lot of sand and coyote-men. Anyone else who's gone out there corroborates that story but the creature called El Diablo believes otherwise. He believes the ruins of his entire civilization are out there somewhere. Has it been so long that all the castles and towers of his memory have dwindled to dust and succumbed to the sand? Or are Mort and Carl lying? For all the nothing they claim awaits them they still return regularly. Perhaps they don't want to share the riches and refuge they've found? Worse, perhaps they've been compromised by the former inhabitants, servants of a slumbering army who now rise and gather beyond the Devil's Crack. Or maybe they just don't like how crowded Boom Town has gotten and just like to get away.

Risk and Reward

Everything is for sale at the Dead Man's Hand. *Everything*.

The only limit is that the desired item has to be realistically something a ghost or Underworld traveler can get. They are mostly scavengers, beggars with only the occasional skilled laborer. That said, any number of strange items await to be procured: water from Underworld rivers,

gewgaws hand-made from salvage, hired hands, guides, *ofrendas*, information, and even slaves. For those willing to brave the streets at the risk of disappearing down a dark alley, Dead Man's Hand can be a scavenger's paradise.

Items for sale include the whole of Dead Man's Hand itself. It won't be cheap by any stretch, but the Death Valley krewes didn't necessarily know what they were getting into when they settled here. Gabriel in particular is increasingly unsettled by the dreams and visions he has the longer he stays. If the price is right, he can be talked into handing over the "deed." That means all the problems of managing this collection of thieves, scavengers, and carrion-eaters falls to its new owners. The new owners also become the focus of the mysterious El Diablo.

Bit Players

Dead Man's Hand attracts all kinds. Many are stragglers who got lost along the way; most of them are the kind looking to stay lost. From the beautifully absurd to the ancient and treacherous, below are just some of the faces around Boom Town.

Gabriel

Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 7

Gabriel — or Gabe to most — is the owner and proprietor so to speak of Aces and Eights and de facto Mayor of Boom Town. A Sin-Eater and his krewes that got lost and never found; Gabriel saw a niche and filled it, settling the area. Over time, more lost souls came and slowly but surely the idea grew into what it is today. What began as a small commune has become a lawless collection of good, bad, and ugly denizens of the Underworld. Much to his surprise and chagrin, Gabriel is the official Kerberos of Dead Man's Hand. Over time he has developed a supernatural affinity with the Dominion. It started as a series of dreams but now invades his waking mind as well. Every time his rough-shod citizenry breaks the rules he's all too aware of it. He leaves following up and enforcing the laws to the members of his krewes, who he has charged as his deputies, but he fears he's losing control of the situation.

DEATH VALLEY KREWE

Gabriel and his krewes stumbled across Dead Man's Hand and never saw fit to leave. This decision and their time spent in the endless bleak midnight of the Underworld has left them all a little "touched." They might come across as normal enough in passing conversation, but little tics show through that the kids are not alright.

Gabriel himself is haunted by voices and visions. He puts a good face on it as often as he can but deep inside he fears that he is becoming something else entirely. He believes he is merging with the Dominion much in the way that he merged with his *geist* (the Hanged Gambler). What's worse, he fears he may be merging with the former Kerberos of this realm and that once this transition is complete only one of them will remain.

Those that stick close to Aces and Eights and Boom Town fare better for the constant camaraderie, but Mort and Carl in particular may be growing increasingly mad for all anyone knows or can control.

All but one of the original krewes can be found around the Dominion. The missing member, Susana, was mysteriously murdered one night on the outskirts of Boom Town. It's a murder that has gone unsolved even with Gabriel's increasing clairvoyance within the Dominion. This has troubled the locals enough to start up a roughshod town watch, although they spend so much of their time watching No Man's Land that crime thrives within Boom Town itself.

Re-Pete, the Stutterer

Power 7, Finesse 2, Resistance 6

An original member of the Death Valley krewes and settler of Dead Man's Hand, Re-Pete is Gabriel's primary enforcer. A job he maintains by default thanks to his enormous stature. Re-Pete has the sort of presence that quiets most problems before they start. Not the sharpest tool in the shed and speaking with a severe stutter, Re-Pete is a man of few words. When and if he does speak he doesn't like when people complete his sentences for him and a visitor can earn a few easy points letting him finish his own thoughts. He stays near Aces and Eights most of the time but can sometimes be found on the outskirts of town near where Susana was found.

Mort

Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 6

Mort and his partner in crime, Carl, is the foremost authority on No Man's Land. Most of their time is spent out in the vast wasteland beyond the Devil's Crack. Reportedly they're mapping and taking note of the few distinguishing characteristics out there in the impossibly large Dominion. Mort isn't one to stand around and chit-chat with strangers and will discourage people from talking to him at all as best he can. Its small wonder such an antisocialist prefers to spend his time alone in the badlands.

Carl

Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 4

Carl is the more outgoing half of Mort and Carl. He's usually happier to see faces that aren't Mort's after coming in from their weeks-at-a-time-long sojourns. Even still he's light on information about No Man's Land and would prefer to get people talking about themselves and things outside the Dominion. His advice is the same as Mort's when it comes to the surrounding landscape: shut up and stay out.

Beth Anne

Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

Beth Anne can be found anywhere around Boom Town, from the saloon all the way out to the Devil's Crack. She took Susana's murder the hardest and accuses the others of not doing near enough to solve the crime. She's realistic about being unable to do it on her own but her interactions with the rest of the krewes devolve quickly into shouted accusations. A few helpful outsiders would be a welcome addition to her world. The only one of the krewes she doesn't have a mouthful of bile for right now is Morbid Earl, who helps her in his own weird way.

Morbid Earl

Power 2, Finesse 6, Resistance 4

The brains of the operation. A sullen individual who spends most of his time in the saloon toiling away at his various notebooks, chronicling what they know of the Dominion so far. He collects accounts and works closely — from the safety of his corner of the bar — with Mort and

Carl. Altogether he's a cheerless chap with a dim opinion of just about everything. He's the only member of the krewes who believes the original inhabitants may eventually return and want their land back. This is just one of his many doom sage opinions. For more, stop in and talk with him for a few minutes and hear all about how doomed everyone is.

Lalorna, the Marrying Whore

Power 3, Finesse 6, Resistance 4

Lalorna is a half-skeletal mess of a ghost dressed in a palette of eye-popping color and beautiful finery. Despite her bluntly awful appearance she has a way of rousing the lusts of anyone she sets her sights on. She will fawn for the attention of any male character, antagonize and deride any female character and generally mug for attention. If anyone pays her any mind her affections escalate quickly from flirtation to forcing herself on her target and ultimately cajoling the poor sap into putting a ring on her finger. Apparently having passed away unwed and unloved she believes if she can find someone to marry her torment will be over. Be aware that the Old Laws are quite specific on words being binding and visitors should resist even sarcastically committing to the wraith.

The Czech

Power 5, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

The Czech is the unofficial don of the Black Bazaar, having been the first to dare Gabriel in public to stop him. It was a move that emboldened the criminal element and started the avalanche of ne'er do wells and cutthroats lurking in the shadows of Boom Town. The Czech is a ghost who has made his reputation selling less fortunate souls to whoever's buying. Some would be surprised to learn that some of his "slaves" are almost willing to be traded as property. Without anchors and meaning, the mockery of life promises only long hours of mournful repetition. Even slavery is a better option than decaying slowly into madness. For now, the Czech is the man to talk to in order to finalize any deals in the Black Bazaar but it's only a matter of time before a bigger fish comes along and wants a piece of that pie.

Miriam, the Skull Whisperer

Power 3(5), Finesse 3(4), Resistance 3(5)

Miriam seems like any other straggler content to hitch her wagon to Boom Town albeit possessed of considerably more vim than most. She moves quickly through the crowd and is down-right chipper when it comes to rolling out the welcome wagon. It doesn't take much to suss out that she's very much alive but doesn't display any characteristics in common with Sin-Eaters. That is because Miriam is a werewolf interested in collecting information on the strange coyote-men reported out in No Man's Land. The second set of stats above represents Miriam in her near-man and near-wolf forms. Her commitment to pursuing her research is admirable but her separation from the mortal world and the trappings of pack are driving her further and further toward burgeoning madness. For now it is content to express itself through mostly harmless obsessive compulsive behavior. However, it will get worse and an insane werewolf is not easily dealt with.

El Diablo

Virtue: Prudence. He'd rather be rid of them all at once, but turn them against one another and the problem will sort itself out. Patience, patience.

Vice: Wrath. It's all El Diablo can do to stop from tearing the legs off these insects.

Background: No one knows much about the mysterious figure known as El Diablo. Most can only tell visitors that he's real quiet and stays to the edge of the crowd. No one remembers when he showed up. They just assume he was here when they got here. This is truer than they think. The thing known as El Diablo is one of the original denizens of this Dominion. He is the last of the *dramatis personae* long shuffled off the stage. Even he doesn't know their fate; only that when he awoke from a deep dismal slumber, his home was inhabited by strangers.

El Diablo is what they call him but that is not his name. Once he was Adar-Malik, a servant in a much larger court



that ruled this Dominion. Now all of that is gone, including most of his memories of it, all except for flashes of his moon-faced beloved, Anam-Alil. As he travels within his erstwhile homeland he occasionally remembers where proud towers stood or the throng of commerce flowing in and out on various rivers. Then his perceptions come crashing back to this cold mockery of his kingdom. If he could remember where his countrymen were buried perhaps he could revive them and drive out these crass interlopers. Until then he bides his time instigating feuds between neighbors and sowing distrust within visitors. His most successful gambit so far was the murder of the girl, Susana. Removing one of many thorns from his side and causing a rift in their little government. Incidentally, this has made the town more vigilant but that will die down over time. Besides, their eyes are all focused outward, which allows the rotting within to fester and grow. If he can catch the other tart, Beth Anne, away from her people, she will be next.

Description: El Diablo wears a thick red robe, similar to priestly vestments, white gloves, and an oni mask (looks like the mask of an ogre, or devil). No part of El Diablo himself shows and what lies under his garments is anyone's guess. He walks with a pitiable lop-sided gait and exaggerated hunch; these ailments are acts put on to throw off his enemies. El Diablo is quite healthy and capable of confronting all but the most powerful geists on his own.

Storytelling Hints: El Diablo will see characters in one of two ways: a threat to him and his home or a cat's-paw to help further his Machiavellian agenda. He is an engine of chaos looking to pit the town's residents against one another and weaken their hold on his Dominion. While El Diablo is a powerful enough specter, he is ultimately a coward preferring to avoid direct confrontation. If an offender comes to him, however, opponents will find him a screaming dervish in combat.

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 5, Resistance 6

Willpower: 10

Morality: 4

Initiative: 10

Defense: 5

Speed: 20

Size: 5

Corpus: 10

Numina: Animal Control (dice pool 10 - Resolve). Phantasm (dice pool 10). Telekinesis (dice pool 10). Terrify (dice pool 10 versus Resolve + Composure).

CONSIDER: ADAR-MAUK

So just who or what is El Diablo — or Adar-Malik? Is it possible that El Diablo was the Kerberos of whatever Dead Man's Hand was formerly? That he remains the Kerberos but is losing in a tug-of-war for primacy with Gabriel? Are they merging slowly but surely as Gabriel fears? Maybe El Diablo loses faculties and memories as Gabriel gains them. Are Mort and/or Carl compromised of his people? Perhaps they're in contact with some other ancient resident, maybe even El Diablo's lost love: Anam-Alim? What about an ancient enemy or representative of a rival faction? Would El Diablo turn to the residents (or characters) to help keep his kingdom from his nemeses?

Maybe it's not as complicated as all that. Maybe he's just some boot-licking lackey; a sole survivor of an Underworld kingdom that grew too big too quickly and toppled over for the weight of itself. Even more ignoble, maybe he's just some wraith or geist who washed up here like everyone else and he's just crazier than a shithouse owl.

THE KILLING FIELDS

Anyone that wanders the gloom of the Underworld soon learns the Kerberoi are the implacable keepers of law. But the question inevitably arises: *who watches the watchmen?* The answer is: other Kerberoi.

At some point in the murky past, maybe even at the beginning of time itself, two of the Kerberoi turned on each other, each claiming the other had violated the Old Laws. The battle between the two was fierce, but inconclusive, as wounds to both combatants began to threaten mutual destruction. Retreating and regrouping, each Kerberoi enlisted followers to aid it in its pursuit of justice. First, small bands of ghosts with the Kerberos at their head clashed with each other, staging hit-and-run battles and ambushes designed to weaken the opponent. The warring bands grew larger as more and more humans died in petty wars on the living surface, and these warrior shades were drawn down to the conflict below. Skirmishes grew into battles, battles into all-out war.

Now, Clockwork and Dominus both rule armies of ghosts, drawn from the dead rank and file of military men and women throughout the long centuries. Each looks to break the other, seeks some final advantage that can lead to ultimate victory and the war drags on and on. Recruitment is ongoing, and is, in fact, a necessity, and those weary travelers that seek to pass through the Killing Fields are pressed into service or hunted by both sides.

Getting There

A relatively shallow Dominion, the Killing Fields is easy to find. The constant need for reinforcements and the nearly-human motivations of the ghosts that fight there no doubt contribute to the wide passages that spiral downwards to empty in the Dominion. The bands of warrior dead trickle down these passages and keep the way relatively clear as the ghosts are likely to deal violently with anyone or anything that gets in their way. Indeed, following one of these bands is the quickest way of finding the Killing Fields, assuming one knows what to look for.

The River of Blood separates the Killing Fields from the other Dominions no matter which direction it is approached from. Most unusually, well-maintained bridges cross the Qiqol-Mal, providing deceptively easy access to the Dominion. Control of these bridges (and of the reinforcements they bring) is a primary objective of both sides, resulting in near-constant battles near them. For those that seek a stealthier means of


approach, boatmen can still be found hidden, here-and-there, along the banks. The price of passage is cheap. Each passenger is only required to reveal his name to the Ferryman. Experienced travelers might be suspicious at the apparent low cost of the toll and they'd be right. The Ferryman's true reward comes when it reveals the names of unannounced visitors to the bands of warrior-shades that patrol the banks.

Some Sin-Eaters claim that each Dead Dominion is infinite in size and, in the case of the Killing Fields at least, they might be right. While it might seem prudent to just avoid the Dominion altogether, the sad fact is that paths that bypass this particular section of the Lower Mysteries are hard to come by and quite often it's simply faster to trudge onward through the Dominion. Man has fought wars for a very long time, filling the Killing Fields with the souls of those unable to move on after death. One explanation for why the Dominion is so hard to bypass is that so many ghosts are drawn to the Dominion that parts of the Underworld have shifted in response, providing evermore paths for these lost souls to travel.

Description

The Killing Fields are a place of endless battle, but this is no Valhalla where heroes strive against each other performing mighty feats and arising from death with each new day to begin anew. War here is dirty and squalid, just like in the world above. The mix of ghosts that end up here come from a wide range of times and places, and are as attracted to violence in death as they were in life. Absent from this Dead Dominion are citizen-soldiers that view service as a privilege or as a secondary means of income. No, the souls that are drawn to the Killing Fields exulted in death, in the blood, sweat, and tears of combat, and in the utter destruction of the enemy.

The landscape of the Killing Fields is the one found in war. Ruins, trenches, and grinning skulls mark the tunnels and caverns that comprise the Dominion. The sounds of constant battle reverberate off stalactites and atrocities are commonplace. Because it's just so damned hard to permanently *kill* a ghost, the warrior-shades that roam this place don't stop attacking a downed or wounded foe until the Corpus has, literally, given up the ghost. Even the centers of power that hold the headquarters of the Kerberoi are stained and marred with signs of battle. The lines of battle ebb and flow, changing on a daily basis. The shattered ruins of a ghost



house that may have been a secure refuge from the fighting last week is the new base of operations for the opposing force this week. It is possible to skirt around the worst of the fighting, but doing so carries its own risks. Skulking figures in the rear are all-too-often labeled as deserters and are delivered up to Clockwork or Dominus for retribution.

The restless, angry spirits of the Killing Fields don't come equipped with uniforms and equipment. A few ghosts might retain possession of a weapon or two, spectral leftovers of treasured arms owned in life, but the majority of the gear found here is either made by the ghosts, is confiscated from travelers, or comes from the Forge (see p. 161). Firearms are in short supply and the ammunition to feed those same weapons is even rarer. Most ghosts get by with sharpened bones, stone clubs, and primitive missile weapons like slings, crude bows, and the like.

To reduce the probability of attacking friendly troops, the armies of Dominus dyes their shrouds in the River of Blood, staining the fabric a gruesome crimson color. The followers of Clockwork retain their normal pale shroud, though some officers might pound bone dust into the fabric to give it a slightly brighter hue of white. Collectively then, the armies are divided into the Crimson (Dominus) and the White (Clockwork). Travelers from the surface who join in the fight are required to announce their allegiance in some manner by displaying the proper color prominently on their person. Subdivisions of the army also include the proper color in the name of their unit. A World War II American unit working for Clockwork might call themselves the White Eagles, while a similar group fighting for Dominus might refer to themselves as the Red Berets.

Something about the Killing Fields brings more of the personality of the ghosts that fight here to the forefront. Perhaps because they are so excited by battle, the warrior-shades drawn to the Dominion act and think in ways that have more in common with the living than the hollow specters of the dead that populate other Dominions. It should be noted that this aspect of personality is entirely one-dimensional. It is *fighting* that brings a semblance of life to the dead. Forced to think outside that dimension or questioned about matters that have nothing to do with combat, the denizens of the Killing Fields remain as confused as every other ghost.

Decisions, Decisions

The first of the Old Laws states, "Fealty Shall be Sworn." How, then, do characters passing through the Killing Fields decide which side to serve? A Sin-Eater may be able to glean some information about the Killing Fields by questioning his geist or by questioning the dead that dwell near the Dominion. The simplest method is to rely on instinct. Here, Vice calls to Vice. The wrathful, gluttonous, greedy, and lustful are drawn to the armies of the Crimson. The prideful, envious, and slothful are drawn to the White. Of course, these aren't absolutes. A character with the Vice of Wrath can still choose to join Clockwork's army just as a character with the Vice of Pride could join Dominus. Lacking other direction, though, Vice acts as the guiding force.

Another possibility is to let chance decide. If the group is divided on which side is better to join, leaving the decision to chance is a reasonable way to resolve the dilemma. The least appealing method of choosing a side is to wander into the Killing Fields and see which side captures you first. While being in the Dominion without declaring fealty is technically a sin, it is a sin that both Clockwork and Dominus are apt to punish by forcing those they capture to choose *their* side.

Crimson: In Service to Dominus

The troops that Dominus tends to attract are the most bloodthirsty and vicious of the warrior-shades drawn to the Dead Dominion. In service to Dominus, the ghosts see an opportunity to indulge in their base desires, to kill and maim in a howling frenzy. The army that bears the Crimson mark also attracts troops in greater quantities than does White. For whatever reason, it seems as though the type of ghosts that are attracted to the Killing Fields are more likely to be brutal than disciplined, leading to numerical superiority for Dominus, who not only tolerates this type of behavior, but actively encourages it. Not every soldier that dyes their shroud in the river of blood is a murderous berserker, but enough are that it's a reasonable stereotype.

Before and after (and sometimes during) a battle, Dominus' soldiers test their strength against each other in brutal unarmed combat. Although rank isn't determined by the winners and losers of the fights, the contests do result in a rough sort of pecking order. Repeat losers frequently find themselves in the unenviable position of cannon-fodder, used to tire the enemy before the main attack or acting as rearguard to the army, which denies them the thrill of combat. These fights also provide a way to keep the warrior-shade's blood up between battles and to sharpen their skills.

The base fighting unit of the Crimson is a 10-man group called a *cohort* and is led by a sergeant. Ten cohorts combine to form a company under the command of a captain and 10 companies combine to form a legion under the command of a general. If more than one legion is present, leadership is held either by Dominus or a member of the senior staff (called commanders).

White: In Service to Clockwork

The soldier-ghosts that choose service in the White army can sometimes seem just as vicious and bloodthirsty as those of the Crimson, but the majority holds themselves and their fellows to higher standards of discipline and conduct. Like Clockwork, these dead appreciate detailed planning and execution of military actions; both offensive and defensive. While no mercy can be, or is, shown to the enemy, the methodology of Clockwork's soldiers is less blatantly brutal than that of Dominus' lot. The ghosts that form the ranks of the White are more dispassionate and efficient in dealing with enemy casualties. No particular rule or law requires White soldiers to behave in this manner, but those who prefer pointless brutality have been known to suffer "accidents" or find themselves stranded on a flank during an attack. Clockwork's ghosts find honor where they may.



Between battles, White soldiers spend most of their time training, drilling, and maintaining their weaponry. As a result of nearly always being outnumbered on the battlefield, training emphasizes the importance of teamwork and of watching your buddy's back. Formations that haven't seen used in living militaries in centuries (at least outside a parade ground) still hold a significant value in the mainly melee oriented combat of the Killing Fields. White soldiers drill and practice until they can effectively perform the complicated maneuvers even in the midst of battle. This discipline puts Clockwork's soldiers on an even footing in the face of the numerical superiority of Crimson forces.

The eight-man squad under the command of a sergeant is the basic fighting unit of the White army. Four-to-five squads form a platoon under the command of a lieutenant and two-to-three platoons form a battalion, commanded by a general. On the occasions when more than one battalion is present, overall command of the army is given over to members of Clockwork's senior staff (called marshals).

The Old Laws

Claiming ignorance of the Old Laws is even less of a defense in the Killing Fields than in other Dominions. These three laws appear *everywhere*. They are posted on decaying wooden signs on the bridges, they take the form of fading propaganda posters plastered to the walls, they are writ in the tattoos of the ghosts, and are revealed in the tattered remnants of manuals, books, and pamphlets carried by the troops.

Faalty Shall Be Sworn

Not even the oldest ghost remembers a time of peace between Clockwork and Dominus. It's entirely possible their feud began at the dawn of time. It's even possible that this law existed *before* either of them ever set foot in the Dominion. Perhaps the Old Law was the cause of the schism. Questions of origin aside, the meaning of this law is clear. Anyone traveling through the Killing Fields must swear loyalty to one Kerberos or the other. Those that do not are hunted by both sides, which is likely to result in being conscripted by whichever side captures the lawbreaker.

Declaration of allegiance is a simple matter. The new recruit speaks aloud his oath upon entering the Dominion and the pledge is sealed. Once a choice is made it cannot be unmade nor can one switch sides. Mortal history might be replete with turncoats and double agents, but the tie between the Old Laws and the Kerberoi make this sort of behavior untenable. Not only will Clockwork and Dominus immediately know if the law is broken, their opposite is also compelled to uphold the law. Even if it was possible to fool a Kerberos, traitors would find no comfort among the enemy.

No Quarter Shall Be Offered

Both sides of the conflict are in it to win it (if such a thing is actually possible). Given the extreme difficulty in permanently incorporating a ghost, mercy is a quality

neither side recognizes or can afford. It's nearly unheard of for a ghost to violate this law. Visitors to the Dominion are a different matter and the punishment for the sin of mercy is that used by armies for centuries to keep their soldiers in line: flogging. The severity of the flogging varies with the crime. First-time offenders receive a gentle 10 lashes of the whip; repeat offenders can receive as many as 25 lashes. In general, each offense increases the total by a count of five. Floggings are performed personally by the Kerberoi. Mechanically speaking, each five lashes of the whip are equal to one point of lethal damage. Neither Kerberoi will intentionally kill as a result of flogging. If a prisoner nears death as a result of the punishment, the Kerberos will commute the remainder of the lashes.

There Shall Be Order in the Ranks

Everyone — ghost, Sin-Eater, vampire, or mage — that enters the Dominion is issued a rank upon swearing fealty. Ghosts instinctively know their own rank and the ranks of allies. Visitors must make an effort to determine what rank they hold. The easiest way to manage this is to simply ask a ghost. Once rank has been determined, the character is expected to behave in a manner befitting that rank. Officers are meant to lead and the enlisted are meant to follow (see the Rank and Privilege sidebar for more information on ranks). Assigned rank isn't necessarily permanent. Just like in living armies, characters (and ghosts) can earn field promotions for outstanding service or because of attrition in the ranks. Other than the possibility of advancement, the rank structure of the Dominion is quite strict. Disobeying a direct order breaks the Old Laws and earns the wrath of the Kerberoi and the officers. The punishment for insubordination varies depending on the frequency and severity of the crime. Repeat offenders are likely to receive the whip and the gravest of offenses can earn imprisonment or even summary execution.

Geography

The major geographical feature of this Dead Dominion is battlefields, especially those parts of battlefields that extend below ground (like trenches) or are enclosed (like bunkers). Whatever terrain might have existed before the eternal struggle between Clockwork and Dominus has been mainly ground away after millennia of war. Only the areas furthest behind the lines and nearest to the centers of power for either side retain a consistent character.

The Trenches

Situated in a large cavern that allows for largely unobstructed line-of-sight, the Trenches are a series of defensive redoubts that surround the area around Clockwork's HQ. Dug into the cold stone floor is a carefully designed series of actual trenches, chest-high bulwarks, foxholes, and claustrophobic tunnels. Created to confound and bewilder attackers, even newcomers to White forces who can travel freely through the Trenches often get turned around or lost. Intruders or the uninitiated can attempt to find their way with an extended Intelligence + Survival roll. The target number of successes is 15 and each roll is equal to 15 minutes. Each failed roll imposes a cumulative -1 penalty on the next roll. If a character fails to navigate the Trenches he is lost and must start over from scratch (see the "Rule of Thumb: Extended Actions" section in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 128). A character with the Direction Sense Merit gains a +3 to his rolls.

The ground between the defenses is strewn with sharpened bones, shattered glass and, here-and-there, actual barbed wire. The Trenches swarm with rat psychopomps that act as eyes and ears for Clockwork, an early warning system nearly impossible to fool or destroy. White forces led by the scouts that are specifically trained to fight in the Trenches (scouts are assumed to have the Direction Sense Merit and any unit led by a scout in the Trenches gains

RANK AND PRIVILEGE

As mentioned, characters are assigned a rank as soon as they swear fealty to one side or the other. If a group of characters all join up at the same time, one of their number (the character with the highest Intelligence rating for Clockwork or the highest Strength for Dominus) is given a higher rank than his associates to act as the group's commander. Characters are expected to follow the chain of command, to offer direction to lower ranking members of the army, and accept orders that come from above.

The ghostly armies of the Killing Fields have a few advantages over their living counterparts. Here, the soldiers have no need of food, water, payment, or the myriad of other petty concerns that are the cause of so many logistical headaches up above. This means that characters that are given (or earn) higher rank needn't concern themselves with minutiae that requires a certain amount of practical training. Generally, the soldiers of the Dominion are only concerned with taking objectives and killing the opposition.

Listed below is the rank structure on both sides of the conflict, including responsibilities of rank and the requirements for promotion. Listings are ordered by Crimson then White. Newcomers are likely to begin service at the lowest rank, save the individual that is chosen to lead a group, who starts a grade higher. In the event one character gains significantly higher rank than the rest of the group, he may designate his comrades as aides-de-camp to more easily keep the group together.

a +3 to initiative rolls) have a serious advantage against any Crimson interlopers. Coming from all angles to attack and destroy intruders, Clockwork's soldiers have never yet suffered a defeat in the Trenches.

Clockwork's Bunker

Protected by the best armament to be found in the Killing Fields, Clockwork's Bunker is the HQ and center of the Kerberos' army. Shaped like a giant, concrete circle, the Bunker sits in the precise center of the Trenches. Twelve doors adorn the walls of the Bunker, only one of which is ever open. The schedule for the opening and closing of the doors is set by Clockwork itself and is changed on a frequent basis. The idea behind this system is simple: Clockwork's soldiers have no difficulty in remembering or reasoning their way through the sequence to gain entrance to the bunker; Crimson forces, on the other hand, are more likely to bang away ineffectually at the same door for hours, making them easier targets for destruction.

While closed, a door is completely impervious to harm (it'd be easier to blast through the surrounding wall). This pattern is repeated inside the Bunker. The interior of the Bunker is divided into 12 concentric circles, with each circle having one less door than the last. The Marshals that form Clockwork's senior staff dwell in the Bunker and use each circle for a different purpose. In the center, rarely seen by its own army, dwells Clockwork. Prisoners that have broken the Old Laws are brought here for punishment, passing through the always-open, single door of the last circle to face the Kerberos.

Messengers are constantly coming and going, relaying orders or delivering reports. Situated in and around the Bunker are clusters of loudspeakers of every shape and kind. From these clusters, Clockwork issues orders in the voices of dead generals, each command echoing like a tinny, bombastic choir. Clockwork's marshals fill the time between the Kerberos' commandments with announcements of more detailed orders, based on the Kerberos' desires.

Blood Gutters

Surrounding the physical center of Dominus' domain is a labyrinthine warren of tunnels, caves, and passages. The Blood Gutters is a lightless, nightmarish place with the sound and scent of the Blood River. Diverted from its source, the constant stream of blood has eaten away at the stone to create channels along the sides of the passages and pools in unlit caves. The blood here isn't as noxious as that found in the Qiq-ol-Mal itself, but still retains unpleasant qualities best avoided by any passing blood-drinkers. Just as confusing to intruders as the Trenches, successfully navigating the Blood Gutters requires the same extended Intelligence + Survival roll.

Crimson messengers regularly pass through the Blood Gutters on their way to the fortification known as the Eye (Dominus' HQ) at its center. These hardy souls have been taught the ways of the Blood Gutters and need no light to guide their way. Light is dangerous here and messengers aren't the only things haunting the tunnels. Bound to guard the Blood Gutters are wraiths called gutter ghouls. Deemed too unstable for frontline service even by Dominus' relaxed standards, these unquiet shades seek out intruders and light draws them like sharks to blood. Lacking enemies upon which to vent their insanity, the ghosts attempt to mollify their passions by bathing and drinking from the blood flowing through the maze. Only Crimson warriors are safe from their wrath.

