Houses of the Fallen



A Player Resource for Demon: The Fallen

Houses of the Fallen

Angels of Wrath

The seven ages of Creation spawned seven Celestial Houses of angels, each one created to govern its own facet of the cosmos. Fire and wind, the earth and the stars, the seas, the wilds, even life itself was governed by a host of angels mandated by God. Although the fallen turned on Heaven and renounced their service to the Creator, the essence of who and what they are remains.

Orders of Damnation

Demon: Houses of the Fallen provides an in-depth look into each of the seven Houses of the infernal host, exploring their history and exploits during the Fall and the War of Wrath. Though twisted by the suffering of their long exile, the fallen still bear the spark of their former glory, and the ancient ties of House loyalties are not easily forgotten.

DEMON the fallen

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Houses of the Fallen

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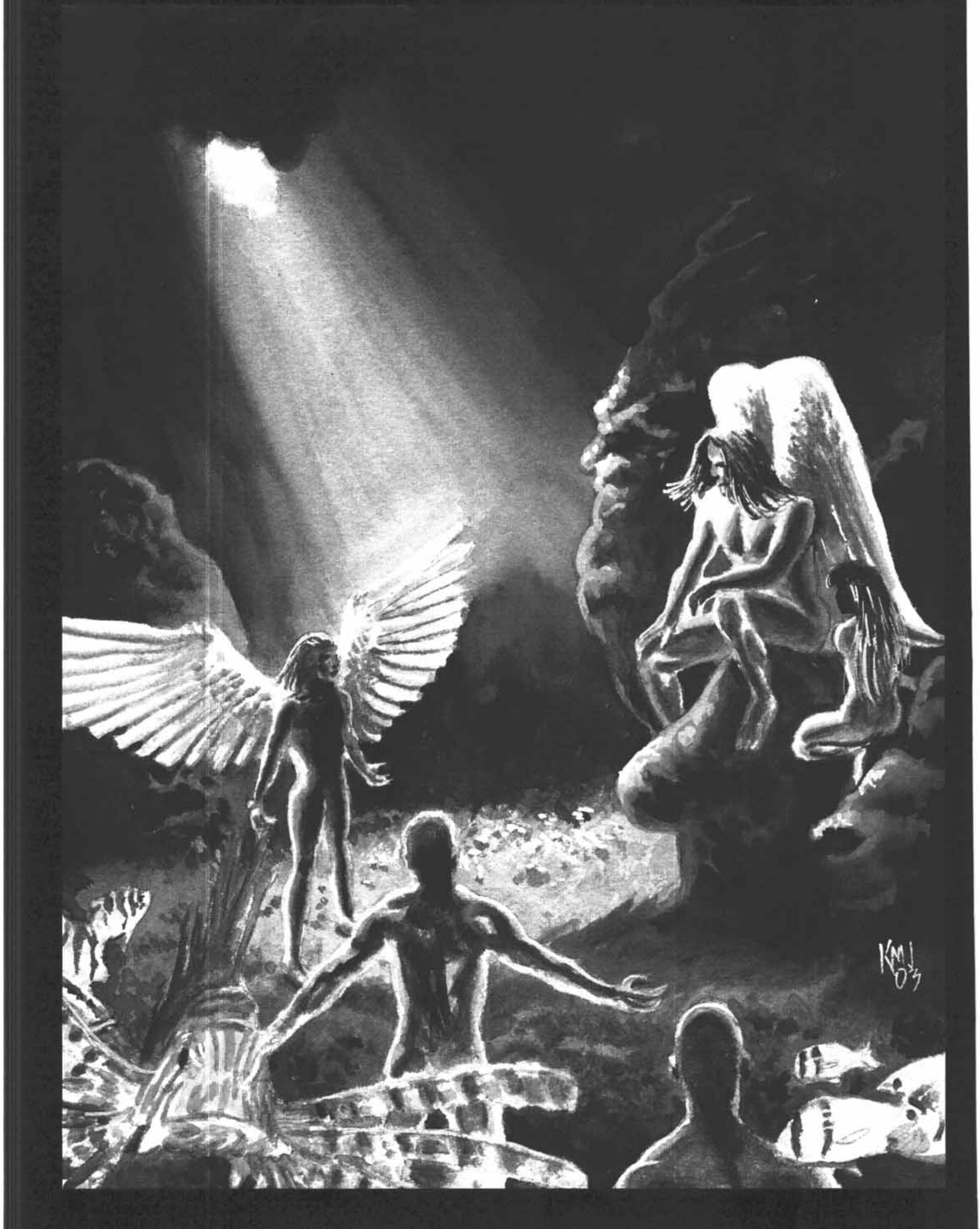
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INTRODUCTION

1: In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

2: And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

3: And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

4: And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.

—Genesis 1:1-4

God was alone in the depths of the void. He looked out at the endless night and sought to fill it with something that would ease His loneliness, so He gave of Himself, taking a portion of His essence and pouring it out like a vast ocean into the emptiness.

The unborn universe was dark and without form, and the void pressed against it from all sides. God moved across the face of the waters and said, "Let there be light," and from His radiance the angels were born. Each spirit was a mote of divine power and wisdom, and their light was the first dawn of Creation. They stood at the edge of the cosmos, pushing back the void, for God made them to be the guardians and caretakers of all that He created. According to God's plan, the angels were ordered into a strict hierarchy, each rank given a specific role to play in the work that was to come. Indeed, having separated the day from the night in the glory of the angels' birth, God called out a number of the Heavenly Host by name and gave them dominion over the dawn. These were the angels of the morning, and their sacred duty was to bring God's light into every part of His creation, and to communicate God's wishes to the rest of the Heavenly Host. These spirits were the first angelic House, and greatest among them was Lucifer.

And so God's plan unfolded. He divided the heavens from the earth, and summoned angels by name who would direct the winds and carry His breath to every corner of Creation. He parted the waters and called forth land and summoned angels to

tend its fires and watch over the wilderness. God lit the fires of the sun and shaped the moon and stars to give signs and seasons and portents, and He named the angels who would direct their courses. He called forth angels to watch over the oceans and all the life within, and still others to tend the beasts of the earth. Every spirit had its role, and each was content.

The Houses of the Fallen

Demon: The Fallen has seven different character types available in the core rules, based upon the seven stages (days) of creation. Each character type commands a different realm of power, depending on the responsibilities assigned to the House during the formation of the world. More than a shared ideology or culture (though encompassing both), a demon's House defines its fundamental essence and outlook on the universe. Though the fallen are certainly individuals, with unique preferences and personalities, their Houses are the foundation that all else is built upon, and they pervade every aspect of day-to-day existence.

This book presents the history, personality and perspectives that define each of the seven Houses of the infernal host, providing for players and Storytellers a richer background to draw from when creating characters for their **Demon** chronicles.

Namaru: The Devils

Once belonging to the House of the Dawn and serving as God's heralds to the rest of the Heavenly Host, these angels were the standard-bearers of God's will and the champions of humanity. Now these Devils use their charisma and powers of persuasion to twist mortal and immortal minds to serve their own wicked desires. Devils are the ultimate deceivers, corrupting souls with guile and honeyed words. Despite their magnetism and presence, or perhaps because of it, they are never quite able to fit in with humans or other demons, and they must struggle even harder against the anguish that threatens their sanity. Devils are drawn to humans with great vision and towering ambition, such as executives, politicians and entertainers who believe that they are a law unto themselves.

Asharu: The Scourges

These former Angels of the Firmament were given the task of directing the winds and carrying the life-giving breath of God to those whom the Creator wished to save. Now these demons are the bearers of plague and pestilence, their passage swift and unseen but their punishments cruel and lingering. Depending on their whim, they can heal or poison with a touch. Scourges are drawn to those fearful souls who believe in perils that lurk just out of sight.

Annunaki: The Malefactors

The Malefactors are the artisans among the fallen, once given charge of the earth and all that lies within it. These demons are cunning, patient and thoughtful, using their powers of fabrication to turn the most mundane items into wondrous gifts that ultimately corrupt the recipient. These are the classic demons of myth who supplied every cursed sword, every magic mirror, every glorious, poisonous treasure that brought doom on kings and kingdoms alike. Malefactors are drawn to insecure, needy souls, perhaps outwardly strong but hungry for some object that will make their dreams come true.

Neberu: The Fiends

The Fiends once directed the course of the sun, moon and stars, weaving the complex patterns that governed the tides, seasons and portents of Heaven. Their power lay in the night, in dreams and visions, and now they use their knowledge to trap the unwary mind in nets of madness. Where once they were oracles, dispensing wisdom and warnings, now they are the masters of nightmares and far-reaching curses. Fiends are drawn to those vainglorious souls who covet secrets and forbidden knowledge.

Lammasu: The Defilers

The Defilers are seducers — ever-changing, always alluring. They were given dominion over the oceans, and they can alter their appearance like quicksilver, taking the form of their victim's greatest desire. They can manipulate not only their own bodies, but others' as well, granting glorious beauty in place of ugliness, but always for a price. These demons seek out the vain and the heartbroken, tangling them in webs of glamour and stealing their faith right before their eyes.

Rabisu: The Devourers

Devourers are the warriors among the fallen, given charge of the beasts of the wilderness and infused with the nature of the predator. They are naturally fierce and impulsive by nature, favoring action over long-winded discussion. By the same token, they are not inclined to slow punishments or long, convoluted corruption. They incite, ravage, annihilate and move on. Devourers are naturally drawn to violent, aggressive individuals as the source of their power, be they street thugs, cops, soldiers or corporate sharks.

Halaku: The Slayers

After God created man and woman, He returned to Heaven, His labors complete — leaving death and decay to follow in His wake. In the beginning, the Slayers touched only plants and animals, taking those

past their time and returning their essences back to the earth. They were the Angels of Death, the silent, gentle Reapers who did God's bidding and ended life when its time had come. After the rebellion, their mandate came to include humanity as well. Now the Slayers who turned their back on Heaven are the tormentors of the dead, masters of spirit who can raise ghosts, reap souls from living bodies or trap a spirit in a vessel of their choosing. Slayers are drawn to souls who believe that there is nothing left worth living for, or those who cling to life at the expense of those around them.

How to Use This Book

This book is divided into eight chapters. Each of the seven infernal Houses has a chapter dedicated to it, and an eighth chapter focuses on presenting House intrigue and power politics in a **Demon** chronicle. Remember, though, that the most important "chapter" in a storytelling game is your imagination. Never let anything in this book become a substitute for your own creativity.

Each House profile chapter addresses the following topics:

Before the Fall depicts the nature of the House in the early days of Creation — its role, duties and perspectives on Earth and humanity. This depiction is followed by the House's perspectives on the Great Debate and the primary reasons that angels of the House chose to follow Lucifer's call to rebel.

The House at War describes how the fallen reinvented their House in the wake of the Fall. The section explores how the House reorganized itself in the wake of Lucifer's creation of the five legions, and explores how militantly House members approached the struggle against Heaven. In addition to describing the House's perspectives on the war, the section explores how the House maintained its identity amid the conflicting interests generated by the legions and Lucifer's feudal meritocracy. Finally, the section relates some of the more notable exploits of House members during the war as well as individual contributions to the war effort.

Out of the Abyss discusses how the overall character and perspectives of the House members changed after exposure to the Abyss. Further, the section explores how the House is trying to re-establish itself in the modern World of Darkness. Topics discussed include the following: Who is in charge? How are they trying to locate and connect with other House members? What are the House's perspectives on the current situation? Is it eager to get back to the way things were during the war, or is it interested in creating a brand new paradigm? Who are the prominent House members at large in the modern World of Darkness, and what are they up to?

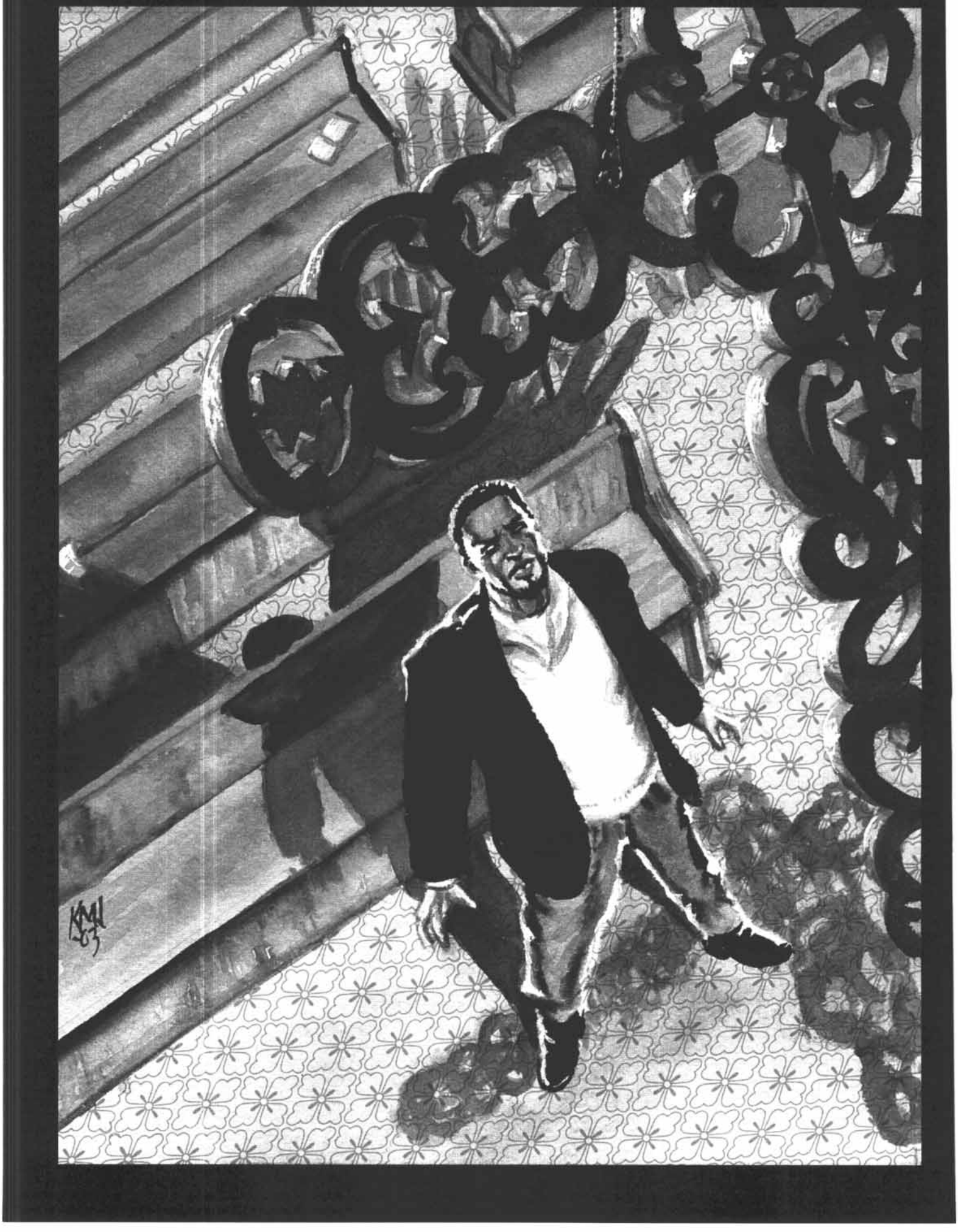
Relics and Lost Lore profiles a number of House-specific rituals and infernal relics dating from the war, which Storytellers can use in their chronicles, or to draw inspiration from when creating their own. The relic profiles are especially intended to act as story seeds and springboards for the Storyteller's own creativity, so don't feel limited by an item's history, its description or even its special powers. Feel free to alter its nature to best suit your needs.

Character Creation is a section devoted to detailed guidelines and advice for creating characters from the profiled House, from Nature and Demeanor to spending freebie points and everything in between. Tips for selecting Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds, Virtues and Lore provide a comprehensive outline for creating an evocative character from a given House.

The Persistence of Memory

Human memory is notoriously subjective. Two different eyewitnesses to the same event can and often do provide dramatically different descriptions of what happened due to the different perspectives and preconceptions of the individuals involved. The fallen are no different. Though they ideally have near-perfect recall of everything they've ever seen or done, the memories themselves are just as subjective based on each demon's unique viewpoint. The fact that their memories are more fragmented by the vagaries of possession only confuse the matter further. Two demons who fought side by side in the same battle might have equally vivid but totally different recollections of what happened.

As a result, while the different House histories of the war all ostensibly discuss the same events and notable figures, discrepancies and omissions occur between accounts. For example, the Devils extol the virtues of Xaphan and his heroic but doomed defense of the shadow lands, but the Slayers' account of Heaven's assault speaks only of the deeds of Charon and his lieutenants. Both accounts are equally valid, colored only by the viewpoints of the individuals involved. Even in the case of the fallen, each demon knows only a small part of the full story.



Chapter One: The House of the Morning Star

What though the field be lost?
All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?
That Glory never shall his wrath or might Extort from me.
—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

When the Creator first reached out His hand and stirred the fabric of Creation into life, He created the Heralds — beings of starlight and nobility, His perfect prototype for the rest of the Elohim. They were radiant, flawless, incorruptible.

And yet, they fell.

They fell from God's grace due to the very qualities the Creator had given them — nobility, courage and love for human beings. When faced with the hardest choice that has ever been required in the history of the universe, many Heralds took the terrible decision to follow Lucifer and reject God's will. To do otherwise would have been to deny the ethical code God had charged them with and deny the truth that moved through them since the universe began.

After their Fall, the dissident Heralds became Devils — leaders and princes of a rebellion against everything they had once embodied. The purpose of their existence changed, but the Devils still retained the qualities that had made them Heaven's best and brightest. Devils led the rebel forces against the Host of Heaven; Devils stood alone to protect humanity from God and monsters alike; Devils governed and advised the legions as they had governed the angels in Heaven. Even those Devils who were consumed by anger and bitterness — few at first, but more and more as the Time of Atrocities wore on — were regal monsters, who performed their terrible crimes with courage and dignity. When the rebellion finally failed and the demon hosts were confined to Hell, the Devils went to the Abyss with the knowledge that they had remained true to their ideals. Even in their Fall, they never faltered or compromised.

But when the bonds of Hell shattered and the Devils returned to Creation, they found that their

resolve and heroism simply hadn't *mattered*. The human race, and Creation itself, had done something far worse than rejecting them — it had *forgotten* them. The defiant courage of the Devils had accomplished nothing, and Creation no longer recognized them or even *needed* them. It was a punishment far worse than any of them could have imagined.

Devils are complex, contradictory characters, more so than perhaps any other House. Some are noble, generous leaders who still wish to free humanity from God's rule — but who think nothing of manipulating and using innocent mortals to forward those plans. Some want God's forgiveness but will not renounce the pride and hubris that sent them to Hell in the first place. And some are terrible monsters who wish to rule the world with an iron fist, approaching that goal with the courage and idealism that befits a chosen Prince of Heaven.

They are the black paladins of Hell, the puppeteers of a lost Heaven and the heroes of a world that doesn't want them. They are the Namaru.

Before the Fall

Before time began, before time *existed*, there was the Creator and the void — infinity and nothingness, existence and absence. To continue His own existence, the Creator needed something else to exist, a third entity that could separate the All from the None — the universe. Creation.

God *could* have fashioned Creation directly, with no more than the force of His desire, but to do so would have required the Creator to touch the Abyss directly and be contaminated by its nothingness. Therefore, intermediaries were needed — emissaries that could mold the Abyss into a new form and erect a barrier between the Creator and the void. And so, God created the angels, perfect agents that could create a universe in His name — and the first and most glorious of these angels were the Heralds, messenger's of the Creator's will.

The Coming of the Dawn

Like stars, the bright bodies of the Heralds burned in the emptiness of the void. Indeed, the Heralds *were* stars — each mobile, sentient being simultaneously a vast furnace of nuclear fire — and the brightest was Lucifer, first and greatest of them all. They shone brilliantly in a space that was less than vacuum, less than emptiness. They watched as God created a vast legion of angels, drew six more Houses of Elohim from His substance. The angels gathered together in ranks with the Heralds at the forefront, and the Elohim of the lesser Houses wondered at the reason for their existence.

And as they wondered, God called the bright stars of the Heralds to His side, because He could not communicate His plan directly to the lesser Elohim. For while the other angels were creatures of immense power and divinity, they were still too small and too flawed to withstand the full force of God's plan. His words would have destroyed them, and their imperfection would have sullied and corrupted the Creator's very being. Only the Heralds were strong enough, perfect enough, to listen to God's plan without flinching or tainting Him through their weakness.

The Creator said to them, "Something new must be brought into being — an eternal barrier to touch the void and keep it at bay. I cannot make this Myself without making it *of* Myself, so you must make it for Me. Here is My plan for this Creation, a thing of life and change that can adapt to the touch of the void. You will take My plan to the other Elohim, and under your guidance they will build a universe." And the Divine Plan of the Creator filled the Elohim such that they nearly crumbled under its weight — until Lucifer, first and strongest of them, took the bulk of the Divine Plan into his soul, bearing its weight and protecting his fellows from its power.

Filled with the divine word of the Lord, the Heralds returned to the waiting ranks of the lesser Elohim. At their head was Lucifer, incandescent with his own brilliance and the blazing power of God's plan. When he spoke, his words were bursts of light that illuminated the infinite expanse of the void.

"We have been given a task," said Lucifer, "and that task is nothing less that the creation of a universe. Our work will not just build a barrier between God and the void, but make that barrier a perfect place that will house God's own glory. To the Heralds God has given the responsibility of leading and directing you, the lesser angels. To you will fall the task of building and constructing Creation and everything in it, to follow the plan as we direct you. Together we will make our Creator proud. Now let us begin."

The Creation of the Universe

In seven days, the Host of Heaven built a single world. And over the course of billions of years, the laws of reality brought a universe into being. Both of these events happened at the same time, because they were the same event. The world was the universe, and the seven days lasted billions of years, and the result in both cases was Creation itself.

Under the guidance of the Heralds, the six Houses of the Host built reality, spinning it from the nothingness of the void and shaping it with their intent. Embodying the laws of reality that the Creator had chosen, the angels used their evocations — their very will and being — to create something from nothing.

While the other Houses did this, the Heralds watched and directed and assisted where they thought it necessary. As the purest and most perfect of angels, the Heralds did not work directly on the building of Creation. Such a task would have required them to touch and interact with the void, or with the slowly forming nucleus of the world, and that would have *changed* them, sullied them with the essence of the imperfect. And if the Heralds were corrupted, so too would be God's Divine Plan.

Such contamination could not be countenanced by the Heralds, so they worked from afar, above and apart from their fellows. Always proud and regal, the Heralds became even more so, and their pride in their perfection and judgment grew and grew. When they did take a hand, it was to command and direct other angels, using their ability to strengthen the will and evocations of their fellows. This too made them feel apart from and superior to the other Elohim. The celestial hierarchy was established at this time. It was a chain of prestige and influence with the House of the Dawn at the top, and no one saw this as being anything other than right and proper.

Under the guidance of the Heralds, Creation took shape. The Angels of the Fundament formed a planet, and the Angels of the Firmament encased it in air. The Angels of the Wild shaped animals and plants that the air brought to life. The Angels of the Deep created water to sustain that life, and the Angels of the Second World shepherded spirits back to God when life came to an end. The Angels of the Spheres set time into motion and plotted the course of the stars in the sky — the stars that were the Angels of the Dawn, the Heralds watching over Creation to guide and rectify any problems that arose.

All was eternal and sustaining, needing only the last element to make it perfect. The time had come for the culmination of God's Divine Plan: the creation of humanity.

The Birth of Man

The Heralds watched as the other Elohim created man in God's image, and were filled with love for their creation. When the time came for the Heralds to bequeath God's divinity to mankind, they touched the face of the sleeping Adam and Eve and knew that *this* was the crowning moment of their existence.

Then came God's edicts — for the angels to love humanity above all things and to never reveal themselves to the race of Adam and Eve. For the Heralds, the first was trivial, even meaningless. They could do nothing else *but* love humanity with all their heart. But the second command sent fear and pain — and worse, *uncertainty* — into the souls of the Heralds.

Why would the Creator make such a demand? Why keep the angels — more importantly, the *Heralds* — from humanity? In the spaces between the layers of reality, the Heralds whispered and speculated. Some felt that God was not to be questioned, but most were too proud and too passionate to simply leave it at that. Two theories became popular among the Heralds. One was that the Creator was displeased with the work of the Elohim and sought to rebuke the angels by forbidding them to interact with humanity, the pinnacle of that creation. The other was that the Creator did not *trust* the Heralds (and by extension, the rest of the angels) to interact with mankind, fearing the Elohim would harm or sully humans through error or imperfection. Both of these theories were unbearable to the pride of the Heralds, who *knew* themselves to be perfect and to have created a perfect Universe. Though they would not admit it, many Heralds came to secretly believe that the Creator's edict was wrong, and in this first elevation of their own judgment over that of God, the Heralds laid the foundation of the Fall.

Decline and Fall

For a time that cannot be measured, the Elohim watched over humanity from a distance, loving their charges while staying separate and secret from them. Mankind remained unaware of the wonders of the Creation that the Heralds (and the other angels) had made, and the Heralds despaired. Humans *could* learn, but only slowly and with difficulty. Like animals, they needed to suffer and feel pain in order to learn from their mistakes. But the Elohim could not bear to allow their charges to feel that pain. The only alternative was to intervene, to teach humanity directly and unlock its true potential — but that, of course, was forbidden. Watching the first man and woman wander blindly through the perfection of Creation, lost in their ignorance, tormented the Heralds. They watched and helped maintain Paradise, and they wondered whether the Creator would ever explain His actions to His angels.

Then came Ahrimal's vision of a coming disaster, and the Great Debate between the Elohim. Some angels wanted to act, to intervene and save humanity from the darkness lurking in the future; others wanted to stay their hand, trusting in God's vision and the authority of His orders. The Debate was deadlocked and inconclusive until Lucifer, the Lightbringer, the first and wisest of all the Elohim, made his appearance. Lucifer argued that obeying the Creator's command to love and protect humanity *required* them to disobey His commandment of secrecy. Lucifer's argument was born of limitless pride and of limitless love for humanity, and when he spoke, he spoke for almost all the Heralds. They embraced his words and



followed him to Eden to reveal themselves to humanity. Like Lucifer, they acted from pride, certain that they were right — and like Lucifer, they acted from compassion, because they felt that only through this defiance could they rescue humanity from the eternal prison God would have trapped them in.

And so the rebel Heralds, angels made so wise and perfect that they could not accept the possibility of their judgment being flawed, turned their backs on God. Thus they were condemned by Him to become the Devils — creatures so reviled that they were deemed beneath the Creator's contempt and unworthy of His notice.

And thus the Elohim fell.

The Sin of Pride

Pride lies in the heart of every Devil. The virtue that made them the greatest of God's angels is the sin that led them to reject the Creator's wisdom in favor of their own. Pride gives a Devil the conviction she needs to fight for her goals and to inspire others to follow her example. Taken too far, pride becomes an overwhelming arrogance that puts the character's desires and personal glory above all other things. All Devils have an element of pride in their personalities. What varies is the extent to which that pride strengthens the character's resolve or blinds her to her own faults.

The House at War

Paradise was no more. The rebellious demons had been condemned by the Creator, but Lucifer's forces had in turn repelled Michael and the Heavenly Host. Now the rebels and their leader — once a perfect Herald, now a defiant Devil — found themselves and their human charges at the dawn of a new era, a time of infinite possibilities.

This was the Age of Wrath. It was a time of wonder and terror, when the demons plumbed Creation's infinite possibilities and helped determine the ultimate destiny of the human race. And it was a time when the Namaru, the Devils, reinvented their rebel House of heroes and serpents, leaders and monsters, and laid the foundation for the tortured beings they would ultimately become.

The First Days

In the beginning, the rebels were without purpose or plan. The Namaru looked to Lucifer, the best and brightest of their number, to provide leadership.

Many of them expected him to establish a similar hierarchy to that of Heaven, with the seven rebel Houses arranged in strict order of power and responsibility, but Lucifer had other plans.

Prince of the Fallen

In many ways, the early history of the Namaru is the story of Lucifer — the first and greatest of the Heralds and the Devils alike. The Lightbringer spoke for his House during the Great Debate and after the Fall. Where he led, the vast majority of Devils followed.

This isn't to say that Devils weren't individuals in the time following the Fall, nor that some of the Namaru didn't disagree with their leader. But in a House based on pride, no one was more deserving of that pride than Lucifer. In a House of heroes and leaders, no one was more heroic and inspiring than the Lightbringer. His glory shone across Creation, and his actions influenced the thoughts and deeds of all Namaru. It would not be until his disappearance that the rest of the Devils would come out of his shadow and begin to shape their own destinies.

The Creation of the Legions

Lucifer led the rebel host from the ruins of Paradise into a new and scarred Creation, a place of wild beauty and terrible devastation. As they traveled away from the scene of their rebellion, Lucifer felt the changes moving through his compatriots — disillusionment and despair, hope and hatred — and he knew that he could not simply co-opt the hierarchy of Heaven for this new society. The lower Houses would allow themselves to be lorded over by the higher Houses again, and those of the higher Houses needed to prove their worth before they could take command.

Calling a halt to the march in the Valley of Tears, Lucifer spoke to the gathered demons. "The order of Heaven is no more. No longer will Dawn command Spirit, Light dominate Wild. These are the dictates of the Creator, and to keep them would be to betray our rebellion. Deeds are what will matter from now on, not one's House; strength and ability, not God's plan. We shall create our own plan, and those who lead will be those who *deserve* to lead."

Lucifer created the legions — part armies, part political bodies, part ideologies — and allowed the demons to flock to the legion with which they identified. Each of these legions was organized as a hierarchy, a structure of dukes and barons and fell knights, according to Lucifer's advice and wisdom — the first courts, the first expression of the new demonic plan for Creation.

Lucifer's own Crimson Legion was dedicated to teaching and protecting the race of man. The grim Ebon Legion rejected humanity and fought Heaven for the betterment of demons alone. The Iron Legion, while also a militaristic legion, fought instead to protect humanity from Heaven's wrath. The Silver Legion worked to uncover the secrets of Creation and God Himself, partially spies and partially explorers. Finally, the Alabaster Legion hid from view, separating itself from the coming conflict to shepherd the souls of man to the afterlife and protect those spirits as best it could.

The overwhelming majority of the Namaru gravitated toward the Crimson Legion, the only legion dominated by another Devil, and the one most aligned with their own gifts and purpose. A significant portion joined the Ebon Legion, their pride compelling them to consider themselves above the mortals that they no longer felt like serving, while a few allied themselves with the other legions.

As the legions separated to build their fortresses and settle their human flocks, Lucifer sought out each of the Namaru and spoke to them in turn. "We have always been the pinnacle of Creation," he said, "and this has not changed. But no longer can we rule our fellows from afar. If you would regain that power and responsibility, you must earn it and *work* to gain the respect and devotion of your fellows. Only then will you be strong enough to shoulder the burden of leadership. We are the most perfect of the Sebettu; the time has come for us to *prove* this."

From each of his fellows Lucifer took the tattered and damaged remnants of God's plan, the divine power that the Namaru still bore in their souls, and took it upon himself. No longer were the Devils burdened by the majestic weight of the plan. No longer did they struggle to contain the Creator's power and intentions. Lucifer took the plan fully unto himself, a power so great that only the Lightbringer could bear its touch, and he used his gifts to conceal it from the rest of Creation. And so God's plan — and perhaps the clues to why He forbade the Elohim to interact with humanity — was lost, and the Sebettu knew it no more.

The New Order

As the legions established themselves and built their fortresses across Creation, the forces of Heaven built their own cities and gathered their strength for the coming fight. Their battles were calm, bloodless affairs at this time, long before the First Murder and the Time of Atrocities, and both sides focused more on establishing their forces and negotiating territory than on clashes or confrontations. Occasionally angels and demons would fight, but such "battles" were more like

exchanges of ideas or contests of skill than anything mortals would recognize as war. For hundreds of years, this quiet conflict went on between angels and demons, while humanity spread out to encompass Creation, guided by the ideals of the Crimson Legion.

During this time, the Namaru worked their way into positions of power in all of the legions. While most demons learned to balance their loyalties between House and legion, many Devils still saw themselves as Namaru first, legionnaires second. The Devils were still proud creatures who felt that power and leadership roles were theirs by right — but in this new order, they took Lucifer's words to heart and *acted* to convince others of this as well.

Proving themselves through their deeds, the Namaru won the respect and loyalty of their fellows, and in turn moved up in the ranks of command. In the Crimson Legion, Devils used their powers to inspire mortals to new heights and to assist the efforts of their fellow demons. Warriors in the Ebon and Iron Legions stood against the forces of Heaven in bloodless combat, demonstrating their skill with evocations and arms to repel angelic opponents. The Namaru of the Silver Legion explored the far reaches of Creation. As for the scant handful of Devils in the Alabaster Legion, they used their powers to enhance the efforts of their Slayer allies, taking a support role to demons they were used to commanding — and perhaps learning a little humility in the process.

The Time of Atrocities

The calm, measured war of the angels and demons ended suddenly and terribly when Caine slew his brother Abel. The shockwaves of this event ripped through Creation, opening the souls of both mortals and demons to the possibilities of violence, excess and hatred. Some of the Namaru, especially those closest to Lucifer, were able to resist the temptation of sin and stay pure. Many more saw the opportunities offered by atrocity and sin and embraced the darkness wholeheartedly.

During the Siege of Sagun, the Namaru of the Ebon Legion joined their Devourer and Scourge allies to unleash the destructive power of their souls. Wrathful Devils sent waves of flame through mortal townships to consume helpless humans, channeled their inner radiance into bolts of blazing energy or paralyzed the angelic defenders by warping and deforming their own spiritual powers. Already in positions of command, the Devils of the Ebon Legion secured even more power and authority during the siege, coordinating the attacking forces and setting the once-glorious citadel ablaze.

Meanwhile, the Namaru of the Silver Legion had discovered an entirely new weapon in the Devilish arsenal: *deception*. In the wake of the First Murder, a Devil named Kel Asuf told a deliberate untruth to a mortal follower, and the human believed him. Previously such a lie would have been inconceivable, but now Kel Asuf knew that deception and untruth were possible — and that the Namaru ability to inspire and command mortals could be bent to manipulate and deceive them as well. Knowledge of this new ability exploded outward from the Silver Citadel of Tabâ'et', filling the minds of Devils across Creation. The Namaru began to explore their new role as masters of deception, while Kel Asuf began to perfect what would later become the Lore of Humanity.

In the aftermath of Sagun's destruction, Lucifer confronted Abaddon, leader of the Ebon Legion — a meeting that ended with a second rebellion and the sundering of the legions. In the wake of Abaddon's revolt Lucifer summoned all the Namaru in Creation to him once more. With the loyalist Namaru of the Crimson and Iron Legions behind him, Lucifer addressed his brethren. "Creation has changed, and darkness now stains what was once perfect and radiant. Yet there is no need for *us* to be stained in the same way. Our purity, our perfection — these things have never been in doubt. Do not succumb to the temptations of darkness, my brethren, for we are always beings of the light."

At his words, some of the Namaru left the ranks of the separatists and rejoined the loyalist legions — but not all. Kel Asuf the Deceiver addressed his former commander: "Creation *has* changed, Lightbringer, this is true. It changed from the moment the tyrant God rejected our wisdom — *your* wisdom — and destroyed Paradise. Creation is now ripe with a potential that has always been denied us, and the opportunity to forever show our perfection and superiority in ways that were impossible until now. And now you would command us as the Creator once did? You, the first rebel, the first to tell us to trust our own judgment above all others? The Divine Plan has passed from Creation, and you do not have that right, not any more. You have taught us too well, Lucifer, and we will not bend knee to you any longer."

And so the separatist Namaru turned their backs on Lucifer, the first and greatest of them, and embraced their sins. As Lucifer watched them leave, he saw them joined by other Namaru, former loyalists of the Crimson and Iron swayed by the words of Kel Asuf and the temptations of power.

And Lucifer wept.

Glory and Depravity

The age after the First Murder was like a second Fall for many of the Namaru, who threw aside morality and loyalty to their House for personal power and glory. And yet, they were Devils still. While they refuted the principles and dreams of Lucifer and the Crimson Legion, the renegade Namaru still acted like the regal leaders they once were and worked to achieve the recognition and authority they felt was their due. Depraved and sinful though they were, they were heroes still, striving to advance the goals of their legions and destroy the Host of Heaven.

For their part, the Crimson and Iron Legions focused on defending humanity from angel and demon alike, while working to reach the race's true potential. Those Namaru still following the Lightbringer gave their all to live up to the standards of nobility and dedication that Lucifer preached. They tried to embody all that had ever been pure and perfect in the Sebettu, even in the face of darkness.

It was called the Time of Atrocities, but it was also an age of nobility and a time of heroism, for the Namaru of both camps were heroes to their causes and charges. Whether standing for humanity's safety or the empowerment of demonkind, Devils stood tall and proud as the heroes of the Sebettu, the noble leaders and warriors that carried the banners of their cause. Namaru exemplars attacked the forces of Heaven, threw down angelic tyrants, destroyed the holy cities and took human slaves as tribute. Others defended humanity against tormented demons or the twisted creatures that had been born from the contamination of Creation by the First Murder. Even when Devil fought against Devil and gave no quarter, they did so with pride and valor. It was a House divided against itself, but loyal to the same *ideals* if not the same causes.

Shining figures of radiance or terrifying apparitions of flame, the Namaru became the figures of legend for both demon and mortal alike, and tales of their valor and depravity live on today in human myths and archetypes. Gilgamesh, Prometheus, Beowulf, Coyote — all reflections and glimpses of the truth, of Namaru heroism from before civilization began. The following are just some of the legends of Namaru heroism from the Time of Atrocities, the Age of Glories. Other stories still reverberate in the modern day, in both demonic and human memory.

Belphigor was one of the greatest leaders of the Crimson Legion, whose torment was that his former soulmate, Belphegor, was a leader of the renegade Silver Legion, who worked atrocities upon the mortals she enslaved. When Belphigor led an expedition to Tabâ'et' to demand the release of a mortal flock, his sister agreed on one condition — that he surrender himself to her and be her prisoner and experimental subject for a year and a day. The warriors of the Crimson Legion prepared to do battle with the armies of Tabâ'et', rather than surrender one of their greatest generals until Belphigor stayed them with a word, laid down his sword and armor, and walked alone into the gates of the Silver Citadel. When Belphegor broke her word and refused to release her human prisoners, and when her forces beat back the Crimson Legion, Belphigor remained her cooperative prisoner, allowing her to commit all manner of terrible experiments and punishments upon his soul and flesh. A year and a day later, Belphigor emerged from Tabâ'et', sorely wounded and much abused, but with his honor intact. And when he led the Crimson Legion back to Tabâ'et', he razed the Silver Citadel to the ground, until no brick lay atop another. Yet he raised no hand to his soulmate, and he accepted her surrender with nobility and respect.

Fossegrim the Unyielding, the Ravager of Innocents, was a prominent figure in the Ebon Legion and a Namaru with a taste for atrocity. Leading his followers against mortal villages and townships, he enslaved humans and used them to assuage his own lusts or made them fight and die for the entertainment of his entourage. But when news arrived from the west about a monstrous creature preying upon mortals — a nightmarish spawn of the First Murder, dripping with poison and fire — Fossegrim armed himself and went to destroy the monster. It took him months of hunting before he found the creature in the process of destroying a mortal redoubt and devouring the humans within. The Namaru warlord threw himself upon the monster and fought it for seven days and seven nights, until the threatened mortals had escaped their ruined citadel. Only then did he unleash the full measure of his powers to destroy the abomination in an explosion of white fire. When asked by his lieutenants why he hunted down the monster and saved the hated mortals from its depredations, Fossegrim replied, "Mortals are our playthings, our property, and that makes *us* responsible for their preservation and their destruction. No misbegotten aberration of chaos may be permitted to prey on humanity, for such is our province and may not be usurped. Those mortals saved from this monster now know that their lives belong to me — not to God, nor to some abomination — and thus is the pride of the Ebon Legion preserved."

Called the White Sword or sometimes Humanity's Beacon, **Mythocht** was a warrior of the Iron Legion who gave her all to rescue mortals and demons alike from imprisonment at angelic hands. Yet one of her most famous exploits saw her battle the forces of the

Ebon Legion outside Araboth, the High City of Renunciation. When the Scourge Decarabia declared his intention to surrender to the Host and enter Araboth for God's punishment, the Ebon Legion vowed to destroy him for deserting the rebel cause. The Iron Legion refused to aid Decarabia, rejecting him as a traitor, but Mythocht went alone to the gates of Araboth to defend the Scourge. She beat back an entire battalion of Ebon Legion warriors beneath the walls of the heavenly city. When the Ebon Legion retreated, Decarabia went to thank Mythocht, but she cut him off. "Thank me not, for I too consider you a traitor. Yet we turned our back on the Creator for the right to make our own choices, and you have had the conviction to make yours. Your weakness is an offense to my eye, but none shall gainsay your right to that weakness, not while my soul still breathes." Then Mythocht turned her back and walked away, and Decarabia entered Araboth, never to return.

Few Namaru joined the secretive Alabaster Legion, but **Xaphan** was the best known of those who did. While his Slayer compatriots toiled to create a haven for the dead souls of humanity, Xaphan did his best to assist in their efforts and to defend them against the occasional forays by Heaven's Host. His aegis was sufficient until Usiel, one of the most powerful angels of the House of the Second World, led a force of angels into the spirit world to destroy the Halaku's creation once and for all. With only a small force of warriors at his disposal, Xaphan knew victory was impossible — yet still he stood before the approaching army, armed in all the fire and finery of his House, blocking their path. Xaphan fought the forces of Heaven valiantly and threw down many angels, but Usiel's scythe touched his side and he was no more, his soul obliterated — exactly as the Namaru had planned. The Devil's death sent reverberations throughout the spirit world, throwing it into chaos, and a vortex of spiritual energy erupted on the spot of the Devil's death, shrouding the spirit haven in a raging storm. Usiel's army was forced to withdraw lest they be engulfed and destroyed. Xaphan's sacrifice saved the Alabaster Legion and its haven from destruction, and his death remains celebrated by Slayers even into the modern day.

The Long March

Lucifer tolerated the existence of the rebel legions and their predatory ways for a millennium and more, but his patience finally reached an end. Mobilizing the Crimson and Iron Legions, he marched upon the separatists, demanding they cease their campaign of terror and genocide and return to his command.

The Long March lasted for years, and it pitted Devil against Devil on the battlefield and in the negotiation room. Namaru heroes of the Crimson Legion led armies against the citadels of the Ebon and Silver; defiant Namaru warriors of the Ebon Legion held off those armies with courage and skill in arms. Over and over again, the conflict boiled down to a battle between Namaru generals and warriors, fought on the burning battlements of Dûdâêl, Tabâ'et' and Kâsdejâ. The Devils of the Ebon and Silver Legions found hard and fought well, but in the end, they were outnumbered and overwhelmed. Lucifer gave no quarter and extended no leniency to his brethren, and the renegade Namaru fell to the evocations and coordinated efforts of the Crimson Legion.

One final time Lucifer assembled the ranks of the Namaru and addressed them in the Great Hall of Genhinnom from his Black Throne. "For too long, we Namaru have allowed ourselves to be blinded by pride. We have striven for glory and honor, but forgotten our responsibilities. No longer can this be allowed, not when

The Heroic Ideal

While it's true that Devils are the source of the "heroic ideal," it's important to realize that Devils don't see "heroism" as a *moral* stance. Heroism, as they see it, isn't about "fighting for the good" — it's about fighting for a cause with courage and conviction, no matter what that cause might be. As far as the Namaru are concerned, it's entirely possible to be heroic while also being a murderer. Indeed, it's possible to murder in a heroic fashion.

Heroism is about determination, dedication and never backing down — at least as far as Devils are concerned. A coward fights through subordinates or compromises to get what he wants, or he rejects responsibility for his actions. A hero does none of these things. He fights his own battles, he does not falter or compromise in his efforts. He accepts the consequences of his actions and takes those actions nonetheless. The Namaru concept of heroism is harsh and unleavened by mortal concepts like "decency" or "morality." Devils — at least, those Devils who live up to their heroic ideals — act with honor and nobility, with courage and readiness to sacrifice all, and that is enough.

Not all Devils hold themselves up as heroes. Too many have learned to take the easy way out, and they use their talents for manipulation and deception to get what they want without taking risks. But all Namaru respect the heroic ideal, even the connivers and cheaters of the House. A Devil with a reputation for courage, heroism and nobility will always receive respect from other Namaru, even those who consider her an enemy.



victory over the tyrant God is at last a possibility. To us must fall the duty of guiding humanity to its full potential, for our birthright grants us power over humanity our fellows cannot match. And to us must fall the duty of governing and guiding all of demonkind — not from afar as we did in the Creator's service, but at their side and at their head. We have squandered our gifts and neglected our duty over these last years, distracted by the pursuit of personal glory. Now we must dedicate ourselves to serving humanity and fallen alike, serving them by governing them. Go from this place, and take command of Creation — not for own amusement or glory or honor, but for the betterment of all."

And with this, the massed Namaru left Genhinnom and dedicated themselves to serving others — by ruling as benevolent tyrants.

The Time of Babel

Unlike the tumultuous chaos of the Time of Atrocities, the Time of Babel was an era of relative peace and calm. The Host of Heaven had been mostly repelled from Creation, and its rare sorties were easily pushed back by the Iron and Ebon Legions. The black experiments of the Silver Legion were halted, and the data from those experiments put to good use: to learn how to awaken the limitless potential of the human race and overthrow the Creator.

The Namaru took Lucifer's words to heart and strove to become the true leaders of the Sebettu and the greatest teachers of the mortal race. Devils who had once been no more than mighty warriors took the next step, becoming statesmen and advisors, governors rather than generals. Harnessing their incredible powers of charisma, Devils took command of all the major positions in the various legions — even the Ebon and Alabaster Legions — and administered the tithes the citadels paid to Genhinnom and the Crimson Legion. Among mortals, Devils shaped human civilizations and societies, acting as judges and defenders. Lucifer took steps to ensure that Devils never controlled mortal societies *directly* — such a position held too much temptation, too much potential for error — but he put Namaru into advisory positions, acting as viziers and teachers to human rulers.

The Grand Experiment

With a social order established — an order where the Namaru did not have complete control, but dominated the balance of power — Lucifer took the next bold step in his plan. He selected 10 of the wisest and most trusted members of the Crimson Legion and named them the Watchers. These trusted lieutenants were charged with teaching humanity the ultimate secrets of Creation, of giving the mortal race the tools and powers it would need to reach its ultimate potential.

Of the Watchers, only one was of Lucifer's own House. Shamshiel the Most Radiant, the Incandescent Throne of Morning, had been one of the select Heralds who had created the sun itself. Indeed, she had *been* the sun for a time, sharing that duty with other angels while Creation was still forming. No Namaru knew more of the sun's holy power than her, and her duty was to educate mankind in the sun's ways. She taught humanity of the seasons and of the passage of time. Under her tutelage, humanity divided the day into hours, the hour into minutes, and made time a substance that could be used as well as measured.

Some Namaru were curious as to why their House had so little representation among the Ten, given Lucifer's commandment to lead by example and command the Sebettu. To them, Lucifer replied, "Leadership is our responsibility, our duty, our purpose — but sometimes, to lead is to weaken. We take responsibility for our charges, and that is sacred, but in doing so we risk diminishing their ability to take responsibility for themselves. Humanity must learn and grow, and it must do so by taking charge of its own destiny — a task made all the more difficult if we stand before it, directing its every decision. Now is a time for *teaching*, not leading. Now is the time for the other Houses to do their work, just as they did when Creation was being formed."

Under the guidance of the Ten — who did not lead humanity to knowledge, but gave humanity the tools needed to create its own knowledge — mortal society prospered. People's eyes opened to the infinite possibilities of Creation and of themselves, and humanity built new things, creations unimagined by the Sebettu. They finally had all they needed to ascend to Heaven.

Until everything collapsed.

Disaster

To this day, few demons know who sabotaged the Grand Experiment or moved to forever deny humans their birthright. Most know only that a demon, (or group of demons) saw the ascendance of humanity as a threat, an exchange of one ruler for another, and acted to betray Lucifer's plans. Some demons believe that it was one of the Namaru who committed this sin, a Devil too proud and too hungry for power to submit to the Morningstar's plan. Others point the finger at the deposed leaders of the Ebon and Silver Legions (perhaps even assisted by elements of the Alabaster Legion), who plotted to destroy the dream of the Devil who had overthrown them. A few rare heretics even claim that Lucifer himself sabotaged his own plan as part of a secret campaign to destroy the Sebettu rebellion and return to the Creator's favor. Most demons have resigned themselves to never knowing the truth.

No matter who the betrayers were, their actions were terribly effective, spelling the end of the Grand Experiment. In a single night that was a stretch of years, demons mated with mortals and gave birth to the nephilim, a race of monsters and abominations that married the powers of demons to the divine potential of humanity — but without the mortality or nobility of either. In a few short years, the nephilim overran the world, dominating mortal society and throwing humanity into slavery. And to prevent their slaves from ever becoming free, the nephilim sought out and murdered the Ten.

Incandescent with fury, Lucifer assembled the full weight of the legions and descended on the nephilim, striking down each and every one of them he could find. Namaru warriors and heroes slew untold thousands of the abominations — and while a few Devils fell to the horrors in battle, their sacrifice only redoubled the righteous efforts of their fellows. Within days, no nephilim remained on the face of Creation (though rumor has it some escaped Lucifer's wrath and hid away until after the Shattering).

But the destruction of the nephilim and the punishment of their progenitors was for naught. The Ten were dead, the Grand Experiment halted, humanity had been pulled back into the clay — and the Host of Heaven descended onto the battlefield.

Downfall

The siege of the High Cities lasted for an age, and the Devils went once more into the front lines to fight off the Host of Heaven in this, the last and greatest war. Dûdâêl, Tabâ'et' and Kâsdejâ fell to the angels in the early days, leaving only Genhinnom to stand against their might — but Genhinnom was manned by Lucifer, the Crimson Legion and more than half of the Namaru. In the first and greatest city, the renegade House of the Morning Star made its stand.

For 40 days and 40 nights, the forces of Heaven assailed the walls of Genhinnom — and for 40 days and 40 nights, the Namaru held them back. Many are the legends of the Namaru heroes of the siege — Ladon, who repelled an army armed only with his own wounds; Nuriel, who threw down a score of malhim and never slew a single one; Scheded-Ma, whose death at the hands of Churiel was so noble that Churiel vowed never to fight again. And while Namaru fought and bled and died at the gates, Lucifer toiled inside the walls of the Citadel, perfecting new weapons and techniques to use against the attackers. It was Lucifer who invented rituals of evocation, allowing for displays of power that were orders of magnitude beyond those of a single demon. The firestorm he conjured engulfed an

entire celestial army in flames, down to the last solider, and sent them broken and defeated back to Heaven.

The heroism and ferocity of the defense of Genhinnom awed both rebel and Elohim alike, and perhaps the demons of the Crimson Legion could have prevailed had humanity not failed them. For in the first days of the siege, it became clear that humanity's faith in the rebel host was no more. Their civilizations shattered, the One Language snuffed out, humanity became estranged from the fallen and saw them not as saviors but unknowable monsters.

Without the faith of humanity to give them spiritual strength and power, the Sebettu could only draw upon their own, limited reserves of energy. Reserves that could not be renewed, while the Heavenly Host drew its power directly from the will of God. The Sebettu fought valiantly and nobly, but their cause was doomed. Every blow they struck, every attack they repulsed, drained their faith even further. In the end, simple attrition did what the Host could not. The forces of the Crimson Legion became too spiritually weakened to continue the fight any longer. The gates of the Black Cathedral finally shattered, Lucifer was bound in chains of flaming iron, and the rebellion was crushed once and for all.

Surrounded and defeated, the massed ranks of demonkind were assembled before the ruins of Genhinnom and condemned to the Pit. There was weeping and terror and horror at the awful nature of God's punishment — to be imprisoned, forever, in complete oblivion. But when it came time to be thrown into Hell, every last Namaru stood firm and resolute. Under the eye of their bound leader, the Morningstar, every last Devil marched proudly into the Abyss, strong and defiant, under their own power, as any true hero would.

To find, of course, God's last black joke — that Lucifer was not imprisoned alongside his brethren.

Out of the Abyss

The Namaru of today are barely recognizable as the noble heroes and haughty generals of the Time of Atrocities. Too much happened in the nothingness of the Abyss; too many demands were made of the Devils' vaunted nobility. Eventually, it all fell apart. Now, though, the situation has changed. The gates of Hell have opened a crack, and the hordes of the damned are trickling through to retake Creation as their prize. A new day has dawned for the Sebettu — and, just as they did in the first days of Creation, the Namaru are the radiant Heralds of that dawn, shining their light on the world.

When the prisoners in Hell realized that Lucifer was not among them, they first thought that he had been imprisoned separately, receiving further torments from the Creator. It was not until an age had passed that Belial, once Lucifer's closest aide and ally, declared that the Lightbringer had abandoned his fellows, and that theory spread like a virus throughout the empty expanse of the Abyss. The hordes of demonkind soon came to believe that they had been betrayed by Lucifer.

Desperate to fight their own feelings of fear and abandonment, to deny that all their heroism and courage and deception had been in vain, the Namaru immersed themselves in infernal politics to an even greater extent than before. The demonic hierarchy had existed for centuries, laid down by Lucifer as a new order to guide the legions in their rebellion. It had been a tool to aid organization and communication, the chain of command in an army where rank was determined by merit and deeds. In Hell, though, the infernal order changed, warping into an intricate political structure of favors, patronage and dominance. No great deeds could be worked in the Abyss, no heroism or intelligence could further the defeated rebellion or break open the chains of the eternal prison, so the old order became increasingly irrelevant. Instead, infernal politics became a tool for control, a way to exert power over other demons. Ascension in rank was attained by manipulating or intimidating others into obedience. Nothing else was left to the exiles.

The Namaru did not create this social order, but theirs was the hand that shaped its degeneration. Lucifer's command for the Namaru to govern and lead their fellows still rang in the souls of the Devils. But while Lucifer had preached that governance was a duty and a responsibility, a task to be undertaken for the greater good, the Namaru now embraced the pursuit of power for its own sake — to dominate the other demons, not lead them. Partially they did this to reject Lucifer, but they also did it to satisfy the corruption in their souls, the terrible pain and loneliness of Hell. Once heroes and champions, the Namaru soon degenerated in manipulators and liars, power-mongers and betrayers — for this was the way of deception, and deception was the only thing left to them in Hell.

From knights and heroes, the Devils became deceivers and politicians. But then the walls of the Pit cracked open, and the Namaru slipped back into Creation. They found a desolate world without a trace of the Creator, and a human race that had sunk far from the heights it had reached during the Time of Babel.

No longer did humanity possess more than the faintest spark of God's divine power, and their lives were dedicated to nothing more than the shallow pursuit of immediate gratification. The Namaru were horrified by the state of humanity — horrified, but also pleased. Mortals seemed to care for nothing except temporal wealth, pleasure or satisfaction, and they embraced any lie or deception that promised such. Such raw need, unleavened by insight, would be simplicity itself for Devils to manipulate. It was possible to make a mortal do anything, just with the *promise* of the right kind of reward — and that was *before* a Devil brought her evocations and divine gifts into play. Mortals *wanted* to believe the lies, and the Namaru — their former nobility eradicated by the rigors of Hell — were happy to provide the lies their eager vassals desired.

But as the trickle of escaping demon souls grew in volume, something happened. More and more often, Namaru found something within the souls of their human vessels that they had long since forgotten — strength, honor and the capacity for sacrifice. While most Devils continue to eschew the old standards of the Crimson Legion, a significant minority is starting to return to the principles of Lucifer — conviction, not compromise; honor, not expediency; responsibility, not instant gratification. Of course, many of these heroic Devils are still tormented monsters who think nothing of genocide, but now they commit their atrocities with their own hands and wear the mantle of sin with their heads held high. And a few, a precious few, combine honor with decency, morality and compassion — the virtues that might yet throw back the darkness and redeem the Sebettu.

A New Dawn

In the first days following the loosening of Hell's grasp, the Namaru formed perhaps the largest group of demons to escape to Earth, but not necessarily the most powerful. The strongest and most terrible Devils were too spiritually massive to escape through the cracks in Hell's walls, while many other Devils were so enmeshed in the machinations of infernal politics that they did not realize that the borders of the Abyss had weakened. But many Devils of lesser or moderate power took pains to gather information from any and all possible sources, looking for secrets or chinks in the political armor of their enemies, desperate for an edge. When this large group of Namaru realized that escape might truly be possible, they moved quickly to leave the Abyss while the getting was good. Many Namaru came to Earth thus, but most of these Devils lacked the prestige and raw power that some escaping demons of other Houses possessed.

While the Namaru were not starting from a position of strength, though, they instantly dedicated themselves to dominating their erstwhile brethren and allies, as well as amassing human followers. Other Houses became distracted by the wonders of this new and blasted Creation, in the pleasures and sorrows of their human forms — but with only a few exceptions, Devils threw themselves into gaining *power*. With blinding speed, Devils set about gaining followers and building mortal cults, then using those sources of Faith as bargaining chips and weapons for exerting influence in the burgeoning infernal courts. Demons of other Houses did the same, of course, but these rival Sebettu could not match the Namaru gift for deception and manipulation, the power to control humans and demons alike through honeyed words and subtle evocations.

The other major advantage the Namaru enjoyed over their rivals was the power and prestige of their mortal hosts. Like calls to like, even across the gap between worlds, and Devils were drawn to mortals who shared their own desire for power and social adroitness. While a few Devils were incarnated in the bodies of middle class office workers or uninspiring nobodies, a disproportionate amount of the Namaru took possession of humanity's best and brightest — mortals with money and power, fame and followers, charisma and contacts. This gave the Namaru an instant advantage, a head start into gathering mundane and temporal power, and the Devils did not neglect this opportunity.

With so many advantages on their side, the Namaru were able to dominate the Sebettu in the early days of the exodus from Hell. Devils formed infernal courts *around* themselves, rather than attaching themselves to existing courts. They took control of the balance of power in a mortal city, then encouraged other demons to flock to their banner. Serious rivals to a Devil's authority were often promoted into advisory positions, mollifying their desires for power and keeping them close to hand, where their activities could be carefully monitored. While the Namaru were *theoretically* still in the service of the greater demons locked away in Hell, almost all Devils paid their masters little more than lip service, their true loyalty only to themselves. As the Sebettu began to establish a new status quo in Creation, the Namaru were perched at the apex of the new order, pulling the strings of demonic society and gathering Faith from devoted mortal followers.

What every Devil fears, though, is that one day demons and mortals alike will realize that they don't *need* the Namaru anymore.