The Eye of the Storm

Past the gurgling corridors of the Blood Gutters is the Eye of the Storm, more commonly referred to as just "the Eye" by Crimson troops. Long ago, Dominus realized it could never counter the cold logic of Clockwork with ferocity alone. So it created a command staff capable of planning and implementing long-term operations. The Eye serves as home and central command for the most ruthlessly brilliant of Dominus' Commanders. Rotated on a regular basis to ensure no one Commander is ever too long from the thrill

Rank (Crimson/White)	Promotion	Responsibilities
Blood/Private	Veteran of 3+ battles	Carry out orders
Sergeant/Sergeant	Direct commendation only*	Implement orders from above, ensure discipline in the troops
Captain/Lieutenant	Direct commendation only*	Implement orders from above, lead in the field
General/General	Direct commendation only†	Implement orders from above, coordinate army maneuvers, lead in the field
Commander/Marshal	N/A	Orchestrate campaigns, lead in the field (rarely)

* A character may only be promoted above this rank by direct commendation of a higher ranking officer, though individuals may assume temporary field command rank as a result of casualties.

† A character may only be promoted above this rank by a direct commendation of Dominus or Clockwork.

of battle, the senior staff is responsible for the overarching strategy of Crimson forces. The fact that Dominus regularly upsets their plans is seen as a positive. The Kerberos' brand of anarchy is the seed of chaos that keeps the White on constant alert for surprise attacks regardless of where a major battle happens to be taking place.

The Eye itself is a defensive structure inside a large cavern of classic motte-and-bailey design; that is, a walled fortification (the bailey) surrounded by a moat, with a hill at the center to provide superior line of sight and tactical advantage (the motte). The walls are made of bone, reinforced and filled with stone. The blood that runs through the Blood Gutters gathers around the stone and bone walls to form a moat. The bailey is formed by a series of duplicate stone buildings, each four stories high. The bottom two stories have no windows, the roofs are flat, and each building has a single, stout door. In effect, the bailey forms a second set of defenses, designed to bleed the numbers of any enemies that make it past the moat and wall. Standing atop the motte is a squat, stone fortress where the Commanders plot the course of the war.

Other Systems

The choice of allegiance defines every aspect of the experience of those from the living lands during their time in the Killing Fields. Declaring for Dominus engulfs the new soldier in a tide of bloodlust and bestial rage, while declaring for Clockwork imparts a logical, moment-by-moment appraisal of every situation.

Bestial Fury (Dominus)

A character that chooses Dominus is gifted with the blessings of the beast. Any time the character suffers even a single point of damage (any kind), he may voluntarily enter a berserker state called the Bestial Fury by Crimson soldiers. While in this state, the character must always make an all-out attack, but the bonus for the attack is increased to +4 rather than the usual +2. The character can maintain the Bestial Fury for a total number of turns each scene equal to his Stamina + Resolve. When the frenzy fades, the character becomes slightly fatigued from his exertions and suffers a -1 to his Defense for the remainder of the scene. Bestial Fury may only be activated within the confines of the Killing Fields.

Clockwork Precision (Clockwork)

A character that swears allegiance to Clockwork is granted some of the precise nature of the Kerberos. A number of times each scene equal to the *lower* of her Composure or Resolve rating, she may spend a point of Willpower to re-roll any combat-related roll, regardless of the original results of the roll. Assuming the character has the available Willpower to do so, she may even re-attempt a failed re-roll (in this event, the +1 bonus does not stack with successive attempts). Clockwork Precision may only be activated within the confines of the Killing Fields.

Risk and Reward

The dictates of the Old Laws require that anyone even passing through the Killing Fields choose a side. Beyond survival, though, why should any character care about which Kerberos is ultimately victorious? Dominus and Clockwork have been engaged in the battle since time out of mind and that battle is likely to continue with both sides as evenly matched as they are. Certainly, characters can pick their way across the Dominion, fighting only when necessary. Many travelers choose to do just that. Those brave souls that choose a side, however, are rewarded for their efforts.

• **Color Coded:** Crimson and White are more than just colors or even separate sides on the battle field. The color a character displays in the Killing Fields speaks to a philosophy of violence to which that character has (willingly or not) ascribed. Color seeps beneath the skin, "staining" the character, which makes him readily recognizable as White or Crimson just by his presence. The stain of color can't ever be washed away, no matter how many Rivers a character crosses or how many showers he takes. Outside the Dominion, other characters that have visited the Killing Fields still recognize the color of the character and said recognition can't help but to have an impact. Characters that run across a person with the opposite color "stain" suffer a -3 penalty on all Social Skill rolls in dealings with that person. On the flip side of the coin, a character that finds a kindred spirit isn't guaranteed to get along better with her, but the bond formed by shared color makes it likely they'll at least be willing to help each other out. Characters that meet a veteran of the same army can add that person as a Contact free of charge.

• **Loot and Pillage:** The battlefields of the Killing Fields are strewn with the remnants of past battles. Most, if not all, of these items have the sort of intimate connection with death that is necessary to form Memento Mori. It's not unreasonable to suggest that this Dead Dominion is one vast storehouse of deathly treasures. Charms are easy to find and to secure. For the more discriminating, deathmasks can be found tucked away in the corners of the Dominion or held as trophies by the Kerberoi. Even the odd piece of memorabilia can be found here, having been lost, dropped by lifeless fingers, or stolen by marauding ghosts. Characters that manage to impress the Kerberoi might be rewarded for service with a useful trinket or two. Defeated enemy ghosts that prefer incarceration over obliteration might even volunteer to be bound in a fetter.

Because Memento Mori are so easy to come by here, the cost of purchasing the Memento Mori Merit is reduced by half as pertains to mementos found in the Dominion.

• **Sanctuary:** Travelers from above are on their own in most parts of the Underworld. Survival depends on the individual and whatever allies or items he has brought along for the ride. Danger might not lurk around every corner, but it often pops up in places where the traveler was sure he could relax for a moment or two. The Underworld is exhausting to body, mind, and soul, and finding relief from the strain is difficult.

Those that serve loyally in the Killing Fields can find respite. Certainly the Dominion comes with its own dangers, but they are *known* dangers and can even be honorably avoided long enough to catch forty winks. Likewise, the army that the character joins will guard and protect one of their own, even from outside threats. Neither Dominus nor Clockwork are impressed with the claims of sin brought to them by Kerberoi that come from the rest of the Lower Mysteries. In fact, as soon as another Kerberoi enters the Killing Fields it must swear loyalty to one side or the other, placing it in the chain of command and subject to orders from above (such as, “cease and desist” for example). The same is true for any other denizen of the Underworld that thinks to bring its vendetta into the Dominion.

Bit Players

Below are some basic statistics for the various entities to be found in the Killing Fields, including trenchrats, gutter ghouls, and a standard trooper from each side of the conflict.

Trenchrats

Power 2, Finesse 5, Resistance 2

The psychopomps that scurry through the Trenches in service to Clockwork are collectively known as trenchrats by both sides. Trenchrats vary in size and appearance. Some are no larger

than a mouse and some are nearly dog-sized. While the majority of these spirits are black or gray in color, a few albinos have also been spotted. Whatever their color or size, all trenchrats look thin and pestilent, and have been known to foam at the mouth when excited or angry. Their bite causes disease in both ghosts and visitors from above. Large groups of trenchrats are best represented using the rules for swarms (see sidebar).

Gutter Ghouls

Power 5, Finesse 1, Resistance 3

Stained crimson head-to-toe, these mad ghosts are further destabilized by the waters of the Qiq-ol-Mal. Gutter ghouls are so glutted with fluids that their wounds seep with a thick, viscous blood when injured. Eschewing weaponry in favor of the sensation of ripping foes apart with their bare hands, the ghouls attack with ragged nails and teeth sharpened by chewing on bones. The ghouls require no light to hunt, relying on sound or Numina to locate prey. Anyone foolish enough to bring light into the Blood Gutters will be attacked en masse by the ghouls. Crimson warriors have this fact so drilled into them that they will actually scatter and retreat if an enemy brings light to a fight in the Blood Gutters. Without a light to spot the hunting ghouls, a cautious trespasser might still be forewarned of the presence of a ghoul by the smell of rotting, clotting blood that clings to it.

Crimson Blood

Power 3, Finesse 2, Resistance 3

The warrior-shades that make up the bulk of the Crimson army are likely equipped with melee weapons and will seek to get up close and personal with the enemy as quickly as possible. The morale of the Crimson is a group-mentality that is only likely to break with sudden, massive casualties. More often than not, they fight to the end.

SWARMS

Animals of Size 1 or 2 are generally best recorded in swarms, flocks, and other groupings of the animals, as they are most effective in such groupings. This includes not just insects, but also most birds and smaller creatures such as rats.

Swarms are measured by their size in yards radius. A swarm generally inflicts one die of bashing damage to anyone within its radius. A swarm can inflict more damage by condensing. Every time the swarm condenses to cover half of its full area, it inflicts one additional die of damage per turn.

Therefore, a swarm of eight yards in radius inflicts two bashing damage per turn if it constricts down to a four-yard radius, three bashing if it halves that again to a two-yard radius, and four bashing damage per turn if it condensed itself down to a one-yard radius. Though condensing doesn't usually happen all that often in nature (save in the case of creatures such as killer bees), it is an easy enough thing for most supernatural powers that command animals to bid them to do so.

Armor is effective against a swarm only if it covers one's full body, but even then it provides only half its rating. In addition, targets are distracted by the swarm, suffering -2 dice on all rolls while they are within the radius, even if they're not specifically attacked.

The swarm cannot be attacked with fists, clubs, swords, or guns. Only area-affect attacks such as a torch affect it. Each point of damage inflicted by a flame or other applicable attack halves the swarm's size. Once the swarm is reduced below a one-yard radius, either all insects are dead or the few remaining disperse.

White Private

Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

The soldiers that sever Clockwork are inclined to open hostilities with a shower of ranged weaponry to whittle down their foes. If the enemy makes it to melee, White troops will close ranks and present a united defense. Unlike Crimson troops, White soldiers will retreat in the face of overwhelming odds. Half the squad will act as a rear guard while the other half falls back. The rear guard will then fall back itself, under a hail of cover fire. This tactic is repeated until either the squad is defeated, breaks the enemy, or reaches a previously designated prepared defensive position from which they will fight until reinforcements arrive.

Clockwork

Virtue: Temperance. Only through a balance of aggression and defense will the enemy be defeated.

Vice: Pride. Any failure of its carefully laid plans is the fault of the cogs with which it must work.

Background: The White leader is single-minded and methodical. Its orders are relayed through blaring loudspeakers that dot the landscape near its command bunker and its plans of attack rely on precise timing to overcome the foe. Clockwork remembers forming out of the mists, its clanking gears and driving pistons echoing across the emptiness of the Lower Mysteries. For a time it was alone, then it became aware of another. Clockwork waited for this other to declare allegiance to it, as decreed by the laws that even then were Old Laws. It listened, measuring the seconds by its ticking heart for

the pledge, the words of submission. It listened and heard nothing. So, Clockwork approached the other in a timely manner, flaying cables extended to exact the price of transgression. It struck again and again, feeling neither anger nor hatred, mechanically inflicting lash after lash and was almost surprised when the other retaliated.

Description: Clockwork is a man-shaped mechanical mass with legs of hissing pistons, oiled cable fingers, and whirring gears for joints. The metronome ticking of its heart acts as sort of regular counter-melody to the chaos of noises it emits. It stares out at its legions through multi-faceted optics set like jewels in the smooth, iron mask of its face.

Storytelling Hints: Precision is the Kerberos' watchword. Each gesture, each action, each order is calculated to produce maximum effect. Its words blast out of the loudspeakers in the voices of long-dead generals, to ripple through the ranks until its will is done. Seldom venturing from the command bunker that forms the heart of its army, Clockwork is the center of the White military machine. Transgressors are brought before the Kerberos by its forces to face the punishments they have earned. It isn't anger or cruelty that drives the Kerberos, rather the systematical relationship of cause and effect. Cause: Transgression. Effect: Punishment.

Characters that declare their allegiance to Clockwork have the feel of cogs in a machine. The higher the rank, the bigger the cog. Orders are not questioned; they are carried out with speed and efficiency. The weakness of this kind of exacting organization is lack of spontaneity. When a plan goes wrong, a flank collapses or enemies attack from an unexpected direction, the White forces flail about ineffectually until orders work their way down from above. On the other hand, a systematic White attack that is properly coordinated by the cogs in the lines is nearly unstoppable until it completes its mission.

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 2, Resistance 7

Willpower: 14

Initiative: 9

Defense: 7

Speed: 20

Size: 6

Corpus: 13

Numina: Mechanical Possession (varies by device, see *Geist*, p. 235)

- **Precision:** Clockwork is always in complete control of its body and bases its decisions on complex calculations that give its actions an eerie semblance of prescience. Spend two points of Essence. For the remainder of the scene, Clockwork's Defense is never reduced by multiple attackers and it may apply half its Defense (round down) against ranged attacks.



Dominus

Virtue: Fortitude. The victor of any battle is the one who can withstand the most punishment.

Vice: Wrath. Violence is justified by victory.

Background: Dominus is nearly the exact opposite of its opponent. Instead of relying on cold logic to formulate its plans, the Crimson leader relies on instinct. While Clockwork leads from the rear, Dominus can usually be found in the thick of the action. Dominus controls the chaos of the battlefield through force of will rather than programmed maneuvers. The Crimson leader's first memory is of awaking, fully formed, with anger pulsing in its veins. At first, Dominus was alone in the Lower Mysteries, with nothing upon which to vent its wrath and then it felt the presence of another. It waited for the other to break the laws that even then were Old Laws and it didn't have to wait long. The silence was unbroken by words of allegiance. With mounting ire, it sought out the other and attacked, claws raking and tearing. Dominus was almost surprised when the other didn't fall.

Description: Dominus is a hulking, bestial figure with the head and horns of a ram. Its body is covered by shaggy, blood-stained fur and its arms end in leathery hands tipped by long, curving black talons. It strides its territory on cloven hooves and the bellows of its rage echo through the Killing Fields as it charges into battle.

Storytelling Hints: Unrestrained brutality is the key to victory. Even an enemy that expects no quarter can be shocked by sheer savagery. Dominus directs its army with barks and bellows that are translated into orders by its senior command. The Kerberos' appearance on a battlefield signals the start of a major engagement. The warrior-shades that fight near it are whipped into a frenzy and throw themselves on the enemy with a reckless abandon that can overcome any defense. Dominus relishes every opportunity to punish those who break the Old Laws. It seeks out the guilty to personally mete out justice.

Characters that declare their allegiance to Dominus are caught in a whirlwind of violence that crashes against the enemy with relentless savagery. Commanders are expected to channel the aggression of the troops to exploit weaknesses and retreat is not an option. Harsh, forced marches strike deep into enemy lines sowing confusion and chaos. Against a well-organized force, Crimson attacks suffer from lack of discipline, but always exact a toll from their opponents. Victories are achieved by overwhelming force and the refusal to yield the field of battle to the enemy.



Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 2, Resistance 7

Willpower: 14

Initiative: 9

Defense: 7

Speed: 20 (species factor 11)

Size: 6

Corpus: 13

Numina: Speed (none, see *Geist*, p. 236)

- **Frenzy:** Dominus gleefully abandons itself to the whirl of battle, disdaining personal defense in preference of tearing opponents limb-from-limb. Spend two points of Essence. For the remainder of the scene, Dominus gains a +1 bonus to attacks for each point of damage suffered to its Corpus. In addition, when Dominus makes an all-out attack while this Numen is active it may apply half its Defense rating (round down) as bonus dice to its attack pool in addition to the usual +2 bonus (Defense is reduced to zero as normal).

LOWGATE PRISON

Some sins last beyond death. The stains formed on the soul by atrocity, indifference, and brutality run so deep that no amount of mortal rehabilitation can ever wash them clean. Some of these sins are imagined, others are quite real. Imagined or not, sin burdens the souls of the wraiths drawn to Lowgate Prison. They long to be punished, to be humiliated, to be locked away with the sins they cannot forget, even in death. They believe that sin can be cleansed by suffering, that mortal debts can still be repaid and so they seek salvation within the dim confines of Lowgate Prison.

The majority of sinners that find Lowgate Prison don't do so voluntarily. The condemned include ghosts that have broken the Old Laws or have escaped the Underworld to revel in hijacked flesh or just for the chance to see blue skies. No shade ever really escapes; time and circumstance always return them to the Underworld and the Kerberoi are there waiting, patiently, for them. Some ghosts seek Lowgate Prison for sanctuary from the call of the living, preferring to abide in captivity rather than be bound as slaves. Surface dwellers can also be found within the Dominion. These travelers believed, in their arrogance, that they could defy the Old Laws and escape retribution. The Judges disabuse lawbreakers of this notion and their authority isn't diminished by Underworld Rivers or Avernian Gates. Many of these captives are nearly shades themselves, having spent too long in the Lower Mysteries, their living essence slowly drained away.

Watching over this motley crew of murderous ghosts, mournful wraiths, and mortal prisoners is the warden, Yama. Though now a Kerberos, Yama is said to be a successful product of Lowgate Prison, all sin and passion driven from it. The welfare and progress of each soul given over to its care is carefully noted and logged by its legion of clerks. Every soul within the prison is subject to its impartial brand of justice. Yama is assisted in its duties as warden by a group of ghosts known collectively as the Judges. These wraiths are also products of the prison and, now free, are bound to no law save the word of Yama. No one knows how many Judges there are, but all fear their attention.

Getting There

Bordered by the River of Woe on one side and the River of Memory on the other, the Dead Dominion of Lowgate Prison is surrounded on all sides by narrow tunnels that seem to restrict movement without actually impeding

progress. The trip down to Lowgate Prison from the Autochthonous Depths can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days. Typically, those of dubious morality find the trip shorter than the virtuous. A traveler actively seeking Lowgate Prison should roll 10 dice minus his Morality rating (or equivalent). Standard length of descent is four days, but each success on the roll reduces travel time by one day to a minimum of two hours with four or more successes.

Example: A Sin-Eater with a Synergy of six is attempting to travel to Lowgate Prison. Ten minus her Synergy rating of six leaves her with a pool of four dice to determine travel time. She rolls and manages two successes, which reduces her travel time to two days.

Typically, the path to Lowgate Prison is clear. Both ghosts and surface dwellers in the know avoid the Dead Dominion for good reason. Travelers might encounter a specter that is either drawn to the Dominion or intentionally seeks it out. A more disturbing possibility is running into a Judge on its way to Lowgate Prison with a prisoner in tow. As long as the travelers make no move to block the path of the Judge or set its prisoner free, the ghost will likely ignore their presence. Unless one of the travelers has broken the Old Laws, that is. In that instance, the Judge is apt to continue on its way with a second prisoner.

Description

The grim prison-Dominion of Lowgate Prison has been bored directly out of the rock of the Underworld. Viewed from one of the Rivers as a traveler approaches, the Dominion looks like a craggy mass of solid stone, with irregularly shaped holes that form small apertures. Dim lights can be seen glowing in some of the windows, but the majority of the face of Lowgate Prison remains lost in shadow grays and blacks. Echoes of muffled wails and screams can be heard emanating from the prison's interior as far away as the River banks. No doors block ingress or egress from the prison, but are instead guarded by wraith guards and fear of the Judges.

Once past the darkened doors, the interior of the prison stretches away in a series of gloomy tunnels and passageways, the floors of which have been smoothed by the trample of feet. The only light that shines here to illuminate the way is provided by bone-white lichen that glows with a dull, red light, reminiscent of the last rays of

the sun at dusk. Apart from the disturbing noises made by the inmates, the Dominion is quiet. Guards pass by without a sound, alternately ignoring visitors or scrutinizing them with suspicious glares. The main passage of the prison runs from one end of Lowgate Prison to the other, allowing for speedy progress for those without business to attend to. Every few feet another tunnel branches off the passage, forming a maze-like interior that baffles would-be rescuers and temporary escapees alike.

Though it might not be evident to casual inspection, someone laid out this prison with purpose. Lowgate Prison is divided roughly into four quarters: the administrative quarter and three Bolgias (cell blocks). Bolgia-1 is named Limbo and it's here that willing prisoners bide their time. Bolgia-2 is called Dis and is reserved for ghosts that have broken the Old Laws. Bolgia-3 is named Malebolge and is where surface-walkers that have been captured by the Judges are imprisoned.

The Old Laws

Chiseled into the rock above every entrance to the Dominion proper are the Old Laws. Prisoners are also marked by at least one of the four Old Laws. As part of their penance, the Old Laws broken by the guilty are branded on their bodies. These brands don't age or heal over time on either living flesh or undead ephemera, remaining raw and painful until the inmate is properly released, at which time they vanish completely. Even with the power and freedom allotted them by their position, Judges may not pass sentences on their own. Those that break the laws are taken before Yama.

The Guilty Shall Submit

Prisoners are expected to do as they are told. This includes accepting whatever punishments are meted out by Yama, following the orders of the guards and generally being mindful of their status as prisoners. Even showing disrespect for any non-prisoner member of the Dominion can be construed as a violation of this law. Minor infractions of this law are dealt with by placing the offender in solitary confinement for a time, beatings or an instructive hour or two in the "Corrections Rooms" (i.e. torture chambers). More severe infractions can earn the above punishments plus additional time added to the sentence (in the case of living prisoners), forced draining of essence and temporary disincorporation.

It is also the broad interpretation of this Old Law that allows the Judges to travel throughout the Underworld and beyond, capturing lawbreakers while retaining the full power and authority they enjoy in Lowgate Prison. Mortal, immortal, and ghost alike are captured by the Judges and transported to Yama's Dominion for punishment.

Freedom Must Be Earned

Yama and its clerks keep meticulous records on every prisoner in Lowgate Prison. The bureaucracy knows the

exact date and time a prisoner should be released and doesn't recognize the concepts of reduced sentences for good behavior or parole. The clerks observe the sentences handed down by the Kerberos with a dispassionate precision. Only Yama has the power to commute or lessen a sentence.

Escape attempts are dealt with firmly. Recaptured escapees are branded on the cheek with a mark that instantly identifies them as potential troublemakers, before making a visit to the Corrections Rooms. A second attempt earns a second brand and a more thorough attempt at rehabilitation through pain. Prisoners that run out of cheeks to brand are deemed unmanageable and are removed from Lowgate Prison by Yama and delivered to an unknown fate. Rumors vary on whether these unfortunates are turned over to the Forge, or weighted down with chain and stone and dropped into the Lethe where their memories are slowly eroded. The darkest whispers claim that Yama devours such malcontents whole.

Violence Begets Violence

The scum that inhabits Lowgate Prison are among the most disagreeable, murderous, and insane shades to be found in the Underworld. Prisoners from above are less likely to be quite as troublesome, but are still, on the whole, an untrustworthy lot. Keeping order in such a place requires an iron fist. Violence between prisoners is not tolerated. Even so much as a fistfight draws the wrath of the guards and the ire of the Judges. Yama believes that those with a propensity for violence should be stripped of the ability to cause said violence and structures its punishments accordingly. It should be stressed that self-defense isn't a violation. In each case of lawbreaking, Yama identifies the party that started the altercation and reserves its justice for them alone.

A minor scuffle results in the loss of a finger. An out-and-out brawl, the loss of a hand. Multiple offenders or those who commit murder while already imprisoned are hobbled, *after* their hands are removed. Unlike normal injuries to ghosts, as a side-effect of the Dominion, these particular injuries do not heal. Care is taken with living prisoners to ensure they don't die from their wounds. It should be noted that this Old Law only applies to violence between prisoners or between an inmate and a visitor. Violence against guards, the Judges, Yama, or the staff is considered a violation of The Guilty Shall Submit.

All Within Are Subject to the Laws

Every so often a traveler gets the bright idea to mess with the system. He might try to bust a buddy out of confinement, smuggle weapons to the prisoners in return for some kind of payment, or just stir up trouble. This Old Law sees to it that no one goes unpunished for their actions. Visitors are not any more exempt from the laws than the prisoners are and breaking any one of the laws is punishable by the same means and methodology. Yama doesn't take kindly to outside interference and troublesome travelers quickly become prisoners.

Geography

Behind the solid rock face that looks out over the River of Woe and the River of Memory lays a labyrinth of twisting corridors. Though seemingly interconnected, Lowgate Prison actually forms four separate quarters; the three Bolgias and the administrative section. In appearance, the four quarters are nearly identical, stone rooms and floors bathed in the red light of the ever-present lichen. In this Dominion, it is the prisoners that create the geography or in the case of the administrative quarter, the staff. The inhabitants of each quarter give that quarter the character by which it can readily be identified. Each new prisoner added to a quarter alters the geography slightly with their personality, their interactions with other inmates or staff, and the troubles they bring with them.

Bolgia-1 (Limbo)

It's been said you can't hold the willing prisoner, but Lowgate Prison manages it all the same. Bolgia-1, called Limbo, contains cells with no bars and holds prisoners without chains. The inmates are free to wander from place to place, to interact with each other (in their limited ways) and to engage in whatever forms of rehabilitation they feel is necessary for them. The only thing forbidden to these shades is release. Once a ghost enters Limbo, it must remain within the bounds of the prison until its passion has been squelched, it's vice muted. Prisoners that attempt to leave are found guilty of breaking the second Old Law, Freedom Must Be Earned, and are transferred to Dis.

No one drives the prisoners of Limbo to the torments to which they willingly submit. No guards herd them to Corrections Rooms. These prisoners go willingly, eagerly even, to the punishments they believe they have earned. Even ghosts that seek out Lowgate Prison as a place of refuge must at least dip their toes in suffering. Yama accepts all, but they must accept its form of rehabilitation in return for sanctuary. In the case of the inmates of Bolgia-1, the ghosts determine what punishments they should undergo, rather than the guards or other staff. One day they might choose the torments of the wrathful, another day they might seek the humiliations of the prideful. The Dominion isn't always what a ghost that comes seeking refuge expects, however. More than one ghost has come to regret giving itself over to the tender mercies of Yama and would no doubt be grateful to anyone clever or dedicated enough to find a way to free them from Lowgate Prison.

Bolgia-2 (Dis)

It's a toss-up as to whether Bolgia-2, called Dis, or Bolgia-3 holds the more dangerous prisoner population. While it's true both quarters have their share of murderers, oath-breakers, rapists, and thieves, the prisoners from the living world held in Bolgia-3 can least *claim* sanity. The wraiths of Dis are rarely thought of as sane. It is within the confines of Dis that the most treacherous and unruly of specters are kept, locked behind rusting bars. Unlike the other Bolgias, Dis has no central common area that allows the prisoners to mingle. The



passageways of Dis are lined with cells that hold a single prisoner each. To do otherwise is to invite chaos. The wails and screams that form the background music to Lowgate Prison issue from Dis.

Guards and prisoners form a steady flow of traffic through the Bolgia to the Corrections Rooms. Here the sinful dead are punished for their misdeeds, their iniquities slowly leached away through suffering. The Corrections Rooms make liars of those who claim the Underworld isn't a place of torment. Here, the prideful are sunk neck-deep in boiling offal. Each time they quicken their tongues to abuse their tormenters, they receive a stinging slap from unseen hands. The envious and the greedy are stripped of every possession, even the shroud that hides their naked Corpus, and their eyes are scorched with blazing irons. The slothful are forced by cracking whips to run on vast, iron wheels that are heated from below. Those that tumble find no respite as the metal sears ephemeral flesh, goading them back to their feet. The gluttonous and the lustful are forced to swallow gallon after gallon of the greasy waters of Acheron — tormented by visions of past pleasures — until their stomachs burst from the excess. The wrathful are bound with thin strands of wire and subjected to taunts and ridicule. Eventually, their anger goads them to lash out and the wire flays them in place as they struggle. Though these treatments seem cruel, nothing is done in Lowgate Prison without reason. It is said that Yama himself was the first to be released, purified, from Dis.

Bolgia-3 (Malebolge)

The holding area for prisoners from the living world that have been captured by the Judges most closely resembles what most people think of when they picture a normal jail. Except for extreme cases that require extreme punishments, the prisoners of Bolgia 3, called Malebolge, aren't subjected to the tender treatments of the Corrections Rooms. As beings of flesh, it is difficult to keep surface dwellers alive (or life-like) long enough for the effects of the Corrections Rooms to manifest. Instead, these prisoners are simply confined within the walls of Lowgate Prison until their sentence is ended. The inmates are allowed to mingle with each other during exercise periods, under the close scrutiny of the guards. The only form of entertainment available to the prisoners is each other, which leads to a certain kind of jailhouse brotherhood.

To the dismay of finger wigglers of every kind, no magic, of any variety, has any effect whatsoever within the confines of Lowgate Prison. It is said that Yama and the Judges know the secrets of how to overcome this limitation, but, if true, they aren't sharing. The most difficult part of prolonged confinement, from the perspective of Yama, is keeping the prisoners of Malebolge fed and watered. Food fit for human consumption is never easy to come by in the Underworld and the prisoners mainly subsist on a variety of edible fungi. The occasional

blood-drinker that is confined in the Dominion is given watered-down draughts of the fluid that runs through the River of Blood, though never more than is required to keep them active. The water given to prisoners is potable, if brackish, and comes from wells dug deep under the prison. In point of fact, the great iron wheels on which the slothful run operates the mechanisms required to draw water up to the surface.