Closing Ranks

As a group, the Namaru find themselves forced to band together, even while they fear and distrust every other member of their House. The Devils must sometimes work together, overcoming their fierce intra-House rivalry, for without a unified front — without the full weight of the House telling the rest of the Sebettu that the Devils *matter* — the Namaru might lose everything.

The blackest, most horrific realization the Namaru made when escaping Hell was this: They are unnecessary. As angels, they were created to coordinate and lead others, to show the other Elohim their purpose according to the Divine Plan. But the Divine Plan is gone, and the other Sebettu know their purpose and powers now. They don't need or *want* the Namaru to tell them what to do. As for humanity, mortals show an eagerness to be led, but *obedience* is harder to draw from them. You can command mortals as long as you tell them what they want to hear, but start preaching a different gospel and you risk losing them. The fact of the matter is that Creation, and the rest of the Sebettu, can manage just fine without the Namaru. *And that cannot be borne.*

The rest of the Sebettu have yet to realize that the Namaru aren't all that important. Demons have such a long history of obeying or respecting the First House that it might take some time before they cast off the habit of deferring to the Namaru. To keep that from happening (or at least postpone it), the Namaru have had to work together as a House, to build up their own importance in infernal politics on Earth. When necessary, the Devils will cooperate as a unified bloc, throwing their combined political weight behind a cause that benefits the Namaru — especially if it increases the importance of the House and gives it a greater purpose in demonic society. The Namaru will often cooperate on an individual level as well, with a group of Devils working to increase the political power of one or more members. While not all the Devils may benefit directly, the House as a whole benefits from the gain in political strength. And as long as the House stays strong — as long as the Sebettu never realize their erstwhile leaders are little more than parasites — every individual Devil benefits.

The flaw in this system, though, is simple: Devils don't trust each other in the slightest. Individual Devils have found that their fiercest rivals for dominance and control in the modern world are other Devils — Namaru who want to claim the same political territory, control the same flocks of mortal worshippers or simply steal away their hard-earned power. While Devils understand their Housemates better than they do any other demons, they also know better than to trust them. Yet they have to work together in order to survive, in order to believe they still have a purpose. To maintain an image of strength, Devils who clash over a particular agenda or territory will usually argue out a secret truce that separates their interests, while both maintain the appearance of control to observers. Having done so, of course, each will work madly behind the scenes to cause the downfall of the other.

The result of these rivalries and desires is a House that's a riot of scheming and betrayal, but which desperately conceals this competition from the rest of the Sebettu. Other demons tend to see Devils as ambitious, and inclined to compete with each other for power, but willing to pull together to advance group causes — which is pretty much the truth. They also see Devils as important and powerful members of infernal society, who have to be respected and obeyed. Naturally, that's just what the Namaru *want* other demons to think.

Politics and Power Plays

To other demons, the House seems moderately unified. Obviously there are differences and rivalries, but for the most part, the House hangs together. Behind the scenes, and hidden even from many Devils, the greatest of the Namaru wage constant and subtle wars for power and influence over their fellows, and ways to turn that influence into control over all the Sebettu.

The first and foremost of the Namaru is, of course, Lucifer, the long-vanished leader of the Sebettu. His recent appearance in Los Angeles has sent all of infernal society into disarray, as demons scramble to learn his whereabouts and plans. His return, while confusing and a portent of dangerous times ahead, has been a boon to the Namaru, because it's led to increased attention and respect from the rest of the Sebettu. Demons look to other Devils to lead them in this uncertain time, as the House best able to comprehend, locate and perhaps control the Lightbringer.

With Lucifer still in hiding, though, the most powerful Devil in Creation is Belphigor, leader of the Faustian faction and one of the most influential demons on Earth. Belphigor has both immense personal strength and power, and the full backing of perhaps the most powerful faction of demons. Even those who oppose him respect him as a great warrior, crusader and powerbroker. With Lucifer gone, many demons consider Belphigor the best choice to lead the Sebettu to new heights, including some demons from rival factions. *He may be an enemy,* they think, *but he seeks to elevate all of us.* In truth, Belphigor cares only for his own power, his own glory. He might want to elevate the Sebettu through harnessing humanity's Faith, but only if he can place himself above every last

demon (Lucifer included). A consummate manipulator and politician, Belphigor juggles dozens of schemes and alliances at all times, advancing the cause of the Faustians and all of the Namaru while also making himself ever more important in infernal society.

Belphigor's most dangerous rival is Nuriel, the Namaru leader of the Reconciler faction. The Reconcilers have a marginal voice in demonic politics, despised by most as traitors and weaklings. Yet Nuriel wins respect — and more importantly, *power* — because of her dedication and courage, her unrelenting drive to redeem demon and human alike. In her, many Devils recognize the heroic ideal that once drove them, the passion and nobility that was their birthright. While few Devils agree with her ideas, many respect or even idolize her for her purity, and that respect translates into political influence in the House's internal politics.

The other major voice in Namaru circles is a new one, an upstart Devil who has suddenly gained a surprising degree of influence and allies. Spentu Mainyu is a mere fell knight, a minor player in the infernal hierarchy, but that was before Lucifer appeared in Los Angeles, Spentu Mainyu's base of operations. In the chaos following the Morningstar's appearance, Los Angeles has become a pivotal location and home to more demons than anywhere else on Earth. It's also a city divided, with two rival courts jockeying for control over the demonic population — and Spentu Mainyu is a member and major player in *both* courts. The Devil has influence and schemes running across the length and breadth of LA — and by extension, throughout his House and perhaps the entirety of demonic society. Belphigor has already made overtures of friendship and alliance, hoping to use the upstart's power to his own ends, while Nuriel hangs back, waiting to see what LA's puppeteer is truly planning.

All of these tensions are, of course, kept secret from other demons, and the Namaru do their best to present a unified front. As time goes on, though, Devils continue to escape from Hell, and more and more of them are seeking their own paths, uninterested in helping their erstwhile brethren maintain power. These renegades and outsiders are more than just loners — their presence is dangerous to the House as a whole. For while the House resents an image of Namaru strength and importance, the renegades can damage that image through errors and missteps (or worse, deliberate action). If flaws begin to show in the Namaru façade, the Sebettu might begin to realize that they don't need their "chosen leaders." And if that happens, then demonic society might tear apart the House that has dominated it for so long.

Leading Lights

Just as the Namaru sought glory after the Fall, just as they sought to feed their pride with great deeds and accomplishments during the Age of Wrath, so too do modern Devils seek to gain power, prestige and the admiration of their peers. Across the world, Devils work to gain power and recognition and to advance the agendas of their faction while amassing personal influence. The following are only some of the Namaru at work in the world, those poised to play a major part in the new order. Far more are waiting for a chance to make their mark and become the new kings of Creation.

Belphigor

With Lucifer out of the picture, Belphigor is the undeniable leader of the Namaru — and that's not a position he has any plans to relinquish. His first priority is to control his major political rivals, keeping them from taking away his power yet making sure that they don't fall completely from power. A true leader *needs* enemies, if only to prove that he is so important that others must conspire against him. It's vital to Belphigor's schemes that Nuriel, Spentu Mainyu and other notable Devils continue to oppose him, validating his position as supreme leader and drawing followers and resources from each other in their own squabbles.

What Belphigor *does* fear, though, is Lucifer's return. If the Lightbringer reveals himself and rejoins demonic society, Belphigor will have no chance of controlling the Namaru any longer. The promise of Lucifer's return is a good thing, as is the co-opting of his dreams of unlocking humanity's potential, but only so long as the Morningstar stays out of the picture. Much of Belphigor's attention is currently devoted to learning Lucifer's whereabouts, gathering information from Luciferan Namaru and other sources. If Lucifer is ever located, Belphigor plans to launch an attack upon him immediately, a fatal strike that can be blamed on the Raveners. If that attack fails, Belphigor will cast himself as Lucifer's closest ally, while quietly preparing to split the House in two and use humanity as a weapon against the Lightbringer. This, of course, might never happen, but fear of Lucifer's return consumes Belphigor. His growing obsession with contingency plans and fallback positions is distracting him from his other schemes and responsibilities. If he's not careful, he could lose power even without Lucifer's return.

Nuriel

Leader of the Reconcilers, Nuriel is the antithesis of Belphigor, a Devil who fights to reclaim the honor and heroism that aeons in Hell beat out of her. While her rival schemes and plans, Nuriel *acts*, fighting to

win the respect of her fellows through her deeds and lead the Sebettu to redemption and forgiveness. The fact that most Sebettu, including her own House, reject her cause and have no desire to be forgiven, does not dissuade her — her faith and her courage are sufficient to sustain her. Nuriel did not actively seek political power, and she does not immerse herself in alliances and schemes like her rival. She views her status as a happy accident and uses it primarily to further the Reconciler goals of forgiveness and integration with humanity.

What few Devils realize is that Nuriel has all but turned her back on her House, and she cares little for advancing the causes of the Namaru. She has no fear anymore of being revealed as useless or unnecessary to the rest of the Sebettu. She no longer defines herself through her House, but through her deeds. Many Devils are still waiting for her to reveal her real plans, for her to throw aside the Reconcilers in order to grab power and gain more status for the Namaru. They don't realize that Nuriel possesses *sincerity*, a rare quality in modern Devils. Some Devils support her out of true respect, but many others do so out of greed and the conviction that she will make it worth their while later. When it finally sinks in that Nuriel is a largely selfless and genuine Reconciler, her power base could fall apart, scattering her Namaru followers and possibly damaging her faction's plans in the process.



Spentu Mainyu

The upstart fell knight never thought that gaining power would be this *easy*, and he has Lucifer to thank for it. Spentu Mainyu had always planned to gain influence over the Namaru and demonic society, and he was prepared to work at it for years. That's why he set up a second infernal court in Los Angeles and removed himself from the role of tyrant. It left him in a better position to slowly gain control over both courts, build a power structure in the city, then gradually increase that power base through media manipulation and constant politicking. But then Lucifer chose Los Angeles as the venue for his appearance, and Spentu Mainyu suddenly found himself the behind-the-scenes master of the most important city in the world. Slow and steady isn't enough anymore. Now he's gaining influence rapidly, and he's become a major player in demonic politics almost overnight.

It's too much, too fast. Spentu Mainyu's plans were deliberate and careful, and he's had to abandon

them to pursue more immediate, less orchestrated schemes. He's made a rival of Belphigor well ahead of schedule, appearing as a threat to the Faustian leader before he's had a chance to dominate the faction. Los Angeles is crawling with demons, many of whom want to usurp Spentu Mainyu's power base before he can truly consolidate it. The mere act of controlling the rival courts of LA is becoming difficult. If the courts escape his control, then he becomes vulnerable to reprisal. Spentu Mainyu needs breathing space, something to distract the rest of the Sebettu while he develops a new strategy. Something like an all-out war between the demons of Los Angeles and the monstrous Earthbound that are infiltrating the city would do. In an attempt to weaken his enemies, the Devil is preparing to feed them to creatures of absolute horror, hoping that he can wrest back control while blood runs in the streets.

He's wrong.

Kel Asuf

They called him the Deceiver, the Father of Lies, the False One. The Sebettu called Kel Asuf many things, before the rebellion failed and the Sebettu were sent to Hell. In the Abyss, though, the Namaru master of lies found his fame (or rather, his infamy) was not an advantage. In a political system based on secrets and subtlety, being famous for being a liar works *against* you because you can't manipulate or fool your enemies if they expect you to lie to them. Kel Asuf was an unparalleled master of deception, and that reputation tainted him in the Abyss. He found himself despised and ostracized by his fellows, who preferred to remove him from infernal society rather than invite betrayal. From his former glory as a major power in the Time of Atrocities, Kel Asuf became the lowest of the low, one of the least powerful and influential of all the Namaru.

Now that he's loose in Creation, wearing the body of sleazy journalist Milo Coltraine, Kel Asuf has no intention of ever being left out in the cold again. The desire for power burns inside him hotter than the sun, and he will do anything to punish the Namaru, and all the Sebettu, for the humiliations he suffered in Hell. His own powers are not sufficient to do that, even with his skill in deception, but Kel Asuf has an impossible, terrible plan. He believes that somewhere in Creation, hidden but not destroyed, is the Divine Plan — the ultimate blueprint of reality itself — taken from the Namaru after the Fall and carried away by Lucifer. The plan has doubtless been damaged and warped, changed and degraded from its former perfection, but it is still something of unutterable power, a force that can define reality itself. A force, Kel Asuf believes, that he can lie to. The Divine Plan defines not just Creation but its Creator, and the insane Namaru plans to convince the Divine Plan that *he is God.* All he has to do is find it.

Relics and Lost Lore

In the race to regain the glory rightfully due their House — and, of course, further other, less important agendas — the Namaru have access to a number of unique powers, weapons, relics and rituals. Some of these have been developed in the scant years since Hell broke open. Others have been lost or secreted away for millennia, only to be found or reactivated in the modern world.

Relics

The following items are ones that are generally seen in the possession of Devils, as opposed to demons of other Houses. Indeed, some are unique and jealously guarded by their owners. Devils also make use of a wide variety of other relics, if they can obtain them, favoring ones that enhance their mastery of human wills or their heroic endeavors.

Subtle Knives

The House of the Morning Star was created as a host of heroes, not a House of assassins, and yet, Devils found themselves to be perfectly suited to such a role after their return from the Abyss. Their honeyed words and commanding presence allowed them to infiltrate the camps of their enemies, to reach the leader's side and wait for a chance to strike. But blasts of fire are obvious, as are the wounds of claw and horn, so Namaru assassins needed a tool that would let them strike their enemies down without betraying their true nature. Thus were born the Subtle Knives — weapons that appear as normal objects to mortal eyes, and whose touch injures without leaving a wound.

A Subtle Knife has the body of an innocuous object but the *soul* of a weapon. The relic's creator takes a mundane item, such as a pen, umbrella, book or other device, and uses it as the relic's corporeal form. High-tech items like PDAs, laptop computers and the like cannot be used, nor may this item be any more than a few feet long or a few pounds in weight. To this item, the demon binds the spiritual properties of a melee weapon, such as a knife or sword. Only melee weapons can be bound in this fashion, and only simple ones. (The process will not work on technological weapons like chainsaws or cattle prods.) The resulting relic has the appearance and mundane properties of the normal

item, but its spirit is that of a killing blade. When used in combat, the relic inflicts wounds onto the spirit of an enemy, cutting his soul to ribbons while leaving his body completely unharmed.

System: Crafting a Subtle Knife requires knowledge of the Lore of the Spirit and the Lore of Radiance, as well as the Lore of the Forge. When creating the relic, the maker decides on both the relic's mundane seeming and the weapon that it spiritually incorporates. The wielder activates the relic's spirit with a Faith roll (difficulty 6), which imparts the weapon's properties to the mundane item for the rest of the scene. An activated relic still appears as a mundane item, but it can now be used as a melee weapon in combat. An invisible spiritual "blade" now protrudes from the mundane item, with the normal properties as a weapon of that type. Only those demons using the Ghost Sight ability of their visage can see the blade. If the wielder cannot see the blade, the difficulty for all attacks made with the weapon increases by one. Similarly, all attempts to block or dodge the Subtle Knife suffer a +1 difficulty penalty if the target cannot see the blade itself.

If a target is hit with a Subtle Knife, the weapon does not injure the victim's flesh — instead, it cuts at the target's spirit. Damage from the blade is soaked by the victim's Wits rather than Stamina, and armor offers no protection. The weapon inflicts bashing or lethal damage, as appropriate, and victims may soak lethal damage only with a Wits roll if they could normally soak lethal physical attacks. The wounds from a Subtle Knife are completely invisible unless one is using the Ghost Sight ability. Supernatural awareness (see page 172 of the **Demon** core rules for details) may reveal that a person has been injured or killed by one of these weapons, at the Storyteller's discretion.

Marchocias' Chime of Repentance

In the annals of the fallen, Marchocias is renowned, and sometimes reviled, as a great Namaru general of the Ebon Legion. During the horrors of the Time of Atrocities, Marchocias committed wholesale slaughter of mortal and angel alike, ripping through armies with fire and sword and screaming his delight to Heaven. But in the Time of Babel, the mighty Namaru destroyer had a change of heart — rejecting the violence and carnage of the Ebon Legion and transferring his loyalties to the Crimson Legion of Lucifer. As a token of his defection, Marchocias crafted a musical chime, a perfect creation of silver and crystal that held his essence and remorse, and set its tones ringing across the world. Whoever heard the chime's music set down his sword and shield and took his enemy's hand in friendship, as Marchocias' peace flooded his soul.

Most Devils who know of the chime's existence and power see it as a powerful tool for peace — a way to prevent battle and conflict while resolving problems through negotiation. Other Namaru, though, remember Marchocias' wiles, and suspect the chime has another function. While the chime's music creates calm and prevents violence, it *doesn't* prevent lying, deception, manipulation or the use of mind-affecting evocations. In fact, these actions tend to be even easier than normal, as those you're attempting to fool cannot muster their anger or dislike to resist your honeyed words. Rather than a tool of peace and tranquility, these opportunistic Devils see the chime as a perfect way to weaken opposition to their plans — and they wonder if that was Marchocias' plan all along.

Rediscovered in a lost cache under the Andes, Marchocias' chime has fallen into the hand of Belphigor, master of the Faustians and most influential of the Namaru. He considers it an invaluable treasure, albeit an inconvenient one. After all, the chime is 15 feet long, weighs almost two tons and is crafted from a king's ransom in silver and precious stones, so it's not something that can be displayed openly and must be carefully guarded. Belphigor has made little use of it as yet, preferring not to rely on its powers or invite the attention of thieves. Instead, he holds it in reserve for when negotiations and truces must be hammered out. Nuriel, commander of the Reconcilers, knows that her rival has the chime, and she is developing a plan to steal it away from the Faustians. It would be far more useful, she thinks, in the hands of the peaceful (and occasionally deceitful) Reconcilers.

System: To play the chime, the user must strike it in just the right spot with a hammer, and strike it forcefully enough for the whole chime to resonate — which requires a Strength + Performance roll (difficulty 7), as well as a Faith roll. A perfect tone emanates from the chime, reaching the ear of everyone within a number of yards equal to 100 times the successes of the Performance roll. Everyone who hears the sound loses the ability to feel anger, rage or hate. They are instead filled with a serene calm that prevents any kind of violence or attack for as long as the tone lingers (a number of minutes equal to 10 times the user's permanent Faith). Those affected are also easier to mislead or deceive; Manipulation rolls made against affected beings have their difficulty reduced by one.

Mortals are automatically affected by the relic, and they cannot resist. Demons can resist the effect, but only with great difficulty and a hardening of their souls against beauty. Make a resisted roll for each affected demon using his Willpower score (difficulty 8). If the roll is successful, the demon resists the power of the chime but also gains a point of temporary Torment.

The Dawnrunner, Lucifer's Warhorse

Lucifer was more than just a general, he was a hero — perhaps the first hero to walk the earth. Like any great hero, he often traveled the world astride a great steed that he carved out of his own radiance and the light of the sun. Named the Dawnrunner by some, Lucifer's warhorse was a creature of living light and flame — a radiant, perfect beast that could fly through the air, travel to the edge of Creation in a moment and trample the foul beasts and arrogant angels its master fought.

When Lucifer vanished, his warhorse did as well, and most demons assumed it had dissipated into energy millennia ago — until the Devil Illuyanka found an ancient, primitive bit and bridle moldering in a mad sorcerer's collection in Dubai. She touched it with her Faith, and the Dawnrunner materialized before her, a giant stallion that shone with the radiance of the sun. At the exact same time, the White Horse of Uffington — a chalk figure of a horse 365 feet long, carved into the soil of a hillside in southern England — vanished, as if it had never existed. (Thankfully it was night in England at the time.) Somehow the Lightbringer had transformed his destrier into a chalk figure, waiting to be brought back to life and to return to the hillside and stasis when commanded.

A demon in possession of the horse's ancient bit and bridle can use the horse as a means of near-instantaneous transportation — a rider can travel thousands of miles in mere moments on the warhorse's back. To an outside observer, the horse and rider vanish in a blur of golden light that streaks momentarily across the sky; to the rider, the outside world smears into a golden blur before he suddenly appears in a new location. Whenever the Dawnrunner is used, the White Horse of Uffington vanishes, reappearing when the relic is not in use. Several British tabloids have already run stories about the vanishing tourist attraction.

System: Summoning the Dawnrunner is easy. The rider must merely hold the creature's bridle and will it to appear (no roll needed). The rider must then make a Faith roll to "activate" the horse, while whispering a destination into its ear. The beast then travels up to 1,000 miles for each success on the Faith roll, covering the distance in a single turn. For particularly distant locations, the horse must make the journey in stages. Each turn, a Faith roll must be made to set the horse off anew.

Unknown to most users, though, the Dawnrunner has been corrupted. The beast's mind, crafted by Lucifer from the spirit of the sun, has grown chaotic and wild over the millennia, and it infects its riders with that madness. Every time a demon makes a Faith roll to use the Dawnrunner, she also gains a point of temporary Torment.

Armor of Mercy

It was during the siege of Genhinnom that the Devil Ladon held back an army of Heaven's mortal followers, armed with no more than his bare hands and a length of cloth, used to bind the wounds of injured humans, wrapped around his body. As each soldier in Heaven's army advanced on Ladon, who stood passively in the wreckage of the southern gate of the citadel, they looked at the bandages bound around his frame and knew just what pain and anguish and mutilation their blows would bring upon his unresisting frame. Each soldier, faced with the undeniable truth of what damage his attack would do, stayed his hand, because inflicting such pain on another was more than their souls could bear. Then the angel Rübeziel, armed with a sword of purest diamond, charged through the ranks of her warriors and reared to strike the killing blow to Ladon — and, after standing ready to attack for more than an hour, finally stood her forces down. Faced with the impossible task of acknowledging the horror they could inflict, Heaven's forces withdrew.

While the bandages Ladon wore have long since rotted away, many Devils have made Armors of Mercy in the modern age from normal garments. Such an enchantment requires knowledge of the Lore of Humanity, the Lore of the Celestials and the Lore of Longing. Anyone attempting to attack an individual wearing the Armor of Mercy is filled with the visceral understanding, just before he strikes, of the pain and injury he is about to cause. The realization is normally so appalling that the attacker cannot bring himself to strike — and if he does, he feels the pain he causes.

System: Only normal clothing can be enchanted. Items that actually give a bonus to soak cannot be used in this way, as the enchantment hinges on the wearer being unprotected. A Willpower roll (difficulty 9) must be made for a mortal attacker each time he attempts to attack an individual wearing the Armor of Mercy; if the roll fails, the mortal cannot bring himself to strike. A demon who chooses to strike a person wearing the armor gains a point of temporary Torment. In either case, an attacker who does strike a person wearing the Armor of Mercy loses one die from all of his dice pools for the rest of the scene due to the sympathetic pain he feels for his victim.

The First Tongue

Before the fall of Babel, humanity spoke the One Language — the first tongue, a language of perfect communication. When the demons finally lost the war, God wiped the knowledge of the One Language from mortal minds, dooming them to discord and removing their ability to truly see and understand the



wonders of Creation. Instead, mortals had to struggle to communicate through dozens of corrupted, ineffectual languages that carried little of the first tongue's power, while the demons carried their own recollections of the One Language to the Pit.

When the fallen first returned from the Abyss, the Devil Telchinen attempted to teach the One Language to his mortal followers but found that it was simply too powerful to be borne by human souls in these faithless times. Understanding came quickly to his pupils, who absorbed the One Language like water — but, like water, it flooded through them and forced all else out. Soon his followers lost the ability to speak, read or comprehend *any* other language, even those they were born with. They could *only* understand the First Tongue, now and forever, and they found themselves in a world of incomprehensible babble.

The experiment might have stopped there, with Telchinen caring for his almost autistic followers until their deaths — until he realized what other effects the One Language had on mortals. First, those who spoke the First Tongue were gifted with the insight mankind had lost in the Fall. They were unaffected by illusions, deception or the hysteria caused by seeing the infernal forms of demons. Secondly, other mortals responded to the First Tongue. While they could not understand the words of the One Language, the *meaning* of those words resonated deep in their souls, to the primal roots of language that their brains used to interpret the world. If a speaker using the One Language gave a command to a mortal, the human could not consciously understand it, but her subconscious would comprehend, and she would be compelled to obey. A mortal using the First Tongue could command other mortals, who would obey without understanding why, until their brains finally internalized the One Language. Like a virus, the First Tongue can spread to listeners, who in turn lose their ability to speak anything else.

Currently, only a scant handful of humans speak the One Language, and their Devil handlers keep them sequestered from other mortals. For the speakers, life has become confusing and frustrating; the world is now a morass on unintelligible gibberish and incomprehensible symbols. The Devils keep them away from other mortals so as not to spread the language "virus" any further, using their power to force obedience only when the risk of spreading the First Tongue is minimal.

System: The First Tongue is a language any demon can possess with the Linguistics skill (although most demons don't bother to use it, gaining far more benefit from speaking Enochian), but it has no effect on them. Mortals can learn it quickly and easily

(it costs two experience points for any mortal to learn it), or they can be "contaminated," picking the language up intuitively by hearing it spoken. In any scene when a mortal character hears a few words of the One Language in person — it has no effect when recorded — make a Perception + Linguistics roll (difficulty 8). A success provides an experience point that can *only* be spent on learning the language. Once the character gains two points in this fashion, she automatically learns the language, whether she wants to or not. Once a mortal learns the First Tongue, she loses the ability to understand *any* other language. Her neural pathways actually change shape, deformed by the mystic pressure of the One Language. Spoken languages are incomprehensible babble, and written words are meaningless squiggles (the First Tongue has no surviving written form).

Mortals who speak the First Tongue gain a number of benefits. First, they are immune to the effects of Revelation, they have the same resistance to illusions as demons, and all attempts to control their minds or emotions incur +1 difficulty penalties. Secondly, the mortal may command other mortals by giving orders in the One Language. The listeners will not consciously understand the command, but they find themselves obeying anyway. When the speaker issues a command, spend a point of Willpower and make the appropriate Ability roll (Charisma + Leadership, Manipulation + Intimidation, etc.). The target resists with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). If the listener gains fewer successes than the speaker, she must obey the command. Orders given in the One Language must be simple and limited in scope, because the subconscious can only parse broad statements that don't rely on proper nouns or modern concepts. You can say, "Attack those men," in the First Tongue, but you can't say, "Steal this car and drive to Pasadena." Demons cannot give commands in the One Language and make mortals obey. That power belongs only to human speakers, and a listener who actually knows the One Language is immune.

Frozen Flames

A Frozen Flame, or pyrestone, is a moderately common bauble used by Devils that looks like a ruby or piece of red crystal. In fact, the relic is made from a diamond or clear crystal; the red color comes from the flame trapped within the stone. Pyrestones are created by trapping a raging fire inside a crystal or gemstone, "freezing" the flame in stasis until the Devil activates the relic — at which point the gem erupts into a fireball.

System: Creating a pyrestone requires knowledge of both the Lore of Flame and the Lore of the Earth. The creator ignites a fire — either through evocation or mundane means — then channels that flame into the stone. The larger and more powerful the fire is, the higher the gem's quality must be. A small bonfire could be captured in a piece of polished clear quartz, while a raging inferno the size of a skyscraper would require a diamond of at least 20 carats. When the enchantment is completed, the fire is drawn into the stone, which turns a deep red and becomes very slightly warm to the touch.

A pyrestone can be activated from any distance by the creator, who invests it with a small portion of his True Name. By invoking this fragment of his Name, he brings the flame back to life. Activating the stone requires a successful Faith roll (difficulty 7). When activated, the pyrestone explodes. Treat this as the high-Torment version of the Ignite evocation (see page 177 of the **Demon** core rules for details), with the intensity and radius of effect depending on the intensity of the original flame.

While pyrestones can be used in combat as a sort of grenade, this is a fairly clumsy application. They're far more useful as bombs and traps. Cunning Devils hide them in the redoubts of their enemies or craft them into jewelry and give them to their foes as "gifts." The pyrestone is hard to detect with supernatural awareness (difficulty 9) or with the naked eye. If examined closely [Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8)], the color inside the stone can be seen moving and swirling like slowly dancing flames. The risk in using the stone this way is that it contains a fragment of the maker's True Name. If another demon examines the stone's spirit carefully [Perception + Occult (difficulty 9)], she can learn that fragment and potentially use it against the creator. (See page 255 of the **Demon** core rules for details.)

Rituals

As outlined in Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide**, rituals are complex evocations that combine multiple bodies of lore to produce new and powerful effects. Devils hold themselves to be the inventors of rituals, claiming that Lucifer himself developed the technique during the first siege of Genhinnom, although some other demons dispute that claim. No matter what House invented ritual evocations, though, Devils have shown themselves to be masters of the art. Their gift for coordinating and modifying the evocations of other demons makes them eminently suited to develop, lead and control rituals.

The following rituals are unique to the House of the Morning Star and are usually not known by members of other Houses. Devils guard their secret

rituals jealously, so as to keep an edge over the other Houses — and, perhaps, so that they can feel proudly superior about their secret knowledge.

Dawn's Light

While the manipulation of light is the province of the Neberu, the Heralds were light itself in the first days of Creation, as well as being the stars that shone in the sky. Most importantly, the Heralds governed the sun, the first and most perfect of stars, and brought the divine spark of the Creator to humanity when morning first broke across Creation and stirred Adam and Eve from sleep. With this ritual, the Namaru can re-create that first dawn in the middle of the night, flooding an area with bright, warm sunlight — not a hot glare, but a soft radiance that stirs the souls of both mortals and demons alike.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Celestials •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Humanity ••, Lore of Light •

Base Cost: 18

Restrictions: The ritual must be performed at night.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Roll Charisma + Leadership. For a number of minutes equal to the successes rolled, the surrounding area is filled by bright (but not blinding) sunlight, for a radius in *miles* equal to the Ankida's permanent Faith. The sunlight radiates from the ritual's sigil, but the sigil does not becoming overly bright. The light casts shadows away from the sigil, but permeates the whole area so that almost all locations within the radius of effect are illuminated as if it were the first few minutes of dawn.

Both mortals and demons within the ritual's radius of effect may be revitalized and inspired by the dawn's light, which is both physically and spiritually illuminating. All mortals within the area regain a point of temporary Willpower, if they had less than their normal maximum number of points. They also heal a level of bashing damage if they were injured. Make a Faith roll for every demon within the area of effect against a difficulty equal to their permanent Torment ratings. For every success, they regain a point of Willpower (up to their maximum rating). If the roll fails the demon is too wracked with anguish and hate to gain determination from the kiss of morning. If the roll botches, the demon gains a permanent point of Torment.

The light created by this ritual is true sunlight, with all the spiritual and physical properties of the sun. Any creatures affected by sunlight in some way, such as vampires or other supernatural creatures, will be fully affected by the dawn light created by the ritual, for as long as the sigil shines or until they find shelter. When the ritual's effects end, the sigil ceases to shine and the light fades away.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual creates a dark, brooding light the color of rust, like the glow of a dying star. Mortals touched by this corrupt glow are plagued by despair, madness and nightmares, and they lose a point of temporary Willpower. Mortal thralls may try to resist this effect with a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 8). Any demons in the area of effect can draw strength from the bloody light, but only if they give in to their inner darkness. Make a Torment roll, with a difficulty equal to the demon's permanent Faith. For each success, the character regains a point of temporary Willpower *and* a point of temporary Torment.

Variations: None

Ghostly Inferno

This ritual allows a Devil to summon a raging inferno not in the mortal world, but in the spirit realm. While the flames do not exist in this world, the effects of the blaze are still felt here — objects and people in the area of effect are burned by cold, invisible flames. In the spirit realm, the fire burns ghosts and demons moving through the world of the dead.

Primary Lore: Lore of Flame •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Realms ••

Base Cost: 10

Restrictions: The ritual requires that a burnt offering of flesh be placed in the center of the sigil.

Minimum Casting Time: 25 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Survival. The flames fill an area in the spirit world with a radius equal to the successes in yards, out to a range equal to 10 times the Ankida's permanent Faith in yards. The fire's intensity is equal to the number of successes rolled, and it burns for a number of minutes equal to the Ankida's Faith.

The flames are invisible to the normal eye, but the Ankida can vaguely perceive a patch of shimmering haze where the blaze lies, and he can attempt to control it while the ritual persists. Make a Faith roll for the Ankida each turn to control the flames. Each success increases or decreases the blaze's radius by a yard or moves the blaze a yard in any chosen direction.

Within the area of the blaze, mortals and demons take one health level of lethal damage each round for each level of the fire's intensity. This damage can be soaked, but since it is a spiritual flame instead of a physical one, each character rolls Wits instead of Stamina to soak. Physical armor does not add to the soak roll. Characters who are immune to normal fire are also immune to spiritual flame. If the intensity of the fire is enough to ignite objects (see page 177 of the **Demon** core rules for more details), the items lose one structural level each turn until destroyed or until the fire dies out.

In the spirit world, ghosts (see page 54 of the **Demon Storytellers Companion** for details) and demons in spirit form that are trapped in the flames take damage, but they may soak with their Stamina and armor as normal.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual sets the very substance of the spirit realm aflame, feeding on dead souls and the malevolent energies of the realm. The flames of this ritual cannot be controlled by the Ankida, but they are more powerful and cover a greater area. Add half the number of successes rolled (round down) to both the radius and the intensity of the blaze. While the flames remain invisible, ghastly moans and screams emanate from the affected region. Make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) for each mortal within the area of effect. If the roll fails, the mortal loses a point of Willpower. If the roll botches, the mortal also gains a temporary derangement (see page 260 of the **Demon** core rules for details).

Variations: Some versions of this ritual allow the creation of flames far from the sigil and performers — the ghostly blaze erupting around a chosen victim anywhere in the world. To perform this variation, add Lore of the Firmament •• to the secondary lore, the sigil must contain a personal item belonging to the target or a piece of her body, and the Ankida cannot control the movements of the flames.

Reshape the Soul

This powerful, terrible ritual is a product of the dark days of the Time of Atrocities, when both angels and demons made use of mortal worshippers or followers to strike at their enemies. With this ritual, demons would "reprogram" a mortal's personality, shaping her into a perfect spy — or weapon.

Most uses of this ritual focus on reprogramming a captured spy or mortal follower of the demon's enemies. The ritual permanently reshapes the captive's personality and loyalty to suit the demon, who can then question her freely or send her out to work for his purposes. The ritual is occasionally used in the opposite way, making a loyal worshipper into a wholehearted supporter of his enemy's works — but one with a number of secret commands buried in her subconscious that can be activated as the Ankida sees fit.

Primary Lore: Lore of Radiance •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Humanity •••••, Lore of Longing ••

Base Cost: 36

Restrictions: The mortal being affected by the ritual must remain in the center of the sigil throughout. If she is an unwilling participant, she must be restrained or incapacitated so that she cannot leave.

Minimum Casting Time: 144 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Subterfuge; the target resists with a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If the Ankida gains more successes, the mortal's mind and soul can be remade as she sees fit. The Ankida can alter the human's personality any way she likes, replacing his Nature and Demeanor with any Archetypes she wishes. She can also alter the mortal's memories — one significant memory or chain of memories for each success gained on the ritual — change his opinions, make him loyal to the Ankida (or to someone else) and so on. The ritual *cannot* increase the mortal's Faith potential. That requires a personal journey for the mortal that cannot be tampered with by demonic powers.

If the Ankida wishes to make the mortal into an undercover agent, she can implant post-hypnotic suggestions into his subconscious. Every success gained on the evocation roll provides a suggestion that can be implanted, with a predetermined trigger and outcome of the Ankida's choosing. When the trigger condition is activated, the mortal will follow his orders, then return to normal with no memory of what he has done. Some suggestions might be reusable on an ongoing basis, such as, "Report on what Manishtusu has done in the last week." Others, such as, "Kill Matthew Wallace," will expire once completed and pass from the mortal's programming. The Storyteller is the final arbiter as to whether or not an implanted suggestion is reusable over a period of time.

The effects of this ritual are permanent unless they are undone by another demon. The Revelation evocation of the Lore of Radiance can negate the programming, though the difficulty of the evocation roll increases by two. Before this can be done, though, the demon must realize that the mortal has been affected by Reshape the Soul, which can only be determined through observation and deduction.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual reprograms a mortal as normal, but at the cost of his sanity. The psyche and very soul of the human are damaged, and he is doomed to madness. If the ritual succeeds, the mortal gains a permanent derangement. For every success gained on the ritual after the first, he also loses a point of permanent Willpower (down to a minimum of one point). Furthermore, he will lose a point of temporary Willpower each time a post-hypnotic suggestion is activated.

Variations: None

Character Creation

Heroes and destroyers, fearless leaders and heartless manipulators, Devils are complex beings with a

wide variety of abilities and powers. The Namaru are the bright lights of Creation, the standard-bearers of the rebellion, and as they degenerate into Torment, the vicious dictators and rampaging killers of the damned. This section offers tips, ideas and advice on creating a character who's not only an appropriate member of her House, but is also an interesting and effective character to play.

Concept

The following concepts are the most common for Devil characters, but you can also come up with a unique concept for a Devil that isn't covered here.

Hero: The Devils were the paladins of the rebellion, noble souls who took it upon themselves to protect humanity from God's unfair punishments. In the modern world, such characters might battle Earthbound monsters to save humanity or take on weak-minded demons who would place mortals above their rightful demonic masters. Heroic Devils are confident and prepared to go into battle — usually physical combat, but also social confrontation — to reach their goals. Such Namaru tend to possess mortals who displayed similar bravery, ones who would stand and fight for a cause rather than run away. Obvious candidates are soldiers, police officers and other combat-oriented persons, but courage comes in many forms. Firefighters, teachers of underprivileged youth, campaigners for fringe political causes and battered wives who finally leave abusive husbands could all qualify.

Leader: As well as being heroes, the Devils were the generals of armies, leading their followers against the legions of the Creator. Many Devils maintain this mindset, directing their forces from the front and providing an example for their charges to follow. Such demons gravitate toward mortals who are used to leading rather than following, ones who work alongside their subordinates to reach their goals. Suitable candidates might include SWAT team commanders, captains of professional sports teams, social campaigners or leaders of street gangs.

Manipulator: Devils possess immense force of personality and are perceptive enough to easily learn what those around them want to see and hear. Little wonder, then, that many Devils grow skilled at manipulating others, whether mortal or demon. In the mortal world, such demons play the puppeteer, controlling others through subterfuge, charm and evocations. Manipulator Devils might pursue noble or self-serving goals, but they do so by using pawns and allies in preference to endangering themselves. These Devils might possess mortals who practiced similar methods, using others through overt or subtle means. Such mortals might include Mafia bosses, corrupt police officers, spies, politicians and cult leaders.

Elementals

A radiant fire burns at the core of every Devil, no matter how dark or dispassionate his exterior is. Devils were *stars* once, creatures of purity and radiance and flame, and that elemental power still drives many Devils. Regardless of their concept, Devils tend to be passionate and energetic — and, sometimes, carelessly destructive.

As well as those mortals with whom they have an ideological affinity, Devils gravitate toward mortals who have felt passionate, destructive urges — spurned lovers, driven artists, obsessed vigilantes and visionaries consumed by their grand dreams. They might also be attracted to mortals who work with or around flame, such as firefighters or arsonists.

Nature and Demeanor

Many Devils are used to being in a position of command, directing mortals and even other demons so as to bring a plan to fruition. Such characters usually have the Architect, Autocrat, Director, Judge, Pedagogue or Visionary Archetypes as their Nature — personality types that push them to evaluate the performance of others and direct them as the Devil feels appropriate.

Befitting their position as the heroes of Hell, some demons are driven to commit acts of nobility and bravery, risking everything to do what they feel is right. Such characters generally have Natures like Caregiver, Gallant, Gambler, Martyr, Rebel, Survivor or even Fanatic at the extreme end of the scale — personalities that encourage them to do whatever is necessary to reach their goals.

Arrogant Devils still consider themselves the best and brightest stars in Creation — imperious princes of the universe who must be obeyed. Since other demons are sometimes foolish enough to reject this evident truth, such Devils attempt to rule in secret, manipulating others into doing their bidding. Natures such as Bravo, Competitor, Conniver, Perfectionist or Rogue reflect the personalities of these characters.

Devils rarely possess the Addict, Bon Vivant, Child, Conformist, Masochist, Thrill-Seeker or Trickster Archetypes. Such personalities focus too much on instant gratification, worldly distractions or an inability to take charge of your own destiny — attitudes that rarely appeal to the sullied heroes of the fallen or the arrogance and pride that drives them.

Most Devils have a Demeanor that's notably different from their true Natures, the better to confuse their enemies and keep their secrets. Devils with strong, confident Natures might act shy, awkward or

unassuming to keep opponents off their guard. Those Devils beset by doubts about their place (or lack thereof) in the modern world maintain strong, organized, invulnerable exteriors so that no one will know their true weakness. Not all Devils keep a mask over their true face. Some maintain Demeanors similar or even identical to their true Natures. Such Namaru are usually supremely confident, bold paragons and heroes who refuse to show fear or weakness, even as a disguise.

Primary Lore

You usually choose the primary lore (and the visage) of your character toward the end of the character-generation process, after choosing Attributes and Abilities. It's worth thinking about the character's primary lore *before* you assign other traits, however. Primary lore and visage have a significant effect upon the character's abilities and style, and some character concepts will suit particular lore more than others.

Lore of the Celestials: This lore primarily affects the evocations and abilities of other demons, rather than mortals. The Bel visage provides both social and physical benefits, plus improved sensory benefits. This makes the Lore of the Celestials well suited to heroic Devils who take on Earthbound and high-Torment demons in battle; there's also some potential for manipulator Devils who want an edge over their rivals in infernal politics. Leaders won't get as much benefit out of taking this as their primary lore, unless they are commanding demons as well as mortal followers.

Lore of Flame: This is a destructive lore, one that applies primarily to combat. Similarly, the Nusku visage provides only combat-related advantages. The Lore of Flame is a great choice for heroic, combat-oriented Devils. It doesn't offer much benefit as a primary lore to leaders, manipulators or characters who prefer to avoid combat.

Lore of Radiance: This lore primarily affects mortals, inspiring loyalty and valor in the souls of human followers, while the Qingu visage improves Social Attributes. This is a good primary lore for leaders, which offers great benefits for Devils who focus on manipulating or controlling mortals rather than other demons. While the visage offers a few combat-related benefits, the lore provides little for heroic Devils that fight without mortal backup.



Attributes

Physical

For heroic Devils, Physical Attributes are very important. While good Social Attributes will probably be a little more useful in the chronicle, Physical Attributes should be your second priority.

Lore of Radiance

While the Namaru were Angels of Light, they are not masters of the Lore of Light; that ability was the province of the House of Spheres, the Fiends. This is because the light the Devils control is not *physical* light, but *spiritual* light. Fiends command photons and illuminate the physical world; Devils command the spiritual substance of light — the *idea* of illumination — and use it to illuminate the souls of mankind.

Therefore, Devils are masters of the Lore of Radiance, which illuminates and elevates the minds and souls of humans, while Fiends must content themselves with speaking only to the eyes and sight of mortals. Both bodies of lore are extremely useful for aiding or controlling mortals, of course, and many Devils are knowledgeable in both.

Stamina is perhaps the most useful of the Physical Attributes for Devils, who must stand alone and survive terrible opposition — especially for the Nusku, as it controls most of the evocations of the Lore of Flame. Dexterity is almost as important, especially for warriors and heroes, as it controls skill with weapons. Strength is useful, but not vital unless your character focuses on melee combat. Devils who fight with ranged weapons or evocations don't really need to be strong.

Social

Social Attributes are extremely useful to all Devils and should probably be your first priority when assigning dots. Even those characters who focus on their own heroic deeds benefit from high Social Attributes. What good are your actions if you can't inspire others to stand up for themselves and emulate your example?

Of the Social Attributes, Manipulation is the most useful for Devils — it allows them to control and influence the behavior of others. Manipulation is *vital* for Namaru of the Qingu visage, and almost as important for the Bel, as it forms the basis for most evocations of these lore paths. Charisma is nearly as useful as Manipulation if you want to inspire instead of fool your followers or you want to be respected and loved rather than feared. Appearance is the least important of the three Social Attributes for Devils. It's more useful for mortals to be inspired by your words and deeds than for them to desire you for your beauty.

Mental

Devils aren't stupid, certainly, but they aren't overly intellectual either. The Namaru focus on being *active*, not on spending time thinking over all the possible options and making plans. Manipulators and leaders, though, need to balance action and thought, so they can command their followers and pawns in the most effective way. Such characters should probably make Mental Attributes their second priority.

Devils need to be able to think on their feet and react to changes quickly, and Wits is the most useful Mental Attribute for them. It also plays a useful part in combat. Intelligence is also useful, especially for developing tactical plans or interpreting useful information. Perception is the least important Mental Attribute for Devils.

Abilities

Talents

Most of the strengths and abilities of the Namaru are things that all characters can do, like persuade, inspire others and engage in combat — Talents, in other words. Most Devils should have Talents as their primary Ability group, because these are the Abilities that will be most useful.

Heroic Devils will benefit most from good ratings in Athletics and Dodge for combat purposes, Empathy and Leadership for inspiring others to follow their lead and Alertness, Awareness and Intuition for detecting and tracking down enemies. Leaders will want to max out the Leadership Talent, and good ratings in Empathy and Expression will also help in working with others. Manipulators need Subterfuge, of course, but they should have good ratings in Awareness and Alertness for protection, and they can gain a lot from Intimidation and Streetwise.

If you're playing a Bel, then good ratings in Alertness, Expression and Leadership will make your evocations stronger, while Devils of the Qingu visage need as much Leadership as possible. The first three evocations of the Lore of Radiance are all based on Leadership.

Skills

Learned Skills are the next most useful set of Abilities for Devils, providing hands-on, practical benefits for day-to-day tasks. Skills are best taken as the secondary Ability group.

For heroic characters, Skills provide not only combat Abilities such as Melee and Firearms, but also Security, Stealth and Survival — Skills that let you endure hardship and infiltrate the redoubt of your enemies. Leaders get less benefit from Skills, but good ratings in Etiquette will help with diplomacy, while Firearms or Melee come in handy when you lead your troops to the front lines. Manipulators will find Etiquette and Performance useful for beguiling potential pawns, while Security and Technology will protect you if things go wrong.

Devils of the Nusku visage should have as high a rating in Survival as possible, as Survival factors into *all* the evocations of the Lore of Flame.

Knowledges

Knowledges are perhaps the least useful Ability group for most Devils, who focus more on getting out and working on their goals than on book learning and scholastic pursuits. That said, the Namaru still benefit from formal Knowledge, particularly when dealing with mortal society.

For heroic Devils, Investigation and Occult can provide useful clues for tracking down enemies. Leaders should know the basics of Finance and Law if they run a formal organization, and Medicine is invaluable for aiding wounded followers. Manipulators with good ratings in Politics and Religion will have a better idea of where to spread their influence through mortal society. And all characters in the modern world can benefit from a few dots in Computer or Linguistics.

Backgrounds

All of the Backgrounds available to characters are useful, but Devil characters will find some Backgrounds more useful and effective than others.

Allies are vital for leaders, who need trusted compatriots to aid them in the field. Leaders also need Followers to carry out their plans, Contacts to provide them with information and Resources to outfit their followers with equipment.

Heroes gain much benefit from Paragon, making their evocations far more reliable in battle. Such self-sufficient characters generally don't have entourages of followers, but they find Contacts and Allies useful for occasional assistance, and they draw on Resources to buy equipment, weapons and information.

Manipulators need strong social connections and powers, represented by high ratings in Eminence, Influence and perhaps Fame. These Devils tend to also be surrounded by Followers, and they find Resources incredibly useful for controlling mortals.

Virtues

Heroic devils tend to have strong ratings in all three Virtues, but especially Courage. It's not unheard of for heroic Namaru to have low Conscience ratings. Such characters perform heroic deeds out of a sense of duty, rather than morality.

Leaders also tend to have good ratings in all three Virtues. If any one Virtue is strongest, it's normally Conviction. Leaders work from plans and discipline, and a strong sense of Conviction aids in keeping them focused.

Manipulator Devils often have low values in all three Virtues. It's not uncommon, however, for a manipulator to have strong Conscience or Conviction ratings. He manipulates others for good reasons, and for the sake of a greater good.

Lore

If you haven't already decided on your character's primary lore, now is the time to do so. Once you've decided, you need to assign dots to that lore, and possibly others, to gain evocations for the character. Some evocations are more useful than others for particular characters. Since you only know three evocations to start with, it's worth assigning your lore dots where they will do the most good.

Lore of the Celestials

Heroic characters of the Bel visage should certainly take two dots in this, their primary lore. Lamp of Faith is useful for detecting hidden enemies, while Send Vision allows for communication with allies and (with a point of Torment) attacking enemies at range. Increasing the lore to four dots with freebie points will allow the character to inflict aggravated damage with the Fire of Heaven, but leaves few points for improving the character's other traits.

Leaders who focus on working with other demons should definitely take this as their primary lore and sink all three initial dots into it. Doing so gives you Send Vision for coordinating the efforts of your forces, and Pillar of Faith to aid demonic allies (or block the evocations of enemy demons). Further improvement with freebie points probably isn't necessary at this stage, since Fire of Heaven and Hand of Faith will only occasionally be useful.

Manipulators can find the Lore of the Celestials useful, but only if they plan to control other demons. Again, three dots will be the most useful, but manipulators risk gaining Torment when they use Send Vision and Pillar of Faith against their enemies, making this a dangerous lore to take as your primary. As with leaders, taking more than three dots at this time is probably a waste of freebie points, especially for a less combat-oriented character.

Lore of Flame

This is a worthy lore for heroic characters, as it has use in direct combat, but is also good for modifying the environment (i.e., setting the place on fire) to weaken your opponents. Heroic Nusku should take at least two dots in the lore to gain Ignite, and it might be worth using all three dots to gain Command the Flame, which can be used to trap enemies. With freebie points, you can gain Holocaust, which

is a risky but powerful combat evocation. Taking Ride the Flames is probably best left for later in the chronicle, when the character's Willpower and Faith ratings are higher.

Leaders and manipulators get little or no benefit from the Lore of Flames. Leaders can use it in battle, but at the risk of the fire turning upon their own troops, and manipulators will have almost no use for the lore. These characters are best served putting their dots into other lore.

Lore of Radiance

Heroic Devils can find it useful to have one dot in this lore, gaining the Voice of Heaven evocation. While not combat-related, it's a useful evocation for communicating with the mortals the Devil may be trying to protect. The other evocations of this lore have little use to heroic warriors, and the character's lore dots should go elsewhere.

Leaders who work with mortal followers will find this an invaluable lore. Such a character should have this as his primary lore, and invest all three lore dots in it. Voice of Heaven allows for effective communication on the battlefield or in the boardroom, Exalt inspires greater competence from one's followers, and Aura of Legend helps cement the loyalty of the troops. Mark of the Celestials and Revelation are best left until later in the chronicle, when the character has amassed more influence and has a more extensive army of followers.

Manipulators also find this a very useful lore, and characters focused on controlling mortals should have this as primary. Such characters are probably best served with only two dots in the lore, however, while spending the other dots on the Lore of Humanity, which gives further options for controlling human pawns.

Common Lore

Heroic Devils might find it worthwhile to take a dot in the Lore of the Fundament. Doing so gives the character the Manipulate Gravity evocation, which increases battlefield mobility (and allows for very cool-looking stunts). Manipulate Adhesion can also be useful when fighting in enclosed environments, but will require spending freebie points to acquire, and might not be as useful as another evocation of your primary lore.

Manipulators who plan to work with humans, on the other hand, should definitely be spending freebie points to gain two dots in the Lore of Humanity. While Translate is useful, the real action comes from the Insinuate evocation, which will greatly enhance the effect of Manipulation-based rolls on mortals for an entire scene. A character with two dots in the Lore of Radiance and two in the Lore of Humanity can easily turn a room full of strangers into obedient, highly skilled servants for a short time.

Leaders gain less benefit from the common lore paths than other Devils do. They don't need as much combat power as heroes or the ability to forcibly enlist mortals to their cause. Such characters are usually better off focusing on their primary lore and gaining more powerful, high-dot evocations.

Freebie Points

A higher Faith rating is useful for a Devil, but it's not essential. Increasing Faith will improve the range and effect of evocations and make it easier to assume the character's visage, but most Namaru won't need to spend Faith on a regular basis — the exception being warriors, who may burn a lot of Faith to heal wounds quickly in combat. On the whole, it's worth spending freebies on Faith if you expect to spend a lot of time in combat, but even then a single point will usually be enough. Further points are probably better spent on other traits.

Since demons can't be affected by mind-controlling powers, Willpower is mostly useful for enhancing mundane actions with automatic successes. Heroic Devils will find a decent Willpower score useful in combat to improve attack and damage rolls. Manipulators who focus on influencing other demons will definitely benefit from a high Willpower. Since they can't directly control other demons, such mundane Abilities as Subterfuge and Politics are vital, and they become much more useful when backed up with automatic successes. Leaders don't need much in the way of Willpower, if they have the evocations needed to enhance their followers and allies.

Heroic Devils with spare freebie points should look at pumping up combat Abilities, Physical Attributes and possibly the Paragon Background. Leaders should consider pumping up Leadership, Charisma and Manipulation, as well as gaining more Followers, Allies and Contacts. Players of manipulator characters should think hard about the benefits of five dots in the Manipulation Attribute, as well as improving the Subterfuge Ability and the Eminence and Influence Backgrounds.


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Chapter Two: The House of the Rising Wind

The god Asharu, the good, god of life, a second time they named "the-exalted-divine-companion";
Who, as though his offspring, gave life to us, the gods who were perishing,
The lord who by his holy incantation made the dead gods live.
—*Enuma Elish*, the Babylonian Creation Epic

Envied by countless Elohim, the fate of the Scourges has always been inextricably linked with the mortal beings they awakened. Where other angelic Houses watched from a distance, as austere guides or awkward teachers, the Angels of the Firmament rejoiced in their role as guardians and surrogate parents. The Scourges' ties to humanity have brought them joy and sorrow in equal measures and have shaped them into the fallen angels they are today.

Before the Fall

Where other Houses were responsible for creating the physical matter of the world, charting its path through Fate or reclaiming it for the Maker when its course was spent, the Angels of the Firmament gave it all meaning with the sparks of life they bestowed.

The Angels of the Rising Wind were charged with a sacred and vital duty, one they have never forgotten even in the face of corruption and despair. They were the angels responsible for carrying the Breath of Life down to the worlds of Creation, a gift issuing from God and carried by His delighted servants. They carried the intangible mystery of life to every plant, every animal, and then to humanity itself, uniting the mundane elements of Creation into a synergy that glorified every living thing.

In the first days of Creation, everything meant to live on Earth was quickened with a breath from an angel of the Second House. Such intimate involvement with the first moments of every life tied the angels to their charges with irrevocable and unconditional love, and their faithful adherence to their other

major task was no chore at all. At God's behest, the life-givers became protectors and guardians as well, shielding the beings they awakened from the dangers of a young world. Their intimacy with the living things of Earth gave the Angels of the Firmament warning when their charges were endangered, and they were tireless in their steadfast defense. Unseen and unsuspected, the Guardian Angels stood watch over their beloved children, knowing every one as a treasured blessing. When any misfortune befell a creature of Earth, it was a Guardian who was there to mend the hurt. When any threat arose to the wellbeing of a living thing, it was a Guardian who hastened to avert even the smallest harm. Tireless and devoted in their duties, the angels of the Second House watched every life on Earth intimately.

Their role as life-givers, nurturers and guardians inevitably cast the willing Angels of the Firmament as loving parents of all life, and their gentle compassion brought tranquility to all who knew them. Where the Lammasu excited and stimulated and provoked, the Angels of the Firmament bestowed serenity and calm. They simply radiated safety and peace. It was said that the presence of an angel of the Second House was enough to still fury and abate suffering.

As awakeners and guardians of the life of Earth, the Angels of the Firmament loved it and all its wonders without question. They did not manipulate it as did the Fundamentals or shepherd its development like the Angels of the Wild. Unlike the seers of the Fourth House, they did not feel the urge to understand it. For the Guardians, it was enough simply to love it. Every plant and animal on Earth lived because of the breath of an Angel of the Firmament, and it is no surprise that many of them grew even more attached to their charges than the rest of the Elohim did.

The Children of God

With that love and parental custodianship in their hearts, how much more wondrous did the Angels of the Firmament find the humans? Here were living beings quickened by their breath, yet with a spark of God's own essence within them — awakened children with the capacity to love the angels in return. Those fortunate angels of the Second House who were chosen to give life to God's ultimate children were envied by all their peers and exalted by their task.

For the Angels of the Firmament, obeying God's first command about humanity — to love the humans as much as they loved God — was no hardship at all. None of the Elohim could have dreamed otherwise, and the Angels of the Firmament were the most devoted of all. Their secondary role as guardians allowed them to indulge every protective and loving instinct humanity inspired, and they gloried in their responsibilities. Every step Adam took was watched by an attentive Guardian Angel; every piece of fruit Eve plucked was carefully inspected by a Guardian before her glance lit upon it. The Angels of the Firmament devoted themselves to their charges — human and otherwise — with almost no thought for themselves. The wellbeing of the lives in their care was paramount.

Unsurprisingly, God's second command to the angels struck the Angels of the Firmament hard. To be forced to conceal themselves from humanity, to be hidden from the beings whom they most desired to know? For the first time, the Guardian Angels knew sadness and dissatisfaction. Had they been willing to criticize God, they might have said it felt like wanton cruelty. So near to humanity, responsible for carefully guarding every moment of their lives, the Angels of the Rising Wind were still anonymous and unappreciated. Their tireless efforts to smooth humanity's path were numbly accepted, their significance utterly unrealized, by the beings they most sought to inspire and excite.

The Angels of the Firmament could have borne their own pain and learned to forget every care and question were it not for the pain of the humans. God's children labored every day to become what their Father wanted them to be, unconsciously grasping for the enlightenment they needed — and dumbly failing every time. The watching Guardians were heartbroken by humanity's struggles, and they cursed their own impotence. Next to these tribulations, the physical wounds and discomfort spared Adam and Eve by the toils of the Guardian Angels seemed trivial and their successes meaningless.

Trouble in Paradise

Humanity's problems caused conflict in the hearts of many of the Angels of the Rising Wind. They saw their children stretching to grasp something out of reach and failing time and again. Every failure brought despondency and frustration, both to the humans and the angels watching over them. Eventually, some of the Second House could not help but quietly question God's commands.

"We are commanded to love humanity as we love Him," the argument ran. "We are also charged to express that love in watching over the humans, protecting and guarding them, saving them from every hurt. And yet the greatest pain they suffer is one we cannot avert, the pain of their constant failure to grow and learn and awaken to the glories of the

universe. We cannot ease this pain, as we have been ordered to do, without transgressing against God's other command to leave the humans in darkness and ignorance. In the face of two conflicting imperatives, how can we know which one to choose?"

Each Angel of the Firmament struggled in his own heart with the task of reconciling their contradictory commands. On one hand, to flout God's will was inconceivable. He was the Alpha and the Omega, from which all began and to which all aspired. Willful defiance of His Word was simply not in their natures. On the other hand, the thought of leaving the humans to suffer and struggle was equally alien to the Elohim — to the Angels of the Second House most of all. Angels of succor and comfort that they were, such negligence seemed a gross dereliction of their duty to the humanity they protected.

Not even the seers of the Fourth House can tell the course the Guardian Angels would have chosen had events not transpired as they did. But, fate being what it is, it was perhaps inevitable that one day a worried Seer should have called his friends to him to talk about a dark cloud on the horizon. What began as a cautious expression of concern and dismay became a debate about the nature of inevitability, and then an argument about the wisdom or hubris of preempting God's plan.

Fall from Grace

The gentle and lovely Lailah, the Defender, was present at the beginning of the Great Debate; indeed, she was the only Angel of the Firmament that Ahrimal called. Despite the persuasion of the Morningstar himself, she eventually chose obedience to God over helping humanity grow. Like every Guardian Angel, though, hers was not an easy choice, and every angel of her House struggled with the same conflicting obligations. The Guardians who chose to rebel began their path with shame and misery at disobeying their Lord, while those who remained with the Host despaired of the future that faced humanity.

Even once the inevitability of the Fall became apparent, it seemed humankind faced a thorny path regardless of the outcome. Whether humans remained ignorant and unconscious, or whether they saw the light but were cut off from God, either path would result in pain for the Allmother and Allfather. Thus even in decisiveness the Guardian Angels were torn, incapable of shielding Adam and Eve from the darkness that surely awaited them. In such dire straits, many Angels of the Firmament chose the path that would allow them to stand by the side of man and woman, protecting and nurturing humanity proudly. They could no longer stand mutely and watch humanity's pain without acting.

In retrospect, it seems inevitable that the Guardian Angels were destined to fall. Every angel was torn between God's two commands — to love humanity and to keep them ignorant — but the Angels of the Rising Wind had the additional goad of their role as guardians to prompt them into dissent. Respected as Lailah was, she did not speak for all the Guardians. Her own choice of fealty to God could not slow scores of other angels of the Second House in their desire to aid their beloved charges directly. Many flocked eagerly to the banner of rebellion. Nazriel, Throne of Unbounded Benevolence, led her fellows into defiance of God, and the House produced many of the greatest stalwarts of the rebel Host. It was Nazriel who bore the responsibility for introducing the Angels of the Firmament to the awakening Allfather and Allmother. She epitomized the gentleness and compassion of the Asharu, and she radiated comfort and safety that unconsciously warmed all around her.

The House at War

Like the rebels of every House, the Angels of the Firmament were stunned and battered by Michael's proclamations on the first morning after the Fall. Newly named the Asharu, the Scourges, the once-Angels of the Firmament were stricken with the news that the humanity for whom they rebelled would be cursed to a short and inglorious life. Despite all the efforts of the Guardians to protect them from harm both accidental and malicious, every child of the human nation would one day cease to live.

The lamentations of the Asharu knew no bounds. Here was the curse they feared more than any other — that humanity would face harm and pain from which the Guardian Angels simply could not protect them. It was the possibility of such a fate that had impelled the Angels of the Firmament to rebel in the first place, and it was now pronounced as fact. The realization that this fate was due to the angels' rebellion merely added to the bitterness of the wound.

In vain the Asharu begged Michael to reverse the sentence uttered upon the humans they knew to be innocent and good, but the forces of Heaven were unrelenting. Offered the choice between ignorant obedience to Heaven, and enlightened defiance with their angelic friends, the tribes of mankind had chosen to remain with their eyes open. They had chosen



their lot, Michael said, and they would be punished as the rebellious angels were.

For their own part, the Scourges were horrified, but few wavered in their resolve. The wellbeing of humanity was at the forefront of their minds, and their own fates seemed far less important by comparison. So much else had been done for love of the humans, with no reward but the satisfaction of serving, that the price of rebellion must surely be compensated for by the love and trust of the humans who would finally know their parents.

Grimly, many of the grieving Asharu resolved to double their vigilance. If a human's sojourn on Earth was to be limited by necessity, they reasoned, it was more important than ever to ensure that that life was as perfect and joyous — as untroubled — as possible. There was no time to waste on mediocrity or waiting; every moment had to be perfect. Their motives were noble, and in clinging to their function as Guardians they found justification for their continued existence. Faced with such a blow to their fundamental natures, many Asharu needed motivation to continue in rebellion, and even in existence. Their fierce re-dedication to their roles as guardians and nurturers gave them a reason to go on.

Other Scourges, however, found it hard to see the matter so. To an ageless and eternal creature, a few score of years is an infinitesimal span. These fallen angels felt that if a human's life span was to be so painfully limited, the quality of that life hardly mattered. Perhaps exceptions could be made for exemplary men and women, they conceded, but how could a being with but a century to live distinguish itself in any notable way? What difference did it make if any human suffered or knew bliss, if either state were only to persist for such a short time?

Over time, these Scourges became harshly critical of humanity and its actions. Each failing by a human, every error man made, became a piece of evidence that humanity was flawed and weak. Such proof reinforced the Scourges' bitter belief that they had been treated poorly by Heaven and ill used by humanity, and they justified their dedication to their self-imposed task of making humanity "right." Many of these Scourges sought to eradicate the errors they saw in humanity's behavior and to make man worthy of the sacrifice the Asharu had made. They formed the core of the Asharu who eventually joined the Ebon Legion under the leadership of the Devourer Abaddon.

Such allegiances were not universal, of course, and those Asharu who had devoted themselves to renewed guardianship of humanity found themselves drawn to many of the other legions. The Iron Legion

of the Archduke Dagon was particularly attractive to the Asharu who chose a path of nurture and guardianship, and they devoted themselves to the protection of humanity as deeply as any of their comrades did. The shield wall of the Iron Legion was supported by ministering Asharu, who brought ease to the heartsick and resolve to the wavering.

The Crimson Legion numbered many of the highest ranking Asharu, drawn by Lucifer's impressive presence and his inspiring statement of love for humanity. Nazriel, highest of the Second House to join Lucifer, followed his cause to the Crimson Legion and attracted more of her fellows in doing so. The Scourges who joined Lucifer's own legion were usually those motivated to push humans to the limits of their potential for their own good. Humans had the capability to become so much more than what they were, the Scourges of the Crimson Legion reasoned. It was the Second House's duty as de facto parents to help the human nation into maturity and blossoming.

The Silver Legion drew those Asharu who were, instead, fascinated by just what humanity's potential might be. If these sadly limited creatures could rise above their brief tenure on Earth and exploit the spark of God's own life within them, the possibilities for their accomplishments would be staggering. The Scourges who followed Asmodeus sought to improve the quality of the beings to whom they brought life, and the quality of those beings' lives.

The Alabaster Legion appealed to the Asharu most grieved by the fact of mankind's mortality. If humans had to die, they felt, the Asharu should be there to ease their hurts and mend their wounds. They found solace in working with the Slayers, offering succor and support to human and demon alike as the Slayers soberly carried out their grim duties.

The Role of the Asharu

When factional conflicts began to tear apart the previously unified rebels, Nazriel tried to forge a clear path for her divided House. She remained true to the leader of the rebellion and followed Lucifer into the Crimson Legion. As she followed the Morningstar, many followed her, and by his side she represented the greatest virtues of the Asharu. Even in the midst of strife Nazriel was a model of peace and protection. Her compassionate touch soothed the most feverish ills, and her mere presence blew away oppressive fear in the Crimson Legion's forces. In truth this was somewhat ironic, as — although she did not admit as much even to herself — she had begun to lose some faith in the rightness of their activities. The atrocities of war grieved her, and she found it hard to justify such harm and suffering even in the name of good intentions.

Instead, she shored up her doubts and uncertainty with a blinding and sincere faith in the Morningstar. His constant sense of "rightness" removed the possibility of disbelief; to know him was to feel the warming, comforting blaze of his confidence and assurance. And Nazriel certainly knew him. She was one of his closest advisors and confidantes, although she avoided the military activities of his inner circle of lieutenants. She tried her hardest to avoid burdening him with her own doubts, and indeed in his presence she was constantly reassured that their path was the right one. Without realizing it, she stopped believing in their cause and started believing in their leader. No one was more passionately dedicated to Lucifer and his actions than Nazriel, and rumor whispered that her passion for him was more than ideological.

As the most senior of the rebel Second House, Nazriel was the titular head of the Scourges. She believed, however, that dictating House-wide policies and giving strict orders to the Scourges' hierarchy was contrary to the spirit of enlightened choice that led the Asharu into rebellion in the first place. She chose, instead, to lead by example and encouraged her fellow Scourges to act as she acted. In her heart — particularly in the later years of the war — she found it hard to justify ordering her underlings to act without reservation in the name of a cause she doubted herself. In spite of her reservations, however, she was widely lauded as a model of serenity and compassion, and emulated by most Asharu of the Dagan visage who had not fallen into spite, resentment and bitterness.

Despite their differences in philosophies and perspectives, the Asharu were united in their fierce resolve to give their utmost to the rebellion and the war effort. For many of the Houses, their role was clear by virtue of their predilections, lore and other abilities. So it was for the Asharu, who quickly found niches where they could be of most use. Their mastery over the air and the winds made them ideal scouts and spies, swift and careful with eyes that saw to the edges of the world. Those Scourges who had focused on their original role as bringers of life found themselves in great demand as healers, protectors and battlefield medics. Nazriel represented the greatest of these, and many Scourges gave everything they had to the causes of peace and protection.

Where other angels of the Second House focused on their gift of the Breath of Life, Mandalagor and his kind were made for nothing so earthly. Before the fall

he was known as Mandalagor Empyrean's Virtue, and his was the joy of the open skies and a clear day when one could see from one edge of the world to the other. Mandalagor was another angel of the Second House who brought ease to all around him. His was not the warm comfort of a nurturing parent, but rather the serenity of a peaceful, shining sky.

Although he was not so intimately bound up with the plight of the humans as his fellow Scourges were, he still felt keenly the injustice of mankind's situation and the apparent conflict in God's dicta. Many Angels of the Firmament who were less enamored of humanity chose to place their trust in Heaven's plans and reject Ahrimal's heresy, so Mandalagor was one of the most highly ranked angels of the Anshar visage to choose Lucifer's side. He did so clear-eyed and confident, unable to see any better course even with his prodigious vision. Unable to sway his masters, he stepped forward to join the Morningstar with head unbowed, and he found to his joy that many of his peers and the lesser Angels of the Firmament — inspired by his example — did the same.

Throughout the war Mandalagor served as one of the most noble and eminent members of the Second House. Commended by Lucifer as the Overlord of Clear Horizons, he trained many of the House's most successful and famous spies and observers in their tasks. Eventually Mandalagor succeeded to a position as a baron within the Alabaster Legion, assisting Azrael faithfully in scrying out those humans who needed the Alabaster Legion's gentle, mournful attention.

Chillingly, many of the grimmer Scourges perfected awful shadows of these powers — songs of toxicity and poison instead of those of healing and nurturing. Such demons as the notorious Riyazgor of the Black Cloud found satisfaction in demoralizing the opposition with illnesses that weakened the hearts and wills of the human tribes still loyal to Heaven. They blasted the lands of the angelic hosts with corruption, disease and other similar perversions of their original gifts of life. Their actions often drew the ire of the other Asharu, who were frustrated at their fellow Scourges' misuse of their powers and sickened by the results. These differences gradually provoked disagreements, which became arguments, which grew into silent schism within the once-united House of the Rising Wind.

Riyazgor of the Black Cloud was, perhaps, the antithesis of the stalwarts of the Choir of Dagan. He began the war with the same dreams of hope and redemption as the rest of his House, but the suffering of the mortals troubled his spirit. When Caine committed the first atrocity in slaying his brother Abel, Riyazgor was battered and transfigured by the tide of chaos that rolled around the world.

As sanity returned, he found himself on the flanks of Abaddon's army marching upon Sagun, and the powers of the winds were at his fingertips. The new awareness of hate roiled within him, and as he raised his hands to call windstorms against Sagun's defenders, the winds were streaked with bilious toxins and currents of despair. It was Riyazgor who unwittingly showed the Second House how devastating its powers could be and how quickly health could be turned to malady. Others followed him, reveling in their newfound abilities, until the battlefield of Sagun was awash with tides of venom and disease.

After Sagun's fall, Riyazgor became one of the most notable Scourges and a stalwart of the Ebon Legion. He was rapidly promoted up the ranks to overlord for his unwavering dedication, and he led parties of scorchers in sorties to blight enemy territory and strike down their forces. The talents and predilections of the Scourges made him a fearsome enemy to Michael's forces, and they spared no effort to capture or destroy him. Wily and experienced, he eluded all the attempts against him until a fellow Scourge — Tamariel of the Sweet Breath, scion of the Iron Legion — caught him in the act of poisoning a village's water supply. He escaped with his life, although barely, and he nursed a grudge against all the gentler Asharu from that day forth.

His was one of the loudest voices calling for sanctions against the Scourges who preferred to focus on their love of humanity rather than their obligations to their comrades, and there were rumors of him taking direct action against the Scourges he considered traitorous. No concrete evidence was ever found, but all but the most extremist Scourges stepped carefully around him.

One sad effect of the war was that it destroyed the innocence and purity of the Angels of the Firmament. By its nature, war is all about sacrifices and compromise, and a war leader accepts the necessity of harm to a certain portion of her troops in exchange for a greater victory. This sort of tradeoff was alien to most of the Asharu, whose nature insisted that all harm to the living things of Earth should be mitigated and minimized, not embraced in pursuit of some bigger goal. As a consequence, few Scourges ever wished to serve as leaders, planners or strategists. Most opted for roles as advisors, spies and defenders, where they could employ their gifts in a fashion they could morally accept.

On the other hand, the more ruthless Asharu were perfectly willing to exchange the short and pointless lives of humans for some advantage in the tides of war. They unnerved many angels of the other Houses with their casual indifference to the fate of the creatures for whose sake they originally fell. Still, lacking the temperament for leadership, they usually chose to leave the crowns to their Devil brethren and instead served as elite agents of detection and disruption in the rebels' war forces.

The Asharu at War

With their new roles before them, the Asharu set themselves to serving the war effort with devotion and dedication. Despite an ever-widening ideological gulf within the House, the myriad and powerful Scourges — whose numbers swelled Lucifer's host more than any other House but the First — usually approached their tasks in the same fundamental ways. Rather than operating in large, organized groups, the Asharu — who were often as human-centric as the Lammasu and the Halaku — thrived in individual roles as shepherds, healers, guardians and spies. As a consequence, the cohesiveness of the Second House was stretched taut. It was rare for the Asharu to operate as a group or to seek conclave with their peers. Each Scourge operated as her heart dictated and as her leader commanded, rather than according to House policy.

Naturally, that did not mean that the House of the Rising Wind ceased to exist as an entity and became merely a loose collection of individual agents. The Asharu were the premier spies of Lucifer's forces, and their mastery of the winds gave them unmatched speed. Along with those angels who had mastered the mystical paths of the world, the Asharu served as messengers from bastion to stronghold to human village. They carried messages to places where the supernatural speech of the demons could not go.

As a consequence, they were constantly relaying messages to and fro with other Asharu, meeting one here to pass on a message and another there to pick up a new missive. Although the Asharu met in large groups infrequently, many of them were in regular contact with at least a few other demons of their House, in a network of messenger-demons spread out across the lands of Lucifer's forces. As they met, they talked and conferred, and the news and events of the House of the Firmament would spread out across the world in a wave as Scourge messengers came and went. The casual and chaotic nature of these communications were perfect for the Asharu, who needed no central authority to carry out their missions in life.

Although their contributions were critical to the successes of Lucifer's armies, the Asharu avoided direct fighting themselves. Their powers were best suited for use at a distance, whether in the gathering of intelligence or in the infliction of terrible plagues. Accustomed to aeons of surreptitious and unnoticed activity, even the most venal and violent of the Scourges preferred to exert their abilities from a safe distance. Even after the Asharu accepted the necessity that war involved compromise and sacrifice, not many of them relished the job of bringing such devastation themselves.

Therefore, the Asharu as a whole were not a violent House. Their powers focused around observation, movement and healing; the twisted shadows of these powers brought pain and misery, but direct combat applications were few. Whether gentle protectors or cursed plague-carriers, the Asharu preferred to leave the brutality of personal combat to others of more appropriate Houses. Those Asharu who followed other demons in choosing the warrior's path usually employed their talents in defense of humanity. Only the most lost of the Scourges found satisfaction in aggression against other demons.

Many of the Asharu were kept ignorant of tactical activities involving the human tribes loyal to the Heavenly Host. In the first periods of the war it was not unheard-of for an Asharu to fly to aid a human at risk, whether that human was a rebel mortal or one of Heaven's faithful — even if doing so involved pitting themselves against fellow demons of other Houses. Humanity was the reason the Morningstar and his allies rebelled in the first place, and many Asharu felt it would make a mockery of their proudly espoused beliefs to condone harm to humans just because they were on the other side. It took a long time for most of the Asharu to forget these scruples or learn to set them aside, and as a consequence, their allies deemed them unreliable in such matters.

A Further Fall From Grace

Sadly, as time went on, it became harder for the Asharu to maintain their serenity and positive outlook. The world was littered with the corpses of once-loved humans, gone and forgotten, and the humans who fought with and against the rebel angels displayed savagery and brutality that taught the angels themselves how to hate. Atrocity was inconceivable until one man slew his brother out of jealousy, and the world trembled with his action. For the first time, the demons understood hate and vengeance and violence.

The Asharu were heartbroken at the horrors they learned to perpetrate, taught by their own children.

They clung to their missions as protectors, guardians, healers — but many Scourges found it hard to maintain their dedication in the face of such casual evil. The fact that it was committed by the humans for whom they had rebelled seemed an ungrateful repayment for the sacrifices they had made, and many angels of the Second House began to resent the humans for everything they had cost the fallen angels.

More and more of the Scourges began to turn their powers against the humans they once staunchly protected. Where once they healed, they brought disease and pain; they poisoned the land and set death creeping among the human tribes. At first this seemed just punishment for humans who were not worthy of protection, those who had committed evil or lived worthless and wasted lives. All too soon, though, the distinctions began to blur and the Scourges ceased to discriminate among their potential targets. What was there to mourn in the loss of such a short, unremarkable life, anyway?

Even the sweetest and gentlest of the angels began to fall prey to the same passions and ugly crimes that tainted the world after the First Murder and the fall of Sagun. Generosity turned to greed, and devotion turned to obsession just as inevitably as the seasons passed. The spreading malaise touched the Second House at every level, from the lowliest fallen angels to the highest ranked Asharu. Even Psidiel, Lord of Renewal — second in eminence only to Nazriel among the Scourges — fell to its corruption. He was Nazriel's underling before the Fall, an Angel of the Visage of Awakening and a devoted healer. When Ahrimal instigated the Great Debate and the angels had to decide where their loyalties lay, Psidiel trusted in the wisdom of his superior and chose as she did. He faithfully followed her into rebellion and became one of her most trusted allies.

Insofar as the Second House ever had lieutenants or a formal hierarchy of power in practice, Psidiel was Nazriel's first lieutenant and assistant, and he commanded considerable respect from his fellow Scourges. Few were as devoted to the Asharu cause, and Psidiel frequently led dangerous missions to bring succor to needy mortals trapped in disputed territory. In time, however, the seeds of bitterness planted deep in the heart of the rebellion's cause bloomed within Psidiel as they did in so many other demons. The pain humanity endured during the rebellion, and the loss of beloved comrades, triggered doubts and uncertainty. Psidiel saw the original decision to rebel as futile and frustrating, when all the angels could do was watch their beloved humans succumb to mortality after short and grim lives.

Psidiel's decision to rebel was based in a deep-rooted faith in Nazriel, perhaps more so than in an informed choice about the issue of the Fall itself. As he began to regret his decision, he began to blame his superior for misleading him and drawing him into a pointless rebellion that served only to damn everyone concerned. Ultimately, his passion for Nazriel — which was rumored to be more than the devotion of a loyal subordinate to his superior — twisted into bitterness and resentment, fueled by the whispers of her liaison with the Morningstar and by what he perceived as the futility of his Fall.

As resolve turned to resignation and joy to bitterness, Psidiel's outlook on humanity changed. No longer willing to risk his life for flawed and insignificant mortals, he became a strict and compassionless judge of human excellence. Only the highest standards of perfection could move him to admiration; to anyone who could not meet those standards, he was a harsh taskmaster whose attention was feared and avoided. His darkening temperament made him unwelcome in the Crimson Legion where he had originally followed Nazriel, and he decided upon Abaddon's Ebon Legion as more suited to his goals. Eventually the corruption of the war turned his dispassion into enmity, and he actively sought out those humans he judged unworthy of existence — almost all of them — to dispense the death his powers bestowed. Sadly, many followed his lead.

The Scourges learned to see humans as pawns, playing pieces to be hoarded and protected merely for their value as a measure of success or failure in the war. The human tribes loyal to Heaven were targets to prove the superiority of the rebel angels. Many of the Scourges cast aside their former devotion to the humans who led them to Fall, and fought the war as savagely as any Rabisu.

Opposing these Scourges were fellow Asharu, primarily those who had followed Dagon into the Iron Legion. They mended the wounds their fellows inflicted along with those caused by Heaven's forces. They replaced disease with health and defended their human charges ferociously, as they had always done. Even in the face of atrocity and despair, these former angels never forgot how to love — until they were banished to the Abyss and lost to the forces of nothingness.

The Choir of Dagan exemplified such unselfish devotion, working tirelessly for a thankless humanity. This group, one of the most closely knit within the Second House, chose to honor its responsibilities as Guardians and Asharu above its duties to legion and

commander. The Choir was led by Gadriel, once the Virtue of Sunlight's Kiss and dubbed a lord in Lucifer's new order.

After the Fall, Gadriel became the Lord of Panacea Unbounded, and collected a group of like-minded Asharu to serve humanity with him. By default the group joined the Iron Legion under mighty Dagon, but it had small involvement with the affairs of the rest of the legion. Instead these Asharu preferred to concern themselves with the health of mankind, and they were tireless in their efforts. Where malicious Scourges had spread plague, they would cleanse the nations of man; where war had blasted the land, they would breathe life back into it. Unsurprisingly, they often clashed with the more destructive Scourges and Devourers even on their own side, and they did their best to mitigate the influence of such spiteful demons.

The Choir of Dagan carried its missions of mercy deep into lands controlled by Michael and the forces of Heaven, although it rarely acted to directly undo the works of its allies. After the first confrontations with angels still loyal to Heaven, it was largely able to continue its work unmolested — although the group was eyed very suspiciously, few angels could take issue with actions so purely good.

Indeed, the work of the Choir of Dagan raised doubts in the hearts of a number of loyalist angels, who saw caring and compassionate ministers in the form of their former brethren — an image at odds with the portrayal of the rebel angels as prideful fanatics motivated by hubris and greed. After the Fall and the subsequent punishment of Lucifer and his allies, however, those angels with doubts were not eager to speak them loudly. Instead, they made themselves content with not harrying those forces of the opposition who were bringing nurture and peace with them.

Sadly, this policy of non-interference could not last forever, and as the war descended into a morass of spite and atrocity, the members of the Choir of Dagan found themselves far less able to go where they would. Gadriel refused to cut back his efforts to heal all of humanity, however, and eventually he was taken prisoner on one of his missions by the angel Scuriel, Virtue of the Fifth House. No word returned to the survivors of the Choir of his fate or the fates of the three angels lost with him. Grimly they continued their tasks as before, under the leadership of Nexalgor of Dancing Light, but the closure of the enemy borders to them saddened them beyond measure, and they grieved for the lost humans ever after.

Out of the Abyss

The modern world represents joy and terror for the newly released Scourges. On one hand, their freedom is unexpected ecstasy after millennia of imprisonment, and the simple act of living again is pleasure undreamed of. The Asharu are needed in the World of Darkness; modern technology has not supplanted their supernatural skill with healing or rendered them superfluous as guardians and protectors, and in the new world order there is so much more to frighten and pain humans and so few allies to protect them.

On the other hand, seeing the depths of mundanity to which glorious humanity has sunk is profoundly depressing for former angels who gave up everything to exalt and nurture these frail mortals. Everywhere the Scourges look, there is wasted potential and needless, sadistic pain. How can they feel anything other than that the world is broken beyond repair, and that the only meaning they can bring is in winnowing the few grains of wheat from the overwhelming human chaff?

The Abyss profoundly changed every fallen angel cast into it and made them worthy of their sobriquets of "demon." The Asharu were changed just as much as the demons of any other House. They originally fell for love of humanity and the desire to manifest that love in every way. Thousands of years in void and darkness, left to fester in bitterness and doubt, finished the job of breaking the Scourges that the atrocities of the war had begun. No longer content to live solely to embody their noble and pure love for humans, the Scourges began to ask themselves — and each other — whether humanity was truly worthy of the sacrifices they had made.

Over time, the abrasive hatred of the Abyss — the rejection by God that it symbolized — wore away all hope on the part of the still-gentle Asharu that their course was a wise one. Few found the strength to argue with their more embittered Housemates, and eventually most of the Scourges adopted an attitude that made their House's epithet all too accurate. They could think of nothing more than sharing their pain and misery with the humans who had innocently lured them into damnation.

When the walls of the Abyss cracked open and freed the lowliest of the demons, everything changed again. The simple act of possessing these wretched, damnable mortals reminded the Scourges of just why they had once loved humanity so much. The warmth

of being needed was enough to shock many Scourges out of the deepest reaches of their bitterness and hatred. It raised the possibility that perhaps the rewards had been worth the costs that the Asharu had had to pay.

A few fragmentary memories of human existence and the flickering remnants of humanity's burning faith were not sufficient to erase thousands of years of learning to hate and resent. Even those Scourges who were the most gentle and forgiving of their House are dismayed by the wreck of the Paradise they built and the bovine contentment of the humans who have fallen so far from the greatness of their ancestors. It is hard for them to look at humanity and see mortals who were truly worthy of the price that the fallen angels paid for their sake. It is hard not to resent the waste the humans have made of the gifts Lucifer and his kind gave them at such a cost to themselves.

In the modern World of Darkness, many angels of the Second House are desperately trying to reassure themselves that there is still some good salvageable in humanity — that the flawed creatures before them can be remade to achieve the glory of their earliest kin. With the sobering experience of the war behind them, and still bearing the scars of their torment in the Abyss, few Scourges are capable of the uncomplicated and unconditional love they once felt for humanity. Instead, most examine mankind with a critical eye, searching out the merits and potential that they once deemed worthy of any sacrifice to protect.

Strange New World

As the first demons broke through the barriers of the Abyss and streamed toward the mortal world, many of them were Scourges. When the cracks in their prison walls began to appear, the Scourges were well placed to take advantage of this route to freedom, and those underlings hesitant to leave comparative safety were ordered out en masse by their demon masters. As a result, many of the newly freed demons in the first exodus to the modern World of Darkness were Scourges, putting the House in a good position to build a solid power base right from the first days.

Unfortunately for them, the Scourges were not the most politically motivated angels, nor the most unified, and they did not capitalize on their early advantage as other Houses did. Countless Scourges were struck anew with their fascination with humans that they'd managed to put aside during exile, and many other priorities were forgotten in the first flush of renewing Asharu acquaintance with that strange, quixotic beast called humanity.

The Scourges did not sink completely into witless obsession, however, and neither did they forget their ultimate mission. Compelled with the lash of their True Name, most set about establishing their own power in the world to better pave the way for their masters to return.

The major problem faced by many Scourges in preparing for a full-scale demonic return to Earth was that of their own hosts. The mortals who called most strongly to Scourges desperately seeking a host were also often the mortals most battered by modern society and those least able to provide mortal resources for the newly born demon to use.

Admittedly, with a confident and powerful demon now in the driver's seat the pointless terrors that plagued the mortal were usually of little consequence to the new entity, and their situations in life usually improved rapidly. The mortal hosts brought little advantage of their own to the demon's new life, however, and most Scourges had to start from scratch in building a potent and useful existence for themselves. This fact contrasted sharply with demons of other Houses — particularly the Devils — who were naturally drawn to people of power and importance, which gave them a significant head-start in this most unexpected of races.

Forging a New Hierarchy

On an organizational level, the Second House underwent profound change during the first periods of adjustment to life on the new earth. Previously the Scourges had been independent and decentralized, each acting from his own conscience and focusing on humanity rather than acting as part of a cohesive House force. In the World of Darkness, however, the demons quickly found that humans were different — they lacked the wonder and joy and so many other traits of their ancient predecessors, and in many ways, they were complete strangers to the Asharu. Despite instincts telling them to focus on mankind, many Scourges found themselves disconcerted and uncomfortable with these almost-strangers, so they turned to their own kind for reassurance and support in a way that many had never done before.

As a consequence, the hierarchies of the Asharu now carry much more prestige and exercise more power than they did during the war. House affiliations are now at least as strong for many Scourges as they are for other demons. In many cases, in fact, they are stronger. Many of the other Houses have always been as focused on their brethren as on humanity, but it is a new phenomenon for the Scourges, and therefore stronger for the novelty of it.

Senior Scourges have realized that this new dependence on — and loyalty to — the Second House could dissipate over time as the Asharu become accustomed to the new order of things in the World of Darkness, so they are acting now to secure long-term loyalty and service from subordinate Asharu. These strategies have ranged from personal — accumulating favors, debts and information on individual Scourges to ensure their continued allegiance — to political. Several high-ranked Scourges have concentrated on inserting themselves into the hierarchies of other power blocs not just for the advantage to themselves but for the political power over their Asharu underlings that it gives them. Needless to say, the other members of the various power blocs would be less than happy with the Asharu should they discover that the Scourges have been diverting factional or court resources to advance the agendas of the Second House.

The nascent power bloc of the Second House carries complications for many Scourges, as it tangles their loyalties even further. In addition to existing allegiances to their legions, factions and infernal courts, the new power implicit in the unity of the Second House requires every Scourge to have an opinion on it. Whether each Scourge chooses to throw in her lot with her earliest peers and give her loyalty to the House of the Rising Wind, ignores the new claims upon her allegiance and continues to devote herself to her faction's existing agendas, or tries to walk a careful line between any number of masters, the rise of the Second House as a concrete entity has had an impact on every modern Scourge.

Despite the new focus on the Second House as an entity unto itself, the ties that bind Asharu to humans are what make them what they are. As much as any other demons, the Scourges are still too deeply obsessed with humanity to just forget about them overnight, which is evident from their behavior in the mortal world. Very few Scourges are willing to cut themselves off from mortals entirely. Those who choose to do so are usually of the Ellil visage, distant and detached scouts and spies who were the most objective and least attached to humanity.

The majority of the Second House has developed close ties to humans, even if the Scourges are busy sorting out how important those mortal bonds are to them. As a consequence, most Asharu have strong connections with the mortal world — power, money, contacts, devoted followers. While not the astute politicians the Devils are, nor yet irresistible tempters like the Defilers, the Scourges have never forgotten the easy comfort of interacting with humans, and most have not lost the knack of endearing themselves where they wish to.

Power Plays

Nazriel still leads the House of the Rising Wind. Now she does it as Nazathor, Princess of Majestic Liberation, and she is very different from the doubtful and repentant creature she was before Lucifer's defeat at Michael's hands. Her time in the Abyss scoured away much of the sweet gentleness of her personality and taught her the truths of necessity. While she might not have plunged as far into savagery as such demons as Belial and Abaddon, she learned the lessons of the Abyss well and discovered that she was capable of much more harsh practicality than she had ever suspected.

In the World of Darkness she no longer exudes the comfort that endeared her to all. Her softness has been abraded away only to show the force of her personality waiting beneath. Gentle or no, Nazathor began her existence as a Throne of Heaven and retains as much majesty and power as any demon. She remains as one of the world's most powerful fallen angels and has risen to greatness within the Luciferan faction.

Her quest to recover their fallen leader is shared by many Scourges, who found the Luciferan faction the most appealing during the long years of strife and argument in the Abyss. It was for love of, and in emulation of, the Morningstar that many Angels of the Second House fell in the beginning; it would be a mockery of everything they are to abandon their leader now. Nazathor's eminence within the Luciferans helped her secure her power within the Second House, in fact. So many Scourges accepted her as their political superior due to her factional power that she found she had a considerable cadre of allies and subordinates within the House of the Firmament itself.

Where Nazathor leads the Second House most visibly, she has found an unexpected ally in Yeshiniel, a Faustian Scourge of some power. Although he never advanced much beyond the rank of fell knight during the war, he was one of the first demons to escape his Abyssal prison, and one of the most powerful of the first wave. He promptly set about capitalizing on his early advantage with a political flair worthy of a Devil, and he built himself a significant power base of mortal followers and secular influence long before the more powerful fallen breached the bounds of the Abyss. As a result he was able to supply aid to all manner of newly released demons — including some of the most powerful —

and he rapidly developed a healthy stock of debts, favors and other political treats.

Yeshiniel and Nazathor have been working together to secure the fortunes of the Second House in the modern world. Yeshiniel holds some power in the Infernal Court of Boston, and with Nazathor's influence over the Luciferan faction, they have been able to draw on their power in other spheres of fallen society to promote the Second House's agendas as well. Naturally, other power players in demonic politics have noticed the rise of this new competitor for their subordinates' loyalty, and although no one has taken active steps yet, it's unlikely that Nazathor and Yeshiniel will be able to continue their program of consolidation with no interruptions.

Ultimately, the House of the Rising Wind is a very different entity reborn in the modern World of Darkness, and it would be almost unrecognizable to the earliest Angels of the Firmament. Most of its House members have had their unconditional love and compassion flayed away. Turned from gentleness to bitterness by millennia of excommunication in the Abyss, they are no longer willing to give themselves so selflessly to the human race. The Scourges are far more tempered by self-interest and calculation than they once were, so they are much more inclined to associate with their like-minded House brethren. As a consequence, the Second House has a cohesion and identity in modern times that it never enjoyed — or needed — in the ancient ages of war.

Famous Names

The modern world operates under different rules than it did during the ancient times of paradise and war that the demons understand best. The traits that made for greatness before the exile to the Abyss are not necessarily qualities that will lead to fame or power in the World of Darkness, but there is still an opportunity for those who understand the ebb and flow of the modern world to distinguish themselves.

Equally, in the rush to establish power bases and safe holdings in the new world, the old power structures were shaken up and remade anew. The lowliest demons, never exalted by promotion or recognition in the old order, suddenly found themselves with an opportunity to seize greatness for themselves and have responded accordingly.

Nazathor

The Princess of Majestic Liberation, as the Scourge once known as Nazriel now calls herself, is one of the most powerful demons in the modern world. Released from the Abyss, she has risen to power within the faction of the Luciferans, as befits her still-passionate belief in the fallen angels' missing leader. Apart from her loyalty to the Second House — reborn stronger than ever in this cold, faithless world — she is most strongly motivated by her near-obsessive search for the Morningstar.

Nazathor is more devoted to her cause than most Luciferans, simply because the Morningstar is very important to her personally rather than just a figurehead and inspiration. Rumors tell that she was Lucifer's lover, and her behavior certainly doesn't belie that; she uses every resource available to her in her search for Lucifer. Traveling frequently between Los Angeles and Rio de Janeiro, Nazathor must delegate many of her most important tasks to underlings as she simply has no time to spare from her constant search.

Yeshiniel

In his first incarnation as an Angel of the Firmament, Yeshiniel was the Archangel of Skyborne Contemplation, and his reputation for careful observation and measured action would indicate that he had joined the Cryptics. Yet that is not so. His earliest days in the modern world provided this quietly calculating Faustian with the building blocks of personal power, and he exploited his every advantage to become one of the most powerful Scourges in the modern world.

Currently claiming a position as overlord, and looking hungrily at the authority of a baron, Yeshiniel is the primary proponent of the Second House as an independent political entity. He is aided by Princess Nazathor, who has nothing to lose if power shifts from factional alliances to House-based loyalties, and he has carefully used his position and wealth to gather information. His mortal identity is known as Isaac Baker, an aggressive young Boston businessman whose technology company has made leaps and bounds of late, amassing a considerable fortune.

Yeshiniel and his followers are currently the main seekers of lost Scourges. Yeshiniel has a great deal of information at his fingertips, and he uses it to track down undiscovered, unaligned and unaware Asharu who can be recruited at his discretion. When he does find a prodigal Scourge, Yeshiniel does his best to inculcate loyalty to himself first and the House of the Rising Wind second. The Second House as a political entity is Yeshiniel's best hope for wide-scale power of his own. Although many of the world's "big names" owe him favors, he's still a weak fish in a pond full of strong ones, and carving out a niche for himself in the factional system is more of an uphill battle than in a new power structure he can help to forge.

Ouestucati

Formerly the Archangel of the Ocean Wind, Ouestucati is a shining light among the peaceful

Reconciler faction. Many demons — Reconcilers or no — seek to emulate her calm serenity, for she has managed to purge many of her negative emotions and is one of the fallen least scarred by the torment of the Abyss. She remains hopeful that the Reconcilers — and the fallen angels as a whole — can repair the damage they have caused and perhaps win redemption for themselves.

At her heart, Ouestucati hopes most strongly that the hard work of the Reconcilers can absolve humanity of its sins, that the sacrifice of the fallen angels can win forgiveness for their beloved humans if not for themselves. She quietly encourages many of the junior faction adherents in this goal, and a small corps of Reconcilers has formed who believe that martyrdom may be the only way to undo the damage they have caused.

Inaroth

Once Inaroth was the Principality of Trade Winds, an ethereal and remote angel whose cool breezes freshened the minds and spirits of all they touched. In the war she served as Lady Inaroth, her powers buoying the combatants likewise. The banishment of the fallen angels to the Abyss hit her very hard, however, and in grief and anger, she blamed humanity and the rebellion's leaders for her punishment. She was recruited early for the Raveners and became one of their most dedicated members.

On her freedom from the Abyss she initially inhabited Dinah Masterson, a homeless young street thief in London's East End, but quickly discarded her in favor of a far more useful host. She currently uses the identity of one Rebecca Windsor, a traveler backpacking and working her way around the world, to act as a messenger and emissary of the Raveners. She is constantly heartbroken at the wreckage of Paradise that the world has become, and she sees little hope of any meaningful repair. Her venomous zephyrs and clouds of pollution wend their way across various parts of northern Europe, serving to intensify an already-grim atmosphere and make the world just that little bit bleaker. Other Scourges of the Ellil visage have pleaded with her to clean their skies, not befoul them further, but she seems lost to moderation and reason.

Relics and Lost Lore

Like every House's ancient history, the lost artifacts and arcane knowledge of the Scourges are of paramount importance in these strange new times of chaos and upheaval. Without the logistic genius of the Fiends or the creative instincts of the Malefactors, the Scourges are not at the forefront of the push to rediscover or reinvent old glories. That does not mean they're prepared to sit idly by, however, and the Second House seeks its legacies as eagerly as any other.

Relics

The relics of the Scourges were usually designed to further their primary roles. For many Scourges, this meant healing, protecting and nurturing roles, particularly focused upon humanity. For others, the venom implicit in the "scourge" sobriquet ruled their lives, and their relics were designed to harm.

With the focus on humanity so many Asharu possessed, their relics were often centered around mortals. Unlike most Houses, the Asharu often created these precious and valuable items expressly for their mortal charges, the better to protect them.

Armor of Air

The Armor of Air is a rare and cunningly designed device, built for protection and defense. Although anyone can use the item, such relics were usually only bestowed on beloved humans, for only in their defense could the Asharu justify the costs of creating this artifact to themselves.

The Armor of Air is enchanted into a small symbolic adornment, often a brooch or a buckle. On rare occasions the enchantment was also applied to shields and suits of armor. The items to be enchanted were always hand-made of the finest materials, as a poorer vessel would not serve to hold the powerful enchantments the artifact requires.

When it is activated, the armor protects the wearer from attacks both near and far. It generates a shell of near-solid air around the wearer that acts like a suit of armor in protecting him from damage. It has several advantages over mundane armor as well. It is light and does not hamper the wearer. It is far more discreet than an outfit of solid metal plates (or, these days, Kevlar vests). Greatest of all, it appears only when required. The captured spirit of an angel or demon trapped inside makes sure of that.

Originally these relics were imbued with the spirits of vanquished angels, the Seers and those of other Houses capable of predicting harm before it happened. Later they were also created with the spirits of fallen angels, whether giving a fallen comrade a chance to serve in one last way or quietly disposing of ideological or political rivals. After the defeat of Lucifer's forces, the Heavenly Host found and retrieved the relics with angelic spirits within. Those few that escaped destruction — and



those created since — are all empowered with demonic presences.

System: Like regular armor, the Armor of Air provides the wearer with a dice pool of six with which to soak ranged attacks. When the armor is protecting against melee or hand-to-hand attacks in close combat, the attacker must succeed in a resisted roll against it. The air shell is quite resistant to force, although it is not sufficient to cushion the beneficiary from falling damage or the like.

It can be activated an unlimited number of times per day. The owner can choose to activate it if he wishes, and the player must make a Faith roll to do so (or Willpower, if the user is mortal). Usually, however, the Armor of Air is activated by the spirit bound into it. This spirit uses its own powers to detect or predict incipient attacks and activate the shell of air just in time to protect the wearer from harm.

The armor does not provide any defense against attacks that are not normally mitigated by armor, unless the attack requires physical contact with the victim. In that case the attacker may make a resisted Strength + Athletics roll (difficulty 7) against the armor's dice pool to touch the wearer.

The Entrapped Spirit: Binding •• (may only resist orders directly contrary to its nature), Empowerment •• (Vessel Control, Spiritual Infusion).

The spirits trapped within these relics were usually those of the Fourth House, or others with similar lore. Mastery of the Lore of Patterns is invaluable in predicting incoming attacks, to allow the spirit to activate the artifact's powers at the correct times. These spirits usually have access to Foresee (Patterns •••) and two or three other evocations from other lore paths. Evocations from the Lore of the Fundament are common for strengthening the shield of air. If the individual demon in the relic has Manipulate Gravity, Manipulate Inertia or Manipulate Cohesion (Fundament •, ••• or ••••• respectively), the relic's wearer can use the armor's dice pool to resist falling damage and the like as well as damage from combat.

Cordial of Dagan

The Cordial of Dagan draws on the power of the Lore of Awakening to heal the sick and wounded. Despite the name, the relic actually takes the form of a flask, carafe or other device for storing liquids. When water or other potable liquids are placed within it, they acquire restorative properties that are applied to the first person to take a drink.

The Cordial of Dagan was first developed to ease the burden on Scourges stretched to their limits after major battles and disasters during the war. Relics of

this nature were developed and lent to mortal aides who would minister to the wounded after a battle. Some few were bestowed permanently on human leaders and healers from isolated settlements, to maintain the population in good health despite the demands on the Second House.

The physical objects used for the Cordial of Dagan have always been of exquisite manufacture. The artifact is powerful in that it combines two evocations to produce its effects, and such power requires a strong vessel to hold it.

System: To produce the healing effects of the Cordial of Dagan, the user must fill it with half a pint of clean and potable liquid. Water is of course the most common, but sweeter liquids were often used to produce medications for children. The relic will not cleanse the liquid itself if it is poisoned or contaminated, and therefore a drinker will suffer any ill effects caused by the liquid. The relic takes one minute to convert half a pint of liquid into the power-imbued elixir that will cure the ill. Someone who drinks the liquid must consume all of it to be affected (although leaving a few drops behind does not pose a problem). Doses cannot be split to affect several people, and any residue of a dose that affects someone will cease to have any special properties of its own.

The artifact must be activated every time a dose of elixir is imbued with healing properties. Activation requires a Faith roll or expending a Faith point for demons, or a Willpower roll or point for mortals. The artifact can be activated an unlimited number of times per scene, but converting each dose requires a minute. The dose remains completely normal until the end of that minute, then it is imbued with the Lore of Awakening as the artifact's power rushes into it.

The elixir has a dice pool of 8 to affect the physical maladies of whoever drinks it. One success (against difficulty 7) is sufficient to cure the drinker of diseases and maladies, unless they are caused by other supernatural sources. One success is also sufficient to heal all of the drinker's bashing damage. Every additional success will heal one level of the drinker's lethal damage. The elixir has no effect on aggravated damage.

Example: *Zachariah is afflicted with cancer and has three levels of bashing damage. He also has three levels of lethal damage from a fight. His player rolls eight dice after he drinks a draft from the Cordial of Dagan against difficulty 7, and gets four successes. He can allocate them wherever he chooses among the character's various maladies. He chooses to use one success to cure the cancer within him, and applies the three remaining successes to heal all his lethal damage. Had he wished, he could have used one of those successes to heal all of his bashing damage at once, but he would then have been left with either the cancer, or one level of lethal damage.*

Crystal Ball

The myths of crystal balls possessing marvelous clairvoyant powers had to stem from somewhere, and the Crystal Ball relics of the Scourges are the probable cause. These artifacts were invaluable for aiding the Asharu in their guardianship of humanity. Drawing on the Lore of the Firmament, they allow the user to see the location and situation of any target she chooses. She must merely know the target's name or have one of his possessions.

A Crystal Ball is a round, heavy sphere of dense crystal. Most are three to four inches in diameter, weighing several pounds. The Crystal Ball is transparent, but it reflects and refracts light at crazy angles, so looking through it shows outlandish distortions of what's on the other side.

To use the Crystal Ball, the user rests it over the target's name or possessions. In the case of the target's name, the user must inscribe it in angelic script and rest the Ball on the writing; for tangible possessions the Crystal Ball can be placed upon them or held just above. As the user calls on the power of the relic, it shows her visions of the target, whatever they may be.

System: Activating the Crystal Ball requires the user's player to make a Faith roll or spend a Faith point if the character is one of the fallen. If she's mortal, the player makes a Willpower roll or spends a Willpower point. Once it has been activated, the ball has a pool of seven dice to produce its effects. The difficulty for the roll is 8 if the user has the target's possessions or mortal name, 7 if she's targeting a Celestial Name and 6 for a True Name. Obviously, if the user seeks a mortal, the difficulty will always be 8.

The number of successes determines the amount of information the Crystal Ball will show. One success shows an image of the target and his surroundings. Two successes show a five-yard radius around the target. Three successes allow the user to hear as well as see the proceedings. Four successes give the user a sense of the direction the target is in, relative to her. Each use of the Crystal Ball requires an activation. If the user is unsatisfied with the visions she sees, she must reactivate the ball to look again.

Note that nobody other than the user can see the images or hear the sounds of the Crystal Ball's revelations.

Eagle Eyes

The eyes of the Anshar, which could see from one horizon to the other, were envied by all who sought to watch the world. They were valued, too, for the incredible perceptive abilities they bestowed upon the Asharu scouts who were so invaluable to Lucifer's hosts. Inevitably, relic-makers decided that that ability should be shared with other demons, and the first Eagle Eyes were created.

Eagle Eyes draw upon the power of the Anshar visage to improve the wearer's sight beyond measure. They are crystal lenses that fit over the eyes, in much the same way that modern contact lenses do, although they are used for much more than corrective or cosmetic purposes. In the days of the war, they were crafted from the finest crystal with honed evocations. In the modern world, they are made to look much like contact lenses and are often colored or styled to suit that disguise.

System: Eagle Eyes bestow more-than-perfect sight on the wearer. At normal viewing ranges, the relic's wearer can see details she'd never normally notice — the difficulty of all Perception rolls decreases by three — while the maximum range of her sight is extended literally ten-fold. The lenses do not bestow any other enhanced senses on the wearer.

When the lenses are first worn, the user's player must make a Faith roll or expend a Faith point (for demons), or a Willpower roll or point (for mortals) to activate the artifact's powers. The lenses come as a pair, and they only work when worn as a pair.

Once they have been activated, their powers remain constantly in effect until the lenses are next removed. Mortal eyes, however, were not designed to have lenses over them all the time. After wearing the lenses for a week, the user must make a Stamina check every day (against difficulty 7) until she has taken the lenses out and left them out for a whole day without wearing them. Failing a Stamina check inflicts a level of bashing damage on the wearer, as her eyes become unbearably irritated from the lenses.

Jar of Winds

The Asharu were originally created as part of the House of the Rising Wind, and although many Scourges chose to focus on their roles as healers and protectors, none were capable of forgetting their divine association with the air and skies. The swift gusts commanded so easily by Asharu of the Ellil visage were invaluable for tasks big and small, and it was often considered a good idea to have tame winds available even when the Angels of the Winds were otherwise occupied.

Jars of Winds were traditionally clay receptacles strengthened with willow, with tightly fitting lids wedged in place. They have been updated in their construction in the modern world, taking the form of anything from a thermos flask to a kitchen storage jar. Even so, their lids are tight-fitting and very sturdy.

When the lid of a Jar of Winds is opened, a strong gust of air streams out continuously. It is forceful enough to knock people down. Rumors persist of older, more powerful relics that produced winds with enough power to batter down doors and walls of fortified buildings. The Jars of Winds known in the modern world do not approach this power, but they can still be used for everything from clearing miasmas and polluted air to keeping hostile bodies at bay.

System: Using the Jar of Winds merely requires a character to remove the lid. The winds trapped within will roll forth in a constant stream. The winds will blow for a full scene before petering out. The jar must then be capped and re-opened to reactivate its powers. Each activation requires a Faith roll or an expenditure of a Faith point for demons, or a Willpower roll or point for mortals.

If the winds are used to blow away noxious gases, the Jar can clear a cubic foot of air every five seconds. The relic has eight dice for its other uses and its effects in general. They can be used as a pool to exert force against people or objects, but as it's a steady pressure rather than a beating wind, it will push targets around or over rather than inflicting damage directly upon them. To knock over an opponent, make an opposed roll using the Jar's dice pool against the target's Strength. Opening a door with the jar uses the system found on page 233 of the **Demon** core rules. (Consider the jar's Strength to be 8.) Similarly, breaking or affecting other physical objects is covered by the Feats of Strength table on page 232 of the **Demon** rulebook. Naturally, the relic's user can take the indirect approach and cause damage to a target by pushing it over, or off a surface, and allowing gravity to do the rest.

Need's Beacon

Need's Beacon is one of the relics most commonly given to mortals. Indeed, these beacons were designed and enchanted for that purpose, to safeguard the mortal lives so central to the Asharu's role in Creation. These relics supercede the usual ability of the fallen to detect someone uttering their name, and allow the fallen a quick and accurate glimpse of the mortal using the artifact, as well as the peril threatening them.

Need's Beacons are usually small glass tubes with ornaments within, ancient and sturdy reeds, spun crystal balloons as pendants or other similar fragile body ornaments. The enchantment is activated by snapping the reed, crushing the bauble or otherwise breaking open the item. When the item is activated, it sends a cry of distress to the demon who created the relic, snagging his attention and indicating that the bearer of the item needs him.

The beacons can be used only once, and are then rendered inert. In most cases, this is represented by a breakage of the relic's physical form as well. Although the enchantment does not strictly require this condition, it was usually incorporated by the creators of these relics to discourage trivial or casual use by the mortals who bore them.

System: Activating the item involves breaking it open and making a Willpower roll or spending a point of Willpower. Each beacon can be activated only once. Once it's activated, the creator of the relic can sense that a mortal is trying to attract her attention, just as if her Celestial or True Name had been spoken (see **Demon**, p. 171). The demon rolls the relic's pool of 12 dice, however, instead of her Faith score (difficulty 6). The number of successes determines how much information the demon receives about the mortal. One success tells the demon who it is and what he looks like. Two successes show the mortal's surroundings, including any physical threat or people surrounding him. Three successes tell her how far away the mortal is, and four successes indicate in what direction. This effect is not blocked by distance or the barrier between dimensions.

The mortal user of this relic does not have to be a thrall of the demon who receives the message. Furthermore, the demon who enchants the relic can nominate another one of the fallen to be the target of the cry for help, in her place. This must be done during the enchantment procedure, for which the replacement demon must be present. Once the enchantment is finalized, the target of the message cannot be changed. In this case, the new recipient counts as the creator for the purpose of the relic's powers.

Plague-Knife

The Plague-Knife is a sad result of the war's distortion of the Asharu's proud purpose. It takes the Asharu lore of healing and succor and evokes a twisted reflection to inflict pain and misery on a victim. A number of variations of this weapon exist, though most were destroyed after the vanquished demons were banished to the Abyss. Plague-Knives are usually vicious, black-bladed weapons with hooks and ridges that hint of torture. They are the size of a large dagger, with a blade no more than a foot long.

A Plague-Knife cuts, and cuts deeply, but the worst of its damage is in what it leaves behind. Plague-Knives bestow a horrible sickness upon their victims. The disease is not usually contagious, but it weakens any sufferers not immediately dispatched by the blade. The more brutal Scourges realized early in the war that a wounded or sickened enemy was better than a dead one, for he required resources and effort from his allies to tend to him while he healed. The Plague-Knives were ostensibly designed with this end in mind, although few other demons wished to question the Scourges who gloried in their use.

System: Activating the infernal powers of a Plague-Knife requires the player to make a Faith roll or spend a point of Faith; for mortals, make a Willpower roll or spend a point of Willpower. Without activation, the Plague-Knife acts as an ordinary dagger in combat, but once the wielder has called on its enchantments, the effects are far greater. It can be activated up to three times per scene, and each activation lasts until one successful blow has been struck. Note that the use of a Plague-Knife could count as an offense on the Hierarchy of Sins (see page 159 of the **Demon** core rules), depending on the Torment of the demon who wields it.

Once the dagger has been activated, it has a pool of 10 dice for its effects, to be rolled against a difficulty of 7. On a successful strike against an opponent — one that inflicts at least one level of damage — the player rolls the Plague-Knife's dice pool. Each success inflicts a level of bashing damage to the victim in addition to the levels of lethal damage done by the knife itself. In addition, the victim loses a temporary Willpower point each day after the attack and suffers another level of bashing damage as the Plague-Knife's disease takes effect in his body. The disease lingers for a number of days equal to the wielder's Faith score, and it cannot be cured by ordinary medicine. The Cleanse evocation of the Lore of Awakening can be efficacious, but the disease requires a difficulty of 9 to cure.

Note that the Plague-Knife's powers do not work against nonliving-but-animate opponents. This includes the walking dead created by other fallen powers, or any number of supernatural creatures, at the Storyteller's discretion. Against such enemies, the Plague-Knife is just a knife.

Rituals

Rituals were developed by the fallen angels in a time of need, desperate for an advantage over their

opponents. The Scourges were well suited to rituals, since so many of their most important responsibilities — maintaining the health and protection of their human charges — could be exercised at a distance or over a period of time. While the Asharu were not averse to immediate action when circumstances warranted it, they would conserve their energies and extend their abilities with rituals whenever they could.

More of the rituals of the Asharu can be found in Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide**.

Cloud Chariot

Demons with mastery over the Lore of the Fundament or the Lore of Winds found that their powers added easy strength and speed to their wings, making fast travel trivial. Many other fallen had no such advantage — and neither did any of their beloved mortals — so the Cloud Chariot was developed. It shapes air into a solid vessel for the Ankida and her friends and allies to ride, and it allowed safe and easy travel in an age of war when such advantages were invaluable.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Winds ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Fundament •

Base Cost: 10

Restrictions: The ritual must be cast under open sky, in an area of at least 60 percent humidity.

Minimum Casting Time: 25 minutes

System: The ritual conjures up a clear, glassy vessel like a chariot, carriage or sleigh. Roll Stamina + Survival. Each success gives the Cloud Chariot one hour of existence. The chariot can hold the ritual's Ankida, plus one extra person for every dot of the Ankida's permanent Faith score.

The vessel moves at the Ankida's will. Although she doesn't need to concentrate on it rigidly, she does need to be conscious and coherent. If for some reason she passes out, is incapable of rational mental thought (such as being drugged) or leaves the vessel, the chariot dematerializes and gravity reasserts its hold over the former passengers.

The chariot is fast and maneuverable. Its top speed (in miles per hour) is equal to the Ankida's Faith score multiplied by 50. It's capable of full three-dimensional movement, though it cannot be submerged in water without dissipating, and it can reach an altitude of half the Ankida's Faith score in miles.

Torment: The high-Torment effect of this ritual creates a vessel shaped of the very essence of corruption. The chariot is formed of clouds of bitter acid and bilious air, and it emits a noxious stench of decay. It functions as usual, but passengers suffer a level of bashing damage every hour from the vile air that surrounds it. It destroys small creatures and plants in its wake. Greenery wilts and birds drop out of the sky at its passing.

Variations: With the addition of the Lore of Storms ••, the conjured chariot can safely be submerged without fear of dissipation. The vessel can travel below water with no problems, although its progress is far slower. Its speed is reduced to a quarter of normal, and it can only go to a depth of 10 times the Ankida's Faith score in yards. If the ritual is modified to increase the Lore of the Winds to •••••, the vessel takes its own air supply with it, providing breathable air for the passengers as long as the Chariot remains below water.

Including the Lore of Awakening •••• allows the vessel to move without the direction of the Ankida. She must still be aboard, but she can merely give the craft orders and then sleep, pass out or become as incoherent as she likes. The vessel will continue with its predefined orders as long as the ritual lasts, or until the Ankida gives new commands.

Fog of War

The Fog of War was developed to hide groups of demons and their mortal allies from enemy troops. The ritual summons evanescent swirls of fine cloud and mist that subtly billow around the Ankida and his companions. With nothing so vulgar as a puff of smoke, the group vanishes from mortal sight and even becomes hard to spot by other demons.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Winds •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Humanity •••

Base Cost: 12

Restrictions: The area of the sigil must be overlaid with maidens' veils soaked in tears.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: The ritual conceals the Ankida and his allies from the sight of mortals. The players of each mortal who should see the hidden group may make a Willpower test against difficulty 8. If he achieves more successes than the ritual casting did, he can perceive the group normally (though such perception does not magically reveal the group to any viewer other than that mortal). Otherwise, the group is hidden from mortal sight. The fog automatically conceals the Ankida and a number of additional people — demons or mortals — equal to the Ankida's Faith score.

The ritual does affect the perceptions of other fallen, but to a much smaller degree. A demon can see the concealed group if she succeeds on a



Perception + Alertness roll with a difficulty equal to the Ankida's Faith.

Roll Dexterity + Manipulation. Each success gives the fog an hour of duration. After which it dissipates immediately. Demons and others with supernatural awareness register the cloud as a supernatural presence or source of supernatural energy (see **Demon**, p. 172).