The Administrative Quarter (Yama's Quarter)

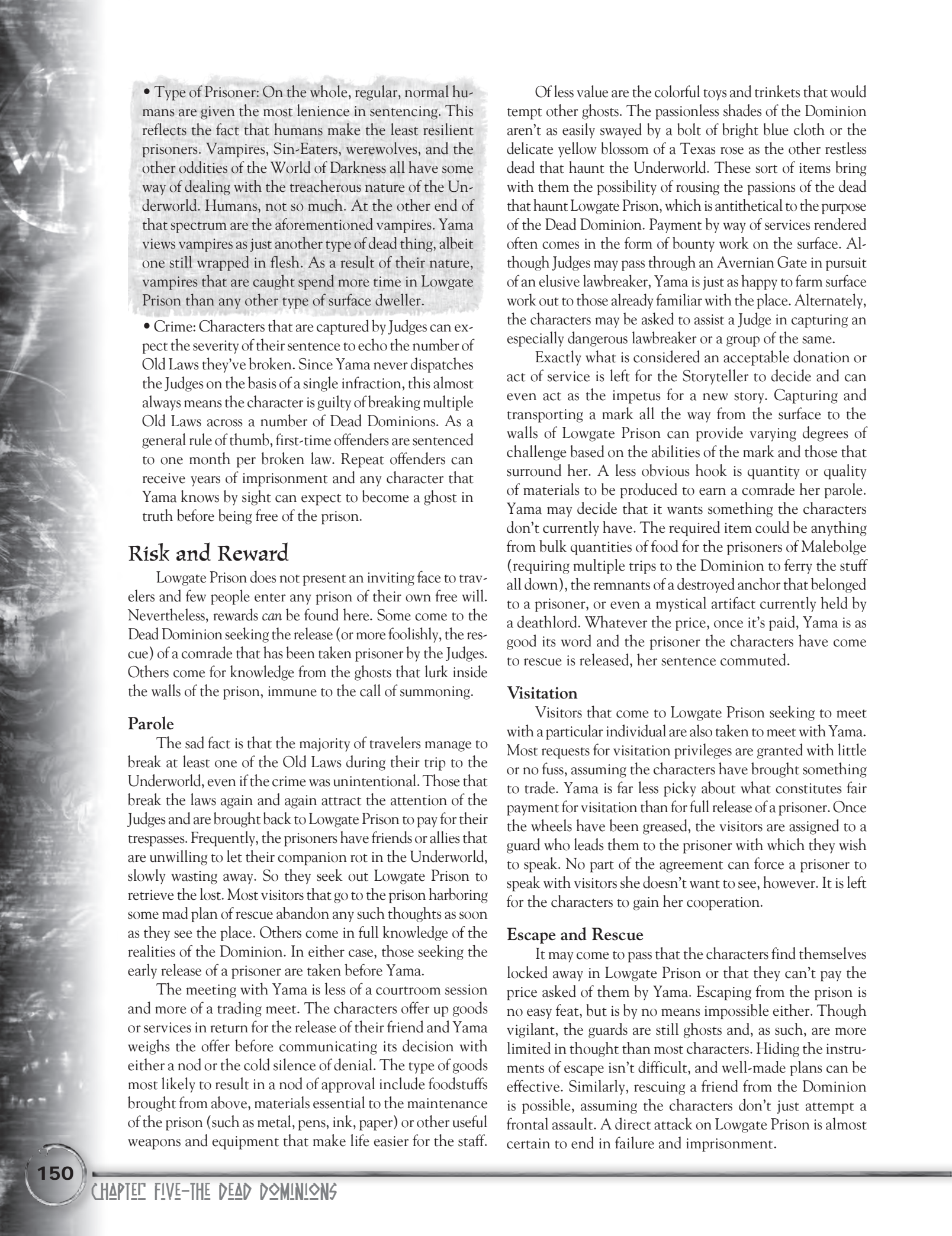
Every quarter has a sound that is distinctly its own. In Dis, the screams of the guilty echo down the halls; in Malebolge, the low murmur of living voices can be heard. The sound of Limbo is mainly silence. The sound associated with the administrative quarter, also known as Yama's Quarter, is the continuous scratching of quills on paper, as the legion of Yama's clerks make their records. Here, scribes nurture the growth of the bone-white lichen so that it grows thick and heavy across the ceiling, making Yama's Quarter the brightest place in the Dominion. Row after row of slate desks are attended by ghosts, successful products of the very prison they now help to run. Shelves line every wall, filled with the reports and records that are the lifeblood of the bureaucracy.

At the farthest corner of the Quarter is a single, snowy white marble door that marks the entrance to Yama's office. Only it may decide when a shade has proven worthy of being declared redeemed. Travelers with business in Lowgate Prison are shown into its domain to confer with him. Visitors to his office find the room small and Spartan, with naught but a slate desk and an iron chair. The only luxury claimed by Yama is its many windows, which allow it to look out over the Rivers that flow past Lowgate Prison.

Other Systems

In addition to the specific punishments meted out for violations of the Old Laws, every prisoner has a sentence that dictates how long they'll be held for. For ghosts, the sentence is usually permanent confinement until one of the Judges sees fit to release them. After all, the dead have nothing but time. A ghostly prisoner is pretty much a permanent guest of the establishment until Yama and the Judges decide he has been purged of the passions that ruled him in life and death. Many of these rehabilitated shades take up employment as clerks or guards for the prison, but some are drawn further down into the Lower Mysteries. Even long-time clerks are eventually drawn away from Lowgate Prison, with the exception of Yama. He alone seems immune to the draw of the depths, content with his place in the Underworld.

Prisoners from the living world, on the other hand, generally have set sentences. This doesn't include any other punishments levied by the Kerberos (see the Geography section for more information on this). When determining the sentence of an outsider, Yama takes the following elements into consideration.



- **Type of Prisoner:** On the whole, regular, normal humans are given the most lenience in sentencing. This reflects the fact that humans make the least resilient prisoners. Vampires, Sin-Eaters, werewolves, and the other oddities of the World of Darkness all have some way of dealing with the treacherous nature of the Underworld. Humans, not so much. At the other end of that spectrum are the aforementioned vampires. Yama views vampires as just another type of dead thing, albeit one still wrapped in flesh. As a result of their nature, vampires that are caught spend more time in Lowgate Prison than any other type of surface dweller.

- **Crime:** Characters that are captured by Judges can expect the severity of their sentence to echo the number of Old Laws they've broken. Since Yama never dispatches the Judges on the basis of a single infraction, this almost always means the character is guilty of breaking multiple Old Laws across a number of Dead Dominions. As a general rule of thumb, first-time offenders are sentenced to one month per broken law. Repeat offenders can receive years of imprisonment and any character that Yama knows by sight can expect to become a ghost in truth before being free of the prison.

Risk and Reward

Lowgate Prison does not present an inviting face to travelers and few people enter any prison of their own free will. Nevertheless, rewards can be found here. Some come to the Dead Dominion seeking the release (or more foolishly, the rescue) of a comrade that has been taken prisoner by the Judges. Others come for knowledge from the ghosts that lurk inside the walls of the prison, immune to the call of summoning.

Parole

The sad fact is that the majority of travelers manage to break at least one of the Old Laws during their trip to the Underworld, even if the crime was unintentional. Those that break the laws again and again attract the attention of the Judges and are brought back to Lowgate Prison to pay for their trespasses. Frequently, the prisoners have friends or allies that are unwilling to let their companion rot in the Underworld, slowly wasting away. So they seek out Lowgate Prison to retrieve the lost. Most visitors that go to the prison harboring some mad plan of rescue abandon any such thoughts as soon as they see the place. Others come in full knowledge of the realities of the Dominion. In either case, those seeking the early release of a prisoner are taken before Yama.

The meeting with Yama is less of a courtroom session and more of a trading meet. The characters offer up goods or services in return for the release of their friend and Yama weighs the offer before communicating its decision with either a nod or the cold silence of denial. The type of goods most likely to result in a nod of approval include foodstuffs brought from above, materials essential to the maintenance of the prison (such as metal, pens, ink, paper) or other useful weapons and equipment that make life easier for the staff.

Of less value are the colorful toys and trinkets that would tempt other ghosts. The passionless shades of the Dominion aren't as easily swayed by a bolt of bright blue cloth or the delicate yellow blossom of a Texas rose as the other restless dead that haunt the Underworld. These sort of items bring with them the possibility of rousing the passions of the dead that haunt Lowgate Prison, which is antithetical to the purpose of the Dead Dominion. Payment by way of services rendered often comes in the form of bounty work on the surface. Although Judges may pass through an Avernian Gate in pursuit of an elusive lawbreaker, Yama is just as happy to farm surface work out to those already familiar with the place. Alternately, the characters may be asked to assist a Judge in capturing an especially dangerous lawbreaker or a group of the same.

Exactly what is considered an acceptable donation or act of service is left for the Storyteller to decide and can even act as the impetus for a new story. Capturing and transporting a mark all the way from the surface to the walls of Lowgate Prison can provide varying degrees of challenge based on the abilities of the mark and those that surround her. A less obvious hook is quantity or quality of materials to be produced to earn a comrade her parole. Yama may decide that it wants something the characters don't currently have. The required item could be anything from bulk quantities of food for the prisoners of Malebolge (requiring multiple trips to the Dominion to ferry the stuff all down), the remnants of a destroyed anchor that belonged to a prisoner, or even a mystical artifact currently held by a deathlord. Whatever the price, once it's paid, Yama is as good its word and the prisoner the characters have come to rescue is released, her sentence commuted.

Visitation

Visitors that come to Lowgate Prison seeking to meet with a particular individual are also taken to meet with Yama. Most requests for visitation privileges are granted with little or no fuss, assuming the characters have brought something to trade. Yama is far less picky about what constitutes fair payment for visitation than for full release of a prisoner. Once the wheels have been greased, the visitors are assigned to a guard who leads them to the prisoner with which they wish to speak. No part of the agreement can force a prisoner to speak with visitors she doesn't want to see, however. It is left for the characters to gain her cooperation.

Escape and Rescue

It may come to pass that the characters find themselves locked away in Lowgate Prison or that they can't pay the price asked of them by Yama. Escaping from the prison is no easy feat, but is by no means impossible either. Though vigilant, the guards are still ghosts and, as such, are more limited in thought than most characters. Hiding the instruments of escape isn't difficult, and well-made plans can be effective. Similarly, rescuing a friend from the Dominion is possible, assuming the characters don't just attempt a frontal assault. A direct attack on Lowgate Prison is almost certain to end in failure and imprisonment.

Clever characters will no doubt come up with more subtle means. The most serious impediment to either escape or rescue is Yama and the Judges. From the moment a prisoner steps beyond the confines of the Dominion, Yama knows and will respond. This sets the stage for potential future conflicts, with one or more Judges dispatched to capture the guilty characters. If the target of a Judge's attention is particularly powerful or is part of a group that Yama isn't sure a single Judge could handle, the Kerberos will send out as many Judges as it feels necessary to get the job done.

Bit Players

Below are some basic statistics for the two types of shades most likely to be encountered in Lowgate Prison; namely guards and an average ghostly prisoner.

Guard

Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 4

Like most of the other staff of Lowgate Prison, the guards were once inmates. Instead of leaving the Dominion after rehabilitation or drifting deeper into the Lower Mysteries, they have chosen to stay to help others find the same peace they enjoy. Capable of feigning anger to keep prisoners in line, the guards are almost like emotionless drones, going through the same routine over and over. In case of trouble, all guards are armed with a weapon of some kind (mainly cudgels) and all carry a bone whistle. The whistles can appear to make no noise when blown, but other guards can clearly hear the call for help no matter where they might be in the prison. After a whistle is blown, reinforcements begin to show up at the rate of two guards every third round.

Ghost Prisoner

Power 2, Finesse 2, Resistance 1

Unless the characters have instigated a full-blown riot that manages to free the prisoners of Dis from their Bolgia, the ghostly prisoners most likely to be encountered are the trustees from Limbo. These shades shuffle along the tunnels of Lowgate Prison on their appointed rounds, speaking to no one without the permission of the guards. Attempts to force the prisoners to talk about the Dominion send the ghosts fleeing in the direction of the nearest guard. Even if the ghosts are somehow restrained and coerced into talking, they will seek the soonest opportunity to escape and begin yelling for the guards.

Judge

Virtue: Justice. No sinner or lawbreaker is beyond the authority invested in us by Yama.

Vice: Having passed through the crucible of the Corrections Rooms, the Judges have no Vice. Instead, a Judge automatically regains two points of Willpower each day at dusk while in pursuit of lawbreakers or while transporting prisoners back to Lowgate Prison.

Background: Once Yama declares a soul has paid the full debt of its crimes in Lowgate Prison, he, she, or it is released to either drift deeper into the Lower Mysteries or, in the case of ex-prisoners from the living world, to return to the surface to resume whatever existence they might have there. Not every ghost is so willing to take leave of Lowgate, however. Some offer their services to Yama to further the noble work of the Dominion. Most of these shades become scribes, but Yama transforms the oldest and most powerful specters into the instruments of its will called Judges.

Unique among the dead souls of the Underworld, the Judges of Lowgate Prison don't remain in any single Dead Dominion or follow the call of death that pulls shades deeper into the Lower Mysteries. Granted a nearly unparalleled freedom of movement, the Judges ply their trade of justice across the Lower Mysteries, the Autochthonous Depths and, if necessary, past the Avernian Gates into the living world.

Description: Every Judge looks exactly the same and answers only to the title it bears. If the ghosts have unique names and personalities, buried beneath the title, no one has ever seen evidence of it. Once a ghost assumes the mantle of a Judge, many of the perceived weaknesses of life-after-death are purged from its new Corpus. A Judge is clear of thought, purposeful in action, and resolute in its authority.

In appearance, a Judge looks like a tall, thin man with "skin" the pale white of fine china. In place of eyes are raw, empty holes. Its face is crowned with something that resembles unruly black hair, but, upon further inspection, is more akin to a mass of writhing cilia. Black too is the suit it wears, stylishly antique with a waistcoat and high-necked collar. A bone cane completes the ensemble, but it is no dandy's plaything. Thick and sturdy, the cane is used to pummel the unrepentant into submission when all other means have failed. The Judges are human enough in appearance that they have sometimes been mistaken,



from a distance, as fellow travelers by those from above. Up close, the illusion fades. In addition to their other deformities, Judges have no mouths. In place of lips are two lines of black stitching, crisscrossing smooth flesh where a mouth should be.

Storytelling Hints: Even without the ability to speak, lawbreakers still somehow know when a Judge has come for them. Maybe it's the way the thing's eyeless sockets bore into the guilty, as if it can see, and measure, the sins that stain a soul. A Judge compels obedience by its very presence and those who struggle against them are dragged bodily — bruised and bloody, if necessary — back to Lowgate Prison to pay for their crimes. If a Judge is defeated while carrying out its task, another will be dispatched to replace it, and another, and another until the job is done. In addition to actual chains, the Judges use Numina to force detainees to return with them to Lowgate Prison. In the living world, treat Judges like ghosts without an anchor. They may freely travel to wherever they need to go to apprehend fugitives from justice.

Attributes: Power 8, Finesse 7, Resistance 9

Willpower: 17

Initiative: 16

Defense: 8

Speed: 26 (species factor 11)

Size: 6

Corpus: 15

Numina: Unless otherwise indicated, each Numen has a dice pool of 15. Clairvoyance, Compulsion, Left-Handed Spanner, One-Step Behind, Telekinesis

- **Apprehend:** With this Numen, a Judge can literally drag the guilty into Twilight. Spend a number of Essence equal to the target's Stamina, and then roll the Judge's Power + Finesse. The target can resist with a Resolve + Composure Roll. If the Judge is successful, the target is unceremoniously yanked into Twilight where the Judge may more easily interact with him. If the target wins the contested roll, the Numen has no effect. Note this Numen only works one way. The Judge cannot use this ability to move a target out of Twilight. For the target to exit his new Twilight state, he must find an alternate way out or enter the Underworld, which translates his form back to solidity.

- **Twilight Chains:** The manacles and chains used by Judges to bind lawbreakers are ephemeral objects that only become "real" in either the Underworld or in Twilight. In effect, the chains are part of the Corpus of the Judge and will only break if it does, though characters skilled in slipping bonds may still attempt to do so at a -3 penalty. The chains carried by Judges also contain some of the essence of Lowgate Prison, which imposes a -5 penalty on any attempt to use magic (or magical type effects like Manifestations, Disciplines, etc.) while bound.

- **Drawn to Sin:** A character that breaks at least three of the Old Laws and escapes punishment for her crimes comes to the attention of Yama and through it the Judges. While the character remains in the Underworld, each time an Old Law is broken after that point, a Judge may spend a point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse to determine exactly which of the Lower Mysteries or what part of the Autochthonous Depths the character is currently in. If the character breaks another of the Old Laws while the Judge is in the same Dominion or is anywhere in the Autochthonous Depths, the Judge can use this Numen to locate her exact position. On the surface, this Numen acts more like a compass heading, indicating in which general direction the offender can be found.

- **Unfettered:** To enforce the Old Laws of the Underworld, Judges are granted more freedom of movement than other ghosts. A Judge may pass beyond the Avernian Gates and regenerate Essence at the rate of one per day even without a formal anchor.

Yama

Virtue: Justice. The guilty shall be punished for their crimes. Such is the way of the Old Laws.

Vice: Yama is free of Vice in the same way as the Judges it sends out to do its work. In place of regaining Willpower by exploiting Vice, the Kerberos may instead regain Willpower twice each scene by nurturing its Virtue.

Background: Neither man nor ghost can rightly say from whence the Kerberoi first sprang. For as long as there have been Dead Dominions, there have been Kerberoi to watch over them. It is generally believed that Yama was once like other Kerberos, tied to and concerned with only its part of the Lower Mysteries. What brought about the change from guardian of a single Dominion to guardian of the whole of the Underworld can only be conjectured. Perhaps the seed was planted when the first men began to descend from the sunlit lands, breaking the Old Laws with every step they took. Maybe it began later, when man-shaped things turned their eyes downward in search of the knowledge of the dead. All that is known for certain is that Yama felt compelled to exact justice on those who break the Old Laws and go unpunished for their crimes.

Many rumors about Yama posit as fact the idea that the Kerberos was the first ghost to ever be successfully rehabilitated in Lowgate Prison. If this is true, the question that must be asked is who or what ran the Dominion before Yama? Only the Kerberos knows the answer to this riddle. Another question that begs answering is exactly how Yama is made aware of violations of Old Laws in other parts of the Lower Mysteries. The answer is two parts mysticism and one part mundane. Other Kerberoi can come to Yama (or send their minions) and

relinquish their claims to punishing the guilty to it. This happens most frequently in cases where the guilty have already passed out of the Underworld and beyond the reach of the Kerberoi. Even when no informant of any kind approaches Yama with a tale to tell, it can sense when the balance of sin in the Underworld is shifted by outsiders. Locating the source of the imbalance is an instinct Yama has cultivated as part of its dedication to justice.

Description: Yama's skin is as chalky white as the simple robe it wears. It is completely hairless and its features, while undeniably male, have apparently been eroded by time to near mask-like proportions. On the rare occasions the Kerberos speaks, it does so softly and calmly, betraying no trace of emotion. Yama deals fairly and impartially with those that come before it, but is unmoved by begging, tears, or arguments.

Storytelling Hints: The Kerberos' presence exudes a purposeful serenity. It has accepted its place in the Underworld and the meaning of its existence. Rather than allow itself to be limited in the same way as other Kerberoi that leave their home Dominion behind, Yama creates Judges to do the heavy lifting for it. Though not as obviously hostile as other Kerberoi, Yama brooks no challenge to its authority. While the Kerberos is empty of Vice and never grows angry, it can (and does) sometimes grow mildly impatient with liars and dissemblers.

Attributes: Power 9, Finesse 8, Resistance 10

Willpower: 19

Initiative: 18

Defense: 9

Speed: 25

Size: 5

Corpus: 15

Numina: Unless otherwise indicated, each Numen has a dice pool of 17. Clairvoyance, Compulsion, Plasticity, Telekinesis, Terrify

- **Drawn to Sin:** See the Judges description for full details.



- **Investiture:** This Numen is known only to Yama and it is with this power that the Kerberos creates Judges and scribes to serve it, and deputizes those from the living world that offer service as payment. Used to target a ghost, the Numen has two effects. The first, lesser effect is to create a scribe. This investiture gives a ghost a slight boost to its mental capacities, which allows it to better serve Yama without altering the core personality of the ghost. The second effect is more intrusive. Each time Yama creates a Judge, it exhausts all of its available Essence, pouring it into the wraith. In return, the Kerberos absorbs some of the ghost's Essence, making Yama an anchor of sorts for the new Judge. This process allows Judges freedom from the Underworld and reshapes the ghost's Corpus to the familiar form worn by all Judges. Used to deputize a visitor from the living world, Yama invests a single point of Essence into the character. This breath of Yama acts as a sort of monitor of the deputy's behavior and only returns to the Kerberos upon completion of a successful mission or if the deputy reneges on the deal.

THE JUNKYARD

In place of the wailing of lost souls that greets travelers to much of the Lower Mysteries, the sound of the Junkyard is the squeal of metal against metal and the clamor of the crushers at work. Where most of the Underworld is composed of rocky tunnels that lead hither and yon, the open grounds of the Junkyard are corroded steel, rusting iron, and broken glass. The mere existence of the Junkyard is a surprise to many surface dwellers that expect every part of the Underworld to resemble the mythic tales of Orpheus and Inanna. This Dead Dominion is a place of ghost machines, metal souls, and mechanical nightmares.

Ghosts that fall into the Underworld begin unlife as ephemeral copies of the fleshy bodies they once inhabited. As time goes by, the ghosts are invariably drawn down to the Lower Mysteries by a force more mysterious and powerful than gravity. Each step of the journey changes the specters in some way. Ghosts that have served in the armies of the Killing Fields have glutted their desire for conflict until it ceased to have meaning to them. Specters that pass through the Dead Man's Hand learn a certain sense of self-worth that remains with them, even when cast adrift in the anchorless depths. The shades that are drawn to the Junkyard have discarded their human identities and refashioned their Corpus' to express purely mechanical forms. Of course, some refashionings are more successful than others. The ghosts that fail the Darwinian test of survival that is existence in the Dominion are broken down to basic parts by the crushers, their souls expelled from the Junkyard.

Getting There

Separated from the rest of the Lower Mysteries by the River of Fire on the upslope and the River of Pus on the down, the Junkyard isn't the easiest Dominion to find. The path is closed for those that find the workings of the combustion engine a mystery or almost believe the advanced technology behind inventions like nanobots is more magic than science. Only characters with oil in their blood and visions of schematics dancing in their brains can find the way. In mechanical terms, this means that any character that is actively seeking the Dead Dominion must have at least two dots in either Crafts or Science (preferably with a mechanical Specialty, such as Auto Repair for Crafts or

Mechanical Engineering for Science) to either find the place or lead the way. These characters alone hear the echoes of the many machine battles (whirring saw blades, shrieking metal, the clang of a hammer on an anvil), and feel summoned by it.

It is *possible* to find the way by accident, though less likely. Characters that carry at least half of their allowed load in technology of some kind may find their steps lead them to the Dominion, especially if that technology has broken down or run out of juice. The Dominion is, as the name suggests, the Junkyard of the Underworld and like calls to like. Characters could also conceivably follow a ghost that is making its way toward the Dominion, perhaps out of curiosity over the changes the shade undergoes as it draws closer to the Junkyard. Half-machine, half-human in appearance, these wraiths are inherently unstable and have been known to lash out at passersby. Caution is advised for any one that seeks to use these hybrids as a guide.

Description

Situated in a cavern so large it defies the name, the Junkyard is a place of prowling ghost-machines and piles of broken and leaking mechanical parts. Semi-clear paths wind their way through the Dominion, paved with detritus that has been ground to bits under the foot of travelers and the tread of machines. The place is lit by the flickering light of burning debris. Some of the fires cover acres, while others are no larger than a campfire. All the fires are caused as a side effect of the fierce mechanical battles between shades-made-metal. Mini-landslides of debris from the stacks of broken parts are a common occurrence, caused by the settling of the scrap or by the passing of ghost-machines over the unstable piles.

Towering over even the highest pile of refuse are the crushers. Ten in number, these colossal machines line the banks of the Phlegethon, powered by captured steam and enormous waterwheels turned by the boiling water. Essentially super-sized presses, the crushers are where the automaton servitors of the Kerberos that rules the Dominion bring their defeated foes to be rendered into base materials. Football field-wide conveyor belts lead away from the crushers, snaking their way through the Junkyard to a common dumping point in the middle of

the Dominion called the Heaps. Every machine produces waste and in the case of the crushers, the waste produced is in the form of the broken souls that are forced out of their assumed machine bodies by the presses. These losers of the constant battle for dominance that takes place in the Junkyard are expelled into the River of Fire and are pulled along by the current to wash up on the shores of other Dead Dominions.

The battles of the Junkyard aren't the organized chaos of the Killing Fields, nor the random violence that can be found in parts of the Autochthonous Depths. They are vicious one-on-one combats between the ghost-machines to prove superiority. Each machine seeks out the others to test the strength of its design, to salvage parts from defeated foes to improve upon itself and to lay claim to larger territories to scavenge for usable components.

The Old Laws

The Old Laws of the Junkyard set the rules by which the ghost-machines fight their battles and, to a lesser degree, the behavior expected of travelers through the Dead Dominion. A ghost that makes its way here finds itself drawn first to the crushers, to witness the fate of failed designs. It is also here that the Old Laws are displayed, written in a thousand languages on the frames of the crushers.

The Design Must Be Tested

This Old Law sets in writing the most basic rule of the Dominion. It isn't enough for ghosts to simply take the form of a machine, they must also *prove* the value of that form. While the law seems straightforward enough, some subtleties that are inherently understood by ghosts may not occur to travelers from above. A test is always between two machines — and only two machines — and the outcome may not be influenced by outside intervention. Other ghost-machines may battle each other nearby or observe the test from a distance (watching, no doubt, for flaws they can later exploit), but they are forbidden to intervene in any way. This Old Law extends to outside visitors. A traveler that takes it upon herself to get involved in a battle between the machines will find herself under attack by both combatants. Upon victory, the winner is allowed (required even, see the second law) to salvage pieces of its opponent to graft to its own form to improve the design. Whatever remains of the defeated is then left where it fell to be transported by the Victor's minions to a crusher and disposed of.

The policing of this Old Law is generally left to the ghost-machines. Few intruders that dare interfere in a test survive the immediate fury of the machines involved. Those that manage to survive or escape, attract the attention of the reigning Kerberos. Standard procedure for the guardian of the Old Laws is to eject the characters from the Junkyard into the nearest Underworld river. Lucky characters end up in the Kohan-Il.

The Design Must Evolve

No design is ever perfect and so the ghost-machines of the Dominion are constantly at work improving upon themselves. More often than not, the best parts available for improvement can only be found in the machine bodies of other metallic shades. This Old Law, combined with the first, ensures the daily battles of the ghost-machines, which in turn ensures that only the strongest designs flourish in the Junkyard. It is very difficult for travelers to break this law, unless one could somehow manage to convince a machine that it was already perfect. On the off-chance this does become a problem, the guilty machine is conveyed to the crushers and the sunlit land accomplice is silenced by a curse to still her wagging tongue before being ejected from the Dominion. The curse persists for 30 days or until the character has crossed two rivers away from the Junkyard.

The Crushers Are Sacrosanct

In many ways the crushers are the life-blood of the Junkyard and are an ultimate expression of the philosophy of dominance that rules the Dominion. It is at the crushers that the defeated are truly vanquished and banished from the Junkyard. No ghost that has felt the steely embrace of a crusher, followed by the scalding waters of the River of Fire, is eager to repeat the experience a second time. Accordingly, no other piece of machinery is the focus of so much awe and fear than the crushers.

It is absolutely forbidden to attack a ghost-machine bearing the jumble of parts that made up its last opponent as it goes to a crusher. Battles within the cleared area that surrounds each crusher are also forbidden. It should go without saying that to harm or interfere with the purpose of the crushers is also forbidden. The ghost-machines would sooner go willingly under a crusher than to break this Old Law, but the same isn't always true of the travelers that pass through the Dominion. The crushers are fantastic occult machines, from which a single screw has the potential to become a mighty memorabilia memento mori.

Unfortunately for potential thieves, the crushers are always surrounded by throngs of the Victor's servants (see "the Victor," i.e. the champion Kerberos of the Dominion, on p. 160) waiting to dispose of defeated machines. Even so, there are always those that are greedy or stupid enough to attempt the improbable. Any traveler caught tinkering with a crusher is immediately attacked and held captive until the Kerberos arrives. The penalty is to be placed upon the crusher, leaving the lawbreaker with three unappealing options. Option one: be crushed and killed. No one, no matter how powerful, can survive the steely maw of a crusher. Option two: roll off the crusher and into the Phlegethon. It is possible to survive a dip in the River of Fire, but only for the quick-witted and swift. (A fast gulp will downgrade the three lethal damage caused each turn by immersion in the River to bashing damage.) Option three: roll off the crusher and into the crowd of automatons. Similar to option one, this likely means death, albeit not the quick death offered by the crusher.



The Smith Shall Retain His Tools

The final Old Law of the Junkyard is the one most commonly and intentionally broken by travelers. Every piece of the Dead Dominion has the potential to be a useful part for one of the ghost-machines. The metallic shades (and the Kerberos) take a dim view of trespassers stealing what could be the difference between a weak design and a strong one. The temptation to steal even the lowliest piece of junk stems from the fact that the bits and pieces of machine taken from the Junkyard don't lose their potency when removed from the Dominion or even beyond the bounds of the Underworld. Further, in many cases, these items work *better* than similar machines that can be found in the sunlit lands or can improve the efficiency of mundane equipment (see Risk and Reward below). Worst of all, the ghost-machines themselves are aware that the best parts can always be found in the metallic bodies of the shades.

It is likely that this combination of potential problems led to the creation of the third Law and might also explain why the Dominion is so difficult to find. Travelers that are caught in possession of any part of the Junkyard can expect no mercy. The ghost-machines will attempt to kill a thief or drive her toward the Kerberos' Junkyard. In place of death, the Kerberos exacts a more calculated price: the offender is stripped of the knowledge required to find the Junkyard before being ejected from the Dominion, directly back to the Autochthonous Depths. In game terms, this means that characters punished in this manner that seek to find the Junkyard again take a -5 penalty on all attempts to navigate to it.

Geography

Among the piles of rusting metal and frayed wiring are wonders to behold. The crushers have no earthly or otherworldly equivalent and the Heaps are a potential treasure trove of useful parts. At the center of this mechanical nightmare is the home of the design that has proved the strongest.

The Crushers

In a way, the crushers are the gods of the Junkyard and the twisted remains of defeated machines are the sacrifices given up by their followers. The sides of the steel alter rain metal on its worshippers and ooze with flowing pus (oil is a rare commodity here, and the waters of the Kohan-Il provide a viable alternative). Every minute, great hammers ring with almighty blows, separating soul from broken machine. The leftovers are carried on miles-long conveyor belts to the Heaps, where the choicest remains are fought over.

Covered in the writing of every known language, proclaiming the Old Laws for all to see, the crushers are unpainted, towering behemoths, stretching up to the rocky ceiling of the Underworld like the skyscrapers of the world above. An iron stair leads up to a landing where the table-like slab of metal awaits its next victim. With pistons humming and throbbing, the press rises hundreds of feet in the air before slamming back down with enough force to rattle teeth and jar loose the entangled souls of the defeated. The area around the crushers is kept clear of obstacles in a 50-yard semi-circle by Victor's servitors waiting their turn to offer up the next sacrifice.