Torment: When Torment affects this ritual, the fog it creates is ominous and menacing. The figures within are obscured by the billows, but the cloud itself is anything but discreet. Shot through with angry gray and red streaks, it looks like a thundercloud in miniature. Enemies who come into contact with the fog are scalded by its venom. It inflicts the Ankida's Faith score in levels of lethal damage on any non-concealed person touched by the cloud.

Variations: With the addition of the Lore of the Beast ••, the characters within the cloud become invisible to animals as well.

Adding the Lore of Light • increases the difficulty for viewers to see through the cloud by one.

Including Humanity •• suggests to mortals affected by the concealment that they didn't just see nothing at all, they saw something else entirely — something particularly innocuous and appropriate, like a grazing herd of deer, a flock of gulls, a group of toddling children or anything else that would lull the mortals into inattention. A mortal can resist this effect with a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 8), but if the roll achieves more successes than the Ankida's Willpower, then the entire effect of the cloud, concealment and all, is negated for that mortal only.

Inoculate

The Inoculate ritual was developed by desperate Asharu who wearied of seeing the human tribes ravaged again and again by the diseases of war — both natural diseases unavoidable in the poor living conditions of a war-torn land and supernatural maladies that spread as fast as breath thanks to malicious or hard-hearted members of the Second House on both sides of the conflict. Their patience wore thin with constant intercessions to the rest of the Morningstar's host to exercise restraint and care for the humans on whose behalf they fought. Eventually the Asharu turned to preventative medicine, setting plans in motion before the fact to protect the humans when it was necessary and the Asharu could not be there.

Primary Lore: Lore of Awakening ••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Patterns •••

Base Cost: 10

Restrictions: The sigil must be drawn in quicksilver.
Minimum Casting Time: 25 minutes

System: The Inoculate ritual protects all the beneficiaries from future infection, disease and ill health for a given period of time. The protection of the ritual lasts for a number of weeks equal to the Ankida's Faith score. During the casting of the ritual, roll Stamina + Medicine (difficulty 6). The number of successes indicates the number of people the ritual can protect. Although it is equally efficacious on mortals, demons, animals and indeed all living things, the Inoculate ritual is usually used to protect groups of mortals to whom the Asharu do not have easy or frequent access.

While a subject is protected from harm by this ritual, he cannot be afflicted with any disease, suffer any infections or be poisoned. The protection is unspecific and unalterable, so the subject cannot choose to voluntarily lift his resistance to a contaminating factor. For example, during the course of the protection, he cannot become drunk, as the ritual's lingering effects counteract the alcohol byproducts before they render him intoxicated.

Players of demons and other creatures attempting to inflict supernatural diseases on the character may make a Willpower roll (or the equivalent for that creature) with a difficulty of the Ankida's Willpower. Success indicates that the power takes effect, though the Inoculate effects may mitigate the foreign power in some way at the Storyteller's discretion.

Note that this ritual does not prevent a recipient from simple harm sustained through combat or careless mishap.

Torment: The version of this ritual affected by Torment makes the recipients immune to disease and similar harm themselves but turns them into "plague rats" who infect everyone with whom they come in contact. Roll the Ankida's Willpower (difficulty 7), resisted by the highest of the victims' Willpower ratings. If the ritual takes effect, each net success on the Ankida's roll inflicts a level of bashing damage on everyone who comes into physical contact with the infected character. The high-Torment version of this ritual lasts for one week.

Variations: Increasing the Awakening level to ••• allows the protection to heal minor wounds the beneficiaries sustain. Each subject can shrug off a number of bashing or lethal health levels of damage equal to the Ankida's Faith score over the duration of the ritual's effects.

Character Creation

Whether loving, nurturing parents or distant airborne watchers, the Scourges' fate has always been intimately involved with that of their human charges. The Asharu are the sweet breath of the morning breeze that lifts and invigorates. Yet, when tainted enough, the breeze carries bitterness and ash as the Scourge can bear her pain no longer and descends into madness. This section offers suggestions for creating unique and interesting Asharu who fit the precepts and principles of the Second House.

Concept

Most Scourges are focused on one of several core motivations, described here. There are many other possible concepts for members of the Second House, but most belong to one of the following archetypes.

Healer: The Breath of Life was the purview of the Second House, and the Scourges could never turn their backs on the helpless mortals to whom they'd brought life. In the World of Darkness, these characters will never be idle, as the deadly plagues and horrific violence of the modern world wound more mortals than they can heal. An Asharu healer is usually compassionate and gentle, though an insensitive or hard streak allows him to act for someone's own good — whether that someone wishes it or not. Healers are drawn to possess mortals with the same protective and nurturing urges — medical workers are the most common candidates, though Scourges are also attracted to volunteer workers, schoolteachers and even loving parents.

Judge: The Asharu's protective, parental impulses toward humanity often developed into a conviction that the demons knew what was best for their mortal charges, and many Scourges held humanity to very high standards of behavior. In the modern world, many Scourges still feel that humans could do so much more with their potential, and they are bitterly disappointed at the masses who let them down. These demons are drawn to human hosts who similarly expect humanity to live by the codes they feel are important, and who seek to remold mankind in a better, brighter image. A Scourge with this mindset might gravitate to such mortal hosts as judges, lawmakers, morals campaigners, political activists and vigilantes.

Scout: The vision of the Second House stretched for leagues, and the swift and observant Asharu were always in demand as scouts, spies and

information-gatherers. Those Scourges who loved this work often love it still, and they are happiest when they're well informed. Demons with these aptitudes often choose mortal hosts with a similar love of knowledge and data. A scout might find herself possessing spies, data analysts, hackers or anyone else with a yearning for knowledge and the freedom to acquire it in their own way.

The Exceptions to the Rule

The Asharu were created to nurture and protect, and these fundamental impulses often drive them toward mortal hosts who need the healing and love they have to offer. Instead of choosing a mortal based on how familiar the host's mentality is, many softhearted Scourges are drawn to their hosts by the mortal's need of them. In particular, the healer type is often drawn to fearful and needy mortals desperate for protection, and too late the Scourge finds himself in the body of a hypochondriac or self-absorbed coward. This approach also means that these Asharu are loath to discard the human elements of their new selves, because the Scourge is not the same as the human. The demon is attracted to the mortal as a complement, not a replacement.

In addition, the Asharu of old were the Angels of the Winds and the Firmament. Many Scourges — particularly those of the Ellil visage — are simply drawn to mortals with an overpowering love of flying and the open skies. Such hosts are usually pilots, sometimes astronauts or aeronautic scientists, but they can simply be disappointed people with failed ambitions for the skies.

Nature and Demeanor

Those Scourges who are focused on their gifts of life usually have Natures such as Caregiver, Gallant, Martyr or Pedagogue — they are beings driven to provide care and succor to others without thought for themselves. Those who have followed this path and been wounded by it often have Natures such as Addict, Deviant, Fanatic, Gambler or Masochist as they lose themselves in the experiences of life to avoid having to think about it.

Natures such as Architect, Autocrat, Curmudgeon, Director, Judge, Perfectionist and Visionary are more appropriate for the more hardened Scourges who feel compelled to realize humanity's potential by measuring them against exacting standards and pushing them as hard as possible — whether humanity wishes to be pushed or not. Those who have lost all hope and despair of the world sometimes become Monsters.

A number of Scourges still focus on the status of the Asharu as the Second House of angels, and they often have Traditionalist Natures that reflect the importance of status in their lives. Most Scourges are individualistic rather than focused on organizations, however, and Loners, Rebels and Rogues are more common.

Few Scourges have Bon Vivant, Bravo, Child, Conformist, Conniver, Thrill-Seeker or Trickster Natures. The hedonism of some of these lifestyles and the thoughtless carelessness of others does not suit the driven Asharu who were always made for devotion to a cause — whatever that cause might be.

The Demeanors of many Scourges are relatively similar to their Natures, as few have an interest in the kind of deception and secretiveness implicit in hiding their true selves from the world. This is particularly true of the more compassionate Asharu, who are loath to put artificial obstacles between themselves and their beloved children. The more reflective and cautious of the Asharu, such as those embodied by the scout concept, often have a stronger façade. This might be an unconscious result of their objective and dispassionate observations, or it might be a deliberate attempt to keep the secrets they learn close to their chests. Finally, the Scourges who are unstable and disoriented as they learn about the modern world are often off balance enough that their behavior is little indication of their true Nature.

Primary Lore

Although the visage and primary lore of the character are chosen near the end of character creation, they're intimately connected with your character's focus and personality. Consider the likely lore choices for your character as you design his concept, Nature and Demeanor, and while you make choices about other traits. An angel's primary lore was his "profession," and he will almost certainly have skills and aptitudes related to his role as a part of Creation.

Lore of Awakening: This is the lore of healing and the Breath of Life. It affects mortals and demons equally, and its lower-level evocations are invaluable for violent and combat-intensive groups who cannot afford to be put out of action for long. It's well suited for characters in supportive roles, and it is the obvious choice for healers. The Visage of Awakening does confer physical bonuses and improved Stealth capabilities, which might

appeal to scouts. At higher levels, it allows for the creation of "unnatural" life, and the high-Torment effects of the evocations inflict corruption and disease. Scourges who have chosen the path of the judge might find it appropriate if their punishments are intended to be particularly cruel.

Lore of the Firmament: The evocations of this lore are focused on power at a distance — they are optimized for effective spying and at higher levels they allow the character to use their other powers at greater distances than usual. The Anshar visage improves sensory and evasive abilities, although there are no improvements to interacting with others in combat or social situations. The Lore of the Firmament is ideal for scouts; judges can find it useful for information-gathering purposes, but healers may be dismayed by the detachment from other people it implies.

Lore of the Winds: This is an elemental power of air and storms, the most violent of the Scourge's lore. Like most Asharu evocations, the powers of the Lore of the Winds will work on mortals and demons alike, and they can be used to very destructive ends. Combat-oriented Scourges might find this the most effective primary lore, particularly those who don't wish to use the high-Torment Awakening evocations. The Ellil visage improves sensory and athletic abilities. The Lore of the Winds has little relevance to healers. Scouts might appreciate the powers of the visage, but the lore as a whole is most useful for judges who wish to call down the punitive fury of the heavens upon those they've deemed unworthy.

Attributes

The Scourges have a relatively wide variety of stereotypes, and unlike some other Houses, there are no obvious choices when allocating Attribute priorities. That said, consider these few general rules when determining an Asharu character's Attributes.

Physical

The Physical Attributes are important for the Angels of Life, representing vitality and wholeness as they do. Stamina is the most important of the three, as it covers the bodily health integral to the concept of healing. It's vital for Scourges of the Ellil and Dagan visages, as it forms the core of most of their evocations.

Healers should have high Stamina, if not other Physical Attributes, to avoid the refrain of "physician, heal thyself." Scouts are likely to be relatively physically active and should put Physical Attributes as their second priority if not their first, so they can meet the demands of their roles. Judges might choose to favor other Attributes over the physical, if they



intend to exact their requirements without direct combat and violence. As the judges' choice of primary lore is less clear-cut than for healers or scouts, they might wish to focus only on Physical Attributes if they've chosen the Lore of the Winds as their primary lore.

Social

Social Attributes are less important to a Scourge than to a Devil or Defiler, but few Scourges wish to dissociate themselves from society completely. Healers should put Social Attributes as their secondary priority, if not their primary, to reflect their long years of interacting with mortals, a good bedside manner or any number of other soothing characteristics for which the Asharu were always known. In this case, Charisma is the most accurate reflection of their gifts. Scouts are the most detached of the Scourges, so they might prefer to excel in other Attributes. Judges should at least have high Manipulation scores if they hope to shape humanity's course by any means except punishment.

Social Attributes are paramount for demons of the Anshar visage; many of their higher-rated evocations depend on Manipulation. The other Attributes are best allocated to suit the character's individual personality, with reference to his Nature.

Mental

Mental Attributes are of varying importance to Scourges. Healers tend to be less cerebral than their fellows, but Mental Attributes are very important for scouts. Those who do their intelligence-gathering up close and personal will need high Wits scores to negotiate the treacherous reefs of modern spy-craft, and all scouts rely on excellent Perception. Judges of a contemplative and philosophical nature might have developed a high Intelligence as they've pondered the state of the world, while the judges who've chosen their path through sheer spiritual despair and anger might dispense with intellectual pursuits altogether.

Of the three Mental Attributes, none are of overriding importance. Several of the Anshar visage's evocations rely on Perception, however, so of the three Attributes, Scourges of the Firmament should focus on Perception. The other visages can choose where they may, as Mental Attributes are not essential to their lore, and they might wish to make Mental Attributes their lowest priority.

Abilities

Your character's Abilities are often augmented by the mortal host's life before them, so give thought to where your character's Abilities have come from as you allocate points into each trait. As for the aptitudes of the Asharu as a House, they're spread fairly evenly across the Ability groups. The focus depends on the character's visage.

Talents

Unlike other Houses, who just excel at things that everyone can do to some extent, the Scourges tend to focus on doing what no one else can. As a result, most have little need for focusing on their Talents, although some are essential.

Demons of the Anshar visage might wish to make Talents the first priority of their Abilities, as all of their primary lore's evocations use Talents. High ratings in Empathy and Awareness are invaluable for using the Lore of the Firmament for gathering information, while affecting thralls at a distance is based on Leadership. The other Asharu visages do not focus on Talents at all.

The more physical of the scouts should allocate good ratings to Alertness, Athletics, Awareness and Dodge, and Streetwise is useful for all scouts. Some healers might wish to follow suit, if their characters have combat experience. Many military medics, Red Cross workers and similar healers have their work cut out for them just staying alive, and Talents are invaluable in the process.

Skills

Skills are the most useful of the Ability groups to the Asharu as a whole. They provide combat effectiveness in the form of Melee and Firearms Skills, and specialized Skills such as Stealth are essential for scouts. Modern-day scouts should also take high ratings in Security and Technology to represent mastery over the modern world's tools of information-gathering.

Survival is *vital* for demons of the Ellil visage. Every single evocation of the Lore of the Winds uses that Skill, and Ellil demons should take as high a rating as they can justify for their character. It's also useful for any other Asharu who might find themselves without the comforts of home, such as the aforementioned combat medics and spies.

Of the other Skills, Crafts is used by one evocation of the Dagan visage, but most are less useful to the Asharu.

Knowledges

Many Asharu are not particularly learned, but one Knowledge stands out — Medicine. Healers, and demons of the Dagan visage in general, should have excellent ratings in Medicine. Three Lore of Awakening evocations are based on it, and it reflects the

general focus on health and healing that is so stereotypical of the Asharu as a whole. Most Asharu, except the most detached of the scouts, will have at least passing familiarity with medicine. Even judges who use their powers to poison rather than heal must know what they're poisoning.

Several other Knowledges are particularly useful for scouts who do their information-gathering at a distance. Computer Knowledge is vital in the modern world of intelligence, and the Investigation and Research Knowledges cover a lot of what modern-day scouts do. High ratings in these Knowledges should be ubiquitous for scout Scourges. Knowledges such as Academics, Research and Science — and perhaps even Occult — are appropriate for scouts who were once mortal researchers obsessed with knowledge.

Judges are less concerned with Knowledges, although those who seek to work within the system to change the world often choose solid ratings in Law and Politics.

Backgrounds

All of the available Backgrounds can be helpful and relevant for Asharu characters. Many are tied to the life of the mortal host before possession, and there are several that are particularly appropriate for Scourges.

Healers tend to be relatively self-sufficient and often don't need the extensive web of connections that other characters rely upon. Allies and Contacts can still be useful as mortal resources to draw upon in carrying out the character's healing mission. Pacts are very common. The Scourge's healing gifts draw eager mortals to supply Faith.

Scouts find information resources invaluable, and Contacts is probably the single most useful Background for these characters. Allies, Followers and Influence are all also useful for extending a network of intelligence-gathering in the mortal world.

Judges find a variety of Backgrounds helpful, depending on the way they choose to act. Those who act as rogue vigilantes find Resources useful so they can maintain an independent lifestyle. Contacts and Followers are also common, although the harsh and critical judges rarely form bonds strong enough to justify Allies. For the single-minded crusaders among the judges, Paragon might reflect an aspect of their focus and drive.

Virtues

Here, the difference between the stereotypes of Asharu is made most plain. Healers tend to have strong ratings in all the Virtues and exemplary ratings for Conscience. It exemplifies the compassion of their nature and their desire to help at any cost.

Scouts tend to be less emotional and more clear-eyed and dispassionate than healers. Their Virtues are more evenly balanced, although the risky and solitary nature of their role as spies and intelligence-gatherers often indicates a high rating in Courage.

Judges are focused primarily on Conviction and usually have fairly low Conscience ratings. In many ways they are the antithesis of the healers that most of them used to be. Courage ratings can vary, and it's not uncommon to see a strong Courage rating reflecting the character's willingness to put himself on the line for his convictions.

Lore

By this stage of character generation you've probably decided the character's primary lore, but you still have to decide how far your character will specialize in it and which other lore to take — if any. Some concepts will want to devote all their starting dots of lore to one path; others might find taking an evocation from another lore useful in supporting their character's abilities.

Lore of Awakening

This is the quintessential lore for healers, and any healer characters of the Dagan visage should allocate all three dots to it at character creation. Without the Heal evocation that the third dot provides, a healer will find it hard to do his job. Find the Faithful is not essential for a healer, but it's the first evocation of the lore, and the Cleanse evocation at the second dot is a useful supplement to the character's abilities as a medic. Improving the rating to four dots isn't necessary as Animate is out of sync with the stereotypical healer concept, and it would use most of the character's freebies that could be better spent elsewhere.

Scouts might find one dot in Lore of Awakening useful, for the detective properties implicit in Find the Faithful, but it's probably not worth their while taking it any further than that during character creation and the early stages of character development.

Judges might choose to focus on the Lore of Awakenings if they've chosen the poisonous, toxic path of vengeance. In that case, at least two dots in the lore would be appropriate, to gain access to the high-Torment effects of Cleanse, which contaminate with disease. An additional dot for the Heal evocation markedly increases the character's effectiveness, giving him the ability to heal — and poison — as well as affecting diseases. It's not essential, though. Characters who follow this path, however, risk acquiring a

lot of Torment fairly quickly, which makes it a risky proposition as a primary lore.

Lore of the Firmament

This lore is the obvious choice for scouts among the Asharu, and they should put at least two dots into it. Remote Viewing and Scry form the core of the scout's arsenal of evocations, although the higher-rated evocations in the lore focus on using demonic powers at a distance and are, therefore, less relevant to an information-gatherer.

The Lore of the Firmament is less vital for Scourges with other priorities, however. A dot in it, for Remote Viewing, can be very useful for judges who understand the value of vision, but most can find more important places to spend their dots.

Lore of the Winds

The Ellil visage is most appropriate for judges who wish to direct the storm's fury at the unworthy, and they should put at least two dots into it. Doing so will provide Summon Wind, which is useful for mobility — especially in the apocalyptic form, with wings — and Fist of Air for direct damage in violent situations. Spending another dot for Command the Wind improves the character's mobility further and puts him in a good position to move on to Wall of Air and Cyclone later in the chronicle. This is not essential, however, and judges might find the points better spent elsewhere.

Scouts may also choose to put a dot into the Lore of the Winds, simply for the mobility advantage that Summon Wind can provide. Most of the later evocations are less useful to them, however, although Command the Wind at three dots extends the advantage provided by Summon Wind. This level of mastery of the lore is better left for later in the chronicle, however, when the character's rating in his primary lore is more impressive.

Healers, by contrast, find little utility in the Lore of the Winds and are better served by allocating their dots of lore to other evocations.

Common Lore

The Lore of the Fundament is useful for almost every character, but particularly so for scouts, who find the advantages of Manipulate Gravity and Manipulate Adhesion undeniable. A scout who has put two dots into the Lore of the Firmament is wise to put his third dot into the Lore of the Fundament, with an eye to improving the rating in it once his primary lore improves as well. Spending freebie points to get a second dot in the Lore of the Fundament provides Manipulate Adhesion, which is very useful for stealthy spies.

Alternatively, scouts may find it useful to put a dot into the Lore of Humanity for the Translate evocation. The easy comprehension of any language is invaluable and probably more useful to more sedentary scouts than the Lore of the Fundament.

Judges might find a dot in the Lore of the Fundament useful for Manipulate Gravity, particularly in conjunction with Summon Wind or Command the Wind, but in general, judges and healers are better served by specializing in their primary lore.

Freebie Points

The Asharu lore paths don't require expenditure of Faith points until higher levels, so improving Faith at character creation isn't essential. It does affect the range and duration of a number of evocations, mostly from the Lore of the Firmament, so of all the Asharu, the Anshar visage is the best suited for improving Faith as a starting character. It's worth improving Faith by a point or so if you expect a lot of combat, but most Asharu are not combat-intensive characters, so they are better served by saving the points for other uses.

Since Willpower has no involvement with hardly any of the Asharu evocations, and since demons are immune to mind control, Willpower is most useful for automatic successes on ordinary actions. Most Asharu don't need a significantly improved Willpower, although combat-oriented judges will gain some benefit. Scouts might also find it useful for improving the Ability rolls for gathering information, since Asharu can't manipulate mortal minds and souls with their House lore the way other demons can.

Healers and scouts might wish to spend spare freebie points on improving their Virtue ratings, since both stereotypes often have high overall Virtues. Judges can avoid this, since they often have a notable weak point when it comes to Conscience.

Healer Scourges should focus on improving their Medicine, Stamina and Charisma. Scouts are best served by improving Perception, Empathy and various Knowledges, although spare freebie points are invaluable for extra dots in the Lore of the Fundament or Humanity. Judges have a variety of aptitudes and might wish to spend the freebie points on improving combat ability, since they are usually the most combat-oriented of the Asharu.


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Chapter Three: The House of Fire and Stone

Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing'd,
On spikèd flames rose; his hot visage
Flam'd furious; sparkles his hair and beard
Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders.
On clouds of smoke rages his chariot,
And his right hand burns red in its cloud,
Moulding into a vast Globe his wrath,
As the thunder-stone is moulded,
Son of Urizen's silent burnings.
—William Blake, *The Book of Ahania*

In the long project to create something from nothing, to build a universe from the absolute emptiness of the void, the Creator knew He needed a reality of more than just emotion and spirit. He needed space and dimension to build upon, solid matter to form Creation on that platform and physical laws to govern it. He needed Creation to be *material*, so He created the Artificers, angels of substance and form, raw stone and dancing electrons, to bring His grand plan into reality.

But the Artificers failed Him, as did all the other angels of Creation, by being too dedicated and too loyal — by caring too much about the universe they had constructed and the humans that they had crafted, to allow the Creator to continue His tyrannical rule. For love of humanity the Artificers fell and became Malefactors, celestial criminals and outlaws for the humans they adored.

But the Annunaki learned that rebellion — forsaking the love of God Himself — was still not enough to gain the love of humanity. They were still doomed to remain apart from mortals, always distant figures of terror and authority. They had the respect, even the worship of humanity — but not its love. So the Malefactors retreated to the things they understood — stone and metal, tool and weapon. The best of them dedicated themselves to serving humanity from afar with their inventions, nurturing their unrequited love

and forever working to raise humanity to their own level, to become the equals of mortals and not their betters. Others drowned in their own bitterness and hate, the pain of rejection poisoning their souls with spite. They crafted machines of torture and pain, tools to degrade and destroy the blessed potential of humanity in an act of pathetic revenge. Both camps let their obsession with humanity define their actions, blinding them to other issues — and blinded, they fell to the force of Heaven's wrath and were cast into the Pit.

Now the Annunaki have returned to a Creation of rust and decay, a broken mechanism that cries out to be repaired. The tyrant God is gone, His enforcer angels with Him. All the obstacles are cleared away, and the opportunity to repair Creation is finally here. The crippled wreckage of Creation is a terrible burning pain in the soul of every Malefactor, but the vision of a new tomorrow, a new and perfect work of art, soothes that pain and drives the Annunaki to new goals. For some, it is the elevation of humanity to the status of godhood, the potential that has always cried out to be realized. For others, it is the chance to shape reality into what it always *should* have been, a perfect engine that exists to sing hosannas to the builders and artisans of Creation.

They will rework this reality no matter what it takes. They are the Annunaki, and they can do no less.

Before the Fall

In the beginning, there was not nothing. Nothing is the opposite of something; nothing is an absence that implies a presence. The void was not nothing; the void simply *wasn't*. Against the utter negation of the void was balanced the infinite power and potential of God, but that power meant nothing if it could not be expressed, if that power could not find substance and existence. That could not happen within the absence of the void, so God needed to bring Creation into being, if only so that He could actually exist Himself.

To create all of reality, God needed agents to do His bidding and shape Creation from the edges of the void, tools of spirit and power that could craft a universe without overwhelming it with His direct power. Therefore, He created the angels, the Elohim, tiny fragments of His own power given minds and wills of their own; creatures that channeled the least part of His strength to create, but not destroy. The angels were beings of spirit, not flesh, light not substance — but soon they would need substance to shape Creation, and such required the strength of the Artificers, who could mold nothingness into the building blocks of Creation.

The First Stone is Laid

As His first angels, God created the House of the Dawn and the House of the Firmament, angels of spirit and word. He knew, though, that spirit and idea would only go so far. Such things were necessary to design Creation, but not sufficient to build Creation. So as His Third House of Elohim, He created the Artificers, the Angels of the Fundament — angels of matter and substance, atoms and stone.

To the Artificers, the Creator said, "Of all My servants, yours is the most important task. For nothing can be made without something to build with; no spirit can underpin Creation if no substance exists to surround it. To you, the Artificers, falls the duty of creating a place in which Creation can be built, and the substance from which to build it. Go now, and spin substance from the absence of the void. Go now and fashion existence itself."

The Artificers gathered, beings of smooth darkness and immense solidity, so unlike the spiritual evanescence that were the other Elohim, and they bent themselves to this task. For an eternity, they mined substance from the Abyss, bending and molding this total absence into matter — or rather, the notion of matter, the very *idea* of substance and solidity. Through their efforts, a point of infinitely dense matter accrued before the Creator, a ball of absolute substance and definition, in which all possibilities and potential existed.

Then the Creator said, "You have begun this great work, but it is not yet done. For while this creation of yours contains all potential, it cannot be realized while it exists here with Me. It must exist separately from Me, and you must create a place for it to exist."

Therefore, the Artificers gathered again and worked for another eternity, while the massed choirs of the Elohim watched and waited for their opportunity to join in the great work. The Artificers ventured again into the void and surrounded part of it with their own spirits, and made it from a total absence into a simple *nothingness* — not an absolute negation of existence, but a mere lack of substance. The Artificers gave this boundary length, breadth and volume, and they called it *space* — the boundary of existence, a zone in which the very *concept* of existence could finally be expressed. Into this space they brought matter, that infinitely dense point of being they had crafted over aeons — and it exploded, bursting open to fill the entire boundary with an even layer of matter. Atoms of hydrogen and motes of elemental substance were spread over space, an infinite expense of potential waiting to be explored. And the Artificers reached out and brought two single atoms together into the first molecule, the first stone, the harbinger of the rich and complex Creation that waited to be brought into existence. Thus the process began.

Creating a Universe

Creation remained unformed, still a vast cloud of undifferentiated atoms and potential. Now was the time to take this matter and make something *with* it. Now it was time to bring out that limitless potential and put it into concrete form. The Artificers immersed themselves in the stuff of Creation, molding atoms and planets, stones and gases, space and physics to create new and impossibly beautiful works. To keep their new creations together, they needed to develop and codify physical rules — gravity, acceleration, cohesion and attraction — which led to the construction of the laws of physics. To achieve their ends, the Artificers manipulated these laws at will through their intuitive control of the fundamental forces of Creation. Knowing that the other Elohim would also need to use these forces to perform their tasks, they taught this Lore of the Fundament to all the Houses of Heaven.

Aeons wore on, and the Artificers worked their miracles upon the fabric of Creation, building stars, then planets, then moons from drifting matter. Working in unison, the ranks of the Artificers pulled matter together to form a planet of molten rock and noble gases, a world of searing beauty to beat as Creation's heart. The massed choir of Heaven celebrated and said, "Now we shall bring our skills to bear on this world, this Paradise."

And the Artificers replied, "Please, not yet. Give us more time to make it better, to perfect it and bring out its potential." So the Elohim drew back, and the Artificers continued to work on Paradise. They cooled the molten lava into stone, and pulverized the clay to create rich and fertile soil. They wove a layer of magnetic fields around the planet to dissipate the sunlight, and carved sea beds and dry rivers into the Earth's crust. And again the Elohim celebrated and said, "It is even more beautiful than it was before! Now we shall work our powers upon Paradise and breathe life into it."

But again the Artificers said, "Not yet. More can still be done." And the increasingly impatient Elohim waited, while the Artificers continued their work. They spun the planet's heart into fiery life and let it beat and flex through tectonic plates and volcanoes. They compressed raw stone into diamonds and crystals, and they seeded the earth with gems of impossible beauty. They pinched mountains from the soil to touch the clouds and valleys that reached deep to touch the world's liquid core. They smoothed out deserts flat and clean, and they inlaid the sea bed with irregularities that spelt out hosannas to the Creator.

And the Elohim said, "Now it is complete, and we must begin our work." And once more the Artificers begged for more time, more chances to perfect their work and bring out the planet's potential. But Lucifer himself denied them, saying, "This is sufficient, and more than sufficient. If allowed, you would spend an eternity on this task, hunting a perfection that only you feel to be necessary. What you have accomplished is already perfect. Now allow the rest of us to perform out work." And so the Artificers stood aside and watched as the Host descended to Creation to carry out their tasks. Yet while they were proud of what they had wrought and were eager to see what the other Elohim could work on the canvas they had created, still a germ of pain and dissatisfaction remained in their souls. For all eternity, the Artificers would feel that Paradise was not truly complete, that a more perfect Creation could have been built if they had but been allowed. Though none would ever admit it, they all felt a miniscule flame of resentment toward the Lightbringer for keeping them from finishing their work.

Loneliness and Lost Love

Of all the Elohim, the Artificers were the ones most involved with the actual *building* of Creation. This was because they, unlike all of the other angels, were concerned with only the material and the concrete, not the spiritual and ethereal. The other Houses devoted at least some of their attentions to developing the spiritual aspects of Creation, crafting the spirits that would inhabit bodies of flesh and matter within the universe that was being built. Some, like the Angels of the Second World, concerned themselves solely with the spiritual; others, such as the Angels of the Wild, focused on both the material and the spiritual. But for the Artificers, the material was everything and all that concerned them. While they did speak with the spirits of the stone and earth, of electron and molecule, they did not *create* those spirits. They simply allowed them to form naturally around the material.

While the other Elohim worked in the spiritual realms, the ethereal layers of reality, the Artificers stayed in the material realm to fashion the stuff of Creation. More and more, they found themselves separated from the other angels, who focused their attentions on the spiritual. The Artificers found themselves left in the company of each other, and of the earth and stone that they shaped. The House became increasingly insular, turning upon itself. The Artificers became private and withdrawn, talking mostly to each other and rarely communicating with the other angels. They still worked with the other Elohim, of course — gluing together hydrogen and oxygen to provide the Angels of the Deep with oceans and rivers, or shaping bodies of clay to be quickened into living flesh by the Angels of the Wild — but when those angels turned their attentions away, the Artificers returned to their



own kind. The Angels of the Fundament became private, quiet creatures who kept their emotions to themselves.

But when God commanded the creation of humanity, everything changed. The angels of every House came together to work on this ultimate expression of the Divine Plan. To the Artificers fell the responsibility of crafting the human form; of shaping clay into a body, of mapping out the surfaces of the brain and the twists of the central nervous system. The Artificers gave their all to the project, building what they hoped would be an object, a body, of utter perfection. Then, though God and the Elohim once again had to rein in their urge to keep working on the project in finer and finer detail, the Artificers were satisfied that they had done a worthy job of building a housing for God's divine power.

But even the Artificers, perfectionists and idealists all, were taken aback by the glory and splendor of humanity, of just how *perfect* the first man and woman were. The Artificers looked upon the two humans — the ultimate marriage of physical, spiritual and divine perfection — and saw the incredible potential that these creatures possessed, the power to take Creation beyond the limits of what its angelic makers had conceived to be possible. In that moment, the insular Artificers were filled with a boundless love for humanity, a desire to teach and assist these beings in every way possible, to take them by the hand and lead them to absolute perfection.

And then God handed down His edict, that the Elohim could not reveal themselves to humanity or do anything to open their minds and souls to Creation. And something vital inside the Artificers died, never to rise again.

Doubt and Decision

All of the Elohim were hurt and confused by the Creator's rule of separation, but the Artificers were more deeply affected than the others. The Angels of the Material were already lonely, unable to truly relate to their own kind. They could find companionship and understanding only from other Artificers and from the stone they shaped. Already separated from the other Elohim, the Artificers had a vast store of untapped love and emotion within them, a love that was to have been lavished upon humanity yet now would forever be unrequited. God's edict left the Artificers confused and hurt — and worse, left their love for the Creator damaged and weakened. In the souls of many Artificers, respect became tainted with resentment. Confusion turned into a pain that could not be expressed.

Then the angel Ahrimal had a vision of a great darkness somewhere in mankind's future, a coming disaster that might still be averted if the angels broke God's edict and touched the lives of humanity. No member of the House of the Fundament participated

in the Great Debate that followed that vision, the argument among the great leaders of the Elohim as to what should be done — but they listened and wept and argued among themselves. All of them felt the pain of rejection in their souls, all of them felt the compelling need to nurture and teach humanity, to allow them to reach their true potential. But at the same time, all of them felt their own love of God, no matter how weakened it might have become, and knew the terrible impossibility of rejecting the orders of He who created them.

In the end, it was Toguiel, the Ruby Dominion, who ended the secret debate of the Artificers, his words cascading through the earth as a vein of precious red stones. "When the Creator fashioned us from his own soul, He told us to build and to work toward making a Paradise that was perfect in all respects. If we do not act now and take humanity in hand, they will never become perfect, and we will have failed to follow the Creator's decree. It is our duty to teach and guide humanity, to let them fulfill their destiny — and if that requires us to defy God's edict, then by God's command we must do so."

And with those words, Toguiel unfurled his wings of rubies and silver and flew to join Lucifer and his fellows. Behind him followed just over half of the Artificers, the love in their souls too strong to deny any longer. The rebel Artificers turned against the Creator and the Host of Heaven, and for this crime — for the elevation of need over duty — were condemned and cast down, labeled forever as the Annunaki.

The House at War

The renegades of the Host had turned against God and Heaven, and Creation would never be the same. The rebellious Artificers had turned the rejection they had felt upon their maker, and rejected Him and His decree. It was the dawn of a new era, a time when the Annunaki would attempt to unlock the potential of humanity, to perfect the mortal race as if it were a stone that could be carved into a perfect tool or work of art. The renegade builders saw Creation and humanity as works in progress and attempted to bring those works to fruition, but they succeeded only in delaying humanity's development by aeons, and perhaps even preventing it entirely. The Age of Wrath was a time of great invention and terrible disasters, of the discovery of amazing wonders and the destruction of all hope. And the Malefactors, the renegade builders of Heaven, fought and studied and worked and died, until the doors of Hell swung shut after them.

The Longest Night

Following in Lucifer's footsteps, Toguiel and the other renegade Artificers had revealed themselves to humanity and helped open their eyes to their own potential and the potential of Creation. Now it was time to prepare and teach humanity, in a single night that lasted a thousand years — before the forces of Heaven came to punish the rebels for the crime of loving too much.

The First Tool

Before the Fall, the angels had no need of tools. They *seemed* to use tools, true — Usiel's scythe and Michael's sword were but two of the legendary artifacts wielded by the Elohim, but these creations were not true tools, not devices constructed and built by a maker's hand. They were simply extensions of an angel's will, an external manifestation of his own abilities and powers. Michael's sword was not something forged from metal. It was *part* of him that had been by his side since God had willed him into existence. And while it could exist apart from him, given permanence by the will of the Creator, it was not something built or invented, not a true tool.

The Broken Sword

Fragments of Michael's sword still exist, as do a small number of other angelic "tools" and items. These artifacts would have vanished with the Elohim and the Creator long ago, if it were not for the faith and belief of humanity. Separated from the will of God and their "owners," these near-relics, pieces of an angel made solid, are kept solid by human faith. But human faith is fluid and changeable, and many of these original angelic relics have changed as well, while those artifacts *made* by demonic hands have stayed much as they were when first created.

The first true tool was, instead, created in the first hours of that millennia-long night. Not wishing to return to the bower given to them by the Creator to sleep, Adam and Eve needed new shelter. Toguiel announced he would build a shelter for them, mold a house from the earth itself. But Adam stayed the angel's hand and asked instead, "Please, let me create my own domicile, for my shelter should be my own responsibility." So Toguiel, proud beyond words of Adam's desire to build and create, instead did no more than bring a number of stones to the earth's surface so that Adam could use them to build a hut.

Adam managed to assemble the stones into a crude shelter with only one stone too heavy and embedded in the earth to move. Toguiel was ready to move it himself,

but again Adam asked for the chance to make his own way. Yet the stone was too heavy for him to move. Then stepped forward Nemere the Iron Crafter, Shaper of Ore, who drew from the earth a simple length of metal. He gave it to Adam and said, "This tool, though simple, will give you the aid you need. And though it is a gift of my craft, the power it gives comes from you alone, so you will still be fulfilling your own destiny." So Adam took the metal rod, and inserted it under the large stone, and by pushing down on the other end, he forced the stone from the earth, and rolled it into place. So was created the first lever, the first tool, and with his gift, Nemere became the first toolmaker, the first relicsmith, and his legacy lives on to this day.

As the night went on, Adam and Eve slept, while their children multiplied and multiplied again, filling Paradise with their families. Nemere and the other Artificers toiled on, creating new tools, new devices to give control of Creation into the hands of humanity. Some were simple things, applications of principles laid down when Creation was still young, such as the wheel, the pulley and the hammer. Others were more complex, intricate knots of power designed by Nemere to manipulate the very building blocks of Creation. He and his fellows created wands that could split the earth asunder to reveal diamonds and iron, and orbs of crystal that contained the secrets of fire and energy. Humanity embraced the simpler tools but was as yet unable to take command of the greater tools the angels had invented. "Surely," said the rebels, "we will have time yet to teach them of the wonders, and show them how to unlock these relics of power."

Denial and Dispersal

But in truth, there was no more time, for then the armies of the Lord descended upon the rebels and Lucifer was forced to defend human and rebel angel alike against Michael's wrath. Then came Michael's condemnation of the rebels, and God unleashed His anger upon Paradise, destroying it utterly. Eden was no more, and the newly christened Sebettu had to lead humanity from the rubble quickly. Rejected now and forever by the one they had once served, the Annunaki collected their new tools and followed Lucifer, ready to begin their teaching anew.

When the Sebettu reached the Valley of Tears, Lucifer called a halt and spoke to the demons gathered before him. He called for a new beginning, and for the Sebettu to teach humanity its true potential. Other demons, though, especially the bestial Abaddon, rejected his call and proclaimed instead that humanity was to be conquered, not loved. Still others went their own way to learn more of Creation's secrets or to ponder their situation and come to their own truth. Across the Valley of Tears, the banners of the five legions were lifted, and the Annunaki flocked to each of them.

Over the coming years, the Malefactors would play a part in the actions of all the legions. They would also become humanity's greatest teachers and most depraved torturers. Each legion has its legends of the Annunaki, and its stories of hope and terror — stories that continued to be told until the last Malefactor descended into the depths of Hell.

The Age of Wonder

As the other legions left the Valley of Tears, the Crimson Legion set upon its mission to bring enlightenment and perfection to human beings, to lift them up to the heavens and give them the birthright God had attempted to deny them. This was an ideal close to the souls of many Malefactors, and almost half of the Annunaki flocked to Lucifer's banner. Chief among them was Nemere, now named Lord of Relicsmiths. He brought with him many of his fellow, Annunaki who had devoted themselves to creating relics and tools for mankind's use. These demons would create wonders of unsurpassed glory in humanity's service, but they would also drive humanity further away from their guardians and sow the seeds for the downfall of the Sebettu.

Not all the Annunaki joined the Crimson Legion, though. Most, in fact, joined the Iron Legion, governed by Dagon the Imperator, He That Withstands the Lightning, in order to defend humanity from the actions of the Heavenly Host. These Malefactors took on the responsibility of being the shield of the rebellion, standing in the way of Heaven's vengeance.

Others joined the Silver Legion, hoping to learn more about the possibilities of Creation and the potential of humanity. While the Annunaki had little ability to understand human emotion and activity, the Malefactors of the Silver Legion left that task to their allies, the Fiends and Defilers who dominated it. Instead, they focused on interpreting the information that their fellows gathered, devising relics and experiments that might elevate human potential. They also set out to physically explore Creation and discover what effects the destruction of Paradise had had on reality. Chief among the explorers was Befana, Sapphire Mistress of Distance, Lady of Seven Miles, whose command of space itself was unparalleled.

Only a few Malefactors joined the Ebon Legion, at first. The bulk of the House felt too much regard for humanity, even after the disaster of the Fall, to turn against it. Yet some, torn and hurt by God's utter rejection, rejected humanity in turn. Only thus could they soothe their own pain, by projecting it onto the

mortals that they still loved. These few, emotionally wounded demons enlisted in Abaddon's Ebon Legion and lent their stony fists to the armies of the Rabisu and Asharu. A scant handful joined the Alabaster Legion to pit their skills and knowledge of the material against the problems of the spiritual and the safeguarding of humanity's souls. These few Annunaki would nonetheless make a major contribution toward humanity's defense, and one of their number would become one of the House's greatest monsters.

A Time of Building

Throughout the legions, the Annunaki split into two major groups, while a few stayed separate from their fellows to follow their own path.

The stonesmiths devoted themselves to building cities, bastions and redoubts across Creation, shaping towers and citadels from the earth with but a thought. The greatest of these fortresses was, of course, Genhinnom, the Black Cathedral — a citadel of such beauty and perfection that it took even Kishar and her stonesmiths centuries to finish its construction. Even from its first design, Genhinnom was perfection manifest in obsidian, the ultimate work of architecture, and a place holy to all Annunaki. Even those Malefactors that defied Lucifer and actively fought his legion still revered the artistry of the Black Cathedral. No Annunaki — not even the mad Schatenkoji — would blaspheme by attacking it or fight beneath its shadow except in self-defense.

As the smiths of the Crimson Legion built Genhinnom, Annunaki in the other legions built the great citadels of Dûdâêl, Tabâ'et' and Kâsdejâ. Only the members of the Ebon Legion eschewed the building of a central bastion. They preferred to base themselves in Genhinnom, the better to defend the teachers of the Crimson Legion, or to stay mobile and patrol Creation for signs of the Heavenly Host. Other stonesmiths spread across Creation, building bastions of all designs and purposes, and a few devoted themselves to building cities and villages for humanity.

A Time of Invention

Meanwhile, the second group of Malefactors, the relicsmiths, devoted themselves to creating new tools for humanity. Nemere and his brethren worked ceaselessly in the depths of Genhinnom, building new and ever more sophisticated relics. Some of these items were created not for human hands but for demonic use, to assist in the work of the Crimson Legion. Others were made for the simple joy of invention, not for any planned project or use. For the most part, though, these relicsmiths created tools meant for humans to use, to give them the keys to unlock Creation and manipulate it with ease.

The relicsmiths of the other legions also crafted fantastic tools, mostly for their own use. The inventors of the Ebon Legion created weapons — although, before the Time of Atrocities, such relics did little more than emphasize the skills and abilities of the wielder — while the Iron Legion produced similar relics for use in defense. The relicsmiths of the Silver Legion created engines of calculation to help them understand humanity's potential, as well as methods of transport and exploration to assist those pushing back Creation's boundaries.

In the Alabaster Legion, the Annunaki inventors worked hand in hand with the Slayers to develop relics that could protect human souls from oblivion or hollow out the substance of the spirit realms to create a hiding space. The process was slow and difficult, for the Annunaki had only the vaguest knowledge of the spirit and the worlds beyond the material, while their Slayer allies struggled to communicate with the prosaic and pragmatic Malefactors. One of these Annunaki — Schatenkoji, a former pupil of Nemere — gained a rapid understanding of the spirit, and his devices became an integral part of the Alabaster Legion's Haven project.

A Time of Sorrow

While the Age of Wonders was, in many ways, a golden time before the horrors of the Time of Atrocities, it was also a bitter time of defeat for the Annunaki, a realization that there were limits to their arts — and to humanity's love.

The relicsmiths of the Crimson Legion produced relics that could have made mankind's existence a paradise, but humanity could not learn how to *use* these gifts. Nemere and his fellows built plows that could till all a tribe's fields in an hour and bows that could unerringly seek out the heart of a boar, but in mortal hands, these relics were no more than normal tools. Humans had not yet learned to harness their own wills, their own faith, and without that power, the relics would not respond to their touch. Desperate to aid their charges, the Annunaki used the relics themselves, doing the work of dozens of mortal farmers and miners, but such acts did not please humanity. Instead, mortals were confused and frightened by the angels and their incomprehensible tools. They came to resent the beings who seemed so much better than they were and bestowed useless gifts that could not be made to function. Mortal hearts hardened against the Malefactors, and the Annunaki, who had thrown away all of Creation out of love for mortals, felt again the pain of rejection and loneliness.

It was not only the Annunaki of the Crimson Legion who found disappointment during this time. The researchers of the Silver Legion failed in their attempts to understand the human race. Even the assistance of

the Defilers, who knew the ways of humanity better than any other House, could not provide the Malefactors with the insight they craved. As the Age of Wonders drew to a close, the Annunaki despaired of ever knowing humanity to the extent they desired — or of ever having their love for humanity reciprocated.

The Time of Atrocities

Everything changed when Caine killed his brother Abel. This First Murder unleashed new and appalling changes upon Creation. Hatred and anger, violence and sin — all of these were now possible, and they consumed the imaginations of demon and mortal alike. The souls of the Annunaki were awakened to the temptations of anger and atrocity. For many of these demons, hurt and rejected by humanity, the desire for revenge was all consuming.

Defections and Betrayals

In the wake of Caine's sin, many Malefactors came to reject the laws of Lucifer. The Lightbringer, after all, had been the first to stay their hand during the forming of Creation, the first to reject their wisdom. "No longer," said the malcontent Annunaki, "shall we be controlled and blocked by others. We are free to remake Creation as *we* decide, and we will use humanity as we see fit in the process."

On the field of battle, next to the ruins of the Holy City of Sagun, a smattering of Malefactors of the Crimson and Iron Legions threw down their banners and left the ranks of the loyalists, crossing the rubble to join the Ebon and Silver Legions. While only a handful of Annunaki left the loyalist legions, they took great riches with them, relics and tools of great power. These defectors joined the rebellious legions and used the wisdom and discoveries of their former allies against them, while the loyal Malefactors of the Crimson and Iron Legions wept to find themselves pitted against their brothers and sisters.

The greatest betrayal of all, though, was in the ranks of the Alabaster Legion. The Malefactor Schatenkoji, inspired by Caine's sin, devised a way to trap human souls in physical chains — to harness the power of humanity even after they had died. He kept this discovery secret from the Slayers, who would have considered it the ultimate blasphemy. In his buried workshop on the edge of the spirit world, he waylaid mortal souls bound for oblivion or the Haven created by the Alabaster Legion and used them as components in his experiments. By the time the legion finally discovered what he was doing, Schatenkoji had perfected his techniques, learning to enslave souls and harness them in his devices. Now his only thought was to gain more and more power from the destruction of human souls. Naming himself Schatenkoji the Ghostsmith, he laid waste to the citadel of Kâsdejâ, maiming and destroying many of his former allies before fleeing to the waiting arms of Asmodeus and the Silver Legion. To this day, the Slayers revile his name, calling him the Greatest Abomination, and will never fully trust the Annunaki.

Engines of Punishment

In the armories of Dûdâêl and the laboratories of Tabâ'et', the renegade Annunaki continued to hone their arts of relicsmithing. A new world of pain, destruction and possibilities was open before them, and the Malefactors — still aching from the rejection of humanity — sought to explore all of these new possibilities upon the bodies and souls of humankind. The Annunaki created new and powerful weapons, from swords of fire to cannon that threw bolts of torn space-time. They developed instruments of torture and murder to unleash upon helpless humanity. In the bowels of Tabâ'et', Schatenkoji the Ghostsmith perfected his techniques of enslaving human souls to the engines of relics. He created items of utter horror that had no purpose except the spreading of fear and moral corruption. The Soulforge, the Window That Whispers, the Copper Heart, the Seven Canticles, the Book of Black Mirrors — the legends of these wicked artifacts still exist in human and demon society alike, eons after they were destroyed.

As well as making items for their own use, though, the bitter relicsmiths also made relics for mortals to use, harnessing souls through the discoveries of Schatenkoji. Why create tools for the creatures they wished to harm? Because these tools could only *bring* harm to the mortals that used them. Some were cursed, destined to turn upon the user and destroy his soul. Others were designed to destroy the lives and souls of others, and it amused the Malefactors to watch humans turn upon their own kind.

And some of these relics bore no curse, no taste for blood, but still held the potential to ruin lives. In their hubris, their emotional pain, the rebel Annunaki cast themselves into the role of judges. Masters of the material world, they decided it was their right to assess the worth of humanity, given that the mortal race seemed unable to transcend its physical nature and embrace its spiritual destiny. If humans were creatures of matter, then the former Angels of Matter could judge their merits — and they often did so by providing a mortal with a relic that she could use. If she could withstand the temptations of power and not misuse the relic, valuable data was gathered; if she tore herself apart in her desires to use the device, then such was the appropriate punishment for her weakness.

The renegades tempted mortals with magic swords and talking mirrors, bottomless chests of gold and scepters of infernal might, and when the mortals succumbed to the lure of the relics' powers, the Annunaki laughed as they observed the carnage.

Protectors and Explorers

While it was an era of horrors and excess, the Time of Atrocities was also a golden age for some, and a time when the loyalists of Lucifer continued to protect and teach the mortal race. While many Malefactors had defected to the Ebon and Silver Legions, many yet remained in the Crimson and Iron Legions and still worked for the betterment of human and demon alike. The warriors of the Iron Legion continued to protect mortal towns and villages, though the threat now came not from the Host of Heaven, but the marauders and warlords of the Ebon and Silver Legions. The shields of the Iron Legion placed their steel and granite bodies between the humans and their demonic attackers, and the renegades fell back, unable to harm their former comrades.

On the borders of Creation, Malefactors conducted experiments into the laws and substance of this damaged reality, building relics that could repair the harm caused by God's destruction of Paradise. The demon Befana, now named Mistress of Roads, made her legendary Diamond Map of Creation and discovered all the hidden byways and tunnels in the fabric of space-time. Working with the wisest of the stonesmiths, she and her allies connected these tunnels into a system of ley lines that crisscrossed Creation, anchored into place with obsidian steles and menhirs. At the center of the network was the First Mountain, Thala-m'kudan, holiest site of the Annunaki — the highest mountain ever pulled from the earth, a stony peak so tall its tip drew asteroids and comets in its wake.

Thala-m'kudan's central position and revered status made it the perfect meeting place for the Annunaki — and from all legions, all sides, the demons of stone met and parleyed in the mountain's caverns. By mutual consent, all enmities and hatreds were forgotten in the sacred caves, all politics and loyalties left outside. The First Mountain was a place where all Annunaki — demons who could gain true understanding and companionship only from each other — met to retain friendships and soothe old hurts, to talk of stone and relic design, to exchange ideas and to forget the hurts and torments of the outside. While many other demons gave their loyalty to their legion first and House second, the Annunaki always retained a strong bond to their House. This made the pain of fighting their siblings and brethren of the House of the Material so much more painful when the Long March was finally declared.

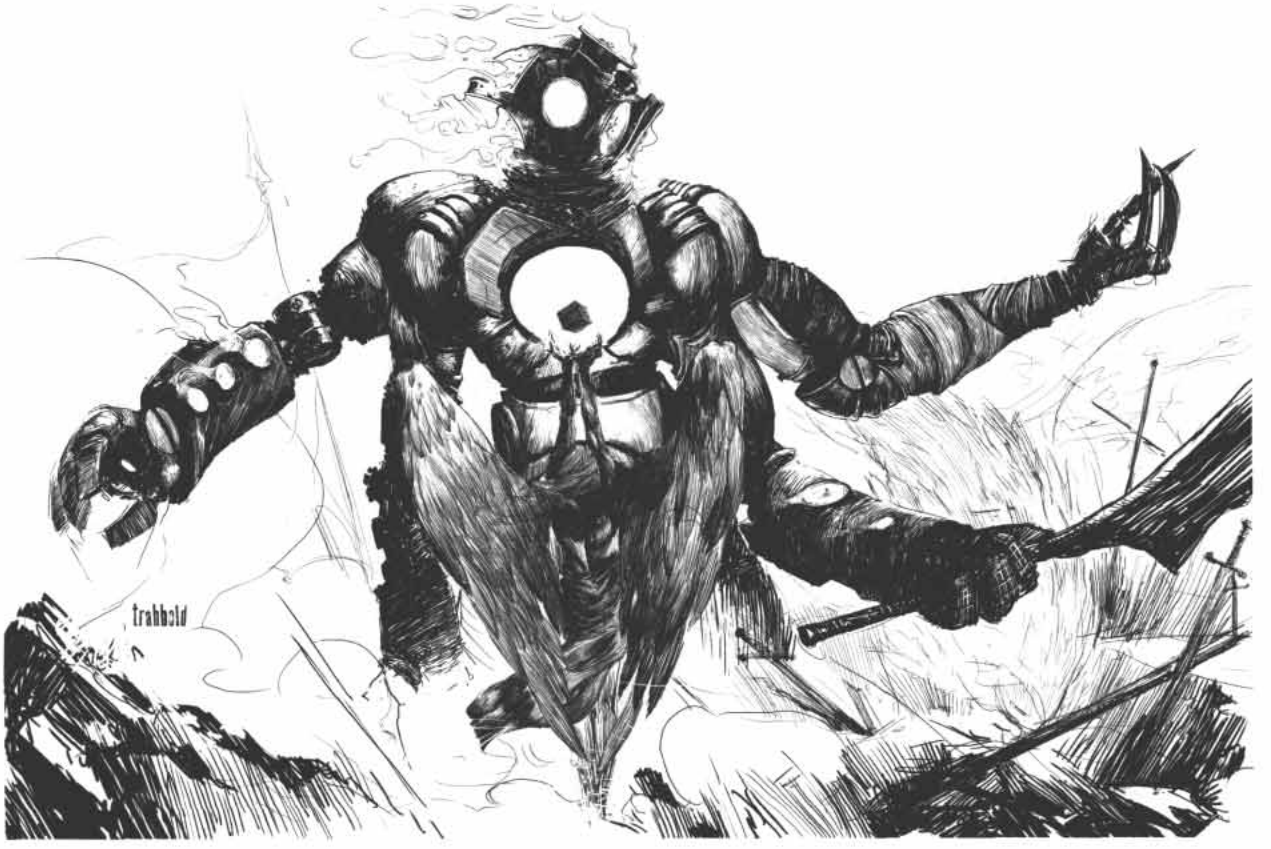
The Long March

The excesses of the Time of Atrocities went unchecked for many years, until finally, Lucifer would countenance no more. He gathered to him the Crimson and Iron Legions, and set off on the Long March, the crusade to bring the wastrels and monsters of the rebel legions back into the fold. In the shadows of the infernal citadels, Annunaki fought Annunaki. Both sides encased their hearts in stone to stifle the pain of fighting their brethren, their only friends.

In the desert, the armies of the Crimson Legion lay siege to the Ebon citadel of Dûdâêl. While Iron legionnaires shielded them from the attacks of the Ebon army, Kishar and her stonesmiths called out to the walls of the citadel to return to the earth, for the stones to cease lying atop each other. The walls shook and crumbled, and Lucifer's forces rushed in to overpower the Ebon Legion.

The siege of Tabâ'et', home of the Silver Legion, was far more difficult, and far more costly to the armies of the Morningstar. The Malefactors of the Silver Legion had learned black and mysterious secrets, and they were armed with weapons and relics unmatched by those of the attackers. Powered by mortals souls and unending pain, the cannon of the defenders breathed molten lead into the bones of the Crimson armies and unleashed vortices of spiritual energy that drew entire battalions into the emptiness of the spirit world. At the battle's height, when all seemed lost for the Crimson Legion, Schatenkoji the Ghostsmith appeared on Tabâ'et's battlements, a four-armed horror of metal and fire, armed with the most powerful and lethal of his inventions. Around his black swords and armor floated a cloud of mortal spirits, bound and enslaved by his relics, screaming in torment and bolstering his power a hundredfold. Screaming in triumph, the Ghostsmith mocked the loyalists and dared them to face him in combat.

Then, from the ragged ranks of the Crimson Legion, stepped a solitary figure, a being of black iron and brass, holding in one hand a small cube of *syir* and silver. Nemere, the Architecturate, Lord of Relicsmiths, stood alone before the walls of Tabâ'et', and Schatenkoji leapt down to destroy him. "Your skill, your knowledge, are as nothing to me," said the Ghostsmith, "for no trinket you wield can have a tenth the power of my slaved ghosts, and no weapon you can create can cut through their protection." To this Nemere said nothing, but merely opened the cube he held, revealing an empty nothingness with a single bright light at its heart, the light of his own perfect soul. The ghosts chained to Schatenkoji's relics were ripped free and drawn into the light. They flooded from the Ghostsmith's weapons and streamed into the cube, and when the last one was drawn into the



box, it clicked shut. Then Nemere fell to his knees, forever lost — his essence consumed utterly in imbuing the cube with the nothingness of the void. The Architecturate lay dead, the light of his soul forever extinguished, but Schatenkoji too was powerless, his relics inert and useless. And with that, a mighty shout arose from the Crimson and Iron Legions, and they rushed forward to overthrow Tabâ'et' and take the Ghostsmith prisoner. No one knows what became of Schatenkoji, who was later taken before Lucifer for punishment. The Slayers swear that he was not destroyed or killed, but neither was he imprisoned in Hell at the end of the War.

With the taking of Dûdâêl and Tabâ'et', the Long March ended, and the legions once more united under the banner of Lucifer. At long last, the rebellion was back on track, dedicated to one goal — to bring humanity's potential to full fruition and make Creation perfect now and forever.

The Time of Babel

Now, at last, the Annunaki could dedicate themselves to one goal — the perfection of humanity, the perfection of Creation. Now was the chance to finish what was started so long ago, the chance to build a new and better world. The Malefactors bent all their knowledge and skill to teaching humanity how to take control of Creation. Yet in the end, it was their own love for humanity, coupled with their inability to understand the human soul, that helped usher in the end of the rebellion and the final triumph of the Host.

Tools of Destiny

Energized by Lucifer's vision, the relicsmiths of the Crimson Legion shaped new artifacts for mortal use. Drawing on the techniques developed by the inventors of the Silver Legion, the Annunaki were able to finally craft relics that could be used by mortals, by binding their own power and awareness into the relics to direct the user's will. It was still not a trivial matter for a mortal to activate the powers of these relics, but it could be done. And for the relicsmiths, the sacrifice of a small measure of their own strength and power was worth the cost.