The Heaps

The terminus of all ten conveyor belts, one from each crusher, is known as the Heaps: the final resting place of the flattened remains of weak designs. This is the place to which the ghost-machines go when seeking out raw materials to add improvements to their metal frames. The conveyors spit out the materials in a nearly constant stream, onto the towering piles of scrap that give the location its name. Not considered quite as holy as the area around the crushers, the Heaps are still considered something like neutral ground.

That isn't to say that the metallic-shades never fight here — they do — but the nature and causality of those fights tends to differ from the no-holds-barred style of combat that happens elsewhere in the Dominion. In the Heaps, two machines are more likely to squabble over a particularly choice piece of material than to begin a death match. Even given over as they are to the expression of Corpus in the form of machine, the ghosts of the Junkyard seem to feel that fighting among the decaying bodies of failed designs is somehow unlucky. Even scavengers from the sunlit lands are more tolerated here. Unlike other parts of the Junkyard, none of the parts to be found in the Heap have any intrinsic value beyond that of spare parts. A machine cobbled together by a character that only uses the leftovers found in the Heaps doesn't work any better or any worse than any other mundane piece of equipment. Still, the occasional jewel can be found among the chaff and there's no place better in the Underworld to find replacement parts or that final missing ingredient of some unusual project than in the Heaps.

The Anvil

The Anvil is more than just a workplace; it is the name for all the territory controlled by the current reigning champion of the Dominion. A ghost-machine that manages to ascend to the top of the heap abandons its old stomping grounds, assumes the position of Victor, and lays claim to ownership of the Junkyard. Compared to other parts of the Dominion, the Anvil is neat and orderly. In place of jumbled piles of parts, this part of the Junkyard has organized rows

of materials. The exact nature of the organization might not be apparent to visitors, but even a casual observer can discern that the parts have been sorted and categorized in some sort of intentional pattern.

The Anvil itself is more high-tech than might be assumed from the name. In place of a solid piece of metal that serves as an anvil are various jury-rigged heating devices and primitive tools. Yes, this area *does* include an actual anvil, but it also has enough crude tool and dye machines to operate a small machine shop. Any tool or piece of equipment required to construct, repair, or maintain machinery can be found in the Anvil. The automatons that serve the Victor are created and maintained here; it's a task that occupies most of the Victor's time.

Risk and Reward

A Dead Dominion filled with homicidal machines and enough rusty metal to warrant a fresh tetanus shot doesn't sound like a place most travelers would want to visit. For those characters sharp enough to make it through without being captured or killed, however, the Junkyard does hold rewards to be had.

I Have the Power

The problem with most gadgets, no matter how bright and shiny they are or how many applications they have, is that they require power. For travelers that might have spent days (or longer) in the Underworld, picking up new batteries isn't really an option and power becomes an issue. The solution to this problem lies in the Junkyard. At the center (metaphorically speaking) of every ghost-machine is the source of ectoplasmic energy that runs their metallic bodies. No two power sources look alike any more than any two of the ghost-machines look alike. In one case the source may look like a modified lawnmower engine, in another it could more closely resemble a miniature nuclear power plant. No matter the appearance, though, each power source serves the same function and mechanically inclined characters can usually figure out how to access that power. The energy generated by a power source is limitless. It never needs to be recharged or replaced.

MERIT: MECHANICAL MEMENTO <...>

Ripped directly from the frame of a ghost-machine, a mechanical memento is a power source extraordinaire. Anything a character can jury-rig the memento up to can be completely powered by the memento alone, no matter what sort of fuel it originally required. To reiterate that point: *only the mechanical memento is required to power any machine to which it is attached*. Energy provided by the memento is unlimited, meaning, theoretically, as long as the machine it is hooked up to continues to function, the memento will continue to provide energy. The only limitations on what can be powered by a mechanical memento are those decided upon by the Storyteller.

Successfully hooking a mechanical memento up to a machine first requires an Intelligence + Science roll to figure out the best way to approach the problem. Actually attaching the memento requires a Dexterity + Crafts roll with a -5 penalty. The penalty is reduced by one for every success gained on the initial Intelligence + Science roll.

The exact dimensions and appearance of a mechanical memento are left for the Storyteller to determine, but should bear some relation to the ghost-machine from which it originated.

Here's the tricky part. That power source that looks like a car battery or even a biomechanical heart is actually the essence of the ghost in the machine. A power source is basically a fetter memento that the ghost itself has shaped and voluntarily bound itself to. Further, only active ghost-machines, that is, the ones that still fight each other and have a tendency to attack "flesh designs" on sight, are the only shades that retain a functional power source. By stealing a power source, the character is effectively murdering the body of the ghost and stealing its heart.

Obviously, this sort of action comes with some consequences. For starters, the other ghost-machines will try to kill any character they even *suspect* is carrying a power source. This means that a thief needs to be cautious with how the source is stored or used as long as they remain in the Junkyard. Carrying around a power source or attaching it to a device that remains in plain view is just asking for mechanical retribution. The other problem is Synergy. Such callous treatment of a ghost requires characters of Synergy at five dots or higher to check for degeneration (roll three dice).

Weird Science

Power sources aren't the only useful parts that can be harvested from the ghost-machines. Each design boasts a multitude of mechanical systems that work together to form the whole. Anything that could be found in a mundane machine can be found in one of the ghost-machines or in the stockpiles of parts that make up the unstable metal hills of the Dominion. Though it's true that the occasional useful part can be found in the Heap, the very best parts are always found in the machines or in the metallic-shade's territories.

Searching for a specific part among the detritus collected over centuries is a daunting task. Storytellers should decide in advance how likely the part sought is apt to be found in the area searched and impose a penalty on an extended Wits + Composure roll based on that assessment. The scale runs from exceedingly unlikely at a -5 penalty to entirely plausible at a -1 penalty. Any character with at least one dot in Crafts (must have a mechanical Specialty) or Science can assist with the search, making the roll a teamwork action. Both the target number and the time each roll represents should vary by location (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 127).

Determining whether a specific ghost-machine is likely to include a sought-after part as an element of its design requires a different roll. The character must be able to observe the machine for at least two turns to determine its general makeup before rolling Intelligence + Crafts (again, mechanical Specialty) or Intelligence + Science. With success, the character can make an educated guess on whether the machine has the part he seeks. Assuming the character can then defeat the ghost-machine in combat, removing a part is a Dexter-

ity + Crafts roll. As is the case with stealing a power source, this sort of abuse of the restless dead can have negative effects on Synergy. Sin-Eaters with a Synergy of 6 or higher should make a check for degeneration (roll three dice).

Part in hand, the character can add it to an existing device with a Dexterity + Crafts roll. The Storyteller then assigns an equipment bonus to the device based on the quality of the stolen part (minimum +2, maximum +5). In general, stronger designs yield higher quality parts. If the part was taken from an operational machine, Storytellers should consider the possibility that it could have been damaged by combat, reducing its quality.

Man Meets Machine

Although the machine-ghosts of the Junkyard left the remnants of their humanity behind when they took on the mechanical forms they exhibit in the Dominion, some parts of the machines still retain human shapes. Metallic arms and hands (especially fingers) are useful for improving the design, legs and feet have proven to be an evolutionary success, and other essential bits and pieces of humans — such as eyes, hearts, and spinal columns — are still useful even in altered machine form. These human-looking devices have had their ephemeral flesh reinforced and replaced by metal and wire to strengthen the design, but they still retain their basic original forms. Somewhat ironically, then, as the machine-ghosts prey on each other and anyone passing through the Dominion for parts, so can travelers from the living world prey on them.

A human that loses a leg, or an eye, or has his spine crushed is pretty much out of luck. True, prosthetic replacements do exist for some things, but these are only replacements in the most basic meaning of the word. This is where the ghost-machines come in. A character that has been unlucky enough to be born with a disfigurement or has suffered a serious injury can replace the missing or damaged human parts with a mechanical substitution. The trick is finding and taking the desired part. Finding the part is the easier of the two tasks (easy in the broadest sense of the word, at least). Unlike digging through the Heaps or scouring the Dominion in general for machine parts, useful replacement limbs or organs can only be found on functional ghost-machines. Potential thieves should be warned, though, the process of harvesting said limb or organ from a machine is likely to break at least two of the Old Laws (The Smith Shall Retain His Tools, The Design Must Be Tested).

Assuming all goes to plan in gathering the replacement limb or organ, the character must now undergo the process of attaching ghostly-metal to living (or the semblance thereof) flesh. First off, this requires blood, lots and lots of it, and the blood that comes from the Qiq-ol-Mal River won't do. The blood can only be donated by the character set to receive the replacement. As some vampire or another

was reported to have said, “The blood is the life,” and in the Underworld this is truer than ever. Blood is a repudiation of all the Underworld stands for. It is the essence of vitality rather than the essence of death. Only once the ephemeral metal stolen from a machine-ghost has been bathed in blood does it take on any solidity outside of the Underworld or Twilight. Mechanically speaking, a character must voluntarily bleed himself to near unconsciousness (i.e. one point of damage shy of a full Health track) and douse the stolen part in his blood for the replacement to take on the semblance of flesh. Note the word “semblance” there. To mundane eyes, the replacement *will* look like the real thing, even down to skin tone and feel. To anyone that can see into Twilight, however, the part retains its machine appearance.

Once the replacement has been properly christened with blood, it is ready to be attached to its new owner. This is a surgical procedure that requires an extended Dexterity + Medicine roll with a target number of 25 (each roll constitutes 30 minutes). With success, the replacement is grafted onto the body and healing proceeds rapidly. The recipient of the replacement gains full use of the part in a number of hours equal to the number of rolls required on the Dexterity + Medicine roll to attach the part. Further complicating the procedure, the clock is ticking on the time between the part being bathed and when it is attached. No more than 24 hours can have passed since the part was doused before it is joined with its new body. Functionally, the new limb or organ works exactly like the body part it replaced, though it does gain an Armor Rating of 4 versus targeted attacks. If the part is ever destroyed, it dissolves into ectoplasm and the character suffers three points of lethal damage.

Taking bits and pieces of the dead and attaching them to a living host doesn’t come without a price. For starters, characters must consider the moral cost to be paid. As with stealing a mechanical memento, with a Synergy (or equivalent Morality type) of 6 or higher should make a check for degeneration (roll three dice). More insidious than the moral cost are the sensations that accompany the replacement. By incorporating part of a ghost into his body, the character has made a connection with the dead. From that point on he hears ghosts whisper to him in his sleep and his dreams are filled with flashes of gruesome imagery. This unpleasant side effect imposes

the Nightmares flaw (see sidebar) on the character for as long as he retains the part. Additionally, whether the character could see ghosts before the operation or not, he can now. This isn’t the quite the same effect as seeing into Twilight. Instead, ghosts appear in the sight of the character in his day-to-day life and he can’t unsee them. For a Sin-Eater this means he can no longer voluntarily filter out his Ghost Sight, regardless of Synergy rating. Finally, if the shade from which the character stole his replacement ever manages to escape the Underworld, he acts as an anchor for the ghost.

Bit Players

Included below are the basic elements of two ghost-machines and an automaton servitor that might be found in the Junkyard. Each particular bit player presents a different type of challenge. The first is an aggressive model to physically challenge characters, the second is a less powerful design that is open to negotiations, and the third is an example of the Victor’s servitors.

Belligerent Machine

Power 4, Finesse 3, Resistance 4

The belligerent machine lurks along the edges of the small territory it has carved out for itself, laying in wait to ambush any machine or traveler that comes its way. Constantly on the hunt, it relies on the low profile of its sleek, steel body to hide, the speed and maneuverability of its tracked suspension to chase, and a pair oversized drills to kill. The machine remains capable of speech, but seldom bothers to communicate with its prey. Characters that encounter the machine must be cautious of engaging it as a group, lest they inadvertently break the first of the Old Laws.

Untested Design

Power 2, Finesse 2, Resistance 2

New to the Dominion, the untested design is just what its name implies. It skulks hyena-like at the edge of combats between stronger designs, attempting to remain unnoticed so it may scavenge leftover parts before the Victor’s automatons arrive. Thus far failing to claim any territory as its own, the ghost-machine has taken to prowling the borders of the Dominion, looking for travelers to trade with or, if they seem weak, to attack. Treated with any sort of respect by visitors

MENTAL FLAW: NIGHTMARES

Some people are naturally predisposed towards nightmares, perhaps as a result of events they have witnessed or just as the result of a weak psyche. People with this Flaw dread the hours they must give over to sleep and do so as little as possible. Each time the character beds down for the night she must roll Resolve + Composure. With success the character manages not to dream at all and regains the normal point of Willpower. If the roll fails, the character is plagued by nightmares and doesn’t gain the benefits of a peaceful night’s rest. Storytellers should feel free to modify the roll based on elements such as the Morality rating of the character, derangements, recent events, or use of sleeping aids.

from the living lands, the machine can prove a valuable source of information on the lay of the land. Outsiders that can provide the machine with ideas on how to improve its design or even help it scavenge for more useful parts can make a temporary ally. As opposed to many of the older, more powerful ghost-machines that haunt the Junkyard, the untested design is still capable of communicating with outsiders via a mesh grill, its voice a hollow, metallic rasp.

Automaton

Power 6, Finesse 5, Resistance 7

The Victor has many automatons serving its needs — they have joined the machine instead of choosing to battle it for supremacy. Each automaton is roughly the same humanoid shape, though the parts used to construct each one varies. One automaton might feature mainly metallic parts, while another is constructed of tightly bound wire with iron struts. Regardless of appearance, all of the Victor's servants serve the same function. It is the automatons that drag the mangled machine-Corpus' of the defeated to the crushers and maintain the sanctity of neutral ground around the enormous machines. If the crushers are considered the gods of the Dominion, the automatons are their priests and the ghost-machines treat the Victor's servants with nearly the same amount of reverence. Violence toward the automatons is extremely unwise as they are considered tools of the Victor and fall under its protection. In the absence of their master, the automatons will defend themselves if attacked. Characters are likely to come into contact with an automaton after a battle with a machine-ghost or if they decide to attempt to steal a particularly tasty part from the servant as it is making its way toward the crushers. Oddly, the automatons are programmed to be helpful (in a way) to travelers from the living lands. If asked, any automaton can give a character exacting directions to the nearest border of the Dominion.

The Victor

Virtue: Fortitude. The tests have proven the strength of the design. All challengers shall be met and overcome.

Vice: Envy. As the design approaches perfection we look to lesser machines for the parts that will make us complete.

Background: The one and only Kerberos of this Dominion is determined by the strongest design. Any machine-shade that defeats the current Kerberos takes its place and assumes the title of Victor. The current incarnation of the



position has successfully defended its design for over 100 years, making it one of the most successful designs ever seen in the Junkyard.

Description: Roughly the size of a bus, the current Victor is better armored than some tanks and rolls across its Dominion on steel-shod treads. The king of the ghost-machines utilizes an impressive sensor array to track and target its prey. Iron claws grapple its victims, holding them tight for the shattering touch of its wicked ram. Less frequently used, but still impressive, is the command of Manifestations and Numina available to this “design.”

Storytelling Hints: Mainly incapable of what might pass for communication to outsiders, the Victor makes its wishes known with a series of one-word commands that leave no room for interpretation.

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 8, Resistance 14

Willpower: 24

Initiative: 22

Defense: 10

Speed: 38

Size: 20

Armor: 5/5

Corpus: 34

Numina: Compulsion, Left-handed Spanner, Machine Possession, Telekinesis, Terrify

THE FORGE OF ORCUS

Deep underground, the still-beating heart of industry keeps its fires lit with the fat and plasm of the dead. From a distance, the Forge of Orcus calls to travelers with the promise of warmth, shelter, and trade while deterring them with its ominous spires, acrid smoke, and wailing screams. Some come in hopes of rescuing lost souls while others seek to exploit the unanchored dead. This fiery Dominion promises treasure and gadgets usable throughout the Underworld for a price — just step lightly, or risk angering the management.

Getting There

The Forge of Orcus spills its wastes out to the Great Below in a muddied current flowing with blood, fire, and slurry. Many have mistaken this flow for an Underworld river but quickly discover otherwise as the would-be drinker scorches herself (for one or more aggravated damage) before the viscous liquid even reaches her lips. Tracking any of these slurries back to its source leads to the Forge itself.

Many Dominions are found in caves or other enclosed offshoots. The Forge, however, is visible in all directions. It stands separated from its surroundings only by the fiery rivers it creates and the bridges spanning them. As such, Underworld travelers are often drawn to the Forge whether that was their destination or not. The high-spire towers and pungent odors have a way of slowing the step of all but the most adventuresome visitor as they draw closer. However, the promise of a warm refuge from the cold, dank road through the darkness is often enough to get their feet moving again.

Description

The Forge spans a rocky archipelago separated by molten streams of rock and soul-slag. Dominating the two largest islands are two soot-stained towers looming overhead with metal spires. Smaller islands are populated by a series of squat buildings. These are the factories from which the molten streams pour, eroding the rock around them and separating the islands upon which they stand. Foul-smelling stacks belch oily black smoke that clings to the cave ceiling for miles in each direction. It's not hard to imagine the fiery pits of Hell while squinting against the stifling heat and hearing the periodic screams and moans of the Dominion.

Welcome

Visitors should take note of the Old Laws of the Forge upon entry. They are spelled out rather conveniently as one crosses over the giant metal bridge spanning the volcanic slurry. The first island a traveler finds is dominated by one of the two giant towers, known appropriately as the Spire of Orcus. Despite the dread name and ominous shadow, the bottom floors of the tower act as... well, a greeting center, showroom, and sales floor. A certain absurdity is bound to strike the visitor as she's approached by a short, fat foreman and asked if her needs are being seen to. Once it becomes clear that the wares and goods of the Forge of Orcus are made of refined souls and the constant moaning and screaming is coming from the production line, things tend to *snap* into sobering focus.

Soul Smelting

Soul smelting is the stock and trade of the Forge. Facsimiles of any manner of item found in the world above or below can be fired and manufactured within the dark factories speckling the horizon. To be clear, these items are created by melting down the corpus of unanchored ghosts and other cast-off souls and recreating them into a new material form. A simple item such as a small knife might only require a portion of a ghost's body. More complex machines such as a watch, however, might require multiple ghosts along with material parts.

The inventor and master of the process of soul smelting is the Dominion's Kerberos and namesake. He is only rarely seen on the lower levels but Orcus insists on dealing with bigger or more influential clients. Wretched to behold but altogether a good businessman, he has a silver tongue and can sell anything. Mostly he leaves the day-to-day sales to other more *presentable* denizens of his Dominion.

The artisans of the Forge trade in souls as both raw material and currency for their unique wonders. Herding together ghosts who are too weak to defend themselves or who have given up on the cold mockery of life in the lands below, the Forge crafts them into jewelry, weapons, and other items. As for the price, a Sin-Eater may "cash-in" a number of Fetters (*Geist: The Sin-Eaters* pp. 201-205), releasing souls already in her service to create more powerful items. Similarly, she may trade enslaved souls, convince a ghost to sacrifice itself, or go into debt with the management (a favor that is almost certain to involve hauling some innocent wretch down to the Forge's soot-stained shores anyway).

Visitors rarely venture further than the showroom floors of the Spire of Orcus despite it comprising a relatively small portion of the Dominion. Most don't have the stomach or the interest to see how the "sausage is made," so to speak. Several bridges and at least one tunnel leads from the Spire of Orcus to two large islands and a number of smaller ones. This is where the real work is done. On every piece of land large enough to hold one, factories big and small excrete the excesses of industry into the surrounding Underworld as they process the restless dead into workable materials. These islands play host to the workers, the raw material and the process by which they're transformed.

The Seven

The last of the major landmarks is only accessible by one bridge from the Spire of Orcus's upper floors. This tower is identical in every way to the Spire of Orcus and only the sharpest eyes will note that this second tower is just barely larger. This is the Spire of Seven, home to the dreaded Sibitti. Sometimes seen wandering around the Dominion (and throughout the Underworld), these silent, white-shrouded creatures inspire a terrifying right-of-way as they pass. Occasionally, they can be seen out on the balconies of the Spire watching, smelling the air, or training birds of prey. Reportedly, they have a whole team of servants in there with them. Those selected for this dubious honor are rarely seen again, leading many to believe they have long since been eaten.

Despite the air of menace and mystery surrounding them, who they are and what they do is remarkably transparent. The Forge needs raw material and that material is the body and souls of the unquiet dead. As mentioned, some come to the fire willingly; most, however, are brought to the Forge by these seven relentless hunters. Their legend is known throughout the Underworld, told as a ghost story among ghosts. The Sibitti are said to target anyone from wretches too weak to protect themselves to lawbreakers too fearsome for the guards of Lowgate to handle. What their actual criteria is no one really knows but if a traveler sees them prowling the Underworld, it's best to steer clear.

Telling the seven hunters apart seems impossible at first glance. They're all approximately the same height and wear white shrouds turned gray from the air of the Forge. Under their shrouds they are identifiably different — each bearing the head of a predatory animal — but such is a rare sight outside of the Spire of Seven. The only method for laymen to distinguish them is how they travel and hunt. One rides a mount on shoes made from Forge-fired souls, another travels with a pair of powerful mastiffs as large as horses, two are known to keep birds (one prefers an owl while the other keeps falcons), still another hunts alone and prefers to strike from the shadows. Each ancient and powerful and possessing a name spoken only between their fellow Sibitti (the Seven are discussed in more detail below). The secrets of their long history are locked within their tower. To enter is no mean feat although presumably not impossible.

The Old Laws

The Forge of Orcus contains a fully functioning bureaucracy and is quite used to visitors. Travelers are surprised to find themselves welcomed in a way that few other Dominions offer. Despite this inviting atmosphere, the weight of the Old Laws is as heavy here as it is elsewhere. The Old Laws of The Forge are posted openly upon the bridge entering the realm but can also be found posted around most entrances within the Dominion. Any representative of the Forge may be asked about them if any visitors are unclear on how to interpret them.

Take Nothing Not Offered

Intrepid souls looking to get something for free are setting out to be sorely disappointed. Theft is repaid in a loss of body parts. Most transgressions are only good for a finger or two. Bolder offenses demand bigger sacrifices ranging from hands to heads depending on how charitable Orcus is feeling. Rumors that such a transgression is how One-Arm, the armorer, got his signature look and name probably aren't true but that doesn't stop officials from pointing to him as a warning to newcomers.

HEY, YOU WANNA BUY A SOUL WATCH?

You need a watch, compass, or weapon that you can carry freely within the confines of the Underworld? The Forge is the place to get it. The only catch is that the item doesn't function *outside* of the Underworld. As soon as its bearer returns to the material world, an Underworld watch is only correct twice a day, the compass becomes stuck in congealed and cloudy mineral oil and even a simple item such as a knife becomes suddenly dull and useless — assume that any item now possesses a -5 equipment bonus upon entering the world of the living. Taking them *back* into the Underworld, however, renews their bonus (below).

Mechanically, these soul-forged items behave like memento mori (**Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, p. 192) but have no corresponding Key (the Threshold may be chosen and will be based on the soul or souls used to make the device). The item confers a +3 bonus (instead of +5) to the chosen dice pools. The wielder does not suffer any social penalties around "normal" people as the tool is inert in the land of the living but neither do they gain the social bonus among Sin-Eaters. The attendant nightmares are still incurred as the wielder is beset by memories of the soul of the poor creature who gave itself to equip the character.



The Price is the Price

No bartering is allowed within the Forge and all deals are final. An attempt to haggle with any of the dealers within the Forge is a punishable offense. Punishment comes often in the form of some minor servitude or additional tax depending on how long or how crassly the potential buyer persists.

Do Not Speak to the Material

Simply put, don't talk to anyone slated for the Forge. This is tricky if a krewe is here on a rescue mission and trying to find a specific soul. If a krewe knows who they're looking for — and what they look like — they might circumvent this rule by simply not talking to the rescued individual until they're beyond the bridges. Such a rescue attempt is still likely to cause some commotion but the difference between being branded a lawbreaker or not can be significant throughout the rest of the Underworld.

What is Made Cannot Be Unmade

Once a soul has been forged, no amount of take-backs is allowed. Crises of conscience brought on when a Sin-Eater discovers what his new gloves are made of are ill-advised and too late. Despite this, rumors persist that one of the makers is willing — for a price — to entertain unmaking an item with the soul intact. Sussing out who is tricky business considering it's a law no one seems eager to discuss. (The identity of the would-be savior is revealed below.)

Do Not Impede the Sibitti

Do not under any circumstances get in the way of the Sibitti doing their job. More than an Old Law, this is common sense. Reportedly, this law was specifically drafted as part of the deal Orcus made to lease the Dominion. As such it's a pretty easy law to follow but, just in case, visitors tend to give the white-cloaked creatures a wide berth anyway.

Geography

The Forge of Orcus is sweltering, oppressive, and covered with oily soot and grime. Alternately, it's quite bright compared to many other subterranean realms, lit by the raging flames and roiling rivers of molten souls. The Dominion consists of four primary islands linked together by bridges with a spattering of lesser islands in between. A few of the notable highlights follow.

The Spire of Orcus

This giant angular tower reaching near 20 stories to the ceiling of the cavern acts as the capital of the Forge. The bottom levels are the showroom and lobby. Very little actual forging goes on within the tower anymore but a few shops are still open and active (mostly for finishing touches, finery, gilding and the like). Some of the more presentable and uniquely talented artisans can be found and commissioned within the middle levels of the tower. For particularly large or special work, Orcus himself will come down and broker the deal. Remember, no bartering is allowed. Most

find Orcus's prices steep but reasonable considering the quality and utility of the devices. The uppermost levels are reserved for accounting and Orcus's private quarters. This is also the only way to travel to the Spire of Seven if a visitor feels intrepid — suicidal — enough to explore.

The Showroom

Throughout the lower tiers of the Spire of Orcus all sorts of items, machines, and other wonders are on display. Who commissioned these items is never expanded upon in the interest of client confidentiality but based on the size, expense, and nature of these devices, it's not much of a leap to presume the Forge deals directly with Kerberoi the Underworld over. The items within most characters' price range are simple items: knives, jewelry, pieces of armor, etc. Complex devices such as handguns, an iron maiden made of still-screaming souls, and a working motor are all on display. Even the simplest of machines is a wonder this far below the living world and all of it is crafted from the one thing of which the Underworld has an abundance: the dead.

Accounting

The purest form of the bureaucracy at work within the Forge is evident on the upper floors of the Spire of Orcus. That a Dominion has an accounting department is almost laughably absurd but remembering that the currency is sapient and composed of once-living persons erodes the levity quite a bit. While not typically open to the public, visitors who gain access to these areas are disturbed at the — ironic — soullessness of it all. Lines of eyeless troglodytes toil away at desks balancing enormous ledgers made of vellum and inked in some sort of *ichor* that is best not considered. These foul little monsters pay little mind to visitors unless specifically called upon by Orcus or some other fat cat. Very little awaits travelers here but if a rescuer wants to be thorough, then finding a soul's name among the endless ledgers and striking it from the Forge's records might be the only way to ensure no one comes looking for her again.

The Factories

Within each of the stone and brick factories, ghosts with a talent for such things prepare, smelt, sift, and shape other souls. A few of the more talented artisans work within the Spire of Orcus but most of the grunt work is performed here. Souls ushering souls to the forge may seem like a particularly ghoulish way to make a "living." However, not all of the ghosts intended for forging are here unwillingly. Particularly hopeless or mad souls take solace in serving a function with their unlife rather than waiting for eternity to run out.

Visitors aren't likely to be walking around the factories much; though if someone expressed enough interest, an exception may be allowed. The foremen aren't worried about trade secrets getting out so much as sudden bouts of conscience letting all the stock go.

The Spoil Pit

Not every part of the soul is useful to the craftsmen of the Forge. Those parts that don't get used find their way into the Spoil Pit. Spectral body parts lie atop each other, some screaming and wailing. Occasionally one will claw to the top only to get dragged back down bemoaning its wretched fate. Phantom limbs flex spectral muscles even as their former owners have long since become part of some device far away from here.

The Spire of Seven

Across one of the larger slurries is a mirror image of the Spire of Orcus: its dark twin on the opposite bank. Here reside the Sibitti, the Seven: wardens and hunters of the Forge. They enforce the laws of the Forge within and without the Dominion and have been known to hunt as far up as the borders of the Autochthonous Depths looking to fetch stray souls for raw material. The Spire of Seven is identical in every way to the main tower except that it is larger by exactly *one inch*. What the seven of them do with all that room is anyone's guess. Since the only other soul to regularly return from the Spire of Seven is Orcus, a mystery it remains.

Breathing the Air

It is extremely difficult to breathe the heavy, smog-choked air of the Forge. It can occasionally overwhelm visitors unused to the acrid smoke. Whenever a player declares any action requiring physical exertion — say, an Athletics roll — the Storyteller should call for a Resolve + Stamina check to see if the character remains conscious. Failure means she swoons or passes out temporarily. Additionally, all Perception rolls among first-time visitors suffer a -2 penalty for the sweltering heat, haze, and smells. Repeat visitors only take away one die, and either of these penalties can be ignored by spending willpower.

Risk and Reward

Travelers hear the horror stories about the Sibitti, or that the Forge trades in items made of Sin-Eaters or Prometheans. Presumably the soul-smelting process can't actually be performed on the flesh and blood of the living (or physically unliving) but few who have heard these stories aren't in a hurry to visit the Forge. Occasionally, a krewé might stumble across a booth representing the Forge in the bazaars and grottos of the Autochthonous Depths or Dead Man's Hand. However, for specialty items, potential buyers will have to travel to the Forge itself.

All manner of device can be created within the Forge of Orcus — or at least a reasonable facsimile. These "forgeries" do not count toward the limit of items able to be brought into the Underworld suffered by Sin-Eaters (see **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, p. 265). See the sidebar ("Hey, You Wanna Buy A Soul Watch," on p. 162 of this book) for more information on such facsimiles.

Purchasing these items should not be taken lightly and should cause anyone with a Synergy (or Morality equivalent) of seven or higher to roll for degeneration. Regardless of the named price, these items are still made of once-living, fully sapient people. Whether that person wanted to spend their existence as a dagger protecting the righteous it's still difficult to get around the softly groaning reminder that these things used to be people. Especially when the owner of the item begins to have nightmares that aren't her own.

Bit Players

A cast of hundreds populate the Forge; from serfs to fodder, from the skilled labor to the dreaded Sibitti hunters. Below are a few of the more notable personalities visitors are likely to meet.

Orcus, Forgemaster

Power 9, Finesse 8, Resistance 8

Orcus is the powerful Kerberos and master of the Forge who lends his name to the Dominion. His face is a cast of recently cooled lava: dark stone, yet still pliable and emotive. As his flesh moves, tiny cracks of bright red lava crackle across the surface of his skin only to darken and fill in as they cool. Despite his title as Forgemaster, he doesn't perform any of the day-to-day duties of the Forge. In many ways, he is a fat bureaucrat having built his fiefdom on the backs of his laborers. While that impression is easy to get and even easier to support, Orcus was once Forgemaster in deed as well as name and ran the bellows a long time gone. He won't take kindly to accusations of pushing pencils while his force toils away. A silver-tongued individual might even fool him with a well-placed challenge to prove his claim and get something forged for free. Few are brazen enough to try and fewer still are skilled enough to con the conman.

The story goes that the Sibitti were here first and a younger Orcus made a deal with them for use of the land. Among the details of the deal was that he would construct a tower in their honor that no other structure would surmount and that he would never impede their hunts. Speaking to this consummate salesman leaves little doubt that he could have easily brokered such a deal.

One-Arm the Armorer

Power 6, Finesse 7, Resistance 5

Rumors swirl around this enigmatic figure: that he lost his arm by breaking the law or that he forged his own arm into a weapon. If a visitor brings these stories up around him she will be met with a steely gaze and silence. The truth is far simpler than all that. One-Arm is an old ghost who willingly entered the service of the Forge and plies his trade one soul at a time. His skill is unparalleled except perhaps by Orcus himself. Most of the more complex devices seen around the showroom have seen his touch. Reportedly, One-Arm made a functioning gun that fires slugs cast from the molten run-off surrounding the Forge. The owner of this device must come back to collect more bullets from the river and get it fine-tuned every once and again.

One-Arm loves his work but doesn't necessarily love the management. Masters of body language and subtext can deduce that One-Arm is jaded enough and less beholden to the realm than his fellow specters. As such he may be willing to "unmake" certain items. It will have to be worth his while, however, as he'll certainly be punished for his transgression should it be discovered. The worst that may happen is his life is made uncomfortable for a few years, a momentary distraction in the centuries he has already endured. Still, he will need to be convinced and the visitor pleading the case must be willing to break the law.

Ulbermink, the Jeweler

Power 3, Finesse 8, Resistance 3

Ulbermink may not be much to look at — in fact, he's a foul, blind little troll — but he has an uncanny knack of creating beautiful objects. Short in stature with an ovoid head crested with bony ridges and bisected by a mouth full of razor-sharp needle teeth, he "sees" through touch. By this method he actually creates unbelievable masterpieces. He's definitely a form kind of guy (function is somebody else's problem) and he's usually called in to put on the finishing touches. While there may not be much call for Underworld jewelry it isn't unheard of among Kerberoi and other long-term denizens of the Lower Mysteries to retain Ulbermink's talents. By and large he isn't supposed to talk to the clientele but for special requests and big spenders, Orcus will want to show off his all-stars. Visitors with the run of the place can notice that Ulbermink bears a startling resemblance to the ghoulish accountants on the upper levels of the Spire of Orcus. Whether this is a coincidence or hints to his origins can't be confirmed.

Erra, Prime of Seven

Virtue: Temperance. The Sibitti are not savages, they are hunters. Hunters wait.

Vice: Pride. The Sibitti are righteous and undisputed in their mission.

Background: The Sibitti are the primary face of the Forge, stalking its fiery shores, issuing the call to hunt, and generally being terrifying. Rumors and whispers insist that any leader the Sibitti have must be holed up in the tower and never seen. In fact, she is around the Dominion just as much as her sisters though it's true she doesn't travel abroad as often.

Erra is the first of seven sisters known collectively as the Sibitti. Her sisters are Utug, A-La, Gidim, Mulla, Dingir, and Maskim. They remember little from before meeting the young Orcus; they have hunted for as long as they can remember but what would they do with their prey before the Forge was here? What they do know is they have the faces of predators and the names of winds but none remember a time before death (or if they were ever alive at all). Erra occasionally recalls images of seven sisters sacrificed to ancient gods, each falling to the fang and claw of wild beasts but nothing so distinct as a memory. The youngest, Maskim, once claimed they served a powerful deathlord until he fell into an interminable slumber of disuse. Whether either or



both of these insights hold any truth is largely irrelevant to their daily purpose. These questions go unanswered, to the point that none of them ask anymore. The sisters amuse themselves idly within their tower and around the Dominion until struck with inspiration — a need to hunt that cannot be ignored. Then they issue forth the call and march from the tower out into the Underworld.

Description: Erra, as with her sisters, is only seen in her thick, white shroud outside the tower, largely indistinguishable from the other six. In the privacy of their tower, however, the sisters do not wear the uniform of the hunt. Here they appear as specters only half-real and as ephemeral as a breeze. In the light they appear as women, surprisingly young and beautiful in an earthy way. In darkness, however, they stand revealed: she and her sisters each bear the visage of a predatory animal. Erra shares the features of a pale falcon and with either face showing she regards guests with large, hawk-like eyes.

Storytelling Hints: Erra, as with all of the Sibitti, is a creature of few words. Always watchful she stalks the grounds of the Forge where her gaze is rarely met. If a persistent enough krewe seeks an audience with the seven it will be Erra who receives them. She is quite capable of speech — all the sisters except Mulla, the mute, can converse in any language. Visitors will find her erudite and thoughtful and probably quite curious why anyone would want her attention where most cower at the thought of it.

Erra is a surprisingly gracious host, supplying food and drink brought by her servants — hand-picked from the souls she and her sisters have collected. She will listen to any request all the way through before giving a response. She will demand to be paid due respect within her tower but will otherwise be welcoming if cold and watchful like the falcons she resembles. She will let visitors or those that approach do most of the talking, letting them set their own noose, so to speak. She is not a contract killer, won't hunt for sport, and is unlikely to help find missing persons, but if she is so moved, she may lend use of their mastiffs or arm the requestor with the means to help himself.

Attributes: Power 8, Finesse 6, Resistance 7

Willpower: 15

Morality: 5

Initiative: 13

Defense: 7

Speed: 25

Size: 5

Corpus: 12

Numina: Animal Control (dice pool 15 - Resolve). Clairvoyance (dice pool 15). Know the Soul (dice pool 6). Telekinesis (dice pool 15). Terrify (dice pool 14 versus Resolve + Composure)

Know the Soul: The Sibitti use this Numen to know the weight of a soul they're hunting: vices, sins, loves, location (or at least the direction in which to start), etc. With a Power + Finesse roll, Erra gains one insight into her target per success. This comes in the form of intuitions and won't provide specific names or detailed litanies of sin, only feelings. Whether this sense can be wrong is something the Sibitti have never considered.

OPPIA

Since before recorded history, people have used nets to obtain food. A net cast into the water or strung across a stream traps fish, and the people on land partake of this bounty. The Dominion called Oppia also makes use of nets, but instead of fish or other game, the ghosts that rule this Dominion capture the very spiritual Essence released by *ofrendas*, Ceremonies, and other rituals. As such, Oppia is a place that many beings would love to see utterly destroyed. The Laws of the Dominion have heretofore protected the inhabitants, but jealous and angry ghosts continue to plot their destruction.

Getting There

Oppia isn't close to the living world, as Dominions go, but it is surprisingly easy to reach. Guardians that might normally interfere with a traveler's progression allow ingress to tunnels leading to Oppia, and the lords of the other Dominions are often happy to provide guidance, advice, and even guardians to those who wish to reach it. This is because, of course, they wish travelers to go to Oppia and destroy it, or at least disrupt it.

It's possible to follow the scent to Oppia. The nets that capture the Essence of remembering the dead give off a distinctive odor, something that calls to mind cut flowers, burnt sugar, and wood smoke. Once a character delves below the Autochthonous Depths, he can try to locate and follow this smell. This requires an extended Wits + Composure action, with every roll indicating 15 minutes of tracking. The target number of successes varies by where the characters start out in relation to Oppia (Storyteller's discretion). If the characters start out in the Killing Fields, for example, reaching Oppia might require 10 successes (more if the characters are standing next to a pile of burning bodies). If they start looking for Oppia while near or in a deeper realm, such as the Grave Dream, the total might be 20 or more. Werewolves and other characters with enhanced senses of smell add the appropriate bonuses to this roll.

Description

Rumors of the splendor and extravagance of Oppia flitter through all levels of the Underworld. Ghosts enslaved in other Dominions wish to visit Oppia, to walk the immense

circular realm, to stare up into the endless Vent, and to stroll the streets of the city, knowing nothing is forbidden.

Oppian was a Greek poet who described, in great detail, the process of fishing in the didactic poem *Halieutica*, circa CE 180. The Dominion of Oppia is named for him, for the idea that led the two ghosts that rule Oppia sprung from a discussion of net fishing. Both had been farmers in life, and both had been poor and hungry. In death, they felt they were entitled to great feasts, to beautiful sights, but all they saw was the Underworld. It has its points of interest, true, but these ghosts felt that *all* of their dreams should be made manifest in the afterlife.

Making matters worse, neither man had much in the way of family or remembrance. Both died childless, one was a confirmed bachelor, and the other's wife remarried shortly after his demise. Neither had more than a simple marker to commemorate his life. Over time, any passions the men might have had became feelings of greed, accompanied by a savage feeling of entitlement. They only wanted what they deserved.

Standing by the edge of the River of Hate, these men talked about whether fish swam the Rivers of Death, and whether it would be possible to catch them with nets. As they spoke, one of them reached down into the waters and grabbed at something. The other, named Euelpides, watched as his companion thrashed and snarled with the unseen creature, the water of the River of Hate churning white with their battle. And when Euelpides could see again, his friend was gone. He had merged with the creature from the river, and become a geist.

The geist, calling itself "Plenty," carved out a new Dominion with Euelpides acting as his watchman and bodyguard. When the realm was finished, Plenty sent Euelpides out into the Underworld to set in motion the apparatus that would make Oppia infamous.

Stolen Offerings

Oppia doesn't absorb much of the Essence floating through the Underworld — if it did, Plenty would have been destroyed already, Old Laws be damned. It absorbs enough for the mad geist-king of the Dominion to grow fat on the spoils, and for him to be able to offer this Essence as enticement to ghosts. It absorbs enough that other Dominions and powerful ghosts notice that it is happening, but not so much that it causes real inconvenience.

As for how it works, Plenty is proud of himself for figuring it out. His scheme was beautifully simple. He's just taking advantage of the natural flow of things.

Ofrendas and other actions meant to honor the dead cause Essence to flow "up" toward the living world. This Essence is richer near the bottom, and as it flows upwards, ghosts, geists, Kerberoi, and other creatures partake of it, sustaining themselves. These beings probably *would* hold on to it if they could, but it flows quickly, and catching it is like catching smoke. It's not necessary, anyway — as long as the living remember the dead, the Essence flows, and every being in the Underworld is able to "eat."

Plenty, however, wasn't satisfied with taking wisps here and there, and this gluttony only grew after he became the geist. By hollowing out a long column of space in the Lower Mysteries, he was able to string nets and catch this free-flowing Essence. He then dug into the wall near the nets and nested like an anemone, drawing Essence into his massive gullet and never moving.

Poor Euelpides, however, paid the price for his master's greed. He left the Dominion and somehow engineered "currents" of Essence that draw the energy toward Oppia. How exactly he did this is a mystery; enemies of Oppia know that he created pits to lower Dominions to draw off their Essence, but even with these vents closed, the Essence still flows. Discovering how Euelpides accomplished this feat would probably lead to the destruction of Oppia, but since Euelpides himself has been missing for many centuries, this doesn't seem likely.

The Old Laws

Oppia has many entrances, but upon entering, a traveler's attention is drawn to the Lounge (see below). A chorus of ghosts flits around the Lounge, attending to the needs of travelers. The five Old Laws of Oppia are written on their bodies. Some have black tattoos, some are written in raised scars, and some wear ornate garments of gold and silver chains, forming the letters of the laws. All a traveler has to do to learn the laws is tell a passage slave to stop and disrobe.

The Law of Bounty

All shall have excess in Oppia. Denying Essence to a traveler or a ghost (except for a slave, who have their own law; see below) is punishable by a short term as a slave. Since Essence takes the form of food and drink in Oppia, breaking this law usually means knocking another traveler or ghost out of the way to get to a particularly tasty morsel.

The Law of Slavery

Slaves are not people. Slaves are allowed only to eat "servant's fare," an unpleasant slop of Essence mixed together from run-off and leftovers. Slaves are not allowed to deny a visitor anything in any circumstance, except to preserve their own existences. Even then, denial of a visitor adds time onto the slave's "sentence." Particularly unpleasant visitors have been known to threaten death to a slave purely to force them into remaining slaves. Slaves that violate this law in other ways are given demeaning duties, extended sentences or, in extreme cases, sent to meet Plenty.



The Law of the Feast

Let every memory be a mouthful, let every offering quench our thirst. Essence becomes food the moment it enters Oppia, unless it is bound up in a being's Corpus or body. The type of food or drink that it becomes depends upon the emotional "flavor" to it. If a person back in the living world remembers her father fondly, for instance, these memories might coalesce into comfort food — cakes, pies, sweets, fresh bread, hot chocolate, even ice cream. If she hated her father, the food might be bitter or spicy, or it might be an exceptionally strong alcoholic beverage. Whatever the specific type of fare, it is always a perfect representation of its kind. That doesn't mean that everyone finds it delicious; the bittersweet memories of a lost lover might become some of the juiciest and ripest strawberries imaginable, but they still don't taste good to someone who doesn't like strawberries.

"Breaking" the Law of the Feast involves trying to take food from Oppia. This offense, again, is punishable by a stint as a slave.

The Law of Graciousness

Do not refuse the hospitality of Plenty. Designed to uncover geists who might be in Oppia to destabilize it, this law punishes anyone who does not eat. No amount is specified, but visitors who don't seem to latch on to the spirit of the place (that is, eating heartily), undergo greater scrutiny by the Kerberoi of the Dominion. Anyone refusing to eat is ejected from the Dominion.

The Law of Plenty

Only the truly desirous will know Plenty. This law isn't specifically enforced. It simply signifies that in order to meet Plenty, the ruler of the Dominion, the visitor has to have the greed and hunger necessary to ascend the Vent, and then climb the Steps and take audience in the Aerie. Attempting to fly up to the Aerie somehow might be construed as breaking this law, but visitors who do that wind up stuck in the Nets anyway.

Geography

Oppia is a circular Dominion. Multiple entrances all lead to a large, rocky plain, which slopes downward to a central area the size of several football fields. Standing near an entrance, visitors can hear music, laughter, sex, fighting, and of course, feasting. All vices are welcome in the Lounge, and the sound carries.

Looking up, a traveler might see wisps of Essence floating from the entrances toward the Lounge. As these wisps reach the central area, the Essence drops to the group like rain, where slaves catch it in their robes and distribute it.

The Lounge is huge, and contained within it are all of the pleasures and debaucheries that nearly a thousand years of humanity have concocted. The Lounge isn't entirely open. Over time, slaves have constructed buildings,

including brothels, huge banquet halls, and even a stadium in which slaves are pitted against each other in races and gladiatorial combat. The Lounge is a city-sized den of sin, and on the streets, slaves push carts of fresh foods (Essence, of course). Anyone can grab food from a cart, but if two people grab for the same item, the Law of Bounty might be breached. This happens on a fairly frequent basis, with the result that more slaves are always on hand to replace those who have served their time.

The Brothel

The Lounge's Brothel is seven stories high, and each floor contains 14 rooms. In each room, a particular slave waits to fulfill whatever depravities a visitor might request. No one has to pay for the Brothel's services — the attendants *are* slaves, after all, and their consent is not required. Some of them even enjoy what they are doing enough to stay on after their term of service has ended (at which point giving them treats and tidbits from the food carts is no longer a violation of the Law of Slavery).

The depravity gets thicker as one reaches the top floors. Stepping onto the seventh floor of the Brothel, a visitor can hear the sounds of animals in heat, as the sex here goes beyond mere human coupling and approaches a level of primality that only geists, spirits, and the truly lustful can understand.

Visiting the Brothel is not a violation of Morality in and of itself, but rape certainly is. Sex without consent, even of a slave, forces a degeneration roll at Morality 3.

The Slave Quarters

The Slave Quarters sit in the center of the Lounge — it's unsightly, but it's the best way to keep the bastards from fleeing. The building is short, ugly, and always bustling with activity. The Kerberoi stalk around the building with their whips and their nets, always ready to haul new slaves in for imprinting with the laws or punish transgressors. Slaves aren't allowed to sleep (nor do they usually need to, but if a Sin-Eater or another living character is enslaved, this can be a problem), but they do come here in shifts to eat their slop.

The Stadium

The Stadium is reminiscent of a Roman coliseum, but has pulley-powered elevators to lift spectators to the highest seats (slaves man the pulleys, of course). The Stadium plays host to races between slaves, gladiatorial combat, and other competitions, limited only by visitor imagination. Slaves cannot be forced to fight to the death, but tradition (though not law) dictates that a slave that survives such a battle is immediately set free.

The Vent

Over the Lounge is the Vent, a column of empty space leading up out of side, bordered by the rocky walls

of the Dominion. One hundred lifts, some resembling platforms, some elevators, and some cages, descend from the hole. All are powered by slaves, and it can take as many as a dozen of the hapless souls to pull a lift to the top (a Kerberoi *always* supervises a visitor's ascent, since the slaves might get tempted to drop one of their tormentors). Mountains of food ascend in these lifts daily to assuage Plenty's hunger.

The Vent is huge, as big around as the Lounge itself. Looking up, all a visitor can see is the ropes of the lifts, disappearing into the endless blackness above.

The Nets

The Nets hang across the mouth of the Vent, just above the Lounge. Viewed close-up, they look like nets of spider-silk, laced together with seaweed or ivy. The lifts are designed to pass through the gaps in the Nets, but every so often one of them gets caught and has to be untangled. This is a lengthy process, and one that the Kerberoi oversee closely. Anyone trying to sabotage the Nets is immediately flown to see Plenty.

Anyone attempting to fly up the Vent runs the risk of being caught in the Nets. Flying through them requires a roll of Dexterity + Athletics, with a -1 modifier for every point of Essence or plasm that the character currently has in his pool. Failure means that the character hits the net, but isn't tangled (though his attempt does immediately alert the Kerberoi to an infraction of the Law of Plenty). A dramatic failure indicates that the character is hopelessly tangled, and is stuck until the Kerberoi come to free him (whereupon he is enslaved). Success means that the character flies through the Nets and can ascend to see Plenty (probably with Kerberoi hot on his heels). Exceptional success means that, for some reason, the Kerberoi don't notice his actions and he can fly straight up to the Aerie with no molestation.

The Steps

Visitors can take the lifts only so far. When they reach the end point, slaves (all of whom look extremely nervous) help them out of the lifts and point them toward the Steps. These huge stone stairs lead up to the apex of Oppia, and apart from flying, they are the only way to reach Plenty. Slaves usually refuse to accompany visitors on this climb, citing the Law of Plenty (they are not desirous enough to make the climb). This isn't altogether false, but the Law of Slavery also protects them — climbing to the Aerie usually spells death.

The Aerie

The lifts that don't terminate at the base of the Steps end here, at Plenty's feet. Plenty's massive bulk rests on a huge rock shelf, and he shovels endless feasts of food into his massive gullet. Whatever spills from his mouth falls down special chutes to the Slave Quarters below, where it serves as a meal for the unfortunate servants of the Dominion.

Other Systems

The usual system of Vice indulgence (p. 124) is in effect in Oppia, but with a few important changes. First, indulgences here don't fade. Food remains delicious, sex remains satisfying... at least at first. Second, after a character indulges a vice (not necessarily his Vice) in Oppia a number of times equal to his Composure rating, the Resolve + Composure roll to avoid addiction is immediately reduced to a chance die. Results of failure and dramatic failure remain the same as usual, but in addition, on a dramatic failure the character finds that indulging here no longer satisfies for long. This makes it more likely that he will shove others out of the way trying to feed his own hunger, and thus wind up a slave, or try to make the ascent to the Aerie and demand true satisfaction from Plenty.

Risk and Reward

Oppia represents a chance for characters to experience Paradise, after a fashion. Yes, their very whims are being carried out by slaves, but they are slaves who broke the Laws of the Dominions, and they're only *temporary* slaves. Besides, it's easy to become a slave for a few weeks, and while it's unpleasant, the turnover rate is high. Meanwhile, a Sin-Eater can sample the finest food imaginable. He can have the best sex of his life — incredible even for the Underworld. If he's more interested in mystical matters, he can study one of the greatest coups the Underworld ever saw. Oppia is without doubt a city of myriad delights.

Of course, pleasure has its risks. Characters who indulge in their Vices in Oppia run greater than usual chances of addiction (see above). In addition, the rules are set up to make them fail, and to send them up to see Plenty. Plenty, ever hungry, is happy to eat the Essence that the Dominion captures, but he has quite a... varied palate.

Also, other powers in the Underworld would love to see Plenty and his pocket kingdom destroyed. Characters who agree to enter Oppia with the intent of disrupt it, breaking its laws, or assassinating its Kerberoi (or, better yet, its ruler!) might be able to name their price. Of course, saying it and doing it are two very different things, and even if a character does succeed, what assurance does he have that his employer won't turn on him? Or that the many visitors to Oppia won't rip him apart for destroying Paradise?

Destroying Oppia isn't simply a matter of obtaining spectral dynamite. One possible method might be to discover how Euelpides engineered the Dominion's properties in the first place. If whatever he did could be reversed, the Underworld would become awash with Essence in a glorious flood, as all the stolen power comes pouring back and everything in Oppia drowned in its own excess — Plenty included. Another option is for the characters to kill Plenty. Without his presence, another being (possibly Euelpides; see below) could take over and reshape the realm.

Bit Players

Slave Driver

Power 7, Finesse 5, Resistance 6

The Kerberoi of Oppia were, apparently, once ghosts themselves. Standing nearly eight feet tall, hugely muscled and oiled, and wearing shining brass armor, they stride through the Lounge, looking for lawbreakers. They move quietly, out of the sight and mind of the visitors — until they are needed, in which case they spring into action, nets whipping through the air to ensnare the unlucky and unwise.

Euelpides

Power 4, Finesse 8, Resistance 5

Euelpides hides among the rabble, taking on the role of a lowly slave. He works to bring Plenty down, but he knows that the geist will know his scent, and so he minds the laws (that he helped write!) diligently. He knows that breaking the laws would spell his doom, and so he agonizes about how to inform one of the many saboteurs from other Dominions of his true identity.

Euelpides is a dark-skinned man with black hair, wrapped in a white slave's robe. The Old Laws of Oppia are carved into his flesh, crudely and deeply. He keeps his right hand hidden as best he can, as it is still stained with blood from when he made those carvings.

Net-Tender

Power 7, Finesse 8, Resistance 4

These creatures resemble the other Slave Drivers, but have huge, majestic wings growing from their shoulders. Some resemble hawk's wings, some dove's, some swallows' and some colorful birds like flamingos or macaws, but all Net-Tenders can fly at Speed 20 and perform remarkable feats of mid-air acrobatics. Only five Net-Tenders exist at any given time (apparently, they are promoted and demoted within the ranks of the Kerberoi, though no visitors or slaves seem to know how their wings are removed or reattached).

Plenty, the Generous Geist

Virtue: Charity. Plenty is very generous with his Dominion, his slaves, and his bounty.

Vice: Gluttony. He is generous, of course, because he views *everything* in his Dominion as his feast.

Background: Plenty's human name is lost to the ages, but he became a geist by grabbing *something* from the River of Hate and merging with it. He occasionally speaks of visiting other Dominions, meaning that someone who can engage him in conversation stands to learn interesting gossip about these Lower Mysteries.

Description: Plenty is nearly 15 feet high, but his girth exceeds that figure. He spreads out on his rock ledge like a massive cone of flesh, and his disproportionately long arms shovel food toward his always-open mouth. The only time he stops eating is to talk, and he always sounds like he is trying to speak through a mouthful of bread pudding. He wears no clothes, but he is so blob-like and corpulent at this point that determining specific anatomical features is impossible.

Storytelling Hints: Plenty's hunger isn't just hunger. It's entitlement. He felt that he *deserved* the best the Underworld had to offer, not because he had an especially virtuous or even interesting life, but because he had lived. Plenty sees everything and everyone that comes within arm's reach as food, and anyone standing on his ledge is within arm's reach. He does his best to convince wise visitors who stand on the Steps to come forward, but for those who don't, he is quite willing to have pleasant conversation over his endless meal.

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 6, Resistance 12

Willpower: 32

Initiative: 16

Defense: 10

Speed: 0 (Plenty is sessile)

Size: 10

Corpus: 22

Key: Passion 5

Numina: Compulsion (dice pool 16), Dement (dice pool 16), Manifestation: Stigmata Marionette (dice pool 11)



ATHENAEUM

Where does knowledge go when it dies? A postcard from a loved one lost to fire or the lost histories of Ur might be found and perused deep within the bowels of this knowledge-lover's paradise. Everything from the unfinished works of literature's greatest minds to a grandmother's zucchini bread recipe she never had the chance to pass down. All of it gets collected and brought to Athenaeum, the great library of the Underworld. For those willing to brave the Underworld at these depths and put in the time may collect any piece of lost knowledge they wish. That's the good news, but beware for the longer one spends in the endless halls of Athenaeum the harder it is to find the way out.

Getting There

The position of this Dominion varies as it does for most Underworld geography. That said, no one has ever encountered Athenaeum less than two rivers deep into the Lower Mysteries. The first sign that a traveler is on the right path are the owlings: owl-like psychopomps fluttering back and forth within the deep recesses of the Lower Mysteries. The closer she gets, the more these spirits can be seen and heard. Their flight seems aimless and random at first but they can sometimes be seen carrying small items with them.

The path itself is a tightly-winding road leading down into a seemingly bottomless pit with switchbacks and loose scree. Along the path the traveler will encounter various gates barring the way. One such gate might be old and iron, rusted shut; another is made of collapsed stone cutting off the narrow path. At these gates a riddle or similar question will be posted. If the traveler can solve the puzzle aloud, the path will once again be revealed. The rusted gate will squeak open or the stone will shift enough for her to crawl through. Eventually, the traveler will turn the last of the doglegs to reveal a large cracked stone dais. Torchlight dimly illuminates ancient symbols in an unknown language written across the stone floor. A true knowledge seeker might find herself so entranced by the mysterious sigils that she almost misses the introduction of the two guardians at the gate.

Description

To gain entrance to Athenaeum, visitors must pass the two enormous sphinx-like creatures who sit on pedestals on either side of the crude stone archway. With lion bodies, eagle wings, and the trunk and heads of a woman and man, respectively, they climb down to the stone dais in appraisal of the would-be visitor. She is Razil, keeper of the lore and he is Narasimha, protector of the lore. They enforce the first of the Old Laws of Athenaeum. To gain entrance each visitor must present a unique piece of knowledge to either guardian. Some nugget of lore that the library doesn't yet possess (what does and doesn't count is detailed further below). If the *ofrenda* is acceptable, the guardians will confer and nod, granting entrance to Athenaeum. If the knowledge is not acceptable, Razil will charitably give the potential visitor another chance to impress while Narasimha will begin to lobby for their demise. If their patience is tested or they are offended in any way by the attempt the guardians are as likely to descend upon the offender and press their enormous paws on her neck until she asphyxiates and dies.

The Great Hall

Once inside, visitors are struck dumb in wonder. Bright light rains down from a skylight towering above and illuminates the grand cylindrical hall, which seems to go down forever. Athenaeum is an indoor wonderland. Stairs, daises, and halls lined with architecture from every culture from every age strike out in all directions with no apparent rhyme or reason. If the traveler or krewes felt lost getting here, they haven't seen anything yet: upside down staircases climb in impossible directions or hallways twist multiple times between their start and end. For all its eye-watering geometries, once a path is set the traveler usually finds them linear enough.

Owlings scurry to and from the various halls and shelves, reorganizing, filing, and swooping in with new knowledge from wherever it is they get the stuff. Having a better look at them inside they come in all colors of the rainbow and don't seem to have feet, which explains their restless fluttering. For all intents and purposes they appear to be psychopomps, but rather than guiding souls, they guide the ghosts of knowledge to their final resting place.

It's said that every thought ever thought dwells somewhere within the twisting, Escheresque halls of Athenaeum. A powerful conceit to be sure, but true enough with only one stipulation: the knowledge must have "died" or been submitted to the guardians at some point. Peeking down any of the branching halls reveals the collection is no less incredible for this criterion.

Stepping out of the Great Hall is to step out of the brilliant light streaming down from the skylight into the labyrinthine darkness of the libraries and collections comprising the many Halls. The tales of all the tribes of man dating back from before he had language to record it can be found deep within the Hall of Words. The Hall of Ideas is a stockpile of all the fictional works ever published; a remarkably unvisited hall as most visitors desire concrete facts and answers. Ideas never realized are considered to have died with their conceiver and can be found within the Hall of Time where entire uncomposed symphonies await to be heard for the first time. Displays of items and devices that still represent knowledge but cannot be read populate the Hall of Artifacts. Lastly, travelers may visit the Hall of Silence where she seeks answers from within.

The Old Laws

The Old Laws of Athenaeum are most often found at the thresholds between Halls. Laws pertaining to a particular area will be posted at the entrance. Sometimes, while skimming the shelves and libraries, one will just happen across a law etched into a bookcase or written on the floor in chalk.

To Gain Entry All Must Offer Knowledge

Exactly as the law states, anyone entering the Athenaeum must donate a unique piece of knowledge or artifact to Razil and Narasimha. It can be a personal secret whispered in the ear of the guardian or a rare example of humankind's work. Handing over a copy of any old book isn't likely to impress anyone but a beloved copy full of notes and observations from the reader may be a unique enough find. Knowledge doesn't only come in the form of books or snatches of fact: a piece of art or unique observation may do depending on the presentation and novelty. Frankly, it often comes down to whether the guardians like the person enough to let them slide so it pays to show some respect and mind one's manners.