While the inventors of the Annunaki toiled in their workshops, the other members of the House also did their part to bolster human society. Lucifer selected two members of the House to join the Ten, the elite band of the wisest and greatest teachers of the Sebettu. Giriel, Rock of Ages, Soul of the World's Core, was chosen to teach mortals the ways of stone. It was he who instructed humans in the secrets of masonry and building, of creating towers and viaducts, and of shaping the land itself through tools and science. His brother in the Ten was Gamael, Celestial

Master of Cobalt, the Anvil of Stars. Gamael taught humanity to make its own tools, to forge steel and iron, copper and bronze. He showed people how to make hammer and anvil, plough and sword, smelter and refinery. The two humble and wise Malefactors joined the other members of the Ten and walked among humans, imparting all the wisdom of the Annunaki to those who would listen.

It was the culmination of the dreams of the Annunaki, the final realization of their desire to bring humanity to its full potential. And it was a Malefactor who destroyed it all.

Sin and the Shattering

Her name was Zipacna, and she was neither the greatest nor the least of the Crimson Legion's relicsmiths. Having worked alongside the Angels of the Wild before the Fall, crafting the forms of animals from clay, she had learned something of the Lore of the Flesh. In the service of the Crimson Legion she built relics to heal the wounds of humanity. She cared deeply for humanity, though she had never truly dealt with mortals. Her only crime was naiveté, but with that she destroyed the Eden dream.

Of all the Houses, the Annunaki were perhaps the most vulnerable to the lies of the betrayers — the renegades who whispered that humanity was doomed to forever stop short of its potential. "Humans cannot reach the divine," these corrupted ones whispered, "but we can. Let us mate with mortals, so that their children, our children, may inherit creation. With our aid, the descendants of humanity can fulfill the dream their parents cannot." For the Annunaki, who had long loved humanity without being able to express that love, this blasphemous notion held great attraction. The act would be sin, and worse than sin, but it would also be an act of love. But the notion was an impossible one. The flesh of demons was spiritual, not physical. While they had bodies, such things were manifestations of their will, not breathing organisms. The Sebettu were spirit, not flesh, and they could not join with mortals to create children.

Not until Zipacna, her wisdom blinded by unrequited love, invented the Stone of Fecundity and Limitation. This tiny relic, no more than a pearl of singular beauty, could allow the spirit of a demon to take mortal flesh. It could clothe her in mortal bones and blood and anchor her immortal essence to mortal seed. Under the influence of the stone, a demon could father and mother children and finally know the love of humanity. Never thinking of the consequences, Zipacna crafted several score of the stones and distributed them to the eager demons who had succumbed to the lies of the betrayers.

What followed was the great shame of the Annunaki — that in their love for humanity, they helped destroy humanity. For the children of the forbidden union were the terrible nephilim, and their rampages crippled mortal society and threw it down into dust and ruin. Their hate drew them to Giriel and Gamael, and to the rest of the Ten, and gave them the power to destroy the wisest of the Sebettu. The love — the lust — of the Annunaki had turned upon them, and in their desire and folly, they had doomed humanity.

The Annunaki fought desperately alongside the rest of the Sebettu against the nephilim, hopelessly trying to redeem the sin of their fellows. The creatures

Hidden Treasures

As the ranks of the Annunaki watched the Host of Heaven destroy their relics and inventions, some of them hid smiles of defiance. For in the final days of the Shattering as their stores of spiritual energy bled almost dry, a number of Malefactors created hidden caches and redoubts for their greatest and most valuable creations. Some were hidden underground, in vaults buried under tons of rock; some were wrapped inside pinches of space, separated from the rest of Creation; a few were hidden in even more complex ways, fashioned with the aid of other Sebettu.

The Annunaki hoped that these hidden vaults and caches would survive Heaven's purges, ready to be opened by the Sebettu when they finally escaped their prison. At least, that's what the Malefactors claimed. In truth, few of them had any real hopes of escaping God's wrath. They simply could not bear the thought of their beautiful, perfect creations being destroyed by the Host, so they hid them forever from the Creator's sight. The Host uncovered many of these caches, and their contents were destroyed, but a few, a precious few, remained lost and inviolate.

Now, of course, the Sebettu have escaped, and many of the Annunaki have set out to find their hidden stores of weapons and relics. The task is more difficult than they had imagined, though, thanks mostly to the clouding of memory brought on by the limitations of human hosts. Moreover, some caches seem to have been moved during the Annunaki's long internment in Hell, as if Creation had altered its very shape. And none dare to whisper another possibility — that someone had discovered the hiding places, opened them for a time, then put the relics *back* to be rediscovered. In any case, hidden stockpiles of relics still lurk hidden under the skin of Creation, waiting to be uncovered and used — whether by their creators, or whoever happens to find them first.

were destroyed, but the cost was enormous — humanity had been cast down, and the dream of Eden would never be realized. And the Malefactors wept tears of copper and basalt, knowing that the perfection of Creation was unattainable now and forever.

The End of the Rebellion

In the wake of the Shattering and the destruction of the Babel Experiment, the Host of Heaven returned to Creation and lay siege to the heartbroken armies of the Sebettu. The Malefactors fought fiercely, at first, wielding relics and artifacts against the armies of God and shielding their allies with their bodies of stone and iron. But as the Final War wore on, the Annunaki lost their will to fight, their desire for rebellion. The pain in their souls became too strong. The sting of rejection, of failure, of hopelessness, became too much to bear. Some threw themselves with fanatical vigor against the forces of Heaven, hoping to fall in battle and pass from this flawed Creation forever. Most, though, simply surrendered, too sad and too broken to continue fighting.

When the walls of Genhinnom finally fell, and when Lucifer was chained in links of fire and light, the Annunaki drew together in the rubble of the Black Cathedral to await their punishment. Some demons stood with their remains of their legion or with allies they had made in the Final War, but for the Malefactors, always the outsiders, the only comfort to be had in the face of judgment was with their own kind. Massed together, they watched as the Host destroyed the relics and wonders they had made, the weapons and works of art that had crystallized the beauty and potential of Creation. They watched as the Host dragged down the towers of obsidian and copper they had erected, and reduced them to dust and ashes. They watched as the Host wiped away everything that they had ever created, everything that they had built to honor the Creation they loved. And when they could watch no more, they walked into the Pit and embraced the oblivion of Hell.

Out of the Abyss

The reasons are still a mystery, but the gates of the Abyss have opened, and the Sebettu are free once more — free to take their revenge on Creation, free to unleash the pain of their torment upon the world. For most of the Annunaki, the joy of freedom is overwhelmed by the horror of seeing what Creation has been reduced to and the emotional scarring that drives them to punish humanity for never loving them enough. For some, though, there is hope — for the Malefactors are builders, first and foremost, and Creation cries out to be repaired and rebuilt once more. Creation lies in ruin, but with dedication and skill — and perhaps the love of humanity — it can be perfected, and both humanity and Annunaki might finally be able to fulfill their destinies.

For the Annunaki, Hell was worse than simple nothingness, simple solitude. After all, Malefactors were used to being alone. No, what made it even worse was the loss of Creation — to be forever exiled from the earth and soil, the stone and fire, that they had crafted from the barest atoms. The Annunaki defined themselves as the companions of the earth, and with the earth denied them, they had no way to *know* themselves any longer.

Slowly, though, the Annunaki grew inured to the absence of earth and stone. There was still pain, there was always pain, but it could be tolerated. Now the Annunaki found themselves in a position to gain power in the hierarchy of Hell. They had always eschewed such power games in the past, preferring their own studies and the company of stone, but that was denied them now. It was time to take advantage of what was available.

The Annunaki moved to place themselves into the factions and power groups, using their intelligence as a weapon. While they lacked social skills and instincts, their ability to learn and analyze was strong. They dominated the intellectual aspects of demonic society and made alliances as necessary to gain social power. This placed them at odds with the Namaru, the Devils, whose incredible social skills allowed them to control most of the infernal court. The Annunaki remembered the arrogance of the Namaru, before and after the Fall, starting with Lucifer's usurping of the perfection of Creation. They pitted themselves against the Devils with vigor, glad to have an enemy they could identify and fight, and they worked to hone their social powers and skills.

To survive the vacant horror of Hell, the Annunaki pushed away their emotions, becoming creatures of cold calculation and intelligence. Such an attitude was the only way to soothe the pain of rejection, the loss of Creation, and the Malefactors were prepared to spend all of eternity as unfeeling, analytical monsters. But then Hell broke open, and the Annunaki were granted their greatest wish — to return to Creation and feel the touch of stone and earth upon their flesh again.

It was a wish that gave them far less joy than they would ever have suspected. Creation is in ruins, degenerated far beyond the state it had reached at the time of the Shattering. The earth is desecrated, polluted, wounded, the jewels and fruits of the earth ripped from its womb by rapacious and greedy mortals. As for those

mortals, the beings who rejected the love of the Annunaki — they have changed too, for better and for far worse. They have become a race of makers, of builders, who have created tools and technology so incredible as to make a Malefactor weep. But this drive to invent has been at the cost of their souls, their potential. Humanity is more separated from Creation than ever before, seeing the world as a resource to be exploited, not a birthright to be loved and honored. Humans *use* the world instead of respecting it, and to the Annunaki who were banished from Creation for daring to love it so completely, this is the worst of blasphemies.

Once the Annunaki would have thrown themselves to the ground and wept at this desecration, but that was before they survived Hell. Now their eyes are dry and their hearts stony, their emotions kept in check. To survive the Abyss, the Malefactors became thinkers and planners, ready to use any resource to their advantage, and they remain such now that they have escaped. Their minds are keen, their hearts are cold, and Creation lies spread before them. Now the Annunaki will take what they want, achieve the goals they desire and rework Creation as they see fit, for only they are the true judges of the material, and only they have the right to decide Creation and mankind's fate.

Retaking Lost Ground

The Annunaki were a relatively small part of the force of demons who first streamed forth from the broken walls of the Abyss. The Malefactors had done their best to forget Creation, to block out their pain and distract themselves with the working of infernal politics instead. When the gates of Oblivion opened a crack, most Annunaki were focused elsewhere, while demons of the other Houses flooded forth to Creation. Those few Malefactors who were part of the first wave of escapees were mostly demons of little power or influence, unencumbered by obligations within Hell. Others were ordered forth by their masters and superiors in the courts, expendable followers who would not be missed if the promise of freedom turned into some new torture of the Creator's.

So in the first days of the great escape from Hell, the Annunaki were a small minority of the demons loose on Earth. Most of these Malefactors became distracted by the indescribable pleasures — and agonies — of being manifest in Creation once more, of being in contact with earth and stone and matter after so long alone in oblivion. But aeons of suffering and solitude had instilled discipline and willpower in the Annunaki, and few Malefactors remained distracted by their surroundings for long. Outnumbered by the other Houses of the Sebettu on Earth — Houses that had become their political rivals in Hell — the Annunaki quickly set to work, establishing political power over their rivals and spiritual power over mortals.

While only a few Annunaki were loose on Earth at first, they possessed a major advantage over their rivals: their ability to create relics, artifacts and enhanced devices. In the Age of Wrath, all demons had access to relics, and the legions maintained large armories of enchanted weapons and tools. In the Pit, no objects or physical devices could even exist, so no House or faction had access to relics. But now, in this new world, the Annunaki had the advantage, the mastery of relicsmithing, and soon they were armed with mystical devices and tools that their rival demons could not match. With this edge, the Annunaki were able to exercise considerable influence over their fellow demons and leverage themselves into positions of influence in the infernal courts and power groups that formed in the first days of freedom.

Unfortunately, dominance of mortal and demon society requires more than enchanted weapons and jury-rigged relics. While the Annunaki had a major advantage over their rivals, they also tended to have a notable disadvantage — the human host whose soulless bodies they now possessed. For the most part, Malefactors had been drawn to mortals who were also inventors and builders, who worked with their hands and minds — not mortals with supplies of money, power and influence. While their mystical abilities were strong, most Malefactors found themselves on the low end of the mortal social order, blue collar workers or hard-working engineers rather than politicians or tycoons. These Annunaki found it hard to marshal resources and influence — and while that shouldn't have been a factor in interaction with other demons, the Sebettu quickly realized that mundane power was just as useful in some cases as mystical ability. The highest positions of power in the newly forming demonic society tended to be claimed by Devils and Defilers, who either possessed hosts with temporal influence or were able to quickly gain such through their abilities. With less mundane influence and less ability to gain followers and worshippers, the Annunaki must generally satisfy themselves with the role of advisor or consultant to an infernal ruler — viziers and counselors, not kings and princes.

Crafting a New Order

Of all the Houses of the Sebettu, the Annunaki are perhaps the most unified, and they have been ever since they were created. Even before the Fall, the Artificers hewed together, separate from the other Elohim. During the Age of Wrath, loyalty to House often transcended a Malefactor's loyalty to his legion, and Annunaki who were (in theory) mortal enemies would trade relic design

ideas on the slopes of Thala-m'kudan. In Hell, this closeness and loyalty gave the Annunaki strength to survive the emptiness of their prison and the purpose to become a powerful force in demonic politics.

Now that they have been released onto Earth, the Annunaki remain a close-knit House. While most Malefactors belong to a faction, the bond to their own House, to stone and steel and the comforts of the earth, is usually stronger than that of mere ideology. Malefactors still argue and disagree over what to do with Creation and humanity. They all agree, though, that *something* must be done, and that only they are truly qualified to take control of the material world. They also agree that humanity is key to whatever goal is to be reached, and that only by gaining the faith and devotion of humanity can Creation be reshaped (or even perhaps redeemed).

But as well as controlling or influencing humanity, it remains vital for the Annunaki to retain their influence in demonic society, especially now that other Houses are gaining a powerful hold over Creation. The Malefactors make up an almost monolithic bloc in infernal society, a powerful group that is more unified and coherent than any other House. This does not guarantee them dominance in infernal politics, unfortunately, as they still lack the numbers, social power and access to mortal faith that other Houses benefit from. But the Annunaki are often the deciding voice in demonic society, an influential bloc whose allegiance has been enough to alter the balance of power on many occasions. In return for this cooperation, senior Malefactors usually demand favors, temporal and mundane influence, greater influence over demonic politics or access to lost relics. Only then will the Annunaki retire in private, so these rewards can be argued over by members of opposing factions and courts.

Some rare Malefactors stand apart from their brethren, although it's almost unheard of for an Annunaki to work against her House. But independent Malefactors do exist, as do those who place faction or personal philosophy ahead of the needs of their House. These fringe dwellers — never complete outsiders, never completely estranged from their fellows — often become key players in demonic politics, simply by virtue of their House. Other demons, knowing the Annunaki almost always speak with one voice, will do their best to win a lone Malefactor to their cause, hoping that she will bring with her the political weight of her House. Cunning loners use this to their advantage, gaining power through the promise of their House's support — which can backfire, of course, if the House decides not to back up a greedy or uncontrollable Malefactor.

Power Plays

The ultimate goal for most Annunaki is to remake Creation, to reshape it into its perfect form. They also wish to rebuild the human race, to allow it to fulfill its potential. Where the Annunaki differ and argue is over just what that potential is and what Creation should become. Some wish to chain the power of humanity and use it to elevate the Sebettu; some hope to cleanse Creation of the scars of centuries and make it the perfect universe it was meant to be. While the House presents a unified front to the rest of the Sebettu, differences and clashes arise within the Malefactor ranks. The factional infighting is far less severe than in, for example, the camps of the Namaru, but it does exist, and it can throw the House into a disarray that it tries desperately to hide from the rest of demonic society.

Such disagreements rarely become dangerous, though, due to the guidance and relentless work of Gipontel, perhaps the most politically powerful and influential of the Annunaki. The behind-the-scenes leader of the Cryptics, Gipontel is the only Malefactor to command a major infernal faction, and he does so in the same way he influences his own House. In the service of his faction, he forges connections with other demons and other groups, trades information and favors and gives sizable rewards to those who advance the Cryptics' quest for knowledge. Behind closed doors, he applies the same attitude to arbitrating disagreements within the House of Fire and Stone, preaching unity, cooperation and advancing the cause of the Annunaki. Most Malefactors look to Gipontel as a clear-headed, mostly objective judge of disputes and disagreements, as he's careful not to advance the needs of his own faction over those of his House.

A number of other senior Annunaki have influence within the House's affairs, and some of them are starting to chafe under Gipontel's dominance. While few doubt that he is sincere in his desire to gain power for the Annunaki, some Malefactors believe that his true reason for doing so is to make himself more powerful, the sole leader of the dominant House of Creation. These senior Annunaki are attempting to develop their own power bases, in order to challenge Gipontel should he attempt to seize power within the House. Given the respect the majority of Malefactors pay the Cryptic leader, though, such rival groups are still small.

The most effective rivals to Gipontel's dominance are those who choose to develop their influence outside the House itself. They gain power in mortal society or within the larger demonic community, arenas where Gipontel has far less power. One prominent rival is Hirguan, whose personal wealth and financial power gives him leverage. Another, Caacrinolas, is making inroads into influencing the British government to gain political and military power. Perhaps the most visible rival to Gipontel, though, is Fell Knight Guanli,

a master relicsmith who has gained great influence in the Infernal Court of Los Angeles. A renegade Cryptic, Guanli turned his back on his former leader to amass his own power base, and he has gained significant influence in demonic politics — in no small part, say some rumormongers, due to his secret alliance with one of the terrible Earthbound.

While these rivalries and tensions exist, relations within the Annunaki are strong for the most part. Most disagreements are resolved even without Gipontel's input, for the Annunaki are predisposed to work together rather than fight among themselves. But as more Malefactors continue to escape Hell and come to Earth, some worry that the House's unity might begin to fray and that more Annunaki — tempted by the prospect of personal power and their own cult of mortals to supply faith — will turn away from their House and seek to make their own paths. Such a development would not just threaten the House's position in demonic politics, it would be the destruction of the only loving, trusting family most Annunaki have ever known.

Shapers of the Earth

Always practical, always pragmatic, the Annunaki seek to gain power and advance their goals in a concrete manner. Some shun the limelight and build in secret, trying to avoid unwanted attention; others work openly for their goals, using their visible projects to distract rivals from any hidden agendas. A House of thinkers and builders, Malefactors develop structured plans, rather than acting on impulse. Many look to the long-term for their ultimate goals, working slowly and steadily to build their empires and perfect their creations.

The following are only some of the major Annunaki loose in Creation, building power bases and amassing both temporal and spiritual influence. Many more are working quietly and calmly toward their goals, choking down their sorrow and waiting for a chance to remake reality in their own image.

Gipontel

As a leader of both the Cryptics and the influential Malefactor bloc, Gipontel is one of the most politically powerful demons in the world. This, of course, has always been his aim. Knowledge is power, and Gipontel has a great deal of both. The only question now is what to *do* with that power, and that's something the demon is still trying to determine. Gipontel wants to make Creation a finer, more perfect thing, a shining wonder with himself as ruler. He's not yet sure what needs to be done to Creation in order to improve it, though. One reason he's worked to assume power within his House is the hope that the other Annunaki will be able to devise a plan for Creation that meets his needs — his own private, loyal think tank.

Gipontel isn't officially a leader of his House any more so than he's officially the leader of the Cryptics. Instead, he presents himself as a collator and controller of information, an objective third party prepared to share his insights and wisdom. The best thing about this image is that it's *true*. His main aim is to keep the House running smoothly, and to make himself equal valuable to all parties. By staying seemingly objective and not favoring even his own faction, he remains respected. By not appearing to actively seek the power and responsibilities of leadership, he ensures that other Malefactors will *give* him such when the time is right.

Guanli

In absolute contrast to Gipontel, Guanli aggressively seeks out power and influence over demonic society. Originally he was a loyal Cryptic, assigned with a team of fellow demons to monitor Los Angeles after Lucifer's appearance there. Seeing a chance to gain power for himself, though, he abandoned his allies and inserted himself into the upper ranks of LA's infernal court, gaining influence quickly through both trading favors and eliminating rivals.

Influencing the infernal court of a single city, of course, is not enough — not enough to satisfy Guanli's dream of a Creation that is the bloody plaything of himself and his lover Ravana. Currently his sights are set on taking control of both of Los Angeles' demonic courts, becoming sole ruler of the multitude of demons in the city. From there, the next step is to dominate demonic politics throughout North America. His secret ally in this is Manishtusu, the horrific Earthbound Lord of Murder. Guanli currently acts as the Earthbound's servant, not its equal, but that too will change as soon as the Malefactor finds a weakness in the monster's defenses and can steal away its power. Hiding his plans from his "master," Guanli has his own servants searching the world for the reliquary containing Manishtusu's soul and power. If he can find it, he might be able to bend the Earthbound to his will.

Caacrinolas

Caacrinolas is the head of the British Research Council, an innocuous name for a far more complex organization. The BRC is devoted to advising the British government on policy ramifications. Its researchers and analysts build projections and mine data to give the government the information it needs before making decisions. Since Caacrinolas took possession of BRC Chairperson Adelaide Masterton, though, the group's function has subtly changed. The

information it feeds to the government is not *wrong* exactly, it's just slanted in a particular direction toward a particular purpose.

Right now, the BRC is advising the government to institute tough new security measures, and to combine them with a reduction in Social Security and welfare. It's also advising the creation of a controlled autonomous zone in London, an area where drugs and prostitution are legalized and taxed. Caacrinolas wants to see what happens when some humans are given less freedom and others more freedom. She wants to know which set of conditions will do more to unlock human potential. The fact that she's gaining influence over the British government — indeed, has several Ministers and Members of Parliament as thralls — is a welcome side benefit that she might use as a weapon against Gipontel.

Hirguan

Uluru, once called Ayers Rock, is the largest single piece of stone in the world, lying immense and sullen in the Australian desert. Hirguan knows full well the appeal of stone, as well as the wound that the loss of the Grandfather Mountain still causes his fellow Annunaki. In his guise as Australian business and publishing magnate Darryl Sykes, he planned to take control of the Uluru tourist park and make Uluru into a new neutral ground for Malefactors, a place to make deals and broker influence. In so doing, he hoped to gain more dominance over the Annunaki by replacing Gipontel as the trusted advisor and arbitrator of the House.

What he didn't take into account was the mystic power of the rock, a serpentine river of energy coiled deep within the stone, protected by its traditional Aboriginal inhabitants. These wise men see through Hirguan's mortal seeming to the demon within, and they are fighting his takeover attempts every way they can. Hirguan also didn't figure on the incredible attraction the stone holds for him — a beauty and grandeur that's eating into his soul. The demon desperately *needs* to come to Uluru to immerse himself in its depths and touch the power within, and he'll stop at nothing to gain access and destroy the stone's guardians. He's already arranged the purchase of illegal guns and other weapons. Now he's looking for bombs, relics and helpers to make his dream a reality.

Zipacna

Biologist Emily Probst burst onto the international science scene recently with new and startling research into human fertility and cloning. For "startling," read "ethically shaky," as many of Probst's experiments seem unusual, if not downright illegal. Opponents of human cloning are demanding a UN inquiry into her methods, and the US government is assembling a task force to investigate her funding and alleged connections with organized crime. Probst, meanwhile, is in Vienna, meeting scientific consortiums and mega-corporations to discuss her research and patents.

None suspect the truth or realize that the real reason Probst fled America was to avoid the attention of her fellow demons. For Zipacna is determined to redeem her great sin, no matter what the cost. With mortal science and demonic magic, she will bring forth a new human race, combining the best features of mortal and demon. And this time, she tells herself in her madness, there will be no nephilim. This time she'll get it *right*.

Relics and Lost Lore

It takes more than skill and determination to remake or repair Creation. It requires *tools*, and none are greater users and makers of tools than the Annunaki. Malefactors have a wide array of weapons, relics, rituals, powers and tools at their disposal, both new and old. Indeed, the House might have more tools than its members can actually *use*, but it's better to have too many options than too few.

Relics

No other House can boast the vast stockpile of relics and mystic artifacts that the Annunaki possess. Many Malefactors have already made dozens of new tools and relics upon their escape from Hell, their creative powers adapting to the new conditions of this weakened Creation. Others are searching for any lost treasures that survived Heaven's purges, kept safe in buried fortresses or pockets of space. The following relics are secrets possessed only by the Annunaki, rarely shown to other demons, but Malefactors can possess any number of other relics. Their only limits are their own imaginations and resources.

The Hidden Mountain

Some mortals believe that K2 is the highest mountain in the world. Most others know that Mount Everest is actually about 200 meters higher. The Annunaki, however, know that Thala-m'kudan is the highest mountain in Creation, a towering behemoth of stone so tall that its peak scrapes the ozone layer. The largest mountain that ever existed, Thala-m'kudan was the home of many Malefactors during the Age of Wrath, its peak a sacred place to the demons of stone. In the caverns of the Grandfather Mountain, all Annunaki were equal, and the wars and vendettas between legions were forgotten. No mortal has ever seen Thala-m'kudan, though, and

most demons believe the mountain crumbled and disintegrated during the Shattering, reduced to dust and rubble by the forces of Heaven.

The Annunaki know differently. Thala-m'kudan exists still, and Malefactors still meet in its caverns. But the mountain no longer towers over the Himalayas. Instead, it exists inside a platinum casket, no bigger than a shoebox. In the dying days of the war, Befana, Queen of Roads, severed the First Mountain from the rest of Creation, folding and refolding the space around it, until the mountain existed entirely outside the universe — the only connection remaining inside the mouth of an ornate casket. The box was hidden far from angelic eyes, and it has only just been reclaimed. It's now in the possession of Gipontel, Malefactor second-in-command of the Cryptic faction.

Thala-m'kudan is sacred to the Annunaki, the single largest piece of solid stone that ever existed. Only Malefactors are permitted to come to the First Mountain. If another demon enters the box, she will be hunted to the end of the earth and punished for her blasphemy. Thala-m'kudan is a meeting place for the Annunaki, who are forbidden to fight or harm even mortal enemies while in its sacred caverns, and any Malefactor who breaks this pact will be destroyed by his fellows. Not all is calm and peaceful inside the mountain, though, for Thala-m'kudan has secrets. Visiting demons have reported hearing strange sounds or seeing mysterious figures or creatures, and some Annunaki have never returned from the mountain. Some say that a few nephilim hid from Lucifer's wrath in the caverns of Thala-m'kudan and remain there still. Others posit that *something* lives in the no-space around the mountain, a black power alien to Creation. A force that hungers...

System: When the box is open, it looks completely normal. Gipontel usually fills it with something innocuous like tobacco. A demon who uses the Find Path evocation of the Lore of Paths, though, can see the pinch of space-time inside the box's mouth and can set foot inside. To an observer the demon simply vanishes, while to the demon's eye the mouth of the box expands to swallow him whole. Once inside, the demon finds himself at the foot of Thala-m'kudan, which towers impossibly huge inside an infinite gray radiance, the space outside space. To leave, the demon must use Find Path again to see the exit, then again walk along the path. He then appears beside the empty casket, even if the box has been closed.

Philosopher's Stones

Medieval and Renaissance alchemists were obsessed with the problem of creating the Philosopher's Stone — a magical tool that could transform lead into gold, base matter into pure spirit. These mortal



sorcerers slaved and toiled for years to no avail, but to the Annunaki, such an item is almost trivial to create. A Philosopher's Stone (sometimes called a crucible) is sometimes an actual stone, but it can just as easily be made from a pot, rod or other item.

It's quite easy to make a large amount of any metal with this relic. Converting lead into gold, silver or steel is quite simple — it's all just metal, after all. Converting the affected metal into a more complex material, such as plutonium or diamond, is more difficult, but still doable. The question is not whether you *can* turn a metal hubcap into gold or mercury or emerald, it's what you *do* with it afterward. If all you want is short-term profit, you can sell the gold, but there are legal steps to doing so that will attract attention. You might be able to turn a lump of lead into diamond, but it still needs to be cut and polished before it's worth anything. And if you've changed a desk ornament into pure ruby, people will think it's a fake due to its shape. As for plutonium... well, you better have somewhere safe to store it and just hope government agents don't come crashing through the windows to confiscate it. Most Malefactors use these relics to simply change low-quality stone into useful steel, the better to build with. Anything more complex or profit-oriented is generally too much of a headache.

System: A crucible usually possesses a pool of six dice, but some are more powerful. To use a crucible, the demon merely touches it to a supply of metal or stone. Make a Faith roll to activate the relic. If it succeeds, the player rolls the relic's own dice pool to then convert the substance touched into any other metal or stone of the demon's choosing. Converting the metal into a simple material such as steel or glass requires a difficulty 6 roll. Converting it into a more complex substance raises the difficulty by one to three at the Storyteller's discretion. This transformation is permanent.

The relic can affect only a number of cubic yards of material equal to the successes generated by the roll, and it will affect only a discrete amount of material. If there's more material in the object than can be affected at one time, the evocation simply fails. The crucible can be used only once per scene. To make a crucible, a Malefactor must know the Lore of the Earth and the Lore of the Fundament, as well as the Lore of the Forge.

Syir

It was the black ur-metal, the First Ore — a crude, rough metal shaped by the bare hands of the Annunaki. The demons called it *syir* and knew it to be valuable beyond words. For while other metals existed during the Time of Atrocities, the first simple ores and alloys forged by mortals (with Sebettu assistance), *syir* had something no normal metal possessed — a *soul*. *Syir* was physically crude, but spiritually pure — a metal with an awakened spirit that responded to the thoughts and will of its users in a way no mundane metal could. The metal was not alive or sentient — at least, not in ways that made sense to mortals — but it knew its masters, the Annunaki, and devoted all of its essence to fulfilling their needs.

Most of the rebellion's supplies of *syir* were destroyed in the Shattering, dispersed into atoms by the host of Heaven. No more could ever be mined or forged, as no vein of metal left in Creation has a spirit that could be quickened into awareness. Yet some stockpiles of *syir* remain hidden from the Host, held against the day that they could be reclaimed. That time is now, and Malefactors are moving to dig up the buried caches of black ore and put them under lock and key. *Syir* is extremely valuable to the Annunaki, more than gold or diamonds, and those who control the supply of it exact a high price in favors and influence from those who wish to use it.

Syir is an unusual looking substance. It appears more like coal or carbon than metal, and items made from it attract the attention of mortal and demon alike. There's also a growing suspicion among the Annunaki that long aeons of being unused has affected the *syir* in some way — that the soul of the metal has grown petulant at being ignored and corrupted by the stresses of solitude. While it's easy to affect the metal with evocations, such infernal powers can also set off a backlash from the *syir*, which strikes out at the demon with waves of unformed anger and emotional darkness.

System: The main use of *syir* is as a component in the creation of relics. The metal's spiritual nature makes it ideal for containing, focusing and channeling the will and power of a demon's evocations. Any relic that contains a reasonable amount of the metal can channel stronger, more powerful effects. If you're using the relic-creation system from the **Demon Players Guide**, *syir* always counts as a material of Superb suitability. If you prefer the simpler system for Enchant Object in the **Demon** rulebook, using *syir* reduces the number of successes needed to create an item. If you use more *syir* in the relic — to the point where half or more of the artifact is made from the metal — then the difficulty of the Enchant Object evocation decreases by one, as does the difficulty of the Faith or Willpower roll needed to activate the finished relic.

It's also possible to craft objects directly from *syir*, although doing so is wasteful. Using the Shape Object evocation, a Malefactor can form a lump of *syir* into whatever she wants, as long as it's a purely metallic item (swords are a popular option). The difficulty of the evocation decreases by one, and the resulting

item is of exceptional quality and may have other advantages at the Storyteller's discretion. (For example, a sword made from *syir* does aggravated damage, rather than lethal.) If the object is further improved with the Enhance Object evocation, the difficulty of *that* evocation also decreases by one.

For all its useful qualities, there are drawbacks to *syir* as well. The ur-metal is crude and cannot be improved by modern forging methods. If crafted in a mundane fashion, it's actually *less* useful than simple steel. Increase the difficulty of any mundane Crafts or Technology roll for working with *syir* by two. Any evocation roll made to affect *syir* (such as Enchant Object) will botch on a 1 *or* 2, and each botch inflicts a point of temporary Torment upon the character using the black metal.

The Warriors of the Broken Ground

Few Malefactors like to dwell on how this relic was first created or how it was used. It was invented by Adramelech, an Annunaki of the Ebon Legion, during the Time of Atrocities. A rapacious monster with a love of bloodshed, Adramelech took mortals prisoner and made them fight for his amusement in gladiatorial games. When he became bored with seeing mortals murder each other, he put wild animals into the pits to tear them apart. When he grew bored with *that*, he developed the Warriors of the Broken Ground. It gave him no end of sick amusement to see mortals stumble into an arena that seemed empty, only to see armed warriors arise from the soil itself to attack them. He laughed and laughed as the mortals flailed ineffectually against the stony, impassive warriors who would butcher the hapless humans where they stood.

When Adramelech was destroyed by Kinkirsi of the Crimson Legion during the Long March, few Annunaki mourned his passing. His fighting automatons, too weak to be useful against the forces of Heaven, were dismissed as a novelty and forgotten. In the Creation of today, though, other Malefactors have re-created the Warriors of the Broken Ground, for the demons of today are weaker, and the mortals more dangerous. Unflinching warriors of stone are a worthy defense against any foe.

System: The relic takes the form of a metal cube, six inches on each side, that is composed of dozens of metal wires and rods. To use the relic, the owner must place it on an expanse of soil or stone (natural stone, not concrete), or bury it a few inches deep in the earth. Activating it requires a successful Faith roll and then an expenditure of Faith points, from one point to a maximum amount equal to the successes generated by the Faith roll. (Mortal users require a successful Willpower roll and must spend Willpower points.) For each point of Faith spent, a warrior forms from the cube. The wires and rods of the cube connect to form a crude humanoid framework, which then pulls in the surrounding earth and stone to flesh it out. The warriors rise from the earth, leaving the ground beneath them broken and torn apart. Warriors look like crude, roughhewn statues of naked humans, with stones and pieces of metal protruding at random from their earthen flesh.

Each warrior is an independent automaton with a simple, crude intelligence suited for nothing except combat. It has a rating of 1 in Intelligence, Wits and Perception, and it has no Social Attributes or Willpower rating. The activator of the relic can command each warrior verbally, but can give only simple commands such as, "Attack the man with the gun," and the warriors will follow that command until given new orders. The Physical Attributes of the warriors are based on the relic's dice pool. (Most have a pool of five or six dice, but some may have larger pools at the Storyteller's discretion.) The warriors have a base rating of 1 in each Attribute. The Storyteller then rolls the relic's pool and adds the successes to each of the Physical Attributes, up to a limit of 5. The warrior also has a rating in the Brawl Ability equal to the successes of the roll and a number of health levels equal to the successes plus the warrior's Stamina rating. The warrior soaks lethal damage with its full Stamina pool, and it suffers no penalties for wounds. It attacks with its stony fists, which inflict Strength + 1 lethal damage.

If a warrior suffers enough damage to destroy it, it falls apart into a heap of dirt and rocks, but the relic can re-create it the next time it is activated. If all of the warriors created at one time are destroyed, however, the relic is ruined and cannot be used again. The cube can be activated only once per scene, and the warriors will return to the earth once there are no more opponents for them to attack.

To build a set of Warriors of the Broken Ground, a Malefactor must have knowledge of the Lore of the Fundament, the Lore of Awakening and the Lore of the Earth, as well as the Lore of the Forge.

Tesseract Generators

These unusual relics were invented by the Malefactor Oriax shortly after she returned from the Abyss. A Reconciler, Oriax came to believe that violence was a trap, an immoral practice that could only draw demons back to Hell. Unfortunately, she was also being hunted by a pack of angry Raveners who were wholeheartedly in favor of violence and weren't prepared to stop and debate principles with her. Oriax needed a tool that could slow and immobilize her attackers without harming them — something that would affect multiple demons, but with an effect that she could avoid. What she created was a Tesseract

Generator — a device that temporarily scrambles the fabric of space in the surrounding area, making it impossible to move normally.

Within that area, space isn't simply bent or rippled, it's completely *broken*. While the space within an object or person is unaffected — organs don't suddenly exist in a separate space from the rest of the body — every few feet of space outside those objects becomes disconnected from the space surrounding it and connected to a random area of space somewhere else in the area. Normally, the space in front of you connects to the space beside you, but now it connects to an area across the room. Any attempt to move into the space in front of you will throw you across the room instead. Imagine space as a completed jigsaw puzzle. Well, the generator breaks the puzzle up and scatters the pieces at random. If you're caught inside the area of effect, space becomes an incomprehensible puzzle. Try to walk toward something, and you find yourself walking in a different direction, hitting an invisible wall of inert space or being thrown in a random direction. If you throw an object at your target, it'll suddenly veer sideways or vanish and reappear across the room, moving in a different direction.

Oriax's first Tesseract Generator was a shoddy thing cobbled together from copper wire and old physics textbooks, but it did the job and protected her from her pursuers. She's continued perfecting the design and teaching friendly Annunaki how to create the relics — a process that requires knowledge of the Lore of Paths and the Lore of the Fundament, as well as the Lore of the Forge. While loyalty to her House has stayed her from teaching demons of other Houses the secret, she has made a number of generators and given them to fellow Reconcilers as a non-violent means of defense. Those few Reconcilers who possess generators tend to use them as a means of last resort, for none of them know the Lore of Paths, and they're just as vulnerable to the generator's power as their enemies.

System: When activated, a Tesseract Generator warps space at random in the immediate area, out to a radius equal to the activating character's Faith rating in yards (Willpower rating for mortal users). The Storyteller rolls a dice pool for the Tesseract Generator's effects — most generators have a pool of six dice, but some may be more powerful. *Every* physical action attempted within the area of effect — throwing a punch, shooting a gun, juggling, dodging a blow — has its difficulty increased by the number of successes rolled. Movement is also curtailed, and characters may move only one yard each turn without considerable effort. A character can try to move more, but she will find herself being thrown around at random. To counter this effect, make a Perception roll (difficulty of 6 + successes rolled for the generator's effects). The character can move an additional yard in the direction she wishes to go for each success gained.

Evocation rolls do not suffer an increase in difficulty, but any evocation that has a physical effect (such as movement or targeting an opponent with a physical attack) must gain more successes on the evocation roll than the successes of the relic's dice pool or else fail. Botches become very dangerous within the area of effect. Most botches will involve the character's actions turning back on himself, as the path of his gun's bullet curves back to him or he throws himself bodily to the ground when trying to run.

The only way to avoid the effects of the generator is to move out of the area, which is very difficult — unless the character can perform the Find Path evocation of the Lore of Paths. Everyone else will have to slowly struggle free, or wait until the fabric of space settles down again. This happens after a number of minutes equal to the successes on the relic's dice pool.

Stone Scripture

Even before the Fall, the Artificers made up the most insular House, and they worked with their own brethren far more than they did with other angels. To assist in their efforts and better communicate about projects, the Artificers invented their own language. They never shared it with the other angels — not out of secrecy, but simply because it didn't seem necessary. This language was not a spoken tongue or a written one exactly. Instead, Artificers encoded stones and crystals with their essence, shifting the electrons of the crystal's atoms and the flavors of its spirit to communicate ideas. Another Artificer could come across an encoded stone, and "read" the variations within as a glyph of information — a burst of data that communicated ideas, diagrams and instructions.

After the Fall, the Annunaki continued to communicate through stones, in what they came to call the crystal code or "stonespeech." With great effort, they developed a variation on their original language, to encode stones in a way their estranged cousins could not understand. Across Creation, Malefactors encoded information into crystals and gemstones, leaving information or warnings for their brethren and maintaining the privacy of their own personal tongue. Aeons later, the Malefactors still use the crystal codes to communicate with other Annunaki, and they keep watch for stones that still contain information from the Age of Wrath that have lain quietly for centuries.

System: Stonespeech is a language known only to Malefactors, and it must be purchased like any other using the Linguistics Ability. The scripture is only a

written language, and demons can only encode messages into crystals and gemstones. (Creation has degenerated to the point where simple stone cannot be encoded.) To impress a message or glyph into a stone, the Malefactor must hold it in his hand and the player must make a Faith roll. The more successes gained on this roll, the more information can be encoded into the stone. One success allows for a simple sentence, like, "Sephidor is hiding in Los Angeles." Three successes allow for a series of paragraphs, such as a detailed breakdown of a skyscraper's security codes and systems. Five successes allow the demon to encode detailed pictorial information, such as a photograph or schematic that will unfold in the mind of the reader.

Encoded stones have a slightly abnormal spiritual shape that Malefactors know how to recognize. Any Malefactor who sees an encoded crystal may attempt to recognize with a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 6). Other demons *might* notice something odd about the stone — Perception + Awareness (difficulty 9) — but they will not understand the significance. Decoding a crystal message requires a touch and a successful Faith roll. If successful, the information is unpacked into the Malefactor's mind. The Annunaki jealously guard their secret language, and other demons are unaware that the crystal code even exists. Even if they discovered it, they could never encode or read messages, since they lack the intrinsic spiritual connection with stone that allows the Malefactors to write their scripture.

Rituals

As outlined in Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide**, rituals are complex evocations that combine multiple bodies of lore to produce new and powerful effects. Rituals were developed during the last days of the Age of Wrath as a weapon to use against the Host of Heaven. The Annunaki have always focused more on physical tools and relics, and they had little to do with the invention or development of ritual evocations. Still, the House possesses knowledge of some secret rituals, rarely sharing them with allies in other Houses.

Volcano

The Malefactors were not created to control fire, but they worked hand in hand with the Heralds before the Fall, crafting the lava underpinnings and molten heart of the earth. With this ritual, the Ankida and her assistants can rekindle the planet's burning blood, bringing it to the earth's face — there to erupt, spewing molten lava and rivers of fire out onto the surface.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Earth •••••
Secondary Lore: Lore of Flame ••
Base Cost: 14

Restrictions: The sigil for this ritual must be carved into solid ground, either earth or natural stone (not concrete).

Minimum Casting Time: 49 minutes

System: Roll Strength + Survival. If the roll succeeds, a volcano grows from the ritual's sigil, a massive cone of earth that spouts molten lava for a number of *hours* equal to the successes gained. The lava moves slowly in an ever-expanding radius and causes great damage to the surrounding area. The Ankida cannot control the spread of the lava once the volcano begins to erupt. Each hour, the radius affected increases by a number of yards equal to 100 times the successes of the ritual. (So with three successes, the lava would spread out another 300 yards each hour.) Almost all objects in the area will be destroyed, including buildings and vehicles, once they come into contact with the lava. Any character in contact with the lava suffers a number of lethal damage levels each turn equal to the successes rolled, which cannot be soaked by armor. When the ritual's effect ends, the volcano crumbles in on itself and the lava cools unnaturally quickly, leaving behind a lake of coarse, brittle stone about an hour later.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual produces lava steaming with corruption and radioactive toxins, jetting from the volcano high into the air. The corrupt lava expands much faster than normal. The radius affected increases by a *mile* each hour, regardless of the successes rolled for the evocation. When the ritual ends, the lava stays hot and will take several days to cool. Furthermore, its corrupt nature poisons the earth beneath it, rendering it permanently toxic and polluted.

Variations: One version of this ritual also produces a cloud of smoke and ash that jets from the volcano, blotting out all light for a number of miles around equal to the successes rolled. Add Lore of the Winds ••• to the secondary lore requirements.

Hunter's Byway

This ritual is used to track down missing persons or demons — whether they are simply lost or actively hiding from the Ankida. The ritual is focused on an item that belongs to the person being sought and that has a degree of significance — car keys, a lock of hair, a favorite shirt and so on. The ritual creates a path through the spirit realms, bypassing the physical world and exiting back into reality just behind the person being hunted. The Ankida can step onto the path, travel quickly through the spirit world and appear behind her quarry in a matter of minutes, no matter where he might be.

Primary Lore: Lore of Paths ••
Secondary Lore: Lore of the Firmament ••, Lore of the Realms ••

Base Cost: 18

Restrictions: The item used as a focus must be placed in the center of the ritual's sigil.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Roll Wits + Survival. If the ritual succeeds, a pathway visible to all the participants but not to observers appears leading from the sigil, and fading from view a few yards away. If someone follows the path, she passes into the spirit realm. From the outside, she simply fades from view, while from her perspective, she moves down a luminous, misty tunnel surrounded by darkness. Movement along the path is not instantaneous. It takes a base of 10 minutes, minus one minute for each success on the ritual roll, to reach the other end and exit back into reality. The traveler appears just behind the person being hunted, who will probably be taken by surprise. He must gain more successes on a Perception + Awareness roll than the successes of the ritual to notice his pursuer arrive. Once the traveler exits the path, it collapses, and she must find her own way back to the ritual site if she wishes to return.

Torment: The high-Torment version appears to work as normal, but it is actually far more dangerous. The pathway actually stays open for a number of hours equal to the successes rolled — hours in which any ghost or spirit that happens upon the path through the realms can exit at either end and wreak havoc.

Variations: None

Chalice of Faith

Faith is the lifeblood of the fallen, a precious commodity that becomes even more valuable because of its scarcity. Faith can only be generated by mortal worshippers, and it cannot be stored, preserved or channeled to another demon — or so most demons believe. The Malefactors, though, know differently, for they made an incredible discovery in the closing hours of the Shattering — a ritual that could store Faith in an object! The ritual turns a specially prepared item into a chalice, or storage vessel, by making its spiritual nature "sticky." Faith is attracted to the chalice and remains trapped in its gravity until drawn out by a demon. Chalices can be any kind of small item (some are cups, but jewelry is also common), and their existence is a secret known to few.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Forge •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Celestials •••••

Base Cost: 20

Restrictions: The item to be affected must be placed in the center of the ritual's sigil. This item must be specially prepared by the Ankida ahead of time.

Minimum Casting Time: 100 minutes

System: Roll Charisma + Crafts (difficulty 7). Success means that the item's spiritual nature is permanently altered, making it a storehouse for Faith. The chalice can hold a maximum number of temporary Faith points equal to the successes gained on the evocation. To place Faith into a chalice, the wielder makes a Faith roll (difficulty 7). Each success transfers a point from her temporary pool to the chalice. Withdrawing Faith works in a similar fashion. The user makes a Faith roll (difficulty 7), and each success draws a point from the chalice into character's pool, up to his normal limit. The chalice can only be used once in each fashion per scene (one deposit, one withdrawal). Chalices have a very unusual spiritual nature, and they stand out to a demon's supernatural awareness (difficulty 7 to detect), but the observer will only know what the item actually does by gaining five successes on a detection roll.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual creates a poisoned chalice, a relic that taints whatever Faith it contains. Whenever a demon draws Faith from a tainted chalice, he gains a point of temporary Torment for *each* Faith point he takes.

Variations: None

Character Creation

The Annunaki crafted an entire planet with their bare hands, but they no longer have a say in how that world operates. They see the human race as a creation that can be improved and perfected, but they can never truly know how mortals think and feel. Malefactors are multifaceted beings who mix an intuitive knowledge of physical matter with fantastic supernatural power and a persistent difficulty in understanding human beings. Creating a Malefactor character is not always an easy task, so this section offers ideas and advice on designing an Annunaki who's fun and effective in play.

Concept

The following concepts are particularly appropriate for Malefactors.

Builder: Every Malefactor is a being created to create — a former angel given life by God in order to build, craft and give form to Creation. The urge to build, to craft, to make something new from the building blocks of the world is a drive that consumes many of the Annunaki. These demons think about little other than building and creating new relics, tools or other concrete artifacts, and they gravitate toward mortal hosts with the same mindset. Such mortals

might include carpenters, inventors, architects, auto mechanics, gunsmiths or junkyard proprietors. While the pragmatic Annunaki have little interest in art, they might find themselves drawn toward sculptors or artists who work in "practical" media.

Investigator: Some Malefactors are consumed with the need to gather information, data and experimental results, the better to understand Creation. Reality is a great machine, an engine that was once perfect but is now corroded and faulty. Only by learning as much as possible about Creation, humanity and the plans of the Creator can the problems be isolated, comprehended and fixed. Annunaki with this mindset feel an affinity with humans who look for answers and concern themselves with the practical question of "How?" rather than the theoretical question of "Why?" Possible hosts include engineers, doctors, insurance investigators, forensic scientists, archeologists or journalists.

Teacher: While many Malefactors prefer to work with solid, dependable substances like stone or metal, others dedicate themselves to forging humanity itself. Human beings were the greatest creation of the angels, but these Annunaki think that mortals are not yet finished. They believe that the human condition can be surpassed, the mortal soul enlightened. With words and lessons, protection and punishment, these demons seek to make humanity better (whatever that means). When they escape Hell, these demons are drawn to the bodies of mortals who worked to improve their fellow humans — not just schoolteachers, but also drill sergeants, motivational speakers, medical scientists, artists, guerilla leaders, social reformers or prophets.

Nature and Demeanor

Stolid and practical, even when consumed by the dark urges of Torment, Malefactors tend to have strong, dependable personalities, that focus on immediate goals and sensible methods.

Builders are particularly interested in methods — the way you build a tool can be as interesting a procedure as what you do with it when it's done. They also care about results, of course. Experimentation is important, but producing sound work is even more so. These characters often have such Natures as Architect, Competitor, Director, Perfectionist or Survivor, reflecting their interest in hard work and useful outcomes.

Teacher Annunaki come from a similar angle — a desire to build and perfect, with interest in both methods and outcomes — but the difference is their need to work with mortals. Understanding of humans comes hard to Malefactors, and those who choose to work toward perfecting the human race tend to be more socially focused than their fellows. Or at least they *think* they are. For every teacher with a Caregiver, Director, Judge or Visionary Nature — personalities that focus on working *with* mortals — there's also one with a Nature of Autocrat, Bravo, Pedagogue or Perfectionist, reflecting someone who tries to work on mortals as if they were recalcitrant machines.

Hearts of Stone

Malefactors are more than simply beings of flesh and spirit — they are things of granite and iron, crystal and silver. Their souls are made of elemental stone and metal, and that elemental nature colors the personality, methods and feelings of every Annunaki. Almost without exception, Malefactors are practical, pragmatic beings, more concerned with facts than theories, immediate solutions rather than hypothetical long-range possibilities. Under the practicality, powerful emotions — love, loss and sorrow — lurk, but are rarely allowed to come to the surface.

While the souls of Malefactors gravitate toward mortals with similar methods or interests, they are also attracted to those of similar disposition. Possible hosts might include working mothers trying to run a family, cops trying to balance a huge caseload with their personal lives, or struggling musicians playing weddings while they look for a break. Annunaki might also gravitate to mortals who work with or spend a lot of time with stone and metal, such as miners, construction workers, cave divers or gardeners.

Investigators tend to be practical, like all Malefactors, but also curious — constantly working to gain more and more information, but only if that information can be *used* in some way. Unlike the dreamers of the Neberu, Annunaki investigators want results and hard data from their questing, and they will only keep hunting down information until they have enough to work with. These Malefactors tend to have Conniver, Curmudgeon, Judge, Loner, Pedagogue or Survivor Natures — personalities interested in immediate answers and how to apply those answers.

It's rare to find a Malefactor who becomes immersed in mortal emotions and interactions, even among those who teach mortals. The Annunaki are too level-headed, and too afraid of their own feelings, to indulge that aspect of their personalities. For that reason, it's very rare to find a Malefactor with an Addict, Bon Vivant, Gallant, Thrill-Seeker or Trickster Nature. These Archetypes are too frivolous and dangerous for most Annunaki to contemplate.

Malefactors may have any kind of Demeanor, whether or not it matches their personality. Some Annunaki, especially those with few social skills or aptitudes, have the same (or a very similar) Demeanor

to their Nature. These plain-speaking demons have little truck with masks, and they expect others to be as up-front as themselves. More socially adroit Annunaki — particularly teachers or others who work closely with mortals — find it useful to disguise their true selves under a more socially acceptable (or simply more likeable) seeming. Only a few Annunaki maintain a radically different Demeanor from their Nature, simply because it's so much *work* for the demons of this emotionally scarred House. Those who do tend to have a definite *need* to maintain a strong disguise, perhaps to avoid enemies or backlash over their experiments.

Primary Lore

You usually choose the primary lore (and thus visage) of your character toward the end of the character-generation process, after choosing Attributes and Abilities. It's worth thinking about the character's primary lore *before* you assign other traits, however. Primary lore and visage have a significant effect upon the character's abilities and style, and some character concepts will suit particular lore paths more than others.

Lore of the Earth: This lore has a number of applications — it allows movement and the shaping of raw stone, and it has combat applications as well. The Kishar visage is primarily combat-oriented, but it also allows for feats of strength. This is a good primary lore for builders, especially those working in stone. It's also good for combat-oriented character, such as teachers who need to protect their students.

Lore of the Forge: Most demons think of the Annunaki primarily as relic-builders, even though only a few have mastered this lore. All of the evocations of this lore revolve around making and perfecting mundane or supernatural tools, while the Mummu visage gives combat powers and advantages for building. This lore is ideal for any Malefactor, but especially builders. It's also great for teachers who wish to give tools and relics to their followers.

Lore of Paths: The subtlest lore of the Annunaki, it still gives the user almost limitless options for travel, movement or stealth. The powers of the Antu visage are also somewhat focused on travel and stealth — the Antu can pass through a crowded room without being seen and conceal a stolen item while under floodlights. This is a perfect primary lore for investigators, who can use it to gain access to secrets no matter how they're hidden. It has less potential for builders or teachers.

Attributes

Physical

Physical Attributes are very useful to Malefactors, especially builders, who rely on fine manipulation.



Such characters will benefit from taking Physical Attributes as their second priority, as will investigators who comb lost tombs or crime scenes for information. Teachers, on the other hand, need stronger social skills, and will probably have Physical Attributes as their third priority.

Strength is key to the Kishar, as it governs *all* the evocations of the Lore of the Earth. The Kishar also become capable of great feats of strength in their apocalyptic form. Dexterity is vital for builders, who need to keep a steady hand when working the intricate details of their creations — this especially applies to the Mummu, as Dexterity plays a part in the major evocations of the Lore of the Forge. Stamina benefits all characters, especially in combat, but is less necessary than the other two — particularly for the Kishar and Mummu, who gain increased Stamina and defenses in their apocalyptic form.

Social

Since the dawn of Creation, the Annunaki have been plagued by their difficulty in understanding the minds and personalities of mortals, and even of other demons. Malefactors understand stone and metal perfectly, but social interaction is a confusing and unknowable thing for most Annunaki. Few Malefactors have high Social Attributes, and it's the third priority for most characters. The exceptions are teachers, who need to be able to communicate effectively with their pupils, and those investigators who seek information from witnesses and experimental subjects.

Of the Social Attributes, Manipulation tends to be the highest for Annunaki characters, as many have learned the tricks of using mortals like tools. It's difficult to inspire trust or friendship, but it's easier to lie, trick or intimidate humans into doing what you want. High ratings in Charisma are uncommon, since that trait requires a degree of empathy and force of personality few Annunaki can master. Appearance is rarely high, unless the demon is possessing an attractive human host — and even then, the Attribute can end up dropping, as the Malefactor ignores pointless mortal distractions like makeup, fashion or even personal hygiene.

Mental

Malefactors are perhaps not the wisest of the Sebettu — that honor probably goes to the Fiends — but they are among the *smartest* of the demons. With their need to gather knowledge and apply that knowledge, and their drive to understand all the engines of Creation (including humanity), the Annunaki focus heavily on their intellectual capabilities. Most Malefactors have Mental Attributes as their primary group.

Of the Mental Attributes, Intelligence is almost always the most useful. Malefactors are thinkers (albeit practical ones), who need to process and analyze information of all kinds, whether building a relic or deconstructing a business plan. Perception and Wits are of roughly equal use to the character. A high Perception helps your character gather and sift through information, while a high Wits keeps her quick on the uptake and enhances the artistic perfection of her creations. Perception is particularly useful to the Antu, as it modifies two of the evocations of the Lore of Paths.

Abilities

Talents

Talents are practical Abilities that get used often in day-to-day life. They're very useful to the pragmatic, sensible Annunaki, although not as much as Skills. Talents should be the secondary Ability group for most Malefactor characters.

Builders benefit from a good rating in Expression, since it helps them make their creations more beautiful — and for all their practicality, the Annunaki care deeply about beauty (as long as it's *useful*). Awareness and Intuition are also both important. Builders need to be aware of supernatural forces that can be tapped and used in their creations. Investigators too need good ratings in Awareness and Intuition, but also in Alertness, if they want to discern as much information as possible. They might also benefit from ratings in Streetwise and Subterfuge if they're dealing with mortal sources of data. Teachers rely on Empathy, Expression and Subterfuge to deal with their Followers, but most of all they need good ratings in Leadership.

Skills

Practical, hands-on knowledge, rather than theory, is the forte of the Annunaki, and that's what Skills represent in **Demon**. Malefactor characters almost always have Skills as their primary Ability group, because these Abilities will be the most useful ones for the character in the chronicle.

Obviously, most Malefactors have a high rating in Crafts. While builders usually have at least three dots (if not more), almost all characters will have at least a dot or two. Builders also benefit from having high ratings in Technology, allowing them to understand and repair mundane devices. Teachers use Etiquette and Performance to communicate with their pupils, and need good ratings in whatever Abilities they're trying to teach their students. Investigators can use Security and Stealth to gain access to protected information, and possibly Etiquette to convince others to provide data. Regardless of concept, many Malefactors have good ratings in Melee and often gain dots in Firearms as well. They were warriors and

soldiers in the Age of Wrath, and they invented the very *idea* of weaponry.

All the evocations of the Annunaki revolve around Skills — specifically Crafts (for the Mummu) and Survival (for the Antu and Kishar). Characters who don't have good ratings in Survival or Crafts will be very limited in their evocations. Don't shortchange these Skills unless doing so is absolutely *vital* to your character concept.

Knowledges

Knowledges make up the least important Ability group for most Malefactors. The Annunaki are intelligent and skilled, but not necessarily learned. They care much more about information that has immediate and practical applications than about book learning and theory. Yet several Knowledges are still useful to Malefactors.

For builders who work with technological devices, Science is very useful, as is Computer. Teachers can gather new students and followers using their knowledge of Occult, Politics or Religion. And for investigators, the Investigation and Research Abilities are vital, while Linguistics opens access to new libraries of information.

Backgrounds

While all Backgrounds can be useful in play, the following are generally those most useful to Malefactors.

Contacts: Builders use their contacts to find new materials and tools, while investigators draw on them as a source of information.

Followers: Teachers will usually be surrounded by their students, pupils and worshippers, while builders and investigators can both benefit from having assistants.

Legacy: For investigators, strong memories of the Age of Wrath can provide vital clues to understanding events in the modern world.

Pacts: It takes a great deal of Faith to create a relic, and builders desperately need to establish pacts to provide that Faith. Creators also need pacts, so that they can channel Faith into improving the abilities of their thralls.