Speak Only Truth Within These Walls

Said simply, don't lie. Not just to the denizens and guardians of Athenaeum either; lies or secrets between characters will not stand. Even lying to oneself is prohibited within the walls of Athenaeum. The truth is more than the law; it's a compulsion. Surrounded by this much knowledge laid bare, most visitors find it nearly impossible to let untruth pass their lips. All Subterfuge rolls suffer a -5 penalty on top of whatever punishment awaits transgressors. This might lead to a cathartic confrontation as buried truths

or loves unrequited burble to the surface. More often this law unearths resentment and burns bridges as true feelings stand revealed and distaste grows into contempt. (Storytellers might want to take this Old Law further — characters possessing deep secrets may literally feel a deep urging to let those secrets fly. The character possessing unspoken secrets must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll every hour, lest he "unburden" himself to others.)

Do Not Feed the Owlings

A simple enough law found on any number of placards throughout Athenaeum. The problem is, the owlings apparently can't read. They will beg and follow anybody they suspect will feed them. It's not uncommon for owlings to get aggressive either, especially if a visitor is carrying obvious food or particularly sweet-smelling *ofrendas* on them. They will circle, dive-bomb, and peck at pockets in an attempt to harry their target into giving them a delicious morsel. If their target gives in and throws some tidbit or another, the swarming only gets worse. The mob of hungry owlings will be the least of her concern if the guardians show up.

Bring No Violence to This Place

Athenaeum is as sacred a place as any church or mosque to those who covet knowledge. As such, visitors are expected to leave all petty squabbles behind. Any sort of physical confrontation is prohibited. Now the letter of this law isn't quite as strict as some others but it isn't to be taken lightly either. Smacking a friend upside the head isn't likely to draw the attention of the guardians. Similarly, defending oneself even to the point of being proactive will be ruled by intent. This includes beating off particularly aggressive owlings or surviving encounters with the Word Eater. However, the denizens of Athenaeum do not share visitors' grudges or predispositions, and dealing the first strike against your enemies won't necessarily be forgiven.

Do Not Feed Dark Hungers

Food and water are very much allowed within Athenaeum — although one should be careful not to let the owlings see. Specifically, this law refers to other forms of "feeding" utilized by the supernatural elements of the World of Darkness. Vampires feed on blood, changelings "feed" on emotion, werewolves and mages might siphon the spiritual energy flowing throughout Athenaeum, etc. This sort of feeding is not allowed and will be punished with banishment if the transgressor is lucky. In more extreme cases, Narasimha will show the creature just how he draws his sustenance.

Make No Sound in the Hall of Silence

This law only applies within the Hall of Silence but is far more strictly enforced than the Do No Violence decree noted above. An incidental shuffle might not set off any alarms but a careless footfall can get a visitor ejected by the alabaster guardians who guard the hall.

Take Nothing

Athenaeum is not a free library where you can just waltz in and borrow a book. Anyone who pays the admission is allowed to roam freely but nothing can be taken from Athenaeum; at least not in the form in which it is found. Anyone is welcome to take notes or sketches as much as they like. Most visitors seek answers that might be profound in scope but are probably easy enough to remember or write down. This law keeps the collection of knowledge together but also serves to keep the Word Eater at bay by keeping everything in its proper place.

No Willworking Shall Transpire Within These Halls

The denizens of Athenaeum do not take to willworkers (i.e. mages and witches). Many of the guardians are openly hostile toward them, starting with the guardian at the gate, Narasimha (although, Razil doesn't appear to share his prejudice). Mages find Athenaeum very unwelcoming but the rewards are countless if they can withstand being berated and harried at every turn without resorting to their magic.

Geography

The Athenaeum is exclusively indoors — although rumors of rooftop gardens and/or what lights the Great Hall persist. The main body of the Dominion is cylindrical with the numerous Halls spoking out in the cardinal directions on each level. This is where any sense of normalcy ends. The tiers are connected by stairwells going every which way and logic doesn't always seem to dictate where a hallway begins compared to where it ends. Whole worlds await those within but the endless hallways and stairs lead further and further from the egress and before long visitors find it almost impossible to leave.

Some of the many features are outlined below.

The Hall of Words: Alexandria Reborn

The mainstay of Athenaeum is the wealth of knowledge lost through the ages to destruction both careless and intentional. Stepping onto any of the twisting paths leading through the Hall of Words will take the traveler from the modern convenience of the Dewey Decimal Classification down to the unsorted basements filled with

blood writ on stone. The uppermost tier of this Hall is supplied somehow with crude electricity running flickering, ever-dying lights. An enormous pile of unworking old computers lie uselessly atop one another staring out from dark, cracked monitors and smiling with crushed keyboard teeth. These modern contrivances mark the inevitable march of progress within the Dominion as information changes form once again.

The range of knowledge within the Hall of Words is mind-numbing. From the proto-cultures of Mu to the Library of Alexandria; from the grottos of the lost Mossad to the remnants of a wing of the Library of Congress lost to flood; the lost writings of Yeshua of Galilee to the true Will of the Prophet can be found by any who crave knowledge. The deeper one travels the more ancient the texts and the architecture. Consider the ratio to be approximately one hour per decade, so your father's Playboy collection might only be a 30-minute ordeal, whereas a lost Gospel or the origin of a forgotten tribe might take weeks to months of fruitless searching. The longer it takes, the greater the danger of getting lost amongst the annals forever. From carpet and metal to crude stone masonry, travelers can see it all as they search for their answers.

Well, almost all.

The Lost Hall

Deep in the bowels of the Hall of Words, a scorched and fallen archway cuts off access to a branching hallway. A symbol in the same unknown language that marks the entrance to Athenaeum and can be found in various passages can be seen as the only epitaph for who knows how much lost knowledge (twice lost, only this time forever). The story goes that a long time ago, a mage travelled deep into Athenaeum seeking ancient and forgotten answers to ancient and forgotten questions. Maybe he didn't like what he found or maybe he didn't want anyone else to duplicate his search. Either way, he destroyed an entire wing of the Hall. None but Enoch, the Librarian, knows what knowledge was lost, only it is outside of his reach now. Some say the wandering soul known as the Pedestrian may know more — or in fact be the cause — but getting answers from him is a near impossible undertaking.

ON ATLANTIS AND WOLF FATHERS

If all of history is truly available within Athenaeum, can your players' characters uncover the truth about Atlantis, Wolf Father, or the origins of the vampires? Certainly, if that appeals to you or them, than this is the place for such answers. Need a map defining the cosmology of the **World of Darkness** or the hidden truth behind the changeling's Keepers? You're not going to find a more logical place to look.

If you're not telling that kind of game or don't want to deal with the distraction, than simply relegate that information behind the destroyed door within the Hall of Words. Or maybe have the characters find a piece of information that simply isn't accurate; yes, this Dominion contains all the history of the world, but history comprises lies and truth in equal measure. Besides, who but their krewes, motley, or coterie is going to believe them even if they came back with some sort of Holy Grail of truth?

The Hall of Time

A popular feature for the casual browser (those who aren't seeking burning answers to immediate questions) is the Hall of Time. Here every book that died with its author, every painting unpainted, every sonnet unwritten, all the masterworks that died before they were born rest upon the impossible shelves throughout the hall. Concerts performed by invisible symphonies play in vast music halls, paintings and sculptures crowd the walls and floor in all directions, books, scriptures, and scrolls line shelves disappearing into the distance. While all sorts of useful pieces of lost knowledge can be found, it's hard not to play tourist perusing the endless works of a favorite author or artist. Not all of it is good, however, and the idling fancies of every person throughout history are intermingled with the great works one might hope to find. Often enough, however, it is these very trinkets, recipes, and poems of unrequited love for which seekers come. Whether to appease a mournful spirit trapped between living and eternal rest or for her own piece of mind.

The Hall of Silence

Entering the Hall of Silence cannot be done accidentally nor should it be done lightly. The entrance is clearly marked (on any level from any direction) by two alabaster figures on raised daises that are easily mistaken for statues. When approached, a single eye will open on each of their otherwise featureless faces. They each hold a single finger in a shushing gesture and return to their inert state. As stated in the Old Laws and specifically at the threshold: no sound is tolerated within the Hall of Silence. For this modest price the empty, shining halls bring peace and epiphany to those who enter. Any meditation roll made within the Hall of Silence gains a +5 bonus. Meditating within the Hall of Silence has been known to grant a variety of soul soothing effects such as regaining lost Willpower, reducing the experience cost to gain Morality, or necessary insight into an ongoing mystery.

The Bowels

While lost in the twisting hallways of Athenaeum, sometimes a traveler will find herself in the servant passages and "living" quarters of the Dominion. Most don't linger long behind the scenes but those that do can see strange and wonderful sights even here. These

areas lead to and from every hall but also connect dining halls, bedrooms, stables, and more. Athenaeum hosts a vast population of servants and guardians within its many halls. Occasionally, strange faces and persons can be seen in these areas, appearing and disappearing without a trace.

Finding the Way

To traverse the insane architecture of Athenaeum takes a certain amount of non-linear thinking. As such, all rolls usually associated with Survival are replaced with Academics. Similarly, an extended Wits + Academics roll can be used to find specific information with the target number of successes reflecting how obscure the information is. A widely published morsel or answers to simple questions will be in the neighborhood of 10 successes, the name of a killer that died with the victim over a century ago or other rare or unrecorded information may be upward of 25 or more successes. Every failure on a search or bearing roll subtracts a -1 penalty to future or subsequent rolls (to a maximum of -5).



Action: Instant (bearings check); extended (searching, target number varies)

Dice Pool: Wits + Academics

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The traveler is lost; possibly forever. Other than sitting still awaiting rescue, a lost traveler may attempt to get her bearings once per day at a minimum of -5 dice penalty. This often results in the traveler just getting more lost and so on for months, years, or forever.

Failure: The traveler takes a bad turn, putting herself off the proper path. Further rolls are made at a -1 penalty (cumulative to a maximum of -5), this penalty is in addition to the time penalties suggested below (to a whopping maximum of -10).

Success: The traveler successfully keeps her bearings or makes progress toward her ultimate goal.

Exceptional Success: As success above and the traveler gains a +1 bonus (mitigating any dice penalties first).

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The item or goal in question is of specific personal significance (grandmother's recipe, father's war journal)
+1	The traveler knows specifically what she wants to find (the dying wish of General Commodius of the 6th Legion, the secret rote of Archmage Mai Bei Fong)
-1	The seeker knows very little about the information they seek (information regarding one of Rome's lost Legions, a powerful spell lost to time by an ancient Archmage)

Risk and Reward

Seekers coming to Athenaeum are left alone with all the world's knowledge. If the saying "knowledge is power" means anything at all, then such travelers have an opportunity to become very powerful indeed.

Mages in particular stand to gain almost limitless insight into the wheels turning behind the universe. This is all true, however, it overlooks some very inconvenient truths. The risks of getting lost forever and the penalties for breaking the Old Laws are detailed more below, but some subtle and more sinister dangers await visitors.

Just because the Athenaeum contains every piece of lost or dead lore doesn't mean it is complete or even truthful. The dying thoughts of a fabled arch-mage might be the demented ramblings of a madman lost for years to dementia. A powerful changeling's writings on the nature of their Keepers might be misguided at best or complete fabrications at worst. Worse is the potential for the seeker to be confronted with the awful truth; the truth that destroys her whole worldview. For a Christian to uncover that the man she knows as Jesus was a murderer and usurper to the true Christ, his Rabbi and teacher; for a werewolf to learn that a legendary and sainted ancestor was only truly successful at being a braggart who had the good fortune of having his lies retold for centuries; for a Lancea Sanctum proselyte to uncover that the first vampire was some uneducated gypsy-cursed farmer; or finding out that your father cheated on your mother with almost religious regularity are all betrayals likely to strip an individual's perceptions to the core. This may result in a drastic shift such as altering her Virtue or Vice, losing Willpower, or potentially even making a Morality check as her entire Gestalt takes a lasting punch to the breadbasket. (Once more, too, consider the nature of "truth" — just because it's "knowledge" doesn't necessarily make it true, does it?)

Lastly and more immediately, strange things roam the Halls of Athenaeum. Faceless, shambling servants might take unheralded exception to something the traveler says or does and attack. Monsters from mythology (and the darkest imaginations) are said to occasionally break free of the bonds of their stories and take form long enough to maim and destroy travelers. The Athenaeum isn't

THE TEST OF TIME

In addition to the above bonuses and penalties, time itself is the traveler's enemy within Athenaeum. The longer a seeker remains within the vaulted and cavernous halls of the Dominion the harder it is to leave. The following penalties should be factored in *in addition to* existing penalties (for a grand total maximum penalty of -10 dice).

Time Spent	Dice Penalty
up to six hours	-1
more than one day	-2
a week	-3
two weeks	-4
a month and beyond	-5

only accessible to the traveler and his friends either. A questing motley of changelings might encounter a True Fae within the Halls, Prometheans may be surprised to find her conceived but never completed offspring (taking form as a destructive Pandoran), or a mage might encounter her sworn enemies seeking the same morsel of lore she does. No violence or magic may be allowed within Athenaeum but can the enemy be trusted to observe the law? Is the unrealized Promethean child beholden to the same standards?

Bit Players

The library feels empty for as large as it is but houses entire communities in service of Enoch and Athenaeum itself.

Enoch, the Librarian

Power 7, Finesse 5, Resistance 11

Enoch is the Kerberos and ultimate power of Athenaeum. He is the alpha and omega of this Dominion and keeper of its traditions, but you'd never know it to look at him. Usually he appears as a crooked old man bundled in rags propelled by impossibly long legs. He pays no mind to visitors as he roams the halls picking up stray pieces of lore or replacing stray thoughts on their shelves. Most travelers pay him barely a second thought in return. If they get out of hand, however, Enoch will come for them in the form of a dark swirling cloud enshrouding a fiery pillar of light shining out from tiny crevasses within the vortex. Beyond that, swarms of owlings or more powerful guardians like Narasimha await his beck and call. Visitors can engage him in conversation but his mind and perpetually unfolding legs may wander off in mid-sentence.

Owlings

Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 2

Owlings are a mystery even to those that fancy themselves experts on the Underworld. An animal by nature yet sharing neither the coloration nor behavior of the Underworld's many psychopomps. Despite these notable distinctions, they ostensibly are the same; instead of guiding souls they guide lost knowledge here to its final resting place. They are largely harmless so long as they aren't impeded in any serious way or shown any food.

The Pedestrian

Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 5

This poor creature ceaselessly wanders the halls of Athenaeum and can be found anywhere within the enormous structure. His wide-range of movement and entirely physical presence lend evidence to a terrifying prospect: the Pedestrian may be a fully alive person who somehow became lost in the Underworld. If this is or was true, he's clearly lost his mind by now. Another popular theory says that the Pedestrian is the supposed magician who destroyed the Lost Hall and has since

been lobotomized and cursed to wander the Dominion. He's not the most helpful guide — what with the gibbering insanity and all — but if a krewe was hopelessly lost they might be able to follow him reliably back to civilization... eventually.

The Word Eater

Power 9, Finesse 2, Resistance 15

A monster haunts the halls of Athenaeum. To all appearances, the nightmare known as the Word Eater is a mindless parasite feeding off knowledge itself. Grub-like with thousands of cilia for legs pushing it through the halls, it devours stray ideas and bits of lore and history. This is why the owlings constantly rearrange the shelves; while the information is shelved and sorted it is safe from the blind questing mouth of the Word Eater. As soon as a piece of information, book, or song is selected, the viewer runs the risk of drawing its attention.

According to Enoch, the Word Eater has been here since before Athenaeum took form. In fact, the Dominion couldn't exist without it. He describes it as something like an ant lion that draws in information, words, knowledge, inspiration, etc. It grew fat on the trickled leavings of mankind able to eat as it desired and never wanting or hungry. Until, of course, Athenaeum was unknowingly built on this site so rich in pure information, right above the Word Eater's burrow coming between it and its food. Driven mad in starvation, the Word Eater invaded Athenaeum and roams the halls blindly searching for food to this day.

Narasimha, Protector of Knowledge

Virtue: Faith. Narasimha can only hope his duty is service enough to one day be granted relief.

Vice: Wrath. He does not share his sister's love and often resents the visitors and gawkers who come to Athenaeum.

Background: Narasimha protects Athenaeum from the unworthy and is one of the first sights visitors see. He and his sister, Razil, stand guard just outside the entrance making sure the price of admission is paid. She is the keeper of the lore and he is its protector. As such, it's Narasimha who is called to protect the Dominion from lawbreakers and other potential threats within.

He has been guardian of Athenaeum for longer than he can remember. Razil claims that she remembers it all; all six of their incarnations back to their first living birth. Narasimha no longer believes her, they have served Enoch for centuries — maybe millennia — any hope of reincarnation should have long left them both. It hasn't though, deep in his heart, Narasimha hopes to one day move on to his great reward beyond this Dominion.



He may not remember any of the details, but Narasimha is certain guarding Athenaeum was a job Razil chose for herself and he followed to keep her safe. She is a creature of fancy, always assuming the best in transient spirits and having no idea how many enemies of knowledge lie in wait. Now he is stuck here, maybe forever. It brings his darkening heart some comfort that she is happy in her work. This leaves him to take out his frustrations on the few visitors not scared away by word of Narasimha the Strong.

Description: Narasimha bears an uncanny resemblance to the sphinxes of legend possessing the trunk of a man atop the body of a winged lion. His face is sharp and distinct but quite handsome, having

a dark cast to his skin and a jet black mane of long, straight hair. He is enormous, towering over all but other Underworld giants. When he attacks he pounces upon his prey with great lion paws and smothers the life from his target.

Storytelling Hints: You are just looking for an excuse to smother and disembowel trespassers, if only to alleviate the boredom.

Despite all your rage and listlessness you are bound to obey the Old Laws as much as the sickly visitors. So you must tolerate them on most occasions. As soon as trouble starts, however, you're the first one on the scene to enact Enoch's will.

Ever since your failure to stop that mage you are particularly driven against their kind. You will not be burned again.

Attributes: Power 9, Finesse 2, Resistance 6

Willpower: 15

Initiative: 8

Defense: 6

Speed: 25

Size: 7

Corpus: 13

Numina: Clairvoyance (dice pool 11 - Resolve). Magnetic Disruption (no roll required). Smother (dice pool 11 - Resolve + Composure). Terrify (dice pool 11 versus Resolve + Composure).

Smother: Narasimha can strangle or crush mortal foes easily enough but strangling a ghost doesn't do a whole lot of good. Smother allows Narasimha and Razil to sap the will of their victim and thus take a lot of the fight out of targets who aren't so easily disposed of. He must first grapple the target and then roll Power + Finesse minus the target's combined Resolve + Composure. The target loses a point of Willpower for every success. Once the target is sapped of Willpower, continued successes sap Corpus or Health in the form of bashing damage (and ultimately lethal as he persists).

MICTLAN

The tale is as old as time, lovers separated by death, the seeds of a new generation needed, a hero clawing his way upward to be reborn. The Underworld of myth is full of quests to retrieve the irretrievable: souls. Even the most ancient geists and Ferryman dismiss tales of a mad king guarding a well of souls as fairytale waffle. They are wrong. Not only is such a place real, but it springs fully formed from the head of legend, resembling a regurgitation of world mythology given maddening form. At the center of this web of legend sits a cackling god who takes subtle but cruel delight in the twisting of the captured fly.

Getting There

Crossing over no less than three rivers and marking progress in weeks, the path to Mictlan is long and harrowing. As the traveler begins to believe she is chasing a lie and doubts the Dominion even exists, she discovers the path is *itself* Mictlan. The dark, dank tunnels of the Underworld give way to brown and rotted ferns and skeletal briars lining the path. Slowly the tunnel walls widen, opening to a vast expanse that disappears beyond a carpet of increasingly lush greens. A cracked stone pillar will announce the first of many Old Laws and the traveler will finally realize she is already on her way. At this point she may be disheartened to learn her journey has only just begun.

Pilgrims looking to make the journey to make a request of the Dominion's sovereign — Mictlantecuhtli, literally "Lord of Mictlan" — will need to stock up for the arduous journey. To be fully prepared, she is instructed to bring riches in the forms of gems and gold, as well as an assortment of food and water.

Bread, meat, and fruit may all be required along the path. One of the first Old Laws the traveler encounters will instruct her not to eat or drink while on the path. Suddenly this advice seems cruel, however, many of the Dominions psychopomp guardians bar the way and will demand appeasement.

Description

Mictlan most often takes form as a long vegetated path slowly overtaking the scenery. Bright greens erupt like verdant firecrackers along the pathway announcing that the pilgrim is most certainly not in Kansas anymore. Mictlan stands out within the Underworld for the wealth of color and finery visible from its pathway. It is the richest of the Dead Dominions and gold and jewel encrusted colonnades occasionally spring up among the deep greens of the subterranean jungle. All but the most jaded traveler might be tempted to see if she can pry a few loose for the journey home. This is the first of many temptations to leave the path and she is better advised to keep her eyes straight and her mind on the task at hand.

Rumors claim the path through Mictlan takes weeks, sometimes months, to travel. None have made it in less than a week (loosely defined this far below the Autochthonous Depths). The length of the path is reportedly determined by such intangible criteria as the purity of the request or the truthness of the traveler's heart. Seasoned Underworld travelers find such reports doubtful, yet they bear some truth, as supported by the first of several guardians who bar the pilgrim's path: the jackal-headed man with the scales (see Geography below).

THE CHICKEN OR THE EGG

Mictlan comes across as a virtual mash up of world mythologies. Enough common threads persist throughout Underworld myths that it's not too far a stretch to think they all draw inspiration from the same place. But which is it, the chicken or the egg? Did Orpheus write out his tragic tale after visiting the really real Underworld or has Mictlantecuhtli remade his once nameless kingdom to reflect his story? Was the Anubis of Mictlan the same silent guardian weighing the souls of the Egyptian dead or did Mictlantecuhtli add a jackal-headed bouncer once he heard of such a thing? You can have it either way.

As alluded to in the When Someone Asks if You're a God.... sidebar below, the mad king is as much a god (fallen, dead or otherwise) as anything the characters are likely to experience. Most likely it's a little from column A and a little from column B. Mictlantecuhtli at least believes himself a real god. A real god, in fact, who has become confused or gathered as many mythological signifiers as he can to subsist himself on whatever belief he can garner.

The Guardians

Beyond the stalwart Anubis, more guardians will harass the traveler along her way. Anubis is the only one who resembles a man, the rest are animals — sometimes exceptional in size or intelligence but animals all the same. Jaguars, dogs, ravens, owls, spiders, rats, and serpents have all been seen along the path, each demanding a different sacrifice from the traveler. Here is where the traveler's meticulous preparation will serve her well, as each guardian demands a specific *ofrenda*. Gems, gold, meat, and fruit appease the guardians into letting her pass with little more than a look askance. Deny any of the guardians their due and they will attack or harry the traveler right out of the realm. Even if the pilgrim manages to fend them off or pass them, Mictlantecuhtli will be none too pleased to hear her request at the road's end. More information on the guardians and their respective dues can be found under the Old Laws below.

The End of the Line

Finally, the pilgrim reaches the end of the winding path. A stone wall with a wide-mouthed opening beckons the traveler to stumble the few remaining steps of her journey. After a short torch-lit hallway she finds herself, finally, in his presence. The Mictlantecuhtli himself, Polydegmon. He is an ominous sight, sitting on his throne of bone. The sickly sweet scent of boiling tallow comes from the braziers lighting his hall and shimmering across his polished stone-like skin. He is a giant of a man wearing an even larger, one-eyed skull as a crown. Based on the ornately carved bone armor he wears, perhaps it is better described as a helmet. Here the road-weary traveler, starved and weak with thirst, may ask Polydegmon to rescue one soul (per traveler) and return it once more to the Underworld.

That the answer is almost always “no” is a sore disappointment to those that made it this far. Whether by breaking an Old Law blatantly or incidentally or due to Mictlantecuhtli's caprice, the request is commonly denied no matter what the traveler sacrificed and suffered to get here.

The Queen's Gambit

However, all may not be lost. If the audience finds the Lord's wife (Mictecacihuatl Kore) and appeals to her she may sway him to be merciful and reconsider his judgment. She can be found nearby in a corner of the cavernous throne

room or back in the courtyard from which they came. She is a fair young maiden (as young as early adolescence by some reports but more commonly early adulthood) with purple flowers in her hair and the musky scent of life — like a spring rain — all around her. She will listen intently, eyes brimming with tears, wearing her big heart on her sleeve.

Such an appeal may be granted but always comes with a cost, usually a quest to be performed for Polydegmon. These tasks are uniformly obtuse and often just as exhausting as the journey so far. Many times these tasks will take the characters all the way back to the surface world to fetch some rare treat denied Mictlantecuhtli in his Underworld prison. Before the pilgrim loses heart imagining her return journey, Polydegmon will supply his servants with a handful of knuckle bones. Once his request is fulfilled they are to spread these bones over any funerary ground and a gate will open directly to his throne room.

Beware; the Lord of Mictlan is an expert at finding minuscule faults in those who seek his aid. He may change his mind or prolong the contract without warning, expecting a whole new set of hoops to jump through all, pushing those seeking souls further from their prize. Worse, Mictecacihuatl Kore may have a change of heart as she waxes to her Persephone personality and betray the trust of the krewe or become violent seeking to chase them from her husband's company.

Endless Cycles

Astute travelers will note that the entire process feels like a setup. From Mictlantecuhtli's refusal to the wife's appeal all the way to the most recent betrayal, it's all a farce. Is this theater to them? Are they trapped in the prison of their own Dominion and this is their entertainment? Is it all mythologically necessary in some way? No one said obtaining a soul would be easy but this can take months off a character's life (and the Storyteller's game) all to have this Kerberos and his bride wind them up again and clap as they dance. Chasing the promise that at the last she will be rewarded for her patience is exhausting but those who pass the countless trials of Mictlan will have their prayers answered in good faith.

From the weighing of her intent by Anubis to whatever final challenge Polydegmon issues to her, it is all a test. All of it is merely an extension of the path with one intent: to send away the weak and impure. Grief passes, or anger replaces it, or she simply outgrows her need to return a soul to the world. Only those who truly believe Mictlan to be the best and only

ADVICE TO STORYTELLERS

It's appropriate that such a potent reward requires a great deal of frustration and toil on the part of the characters. But, that toil and frustration better not carry over to the *players*.

If, in using this Dominion, you discover that the players seem weary of the idea, you need to either pull back on the tasks at hand, or you need to offer them fresh encouragement *and* a hint that there exists more to this than what it seems — a psychopomp or even Kore the bride might offer a “word of advice” that this is very much a test to determine how committed the characters happen to be. Some hint in this direction may renew the players' vigor; ultimately, it's just important for them to know you're not jerking their chain session after session (and, frankly, if it's taking sessions to handle all of this, you might want to trim it down a bit).

answer, enough that she would go through all of this, are worthy of the reward. Finally, she will please Mictlantecuhtli and his bride and collect her reward. Once the pilgrim has successfully appeased Polydegmon they are free to go with their prize. They will find the Autochthonous Depths just around the first bend in the road home.

What she does with the retrieved soul is up to the individual pilgrim. Perhaps she can find it a new home in the Underworld, carving out a life in Dead Man's Hand or plying its wares in the Forge of Orcus. Maybe she could craft a new anchor to let the soul return to the Autochthonous Depths or with powerful magic return the soul to a body back beyond the veil in the tangible world.

The Old Laws

The Old Laws of Mictlan are many, some seemingly contradictory and all intended to trip up anyone with hubris enough to try and cheat death. Never is this more apparent than the last of these laws, which purports that any law may be concocted on the spot by the Mictlantecuhtli. Is the path and price so exacting to keep the dead in or pilgrims out? Or are Polydegmon and his bride as bound to play their part in this Passion play as everyone else?

Do Not Look Back

This law is as old as myth and written above the great yawning ingress to Mictlan. As soon as any intrepid visitor crosses the threshold they are not to look back for anything. The visitors will hear all sorts of sounds to cause them to turn but they *must* resist. To be specific, they may turn roughly 90 degrees and look out over either side of the path but they must be careful to not focus on their periphery or else the law is broken. No matter how far along the path a single glance backward will reveal the cold, dark tunnels of the Underworld and the path to Mictlan will disappear entirely. She will have to find the path all over again and start over.

Stay On the Path

The long winding path through Mictlan plays host to wonderful sights, temptations both seen and unseen call to visitors at all legs of the journey. The law is clear and simple: do not step foot off the path. The temptations will be many, the closer one gets the more insistent those temptations. Visitors must harden their hearts to cries for help, steel themselves from assailants hoping to push them into the brush and quiet their bellies to the many mouth-watering treats lying just out of reach. Few have the resolve to finish the journey but those that fail to heed this law disappear into the verdant brush never to be heard from again.

Deny No Guardian Their Due

Two-headed dogs, shrouded boatmen, mute jackal-headed figures bearing scales, or hungry jaguar spirits all lurk along the long, dark path through Mictlan. Each sated by a different *ofrenda*, travelers must be prepared to give each their due. Typical *ofrendas* include bread, fruit, meat, personal items, and jewelry. Each guardian will harass the traveler until

it has been awarded its prize. Generally speaking, dogs want bread, spiders want fruit, snakes want meat, and jaguars desire jewelry and gems. The mute jackal-headed guardian will take any personal item and weigh it on his scale to see if the traveler is worthy to continue. Failure to supply any guardian with their desire will turn them hostile. Even if a pilgrim is able to fend them off or outrun a particular guardian, Mictlantecuhtli won't be pleased upon her arrival to his throne.

(Discovering what *ofrendas* might be necessary for the journey will not be an easy task. It may require canvassing dozens of specters, or even taking a trip to the Athenaeum, found on p. 172. Should the characters not possess the proper offerings, they can always leave and return with the correct ones... but this only adds dreaded time to the journey.)

Eat Nothing, Drink Nothing

A simple enough law to understand but torture to accomplish. This law becomes increasingly more difficult to abide as days pass, bellies grumble, and another guardian expects some kibble or treat to let her pass. Thick brambles lined with plump berries, crystal blue streams trickling over bleached bone-white rocks and orchards hanging bright red fruit occasionally interrupt the scenery off the path. Such sites require a Resolve + Composure roll to avoid jumping in with both feet and gorging on food or drink. Here the temptation is double not only to eat and drink her fill but to leave the path breaking both laws. The curious thing is, the rules of deprivation do not apply here — but they might *feel* like they apply. Mechanically, the Storyteller may start to impose Mental penalties based on the pangs of deep hunger and plaguing thirst, but neither hunger nor thirst actually *harm* the character.