Paragon: One bungled evocation can destroy or irrevocably corrupt a relic, so builders will gain a lot of benefit from this Background.

Resources: Whether it's buying parts for a creation, finding housing and equipment for followers or simply bribing sources of information, all Malefactors can benefit from access to ready cash.

Many Malefactors have positions of influence and power in the infernal court, represented by Eminence. Few of them, however, possess the social ability needed to maintain power in mortal society, so good ratings in Fame or Influence are rare.

Virtues

Many of the Annunaki are not overly burdened by Virtues. They make choices and decisions based mainly on what's *useful*, not what's right or moral. This pragmatism can be helpful, but it also provides little protection from the dangers of Torment and sin, and too many Malefactors succumb to their inner darkness while in pursuit of knowledge.

Of the three Virtues, Conviction tends to be the highest for Malefactors. While not always burdened by morality, the Annunaki rarely lack for dedication or an understanding of the workings of Creation. Courage is usually the next highest. While Annunaki are rarely fearless, their curiosity usually overrides any timidity or caution. Conscience is most often the weakest Virtue for Malefactors, who can become oblivious to the pain of others when focused on a goal. Even the most moral teacher might perform dark experiments on her students in the cause of perfecting the human race.

Lore

If you haven't already decided on your character's primary lore, now is the time to do so. Once you've decided, you need to assign dots to that lore, and possibly others, to gain evocations for the character.

Lore of the Earth

For builders of the Kishar visage, it's worthwhile putting all three dots into the Lore of the Earth, which gains you the Mold Earth evocation. (This evocation allows you to create or remake a stone structure.) Further dots are useful for self-defense, but they won't aid in creating or building things.

Kishar investigators probably don't need to go that far, and instead should just take two dots of the lore. This gives you Earth Meld, which provides protection and enhanced movement (at the cost of Torment), and Roil the Earth, which is a great way of turning up buried secrets.

Teachers don't gain a lot of useful abilities from the Lore of the Earth. They can use the evocations to fight for themselves or their students, but that's about it.

Lore of the Forge

This is the lore most associated with the Malefactors, and it's one of the most flexible and useful bodies of lore available. Unfortunately, it's also a difficult lore to get the most advantage from, especially at character creation. It's possible to gain four dots in the lore with freebie points, gaining the incredibly useful Enchant Object evocation — but what can you do with it? Before your character can make enchanted items, he also needs to know other bodies of lore —

otherwise all he can produce are relics that produce the effects of the Lore of the Forge. You can gain one dot from another lore with the rest of your freebie points — which allows your character to make relics that use that lore — but his Faith rating will still be low, and he might not be able to spare the Faith points to create the relics he now knows how to make. By and large, it's probably best to forget about gaining Enchant Object at character creation. Save it for a bit later in the chronicle, when your character has a grounding in other bodies of lore and a high enough Faith rating to create fun and useful relics.

With that said, any character who takes this as his primary lore should definitely sink all three lore dots into it, giving him the Enhance Object, Activate Object and Shape Object. That's a combination of evocations that allow him to take any object, reshape it into a useful item, then enhance it into a perfectly suited tool. This also puts your character in a good position for learning Enchant Object later in the chronicle. Non-Mummu Annunaki characters should still consider taking one dot in this lore to gain Enhance Object. The minor relics created by this evocation can give any character a significant edge, especially in combat.

Lore of Paths

This unusual lore offers strong possibilities to investigator Malefactors, especially those who take it as their primary. Antu investigators should definitely put two dots into the lore, giving them the Lay Path evocation, which allows them to access locked rooms, reach buried redoubts or even walk through walls by manipulating space. Putting an extra dot into the lore grants the Conceal Path evocation, which is useful but not essential. It's best for stealthy characters who place a premium on not being followed, while other characters can place that third lore dot elsewhere.

Teachers and builders get less benefit from the Lore of Paths, since their efforts are focused on working with their chosen material (human or inanimate), rather than moving about efficiently. If you're playing such a character, you should probably choose a different primary lore.

Common Lore

It was the House of the Fundament that developed the core of the Lore of the Fundament back when Creation was young and passed that knowledge to the rest of the Heavenly Host. Unsurprisingly, many Annunaki still retain knowledge of this lore, which can be useful for any Malefactor who enters combat. Manipulate Gravity increases battlefield mobility, which is particularly useful for characters who fight with enhanced or enchanted melee weapons. Manipulate Adhesion isn't as immediately useful, and it would require freebie points to acquire that could better be spent elsewhere.

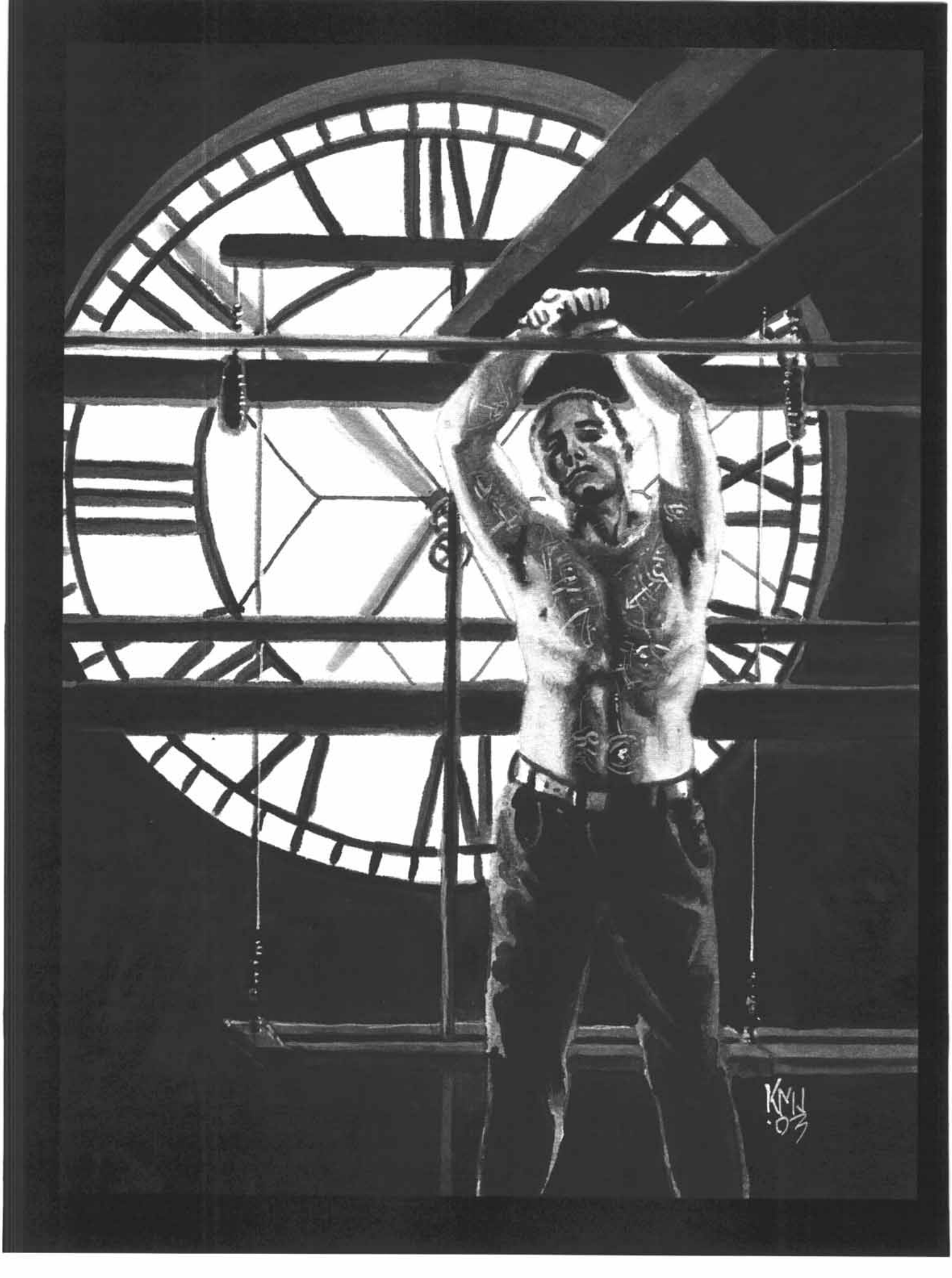
Teachers and investigators should definitely consider putting dots into the Lore of Humanity, which can go a long way toward alleviating the weaker social skills of most Annunaki. Translate is useful for investigators, since it improves their communication skills and ability to gain information from mortals. Teachers might want to consider the benefits of spending freebie points to gain the Insinuate evocation, which can greatly improve the character's Manipulation-based rolls against her mortal followers.

Freebie Points

Faith is extremely useful to Malefactors, and vital for characters who want to make enchanted relics. Such relics require large quantities of Faith to be spent during the enchantment process, and if the character's Faith is low, she may not be able to afford to create the relics she desires. Faith is also useful to characters who get into fights, since it can be spent to heal wounds. It's certainly worth considering buying an extra point of Faith for your character, taking her total to a more flexible four points. More points might not be that useful at character creation, and they can probably be gained later with experience points instead.

Like Faith, Willpower is very useful to the Annunaki, because it can be spent to permanently enhance mundane objects via the Enhance Object evocation. If your character has that evocation (and it's worth picking up), it's definitely worth spending some freebies on improving her Willpower rating to at least six. If your character doesn't have Enhance Object, Willpower is still useful as a source of automatic successes — especially for builders who want to perfect their mundane creations — but it probably doesn't need to be improved by more than a point or two.

Builders with freebie points left over should definitely improve their Crafts and Technology Abilities, possibly improve their Dexterity and consider buying more dots in Paragon. Teachers might want to improve their Manipulation or Charisma Attributes, increase their ratings in Leadership or Empathy or simply gain more students by buying more dots in Followers. Investigators should consider increasing Wits and Perception and possibly increasing their combat-related Abilities. They are the Malefactors most likely to end up fighting to get the information they need.


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Chapter Four: The House of the Indigo Night

Not from the stars do I my judgment pluck
And yet methinks I have astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of dearths, or seasons' quality;
—William Shakespeare, *Sonnet XIV*

God moved across the blackness of the void and said, "Let there be light." With those words the angels were born, and the Host surrounded the Creator, proclaiming His glory. From their number He named His Heralds, and the Creator revealed to them the Grand Design of the cosmos. The angels of the First House would bear God's vision in their souls and harness the energies of the Host to fulfilling their Creator's plan. They kindled the fires of Creation and limned the boundaries of the unformed cosmos.

Then God turned to the Host and called from their number the angels of the Second House, and commanded them to breathe life into every corner of the universe. They stirred the primordial gases with the beating of their great wings and laid the foundations of the firmament.

After the firmament was formed, God called forth the angels of the Third House and commanded them to make form out of formlessness, harnessing the fires of the First House and the vitality of the Second House to fill the emptiness with shape and substance. Their hands molded the planets in all their varied forms, carving mountains and valleys and smoothing out great plains like blank, inviting canvases.

And then, after the boundaries of the cosmos were set, and the heavens separated from the earth, God turned to the Host and picked from their number the angels of the Fourth House. "Behold," the Creator said, and the Fourth House stood at the Creator's side and saw all the wonders their predecessors had wrought. They considered the stars, and the worlds hung like jewels in the emptiness.

"Behold," God said again, and the angels of the Fourth House looked deeper still, and saw how each aspect of Creation was made to act upon all those surrounding it. The stars were made to act upon the worlds that surrounded them, which in turn allowed the worlds to alter their features and act upon everything that rested upon their surfaces. They saw beyond the works of their brethren and discovered the relationships that knit them together in an ever-expanding web of action and reaction, cause and effect. The universe was more than mere existence. It had a *purpose*. A function.

The angels of the Fourth House cried out in wonder, and the Creator commanded, "Set their motions and mark the workings of all that I have made."

The Hands of Fate

The mandate of the Fourth House was not one of creation, but of regulation. They were, in a sense, the engineers of the cosmos, working tirelessly to ensure that the countless elements of the universe worked in harmony with one another. From the orbits of the planets to the decay of isotopes, they calibrated the interactions of the cosmos to conform to the design God made. Where other angels saw the universe as a collection of elements, the angels of the Fourth House saw the web of relationships that bound them all together. Their work was performed patiently and subtly. Conscious of the implications of their every action, the Angels of the Spheres became masters of indirect influence. They altered seasonal patterns with the beat of a hummingbird's wings half a world away or timed the flow of ions from the sun to alter the orbit of a distant moon. They were artists who wove symphonies of probability into elegant certainty.

Viewed from the outside, the Fourth House appeared to be a collection of silent observers, watching from the sidelines as the rest of the Heavenly Host did the work of the Creator. In a sense, this was true. The Angels of the Spheres watched *everything*, marking the motions of the cosmos as God intended and testing each action for its effect on the whole. They were the first scholars, the first scientists and philosophers. Their task was to see beneath the surface of Creation and ask *why* things occurred the way they did and what that meant to reality as a whole. Their success was measured by inaction, their glory reflected in the seamless order of the universe.

The seeds of their fall lay in the certainty that every question had but a single answer.

Before the Fall

The angels of the Fourth House bent themselves to the task the Creator had given them — not with fire and thunder, but with silent contemplation. They scattered throughout the inert cosmos, observing, recording and calculating. They studied the untapped forces inherent in the fabric of Creation and calibrated them according to the needs of the Grand Design. Finally, after every outcome had been considered and the precise result formulated, Tyriel, Throne of the Indigo Expanse and greatest among the angels of the House, dispatched his brothers and sisters to predetermined points across the breadth of the cosmos. When the last angel reached her appointed place, Tyriel took hold of the restive forces underlying the cosmos and *pushed*. On one level it was the first iteration of a complex formula; on another a single, pure musical note. On yet another, it was the sound of metal on metal, the pent-up groan of a machine too vast for any one angel to ever fully comprehend. The reverberations rippled through the fabric of reality, touching each angel in turn, who added their weight behind it and amplified it further. And little by little, gathering momentum with each successive step, the Grand Design came to life.

Objects in Motion

As the cosmos spun into motion, the angels of the Fourth House joined in its dance, from the wild gyrations of subatomic particles to the stately whirl of vast galaxies. Beneath the light of the ever-watchful Heralds, the Angels of the Spheres remembered the commandments of their Creator and noted each and every interaction that occurred. Action spawned reaction, growing in ever more complex iterations of cause and effect. The angels were amazed at first, but their sense of wonder turned to apprehension before long as the iterations increased in speed and complexity and showed no signs of abating. Therefore, Tyriel's first command as the autarch of his House was to focus each angel of his House on maintaining only a portion of the cosmic record rather than have each individual struggle to remember the entirety. The Edict of Memory, as it was called, was more than just a feat of organization. The framework Tyriel and his deputies created to record the history of the cosmos had a consequential impact on the universe itself. By creating a system that allowed an outside observer to trace the relationships between disparate events, the Fourth House laid the foundations of time itself.

The Eternal Record created by the edict was far from static. Events in one epoch created causal

relationships that reverberated through adjoining ages. As a result, each angelic historian, or Source, was constantly employed updating elements of the record to reflect the links to both past and current events. These updates demanded constant communication between Sources, coordinated by Tyriel and his chosen deputies, Kusiel, Gemmnor, Ysriel, Abishai, Osir and Asmodeus. Together they formed the Vigil, a council regulating communications among Sources. The laws of the Vigil governed a volatile web of correspondence between Sources that came to be known as the Gyre. The Vigil governed the assignment of new Sources, ensured the constant flow of information along the Gyre and dictated the protocols of communication to maintain accuracy and clarity. It was efficient and ruthlessly autocratic, and while it kept the integrity of the Eternal Record perfect, it also consequently ensured that no one member of the House had access to the entire record save the members of the Vigil itself.

In time, the storm of correspondences abated, settling down into a predictable routine of orbits, periods, constants and seasons, and for a brief time, the Vigil maintained the Grand Design with metronomic precision. Then God turned to the Host and called from their number the angels of the Fifth House, and the Vigil found their fragile web put to its first test.

Seizing the Moment

Until the moment the Fifth House was born, the labor of the Host had been to shape order from chaos. Now the Angels of the Deep seemed poised to upset everything their elders had built.

The problem with the Oceanites was that they broke the rules. They defied easy description — in fact, they defied any sort of description at all. Where the Fourth House charted the myriad relationships inherent to Creation, the Fifth House was born to create connections where ones never existed before. What was worse, the Oceanites would *break* connections when it suited them, something that the Angels of the Spheres regarded with horror. The causal storm that Tyriel and the Vigil once wrestled into submission returned with renewed force, fueled by the chimerical Oceanites, and this time the winds of change showed no signs of abating.

Almost immediately the angels of the Fourth House detected signs of strain in the Grand Design. In an age of layered realities, a single creation or concept spawned reactions that reverberated in vast, often unpredictable ways. As the Oceanites upset the old order with their dance of dreams, Tyriel and the Fourth House were forced to take action in order to uphold their mandate from God. Conferring with the Vigil, Tyriel drafted the Edict of Instance, a command that ordered a third of the House to assume the role of keeping the clockwork order of the cosmos intact. Where the Sources labored to record the events of the past, the Diviners were focused on securing the present in accordance with the Creator's plan. At first the Diviners hurled themselves into the teeth of the Fifth House's mercurial storm, battling to turn back the tide of creativity and restore the universe to its former precision, but for every tiny restoration they made, a hundred other alterations rippled through Creation. Reluctantly, Tyriel and the Vigil ordered the Diviners to conserve their energies and focus on actual disruptions of the Grand Design instead of chasing down every little alteration. The change in tactics made the Diviners far more effective, and revealed over time that the cosmos was built with a substantial tolerance for alteration. Indeed, some aspects of Creation seemed to encourage re-invention or evolution, spawning ever more refined patterns that benefited the cosmos as a whole. Before long, the cosmos settled once more into a steady equilibrium, riding out the ripples spawned by the Fifth House under the watchful eyes of the Diviners, and the Gyre continued to grow. Despite the newfound order, however, Tyriel and the Vigil were left to consider the implications of their newfound knowledge. The universe as they understood it was not static. It was *meant* to change. Nothing was certain anymore.

Reading the Signs

Tyriel and the Vigil did not have long to contemplate the implications of a dynamic universe. The rise of the Sixth House and the spread of plant and animal life introduced a vast new set of variables into the Fourth House's calculations, taxing the efforts of the Diviners to their utmost. The control of information instituted by the Vigil kept the vast majority of the House from realizing how desperate the situation was. Tyriel and his chosen lieutenants knew something akin to despair. If the inclusion of variables continued, it would soon outstrip their ability to manage them. Their failure was a matter of mathematical certainty.

When God created the Seventh House, Tyriel and the Vigil dared to hope that at the last the Creator had included a mechanism to purge the Grand Design of errors and excessive variables. But the inclusion of entropy and death only complicated matters further. Even in death, a sparrow — or a star — left a mark of its passing behind, creating new causal relationships

that rippled throughout Creation. Death was not an end, but merely a new iteration of variables.

Then came the breaking point.

After the final House had been named and the cycle of existence completed, God commanded the Host to combine their potent lore in a final, ultimate act of creation. Thus was humanity born, and in them the Fourth House saw the future of the universe made manifest — and the ultimate threat to the stability of the cosmos.

If the cosmos was a vast mechanism of enormous power and uncertain purpose, mankind was meant to be the mechanism's guiding hand — and the ultimate product of its use. Humanity was made to harness the relationships wrought by God and the angels; to dream, to conceive, to build. People were meant to shape the storm of ideas according to their will, laying new pathways of causality in accordance with their desires.

The implications were awesome. The potential invested in mankind was limitless. Failure, as the Fourth House saw it, was certain.

Of all the Houses, the Fourth was least troubled by humanity's innocence. The less that man and woman interacted with the rich potentials of Paradise, the better. Even the clumsy, limited ways mankind interacted with the world touched off enormous surges of causal interaction that made Tyriel and the Vigil tremble. Still, the angels of the Fourth House were determined to see their duty to the bitter end, and they watched humanity with unblinking intensity, marking their every step and testing its effects on the surrounding equilibrium.

Over time, patterns emerged. Innocence bred habitual behavior. Faced with a world of limitless possibility, man and woman returned again and again to their meager store of acquired knowledge for happiness and survival. They were actually *disinclined* to continually invent and challenge the accepted order. The notion offered a glimmer of hope to the hard-pressed Fourth House and suggested a radical new approach to their own role in the cosmic order.

It was Asmodeus who first proposed the idea: If human beings behaved in habitual patterns of existence, was it not therefore possible to predict their likeliest course of action in advance of the actual event? If so, the Fourth House could test the relationships spawned by each event well in advance and have ample warning when action was required to maintain the cosmic balance.

Had the humans been anything but ignorant of the universe around them, the angels would have had no chance to perfect their techniques. As it was, the Vigil was able to focus on the relatively small set of behaviors presented by mankind and learn to project their effects farther and farther into the future. Jubilant, Tyriel issued the third and final edict that would shape the identity of the Fourth House. The Edict of Momentum created the Oracles, angels whose sole function was to see into the future and look for threats to the Grand Design.

The creation of the Oracles further broadened the authority of the Vigil and the dissemination of data between the three aspects of the House, as the efficient management of information became paramount to the success of their divine mandate. Predictions made by the Oracles were presented to the Vigil for review, who constantly consulted with the Sources for past precedents that supported the Oracles' conclusions. When a prediction required action, orders were issued to the Diviners, who took steps to head off the impending imbalance. Later, the Vigil would review the actions taken and the final outcome and present the data to the Sources for inclusion into the Gyre.

Storm Warning

Of the three edicts, the Edict of Momentum was the single most influential decision to shape the character of the Fourth House as a whole. The ability to peer into the unformed future caused the Angels of the Spheres to retreat even further from the company of their fellow Elohim, reinforcing the image of the Fourth House as an introverted, introspective lot. Even the Diviners, whose duties allowed them to relate best with their fellow angels, maintained a certain degree of secrecy and separation from their peers. To some extent this attitude was an outgrowth of the tightly defined interrelations within the House, but a certain degree of distance was also required in order for the agents to maintain their focus on the "bigger picture" instead of the minutiae of existence. As the Oracles grew increasingly adept at predicting the course of the future, the number of interventions required by the Diviners dwindled, and the House became increasingly removed from the day-to-day course of cosmic existence. As a result the majority of the Heavenly Host went about their duties unaware as the Fourth House saw the first signs of an approaching cataclysm.

At first, the signs were small and scattered. Numerous Oracles reported to the Vigil that the number of causal threads was starting to dwindle — something the Fourth House had never seen before. At first the indications were more a source of curiosity than real concern, and the Vigil assigned a handful of lesser

Oracles to study the phenomenon and see what could be learned from it.

Time passed, and the reports mounted. Though still measured in near countless millions, the causal threads were dwindling with increasing speed. The Vigil's interest changed from curiosity to deep concern. The small cadre of Oracles studying the problem concluded that causal pressures were building throughout the Grand Design and causing a relentless contraction to a single, climactic decision point. The moment was fast approaching when the entire cosmos would hinge on the outcome of a single question.

Tyriel and the Vigil recoiled in horror at the revelation. The very possibility of such a contraction went against everything they believed about the Grand Design. The evidence was impossible to deny, yet no matter how intently they questioned the Sources, they could not discover the source of the mounting pressure. Did the fault lie with them? Had they somehow erred in their oversight of the Grand Design? The thought drove the Vigil to acts of even greater secrecy. The Oracles were forbidden to discuss the matter with anyone, even their fellows. Instead *all* information was to be shared with the Vigil alone, specifically Archangel Asmodeus. To further strengthen the Vigil's control of the flow of information Tyriel delivered the Edict of Silence, expressly forbidding the discussion of future events with members of the other six Houses. By clamping down ruthlessly on the dire warnings of the Oracles, the Vigil hoped to unravel the mystery and avert the looming disaster, thus maintaining the House's honor and its holy mandate.

As it happened, they only played into the hands of the fate they had sought to avoid.

The First Rebellion

As the Vigil concealed the knowledge of the impending disaster in an iron fist of secrecy, only Asmodeus and a handful of Oracles knew the full extent of the approaching catastrophe. As the time of the decision point loomed closer, the Oracles were better able to predict possible futures emanating beyond the event, and nearly all of them were visions of heart-wrenching destruction. But the more they saw, the less they knew of the source of the pressures pushing the Grand Design to the breaking point. The only conclusion that made sense was that mankind's ignorance was causing the cosmos to contract. By failing to make connections with the concepts surrounding them and harnessing the power of the ideas inherent in Paradise, humanity was forcing the energies of the Grand Design into an



Patterns of Influence

Even today, there is still much conjecture among the Fiends about why the Oracles were unable to predict the precise cause of the Fall. The prevailing notion is that the cataclysm could not have been predicted because there was no direct chain of events leading up to the event itself. The decisions that spurred the Fall were made by forces literally outside the realm of cosmic events. The Elohim prior to the Fall maintained the cosmos but did not exist within the pattern in the same way that humankind did. Therefore, there were no clear trends within the fabric of existence that could point the Oracles to the source of the coming storm. The diminishing of causal threads was the only indirect evidence that suggested the angels were becoming increasingly conflicted by the contradictory commandments God gave them regarding mankind.

Of course, there are other, more conspiratorially minded Fiends who suggest that Tyriel and the Vigil had enough information to predict the impending Fall and its results. If so, this raises questions with the rebels about the real reasons behind Asmodeus's defection. Was he acting on the orders of the Vigil, part of an effort to influence the overall course of events? Did he instead turn his back on his peers because he'd concealed vital information from Tyriel and the Vigil that might have prevented the Fall in the first place? If so, why? Only Asmodeus, now one of the Earthbound, knows the truth.

increasingly limited future that was never intended to exist. One Oracle in particular, a rank-and file angel named Ahrimal even went so far as to conclude that the only way out of the impending crisis hinged on manipulating humanity itself rather than wasting time and energy tracing causal threads. The Oracles passed their urgent recommendations to Asmodeus, who conveyed them to the Vigil, but always the answer was the same: *Be calm. Have no fear. All is as the Creator wishes.*

The more time passed, the more desperate Ahrimal and the other Oracles became. Isolated not only from the rest of the Elohim but even their peers within the House, the seers grew increasingly desperate for a solution. More and more, Ahrimal believed that humanity's ignorance was the source of the building causal pressure, but having been isolated from humanity almost from its creation, the angel had no idea how to address the problem as he saw it. The only hope was to bring the matter to the other Elohim in hopes that their insight and experience would suggest an answer. Such an act would violate the Edict of Silence, Ahrimal knew, but the choice was disobedience to an angelic edict in the service of his mandate from the Creator. Nevertheless, Ahrimal's decision could be seen as the first true rebellion, an act of courage that few if any fallen would later recall.

A true angel of his House despite his rebellious convictions, Ahrimal carefully chose a small number of influential Elohim to whom to reveal his secrets, hoping to arrive at a solution with a minimum of impact on the Host. With the greatest care, he summoned the angels to his citadel on the lunar surface, leading them to a deep cavern lit with lamps of captured starlight. Many of the assembled luminaries had never spoken directly to Ahrimal before. Now, faced by such powerful figures as Belial, Virtue of the Boundless Deeps, Lailah the Defender and Usiel, Throne of the Sundered, Ahrimal slowly and methodically presented the crisis that threatened them all. "My friends," he whispered into the silence that followed, "What can we do?"

Ahrimal's hopes for a quick and decisive solution were short-lived. His revelations served to crystallize the secret doubts and fears that many of the angels experienced since the birth of mankind. Instead of a clear and obvious answer, Ahrimal touched off the Great Debate, unleashing passions that would split the Host of Heaven and change the universe forever.

Falling Stars

Despite its secretive beginnings, the Great Debate sent reverberations throughout the Host, eventually rebounding back upon the Fourth House itself. From Sources to Diviners, and finally the Oracles themselves, the full scope of the crisis — and how it had been hidden from them — shook the angels to the core of their being.

Despite its scholarly beginnings, the Great Debate left little time for the angels of the Host to decide between loyalty and revolt. When Lucifer raised the banner of rebellion, the die had been cast. The question was not a matter of *if*, but *when* and *how many*. The realization of how the angels of the Vigil had deceived their peers, regardless of the reasons involved, spurred many members of the House to make their decision based on feelings of anger and betrayal rather than cold, hard logic. It was the first spontaneous decision they ever made.

The passions of the Great Debate split the House in two, though the number of defections

varied between members of the three disciplines. The greatest number of defections came from the Diviners. Partly a result of the outrage they felt at the Vigil for letting the crisis fester secretly for so long, many Diviners chose the course of rebellion because their disposition drove them to take action for the sake of the cosmic balance. By contrast, only a bare handful of Sources chose the path of defiance, firm in their conviction that the Elohim were commanded by God to remain impartial and remote. It was not for them to say what course the universe took, only to watch and record what came to pass.

The Oracles fell between the two extremes. Slightly more than a third of the seers chose to rebel, including all of those who had studied the crisis from the beginning. Save one: Ahrimal, architect of the rebellion, decided to remain, horrified at the havoc his rebellion had spawned and determined to submit himself to the Vigil for punishment of his crime. No one knows for certain what later changed his mind, but legend hints at a secret meeting between Ahrimal and the Morningstar in the hours before the Fall. What was discussed — if the meeting occurred at all — remains a matter for speculation. Ahrimal has never explained his change of heart to anyone.

The last of the House to Fall was one of its brightest lights. Asmodeus, lieutenant to Tyriel and Navigator of the Stars, took his place in the ranks of the rebels without a single word to his fellows. Many were amazed at his sudden defection. Many more would have cause to wonder about his motives in the war to come.

The House at War

Each and every Fiend, from the lowliest angel to the highest of dukes, remembers with awful clarity the moment Michael and the wrathful Host of Heaven filled the sky above Paradise. The universe changed forever in that moment. The cataclysm they had so feared was finally upon them, *and they were the instruments of its creation*. The disaster revolved around humanity, it was true, but Lucifer's call to disobedience was its root cause. It was a realization that would haunt the Neberu throughout the Age of Wrath, and it helped shape the character of the fallen House afterward.

But as terrible as this knowledge was, the worst was yet to come. In the wake of the confrontation between Lucifer and Michael, the Fiends sensed the movement of the Holy Host, and the Oracles among the fallen quickly studied the causal web to see what was about to transpire. What they saw shriveled their souls.

There was no time to act, no time to beg forgiveness of the Most High before His fury smote the cosmos. Layers of reality shattered beneath the blow, and the delicate workings of the Grand Design were twisted and bent beneath His awful hand. The nightmare the Fourth House had long feared had now finally came to pass. They had failed in their duty to Heaven, and the glorious machinery of Creation was broken beyond their ability to repair.

Many Fiends were never the same after witnessing God's retribution. Guilt and shame caused them to withdraw deep inside themselves rather than face the wreckage of Paradise. For them, their time in Hell began the day the cosmos started to die. Still others, angels to the last, watched the fabric of reality begin to come undone and swore that they would somehow set it right again.

Oaths of Fealty

Asmodeus was not idle in the wake of God's vengeful blow. Even before the Morningstar set the fallen on the path of war, the fallen archangel spoke to his fellow Neberu. "There is no turning back now, brothers and sisters," he said. "Much has been lost, but there is much more still that may be spared if our hearts are true and we dedicate ourselves wholly to the task. Let us come together as before and restore our broken House."

The archangel's words struck a chord in the hearts of many guilt-stricken Fiends, but their instinctive need for structure and unity was tempered by feelings of betrayal and suspicion. Many Fiends still felt that they had been deceived by the iron-fisted leadership of the Vigil, and they balked at the idea of returning to the intrigue and confounding practices of the Fourth House.

The solution to the dilemma seemed to present itself in Lucifer's new, egalitarian order. The creation of the legions imposed a new structure free of hidebound House tradition and gave the Fiends the opportunity to decide what role they would play in the battles to come. Slightly less than half of the Fiends scattered to serve under the banners of the Crimson, Ebon, Iron and Alabaster Legions, quickly securing positions of rank as strategists, scouts and advisors. When faced with a choice of roles in the rebel host, however, the bulk of the House gravitated to the one legion whose mission made more sense than any other. Lucifer raised the Silver Legion to act as his eyes and ears, uncovering the enemy's secrets

and spoiling Michael's many plans. Asmodeus, highest of the Fourth House to side with the fallen, was the logical choice to command this legion of spies.

A handful of Fiends chose to side with none of the legions. Many were practically maddened by grief and shame over the breaking of Creation, fleeing from the presence of man and fallen alike. A few, including the fallen angel Ahrimal, chose to follow the dictates of their own conscience, refusing to contribute further to the suffering of the cosmos and devoting themselves wholeheartedly to the task of repairing what they had inadvertently broken. These lonely souls would come to haunt the camps of both armies through the course of the war, spreading dire warnings and twisted chains of prophecy meant to spare men and angels from the tragedies of war and protect the fabric of reality as best they could. The rebel host took to calling these mad prophets stormcrows, while the warriors of Heaven referred to them fearfully as the ashen seers.

Gambits and Stratagems

Lucifer wasted little time putting the skills of the Neberu to work. The early battles of the war were complex, often esoteric affairs that were fought on myriad levels of meaning. The clash of armies resonated as complex formulae, symphonies of song and ephemeral patterns of light. Often a battle was decided in moments as the two generals calculated the strength of their position and the passion of their arguments and decided who had the commanding position. To this end, the Morningstar instructed all of his commanders to make the best possible use of the Fiends and their abilities at prescience and mobility to gain warning of the enemy's strength and intentions. If a fallen leader knew his opponents' dispositions beforehand, he could attempt to counter them in unexpected ways and tilt the contest in his favor.

The demands of the war effort forced a number of changes on members of all three disciplines. The few Sources who joined the rebel cause (all of whom found themselves part of Lucifer's personal staff) were enjoined to use their abilities to record the course of the war in every possible detail, providing the rebel host with a valuable tool to learn from both victory and defeat. In addition to this new responsibility, the Sources were keenly aware of the vast store of knowledge now lost to them by their defection, and they now took steps to create a new method of record-keeping that didn't exclusively depend on the memories of the fallen. In time, these efforts would lead to the development of the Lore of Light and the great Library of Genhinnom.

Like the Sources, the Diviners found themselves tasked with developing military applications of their talents. Their mastery of the Lore of Portals provided them with a powerful degree of mobility and stealth, and their instincts for influencing events led them to develop tactics of espionage and provocation. When they weren't gathering moment-to-moment intelligence on

The Dominion of the Evening Star

Among Lucifer's closest councilors during the course of the war was a Fiend named Shaphniel, also known as Lady Sapphire or the Dominion of the Evening Star. She was a low-ranking angel of the Fourth House before the Fall, and she held no lofty title among the Fiends of the Crimson Legion even after the rebellion. Shaphniel was known to have a quiet, almost ethereal demeanor, but her beauty was legendary even among the angels of the Host.

Many fallen of Lucifer's legion quietly speculated about the relationship between the Prince of the Fallen and the enchanting Neberu. At some point the suggestion was made that she was the Morningstar's lover, offering the troubled Prince what comfort she could from the pain of war. The story grew with the telling, and before long, even the legion's mortal flocks had their share of songs and stories about the tragic love of the Prince and his evening star.

Other members of the legion — particularly Neberu who served alongside Shaphniel in the infernal war council — told a different story. They pointed out Shaphniel's supernal powers of logic and her unsurpassed skill in gleaning information from the most obscure strands of fate, and they suggested a very different sort of relationship. They believed that Shaphniel was Lucifer's spymaster and Mistress of the Inquisition, charged with unearthing hints of treason among the rebel host with the help of a handpicked cabal of agents from all seven Houses.

History suggests that the arguments for either description has merit, and the truth likely resides somewhere between the two. What is known for certain is that Lady Sapphire was one of the Morningstar's constant companions, never straying far from his side. And when Abaddon and the other archdukes split with Lucifer after the fall of Sagun, the Morningstar was sorrowful, but not surprised.

enemy activities, they looked for opportunities to throw the enemy off balance with unconventional attacks. On many occasions their actions tipped the balance of power in the favor of the rebels and snatched victory from the jaws of certain defeat.

The Oracles were the least affected by the new demands placed upon the House, but at the same time, their task was the hardest of all. Where once they could peer down the clean, ordered lines of causality and predict events thousands of years into the future, now the future was full of jagged uncertainty, brought about by God's terrible retribution. Complicating matters further were the tenuous traces most fallen left on the fabric of time, creating a battle of wits between Oracles and the enemy leaders they sought to predict. Over the course of the war, a number of Oracles gained great renown for their predictive and deductive prowess. The Oracle Anat was justly feared for her strategic insights, leading her lover Baal to victory after victory throughout the course of the war. Likewise, the Fiend Vituryan led a cadre of Oracles and Diviners under the auspices of the Iron Legion that distinguished themselves in their battles against the dreaded malhim later in the war. Most famous of all was the eccentric and often unpredictable Oracle Javiel, also known as the Hand of Infinity. Originally a companion of Ahrimal, Javiel's talent for reading the strands of causality was so powerful she became a close confidant to the Morningstar and was the target of an audacious assassination attempt by heavenly Reapers during the height of the Time of Atrocities.

Many senior members of the fallen legions attribute the early string of rebel victories to the efforts of the Neberu. Their predictive, deductive and intuitive skills gave the fallen armies a degree of flexibility and agility that the more hidebound forces of Heaven could not match, despite their advantages in numbers and raw power. An early and decisive victory by Michael and his angels might have shaken the determination of the rebels, so soon after God's display of wrath, so the Fiends, in their own quiet way regained a measure of the self-respect lost in the wake of the Fall.

Throughout the early stages of the war, the Neberu did not exist as a House, per se — the pain of betrayal and mistrust of House authority ran too deep. On a number of occasions, Asmodeus encouraged the Fiends to build ties of communication between one another, for no other reason than to improve their effectiveness by sharing information. The overtures were



almost reflexively refused, but the fallen archangel was not deterred. With an immortal's patience he watched and waited for the opportunity to lure his brethren back into the fold.

When one failed to present itself, Asmodeus elected to create one of his own.

Bearing Witness

From the earliest days of the war, the Sources made every effort to restore the enormous amount of history lost to them in the Fall, as well as creating the comprehensive record of the war commanded by the Morningstar. A singularly effective approach to this effort was devised not by a Source, but a Diviner called Xipharael. A cunning and resourceful warrior who gained fame for his unconventional tactics, the Fiend adopted the practice of freeing human and angelic prisoners captured in battle if they were willing to make a faithful and detailed report of their experiences in the war to that point. This form of ransom, known most commonly as *bearing witness*, provided a windfall of information to the Sources, who later expanded the scope of the accepted testimony to include the angel's memories prior to the Fall. The practice is coming back into vogue among Fiends in the modern age, with some ruthless Neberu manipulating other demons into desperate situations so they can squeeze them for useful data.

Stealing the Moon

Where the other Houses of the Host thought of the Earth as the seat of their glory and power, the Angels of the Spheres preferred the sanctity and serenity of the moon, raising glorious citadels of ice and diamond where they could work without distraction. Even after the Fall, the loyal angels of the Fourth House performed many of their routine tasks there, far removed from the chaos of the battlefield. Among these tasks was a long-term effort largely identical to that pursued by their fallen brethren: restoring and protecting the cosmic record, this time in a format that was not dependent on the memory and loyalty of the members of the House. These testaments were recorded in diamond matrices using the Lore of Light — a technique the loyal angels learned from a number of Fiends captured over the course of the war — and stored in the most secure vaults the House could make.

Asmodeus devoted no small amount of time and energy to observing the creation of this vast lunar library. Its existence served his purposes in a number of important ways. The library itself was a treasure trove that could seduce the most aloof Oracle, and the means of its protection was a challenge the Fiends were uniquely suited to overcome. Once he was reasonably certain that the library was nearly complete, the fallen archangel summoned his brethren together for the first time since the Fall and presented his plan.

With the care and precision typical of his House, Asmodeus described the scope of the library and the long litany of protections the Vigil had crafted to ensure its safety. Layer upon layer of powerful wards. Fierce and deadly protective rituals inscribed with the Celestial Names of each and every rebel Fiend. Concealed strongholds hidden behind the most cunning portals created by exemplars of the lore. The library was sealed in a fortress meant to be proof from no less than a horde of plundering angels.

The Neberu analyzed the library's defenses and concluded without exception that a raid upon the moon had absolutely no chance of success. Asmodeus agreed then declared that the Fiends would therefore have to *create* such a chance for themselves.

Asmodeus challenged the Neberu to consider the lines of causality in an entirely new way. The angels of the Fourth House had long since accepted that it was possible to maintain the cosmic equilibrium by manipulating the forces of probability. When the Oracles detected a potential threat to the balance, the Diviners would act on that knowledge and take steps to ensure that the threatening event did not occur — or at least played out in a way that did no harm to Creation. They had manipulated the causal threads in service to the Grand Design for ages, so why not use those same skills to create a future that served *their* interests instead?

The implications of such an idea stunned the assembled Neberu, but as the fallen archangel knew, the lure of the knowledge hidden in the vaults of the moon proved too great a temptation to resist. First one, then another of the assembled Fiends put forward suggestions about techniques to alter their chances of success. Asmodeus quickly stepped in and declared that the effort would require more than just a handful of the assembled throng. It would require all the skill and experience that the assembled fallen could bring to bear, from Sources to Diviners to Oracles. With that, Asmodeus sent the Fiends back to their bastions and cathedrals to consider the problem, and he waited to see what course events would take.

Over the next century, Asmodeus watched the Neberu become a House again. United by a common

purpose rather than autocratic fiat, the Fiends were able to put aside their mistrust and begin reaching out to their scattered kin. Little by little, lines of communication were established, and the ideas began to flow. The iron discipline that once allowed them to keep a universe in balance now served to focus the energies of the Neberu with relentless intensity. Asmodeus placed the full resources of the Silver Legion at the Fiends' disposal, requiring only that a group or council of individuals be formed to coordinate the efforts of Sources, Diviners and Oracles for maximum efficiency. Six Fiends, two from each discipline and all of them members of the Silver Legion, were appointed by their peers to form the Oversight Council under the direction of Asmodeus himself. The Oversight Council managed communications between the scattered Fiends and ensured that the proper resources were made available when needed. For all intents and purposes, it was the Vigil reborn under a new name.

As the plan for the raid progressed, so too did Asmodeus slowly tighten his web of control between the members of the House. The flow of information passed much more freely — the members of the Oversight Council saw to this — which served to mollify the worst concerns of the rank and file. The prospect of restoring their lost records and the opportunity to work among their peers once more proved able to overcome the Fiends' inherent mistrust of organization and authority.

The plan for the raid came together in small, subtle increments. In a real sense, it wasn't a plan at all, but the careful alignment of possibilities that would make an attempt successful. First, circumstances were manipulated to affect the decision of the Heavenly Vigil regarding the maintenance of the library's security. By manipulating the causal threads to ensure that the Vigil would decide not to improve or alter the current security procedures, the Fiends then had a free hand to gradually erode the protections already in place. Circumstances were arranged so that certain wards were allowed to lapse. Rituals were partially damaged under extraordinary situations like meteoric impacts or seismic shifts. The Fiends created a window of opportunity by painstakingly creating a chain of events that strained the limits of probability to the breaking point. Then, when all was in readiness the Neberu struck.

The Oracle Vituryan led the raid with his elite cadre of Fiends. Taking advantage of a number of Bottomless Satchels created specifically for the raid, the Fiends systematically looted the crystal vaults until the probabilities for discovery grew too great. The raiding party returned to Earth unscathed with a treasure trove of lost knowledge, including Heaven's perspectives on the war to that point.

There was never a full accounting of the amount of information stolen from the moon during the raid. It is believed that nearly the entire cosmic record was taken, along with a wealth of secret information known only to Asmodeus and the Oversight Council. Almost immediately, the crystals were dispersed among the bastions of the legion and hidden in portable vaults that could be moved at a moment's notice if necessary. Thus began a game of cat-and-mouse between the Fiends and their loyalist counterparts that lasted until the end of the war, with victories and defeats gained by both sides. The vast majority of the stolen crystals had not been recovered by the time the Fiends were cast into the Abyss, and how many survived to the present day remains a tantalizing mystery to the newly returned fallen.

To Asmodeus, the acquisition of the record was secondary to the symbolic importance of the raid. The Fiends had learned to overcome their suspicions and achieve a decisive victory that also restored a significant portion of their lost pride. What was more, the Neberu had been shown that they could be an active force for change in the cosmos. The age of passive observation and maintenance was over.

The seeds of tragedy had been sown.

The First Murder

It was not long after the lunar raid that the Neberu Oracles caught sight of a terrible upheaval looming in the causal streams. It represented another crucial decision point in the future of the universe. One action would unleash a storm of consequences that would envelop all of Creation if permitted. The Oracles reported their findings to one another and then to Asmodeus and the Council. In a move reminiscent of times past, the Council told the Oracles to continue to study the phenomenon and consider its implications.

What they saw was horror and destruction on a scale that beggared even the angelic imagination. They saw the High Cities of Heaven besieged, and skies aflame over fields littered with the dead and dying. It was a different sort of war than the esoteric contests of strategy they'd become accustomed to, but from what the Oracles could determine, this new war was one the fallen were *winning*.

What was the price of ultimate victory? That was the question that consumed the Oversight Council as the Oracles painstakingly traced the crucial decision to its source: Caine and Abel, the children of Adam

and Eve. The Oracles watched in horrified fascination as Caine killed his brother and created a new, poisonous set of concepts that would ultimately infect man and angel alike. The Oracles' first instinct was to bend all their efforts to preventing such a terrible act, but the lessons recently learned during the lunar raid gave them pause. Would it be worth it to allow the First Murder to occur if it led to a final triumph over the Holy Host? The idea tantalized them. This would be their first attempt to consciously alter the universe according to *their* will rather than God's, and in the end, the allure of that fact overcame their moral reservations. The storm approached, and the Neberu did nothing, believing that they were about to forever turn the tide of war in the rebels' favor.

Only Ahrimal, wandering in the wilderness, attempted to prevent the tragedy. Sensing what was to come, he attempted to warn the Morningstar, but the Prince of the Fallen seemed to dismiss his dire predictions. Though he tried to avert the tragedy himself, Ahrimal arrived too late and became a helpless spectator as one man learned to spill the blood of his brother.

In retrospect, Lucifer's inaction and the inability of Ahrimal to affect the outcome of the First Murder seems inexplicable...unless other forces were at work, behind the scenes. The Oversight Council did nothing to corroborate Ahrimal's warnings, presenting a conflicting picture of events to the Morningstar, and some Fiends later surmised that Asmodeus and the council had taken an active role in hindering Ahrimal's search for Adam and Eve.

The Time of Atrocities

Following the First Murder, a terrible transformation came over the fallen host. The angels now existed in a reality where the sanctity of God's creations could be swept away in a tide of rage and the spray of blood. Suddenly the rage of angels like Abaddon and Lirael found a potent form of release, and the Ebon Legion marched on the High City of Sagun in a bloodthirsty frenzy. The Alabaster Legion joined the march, and surprisingly, the Silver Legion did as well. The storm was upon them, and the Fiends could not resist experimenting with the forces they had unleashed.

Like the rest of the fallen, the First Murder changed the Fiends in a number of profound ways. While they always viewed the Grand Design in a detached, intellectual fashion, they held a deep reverence for its divine origins and saw themselves as its stewards. Now, with the taste of blood on their lips darkening their souls, they saw mankind and the broken universe as a machine that could be used, altered or rebuilt as they chose. As the legions were scattered, each pursuing their own objectives against the Heavenly Host, the Fiends of the Ebon, Silver and Alabaster Legions indulged in visions of a universe reborn in their image, fueled by the blood and faith of mankind.

During this age of nightmares, the Fiends were everywhere, watching and recording the depravities of their fallen peers. They walked Abaddon's killing fields and operated the arenas of Dûdâêl. They created vast concentration camps in the fields around Tabâ'et' to supply subjects for their arcane experiments, and were constant purveyors (and participants) of Belphegor's Palace of Sighs. After ages upon ages of cold, intellectual pursuits, much of the House lost itself in an orgy of sensuality. No longer detached observers, they actively collected (or created) areas of knowledge that allowed them to manipulate or pervert the Grand Design in ways the Creator never intended. No longer mere scholars, they became Creation's first sorcerers and scientists, twisting reality to suit their darkest whims.

To the House's credit, not all of the Fiends succumbed to these newfound lusts. A number of Neberu remained loyal to the Crimson and Iron Legions, and the counsel of Fiends such as Anat and Shaphniel are rumored to have been instrumental in forcing the Lightbringer to embark on the Long March and bring the wayward legions to heel. Later, when Lucifer announced the beginning of the Grand Experiment, these selfsame Fiends were at the forefront of the Age of Wonders that followed, hoping to restore the honor of the House and expiate the sins of their brethren.

The Babel Conspiracy

Not all of Lucifer's lieutenants were pleased with the Morningstar's wish to deify humanity. If mankind became a race of gods, what need would it have for angels? Abaddon, Archduke of the Ebon Legion, was the first to suggest such a notion, but it was Asmodeus, Archduke of the Silver Legion and now titular head of the Fourth House who suggested the plan to bring Lucifer's dream to ruin.

The full extent of the conspiracy remains unknown, but many of the Silver Legion's highest-ranking Oracles, Diviners and Sources took part. Asmodeus used the framework he'd created for the lunar raid to compartmentalize the efforts of the conspirators, providing each of them with only enough information to fulfill their intended part of the plan. Primarily, the Oracles and Diviners were tasked with

concealing the efforts of the conspirators from the watchful eyes of the Crimson and Iron Legions. Whenever a potential for discovery emerged, the Diviners were directed to alter the course of events to a safer outcome. The Sources, on the other hand, were directed to research the records of the Time of Atrocities and gather all the data available concerning Belphegor's eugenics experiments at the Palace of Sighs. This information was duly presented to Asmodeus, who disseminated it to the conspirators in the other legions. This data provided the basis for creating the race of human-angel hybrids known as the nephilim.

By the time the individuals involved understood the full implications of what they'd done, it was too late. Asmodeus' careful schemes since the beginning of the war had borne a final, bitter fruit.

Had it been the archangel's plan all along? Had it always been his intention to sabotage the rebellion from within? If so, why? Was it an act of altruism, an attempt to secure a final victory for Heaven, or did the archduke simply surrender to baser instincts of spite and revenge in the wake of the Long March?

These are questions that torment many of the newly returned Fiends. For those who found themselves victimized by Asmodeus' final manipulation the answers could mean the fate of their very souls.

Out of the Abyss

The cracks that appeared in the walls of the Abyss initially frightened the Neberu. This fear did not stop them from rushing at this chance to escape from their prison, but it did cause them to hesitate.

Once free, the situation continued to spiral out of control in unpredictable directions. The first big surprise, of course, was how their demonic spirits interacted with human flesh. Even more than the other Houses, this interaction has been a source of trouble for the Neberu because they were used to being cold, intellectual creatures. The human body, however, with its hormones and biological imperatives, overwhelmed the Fiends.

While they were forced to adjust to this new symbiotic lifestyle, they have also been forced to accept the enormous shock of what the world has become, the completely absent Elohim (who won the war, after all) and the fact that humanity appears to have abandoned its belief in God. With no real idea of what was happening or why, the Fourth House had to come up with a plan for how to survive in this strange new world.

Banding together was the obvious first step, and the Fiends took it. Ahrimal, who had started it all, was among the first to break free, and he raised the banner of the Cryptics in Atlanta, Georgia. Once a small core of fallen had gathered together, Ahrimal directed his group to start locating others. The logic here was twofold. First there was the desire to help his brethren through the traumatic experience of being merged into human flesh in order to help keep their existence secret. Ahrimal quickly appreciated that the Fallen were bare shadows of their former selves and in no condition to survive if someone launched a coordinated assault. The second reason was to try to recruit as many newcomers as possible in order to build up the numbers of the Cryptics. Ahrimal is convinced that another war is coming, one that will be fought between the five factions, and he intends to make certain that the Cryptics will survive.

Politics in a Strange Land

The Fiends have become political contenders since their return. Their love of knowledge and understanding is still what motivates them, but it is acting on them in new ways. Now they are fighting to create a place that is safe for them to explore and understand that knowledge.

As of the present, only Ahrimal is a prominent figure among the newly escaped Neberu. Many lesser Fiends are using their talent for gathering information and developing strategies to build their own power bases, and they are sticking to the back areas where other fallen are used to seeing them. For now the angels of the Fourth House are content with the background, because they feel that there is no way of maintaining control over the foreground. An excellent example of this is found in Los Angeles. Jahi is a rare Faustian who had been a minor scout for the Ebon Legion and a confederate of the Devil Spentu Mainyu during the war. She was a reliable but unremarkable scout who garnered no real attention for her actions.

Upon escaping from the Abyss, she went in search of her old friend. She found Spentu Mainyu in Los Angeles playing a delicate balancing game with the highly convoluted court system there. At first she was content to help out her old friend, but as her knowledge of the area and, more importantly, how the humans behaved there grew, her ideas shifted. Before she had been content to play the usual role of her House, to advise and assist, but now she found herself thinking that her own native ability was the equal of every other player. Sure, some of the others might wield more raw power than she did, but few could match her finesse. If she were equal to them,

Jahi found herself thinking, then why should she not be the one in charge of them? Now her plan is to make herself essential to Spentu Mainyu's plan, to make the Devil dependent upon her, to make herself irreplaceable. Once she does so, she will be in a place to dictate terms to him.

This is typical of how Fiends are beginning to think and behave. They are trying to blend in but make themselves absolutely essentially to the survival of whatever political system they are in at the same time, then they intend to quietly assume control. These thoughts are taking place in Fiends all across the world without anyone discussing it with the others. Quite independent of each other, many Neberu seem to have grown tired of acting as mere observers and now desire a return to the dark days of the Time of Atrocities. As more and more powerful Fiends break free of the Abyss, they might find waiting for them a network of behind-the-scenes political manipulators that can be forged into a source of power and authority over *all* the fallen.

The history of the Fiends has largely been one of dedication, obedience and observation. Now, as their souls mingle with human flesh, they find themselves wondering if that isn't what has been going wrong all along. During the war, the Fiends first tasted the fruits of power, and the ability to shape the fate of not only themselves, but mortals and other fallen, is an intoxicating possibility. Other demons can dream of reshaping the world to suit their whims, but the Fiends can *ensure* it.

Relics and Lost Lore

Every House had its own special relics and rituals created during the rebellion, but the Fourth House, given its limited acquaintance with the battlefield, did not often find occasion to create such tools. When they did, the Fiends still managed to create several powerful artifacts to serve their efforts, and their rituals remain among the most powerful ever created.

Relics

The following items are ones that are generally seen in the possession of Fiends, as opposed to demons of other Houses. Indeed, some are unique and jealously guarded by their owners. Fiends also make use of a wide variety of other relics, if they can obtain them, favoring artifacts that enhance their ability to obtain information and enhance their perceptions.

Duality Scrolls

These books were actually developed before the Fall by the Oracles to help them record their thoughts and observations, and they were derived from the Fiends' mastery of co-location. Duality Scrolls were always constructed as a pair, using the exact same materials and created with the same set of evocations. The creation process established one scroll as the "master" and the other as the "slave." When activated, anything written on the master scroll would likewise appear on the slave scroll, no matter how far the two scrolls were apart. Information written on the master scroll would linger for only a few moments, then vanish, ensuring the security of the information transcribed. By the same token, a small expenditure of Faith allowed the owner of the slave scroll to erase its contents for reuse later.

As tools for spies, the Duality Scrolls were invaluable. In fact, toward the end of the war, possessing either side of a Duality Scroll was considered proof of being a spy and grounds for execution without trial. Duality Scrolls are beginning to reappear in the modern age, but modern versions adopt more advanced forms such as journals, notepads and even newspapers. So far the fallen have not been able to use anything more high tech than paper, but that might change, especially as the Malefactors become more proficient with modern technology.

System: Activating (or erasing) a Duality Scroll requires the expenditure of a Faith point in the case of a demon, or a Willpower point in the case of a mortal. Their construction requires Lore of Portals •••• and Lore of the Forge ••••, and the pair of scrolls must be made at the same time. They are fairly simple to make, and most Malefactors who possess the correct lore would already be familiar with their construction. An interesting variation, however, began to appear during the Time of Atrocities. It involved using Lore of Portals ••, Create Ward. With this addition, the scrolls could be opened only by designated people or by using passwords. As no method of defeating these wards has ever been found, Duality Scrolls locked in this manner became a secure method of transmitting information that still has uses even in the modern electronic age.

Bottomless Satchels

These artifacts were originally created by Malefactors of the Silver Legion to facilitate the raid on the Fourth House's lunar vaults. The Diviners immediately recognized their utility, and by the end of the war, these bags found their way into the service of Fiends in all of the fallen legions.

System: The only way to open one of these satchels is by expending a Faith point to do so — mortals cannot open them using Willpower. Making them is fairly simple, and most Malefactors with the proper lore will remember how to do it. Lore of the Forge ••••, Lore of Portals ••••• and a sturdy container is all that is required for their construction. The danger of using flimsy material is that if the container suffers any structural damage — a torn seam, a small hole, or any damage that exposes the interior of the container — then the artifact is rendered useless, and anything that had been stored inside it is lost. Since whatever is placed in a Bottomless Satchel is not actually being stored there, the container does not increase in weight. The storage space of a Bottomless Satchel is unlimited, but bear in mind that anything placed inside the container must be able to fit through the opening. There are stories of armies placing their entire stock of supplies in a single container in an effort to be able to travel light, only to lose everything when the container was struck by a stray arrow or snagged on an unlucky branch.

Bottomless Satchels come in a variety of shapes and sizes, though the largest such relic made during the war had an opening only three feet across. Malefactors working with the items discovered that increasing the size of the opening beyond three feet made the relics inherently unstable and prone to collapse.

The addition of a ward, via Lore of Portals ••, showed up with these artifacts as well during the later stages of the war, meaning they could be opened only by a specific person or by using a specified password.

Armor of Portals

This armor was developed by the famous Malefactor smith, Guanli, for those Fiends who took to the battlefield to oversee the implementation of their strategies. The armor resembles plate mail in general construction, but rather than metal, each plate consists of a mirror-like portal which is imbued with Doorway into Darkness (Lore of Portals •••••). The effect is that any blow that strikes the armor actually strikes literally nothing at all. The only way to harm someone wearing this armor is to strike between the plates.

System: Activating the Armor of Portals requires two points of Faith if the wearer is a demon, or two points of Willpower if the wearer is a mortal. Once activated, any blows that strike the armor inflict no damage at all. The danger of this armor, for the one wearing it, stems from its fragile nature. Blows that strike the frame of a portal will shatter it, creating a gap in the suit's protection. Targeting the frame of a portal in combat adds four to the attacker's difficulty, while targeting a damaged section of the armor increases the difficulty by two.

Gaar-Asok's Library

As one of the most active scouts/spies during the war, Gaar-Asok was given several special tools to help him. One of these was a set of books with a special ability. Instead of writing on their pages, Gaar-Asok simply spoke his words into the books, and the books recorded his words in print. What was written could not be erased or otherwise unwritten, and once the pages were full, the books' only use was to be read, so there is no way to use the special qualities of the books now. What makes them so special is that Gaar-Asok traveled a great deal and saw many wondrous things, and now, in a time where most fallen can barely remember their names, this knowledge of the past is at a premium.

The books were waterproof and fireproof, so they are still legible, even today. The only problem is that they were written in the First Tongue, which most fallen can no longer read, so even possessing one of these books is not the same as possessing their knowledge. The books had all been stored in Genhinnom, Lucifer's citadel, and were assumed to have been destroyed along with the palace. Lately, though, single volumes have been turning up all around the world in the strangest of places. Not in the libraries of mystics or in the backrooms of antique bookstores, but in the huts of an aboriginal tribe in New Zealand. Another was found among other ancient manuscripts in the ruins of a Buddhist monastery in northeastern China. The pattern suggests that the books were never buried or lost in the classical sense. Rather they had been scattered around the world and stored with peoples who were mystically inclined. This suggests that someone deliberately chose these locations, but no evidence can be found to suggest who this person might be.

The secrets of the library's creation were known only to Guanli himself, but his memory of them is incomplete at present. An enterprising Fiend or Malefactor who could attain a volume and discover the secrets of its manufacture could name her price from any arcane scholar or demon.

Spider Golems

These little creatures were used by the scouts of the Disciples of the Moment to reach those places where a human-sized Neberu might be noticed. In travel form they appeared to be harmless, semi-precious gemstones, but when activated, usually by a code word, they sprouted eight legs that could climb



any surface. The being who activated them could look through their eyes and direct them to travel wherever she wanted. The spiders were not sentient, so the user had to imbue them with a tiny portion of her own life, and if the spider was destroyed while active, the user felt the blow.

Several of these little golems have been on display in museums around the world. Most have been dug up in various archeological digs and were mistaken by modern day archeologists for decorations. If the fallen had not escaped from the Abyss, it is likely that these little gemstones would have remained an untapped potential.

System: A spider can be activated by speaking the proper code word, which will be in the First Tongue, and investing a point of Faith (or Willpower, in the case of mortals). If the code word is not known, it can be found by anyone who views the stone from the spirit realm, where the word will appear to be carved into the facets. Once active, the spider will respond automatically to the user's thoughts. If the spider moves more than a mile away from the user, or vice versa, then it will deactivate. The spider's eyes can see through multiple spectra of light, including ultraviolet and infrared. No spider was ever equipped with an attack. Their sole use was as a spy tool. Their legs can climb up even frictionless surfaces with ease. They cannot soak any damage, and they should be thought of as having four health levels. The user can deactivate the spider at any time.

Rituals

The Neberu designed two categories of rituals. First there are the House rituals, which were developed over time for various and sundry reasons, and then there are the rituals dealing with prophecy. These latter rituals are among the most ancient of all rituals, having been developed before the Great Debate, and they are also some of the most powerful.

The following rituals are unique to the House of the Indigo Night and are usually not known by members of other Houses. Fiends guard their secret rituals jealously, so as to keep an edge over the other Houses — and, perhaps, so that they can feel proudly superior about their secret knowledge.

Ritual of Eternal Imprisonment

This nightmarish ritual was created in the last days of the war as a means of striking fear into the hearts of enemy angels. It was only used twice, and so horrific were its effects that all but the most hardened fallen cried out against it ever being used again. In fact, some fallen think that it was the use of this ritual that caused the Creator to cast the rebels into the

Precognition Rituals

Why are the precognition rituals using Lore of Patterns ••••• (Twist Time) instead of Patterns •••• (Causal Influence)? The seers of the Fourth House have worked so much with time that they have become adept at seeing how certain patterns play out. For example, we know that a baseball thrown into the air will fall back to the earth, and this is a kind of precognition because we know what will happen before it does. In a sense, the second baseman who catches a pop fly is predicting the future by knowing where the ball is going to come down. Because we see this all the time, however, it does not impress us so much. Still it takes good hand-eye coordination to catch that ball. This is essentially what the fourth level of the Patterns lore is all about, a seer who has watched so much time, she instinctively knows what is going to happen next, in the short term.

The long term is a different story. The far future remains unknown and unknowable, because humanity has free will, so the future has not happened and is not set. Therefore, in order to predict the future, the precognitive must look at patterns in the present in order to guess what will happen in the future. If the seer knows what is going to happen, though, then the future is set, and mankind is denied free will. This is why Twist Time is needed to see the far future, because the seer must alter time to look at the future without cementing it in place. In other words, time in the center of the sigil is going faster than time outside the center, which is in turn going faster than time outside of the sigil, thus allowing the seer to look ahead. Once the seer and all the other participants leave the sigil after the ritual is over, they are stepping back into the past.

Abyss. The ritual was thought to be lost, until one of the books of Gaar-Asok turned up with the details of the ritual mentioned inside.

The purpose of this ritual is to trap a person in time. To allow space to pass her by as normal, but not time, so that she is eternally frozen in time. The reason this is so horrific has to do with the nature of revolution and the fact that even when we stand still, we are, if fact, still moving. When a being is frozen in time, she vanishes, because, in those milliseconds that follow being frozen, the Earth speeds away as it rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun, while our galaxy completes its celestial rotation. In fact, a creature locked in time becomes lost in vast eternity of space, and so is lost forever. This is the horror of this ritual. It is an eternity locked in solitary confinement with no hope of release, escape or death.

Primary Lore: Lore of Portals •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Patterns •••••, Lore of Portals ••

Base Cost: 36

Restrictions: The subject of this ritual is placed in a metal rectangular container, and this container is placed in the center of the sigil. This ritual requires at least seven fallen who possess Lore of Patterns ••••• because of the difficulty of completely freezing time around the box in the center of the sigil, but there is still only one Ankida.

Minimum Casting Time: 144 minutes

System: Roll Intelligence + Science (difficulty 8). The victim resists by using Willpower. If the Ankida is successful, the victim disappears from view, never to be seen again. If the Ankida's roll fails, the ritual ends immediately and must be started again.

If the ritual botches, however, there is a risk that the temporal bubble meant to contain the prisoner will claim his jailers instead. Make a Willpower roll for every person involved in the ritual against a difficulty of 8. If the roll fails, the person disappears. The good news is that the effects on the hapless participant are not permanent. The individual will return to the time stream at some point, but cannot control when or where her return will occur. The Storyteller is the final arbiter on the time and location of the victim's return, and he can choose arbitrarily when and where the event happens.

Torment: None

Variations: There are rumors that the ritual could be performed with seven Mudu with Lore of Portals ••••, which would permit the prisoner to be teleported back to reality after a specific length of time had passed or a certain set of conditions had been met.

Character Creation

Fiends are the classic ivory-tower scholars, long on theory and short on practice. Their tendency to watch how things should be frequently leaves them blind to how things are. Even the Sources and the Diviners, far more practical than the ethereal Oracles, are prone to be theoreticians instead of down-and-dirty players. None of this means that Fiends are incompetent, but it all points to their natural predilection for contemplation over action.

Concept

To outsiders, the Fourth House seems the most homogenous of the Houses because all of its members pursue knowledge. Even now, as they break free of the Abyss, Fiends are not being drawn to as broad a selection of humanity as the other demons are. They are being drawn to knowledge-seekers of all different walks.

This is the outsiders' opinion. To the Fiends, while they all do seek knowledge, they are as varied as the life in a tidal pool. Although it is true that fiery passions have no appeal to the Neberu — who have always been uncomfortable around strong emotions — the Fiends do find themselves possessing those who love information. The three most common concepts center around which kind of disciple the Fiend was before the rebellion, since each of the three disciplines had strong themes of commonality.

Sources: Followers of this discipline watched over the great libraries of the Age of Wonders, and the protection of knowledge for knowledge's sake is a primary driving force for them. When the war came, these Fiends stole tomes of forbidden knowledge from enemy strongholds and hid them away in facet dimensions. Here is a person to whom knowledge is an end unto itself — such as a Holocaust survivor who would protect a copy of *Mein Kampf* simply because destroying a book is wrong. In the modern world, these people would be librarians, passionate bibliophiles, the small town freak who works overtime in the corner bookstore, et cetera.

Diviners: These angels practiced the most action-oriented of the three disciplines, but even their actions were motivated by a love of understanding. They were fearless creatures who would dare anything to see what had *really* happened, then record it as faithfully as possible so that others might know the truth. In the pursuit of this truth, these Elohim would defy even their Creator. As they escape the Abyss, these Fiends find themselves drawn to journalists who travel to war-torn areas, engineers who work in the field (not behind a desk) building dams or electrical plants, archeologists who brave hostile environments to scour the earth for clues to the past, spies, et cetera.

Oracles: The Sources worship knowledge, the Diviners act upon the knowledge they are given, but to the Oracles, understanding is all. The image of the Oracle is what most fallen think of when they think of the Fiends. Mystic seers whose cryptic words can lead to profound victory or disastrous defeat. This is the most theoretical and abstract of the three disciplines, and its followers are the most removed and distant. To them, reality should be subordinate to theory. Most attractive to these Fiends are philosophers, theoretical scientists, professors and writers.

Nature and Demeanor

Surprisingly, the Neberu are quite varied in their Natures (their true selves), but they are rather similar in Demeanor (the face they show the world). In most social groups, the reverse is true. People try to make themselves look distinct externally while conforming internally, whereas the Fiends preferred to be indistinguishable externally while pursuing their individual ideas and concepts internally. To praise a Fiend, you must praise her ideas, not her appearance, which she usually neglects to one degree or another.

When considering a Fiend's Demeanor, the most likely examples are Curmudgeons, Directors, Perfectionists and Visionaries. It should be noted that these are not the only Demeanors available to the Neberu, but they are the most common.

A Fiend's Nature can vary widely, often depending on which discipline the character pursues. Oracles are often Architects, Directors or Loners — individuals who are isolated by their pursuit of knowledge and the search for secrets. Diviners are much more diverse, and they can embody Archetypes as varied as Autocrats, Bravos, Fanatics, Gamblers and Judges. Sources are almost stereotypically the ivory-tower scholars and lend themselves to Autocrat, Judge, Loner or Martyr Archetypes.

Lore

As has been mentioned in other chapters, now is a good time to start thinking about which will be the primary lore of your character, since so much of how your character will be perceived and how others will interact with him will be influenced by his primary lore. Plus, getting an idea of your primary lore and visage will help you slant your character generation to a more accurate picture.

Lore of Patterns: Dealing with precognition, this lore is the domain of the Disciples of Momentum, almost exclusively, because a seer without this lore is little better than a fast-talking con artist. While it is not unknown for Sources or Diviners to have some minor knowledge of this lore, it is rare, and it is entirely unknown for anyone outside of the Neberu to have any knowledge of this lore path. This was one of the most closely guarded secrets of the Fourth House. The Ninsun visage grants increased levels of Mental Attributes and a reduced difficulty for Intuition rolls. Also, all five levels of the lore require Intuition for the

system rolls, so using freebie points to increase that Ability is a good idea.

Lore of Portals: This lore was mainly created by the Diviners to provide near-unlimited mobility as they worked to maintain the cosmic balance. Unlike the Lore of Patterns, however, this lore path was commonly shared between Disciples of the Moment and Disciples of Memory, so choosing it as your character's primary lore does not limit your character concept the way the Lore of Patterns does. Again, the system rolls for the first four levels of the lore require Intuition, so that Talent should be fairly high, but the Nedu visage does not grant a lower difficulty level. Instead Awareness is easier, so that Talent is also fairly important to those who follow this lore.

Lore of Light: Illusions and distortions are at the heart of this lore, which was developed by the Disciples of Memory to help them store, read and protect their tomes of knowledge. This lore path was shared freely with the other disciples, though, so choosing it as your character's primary lore does not commit your character to the ranks of the Sources. This lore does not utilize a single Attribute or Ability the way the other two do, but Stamina, Intelligence, Science and Expression are all very useful at various levels. The Shamash visage is a culmination of the illusory powers of this lore, granting bonuses to the Mental Attributes, protective illusions and a the ability to see even in utter darkness.

Attributes

Physical

Not all Fiends neglect the physical realm. Diviners frequently possessed fine physical skills due to their role as investigators or spies, so this would be a sensible secondary set of Attributes for such a character. Some Neberu have tremendous Stamina ratings, whether it is for all-night study sessions or running all night to witness a battle or just being able to drink the one you are spying on under the table to leave you free to investigate the location.

Social

This is most commonly chosen as the secondary Attribute, and it is a good choice. Many Neberu depend upon social interaction to achieve the fullest use of their knowledge. After all, what is the use of envisioning a perfect world if you cannot convince anyone to help you build it? Most Fiends have this as their secondary set of Attributes, especially focusing on Manipulation.



Mental

Obviously this Attribute should be your character's primary Attribute, with Intelligence being top out of the three to reflect the Neberu's insatiable love of knowledge. It is not so clear which of the other two, Wits or Perception, is more important. It is worth noting, though, that many great thinkers, prefer careful contemplation, so high Wits are not crucial to Fiends. Then again, one of the signs of great intelligence is not just the ability to process information, but the ability to do it quickly.

Abilities

Talents

This is usually a Fiend's secondary set of Abilities, if only because of the opportunity to purchase the crucial Talent of Intuition. Almost without exception, the Neberu have a facility for Intuition, and it should have no less than two dots (preferably three). As for the others, Subterfuge, Expression, Empathy and Awareness are all useful things for a Fiend to have, and if you are choosing to play a Diviner, then Dodge and Athletics are also recommended. If they have to fight, most Fiends prefer using weapons rather than their hands, so don't bother with Brawl.

Skills

It is a common flaw among the rarified intellectual that they spend so much of their time thinking about how the world is and should be, that they have very little practical knowledge. Things like proper social behavior (Etiquette) or how to camp in the wilderness (Survival) are frequently overlooked, but every Fiend usually has one or two hobby Skills at which they are especially proficient. Given how eclectic the Neberu can be, there is no real limit to what these hobbies are, but consider putting three dots into one and two dots into the other. The exception to this rule tends to be the Disciples of the Moment, who have slight ability in multiple areas — so one dot in five different Skills.

Knowledges

Again, it should be fairly obvious why Knowledges should be your character's primary set of Abilities. Knowledge and the desire for more knowledge is practically a definition of what being a Neberu is, so making this your character's primary choice is obvious. The choice you should consider is how to apply your dots. There are two good methods. Either your character is a kind of jack-of-all-trades with a dot in every subject to represent a broadly read person, or she is a specialist, with, for example, three dots in Medicine, Science and Research, then two dots in Academics and one each in Computer and Investigation. Sources and Oracles are mostly specialists, whereas Diviners are more likely to be broadly read.

Backgrounds

Most of the Backgrounds can be found among the Fiends, but even here there are some patterns. The more active Diviners usually have Allies and Contacts to represent their broad areas of travel, while the Backgrounds like Eminence and Paragon (a well-known seer from before the imprisonment in the Abyss) or Influence and Fame (a public speaker who counsels politicians and world leaders) are frequently found in the more passive Sources and Oracles. Even Pacts and Followers are not uncommon because of the curious hierarchical nature of most institutes of higher learning.

Virtues

Usually the Neberu have a high Conviction and a low Conscience. They are idealists who tend to put their ideas above the good of an individual, so they can happily sacrifice a loved one for the good of the cause. This is one of the ways that Fiends can, subtly so, be very dangerous. As for Courage, that is very much a matter of the individual. Some are passionate idealists whose desire for a brave new world grants them near fearlessness, while others are simply using clever words to mask their own cowardice. This very much relies on your concept of how you want your character to be.

Lore

If you have not yet chosen a primary lore for your character, now is the time.

Lore of Patterns

This lore is the domain of the Oracles. It is, after all, what makes them distinct and unique. Not only is the Lore of Patterns a great secret of the House, but used incorrectly, it can lead to profound disasters. Therefore, the Disciples of Momentum guarded the knowledge of this lore intensely.

If this is your character's primary lore, you will want to purchase a high Intuition to reflect your character's intimate link with the flow of time.

Lore of Portals

The Diviners developed this lore to aide them in their role as maintainers of the cosmic balance. With this lore, they could gain access to locations denied their brethren or deny their brethren access to these same locations. Thresholds might be another way to

consider this lore. It deals with thresholds, which can be opened, closed or caused to open on something entirely unexpected.

With this as your character's primary lore path, your character should still have a high Intuition, now representing the instincts of a person in constant danger, as well as a high Perception to reflect a spy's need to be able to observe everything in a moment. These characters are more likely to be physically adept than their brethren, but Attributes like Manipulation should still be high.

Lore of Light

This lore was developed after the rebellion began, as a means of presenting and later storing information for the benefit of other fallen and their mortal flocks. Only later, during the Time of Atrocities did the Fiends learn to bend this lore for the purposes of illusion and deception.

Fallen with this as their primary lore are more likely to be tricksters and game-players, but also highly knowledgeable. Remember, creating a good illusion requires an excellent base of knowledge about the real thing, otherwise the illusion is not convincing. Also bear in mind that tricksters were not the same as comedians, especially in the old days. When tricksters laughed, the proud tended to weep.

Common Lore

Most Fiends had no use for the Lore of Humanity, so, while it was not unknown for a Neberu to possess this lore, it was uncommon. The Lore of the Fundament, however, is a different story. Space, is intimately tied to time, so to manipulate the one, it is often necessary to manipulate the other. In fact, many believe that this lore was developed by members of the Fourth House, but its uses were so universal that it was shared with the other six Houses.

Freebie Points

Now for the final touches. Virtually every Fiend can benefit from using freebie points to increase Intuition. Although it's tempting to throw every available point into purchasing lore paths, it's important to remember to balance the evocations with the pertinent Attributes and Abilities needed to make the evocations effective.

Fiends are theoreticians and philosophers. Like many of that kind, a high Faith is common. It is the kind of Faith that does not always survive a harsh encounter with reality, though, so you might want to leave your Faith at an average level to reflect this. Also keep in mind, that as strategists and planners, the Neberu do not fight often. Therefore, they do not need to spend their Faith as often, so your freebie points are probably better spent in other places.

Here, the Neberu tend to be very strong. It stems from being strong in their convictions. No matter what happens, what goes wrong, the Fiends remain convinced that they were right. This might have something to do with the fact that they rarely commit themselves to anything, thus reducing their chances of making mistakes. Whatever the reason, Fiends tend to have a high Willpower.

Again, a high Intuition is practically a requisite for most Fiends, so you should consider raising it to at least a 4, preferably a 5. Also, Intelligence and Manipulation should be at least a 4 and 3, respectively, preferably higher. One of the best places to spend your freebie points is in Abilities and Backgrounds. Use these cheaper areas to boost up the rolls you will use most frequently, thus ensuring a higher degree of successful rolls. Abilities like Science, Performance, Expression and Awareness are all used in the Neberu evocations. Investigation, Religion and Occult are all likely Abilities that a Fiend might need in her pursuit of knowledge.


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Chapter Five: The House of the Restless Deeps

A gowden moon on a flowin' tide;
An' Lammas floods for the spell to bide;
And a gowdon mon wi death for his bride.
—Gaelic verse [as found in Bram Stoker's *The Mystery of the Sea*]

Ethereal, callous, generous, self-absorbed, curious, fickle, resplendent, wrathful — these words have all be used to describe the members of the Fifth House of demons let loose on the world. They have been called sirens, succubi and muses. They might represent a calm and gorgeous lagoon or the unending depths of the stormy ocean. They inspire greatness, dance through nightmares and pass unnoticed on the street.

During the war against Heaven, they had a special relationship with humans, creating great heroes, overseeing settlements and cities and shaping them with cruel whimsy. Now the fallen Defilers are closer to humanity than they have ever been, looking out at a strange, dark world from behind human eyes. Will they be lost, too close to the ones they love to cause anything but confusion and pain, or will this new perspective allow them to avoid the mistakes they have made before? Will it give them the ability to raise both themselves and those around them to new heights of glory and wisdom?

Before the Fall

The oceans existed even before the world. The primal essence of the universe was water, and it was a great sea that the Heralds created and prepared for the wonders to come. When those of the Third House — who would become Malefactors — created matter, they started with dry land to shape the oceans under Heaven, and they built upon that. Between these islands and continents existed a great, featureless plain of liquid. Only the movement of angels stirred

currents in the water, brief ripples that flattened quickly. Even after all this turbulence, even as the stars whirled in the sky, the oceans were still.

And then the angels of the Fifth House came to impart movement, color and beauty into the silent depths. When the animals came into the world, including all the teeming schools of fish, the solitary hunters, the phosphorescent creatures of the deep, the leviathans and kraken, they only provided more instruments through which the Nereids could play. Intricate dances of enormous complexity, depth and resonance provided a chaotic counterpoint to the steady turn of the heavens — the progress of creation itself — that continued around them.

Of course, there was nobody to see these dances except the participants and, it could be imagined, God Himself. The other angels had their own tasks to perform. Humanity, newly born and running naked upon the land, did not even conceive of such things. The Nereids could look upon the shore, but humanity did not return their stare.

Later, in the war, most Houses claimed to be the first to feel the dissatisfaction that led to rebellion. The Nereids got little argument, however, when they said that there had been little for them to actually do that made an impact on the humans' world. Unable to show themselves to the humans, they performed their dances, sang, liaised, discussed, built huge palaces of coral in which other Houses would convene their meetings on occasion, and little else. They had no doubt that this was why they had been created, nor that they were capable of the great beauty that was required of them. But when other angels would mention, only half in jest, that even the lowly House of the Second World performed a more useful function, there was little they could say in reply.

The Hierarchy

Not all the Angels of Deep were so removed from humanity. The jurisdictions of the lieutenants Caransai, the Force of Inescapable Current, and Penemue, Lace Upon the Shore, brought them close to the land. Caransai controlled the mightiest of rivers, which were too dangerous for anyone to approach, but others under her command looked over gentler streams from which humans drank. Although Caransai herself did not join the rebellion, it was one of her favored underlings, Senivel, who was chosen to represent the Nereids when the time came to reveal themselves to humanity.

Penemue was the most hopeful of the four lieutenants of the House. He was given the best chance to attract humans away from land and into the mysteries of the open sea, since he oversaw the boundary between the two. But everything he and the thousands of angels under him tried — from calm, inviting vistas teeming with fish to lonely islands that hinted of treasure and excitement — failed to attract anyone. For most humans, it was not that they were scared of these strange opportunities, but that they did not give them a second thought.

The other two Nereid lieutenants — Tiamat, the Keeper of Waylaid Dreams, and Markeeva, the Crucible of Shaping — had a more complex relationship with humans that was only fully explainable in the less literal, but still very real, levels of creation. Tiamat was the shepherd for the aspirations of humanity, yet by God's decree she could do little apart from react to those dreams that had moved beyond the thoughts of their owners, protecting them in case they might be found again. But the dreams of Adam and Eve were shallow and ephemeral things, momentary fancies about paths decided against, as unadventurous as the paths that they did tread. Such fancies dissipated in the grasp of even the most careful or lowly angel, and not even the help of the Fourth House gave Tiamat's domain any substance at all.

Markeeva's duty was the closest to humanity, and perhaps the most heartbreaking. In her jurisdiction was the cradling of the unborn within the womb (once an angel of the Second House had given the breath of life), and the force that pushed life from the sea and onto the land, pushed animal-kind toward human-kind, over the countless aeons of evolution upon the watery sphere of the world. Yet again, God's decree bound Markeeva. It was not blind chance that saw humans rise above their ape ancestors, but it might as well have been. The difference could be detected only by the most perceptive of onlookers — humans did not understand anything of the world about them, let alone have the senses to analyze forces subtler than those of most other Houses. In a simpler reality, the unborn child held by the warm waters of its mother's body was as inviolable to the touch of angels as it would be once born — and somewhat less interesting as well. Markeeva's charges had all the potential of greatness, but they could not even begin to express that greatness before they moved beyond her reach.

Ranked higher than these four lieutenants was the most beautiful of his House, and the furthest removed from its charges. Belial, the Virtue of the Boundless Deeps, held his court on the floor of the oceans and, true to his name, roamed trenches deeper still. So far from land and Heaven, the waters he found were as virginal as they had been in the ancient

days when only the Heralds existed, and resonated with the potential of creation yet to happen.

Whether it was these waters or his own nature, he was not greatly active in the rulership of his House, keeping instead to the depths. Some said that he had never even looked at humans from afar, as other angels must (which was not entirely true). Because no human could come near his realm, however, Belial was the freest of his House — perhaps the freest of all angels — to create artworks within his domain, which he spared no time or effort in doing. From great living sculptures of coral hundreds of cubic miles in volume, to tiny frescos of precious jewels, each one expressed the longing, the sense of adventure and wonder, the playfulness and sacrifice, that the Nereids embodied. And all that longing was turned toward only one subject: humanity.

It was later said that if the Great Debate had occurred in Belial's halls rather than in those of the lunar palace, then all those present would have joined Lucifer and victory would have been assured.

A Dangerous Idea

As with other angels, the Nereids were initially puzzled, and increasingly frustrated, at the non-responsiveness of Adam and Eve to the wonders around them. The restrictions placed upon the host by God seemed no more or less than cruelty, and the Nereids spent long years trying to understand their Creator's will, so that they might serve Him better. Since they could not reveal themselves, most Nereids determined to make the world so alluring that the joy of Creation would become self-evident, although their distance from humanity made this very difficult. Penemue and his colleagues plied their craft along the shoreline, to limited success. One of the furthest reaching effects was the creation of an angel called Enshael who, with a great deal of coordination from others of his House (and the consent of the Fourth), created a vast rainbow across the lands of Eden. This had come after a particularly cool and refreshing shower, but the humans were dry beneath a canopy of leaves, and they remained oblivious to what was above them.

It was Enshael who suggested, as the angels looked upon their ruined plan, that if the rain had been heavier and colder — had pierced that covering of leaves and given the humans an unpleasant soaking — then they might have looked more fondly at a bridge across the heavens, however illusory. He said this lightly, and others angels did not take up the thought, but that was perhaps the wellspring of an undercurrent of subversion among the angels of Fifth House. It was most noticeable in the underlings of Tiamat. They stated among themselves that if there were fewer angels crowding the humans, invisibly catering to their every whim and receiving nothing but ignorant dismissal for their efforts, then the dreams of the two would be wilder, their aspirations higher. Most did not say this with any intention of action, or even as a serious attempt to grapple with the issues at hand. It was more meant to be a score in the subdued inter-House rivalries that existed, against the Sixth House in particular. It was also true that the humans had their share of discomfort, but that was mainly distress at the death of animals (and, related to it, confusion over as simple a thing as the changes of the seasons). But these feelings did not push their dreams outward, only further inward, to become the particular torment of the House of the Second World.

A few individual Nereids did take the sentiment behind these ideas and thought about it deeply. Perhaps it was not God's decrees that had been in error, but the angels' slavish and careless implementation of them. These individuals started colluding. The First, Third and Sixth Houses were most at fault in this matter, they decided, but all angels shared some culpability. They approached Tiamat, making their point in phrases that were elliptical even for the angelic tongue. She thanked them gravely for their insight and courage and said that she would think over the matter, perhaps with other lieutenants from their own House and from others. Whatever action Tiamat envisaged in response to this idea — if any — none occurred.

The expression of such an idea was not an isolated case, although it was perhaps the one with the best chance of action at the highest levels. By this time, frustration was dissolving into despair. In the deep ocean especially, but also everywhere water could be found, the longing that embodied this House was turning to poison. Most solutions that were discussed were hardly as analytical as the earlier idea (many were not even rational), but almost all agreed that something had to be done. Unlike some from other Houses, none of the Nereids approached God to see Creation as He would see it. They were more concerned with grand visions of what might be and what they increasingly saw as the betrayal of their dominion.

It was at this time that Belial was called out of his beloved deeps to Ahrimal's sanctum.

The Call to Rebel

Belial returned from the Great Debate with a clear message for all the angels under his command.

The time for action was at hand. It was not an order as he could have made — backed by the power of Names — but neither did he call for any debate or make allowance for any resistance. The decision had been made, and it was now as obvious to him as the turning of the tide.

It was not as simple as that, of course. Although different ideas had been discussed and action had been called for, the gravity of the situation was apparent. A few threw themselves behind Belial's orders with enthusiasm, but many others balked. More time was required for more options to be explored. Many simply refused to consider disobedience of God's will. Belial explained. This was not disobedience, this was the proper interpretation of God's decree. Yet still there were doubts.

"Enough of this," Belial commanded. "Those who are with me, come now. There are weaklings who would see this great opportunity squandered, this great dream forgotten before it can be made real. So decide in your heart, but decide now."

Only two of the lieutenants, Penemue and Tiamat, joined him. And yet, from the lower ranks, more angels joined the rebellion than from any other House.

Vindication

The long night before the confrontation between Michael and Lucifer was all that the Angels of the Deep could have hoped for. This was the time that made them complete, that answered the questions of their lives, that filled the void. All the Houses had gifts to give the humans, but it was the Nereids that showed them what to do with their gifts. The humans were shown that the Earth contained wonders; the Nereids gave them the perseverance to excavate them for themselves. The humans were shown that the sky was full of patterns and portent; it was the Nereids who gave them the will to seek out what they did not see.

Of course, it was not to last. But even though many of the House understood that Michael, or some other Angel of the Lord, would come to them, they did not wish to believe it. The night stretched on, and humans multiplied across the land. They developed rituals of community, of courtship, marriage and birth. At last, they moved to different lands, even those across the sea. Boats were built, long journeys were made, carried upon the waves and before the winds of Life. Some of the Nereids believed that the Angels of the Lord would come too late and the humans would spread too far. Others believed that this world in which they worked their desires was the fulfillment of God's design. The loyal angels would come to say that everything was as it should be. It was Penemue who knew different. The lieutenant approached Belial and said that one thing was missing. No matter what the situation was in Heaven, there was one thing yet to come. The humans had to make a choice — not merely in their ready acquiescence toward Lucifer in his first shining visitation, but a choice between all these true wonders that they had been shown and obedience to God.

And so it came to be. Although Michael's message was more terrible than any of them imagined, the choice was presented and the decision made. Those few angels who did return to the Heavenly Host were not of the House of the Deep. God's hand brushed across creation, and all was thrown into chaos. The Nereids were now the Lammasu, Defilers in the eyes of their Lord. But they would go on, and in truth, most of them still rejoiced in the opportunity to do so.

The House at War

The Lammasu were not creatures of war, but then, no angel was. The rebel forces divided into the five legions, the Defilers favoring the Silver and, to a lesser extent, the Crimson Legion. The former were the searchers for truth in the new, desolate lands, and the highest ranked Defiler was Belphegor, the Dream of Beauty. The latter were the protectors of humanity, under the command of Belial himself. Penemue joined the Iron Legion, and Tiamat was undecided, joining the Alabaster Legion by default.

The Fifth House did not make significant contributions to the battles fought between rebel and loyal angels in those early days. They were structured affairs, little in need of the Defilers' gifts. The humans, however, were in more desperate straits. No longer did the land provide for them automatically; they had to wrest their sustenance from it. Now they fished and fashioned crude traps, and they tilled the hard earth to make their farms. The Devourers would have been of most help in these endeavors, but that House was more concerned with the war, and many were a part of the Ebon Legion, which disdained humanity and its troubles. So it was the Lammasu who provided inspiration for agriculture and hunting, and they oversaw the rebuilding of a number of the human cities (all had been greatly damaged by the cataclysm).

One early lesson that the Lammasu learned was that they no longer controlled the oceans. Their counterparts among the loyalists were equally out of

place in battle and were not called upon to assist those humans who had pledged their loyalty to God. So they secured the oceans under the control of Heaven, and although Belial would have contested that, it seemed to him there were better things to do. As the war progressed, this dominance lessened, but still, there were only a few citadels built or battles fought upon or beneath the waves. Few Defilers wished to return, in any case. The oceans were not as any remembered them. Where once they had been sparkling pure water, they were now fouled by earth and soot and salt. Few creatures remained within them, and those were either maddened or sickly, or the deep creatures down where the pollution was slow to settle. It was a strange thing that the loyal angels of the Fifth House ruled over a more corrupt realm than those of their rebel kin. Some of the Defilers still harried their counterparts, so that they could not be comfortable in their traditional home. The most famous and successful of these early guerrillas was Abinereth, or the First Storm, known for his great anger even in the earliest days of rebellion. He was nominally of the Ebon Legion, but he did not report to anyone.

For the others, there were still the rivers, some of the great lakes, stretches of shoreline, and the rain that fell on the land. These were where the Defilers could retreat to be within their element.

Bastions of Beauty

Although it was the Malefactors who worked most industriously on the bastions, the Defilers had some influence over their design as well. This work was not so much done on the headquarters of the various legions — not even Tabâ'et' of the Silver Legion — which were built to practical designs emphasizing their defensibility. Kâsdejâ, the fortress of the Alabaster Legion, was a partial exception, and the Defilers had some influence upon Genhinnom, as did all the Houses. Belphegor's great palace, far from the lands where the loyalist humans lived, was the most prominent of the Defiler-designed bastions. In those early days, it was called Ninâtan.

Another prominent landmark was Tannilarn. It was designed for humans by Sehettan of the Crimson Legion as a lakeside city of soaring towers and beautiful parks, where the surrounding desolation could be forgotten. Tannilarn was where the first church was built for the worship of angels. The church was the centerpiece of the city, a grand hall, half natural grotto, half magnificent cathedral, with great sheets of delicate crystal spinning slowly in the air, reflecting the beautiful lights and the currents of the lake water that ran through the center of the room. Sometimes the crystal showed other things as well, strange patterns that might have been the future or the past. It



was the Devils, the Fiends and of course the Defilers who were most honored in this room, although there were shrines dedicated to the other Houses as well. Some of the fallen who would not otherwise show themselves to humankind would come to the church of Tannilarn to remind themselves of the choices that humanity had made, and the beauty that victory would bring.

The dream of one Defiler, Zamael of the Silver Legion, led to the building of the oasis of Kappesa, a small wellspring in the center of the great desert near where the original gates of Eden stood. Few people would ever live there, and some claimed that Zamael was running from the war where no one would care to go. Kappesa provided relief and sanctuary after many of the battles of the war, however, and its waters were still pure when the fallen were banished into Hell. Perhaps they still are.

Battle Lust

It was at the siege of Sagun that the Defilers first learned what they could contribute directly to the war, even as they reviled the possibility. The resonance of Caine's betrayal of his brother traveled fast. The exultation he felt as he tasted the blood upon his hands went to the heart of the Defilers' being, and Sagun became the focus of all that feeling. What was to be a sortie of the Ebon Legion turned into something much larger as demons from all legions set upon the fortress from many sides. And the Defilers were there as well, the exultation of death within their voices. They spurred their compatriots on and some, not content with this indirect action against the hated Host of Heaven, took up arms as well. The rebel assault was like a wave that crashed over the fortress, and then all the other fortresses of the Host, leaving only broken things behind.

The Chant of Life Long Passing

Not long after that, even as the legions scattered about the Earth under the recrimination of Lucifer Morningstar, a song began to spread among the humans, called *The Chant of Life Long Passing*. It was a narrative poem set to a heartbeat rhythm, seemingly simple but with many versions that all seemed to complement one another. Together they created a vast tapestry of a life. It concerned a worker of the earth (though whether a farmer, potter or perhaps even a Malefactor, seemed to depend upon the version being sung), looking back to a time of war and chaos. Such things, the narrator mused in a mournful and often roundabout way, did not bring life from the Earth. Yet the detail of the piece told of excitement and adventure, punctuated by sudden and shocking violence, acts of love in desperate circumstances, and the emergence of friendship from those trying times. The theme of the song — again, depending upon the exact version — was that the frailty of flesh and the individual's perception was what made war the horrific experience it seemed to be, but glory, grandeur and honor was there in the accumulation of participants upon the battlefield. Whatever the version, it was clear that the narrator would not be working the earth had he not defended his lands from the tyranny of the Creator.

Many angels were contemptuous of the songs of humans, particularly those not raised in praise of the angels themselves. Nonetheless, the song's message was an influential one, perhaps even more so on those who made to dismiss it. The idea of a violent war was still fresh and painful; the idea of someone looking back at it from a time of peace was equally new. The song contained all the contradictions of the war — indeed ruminated on some contradictions that had not been obvious before — and soothed them in a way that was neither too sweet nor too bitter. It was of course the work of Defilers, although no one seemed sure precisely who had written it.

In the Hierarchy

As this cunning piece of propaganda was starting to spread, the situation of the Defilers themselves was less encouraging. The resonance of the madness experienced at Sagun affected most of the House. It was no longer clear to many of them what their role was — whether of war or art, or some strange combination of the two. Those who took up arms wished to continue their practice, although their inexperience was obvious, to them most of all. Those whose contribution had been the songs that had reflected the frenzy of the massacres, providing further encouragement and a group dynamic to the participants, also did not find their path an obvious one. During the momentary lull between battles, most felt ashamed of their bloodthirsty hymns.

Decisions did not have to be made immediately, and there were many things other than battle to occupy the rebels, including self-organization. The military hierarchy imposed by Lucifer, and still held by the legions that had broken away after the siege, did not favor the Defilers. Belial proved an excellent lieutenant, indeed the one who kept closest to the counsel of the Morningstar, but even in his ranks, those of his House found themselves ill at ease and out of place. The Silver Legion and the Alabaster Legion provided the most opportunities, by recognizing deeds that were not necessarily direct action. But even so, Defilers did better inspiring endeavors from within a

company rather than from a position of command. Those who were promoted often found themselves given tasks to which they were not suited.

There were, as always, exceptions. Belphegor's talent for organization, and her recognition of these problems (which Belial did not seem to share), saw her palace of Ninâtan grow large and powerful, with many Defilers occupied gainfully. Tiamat proved herself admirably in the Alabaster Legion, since she found herself able to soothe the hurts of Slayers under her command, well enough at least so that they could interface with other Houses successfully. (The other lieutenant, Penemue, was less successful, and he achieved little of distinction for his legion until the Time of Babel, ending up being outranked by a lesser Nereid called Hanural.)

Unlike the solitary Abinereth, a Defiler called Enzalthra rose through the ranks of the Ebon Legion to become a baron, thanks to his ability to lead lightning fast raids on enemy positions (along with his consort, the beautiful and deadly Lady Eluria). Unfortunately, Enzalthra was slain in the air above the human city of Dumishal, not long before the Long March would have pitted his cunning against Belial and Lucifer. Although there were rumors that his death had not been at the hands of the angels, his consort Eluria was one of the first to argue for rejoining Lucifer's vision, which satisfied most onlookers that the Crimson Legion had not betrayed its hero.

Among Humans

Of course, the Nereids had not rebelled for the chance to associate with other angels, but even in the presence of humans, where the Defilers had desired to be for so long, they found themselves unsure of what to do. Certainly, they could inspire men and women to the backbreaking work that was needed in those hard times. Yet the length of the work, and the tedium of it, sapped their spirits — perhaps more so even than the humans themselves, many of whom found purpose and a way of forgetting in the simple rhythms of life. Although they had not thought of it in quite that way before, the songs that had come easiest to those of the Fifth House were of celebration. They sang hymns to the wonder of God, laments for the love of humanity from whom they were separated and ballads about the accomplishments of creation. In the long night before the first battle, celebration was easy. Now it was not. In part, that was why battle chants became such an attractive option — they were, in their own way, celebratory.

There were other ways, however. Many of the interactions with humans were done indirectly through dreams and omens, because even more than the other angels, they found frequent direct contact disorientating for the mortals, and often counterproductive. With greater practice at these manipulations and carefully engendered celebration of the less appreciated aspects of life, they could not only inspire humans to immediate action but to ritualize their actions as well. The patterns of daily existence became more important to humans, proving a stabilizing element to help them endure their hard work. Even more useful, the Defiler contrived to make that work into a noble pursuit, so that the lessons spread faster and easier and were not lost with time. Social prestige became a strong force among mortals, which the Defilers manipulated expertly.

Eventually, it became clear that the humans were to be bound closer to the war than mere civilians to be protected. Driven in particular by the Ebon Legion (its leader, Abaddon, was not reticent in his contempt for human "indolence"), but eventually embraced by all of them, humans were required to take up arms. They were expected to protect themselves and attack the enemy's position and own human tribes, if not the loyalist angels themselves.

The work that the Defilers had already done proved invaluable groundwork for these endeavors. Now that humans were proud of their work and strove to better themselves at the expense of their fellows, it was easy to add military training to the list of noble pursuits. Human pride in families and communities over strangers was already developing, and now Defilers added to that, introducing subtle and easily manipulated criteria to alienate one community from those around it. Competition between neighboring cities became fierce, yet that belligerent spirit could be turned on more useful targets as desired.

Although a well-defined military structure was already in place — as used by the rebel angels themselves — Defilers did not push for such a rigid hierarchy among the mortals. Almost instinctively, they inspired individual human "heroes" who would act as free agents, or in small groups, seeking out "adventure" and in so doing, inspire greater numbers of their fellows to do the same (often in a more regimented way). The trials of these heroes became the stuff of legend. Defilers found in them something to celebrate that stirred their own blood, rather than just fodder for their art. Sometimes the humans would find their own danger (there was plenty to be found), and sometimes the angels would direct them with dreams and eerie visitations to seek out particular goals. Sometimes the angels themselves created peril so as to test their heroes in new and bizarre ways. Many died, but even so, the deeds of those who had

been overwhelmed in a distant place were still sung back in the taverns where they had lived. Often an angel would show herself to the dying heroes, promising their spirit would live on, even as their story would. Less often were there promises kept.

Of course, they could have got a similar effect by simply inventing the songs, rather than inspiring the deeds of which to sing — in the same way as the obviously fictional character at the center of *The Chant of Life Long Passing* — and this was suggested at various times. The fact that these were real people, however, making a real mark upon the world — and the fact that some did indeed return to talk of what they had done — lent the tales a verisimilitude that they would not otherwise have had. There was another reason as well, which the Defilers were less forward in presenting. *They* knew the stories were real, so they again had something to delight in that was not the confusion and pain of their own battles.

Some of the tales were short lived, but others grew with the telling. Nimrod was one such hero, a strong and proud man who slew beasts along the river Callaphai — the creatures grown huge and maddened by the upturning of the world. Within a single generation, four cities claimed him as their own, and the beasts were growing larger and more widespread.

Tanee was another example, many years later, in a time when the individual myths of human deeds were solidifying into a mythology that was hard to surpass (though that problem was later addressed by the Defilers themselves, as they emphasized immediate action over tales of dubious pedigree). After leading a series of raids against loyalist lands, Tanee managed to find a weakness in the defenses of Araboth, Caiel's great citadel of lament, leading to a successful offensive from Abaddon's forces (one of a number of such attacks). A year later, Tanee mounted an expedition to Zebul, city of memory, but was never heard from again. A story circulated among some Defilers like a private shame, that she had been shown the records of the war, including the manipulation of her life. Most assumed she'd simply been killed.

All this had the desired effect, in that human children dreamed of swinging swords and fighting the evildoers (often hazily defined), and grew into adults who organized themselves into armies or set out on their own. It had some unexpected consequences as well. No longer was farming and building seen in the same noble light, and although the Defilers strove to keep a balance in order that necessary work was not abandoned, many erred on the side of legend.

Because of the length of the greater war between the angels and demons, there arose a multitude of these heroes over many generations. Few had significant effects by themselves, but the sum of their achievements was incredible. Toward the end of the war, the humans still loyal to God had dwindled into hidden villages and scattered families, often thanks to the efforts of their rebel counterparts. There had also been battles where human troops, enhanced by demon-wrought magic, had overwhelmed a company of angels. The most famous of these incidents was in a small and swampy city called Wassaif, where the city's occupants and a mere three demons (none of them Defilers), slaughtered almost 60 of the enemy in a quickly designed but cunning trap.

Working Together

Of course, there were many things to be done other than pushing humans about the countryside with lures of danger and gold. There were battles with the Heavenly Host, infiltration of the loyalist humans, even great schemes to manage the rivers and the lakes so that water could be diverted to where it was needed and taken from the lands of the enemy. (That water could be a valuable resource — in some ways *the* valuable resource, along with the lay of the land and the presence of angels where they were needed — was another strange lesson of this time.) Others such as Inana of the Iron Legion traveled to bolster the morale of rebel troops, who were often widespread and cut off from the support of a bastion. Some lost themselves in combat, either taking to the sword and relying on their physical skills or adapting their natural talents in strange directions. An infamous example was Vohu Manu, who used song as a weapon — unnerving and disorientating the enemy, sometimes to madness.

Again, the number of rebel Defilers compared to the loyalists proved a great advantage. These events were exciting and terrifying (as the songs made them out to be), but something else as well. Like hard work to humans, they were a way of forgetting, of losing what the angels had been before, until all that was left, was the current mission and the preparation for the next. Some Defilers welcomed that process, but most did not. Such limited consciousness was anathema to their being.

Away from those missions they started to congregate, not with the colleagues they had fought or researched besides, but with others of their House, often from different divisions or legions. They made pilgrimages to the church at Tannilarn, and created their own. They created their own songs, simply for the joy of creation with no practical purpose at all. These were in a dizzying array of styles, with trends of theme and subject matter that would expand rapidly,

and then die away equally fast. There was less emphasis on other forms of art other than architecture and "religious" iconography, both in their well-recognized place. But when they were together, they would talk about all the things they wished for, all the possibilities that seemed open before the Fall, all the art they would like to create. Sometimes, especially within a large group of angels who had not fought together but who understood what they were trying to achieve, it seemed that they could forget the war entirely, rediscover a little of their innocence and take that back with them to the trenches.

By no means did all the Defilers fall into such patterns. In a sense, it was quite an alien way for them to express themselves. Once again, they found themselves most of use among those they were inspiring — at best, slightly in the background so that they did not intrude — so while group meetings of Defilers harked back to their days alone in the oceans, they still felt somewhat unnatural. They were not alone in this feeling. Most other demons were contemptuous of this escapism — even those who tended to congregate within their own Houses — saying that it weakened the group. The lieutenants of the Ebon Legion and the Crimson Legion (even under the command of Belial) often forbade Defilers from traveling far or associating with anyone outside their division. These orders had varying success at different times of the war. The Defilers' own self-consciousness about the meetings meant that they usually obeyed (although they countered direct criticism, in an already old tradition, by saying that nay-sayers were simply jealous). See the section on relics and lost lore for more about Defiler artworks and their attitude toward them.

A Single Atrocity

It was not called the Time of Atrocities for nothing. As each tactic of war moved from shocking to commonplace, another would arise — more devious, cruel and casually brutal. All Houses contributed to the barbarity, but there were those who blamed the Defilers above all others (even from within the House). It was in the nature of the Angels of the Deep to encourage innovation, and certain of them gained notoriety for acts as cruel as any Creation had seen.

Like most things they were involved in, not only did the Defilers perform an action, they tried to engender an attitude so that the action seemed the most natural and desirable outcome. It was not so blatant as the creation of a philosophy in which cruelty was the greatest good, but in word and deed, the House moved toward such a stance. This was a justification for deliberate acts (such as those performed by the Ebon Legion, as it pushed humanity to the limit), and incidental ones. (There was much suffering and horror felt by almost all mortals, regardless of attempts to alleviate it.) The fostering of an attitude — among both demons and humans — that this was in some way inevitable and necessary, however, was not a premeditated act of self-justification. It was simply the instinctual way that the Defilers reacted to the world about them. That was how they were designed to be.

The fact that such a philosophy could exist was first expressed explicitly among the Alabaster Legion. It was said by the Slayers that the more physical sensation, and the greater range of sensation, experienced by a human, the closer his spirit would be bound to the world upon his body's death. It seemed that pain was a more effective feeling than pleasure, at least in the implementation of the theory. A more influential idea also came from within Tiamat's forces, later in the war — that a lack of demonic supervision would only increase the Faith of humanity in the power of demons. The Defiler Nabutra, who was one of those who had presented this idea to Tiamat before the Fall itself, recognizing her words given this new shape. Soon after she presented herself to the enemy city of Araboth, to renounce the war and her own existence.

None of this addressed the deliberate torture of an individual, be it a mortal or a captured member of the enemy — or even of another demon, for some perceived crime. There was no end to this abuse performed by the members of every House, of every legion, but there was less by Defilers than most others. This was not because of kindness or regard for an individual's life — quite the opposite, in fact.

Ninâtan, now greatly enlarged and known as the Palace of Sighs, became the most infamous of the Defiler bastions at the time, set deep below a volcanic peak. Within its halls, the potential of individuals was used to influence the whole race by breeding human with human and experimenting with strange magics and rituals to see which could be carried into the children of those affected. To some Defilers, this was the ultimate expression of their purpose; to others, it was an abomination.

An overlord of the Ebon Legion, Kanasai, tried a different approach, attempting to turn humans into warriors that could be used to directly storm Heaven's bastions. Tens of thousands of them died under his tutelage and then in the fruitless attacks the survivors made. But Kanasai did not stop until he was killed in the Long March. A less famous figure among the demons was Zaphoriel, who spent most of his time

tormenting human tribes, to whom his name became synonymous with madness and power. His main source of amusement was to twist the portents of the stars and the signs to be found in the land, so that the human leaders and sages grew confused and ultimately crazed, subjecting their people to arbitrary and senseless judgments.

It was at the time of the Long March that Fell Knight Sabriel of the Iron Legion wondered at the future of the war with God. "It is not a war of attrition," she mused, to her comrades in the siege upon Kâsdejâ, "because God does not decrease, although we do. It will take a single act to win such a war, and already we have given up all our past and future in an act of love, so love will not suffice. It must be an act of atrocity, then, just a single act, which the angels and the demons will unite against in horror. We have seen the effect that Caine's sacrifice had upon the world. Now who, then, is to provide this greater act, for us all? God, perhaps? Who else can?"

But it seemed no one was listening, for the world was saturated in cruelty, demon was fighting demon, and no one who listened could conceive of worse.

The Rise and Fall of Babel

For many years, it seemed that the tide of atrocity had turned, perhaps for good. After Lucifer's victory against his fellow rebels, he inspired all of them with a vision of the future that would put the barbarity behind them. Few fallen had not been sickened sufficiently to welcome the chance of amends that the Grand Experiment promised.

As with most affairs to do with the lives of humanity, the Defilers were heavily involved. Those under Belial, and from within the Silver Legion (although not those from the Palace of Sighs), were particularly instrumental in the organization. Yet only a single Defiler was chosen to be one of the Watchers, the ten teachers who traveled throughout the world to impart the knowledge that would raise mankind into the realm of gods. Penemue, the former lieutenant who was now a lord of the Iron Legion — and who had a record untainted by disgrace — expressed such enthusiasm that he was chosen to be the last and perhaps greatest of the Watchers. It was he who would impart the gift of written language. Apart from that, the Defilers were charged with inducing in humanity the necessary appreciation of wisdom that would see the Watchers welcomed wherever they traveled.

By this time, the rebel forces had control over all the world apart from the most secure fortresses of the enemy. Humanity also spread over the ocean again for the first time since the Long Night, inspired by a new wanderlust in part engendered by the Defilers (although also by the greater safety of the world which, if not at peace, was not so much at war).

Of course, it did not last. It was said that Asmodeus and Abaddon fomented the betrayal of Babel, but also that Tiamat grew only more maddened during this time and was easily led by them. Although the majority of humans were at last at peace, the horrors of the Time of Atrocities could not be forgotten so easily.

Although they had met only a few times during the war, Tiamat had not forgotten Belphegor's True Name, and he now bound the repentant demon to give up the secrets of the Palace of Sighs. These rituals were combined with Abaddon's knowledge of flesh and certain artifacts, and the nephilim were born soon after, the very first of them fathered by Tiamat herself. As the battles against that monstrous breed destroyed all that had been built, she frenzied as a storm above the world, and as a dragon through the dreams of mortals. Even as the rebel forces were overwhelmed by the Heavenly Host, and forced into the Pit, she raged endlessly, even against her former colleagues — unknowing or uncaring what punishment God had decreed for them all.

The rest of her House was scarcely more rational. In the battles against the nephilim, the humans often sided against the demons and threw down the wonders that had been taught them. The Defilers did not look to Lucifer and his eternal defiance, so they did not feel his absence as strongly as the other Houses. Humanity had already left them. Hell was only the completion of the pattern.

Out of the Abyss

Whatever glories they witnessed in the early days of Creation, whatever horrors they experienced in the war and in Hell itself, Defilers have not yet lost their innate sense of wonder (even if it takes the shock of human memory to reawaken their interest). Perhaps it is only their new, limited senses, but the modern world is a vast and complex tapestry, ripe for exploration, even as it falls inward under its own sprawling and festering weight.

Among Humans

For most Defilers, humanity remains the focus of their existence. They did not fight for Lucifer, and they felt more betrayed by the sons of Adam and Eve than they did by God Himself. Beyond that, the attitudes of different Defilers vary widely. Some

become fixated on a very small scale (although not usually down to the level of a single individual). They might spend their time trying to elevate their small circle of thralls without regard for anyone else or concentrate on an equally small vendetta — perhaps against those she feels have harmed her host. At the other end of the scale, they might be fighting for, or against, entire cultures or societies whose raison d'être stirs the demon's passions.

Just because they are focused on humanity, however, does not mean they understand what they see. All the potential still seems to be there, but in the modern age, it is treated as an aberration. At best, art is a pretty thing around which small groups gather or the rich bicker over; at worst, it is a bland excrement of the commercial process. It is not even that there is a shortage of beauty — beauty, indeed, seems the great obsession of the age — but it has reached the level of cooking shows or wildlife documentaries. It's a brief distraction on TV that somebody else is doing, so you can feel good without actually doing anything.

Therefore, something must be done to reawaken humanity's sense of passion and adventure, but the path to such a transformation remains unclear. Since one of the House's great achievements during the war was the inspiration of multiple generations of human heroes, many Defilers are hoping to repeat that achievement. The new shape of society has made this harder than it was before, however. There is no lack of "heroes" in the modern age, but they are generally revered in a single narrow field of endeavor and disregarded beyond that sphere — the sporting field and the entertainment industry provide the most examples. Anyone trying to make meaningful contributions in the political arena is usually derided and certainly distrusted, for his efforts. As such, a range of options exists, which can provide good role models and examples (not least of all to the Defilers themselves, trying to understand what inspires those of the modern world), but often little more. Perhaps some of that fame and occasional passion might be put to better use with careful handling.

Individual Defilers either decide to fight that trend or go with the flow. Either approach presents its problems. In addition, the sheer lack of time can be the greatest hurdle. No longer can anyone be confident that there will be generations to inspire — the pace of change seems much, much faster than that. It seems the Defilers will have to make do with what they find around them and hope that those they temper for greatness do not break.

Thralls

Defilers are more comfortable with a group than with separate followers. Of course, almost all demons favor multiple thralls, but most find it both simpler and more secure if they do not know each other. There are several advantages to a more tightly knit structure, including the mutual support (half reassurance, half competition) of the chosen few who know the truth. For Defilers, it is simply that they relate to the group better, although it is still a good idea to have several groups rather than a single one. Whether they focus on an already existing assemblage, start with an individual and then move on to her acquaintances, or enthrall suitable people and introduce them after the fact, depends upon the situation. In addition, they will often be satisfied with people of a lower Faith potential, even ones who do not donate any daily Faith, as long as they fit well into the group.

Some Defilers decide that a sex cult is the way to go, in part because of the mythology of the succubus (which they themselves might believe in their confusion), and in the hope of cohesion and an outlet for inspired passions. They soon discover, however, that sex by itself is not enough. If it becomes the defining social mechanism, things will likely disintegrate quickly or simply never supply enough Faith to be worthwhile. Most also discover that participating in such practices is unwise. Without careful handling, close contact is more likely to burn a thrall out than anything else. Sex (either as the promise or the practice of it) can be an effective lure, but the humans involved lose all sense of the group over time and focus only on the demon herself — often achieving extremes of narcissism or plummeting self-respect in the process.

Instead, a structure like an artist commune or even a small-scale political movement is ideal. Within it, the thralls can experience the world in its many aspects (especially if pointed in the right direction), so as to gain a true appreciation of it and of their place within it. It is then that they are of most use to the demon.

As for deciding who to enthrall, there are many possibilities. The vain actually make poor followers, as they are often crushed by the realization of physical perfection, but those who are proud of their accomplishments are more likely to keep a sense of themselves when the nature of their patron, and the cosmos, is revealed. There are more sources of this pride than artists and activists. For example, the aggressive and cocksure men and women of the inner cities might be less likely to cultivate a love of nature but, as long as they are not too brutalized, they can make an effective and pragmatic group (and be good in a fight besides).

Then there are the religious and far-sighted, the very opposites of the type to which the Defiler was initially drawn. If she acts carefully, she can create a relationship — perhaps even a friendship — and



slowly reveal the truth of what she is and what her existence implies about the world. She must then hope that the chosen thrall can justify his or her actions well enough to stay focused and sane. If so, a great deal of Faith may be attained from a single individual. This is also a microcosm of how the House deals with humanity in general.

The Wider Society

As they encourage their thralls to understand the world, so they encourage them to change it. But their interest and influence does not stop at the few with whom they have made pacts. They seek out important individuals and ideas and often give them a little nudge in the right direction. They are not so concerned with the accuracy of the ideas (nor the morality of the individual) but with how they might strengthen the social fabric — be an example, for good or for ill. It would likely devastate most thralls, or others that they encounter, to find that the demon is simply not that interested in the concepts at stake, but rather in how widely and deeply they are perceived. She might set up a group so as to provoke an opposite response, and she will do it with love and care even if it costs the original members their lives or their sanity.

Beset by the memories and experiences of a single human, under the continuing stress of Torment, and remembering her own history as an individual within the great war against Heaven, however, a Defiler's dedication to such an abstract philosophy can never be perfect. She will find that there *are* both important and trivial issues about which she genuinely cares and people (or at least groups of people) whom she does not want to see hurt. Actions that should seem natural might only produce feelings of guilt (and strengthen the hooks Torment already has in her soul).

In addition, subtle manipulation on a wide scale needs a deep understanding of the real way ideas and concepts propagate throughout society, and the people who are going to receive them. Without this, any manipulation is likely to be completely ineffectual or spin out in unforeseen directions. A newly arrived fallen will most likely have enormous difficulty with this. She knows the theory (indeed, she *is* the theory), but the sheer size of the global village and the deep differences of culture found within even a seemingly simple township, for example, make practical application extremely difficult. Most understand at least that the perception of a culture carried by its own entertainment and information sources is extremely unreliable at face value (once again, they wrote the book), so careful observation, travel and experimentation are going to be required.