Bear No Coin beyond the Gate of Mictlantecuhtli

Do not carry currency of any kind into the throne room of Polydegmon. Whether its paper money, gold, or anything able to be reasonably traded as tender (gems, jewelry, etc), leave it at the door.

Tread With Bare Foot

Once the traveler has been approved by Anubis, she must tread the long road in bare feet. The path is rocky and uncomfortable against the skin but otherwise this law is a nuisance at worst. (At least it's easy to abide and the traveler is unlikely to be tricked into wearing her shoes accidentally.)

You Cannot Claim Your Own Soul

You may not ask for your own soul. This may seem self-evident to those still possessing their souls. However, vampires or other soulless creatures are likely to know what these words mean. Such a creature can travel with someone else to make the request but he can't be the one who does the asking.

The Word of Mictlantecuhtli Is the Law

By dint of this law, Mictlan Polydegmon may ascribe new laws at his merest whim and the pilgrim would do well to appease him by every means possible. If Polydegmon decrees that dancing windershins around his throne room



is law, then it would be wise to get dancing. This ability to will laws into being and dismiss them just as quick belies the deep reserve of power Polydegmon holds over his Dominion. A poet driven mad on the road to Mictlan swore to his dying day that the entire Dominion exists within Polydegmon's head. Whether true or not, the traveler better err on the side of caution and do whatever is asked of her.

Geography

Mictlan is a long, winding road down. Usually, the path leads through a dark subterranean jungle although variations have been cited as far reaching as deserts and ice-fields. One Sin-Eater claims he crossed an ocean on a boat that piloted itself, but most presume he's describing somewhere else entirely. Whether this difference is cultural or based on some cycle to which only Mictlantecuhtli is privy is unknown. Curiously, this change in scenery does seem to loosely correspond to the cardinal direction the seeker travels. Travelling north cuts through a jungle, travelling east goes through a desert, etc. As such, the geography is difficult to define since no two accounts seem entirely the same. Despite these cosmetic changes in theme most of the elements, temptations, and trials remain the same.

The Path

While accounts may differ when describing the path to Mictlan, the bright, lush colors and ruins feature in all of them. Sometimes, the path leads past pyramids (Egyptian, Aztec or sometimes both). These spouts of architecture vary in style from Mayan to Greek from Mesopotamian to Chinese. Always old and fallen and often standing next to one another, connecting civilizations of the ancient world in one great Dominion. This hodge-podge carries throughout the entire Dominion, from the various mythologies represented to the types of vegetation and guardians found along the way as well. Jaguars and European-bred dogs may be seen within the same stretch of path. A wild palm grove might be found beside an explosion of ferns leading past a baobab tree. Nothing is unheard of on the way to Mictlan. Even traveling through a desert of cold volcanic ash, sprouts of green, and oases of blue are said to speckle the roadway.

The Jackal and the Scales

A day or more into the journey, the traveler will come across the first guardian. He is jackal-headed, obsidian-skinned, and silent, dubbed Anubis by travelers due to his obvious likeness to the Egyptian god. He bars travelers from going any further until he is given his due. He isn't looking for orts or jewels like the others. Instead, Anubis wants a piece of the character's soul: a personal item, a secret, a fear never spoken aloud. Once he has been given what he desires, Anubis will weigh any objects given to him upon the trays of an old-fashioned scale. If it was a secret or other ephemeral trade then he will do nothing, but the scales move all the same. The only stories that return from Mictlan come from those who passed this test. Details are unclear what happens if the scales don't favor the weary Underworld pilgrim.

The Palace of Mictlantecuhtli

Finally, the path will come to a walled-in pyramid-like palace carved in stone and overgrown from the surrounding jungle. Here is where Mictlantecuhtli Polydegmon and his bride reside. A gate interrupts the wall and grants access to an enclosed courtyard. Within the courtyard any of the psychopomp-like guardians might be found grazing and milling around. They do not bar the rest of the way at all and seem to take no notice of travelers at this point. The only exception is if the traveler successfully denies that guardian along the way then it might harass her once more.

Resisting Temptation

As detailed above, temptation waits around every turn on the path to Polydegmon. Turning away from the various rewards promised just off the path will require frequent Resolve + Composure rolls. The roll suffers the natural penalties from exhaustion and hunger (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 179-180; pp. 175-176, respectively) to a maximum of -5. Bonuses might include adding Survival to these rolls or from appropriate Merits such as Iron Stamina, etc.

Risk and Reward

Why make the journey to Mictlan at all? For all its arduous trials and contradictory tortures a person would have to be mad to even attempt the journey let alone expect to succeed. So what lies in wait for those foolish enough to bother? The ultimate reward: a soul.

Polydegmon trades in souls, the dead of the dead. For those who make it through the many trials they may make one request of Polydegmon and he will procure the soul from any stage of *ex mortis*. Whether they were ever anchored, disappeared centuries ago, or were destroyed deep within the Underworld doesn't seem to matter to him. Ask for the soul by name and it is the requestor's for the taking. Of course, they will have to travel back out of Mictlan with all the same laws and caveats but, contrary to mythology, that tends to be the shorter of the journeys. Now the question arises what will one do with the soul once they've suc-

cessfully led it out of Mictlan. Maybe a new anchor can be created allowing the departed to return to the Autochthonous Depths; or if the requestor has some way to provide a body it may be possible to return the deceased to life.

Bit Players

A host of sights and sounds suggest a lush ecosystem beyond the road's edge and yet only a few creatures are ever seen. A few curious souls have ventured off the path to find out what's out there and reportedly never come back. Better to stick to the path and take one's chances with the guardians. Beyond the animal-like population, a few other denizens may be encountered around Mictlan.

Xolotl the Guide

Power 8, Finesse 5, Resistance 7

A large black dog with skin pulled tight over a skeletal frame and with backward-turned feet, Xolotl stands out from the various guardians and psychopomps along the path to Mictlan. He is considerably bigger than his fellow guardians, almost the size of a tiger. Also, he can speak, in a number of languages too, mostly Romanic and Nahuatl (the language of the Aztecs). Unfortunately for many, he doesn't speak English. Xolotl will come to those he deems worthy and provide them assistance and guidance along the road to Mictlan. This can save the sanity of the sleep- and food-deprived traveler and he may even help the traveler pass guardians for which they have run out of offendas. Who he comes for and who he forsakes is entirely up to Xolotl, but he seems to have a soft spot for the good of heart (consider Morality seven and above).

The Faceless Lutist

Power 1, Finesse 6, Resistance 4

The lutist is heard before seen, sometimes days in advance. The dulcet strains of lute music drift up, periodically. The music sounds as if it's coming from over the next rise or somewhere maddeningly close, as if the musician must be right on top of the traveler. After days — sometimes weeks — of this, the Faceless Lutist is finally revealed, visible in the distance. He will make no move to evade or hide,

PASSING ANUBIS

In order to pass the guardian Anubis, Storytellers are encouraged to make a Morality (or appropriate stat) check for the character as if the character committed a level three sin. This check may come in the form of a moral quandary, a choice you put to them, to save a child from a rushing river while abandoning a helpless crew adrift, or whether, trapped in the wilderness he would eat his animal companion or trust it to help find food. If the roll succeeds, the character passes, if it fails they lose a point of Morality, staking a piece of his own soul for the quest.

Ultimately, to pass or not pass depends on what serves the story best, but by amping up the stakes, the player (and characters) become starkly aware a price must be paid to ride this ride.

simply plucking away at the strings with his back turned to the traveler. Any attempt to hail the lutist is met mutely, with barely any acknowledgement of her approach. She must be practically beside the figure before he might turn only to reveal his faceless visage. No eyes, no ears, no nose, no mouth, no interruption of features at all. Like a caul of flesh pulled taut over the skull. It is believed the Faceless Lutist is just one of many souls who tried to make the journey to Mictlan and failed.

Mictecacihuatl Kore (Persephone)

Power 4, Finesse 8, Resistance 2 (Kore); Power 8, Finesse 2, Resistance 4 (Persephone)

The Mictecacihuatl — the Lady of Mictlan — has two faces. The first is that of a young maiden, fair and vibrant known as Kore. She is caring and will show outward concern and sympathy for any traveler's plight. If the traveler's request is refused, Kore may pull the dejected adventurer aside and bolster her spirits, offering to appeal to her husband on her behalf. Sometimes she won't even wait, interrupting her husband's refusal there and then. Kore is radiant and full of life in this palace of death, yet carries a sobering sadness. She smells of wet moss, fragrant pollens, and sex.

The other face is an old woman with skin peeling away revealing her skull in places. This personality answers only to Persephone and wears a skirt of living snakes. The differences from her younger self are not limited to appearances; her personality wildly differs as well. She is cruel and spiteful with no sympathy for sob stories or begging. Persephone is a terror who will speak openly about boiling the pilgrim in a pot of boiling fat and will betray the trust of any who confided in Kore.

If the traveler finds the chance to wander around the palace grounds she might encounter both personalities independently and never know she was coddled and terrorized by the same creature.

Mictlantecuhtli Polydegmon: The Collector

Virtue: Charity. The way to Polydegmon's good side might be extremely long but ultimately he will concede.

Vice: Greed. Polydegmon protects what's his and doesn't like to lose.

Background: The Kerberos of Mictlan is known by many names, most often Polydegmon (Receiver of Many) but also Pluto, Polynomos (He of Many Names), Polysemantor (Ruler of Many), the Collector or simply by his title: Mictlantecuhtli, Lord of Mictlan. He is by every account a madman and incredibly difficult to negotiate with. Sometimes his manner can seem charming or amusing but he is not to be trifled with nor underestimated. He has all the power of the god he claims to be and without knowing what he might do one second to the next should be more terrifying than not.

Polydegmon has been Mictlantecuhtli for as long as humans have had the cognitive ability to try to describe the world to each other. To hear his version of the story he claims to remember a race of man before this one. That's where things start to get hazy. Sometimes he'll talk of having two brothers and other times only one. He might mention that they all had to eat their father or that they pulled him apart and made the world of his bones. Anyone still listening at this point inevitably wonders how much of his own insanity he believes.

Regardless of what is and isn't true, he's obviously ancient and just as obviously powerful. All the beasts in his courtyards and gardens do his bidding and every plant that grows in his kingdom does so at his command. With a wave of his hand, a swathe of vegetation will wither and die; with another it will rise again just as green as before. The very palace around him obeys his command and his influence is so widely spread that every minor interaction with the Dominion is known to him. He can prove it too, intimating private moments or recounting the traveler's journey back to her in excruciating detail.

Description: Sitting still, Polydegmon looks like a statue carved out of obsidian or petrified wood. His movement and musculature move naturally and fluidly despite the appearance of living stone. The careful eye will note he is rooted to the spot, very much a part of the throne, floor, and surrounding Dominion, as if the realm itself grew this visage to communicate through. Polydegmon wears an oversized skull with a ruby the size of a fist stuffed into its solitary eye-socket as a crown. He adorns himself in an ornate carapace, seemingly made of

IF SOMEONE ASKS IF YOU'RE A GOD...

A tremendous amount of evidence suggests Polydegmon and/or his bride may be mythical deathlords. If they didn't inspire the ancients to write stories about them and they aren't myth made real, then they play their parts entirely too well. They have garnered followers and sycophants throughout the Underworld although usually too few and far between to be considered a proper cult. It's hard to imagine such inscrutably mad creatures as approaching godhood. However, those alien intentions are exactly what make them most like the gods of myth. The control they have over the Dominion and their uncanny resemblance to any number of legends is proof enough to tread lightly around them. You may be in the company of gods.

bone. Animals such as spiders, bats, ravens, and jaguars are carved into its surface. When the Mictlantecuhctli speaks, his voice is simply heard regardless of whether his lips move or not.

Storytelling Hints: Much is made of his caprice and madness, yet he does have a method to his madness. Souls aren't something that should be easily won or left to roam freely, he believes. The rules governing life and death make perfect sense to those that guard the gates. He understands the order to the chaos, or so he believes. That is why so many tests lie between the quest and the reward. Each ponderous step and inane rule is another trial to prove the worth of the request: that one soul is worth bending the rules. If he takes extra delight in watching them squirm and dance, so be it. His is the head that wears the crown, not theirs. He will not be judged for playing his part — nay, *he* is the judge.

Attributes: Power 15, Finesse 15, Resistance 15

Willpower: 30

Morality/Synergy: 5

Initiative: 30

Defense: 15

Speed: 40

Size: 7

Corpus: 20

Numina: Animal Control (dice pool 18 - Resolve). Clairvoyance (dice pool 18). Phantasm (dice pool 18). Geognosis (dice pool 18). Summon Soul (dice pool 18). Telekinesis (dice pool 18).

Geognosis: Polydegmon is intimately tied to his Dominion. He is able to see and interact with any part of it. By rolling Power + Finesse, Polydegmon may shape the very fundament of the Dominion: shortening or lengthening the path, raising or lowering the temperature, shaping the landscape with a whim. This power beyond any other gives pilgrims the evidence and pause that they are in the company of a mythical deathlord.



Summon Soul: By rolling Power + Finesse, Polydegmon can call forth the soul of the deceased. This includes souls that have been dead for years but recently lost their anchor, were destroyed in the afterlife many years ago, or never stopped between death and the Autochthonous Depths. These souls have no memory at first but as time passes they will recall their previous life and return to their own habits and routines as best they're able. Whether these souls are the genuine article or a simulacrum Polydegmon has the ability to create is up for debate. The returning memories could come from absorbed impressions of their loved ones until finally becoming a sort of idealized version of the person.

THE GRAVE DREAM

People have dreams, desires, and wants by the millions. However, life is cruel (especially in the World of Darkness) and great ideas get forgotten, people become sidetracked and never find their way back to the “dream,” and even the greatest of ambitions dies on the vine when untended. Among the deepest Dominions of record, this abyssal pit has no name for itself but has been given quite a few: Phantasma, Hypnos, Oneira, Dream, Hypnogogia, Inner Space, or simply the Dark among countless others. One name that is repeated more than most is the Grave Dream.

This Dominion where dreams go to die exists somewhere between eyes open and eyes closed. A traveler who finds her way to this seemingly endless frontier may recover lost causes, forgotten dreams, or abandoned ambitions. First they must survive the journey and the enigmatic natives.

Getting There

Travelling to the Grave Dream is an unenviable journey deep within the Underworld, deeper than most are willing to go. The Dominion lies beyond at least four rivers — sometimes six or even more, depending on the circuitous route one takes. The laws of physics get strange at these depths: gravity becomes an enemy, and every step the traveler takes is a chore for the weight pressing down on her while trekking through the strange carpets of moss and slime. Any light is so diffused as to be useless beyond a few inches and the last leg of the journey is made in complete darkness. As she stumbles blindly through the dark, the traveler’s foot suddenly misses the ground beneath her. After a brief heart-stopping fall, the traveler will be buoyed gently in blackness. This is the Grave Dream.

That’s the long way. A shortcut exists — a cheat if you will — that thousands of sleeping minds pass through none the wiser. For such a deep Dominion it can be practically stumbled upon, somewhere between waking and unconsciousness. Lucid dreamers, “sensitives,” mages, and changelings happen upon the Grave Dream far more often than Sin-Eaters or other common Underworld travelers. These special visitors rarely recognize that they’ve gone anywhere at all or continue unhindered to stranger destinations. Such astral travelers describe the journey as a long dark tunnel. They seldom stop and consider what it’s a tunnel through.

Description

The Grave Dream defies description as a wide expanse of liquid darkness with no sense of up or down. To be in the Grave Dream is to float buoyed gently in the blackness — calling to mind a sensory deprivation tank — as writhing shapes swim past. It’s like waiting for your eyes to adjust on a moonless night... but they never do. Visitors float along on currents of dead and dying thoughts, dreams, and ambitions. Streams of murky gray cloud-like images rush past. Ideas swim into focus for a moment before quickly moving past in a flash of detail or hint of song. These are the lost dreams of humanity. Some are dreams long forgotten; others are inspirations past and still others are the waning thoughts of the comatose or dying. A visitor can summon insight from the roaring streams or steal old ambitions for herself. The lost dreams of a specific person can be called upon or stray thoughts about a particular subject may be of more use.

The Buddy System

Traveling with a group is the safest route through the Grave Dream but tricky business. Conversations among characters prove difficult for the constant roaring din. Furthermore, it’s incredibly easy to lose sight of each other by the scarce gray motes interrupting the darkness. A dim silver strand connects visitors who come in together but this can be stretched too thin and broken (or cut by unseen denizens). Better to hold onto each other and move in tandem as much as possible.

Not Alone

Figures and faces may be glimpsed peripherally only to disappear as they’re focused on. These phantasms are called doppelgangers as they seem to mimic the viewer before dissipating. These implied and disappearing figures aren’t really there but echoes carried by the dying dreams; which isn’t to say a traveler is alone in the Grave Dream, she’s not nearly that lucky.

A handful of alien and bizarre creatures stand watch over the Dominion and the less of their attention a krewe calls to itself, the better. These creatures are ancient and aloof and few survive their prolonged attention: the Dark Man, the Hag, and the Spider. A few travelers have reported seeing large, black hounds or other monstrous images but the three figures above are the most common encounters within the Grave Dream. They may appear without warning and steal away a

visitor's fear, breath, hope, or life. What's worse, fleeing back to the living world might not be enough of an escape.

The Door Swings Both Ways

The citizens of the Grave Dream are able to reach into the tangible world in a state resembling Twilight. This isn't an illusion — they can reach across the worlds, effectively manifesting as hypnagogic hallucinations. From the victim's perspective, time slows to a crawl, the rushing sounds of the Grave Dream fills her ears and one or more dark figures appear. What they want from their victims isn't known, but the best guess is that they need to feed. The two real "personalities" of the Grave Dream seem to inflict a sort of emotional vampirism. The Dark Man feeds almost exclusively on fear; the Hag however feeds on misery, breath, sex, or whatever other snatch of humanity she can steal for herself. A lawbreaker from the Grave Dream may find herself regularly visited long after she believes she's successfully escaped the grips of the Underworld.

The Old Laws

The laws of the Grave Dream are written into the very fabric of the Dominion. They aren't so much read as understood. The laws appear randomly within the various streams and clouds that permeate the realm, like a bright flash of metal in the dark. One doesn't see words, or even hear them spoken — in the bright flash, the Old Laws are revealed to the mind.

The punishment for breaking the Old Laws of the Grave Dream is often subtle and sinister. Sometimes it will come as a direct attack or sudden banishment. Reportedly a soul can get lost within the Grave Dream forever, a fact that brings sick delight to the Hag. If she gets to the transgressor first she's likely to shove her into a passing stream and let her float away, lost forever like the rest of the dreams. A visitor projecting her consciousness into the Grave Dream will fall catatonic and her body will atrophy as her soul remains trapped in the Dead Dominion.

More often the punishment is that the trespasser gains the notice of the Grave Dream's guardians. She should expect a visit some night soon. As mentioned above, the denizens of this place can reach across into the waking world and feed from the fear and misery of the living. A lawbreaker may find her name just got added to their short list and her punishment may not come for days but will haunt her for the rest of her life (or unlfe).

Dead In, Dead Out

The old wives' tale that dying in a dream means dying in real life? That's true here. Whether here as a lucid human sleeper, a ghost, a projecting mage, or a changeling: dead means dead in the Grave Dream. If the nightmare denizens get their hands on her, they can kill her (although they more often prefer to feed from her). If she is visiting a particularly violent dream or reliving the last sights of a dying man, she is in very physical danger.

No Light Shall Pierce the Dark

No flashlights or any amount of fire will give viewers any better of a look around. Even if it did it wouldn't be tolerated. The creatures that reside within the Grave Dream will see to it that such attempts are punished. Although it's notable that they seldom approach the bearer of the light directly and more often come for them later in the real world. Perhaps this law is more for their protection than the usual arcane and alien dicta of the Underworld.

Bring No Iron

This law only pertains to those who physically travel to this Dominion through the Underworld. Changelings use this Old Law as further evidence that this dark hell has some deeper connection to their former Arcadian prisons. Despite the substantial evidence of such a connection, this Dominion remains very much an extension of the Underworld. Still, the connections are currently under investigation by at least one of the half-breed fae (see the Oneironaut below). Similar to

SO WHAT'S ALL THIS THEN?

What is the Grave Dream? Is it an extension of the changelings' Arcadia? Or a shard of the supernal Stygia that rises to touch the sleeping world? Or perhaps some fragment or entry point to the yawning Abyss that mages fear?

As it is written, the Grave Dream is simply another Dead Dominion where dreams and aspirations go when they die. The same way bygone knowledge descends to Athenaeum, for instance. What if something more sinister lies below the surface? What if the Dark Man and his ilk are True Fae or the specters thereof? What if this Dominion marks the physical lip of the supernal Abyss? What if its vast well of power could be tapped or stemmed from the vantage of the Grave Dream? If they're absorbing lost and broken dreams and aspirations, are they using these as "fuel" to push across the boundaries between life and death to only further their feeding habits? What happens when they accumulate "enough" energy?

The World of Darkness is a very strange place and only those afflicted with the greatest hubris believe they could map its cosmology. Still, exploring the connection between death and dream might excite those that covet such lofty knowledge. Be careful to linger too long in the dark. For you know what they say about gazing into abysses.



the law before this one, the lawbreaker usually isn't confronted immediately or directly, reflecting a possible fear from the Kerberos and his kin. Still, they are patient creatures and a visitation will be upon the lawbreaker sometime soon.

Do Not Cross Over

The denizens of the Grave Dream can reportedly project themselves into the real world, the living world, using a dreamer's mind as a bridge. As inferred by this law it may be possible for physical visitors to use this same method to re-enter the waking world somewhere other than where they came in. No one has discovered how to do this, but the law is quite clear about its prohibition. Still, if they bothered to forbid it then it must be possible. Right?

You Have No Name Here

Sin-Eaters and other visitor's should not speak names within the Grave Dream. Not her own and not their krewe mates' either. No names at all. This isn't just a law, but a good idea. Beyond not wanting the strange citizens of the Grave Dream to know who she is anymore than they might already; her name may float along the streams of the Grave Dream forever, eventually being found by some other or future visitor. It might fall into the clutches of the True Fae or an unsavory mage who knows how to harness the power of names.

Shroud Not Your Head

At first blush this Old Law comes off as an obscure little rule. Don't wear hats; is that seriously an Old Law? Put

simply, yes. It may seem an odd sort of law, but covering the head shows up in a number of belief systems (specifically Abrahamic) so it's not without mythological precedent. It may have simpler roots, however. It seems the childhood logic of pulling covers over your head carries some resonance here. At least, the Dark Man and his kin don't seem to appreciate it.

Do Not Impede the Servants of the Dark

Stay out of the way of anything or anyone encountered within the Grave Dream. This can be a difficult law to abide, like when a swarm of dark spiders attack or if the Hag sets her sights on the krewe. Fighting back counts as impeding, unfortunately, and even if the transgressor escapes she may find she's a long way from done with the servants of the Grave Dream. More to the point, they're a long way from done with her.

Speak Not of the Cousins

Many see or hear this rule and have no idea what it means. For those that do understand, however, they don't need to be told twice. It isn't referring to a person's familial relations but rather the very real monsters that make changelings what they are. They are the so-called Keepers, the Gentry, and the Fair Folk. They are not to be referred to, mentioned, or invoked in any way by any name. Whether they fear drawing their attention or are motivated in some other way, the Dark Man is sure to come for those that break this rule.

Tell None of What You See

That's the rub. Visiting the Grave Dream offers a profound ability to suss out secrets, visit the last thoughts of loved ones, or recapture lost inspiration. Yet, by the law the information can't be told to another soul. What use are these sights and insights if they can't be shared? For one, if the whole krewé witnessed the same sight then this prohibition becomes largely moot (another reason to stay together). Nothing to talk about if everyone saw the same thing. Also, the viewer can simply act on the new information and trust her krewé to have her back. Lastly, going back to the Autochthonous Depths with insight into a wraith's torment or reinvigorating her lost dream doesn't need to be explicit. With a few hints and the right words placed carefully, a visitor can deliver the message without ever betraying her source. Ultimately, she can use the information in any way she sees fit so long as she doesn't describe where she got it.

Geography

It's hard to describe the Grave Dream as having "geography," as it's little more than a dark vacuum with highlights of gray, black, and more black. The constantly moving streams and bizarre inhabitants are largely glimpsed as gleaming black shapes moving against a matte black background. The only features that truly stand out are other visitors and the occasional bright flash as dead dreams and Old Laws pass by.

Interacting with Dead Dreams

Visitors to the Grave Dream are usually here for one thing only, to access the bygone dreams, aspirations, and hopes flowing through the Dominion.

Summoning Dream: To summon a dream from within the Grave Dream the traveler must know something about the dreamer or dream. If she wants to call upon the lost dream of a specific individual then that person must have had that idea and lost it or himself be dying or away from other means of communication; if she wants to call on a type of aspiration (example: climb Mount Everest) or a type of dream (example: naked in school) she has a broader palette from which to draw. The visitor's player makes a normal meditation roll (Meditation, **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51) with the target number of successes dependent on the destination dream, per the chart below.

Note: These rules and numbers apply only to non-changelings; the Lost have their own rules for oneiromancy, which can apply within the Grave Dream as well as they do among the dreams of the living.

Target Number	Destination Dream
10 successes	Subject Dream (e.g. Rock Climbing)
15 successes	Individual's Dream (e.g. Travis North)
20 successes	Lucid Dreamer or Changeling's Dreams

If interrupted, she will have to start over. If she suffers two consecutive failures, the potential voyeur might attract the attention of the local color. If she's lucky she'll only disturb the spiders, but that still counts as breaking one of the Old Laws, so lucky might not be the right word. Once successful, however, she may observe or sometimes interact with the dreams as detailed below.

Dream Viewing: Once the viewer gains contact with the dream, the player makes a Resolve + Empathy roll (bonuses may be gained from having appropriate powers such as a mage's access to the Mind Arcanum or a Sin-Eater with the Phantasmal Key). Failure means the dream was successfully summoned but the picture is grainy and the viewer can't hear anything substantive. Dramatic failure on the other hand is sure to call the attention of the Grave Dream's guardians. Success means the viewer can observe the dream from the outside, while an exceptional success allows the viewer to physically step into the dream and potentially even interact with the dreamer's soul whether they are long dead and gone or trapped in a coma somewhere.

Watching the dreams of another may impart insight into that person's past wants, desires, or fears. Be warned: witnessing a person's subconscious may forever harm the viewer's ideal of that person through no fault of their own. None should come to the Grave Dream lightly — and none do — but it is a worthwhile caveat all the same. This may grant bonuses to subsequent interactions with the dreamer in question if they're still around or provide other answers and advantages to the viewer (what made Grandpa tick?).

Watching dream gives a unique vantage point on even the most mundane activities. By observing these dreams and succeeding on an Intelligence + (relevant Skill such as Athletics) roll, the player may purchase an appropriate Specialty (related to the relevant Skill) for two experience points instead of the usual three, or may instead purchase dots in that Skill at half the normal price (round up) in experience points. (So, if the example dream was related to climbing Mount Everest, then Athletics is the likely relevant Skill. If the dream was related to being naked in front of a classroom, it's possible that the Skill would be Academics, for the school environment, or Intimidation for the feelings of fear and inadequacy).

Lastly, the viewer may recapture some lost inspiration either for herself or to impart upon a soul (whether still living or stuck within the Autochthonous Depths). A specter stuck in the repetitions of death may be able to break her unseemly cycle with a whispered memory of when she wanted to be a ballerina. These minor changes may bring relief to troubled souls or course-correct a body who has long since lost their destiny. Bringing these dead inspirations back to their source may act as an *ofrenda* when dealing with a ghost or simply grant a bonus on Persuasion rolls when trying to steer the target back to their lost love or aspiration.

Risk and Reward

Physical visitors are exactly that, *physical*, and are just as able to be harmed by any dream with which they interact. If a person gets shot in a dream she's as likely to wake up; if a visitor within the Grave Dream gets shot, then hey, she gets shot. Similarly, if she gets caught in a dream (or pushed by the Hag) she will travel upon the current wherever it takes her. If she escapes somewhere else down the line she might be far from any known exit (requiring an extended Wits + Survival roll with possible bonuses from appropriate powers such as the Auspex Discipline or Mind Arcanum to find the way back). Lucid dreamers and other out-of-body visitors have much the same problem. In their case, the physical body may continue to live but the soul isn't home so to speak. Eventually, the body will atrophy and die if the traveler can't return. Lastly, any visitor may anger or otherwise draw the attention of the nightmarish watchers that populate the Grave Dream. This risk may seem relatively low to start, but once you've blipped on their radar, they are slow to forget and may call upon the visitor again and again.

The reward is simple: the ability to visit the lost dreams of anyone in the world. Lovers, enemies, a potential betrayer, or perhaps a coma victim who holds a secret he cannot tell. All of them are accessible within the Grave Dream if one knows where to look.

Bit Players

It's possible those listed below are the *only* players within the Grave Dream. Few others have ever been rumored, let alone reported. Sometimes large animals with red eyes have been seen such as dogs, rats, snakes, and other creatures seen just as frequently throughout the Underworld. Are they creatures of the Grave Dream, are they misplaced psychopomps, or simply the mind playing tricks on visitors? Maybe the truth is stranger still and the psychopomps seen throughout the Underworld from the Ocean of Fragments up to the Autochthonous Depths originate here in the Grave Dream and travel abroad for some purpose known only to the Dark Man.

The Dark Man

Power 8, Finesse 5, Resistance 8

The Dark Man is undisputedly the most powerful of the strange vespers that haunt the Grave Dream and stands as the Dominion's Kerberos. Why anyone would want to get his attention is up to them but by and large he should be avoided at all costs. The Dark Man's name is his description: he is a dark, often featureless man with stark eyes of piercing white, red, or smoldering gray. Sometimes, however, he is described by voices trembling with fear as a particular someone or

wearing a uniform the viewer recognizes — and fears. Most commonly these appearances include government, clergy, or other authoritative figures. The Dark Man can take many forms but is limited to a certain milieu. He overpowers opponents with paralyzing fear. While causing this fear he also feeds from it as a sort-of self fulfilling emotional vampire.

The Spider

Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

The Spider is a type of creature — or possibly a single intelligence expressed through multiple bodies — that is the most common encounter throughout the Grave Dream. Separating itself from the darkness only by movement, they travel from stream to stream. They briefly attach themselves to these ropey clouds and watch their contents intently before detaching and moving on to the next one. Presumably they are taking some account of these stray thoughts or perhaps protecting them. The spiders have been reported to converge on visitors they deem as hostile (although what their criteria might be is a mystery). These harrowed voyeurs seem to survive the experience but the kneejerk response is to attack or defend oneself. While understandable this unfortunately breaks the law of not impeding the Grave Dream's servants and will bring even more dire punishment in the future.

The Oneironaut

Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 3

This quirky individual introduces himself only as the Oneironaut. He is a changeling who has found a way to reliably break through the caul between dreams and the Grave Dream and considers it his personal mission to explore this bold new frontier. The oneironaut isn't his real name — or even his "real" changeling name for that matter — as he still is beholden to the Old Laws of the realm. He describes himself as a "Darkling" or "Gravewight" on occasion and has reportedly discovered a way to hide himself from the Dark Man and his cohorts. If he could be convinced to share this secret any number of souls interested in making repeat visits — or those already haunted by these figures — would be quite grateful.

The Hag

Virtue: None. If the Hag ever had a higher ideology it's lost behind her façade of madness.

Vice: Gluttony. The Hag is always hungry and can never be full.

Background: The Hag is an old player. She is the breath-stealer, the succubus, the crib death. The Hag takes a discomforting amount of interest in non-dreamers within her home. Traveling in groups will not deter her; in fact, she seems to see them as a challenge. She will harry them,

lure them away from each other, and otherwise seek to cut the silver strand that binds them together. Then she wraps them each in a passing dream and lets them drift away, lost forever.

She delights in the misery of others... put simply, it is her bread and water. If the Dark Man feeds on fear then the Hag feeds on misfortune, yearning, and breath. Stories as old as recorded history tell tales of the Hag visiting sleepers in the night and feeding. Whether this entity is the same hag or if she is merely the most current iteration would be impossible to judge. What is known is that she hasn't changed very much from her original blueprint. The stories of Lilitu killing children, of the succubus twisted in appearance forcing her targets to nocturnal emission, or the old woman who squats on a sleeper's chest and steals their breath may all stem back to the same foul creature living in the Grave Dream.

Description: Like the other creatures of the Grave Dream, the Hag is difficult to describe as she barely stands out against the ever-present blackness of her Dominion. She may have no features at all until her appearance is scrutinized and features melt into place drawing from her viewer's subconscious. She always appears as an old woman. Sometimes she is sneering and menacing while other times she looks kindly and beatific. The latter of these appearances is a lie, a veneer spread thinly to disguise her hateful nature.

Storytelling Hints: She lives to spread misfortune and misery. It is her entire reason for living. She would pull a single wing from a fly just to see it dance and writhe in confusion as its body betrays it. Ultimately, the entire world serves as her fly, and so many wings are waiting to be plucked by her uncaring fingers.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 6, Resistance 8

Willpower: 13



Morality/Synergy: 3

Initiative: 14

Defense: 8

Speed: 21

Size: 5

Corpus: 13

Numina: Drain (11 dice), Phantasm (11 dice). Terrify (11 dice versus Resolve + Composure).

Drain: The Hag must first touch the target (see "Touching an Opponent," **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157) and spend an Essence. Roll Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve + Stamina. The Hag may choose to drink breath or drink misery. Consuming breath causes one point of lethal damage to the subject per success, while consuming misery causes one point of Willpower loss per success.

THE OCEAN OF FRAGMENTS

How does a person identify himself? When asked, “what are you?” does the subject respond by stating his profession? His religion? Does he focus on the most important part of his life, as he sees it — maybe that he is a father or a husband? Or does he define himself by what he has done? He might be a soldier who saved a comrade in a firefight, and this might be his defining moment. He might see himself as a servant to his God or his state, and have or want no other identity beyond that.

Add the supernatural to the mix, and now the hypothetical subject has a whole host of other possible answers. “I am a vampire, of the Clan Gangrel.” “I am one of the People, the Uratha.” “I am Awakened.” And so on.

All forms of self-identity can be stripped away, though. Memory, self-image, ego — all of this can come to mean little to the subject. He can train himself to simply *be*, or so some cultural and religious traditions teach. Is it a virtue to lose all identification as an earthly and singular being and simply *exist*? Or does this equate to turning one’s back on all of one’s accomplishments? This question is one for philosophers to consider.

What such philosophers do not often realize, though, is that a place exists, deep within the Underworld, where such transitory notions such as identity can be stripped away. This place is called the Ocean of Fragments.

Getting There

Finding the Ocean of Fragments isn’t easy. It’s a long way from the surface. This Dominion lies deep within the Underworld, past many of the other realms that reflect (or at least call to mind) human notions of death and what comes after. Considering the appearance and the effects of the Dominion, it might well be the *deepest* of any known realm. Certainly, the travelers who have found the Ocean and returned report feeling a sense of finality when touching its waters, as if they have truly *arrived*, and no further progress is possible. Of course, that might just be the effects of the Dominion on the psyche.

“Under every deep, a lower deep opens,” wrote Emerson, and as characters travel through the Underworld, they will find this to be true. Every Dominion has a way to go *lower*. Every place has a trap door, a natural spring with an underwater cavern, a sinkhole, a staircase, something leading down. Many Sin-Eaters feel that the Underworld is

endless, and they might be right. But at the same time, the Ocean of Fragments might represent the end of the line for anyone wishing to have any chance of returning. As such, the dangers that travelers might face on the way to the Ocean comprise any of the threats that the rest of the Underworld might present. Getting there is just a matter of going *down*, finding an aperture large enough, a way to climb down rock faces or a guide to show the way through tunnels.

And then, sometimes one hears rumors about vertical tunnels that go on forever. Underworld travelers spin yarns of falling into one of these holes, freefalling for hours or days, and finally managing to get a handhold and pull themselves up into a crevice. Rocks tossed into these holes never hit bottom, but those unfortunate travelers who claim to have seen these shafts always report the sound of waves, lapping ever faintly below.

Travelers might approach the Ocean in two ways. First, they might arrive after the seemingly endless trek downwards through the Dominions. If this is the case, they arrive on the Black Beach (see below). Second, they might fall into the Ocean of Fragments through one of the shafts that lead upwards. If this happens, the characters simply drop directly into the waters of the Ocean of Fragments, potentially miles from the shore. Retaining enough identity to reach that shore is a truly heroic task.

Description

The Ocean of Fragments is an endless, black sea. The sheer size of it causes Underworld travelers to despair, for how can one dive into the ocean and have any hope of finding a single object?

Under the waves, the Ocean of Fragments is strangely empty. Travelers might expect ships, fish, sea serpents, or other such monsters, but such things are almost nonexistent (in fact, only one ship sails this Ocean — see below). The waters are black, with no sunlit zone, because of course, the Underworld admits no sunlight. Once below the surface of the water, travelers can “see” (the Laws of the Dominion prevent obscured vision from any source), but the waters are still lifeless.

But wait long enough, and something will float by. It might be drifting lazily down to the depths, or it might shoot up from the bottom, as though propelled by some sudden disturbance below the witness. It might be a ghost, slowly

losing the memories and ego that kept him aware of himself after death. It might be an object, the physical representation of an identifying characteristic. It might be a living person, a Sin-Eater, a mortal, a mage, or something stranger still. All that is required to become lost in the Ocean of Fragments is the capacity to self-identify. That means that anyone that a traveler sees in the Ocean is steadily losing that capacity.

Layers

The waters of the Ocean of Fragments remove *identifiers* — the traits that allow a character to define himself. The average adult has thousands upon thousands of them, because every memory in a person's mind is potentially an identifier. Of course, as stated above, the question "who are you?" probably doesn't provoke a specific, comparatively insignificant memory such as, "I'm the boy pictured stirring apple butter in the 1978 *Lambertville Gazette*," but even *that* is an identifier.

Immerse a carcass in warm water, and the flesh eventually loosens from the skin and the bones. The same thing happens to a person's sense of identity in the Ocean. As a character swims in the Ocean of Fragments, the identifiers loosen around his mind. Bits of the character separate, take physical form, and float off into the water. The character can, of course, try to catch and hold onto them... but imagine how many memories an adult has that might be part of his self-image. The small ones become tiny pearls or grains of sand, while the bigger ones become chunks of driftwood or pumice-like rock. It is impossible to tell what an identifier represents without touching it and concentrating, and once a character loses one, it might sink out of sight (yes, the waters are clear, but they are also impossibly deep).

The Ocean of Fragments is divided into four zones. In the first zone closest to the surface, the identifiers lost are specific memories, useless without context. A character can afford to lose many thousands of these without giving up anything truly integral to his personality (though it will certainly be painful to lose these memories). When the character loses enough of these identifiers (called "motes," about the size of small pearls), he sinks to the second zone.

The second zone strips the character of larger identifiers, the size of golf balls or small apples, called "formatives." These identifiers are also memories, but they represent events that truly shaped the character's identity — "I am the man who wrote and directed *True Beauty*." "I am the woman who saved a boy's life after a fire." The character can stand to lose dozens, perhaps hundreds of these memories (an adult character with a normal amount of life experience, at least — a child or a shut-in won't last as long) before sinking again. Fighting erosion becomes easier at this zone (see below).

The third zone loosens the basic points of self-identity, allowing for cultural and other societal considerations. These identifiers (called "truths") are about the size of large

grapefruit, and usually fall *out* of the character from under the ribs, rather than off the character's limbs as motes and formatives tend to do. Truths (such as "I am a Christian," "I am homosexual," "I am a liberal," and so on) loosen and fall much more slowly than lighter identifiers. Unfortunately, the average adult has only a score or so to lose before sinking again. As a point of interest, "I am a mother/father" is often the last truth to dislodge itself. Even after all superficial memories of one's children have come loose and drift away, the notion of being a parent is so deep-seated that it often blurs the line between truth and natal.

The fourth zone isn't the deepest part of the Ocean of Fragments, but looking down, a traveler in the fourth zone sees only blackness. Since the Laws of the Dominion prevent deliberate obfuscation of sight, that means that below the fourth zone must *be* blackness — the black sands of the Ocean's bottom, or simply the inky nothingness of oblivion? No one knows, because no one has ever come *up* into the fourth zone to say. In the fourth zone, the only identifiers that the character has left are called "natals," the few points of identity with which human beings are born. These include gender and, for some, name (people aren't born with names, obviously, but usually receive them shortly afterwards — for some travelers, the name is a truth rather than a natal). The character does not have to give these up unless he wants to. He can hold onto them for all eternity, bobbing up and down in the fourth zone.

Below the fourth zone is the Deeps. The Leviathan (see below) comes up from the Deeps sometimes, but no other being has ever been witnessed doing so. In the Deeps, the character can lose the last identifier he has, the "ego." This identifier, which consists only of the statement "I am," is the last thing the character possesses. When that is gone, *he* is gone, devoid of any identity. What happens then is a true mystery.

The Freighter

As mentioned, only one ship sails the Ocean of Fragments. It changes form every so often. It has, in the past, resembled a Phoenician trade ship, a Viking longship, a schooner, or even a steamship (one fevered tale claims the *Titanic* had the honor for a time, in fact). Whether it changes its form in response to some external factor or whether newer ships somehow replace the old ones is unknown, but the Laws of the Dominion are clear — the *Freighter* is the only ship permitted to sail the waters.

The *Freighter* has a crew, of course, but only just enough to keep the ship moving. The term "skeleton crew" applies, and more than just figuratively. The ghosts that crew the ship are barely self-aware enough to know their jobs on the ship. They know a few random facts about themselves, but have lost so many of their identifiers that they appear as little more than skeletons with a few ragged lumps of flesh still clinging. They repeat these identifiers constantly, and are happy to tell others who they are — "I am a Christian. I am a sailor. I am Helen's mother. I am a murder victim."



The captain of this ship is widely believed to be the Kerberos of the Dominion. It's a reasonable assumption — the sailors call this being “the Admiral,” and obey his orders without question. Rumor has it that those identifiers are each from the first human being to die, the memories and life of the first member of the species with enough cognizance to realize *I am*.

For all his power, though, the Admiral is not the Kerberos of the Ocean of Fragments. That distinction belongs to a much more powerful and horrific creature, lurking in the deepest parts of the Ocean.

The Leviathan

Every human being in the world has had the nightmare, even if they can no longer remember it. The dreamer floats in the middle of the ocean, *nothing* around for miles, at night or during the day. Time doesn't matter. The utter hopelessness of the situation sinks in as the dreamer realizes that even if by some miracle he starts swimming in the right direction, he will tire and drown long before ever seeing land.

And then, that fear is gone, replaced by a much worse one — something brushes his leg. Or perhaps he looks down and sees the shadow pass below him. The Beast Below. A shark, a sea monster, a squid, or just some nameless horror from the Deeps? It doesn't matter and the dreamer has no time to consider taxonomy. He awakens, sweating, thanking whatever deity he might believe in that it was just a dream.

But the Beast Below exists, and it guards the Ocean of Fragments. It enforces the Laws of the Dominion, and despite its great size and the limitless scope of the Ocean, it can swim vast distances in an instant, dragging an unfortunate traveler down. The Leviathan is also the only Kerberos of the Ocean, and so if a traveler can escape its grasp, he can get away with breaking the laws.

The Leviathan defies form. It is larger than any ship, and is apparently cephalopod in nature, judging from the tentacles that occasionally break the surface when it is near. It is never entirely visible, but that is only because it is too big to take in. All a character sees of the monster is an endless wall of blue flesh, and perhaps an eye the size of a small house.

THE LEVIATHAN IN PLAY

Traits aren't provided for the Leviathan, because it is meant to be a force of nature more than a combatant. That said, it should be possible for characters to escape its tentacles. The traits provided for the Leviathan at the end of this section are meant to represent the monster for attempts to escape it or inconvenience it (throwing a lantern at its eye to drive it away, for instance). Characters have no more chance to kill the Leviathan than they do the rain or the tides — the Beast Below just is.

The Old Laws

The Laws of the Ocean of Fragments are inscribed on the rock walls of the Black Beach, but nowhere else. The Ocean has 12 laws, carved in simple characters into the rock face. The lettering is weathered with time and sand, but still legible.

The Leviathan enforces the Laws of the Ocean, usually by removing the offender from his current area. The Ocean is vast — probably infinite — and while the Leviathan doesn't kill, it can drag a lawbreaker so far away from the problem area that he stands almost no chance of returning.

The Law of Contiguity

All oceans are one ocean. This law refers to the fact that anyone can enter the Ocean of Fragments directly via the oceans of the physical world. Violation of this law isn't really possible, as it seems to be less a law governing behavior and more a natural law, the one upon which the Ocean is founded. That said, characters visiting the Ocean of Fragments find that referring to any of the “natural” oceans by name (Atlantic, Pacific, etc.) results in a sudden drop in water temperature and a quickened current, and greater scrutiny from the Leviathan.

The Law of Escape

The Ocean ends at the Black Beach. The Black Beach is a kind of “neutral zone” with regards to the Laws of the Ocean. If a character can reach the Beach, he has escaped the powers of the Leviathan and the *Freighter*, and they cannot enforce the laws.

The Law of Cognizance

Only those that claim identity can enter the ocean. Animals and other creatures with no sense of self cannot enter the Ocean. The waters obliterate them entirely upon contact. Normally, this happens to animals, including familiars that characters bring with them, but spirits might also be subject to this fate if they are not powerful enough to have their own names.

The Maritime Law

Only the Freighter may sail these waters. A band of characters bringing another ship into the Ocean finds itself under attack by the *Freighter* (its armaments vary by its form, but it is *always* well-armed). The ship that remains afloat is the new *Freighter*...which means the Admiral immediately appears on deck and takes command. Characters wishing to sail the Ocean of Fragments are better advised to run from the *Freighter* than fight it.

The Law of Clarity

No obscuring vision. The Ocean of Fragments does not permit obscuring the truth. Anyone entering the waters can see clearly, even if he is usually blind. Anyone that attempts to blind another traveler summons the Leviathan, who grabs and flings him (thus assuring that at least some identifiers will be lost in the swim back to wherever he was).

The Law of Identity

You are what you keep. Identifiers start breaking off from characters the instant they set foot in the water. In order to keep an identifier, the character must physically take hold of it and not let go. If the character takes hold of someone else's identifier, she must assimilate it into her own identity before leaving the Dominion. If she gets too close to the Beach while still holding onto an identifier, the Leviathan attempts to drag her back into the water and hold her until she assimilates it. This can be problematic, and might induce her to stay until it falls off again. If she does manage to make it to the Beach without assimilating it, she finds she can't access the information within it without assimilating it anyway (though at the Storyteller's discretion, Fate magic or a special Ceremony might unlock the knowledge in an identifier).

The Law of Salvage

What one finds, one may keep. A traveler that finds an identifier (for there is little else to find in the Ocean of Fragments) can keep it, and is under no obligation to find the person to whom it originally belongs. Even if that person should arrive and lay claim to the item, the finder is entitled to it by the Laws of the Dominion, and the Leviathan will intervene on his side.

The Law of Command

The Admiral's word is law. If the Admiral gives an order, anyone on his ship must obey it. Disobedience is punishable by being cast overboard (and the Admiral is persuasive; see his traits on p. 198).

The Law of Noninterference

Leave other travelers in peace. While floating in the Ocean of Fragments, travelers have the right to lose themselves without being disturbed. Molesting — or attempting to aid — a traveler in the water summons the Leviathan, who simply drags the offending party a few miles away. Travelers with some kind of mystical bond can help each other without violating this law. This includes Sin-Eaters who have formed a krew, changelings who have taken a pledge to each other, werewolves bonded by a totem, and branded throngs of Prometheans. Bands of travelers who have simply made a promise to one another with no magical or arcane backing, however, are not exempt.

The Law of Passage

Travelers may travel with the Freighter. Travelers can petition the Admiral or his crew for permission to come aboard. The Admiral has the final say on the matter, but the crew has been known to smuggle travelers aboard and attempt to steal any identifiers they might be carrying (hoping to use them to buoy them long enough to get to shore). Once a traveler has accepted passage, he is less able to resist obeying the Admiral's orders (-3 on all attempts to do so).

The Law of Maintenance and Cure

No one on the crew of the Freighter will lose himself. Any one agreeing to join the Admiral's crew is entitled to one of his own identifiers back. The Admiral shows the character which ones he has lost, and casts his net for the one that the character would most like. This is usually a fairly important one, which is why the crew of the *Freighter* tend to have only one or two very basic identifiers remaining. Agreeing to join the crew, though, means that the character is almost completely unable to resist the Admiral's orders (any attempt to do so is automatically reduced to a chance die).

The Law of Conservation

The Ocean must not be emptied. Removing water from the Ocean of Fragments is forbidden. This law is an exception to the Law of Escape — a character attempting to ascend through the Lower Mysteries with a jug of Ocean water finds himself harried by *all* Kerberoi. No one knows what effect this water might have in the world of the living, as no one has survived long enough to find out. Violators of this law are taken back to the Ocean, whereupon the Leviathan drags them into the Deeps, never to be seen again.

The Law of Depth

The progression of erosion must be followed. It is a violation of the laws to attempt to dive down to a deeper zone in an attempt to lose a particular identifier. That is, in order to lose a truth (and stay faithful to the laws), a character must first lose all motes *and* formatives. A character that attempts to break this law attracts the notice of the Leviathan, who usually holds him at his "proper" depth until he either escapes or loses the right kinds of identifiers to return to the depth he was attempting to reach.

Geography

As mentioned, the Ocean of Fragments is largely homogenous. Only the *Freighter* and the Leviathan cruise its waters consistently. Other travelers simply swim, losing more of themselves until they sink (see below). The only geographical feature in the Dominion is the Black Beach.

The Black Beach

A traveler approaching the Ocean of Fragments first hears the lapping of the waves, and the rush of the endless ocean. Shortly thereafter, he feels the ground become soft beneath his feet. If he looks down, he finds that that "sand" is black, as though completely composed of ground ebony. This path leads to a cave opening, with rock walls on either side that stretch on for eternity. On these rock walls, as mentioned above, a traveler can find the Laws of the Ocean of Fragments.

The Black Beach leads down to the water, which, from the vantage point of the beach, looks like an endless ocean of ink. This might be because the ocean floor is composed of the same black sand, but those travelers who have had the misfortune to swim the Ocean of Fragment state that it *has* no bottom. It looks black from the beach because the Law of Clarity is not in force there.

A traveler who stands on the beach long enough might see the sails (or the smokestacks, depending on its current form) of the *Freighter*. Hailing the ship is possible, and requires a roll of Presence + Expression. If the roll succeeds, the ship makes for shore. Boarding the ship entails swimming to it, as the Admiral refuses to let the ship get too close to the beach for fear that his crew will jump ship.

Loss of Identity

Immersion in the Ocean of Fragments has a pronounced and constant effect on travelers. They slowly lose their identifiers, beginning with the smallest, most specific memories ("I am the woman who ran a stop sign and caused an accident on New Year's Day, 1987, in San Diego") and eventually working up to the cornerstones of the self ("I am a woman").

In the first zone, the character can't resist erosion for long. For each *turn* that the character wishes to hold himself together, the player must spend a Willpower point and roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll succeeds, the character does not lose an identifier that turn. Of course, the character can only keep this up for as many turns as he has Willpower points, and the Ocean is endless.

In the second and third zones, the system is the same, but does not require a Willpower point. The character can therefore remain at this depth indefinitely (but eventually, the player's luck is going to run out and the roll will fail — we don't recommend rolling to see how long it would take).

In the fourth zone, the character can attempt to keep his natals from falling off as usual, but he can also just grab them when they do come loose and hold on for as long as he likes. Of course, that makes it harder to ascend (see below).

Ascending the Zones

It is possible to gather identifiers as they sink and rise. A character in, for instance, the second zone can grab hold of a mote and rise to the fourth zone (whereupon he immediately must attempt to resist losing it again).

Grabbing hold of an identifier requires the player to roll Dexterity + Wits. Attempting to grab a mote imposes a -5 modifier, grabbing a formative is a -4, a truth causes a -2, and a natal imposes no penalty. Upon grabbing an identifier, the character immediately floats to whatever zone is appropriate (meaning that a character in the fourth zone that somehow grabs a mote would find himself breaking the surface again, but not for very long, unless he immediately gathered more).

Characters do *not* have to grab their own identifiers. Once an identifier has come loose, a character can no longer identify it as his own, nor recall what specifically it was.

Choosing What to Lose

A possible long-term strategy for a character adrift in the Ocean of Fragments is to choose which identifiers to lose. This requires a Wits + Resolve roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character sinks into the ocean, losing thousands of tiny identifiers in seconds. The character falls directly into the next zone.

Failure: The character does not guide his loss of identity, and loses an identifier as usual.

Success: The character can choose the next identifier he loses, but cannot lose an identifier inappropriate to his current zone.

Exceptional Success: The character can choose any identifier to lose, regardless of his zone.

Risk and Reward

The risks of going to the Ocean of Fragments should be obvious. In addition to braving every horror that the Underworld has to offer in order to get there (unless one is “lucky” enough to find one of the shafts that drop a traveler directly into an endless ocean), the Dominion slowly destroys those who travel to it. Along the way, characters might be able to pull themselves out long enough to be forced into service on a ship, or lose so much of themselves that they *cannot* get back home. Why would someone ever go?

Three main story hooks might draw characters to the Ocean. First, the characters might wish to find a specific identifier, perhaps one lost to the ages by a ghost thousands of years dead. Finding the proper identifier is, mildly put, a Herculean task, but the Admiral could help (see below) if they can talk him into running out the nets or letting them look through the *Freighter*’ storeroom.

For example, the characters might wish to solve a centuries-old murder. They meet a ghost in the Underworld who think he might have had something to do with it — but was he a murderer? A witness? Another victim? He lost too much of himself in the Ocean of Fragments to remember exactly, but he and many of his identifiers were scooped up in the *Freighter*’s nets. Somewhere in the hold, then, is the information the characters need.

Second, one or more of the characters might wish to rid themselves of troubling identifiers. What if the character wants to lose “I am an alcoholic?” What about “I am a murderer?” “I am a vampire?” The character just has to get to the right depth (which might violate the Law of Depth, unless the character wants to lose all of the identifiers required to get to that zone) and attempt to cast off the right identifier... and then get back to the Beach, which is definitely the hard part.

Finally, the character might want to end it all. There’s suicide and then there’s *real* oblivion, and to do it right, to really and truly pass beyond all mortal ken, you need to go to the Ocean. This might make an interesting endgame for a character that truly wants to lose everything, or who believes that stripping himself down to pure consciousness paves the way for Nirvana or Heaven or the like.

Bit Players

The Leviathan

Power 12, Finesse 9, Resistance 11

As mentioned above, these traits for the Leviathan are provided in case the Storyteller needs to simulate a character’s action against the Beast. The Leviathan cannot be killed or placated, only dodged or driven off.

TIME

How long, then, does it take an average adult to pass through the zones? It’s largely up to the needs of the story, but since it has a kind of system to it, let’s consider the question. If we assume that an average adult has at least 10,000 motes (probably more over a whole lifetime, actually), that means he’ll lose one every turn, which is about 10 a minute. That means it will take just over 16 hours to lose all of them, at which point he sinks to the second zone and starts losing formatives.

Figuring one 100 formatives (again, this number varies), the character loses roughly one per hour. Just over four days later, the character loses his last formative memory and sinks to the third zone.

Now the truths start to drift away, and they require a day each to come loose. Assume our hypothetical character has a dozen of them. Once they are gone (assuming he doesn’t fight it), he has only his two natals to lose: name and gender. They take a month each to dislodge.

If the character does nothing to stop his fate, or has been bound and thrown into the Ocean and thus *cannot* prevent the fragmentation, it takes him three months, four days and about 16 hours from immersion to annihilation (or transcendence, depending on how you look at it). Of course, if the character fights, this time can be extended considerably.

The Hermit

Power 5, Finesse 7, Resistance 10

This ancient ghost lives on the Black Beach. He spends his time sifting identifiers from the water, assimilating them, and then bathing in the Ocean to lose them again. He rarely goes deeper than the second zone, for fear that he won't be able to get back. His personality is variable — it depends on what identifiers he has taken into himself that day. He's fairly sure he's always been a man, though he admits he could be wrong about that. He claims he used to be king of something, and that vast armies of powerful monsters served him. But how would he know?

Sailor

Power 6, Finesse 5, Resistance 4

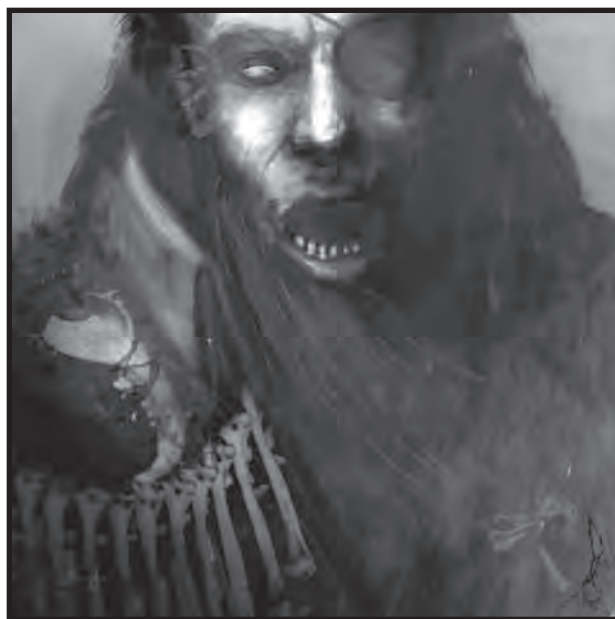
The sailors on the *Freighter* resemble walking skeletons in robes. Chunks of flesh represent their few remaining identifiers — sometimes this flesh makes up a bit of arm muscle, facial skin, or an internal organ hanging grotesquely in an otherwise empty rib cage. The sailors, for the most part, want to find enough identifiers to make it to shore and escape the Ocean, and they aren't above gambling for them (losers in their games are put into huge crab pots covered in mesh and dropped into the drink; the mesh catches the identifiers, and the winner of the games takes the one he wants).

The Admiral

Virtue: Charity. The Admiral is given to occasional acts of kindness and magnanimity. They are few and far between, but if a character strikes his fancy, he might allow an unsupervised search through the storerooms or provide passage back to the Beach.

Vice: Pride. This assumes, of course, that no insult to his honor or his ship has been made. The Admiral does not forgive slights.

Background: Who was the Admiral in life? Was he ever a living man? The question is impossible to answer and academic to boot. The Admiral's only purpose now, his only identifier, is "I am the Admiral, and the captain of the *Freighter*." He pilots the ship across the Ocean of Fragments, lowering the nets and scooping up loads of identifiers, and placing the most interesting ones in the hold of his ship. How he determines "interesting" is a mystery, as visitors to the hold might find a pile of truths that all equate to "I am a Muslim," but the Admiral seems to know what he is looking for.



Description: This ghastly being is nearly eight feet tall. He wears black robes, and a stole of brackish seaweed, upon which are strung chunks of wood, bone, and rock that must be identifiers.

Storytelling Hints: The Admiral is an enigma in one of the most mysterious places imaginable. He is friendly (unless insulted), knowledgeable, and honest, but that doesn't mean he is accommodating. He runs a tight ship, and those who would think to dispute him or cause a mutiny are soon acquainted with the waters once again.

Astute travelers might note that the authority on the *Freighter* is called "Admiral," not "Captain." This is odd, given that the only ship on the Ocean is the *Freighter*, but the title "Admiral" implies other craft under this being's command. And then, these travelers might recall the Ferryman who carried them over the Rivers of Death, and wonder about the origins of the identifiers around the Admiral's neck.

Attributes: Power 10, Finesse 12, Resistance 10

Willpower: 20

Initiative: 22

Defense: 12

Speed: 32

Size: 6

Corpus: 16

Numina: Compulsion (dice pool 22); Manacles (dice pool 22); Phantasm (dice pool 22); Telekinesis (dice pool 22)

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