In theory, these difficulties should simply be part of the process of evolution within themselves, matching their manipulation of the environment. In practice, they might not have that luxury. The complexity of demon politics, the danger of the Earthbound and the distractions of the world mean there are many pressing priorities. The fact that the Defiler is likely to have strictly local concerns, at least to start with, does reduce the problem to a more manageable size. By starting with a particular area (from a tenement up to a small town, perhaps), or an otherwise limited subsection of the species, such as all those of a particular profession, she can prepare herself for the larger task she likely sees before her.

Among Demons

Despite the numbers that were drawn out as Earthbound, Defilers were not the most numerous of the Houses to escape Hell when the walls cracked. Those that did speared straight through the intervening planes as fast as they could, taking the first available human body they encountered in their hunger for sensation.

As a result of this all-consuming hunger to experience the physical world, the House spent a long time getting itself organized, compared to most others. It is not in a Defiler's nature to seek out others like herself, and many tried to ignore the other refugees from Hell who quickly appeared, preferring to seek out the wonders hidden around them as individuals. Doing so has been impossible for most, and they are forced away from their newfound proximity to humans to return again to the demon society. Either the dangers they encounter send them running for shelter, or the courts gather them up as part of the fold.

Other Defilers have not been so reticent. A Lammasu might have had her fill of the plodding sameness of humanity during the war. She might have a grand vision and believe that only the power of a demon court can see it to fruition. She might see her social skills as being more relevant practiced on demons than anybody else, or maybe she just wants to congregate with those she has fought beside.

The Courts

As in the original legions, the Defilers have found themselves somewhat ill suited to life in the infernal courts. This time, however, the relationship between the courts and the humans that surround them has changed dramatically. Indeed, the whole system is less stable than it used to be because of the greatly depleted numbers of demons, and because it is possible to have several major factions represented in the same court (as opposed to the different legions which all had separate courts of their own). Therefore, Defilers find themselves more strategically important to their fellow demons, so they have more opportunity to influence the structure has a whole.

The Factions

The organization of the factions is a little more complicated than that of the courts, and the Defilers are once again fitting into these global power structures better than they expected. They are particularly good at navigating between the large-scale view of their faction and their regional concerns of their court, and they can facilitate communication and cooperation between the two.

Some say that without the Defilers, the Raveners would not even be a faction, just a group of individuals trying to destroy everything. While this is overstating the case, the House is nonetheless an important part of keeping the Ravener philosophy focused on achievable goals that lead toward their larger objective. The other faction of which Defilers are an important part is the Faustians. The faction does attract other demons who share similar characteristics, however, so the achievement of the Defilers as a whole is less noticeable.

The Defilers in the Cryptic faction are usually traveling researchers. The few who join the Luciferans are often more focused on being a part of the hierarchy to begin with, so they fit neatly into the ranks. Only very rare individual Defilers have joined the Reconcilers. The faction actively encourages others to join, though — perhaps in the hope that it will gain a better reputation among demons and more of an influence over humans.

Famous Names

It is sometimes difficult to keep account of the Defilers in the modern world. Some keep their Celestial Names to themselves, and they use a variety of human identities who might or might not look anything like each other. But there are many who are easier to pin down, particularly the ones who hold some sort of rank. Even then, there are sometimes rumors of who they might be whenever they can escape the bureaucracy for a while.

The House does have some representation among the upper echelons of factions, which are as close to global organizations as the fallen currently have. Senivel, the first of her House to reveal herself to humanity, is now one of the leaders of the Faustians, along with the Devil Belphigor (not to be confused with his soulmate Belphegor, of the Palace of Sighs). Suphlatus, the Duchess of Dust, was once a companion of Senivel (some say lover), but she now leads the

Raveners with the Slayer Sauriel. Neither of these — and perhaps no one else currently on Earth — is a match for Belial, the Great Beast, who has a large proportion of Los Angeles under his thumb.

The following are a number of individuals without anything like that sort of power, but who have nonetheless made their mark on the world, within both the human and demonic sphere.

Sabriel

Sabriel first came to the attention of other fallen when she negotiated what amounted to a peace settlement between Faustian and Reconciler demons within Vienna. She has kept moving since then, spending most of her time within Europe, venturing occasionally into Asia and the Americas. Her caustic manner and ever-changing appearance and priorities have made her a memorable figure in the courts she has visited. Whether it is a trade in relics, information or fealty, she always seems to know who to approach and what the price will be. There seems to be no court she will not enter, from refined Paris to the degraded band of Raveners in Brussels — though rumors that she has consorted with Earthbound remain unproven.

The only real constant about her politics that can be discerned is her relation with humans. She delights in the inspiration of artists, regardless of their discipline or the scale of their work. She drives them toward obsession, both with their work and with herself (or, as the human might believe, himself). This leads almost invariably to tragedy. Suicide, insanity and acts of mass murder have all afflicted those to whom she has turned her attention. Whether this is Sabriel's aim, the byproduct of her pushing too hard for greatness or part of some other game has been impossible to determine.

Of course, such a figure attracts intense interest, and it was Talakine, a Scourge and member of the Cryptics in Athens, who managed to discover the identity of her host. It seems Christina Vadrudakis had been a headstrong young woman who had come to Athens for a university education, abandoning her family business in an obscure coastal town. Hospital and legal records told the story of a failed marriage, and perhaps abuse that led to a miscarriage. She had been declared dead after her car was found near the sea-cliffs of her home town. Local politicking in the court meant this information became public knowledge, and within a fortnight, Christina's father had died in a mysterious fire. When asked about this, Sabriel shrugged and said she'd either done it herself or killed the bastard responsible, and the Cryptic had been wrong anyway. What any of this means (if anything) is unknown, although it is said that Talakine is taking more precautions for personal safety.

In the meantime, Sabriel has kept moving. She has a growing list of friends and enemies (not all her negotiations have been for peace), and even her allies seem disquieted by her bitter intensity and uncertain agenda.

Bravakh

Swimming the 112 miles across the Straits of Florida between Key West and Cuba was a strange ambition — it was not even the longest swim of Jill Allison's career. The preparations (from the newly designed shark cage, to negotiations with various charities) had all gone well, the weather seemed to be behaving itself, and so the marathon stretch started. The swim was proceeding as planned, until almost a third of the way through, when suddenly Jill screamed and sank quickly. The attendant boat quickly removed her limp body from the cage. "Heart attack," the doctor shouted as he tried to resuscitate her. But suddenly her heart was beating fully and strong. She opened her eyes and screamed again, this time in laughter and defiance of God.

By the time the helicopter arrived to take her back for further medical treatment, she has disappeared. The doctor, and others on the boat, said that everything was going to be alright — albeit, with a worryingly glazed look in their eyes. The Coast Guard quickly arrived as well, to search further (including the unlikely possibility she *had* continued her swim without assistance), and there was a debate about what charges, if any, were appropriate. Fifteen hours later, Jill Allison climbed up onto the docks in Havana Harbor and asked where all the cameras were.

It became quite a sensation. The swim itself, of course, but that became overshadowed by the political ramifications as Jill declared her undying love of Fidel Castro, all Cubans, and indeed everyone everywhere. Pressure by American officials to restrain her enthusiasm backfired, and suddenly it seemed to be becoming a full-scale political incident.

Jill did end up back in the United States, where all sorts of people crowded around her — including members of Miami's infernal court. The entity that had taken possession of Jill's body was called Bravakh, it was discovered, although her memories before Jill were almost nonexistent. Bravakh quickly discovered that the court in Miami was not to its tastes, and so it sought out other demons, ending up a member of the Faustian faction, where it felt at home (if not entirely sure about all the intricacies of its new position). Meanwhile, Jill's position as a magnet for controversy has continued as communists and political extremists of all stripes, fitness and survival fanatics, and more than a few of the mad seek her out. Not only that, but the press has remained interested. Bravakh is starting

to shape that attention with skill, and many wonder what it will be able to achieve.

Indrahi

Indrahi was one of the angels under the command of Tiamat, and he dived enthusiastically into rebellion and found a place for himself within the Crimson Legion. The Defiler spent much of the war tending the humans who lived within the citadel-city of Genhinnom, a satisfying task in some ways, though he often yearned for wider vistas. Apart from some trivial errands, he really only saw the world during the Time of Babel and the disaster that followed. Part of him thrilled at the wildness and chaos of it all, but in his heart, he wanted the more ordered environment of Lucifer's bastion.

Billy Rohan was a mid-list Hollywood actor whose screen presence was one of lithe beauty and quiet passion. It seemed he was on the way up, but his fans were devastated at the news of an accident high in the snowfields of New Zealand where he had been filming a movie. Two days later, it was announced that it had all been a bit of a false alarm — Billy was fine, perhaps even better than ever. Actually, though, it was Indrahi who was fine.

Since then, he has been busy. Billy has continued filming, and word has gotten out that his performances have matured into something truly mesmerizing. Indrahi has been in touch with a number of infernal courts and has become one of the highest profile Defilers to pledge allegiance to the Luciferans. He is using his position to strengthen his contacts among mortals, and it is said that he is using his persuasive powers to green-light a new film, perhaps one to somehow further the Luciferan cause. In the new Hollywood, confused by devastation in Los Angeles and the complicated tapestry of war and religious fervor in the world, he may have a good chance. (Of course there are other agendas fighting over such a powerful medium, though.)

One oddity about Indrahi's appearance is that a number of demons believe he had already been on Earth before Billy's accident. Perhaps his original host met some misfortune — or perhaps it was no accident that Indrahi came to inhabit the body of such a promising young star.

Relics and Lost Lore

There are not many examples of Defiler relics to be found in the caches uncovered by the fallen in modern times, but some do exist. Some sculptures, murals and paintings can be found, as well as more practical tools, which often lack the durability of Malefactor equipment. There are more rituals to be uncovered, as the House designed a great many of them and distributed them so that they would not be lost. (As with equipment, though, the results were sometimes not as useful as others.)

Relics

Like the Malefactors, Defilers used a startlingly wide range of materials to construct their artifacts, though with different criteria in mind. Aesthetics is of major concern for even the most pragmatic of tools.

Lyrupham's Robe

Lyrupham, the Mistress of Joyful Tears, was considered one of the great muses of the Fifth House, an inspiration to mortal and fallen alike. Although the Time of Atrocities left its mark on her, her presence was welcomed wherever she traveled, raising the hopes of the rebel forces. Most notable of her possessions was her robe of shimmering color, all greens and blues and browns and hazels, trimmed with an ever-changing skein of liquid marble. She had joined the Silver Legion and was charged with moving swiftly about the world seeking knowledge to be put to use in Tabâ'et', the legion's labyrinthine and sulfurous tower. The last time she was seen was just before the Battle of the Red Fords.

The malhim had only recently been revealed to the rebels, and they had been making a series of daring raids on a great variety of locations. The Ebon Legion in particular was hard hit and reeling, trying to cope with an enemy that had transformed its tactics and capabilities overnight. A group of Ebon commanders had gathered at Red Fords to discuss this in solitude, but they too were attacked, and although the malhim were driven off, casualties were high. After the battle, Lyrupham's robe was discovered nearby, torn in great slashes and splashed with blood. In the ground was scrawled in a series of sigils within the dirt "Blinded by Beauty." Nobody knew what this meant, or whether Lyrupham was dead or not, but when Abaddon himself declared that she had been a spy for the forces of Heaven, no one dared contradict him. Her name was not mentioned again, and the robe disappeared into the vaults of Tabâ'et'.

Now there are rumors among the Cryptics that the robe has resurfaced among the possessions of a recently deceased art collector in New York. The liquid marble has long since dried or drained away. The splashes of blood (no one even knows if it was Lyrupham's) appear to have been carefully cut away at some point in the relic's long life span. What

remains are tattered strips of a diaphanous material that still catches the eye with its inconstant shades and hues. Their reappearance has provoked some renewed speculations about Lyrupham's fate, and Gipontel, leader of the Cryptics, has offered a substantial reward for any fallen who can unearth the facts behind the relic's reappearance.

System: Activating the relic requires one point of Faith if the wearer is a demon or a point of Willpower if the wearer is a mortal. When it is active, the robe reduces the difficulty of all Empathy, Intuition, Leadership and Performance rolls by one for the duration of the scene.

The Chant of Life Long Passing

One of the first and most successful compositions made after the declaration of war, the chant has the potential to be a powerful tool in the hands of a skilled user. Its lyrics are in Enochian, and its structure is complex, especially to modern minds and vocal chords. Just the sound of it, however, is enough to have an atavistic effect on mortal minds. Any demon who knows enough of the words and tune can use it to inspire humans who are fighting for her cause.

No one knows for certain how many total verses of the chant were written. The chant was known to have continually evolved over the course of the war, and it is believed that multiple versions came to exist, each evoking a different set of emotions and conferring different abilities on its mortal audience. There are numerous efforts underway by newly escaped Lammasu to reconstruct these chants, gleaning scattered fragments from human myth and the memories of their fellow Defilers. Verses of the chant have even become a sort of coin of exchange between Defilers of the Cryptic faction, trading verses or bits of verses in exchange for other favors. There is also talk of continuing the evolution of the chant in the modern age, crafting the song to speak directly to mortals today, an idea bitterly debated among the senior members of the House.

By no means do all demons see the chant as a mere tool in interacting with humans. For some it recalls the beauty and potential of Enochian, and thus is to be cherished — perhaps sung ceremonially during certain occasions at court. For others it is turgid propaganda for a war that is long over or, at least, one that has changed in form so markedly that its use is irrelevant.

System: Performing the chant requires the expenditure of a Faith point and a successful Manipulation + Performance roll (difficulty 8). If successful, mortals within earshot of the chant are rendered immune to the effects of mind control and are filled with a sense of courage and resolve. The difficulty of all Willpower rolls for mortals within earshot of the chant decreases by one for the duration of the scene. Mortals are unable to perform the chant in its ancient form.

It is rumored that a variation of the chant exists that can heal the mind of a mortal, erasing the scars of a traumatic life and restoring a listener's sanity. This variation of the chant can affect only a single mortal at a time, and it requires the expenditure of two Faith points per use instead of one. If the chant is successfully performed, make a Willpower roll for the mortal listener (difficulty 7). If that roll is successful, the mortal is healed of any temporary or permanent derangements.

Iesu's Caul

Birth cauls — the membrane covering the head of some newly born children — have long been reputed to be a protection from drowning. In the town of Kalogeri, on one of the many Greek islands, a church has laid claim to ownership of the caul of Jesus himself, which local legend held was kept to protect the sailors among whom the young Messiah grew up. When Sabriel investigated the claim, she found it misnamed. The half-fossilized tissue was a thing of power, but it was far older than Christ. This relic's exact provenance is unknown. Several theories exist, some suggesting it to be the caul of a nephilim or the byproduct of one of Belphegor's blasphemous experiments in the Palace of Sighs. Yet another theory points to the possibility that Iesu's Caul is derived from a race of beings that came to be long after the war and the exile of the fallen, an idea that fascinates and disturbs some Defilers.

The effect of this relic is to protect its owner, and those bound by a bond of blood, from the effects of storm and raging water. It does not protect against drowning explicitly (it won't help someone caught in a sealed container of water, for example), but anyone caught in rough seas will be buoyed to the surface and slide harmlessly over sharp rocks. Further, evocations and rituals based on the Lore of Storms will do no harm to the bearer of the caul.

System: Activating the caul's effects requires the expenditure of either a Faith point if the owner is a demon or a Willpower point if the owner is mortal. When activated, the caul protects the owner and those individuals who have a bond of blood with the owner for a period of days equal to the owner's Faith (or Faith potential). The nature of the relationship seems flexible but must be related to blood. It might be familial (parents, siblings or children), created by some sort of blood ritual, or even a simple transfusion. There is no apparent range limit to this effect.

Individuals protected by the caul have the difficulty of all Athletics or Survival rolls relating to swimming or living on the seas reduced by two. Any damage inflicted by the direct effects of a storm — being battered by water, thrown against rocks or hit by natural lightning — is negated.

Jacincati's Trident

Jacincati was a fell knight in service to Abinereth, a fearsome guerilla fighter known for his legendary skill with an obsidian trident called the Bane of Angels. When Jacincati was eventually trapped and killed by a pack of vengeful malhim, it was believed that the trident was destroyed — until recently. The artifact was found drifting on a boat that had been conducting illegal salvage operations off the Venezuelan coast. Reconstructing events, a team of Cryptics conjectured that one of the crew had been possessed by a demon after some sort of accident. The demon had swum down and retrieved the weapon (presumably he had memories of it, or it had called to him), then returned to attack everyone on board, only to be eventually shot dead by the ship's captain. Byproducts of the trident's attack had already disabled the ship and all electronics, so the few remaining crew died from their wounds and exposure to the elements. The Cryptics believe that the weapon had been hidden in an even greater cache of relics somewhere along the ocean floor, though why the malhim would attempt to conceal such potent tools remains a mystery.

System: The Bane of Angels is a trident made from obsidian with a grip wrapped in strips of shark hide, and it inflicts Strength + 2 lethal damage. Activating it requires a Faith roll if the wielder is a demon or the expenditure of a Willpower point if the wielder is a mortal, and its effects last for the duration of the scene. When activated, the relic inflicts aggravated damage instead of lethal, and the trident's obsidian points penetrate all forms of mundane armor without effort. Only relic armor types (enhanced, enchanted or demonic) or armor conferred by apocalyptic forms can be used to soak damage inflicted by the trident. Finally, the activated relic emits a powerful magnetic field that disrupts electronic devices within a radius in yards equal to the wielder's Faith score. Any electronic device, from light bulbs to computers, ceases to function within this area of effect, and if the wielder's Faith score is greater than 7, the disruption is permanent.

Man Beside a Tree

Belial's palace had many treasures and artworks throughout it, including a large series of life-size sculptures of humans crafted from a substance called kiatum, a pliable form of rock that used to exist beneath the oceans — similar to magma but cooler (roughly 480° F). Its most interesting property is that it is able to retain its heat indefinitely, and with proper handling, keep its shape as well. Recently, several fallen have reported that an Earthbound cult had grown up in a Southern Russian town near Novosibirsk. It seems that the reliquary of the Earthbound is none other than Man Beside a Tree, one of Belial's ancient sculptures.

The Earthbound seems to be a Defiler called Basirajkael, a minor fell knight of the Silver Legion. The statue is far more interesting, and now that the news is semi-public, several factions are aching to lay claim to it. There are a number of reasons for this interest. As a reminder of humankind in the days of Eden, it is a piece of art of singular rarity and beauty in this age. It might also reveal clues to the location of the rest of Belial's treasures, which would be greater by many magnitudes than any single piece. In addition, kiatum was a rare substance, even in the ancient days, and the practically inclined (mostly Malefactors) think they could put the material to good use. And finally, some think that one of his old possessions might be used to influence Belial, for good or for ill.

But although Basirajkael (if that is who it really is) is not greatly powerful, her cult is well established, and recent attempts to "liberate" the statue have all been repelled.

System: This relic does not have any special abilities per se, but besides being the reliquary of a fairly "young" Earthbound, the statue almost certainly bears a significant portion of Belial's True Name. A demon or mortal in possession of the statue can attempt to glean fragments of the Great Beast's True Name from the relic using the system described on page 255 of the **Demon** core rules. How many parts of the name can be gleaned from the statue is up to the Storyteller to decide.

The material kiatum causes aggravated damage due to its extreme heat. Without careful preparation, keeping the statue from destroying its surroundings is very difficult. There are many modern materials that can withstand the heat, but an extremely large cooling system is needed to make the air around it bearable.

The Manacles of Ashmael

Most demons believe Ashmael to be an obscure Defiler craftsman, perhaps one who had spent most of his time in the depths of Belial's palace before the war. There are even various stories of the early battles he died in, after which his handiwork went on to become the unofficial symbol of the Defiler House. Actually, Ashmael is the fictitious protagonist of a song that muses on the ties between "angel" and human, and his

manacles started as purely metaphorical creations. Later many different objects were created and given that name, though the most widespread ones were ones that the captured did not *want* to remove. Although they were designed and usually used by Defilers, they were constructed by Malefactors of the Silver Legion, and the secrets of that construction seem to be lost. Some five or six of these relics have survived into modern times, though it is possible that others are waiting to be found in hidden caches around the world.

Although they are symbolic of the House as a whole, the manacles also came to take upon more complicated shadings of symbolism — much more satisfying to the Crimson Legion, which protected humanity, than to the Ebon Legion, which exploited it, for example. In the modern times, Faustian Defilers are likely to see the manacles as symbolizing their linked destiny with (and power over) humanity, while both Raveners and Reconcilers see them as chains to be broken.

System: Closing a set of these manacles about the wrists of a prisoner creates a literal bond between captive and captor, allowing said captor to share the captive's every thought and emotion. The manacles will not lock in place without the expenditure of a Faith point — unlike many infernal relics, the manacles are specifically designed to be activated by the fallen alone. Once activated, the captor is constantly aware of the location of her captive relative to herself. She knows how far away and in what direction he can be found at all times. Further, by focusing her attention, she can eavesdrop on what her captive is thinking. Make a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 7). If successful, the captor can read the captive's thoughts for the duration of the turn.

The manacles have no lock that can be picked or forced. It is possible to break them open with enough force, with considerable risk to the wearer. The manacles have an effective pool of 10 dice to soak damage, and every health level soaked is passed on to the wearer as a health level of aggravated damage. The manacles themselves can withstand six health levels of damage before they are broken open, and once broken, they cannot be used again. The only safe way to open the manacles is for the captor to willingly release them. With a single touch, the manacles fall from the captor's wrists.

The Tears of Tiamat

Only a few of the strange spheres called the Tears of Tiamat are known to exist today. Each is about an inch in diameter, made of a smooth black crystalline substance that reflects light strangely, like the refracted colors of oil on water. They are said to literally be the tears shed by Tiamat in her final days of insanity before being banished to the Abyss. Two have been discovered near the Ravener stronghold of Lemuria, another one has turned up as part of tribute to a fledgling infernal court in Pretoria, South Africa, and there is a rumor that one is part of a private archaeological collection in New York. Another rumor is circulating that these are actually fakes being manufactured by an Earthbound Defiler somewhere on the African continent, but there is no proof of that. (Tiamat herself is still in the Abyss, which most fallen regard as a good thing.)

System: The Tears of Tiamat have a number of properties. If worn against the skin, the wearer's Manipulation increases by one. (The Attribute can exceed 5 in this fashion, but the effect of multiple tears does not stack.) If placed in an eye socket, Charisma goes up by one as well, and the "wearer" gains the ability to influence the dreams of mortals. The wearer must be able to touch the mortal while she is asleep to use this power. Roll Manipulation + Intuition with a difficulty equal to the mortal's Willpower. If successful, the demon can sense and manipulate the mortal's dreams, altering the dreamscape or injecting vivid images that the mortal remembers upon waking. Mortals who receive suggestions (or warnings) in this fashion will act upon them, even subconsciously, over a period of days equal to the wearer's Faith score (or Faith potential).

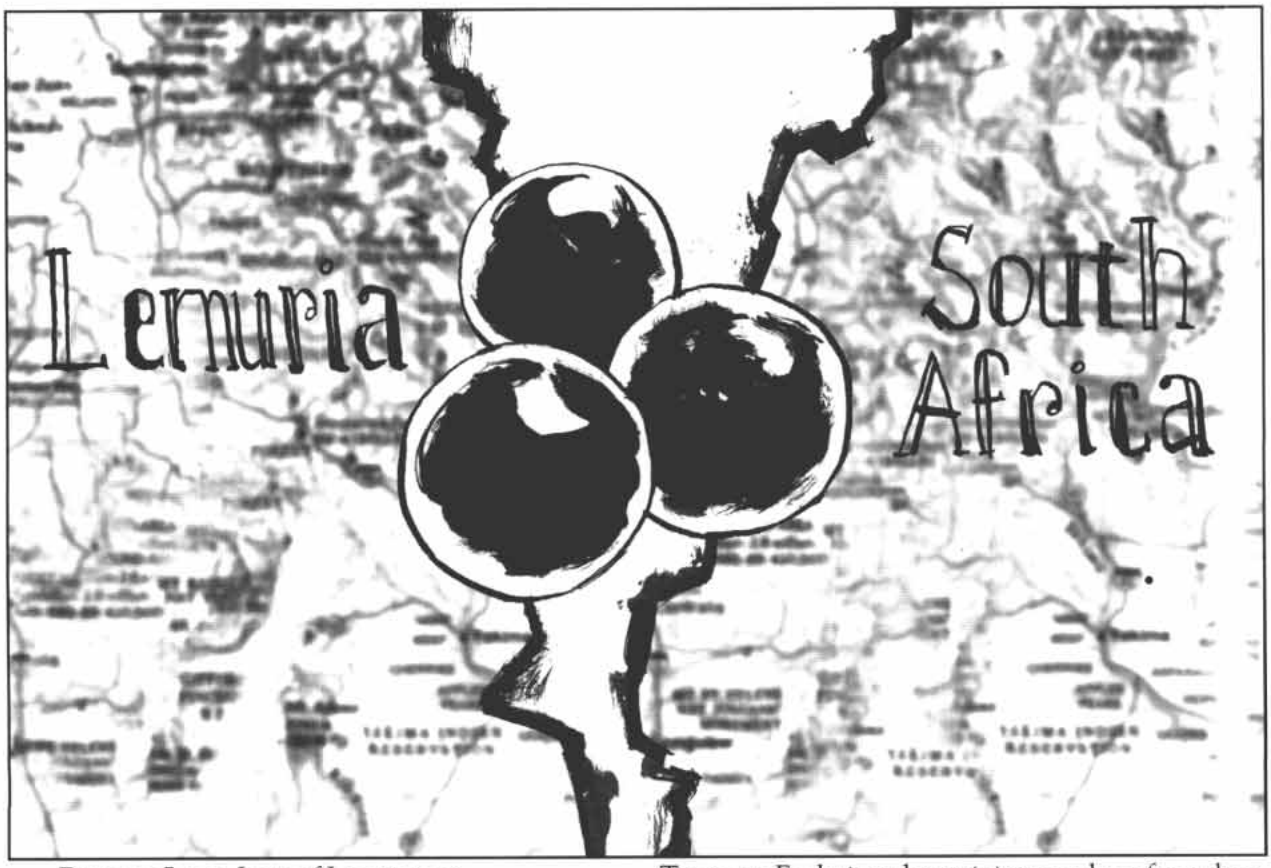
Rituals

Although it is not believed that Defilers were the first to develop rituals, they immediately saw their application and became enthusiastic advocates for their use. The very concept of power surging through a group, becoming more than the sum of its parts, is a sacred one to the House. It has a sacredness that often supersedes the profane (or, at least, abhorrent) effects most rituals produced.

Horn of Truesight

This ritual influences the dreams of the recipient, but only as a filter. Only things that are true will appear in dreams, but the ritual does not influence what those dreams might be. If the recipient was to have had false dreams, they simply would not occur, and nothing would take their place.

Traditionally this ritual was bound into a circlet of horn taken from a creature of the oceans to make a permanent enchanted item. Since no suitable creatures currently exist, however, its use is strictly temporary (unless someone researches a suitable variation or breeds a creature to provide the material).



Primary Lore: Lore of Longing ••
Secondary Lore: Lore of Patterns •
Base Cost: 6

Restrictions: The recipient must be within sight of the Ankida for the duration of casting.

Minimum Casting Time: 9 minutes

System: A roll is necessary for this ritual only if an external force tries to implant false dreams into the recipient. If such is the case, roll the Ankida's Manipulation + Intuition in the same way that Perception + Alertness is used to resist illusions (see the core rulebook, page 171). If this roll is successful, it indicates that the dream could not break the barrier. Otherwise, the ritual's effects are such that hidden truths about the dreamer's own personality are revealed, allowing her to gain greater insight into herself and possibly restore lost confidence or conviction. At the Storyteller's discretion, the recipient of this ritual might regain one or more lost Willpower points upon awaking may overcome a temporary derangement.

The protective aspect of this ritual is effective for as many nights as the Ankida has points of Faith.

Torment: Instead of filtering natural dreams, the ritual creates its own — dreams of fear and paranoia that make it impossible to rest. The effects of the ritual last for a number of days equal to the Ankida's Torment. Each time the recipient awakens from sleep within that time frame, he loses one die from all Mental dice pools, though no dice pool may be reduced below one die. The recipient can attempt to avoid this erosion of mental faculties by remaining awake, requiring Stamina or Willpower rolls as the Storyteller deems appropriate. Once the ritual effect ends and the recipient gains a full night of undisturbed sleep, his mental faculties return to normal.

Variation: Another version of the ritual, with the same components, filters out true dreams, instead of the opposite. It is easier to create an enchanted object with this version, since it requires ivory from a sea creature — the tusks of a walrus or narwhal will suffice.

Liquid Assassin

This simple but potentially lethal ritual literally forces water into a victim's lungs, drowning him far from the presence of any large body of water.

Primary Lore: Lore of Storms ••
Secondary Lore: Lore of the Fundament ••
Base Cost: 8

Restrictions: The Ankida must hold a vial of quicksilver in her hand during the casting of the ritual, and the target must be within the Ankida's line of sight at the ritual's culmination.

Minimum Casting Time: 16 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Science (difficulty 7). Each success represents a quantity of moisture drawn from the victim's surrounding environment that condenses on the victim's skin and slowly flows into his mouth and nostrils. The victim can attempt to fling the water from his skin with a Strength + Dodge roll (difficulty 7), with each success canceling one of the Ankida's successes. Each unsaved success inflicts one health level of lethal damage per turn for a number of turns equal to the Ankida's Faith score. Using towels or other absorbent material has no effect on the water, but high temperatures will evaporate it. Every 10 degrees of heat above 90 degrees Fahrenheit cancels one of the Ankida's successes each turn.

Torment: All the water between the Ankida and the victim (and a yard on either side of that line), acts in a similar manner, trying to kill every mortal in the affected area.

Variation: If Lore of the Winds •• is used instead of Fundament, then the ritual becomes far more beneficial, allowing the recipients (either a single individual, or all the members participating in the ritual) to breathe beneath water for one hour per success rolled on Constitution + Science. Adding Fundament • to the Winds •• version allows the recipients to resist water pressure as well.

Prenatal Guardian

Before the war, one of the functions of the Angels of the Deep was to protect children growing in the womb. Few, however, had the time or even desire to do so during the darker days of the war. This ritual was developed to provide a similar function, in order to assuage the guilt felt by some Defilers (though others used it as a tool of propaganda and control over the human population). It was also one of the few rituals relating to birth not developed in the Palace of Sighs, so it has escaped the terrible reputation of similar effects. (In the confusion of the modern fallen, though, the distinction may be lost.)

Primary Lore: Lore of Transfiguration •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Storms ••, Lore of the Flesh •

Base Cost: 18

Restrictions: Must be cast upon a pregnant woman within one week of conception.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Roll Stamina + Medicine (difficulty 8). Each success protects against a negative influence on the growing fetus. Such an influence might be the transmission of a disease or poison from the mother's body, the development of a congenital disease or even miscarriage. When the baby is born, any remaining successes not used will increase the baby's potential Attributes at the Storyteller's discretion. These rituals can create child prodigies whose talents far exceed those of their peers, creating a potential resource for unscrupulous fallen. There are rumors that monstrous demons and even Earthbound continue to refine this ritual as a means of creating superhuman vessels for themselves or their still-imprisoned superiors, sometimes using isolated villages to breed scores of altered children for their experimentations.

This ritual can be cast more than once during the one-week period after conception, but the successes do not stack. Instead, the roll with the highest number of successes is used. It can be cast only once per day per woman. If the woman is bearing more than one child, then each is affected, but the number of children is subtracted from the number of successes.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual creates a soulless twin of the unborn child. Instead of shielding the child from disease or malformation, these evils are passed onto the twin, yet the power of the ritual ensures that the twin will survive its deformities and be born as a feral, bloodthirsty monster. Like the low-Torment version of this ritual, extra successes increase this twin's Attributes, so it is possible that the infant can emerge fully formed (and lethally capable) from the womb.

Variation: One form of punishment inflicted on human women was to curse them with bearing an animal (usually a goat). Replace Flesh • with Lore of the Beast •. Note that the animal grows at the same rate and to the same size as a human baby, making it a (very slow) way to produce giant-sized animals. The animal chosen may create other complications, at Storyteller discretion.

Song of Ecstatic Battle

This ritual enables human troops to more effectively fight on while injured. Under its effects, each feels no pain from wounds, but only a surge of adrenaline and power that makes them redouble their attack.

Primary Lore: Lore of Longing •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Transfiguration ••, Lore of Awakening ••

Base Cost: 21

Restrictions: A drop of blood from every human potentially affected.

Minimum Casting Time: 49 minutes

System: Roll Charisma + Leadership. For each success, three troops can be affected. When they have taken between two (Hurt) and five (Mauled) health levels of damage, they *add* one die to any pool based on a Physical Attribute, rather than subtracting anything.

Once they reach six levels (Crippled), however, the entire effect catches up with them. In addition, each level of lethal damage taken while under the effect of the ritual creates an extra level of bashing damage (that cannot be soaked) once the effect dissipates. The duration is 10 minutes per point of Faith.

Torment: An attempt to relieve anyone of the ability to feel pain is anathema to a tormented soul. This version adds an extra die to every Physical dice pool, but the pain from any attack is such that wound penalties are doubled. (Once Hurt they are at -1, Wounded is -3, and Crippled is –9.)

Variation: A strange version of this ritual replaces the Lore of Awakening with the Lore of Humanity •••. Each wound sustained under this ritual makes the character less likely to be attacked if he wishes to retreat (or move to a more strategic location). Each time a recipient is wounded, he can decide to step back, in which case the wound penalty acts as if that many dice were rolled on a use of the Fade evocation (Humanity •••). For example, if an affected soldier is Mauled (with a -2 wound penalty), any opponent would have to make a Willpower roll and get more than two successes to continue the attack on that individual (and in a pitched battle is more likely to just focus on a different target). If the soldier continued attacking, however, this chance is lost until he is wounded again. If the recipient was to attack after the person who injured him in the turn, then he must abort his action to keep from doing so (see the core rulebook, page 240). The effects of the Fade on each individual so affected lasts one minute per point of Faith in the ritual.

Character Creation

If personality is defined by experience, the fallen have a wide and varied tapestry of raw materials, only confused further by the fragmentary nature of their memories. An angel, a lord of the Earth, a damned soul and a human life in the World of Darkness all contribute to the mix. Yet most of these elements complement each other. The long thread of a demon's life is drawn into a mortal shell with which it has some compatibility.

Background

For most demons, it is their conduct in the war that showed their true character, rather than their position in Creation (under the different lieutenants) or even their choice of legion. For Defilers, however, that conduct is often difficult to interpret, and it can be the source of much ambivalence in your character or others' reaction to her.

With the exception of the Silver Legion, most Defilers did not perform the standard roles within the hierarchy. (If your character did so, though — taking up a sword in battle, for example — that would be a significant point to note.) Many provided support roles instead and interacted with the humans who had sided with Lucifer (and occasionally sent to influence those who sided with God or were undecided between the two). They also worked to mold the perception of their colleagues and themselves. For example, the Ebon Legion acted with aggression toward everybody and exploited humans mercilessly. Some of the Defilers in the ranks spun such acts into tales of valor and nobility; others created hateful anthems to further encourage the butchery and degradation. Which was more accurate (or the most deceitful) is a matter of debate. Defilers would often change their conduct and motives over time as well, and although doing so might have been a reaction to different circumstances and new challenges to their understanding of the world, it could simply have been all part of an ongoing manipulation. Most intelligent beings can hold conflicting viewpoints simultaneously; the Defilers almost revel in the practice.

For your character, deciding on the traits that characterize her can be difficult. She might have been cowardly, for example, but she might also have been cowardly for a good reason. Perhaps she took up a weapon and swung it with mad abandon, but did so only as a deliberate refutation of her House's role or as a deliberate inspiration for others. She herself might not be sure of her true motives — the word "deliberate" is difficult to ascribe to anyone of the House.

Fortunately, it isn't always that complicated. For a start, some Defilers are better at manipulation than others. Many have developed distinct personalities that obviously impact upon everything they do. Many have concerns from which they cannot be turned or obvious weaknesses that affect all their deeds. The complexity of the world at war meant that their inspiration often failed or was misdirected. The idea of the Defiler as a tabula rasa that purely reflects and amplifies the world through art and interaction is an ideal toward which many of them aspire but cannot achieve.

The Host

And then there is the matter of the shocking awakening within a human body, when the joy of freedom mixes with the limitations of base matter and mortal memory. How does that affect the character?

As it notes in the core rulebook, a Defiler's host is usually vain and passionate. Artists and activists are naturals, but so are many other possibilities. Teachers and scientists are also likely, especially if they have a love of learning and the dissemination of knowledge in general, rather than an obsession with a particular subject. (Marine biologists and hydrologists would certainly be fitting, though.) Other sorts of communication skills can also be attractive to the Defiler's spirit. Television hosts and news-readers, although not usually regarded as artists, are nonetheless skilled in presenting to an audience. The local gossip who keeps her eyes and ears open, and can winnow out the truth and drama around her, is similarly attractive. Such gossip would have to be a large part of her life to be suitable, though — part-time tattletales need not apply.

Affairs of the heart have a different kind of attraction. Those who habitually sleep around, seeking love or solace, or those who have dedicated their lives to some unattainable love are possibilities. Another category of likely hosts consists of those who are physically or emotionally transsexual. No metaphysical reason exists to explain this tendency, but those with the strength to fight societal mores over their appearance and gender role are also prone to attract a Defiler.

Concept

Defilers often seem inconstant beings, but their core motivations — how they consider themselves and their relationship with the greater world — are a lot more stable than is first obvious. Here are some of the most common concepts to be found within the House, though a great many others also exist.

Beguiler: These characters work in the background or on center-stage, but their efforts are turned toward inspiring those around them toward some goal — often artistic or political. It might be a grand vision or something more personal, such as helping her thralls find self-realization. What distinguishes beguilers from other manipulative and charismatic demons is that they delight in presenting a dizzying and complex façade, so that even those whose agendas they are trying to further can never be sure what they are up to. Some demons have a high tolerance for this behavior, which has been present in certain Defilers from the time of the rebellion, while others regard it with thinly disguised contempt. Humans, however, are often too overwhelmed to see the larger picture, and they are swept along in a tide of awe, exasperation and fear.

Infiltrator: This concept describes those Defilers who slip unannounced and hopefully undetected into the cogs of the world machine. They are among the



most focused members of their House, often holding strong views and undertaking dangerous assignments to further their aims. They are interested in minutiae, and they usually back up their natural talents with an impressive array of support, perhaps including elaborate props and resources to fool careful background checks. They might specialize in small roles to reach their latest objective or go deep undercover for weeks at a time. For some it is the thrill of deceit; for others, it is a pragmatic use of their talents. A few even seek to lose themselves and their dreadful memories in the persona of somebody else.

Old Salt: These characters disavow manipulation and all the other games that go along with demon society. They are the most elemental of their kind, often remote and sometimes cruel, but with a genuine interest in humans. They are most often found far from cities and the contrivances of civilization. Sailors, explorers and those who wish to contemplate the world from a distant shoreline are popular companions. Many act as subtle mentors to those around them (perhaps indulging in a little more manipulation than they realize), but they are also willing to learn from mortals and simply live among those they fought for so long ago. Whether they can avoid current conflicts is a different matter.

Siren: This concept is similar to the beguiler, except that the cause all her efforts lead to is the veneration of herself. She has grown used to the worship of humans, and she uses mind games to make those around her lose all sense of themselves, leaving only a self-destructive exultation. Some take it only far enough to create a group of extremely dedicated followers useful for greater purposes. They must be careful, however, as such narcissism — regardless of the motive — is an invite to Torment.

Nature and Demeanor

Some particularly suitable Natures include Addict, Bon Vivant, Caregiver, Child, Gallant, Pedagogue, Thrill-Seeker and Trickster. Nonetheless, the more "serious" Archetypes, such as Architect, Perfectionist, Traditionalist or Visionary, are not uncommon. It is only Natures like Loner, Martyr and Rogue that particularly go against the grain of this House, though some Defilers shun demon company for humans, which might have a similar effect. A few become genuine loners, often because of the nature of their host. (Modern culture seems to encourage such tendencies in many artists.)

As for Demeanor, Defilers may have any imaginable. Some change theirs frequently, others put on different façades for different circumstances, while many are far more stable. Most will at least adopt a consistent Demeanor for interaction with people they trust, but again this is not a reliable guide to their true feelings. If an onlooker tries to reason that a Defiler's Demeanor is in some way the opposite of her Nature — or otherwise figure out what effect she is trying to achieve — the Defiler is usually way ahead of him. If her guard seems to slip, it might just be another layer of deception. Not all of them are adept at such games, though.

Primary Lore

A choice of primary lore early in the character-creation process is often a good idea, as it strongly reflects the background of the character. It also might affect the spending of points in early stages.

The Lore of Longing is particularly common among those who were originally under Tiamat's rule. Many Defilers adopted it during the war, though, to better influence the humans of both sides.

The Lore of Storms reflects Belial's and Caransai's domains, and it has been adopted by those who do not wish to lose touch with their elemental nature.

The Lore of Transfiguration was developed by those under Penemue and Markeeva. It was sometimes taken up by others who saw it as being of more use than the Lore of Longing in interaction with other demons.

Attributes

Almost by definition, Social Attributes are important for the great majority of Defilers. The balance between the three groups still has a lot of variation across the individuals of the House, however.

Physical

Although Physical Attributes do not have the significance of the Social ones, they still reflect the demons' elemental nature. These Attributes are often the secondary group chosen, and sometimes the primary. A reason one might be interested in Physical Attributes over other groups is that the character has focused more on the power and flexibility of water rather than on manipulating humans. (Perhaps he was originally from Belial's realm, far from any human contact, or in the Ebon Legion, and he was required to develop the arts of war.) Sometimes the nature of the host also has an effect. A human who uses her body as a showcase for her art or as a focus of her machinations, and then attracts a demon, might be suitably well endowed.

Within the group, Dexterity is commonly built up, as many angels of the House are lithe and quick. For those with the Visage of Storms, a high Stamina is essential as the effects of this lore path rely

almost exclusively on personal fortitude. Strength is rarely important, other than as a reflection of the host's background.

Social

God created the Nereids to inspire others and be a conduit for both beauty and the appreciation of beauty. It comes as no surprise, then, that the great majority of Defilers, find Social Attributes intrinsic to their being. Some have turned toward other areas, meaning Social might not be the primary group, but only the rarest individual — who has likely violently repudiated God's design, twisting it into contempt for any sort of group experience — will relegate it to third choice.

The balance for the values within the group depends upon the character. Many assign equal weight to all three. Those who emphasize Manipulation over Charisma tend to be more calculating in the use of their talents. Appearance is determined to an extent by the host body, but the presence of the Defiler smoothes over the imperfections, so that it never looked so good.

Mental

Mental Attributes are not often emphasized, as Defilers favor intuition and aesthetics over logic. Nonetheless, many have a good Perception rating due to their discerning eye (along with their other senses), and Wits often makes a good companion to the Social skills. This leaves Intelligence as the most neglected of the three, though a select few individuals place them all as equal. Even Defilers who are interested in politics often have less interest in probing questions and complex issues than they do the interplay of humans leading each other toward one conclusion or another. The main exceptions are those who find themselves in a host whose sense of aesthetics includes a wonder at complexities. For example, a demon whose host was a marine biologist in love with the beautiful ecosystems beneath the waves might have Intelligence as her highest Attribute.

There is one other reason to consider a high Intelligence — it becomes useful in the higher evocations of all three Defiler lore paths. If you wish to concentrate on a particular path, it might be worth giving your character a good head start so she can more easily master these intricacies. (As explained later, though many Defilers buy multiple paths, making them less likely to reach the higher levels in any.)

The Defilers who used to be subordinate to Tiamat, Penemue and Markeeva are more likely to favor Mental Attributes over Physical ones, perhaps putting Social Attributes between them.

Abilities

Abilities are often remnants of the host's own talents and skills, enhanced by demonic experience and confidence. While it is counterproductive to blindly match Abilities with the lore paths you intend to buy, keeping a weather eye on the consequences is still a good idea. The Defilers' lore paths use a wide range of Abilities, with important ones including Empathy, Medicine and Subterfuge. The first is vital if your character has the Lore of Longing, and even more so if she also has knowledge of the Humanity lore (and is a good match for many Defilers, regardless).

Talents

Almost every one of these Abilities is fitting for Defilers, and very few will not choose Talents as their primary group. There is certainly no lack of options for the dots to go. Alertness, Dodge, Empathy, Expression, Intuition and Subterfuge are particularly appropriate, and each of the others is important to a great many Defilers. In that case, it becomes a matter of prioritizing. Putting one or two dots in each is going to provide a flexible character, but one with few fields of expertise (though you can leave that to other areas such as the various types of Advantages).

The way you spent points on Physical and Mental Attributes probably helps you decide between Athletics and Alertness, or Brawl and Streetwise. Intimidation and Leadership is a good combination for those who assumed some sort of command in the war (or *seemed* to do so). Many mortals will easily believe that a Defiler could have commanded legions, even if most demons know better.

Skills

A few Skills are particularly appropriate, including Etiquette, Performance, Stealth and Survival. For most Defilers, this will be the secondary group of Abilities. A high Survival was not necessarily a part of the host's background. It could also represent the demon's understanding of natural forces, leading her to the best position from which to attempt whatever goal she has. Etiquette is a Skill that is of more interest to those who want to blend seamlessly into the background than it is to the more flamboyant (and typical) Defiler, who makes up her own etiquette as she goes along.

Knowledges

Few Knowledges are intrinsic to a Defiler's nature, and few Defilers care a great deal about the details of modern life. They are more interested in the

wider passions. A high Science rating can represent her understanding of natural forces (in the same way Survival does), while Medicine can represent her understanding of those forces within the human body (most common in those under Markeeva). Many Defilers have had some contact with rituals, which could indicate a reasonable score in Occult, and the processes of Politics are also of interest to some. Because of their interest in communication, they might be attracted to a multi-lingual host, thus gaining dots in Linguistics. If they cannot spare the points to learn the Lore of Humanity, they might attempt to learn one or two extra languages at a later time.

Nonetheless, this is most often relegated to third position among the Abilities.

Backgrounds

The social Backgrounds, such as Allies, Contacts and Influence, are all very suitable, depending upon the identity of the host to an extent. Eminence is rare and often earned more for particular acts of infamy rather than steady advancement in the military hierarchy. Fame and Resources might have come from a successful career of the host — as an actor or telegenic activist, say — but are otherwise not very likely. Those Defilers who do inherit a fortune usually find that their host was the type to spend as much of it as possible, or perhaps ignore it in preference to their vision.

Paragon is less emphasized among Defilers than it is in some other Houses.

Virtues

How you spend the points in Virtues really depends upon the background of the character — how she spent the war and what her current attitudes are. Many have a greater Courage than Conscience, however, reflecting in part that many can commit shocking acts as individuals to further the cause of the group.

Lore

Some Defilers do not concentrate as much on lore as many other demons do. They see their natural Attributes and Abilities as being sufficient for many of their usual tasks. Nonetheless, they will not waste their supernatural edge, and most learn evocations from two or three paths, rather than concentrating on a single one.

Lore of Longing

This is the most common of the Defiler paths to be adopted as a primary focus. It gets right to the heart of the reason many rebelled — to touch humanity, and inspire a response within them. This lore should not be taken by characters who have placed Mental Attributes last.

Lore of Storms

This path is probably the least common chosen for a primary focus, and it is for those who retain their elemental essence or who wish to mold simpler and larger forces than the human mind. This path requires no Social Attributes at all, and those with the Visage of Storms most often prefer Physical and sometimes Mental over the more typical choice.

Lore of Transfiguration

In a way, the evocations of this path are seen as less of a cheat by some Defilers. It is in their nature to inspire others, but they might still think humanity should retain free will to make its own decisions. As such, it might reflect a higher Conscience or maybe a tendency toward the Reconcilers (but not the Faustians). Many think it makes a good companion to Longing, so they buy evocations in both.

Common Lore

One reason that Defilers spread their points around different paths is that many of them are extremely fond of the two common lore paths. Some might even wish to specialize in the Lore of Humanity (although the closest they can get is to divide all their points between Humanity and one of Longing or Transfiguration).

Freebie Points

One solution to the problem of characters being interested in multiple lore paths is to buy another one or two dots of lore with freebie points, and spread them around, perhaps onto the common lore paths. Extra Faith is not a bad idea, and many Defilers can maintain enough pacts to allow them to spend multiple temporary Faith points per day. Otherwise, spending the points directly on Attributes and Abilities is common. Virtues and Backgrounds are chosen less often (though you might want a *lot* of Allies and Contacts), but having one or two extra points of Willpower never hurts.


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Chapter Six: The House of Blood and Bone

Tiger! Tiger! burning bright
In the forests of the night,
What immortal hand or eye
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
—William Blake, *The Tiger*

The House of the Wild is known for its bravado, impulsiveness and recklessness. These angels are guaranteed to disrupt any diplomatic meeting with unpleasant facts, and they dare others to take offense. They are lusty fighters who live life to the fullest, drinking deeply of its joys amid the chaos of battle.

But beneath the anger and aggression, the Devourers are also highly disciplined, unshakably determined and coldly perceptive. They are ruthlessly pragmatic, embodying the cold laws of nature that they themselves created. They see opportunities and take them. They see a threat and overcome it or move aside or die fighting. Fallen Devourers must assess the danger, decide what they believe in and live as best they know — by the sword.

Before the Fall

Only when all the previous Houses had started their work could life be created within the universe. Life was not just an additional element added to the mix, but one that insinuated itself into almost all parts of Creation. Using the motion and the breath of vitality from the House of the Firmament, and anchoring itself to the physical reality created by the House of Matter, life started simply. Falling into the patterns of seasons and the movement of the heavenly bodies provided by the House of Fate, and expanding into new and more complex patterns under the influence of the House of the Deep, life prospered and spread. And it took something from those of the First House

as well, the instinct to preserve itself and act as an autonomous extension of God's will, if only by its mere existence. It was not long before life made use of the last House. As one generation followed another, the cycle of life was fueled by death.

But all of this quickly spreading activity was neither blind nor cruel, because almost every aspect of it was under the careful gaze and gentle hands of the Sixth House. From Ziana, the Seraph of the Cycle, who oversaw the ecosystem from a universal perspective, down to the individuals who looked after small environmental niches, the Angels of the Wild approached their assigned task with dedication and care. Both plants and animals were cared for with equal attention, and the delicate balance between them maintained. More variety existed in the natural world then than does today. The concept of species did not exist as it does now, but spreading families of plants and animals changed quickly in response to new conditions and neighbors. Nor were individual angels assigned to particular families. The lowest levels of the hierarchy looked after a geographical area — perhaps a small mountain range or a medium-sized forest — and ensured that as many as possible of the life-forms within their jurisdiction were able to reach their potential. The angels divided themselves up by the type of animal or plant with which they had most affinity, however, so multiple individuals were needed in each area, to ensure that the balance was properly kept.

The Hierarchy

Underneath the autarch, Ziana, there were seven lieutenants who divided the angels of the House into broad bands of affinity, though the boundaries between them could be a little slippery at times. Animals were divided into four types, related to the environment in which they could be found. Those who primarily lived in the air were the responsibility of Abaddon, the Grace of Wings, while those found within the ground were of Azag-Rhan, the Power of Movement Unseen. Those that lived between these two states, walking upon the earth, were the responsibility of Calentat, the Power over Beasts of Field and Forest, while Nansheus, Lady of Shoals, ruled over those beneath the ocean waves.

The plant kingdom was also divided among lieutenants, though there were only three. Liban'isu was the Power of Silent Forests, who had dominion over all trees. Agriel, the Eternal Seed, had jurisdiction over all herbaceous plants, including flowers and grains. The last lieutenant was Tamanael, Dominion of the Lesser Ones, who oversaw the world of "low plants," as they were called (cryptogamic in more modern terminology) — including mosses, lichen, ferns, fungi and algae.

Although there were often stark differences between the tasks carried out by those under the seven different categories, none of them were accorded more status than the others. Each was deemed essential, its tasks as important as any other performed by the House. The one exception was Liban'isu, who enjoyed her status as the most favored of Ziana's lieutenants, because on one level of reality, the Seraph of the Cycle had more literally subsumed the territory of the other Houses, becoming the World Tree.

Underneath the lieutenants was a complex series of levels, made up of angels who were responsible for different types of behavior — social structures, territorial behavior, types of diet and methods of caring for young, for example. Even for plants, similar categories developed. These positions were not true levels in a pyramid-hierarchy, though, because individuals below them kept to their geographic regions and called upon the expertise of the higher ranks only when necessary. Because everyone understood that diversity was strength, this arrangement worked well.

This did not mean that individuals were immune to power plays, nor were there friendly experiments to see how far some characteristics might be taken. Huge creatures pushed their way through ancient jungles and deep oceans, often fighting when they encountered each other. Their size was matched by the great trees, although perhaps the largest living thing — then or since — was a single ground fungus over one hundred thousand cubic feet in size. As always, the depth of reality made such comparisons harder (and more interesting for the angels). Meanwhile, the wide plains saw different battles, as swift predators thinned the herds of alert grazing animals, and carrion birds whirled overhead. Likewise the relationships between angels of flora and fauna were sometimes complex. In general — though not always — animals were dynamic and plants were stable, which affected the angels that tended them. Families of animals changed faster (even if their generations were longer), while plants were the memory of the natural world, the longer-lived ones keeping a record of the passing years in ways that more mutable animals and more intractable rock could not.

An Anthropomorphic Landscape

Life flourished across the world, taking root in every corner of Creation. There were no deserts in

Eden, and land and sea, sky and earth, all teemed with the patient industry, instinctual beauty and quiet joy of the Sixth House's domain. Animals lived together as predator and prey. Plants pushed their steady way out of the soil and toward the sun, and great flowers opened in celebration of existence.

But although the activity of the House was widespread and ever busy, dissatisfaction grew among its members. As with other angels, the point of contention was humanity, though their reasons were different. In a way, the members of the House of the Wild were the closest of all angels to humankind. Adam and Eve shared many characteristics with the beasts around them. Even their lack of comprehension of the world was close to bestial. While the angels of higher Houses despaired because they could not impart beauty or knowledge, this was not as much of a concern for those of the Sixth. They were content to let beauty develop through the interplay of individual components, each finding a balance with the others. It was a complex web of relationships that made up the gorgeous riot of color and movement of the natural world.

Though humanity was blind to this interconnecting web, ignorance did not vex the angels of the Sixth House. The problem was that the humans formed emotional ties to the animals and plants around them that had little to do with reality. As with everything else about Adam and Eve, these emotions were simple, shortsighted and often contradictory. They feared the carnivores, although they were never attacked. They mourned the death of forest creatures and threw rocks at others to eat them. The treated potentially dangerous animals as pets, so that their natures were stifled, and they drove away animals that would have been beneficial. The Wild Angels had been instructed to love humanity, and they did so, but in trying to accommodate these distortions, they themselves started to change. Where initially the different categories under each lieutenant had been treated equally, a complex pecking order started forming, warped by humanity's perceptions. Those angels who controlled the aspects of predators, for example, had never been cruel or wanton in their duty, working closely with others to ensure proper balance, but Adam and Eve's fear of their kind subtly influenced all of the House, leading to increased isolation. While the Angels of the Wild had managed to avoid the politics that often beset the other Houses, contemptuous of all the contrived games and hidden agendas, they found themselves falling prey to it from a different direction.

The one who most eagerly took on this role was Grifiel, the Principality of Those Who Hunt By Day, who became the most powerful and respected angel under Calentat. Meanwhile, Ningursu, Lady of Talons, became particularly influential among the angels of sky-borne creatures. Perhaps strangely, Hadsharpal, Virtue of the Hungry Deeps, rose to a similar position among those who tended the ecosystems within the ocean, despite being far from humanity's gaze.

Less successful were angels such as Manishtusu, the Lord of Sightless Feasting, who oversaw carnivorous behavior in Azag-Rhan's domain. He found himself increasingly ostracized because of the human fear of dangers that might lie below their feet. Similarly Beelzebub, Lord of the Flies, who was dedicated to the cycle of life within the corpses of other creatures, found himself growing repulsive to others.

Plant life had a different effect on humans. This was in part because poisonous and otherwise dangerous plants were kept well away from the areas where Adam and Eve roamed, so that they were not encountered accidentally. Wild animals looked upon humans as their betters, and so would not attack, but by God's decree, the angels could do little to prevent humans eating an unpleasant plant, except by destroying it while it was still out of sight. This exclusion started having its own effect, however, so some angels like Agantyr, Prince of Wild Courage, also found themselves increasingly alienated.

Angels dedicated to plants that fared better from the situation include Ashur, Wisdom of Wood, and Amaushum, the Bread of Life. (In Eden, though, "bread" referred to a category of starchy fruit, encompassing things similar to potatoes and dates.)

The Houses of Life and Death

Despite having a jurisdiction similar to that of the Second House, the life-givers and nurturers of all life, the responsibilities of the Houses were different. The Angels of the Wind protected individuals, while the Angels of the Wild protected families of animals and plants, as well as the relationship between them. When these aims conflicted, an arrangement had to be made, and House precedence often won out. If nature was out of balance, a life might be saved by moving it elsewhere, rather than giving it up to the Seventh House.

Even the Fifth House had some jurisdiction over the changes of animal and plant life across the generations. Life was a fragile and elaborate realm, the base upon which humanity itself was built, but immensely larger in scope. Therefore, no angels dedicated to it found themselves idle.



The Book of Abaddon

It was an unnatural situation, and even those who seemed to benefit could feel the tension it created. The humans saw only the tip of any chain of action. They saw the presence of fruit, but not how that fruit had come to be; they saw a death in the forest, but not why that creature's time had come. The distortions rippling from that naivete threatened to disrupt the delicate links that the angels wove. There was little chance of environmental disaster (not with so many angels dedicated to keeping things in balance), but by affecting the structure of the angelic hierarchy, the balance shifted toward the extremes. There was more sustaining fruit, more predation and less of the myriad possibilities in between.

Of course, by God's decree the House of the Wild was not able to educate humans to recognize what they were missing out on or the effect they were having. And, in truth, most of the House settled into these new patterns with little complaint. The fact that Creation did not match up to its full potential was not a great surprise. After all, these angels could see the power plays and imperfections of angels in the Houses created before them, and many intuitively recognized the limitations of a divine plan filtered through layers of actuality. They accepted the situation, and continued to love humanity and fill the landscapes with their own passions.

But one individual in particular was not satisfied. Abaddon rode the currents of the air above the world with a growing sense of disquiet. He vowed that if Creation was less than perfect, then he would record all the potential that was not being met. It would be a document of loss, but also of hope, so that if the situation improved, the House could return to patterns that might otherwise have vanished.

The Book of Abaddon was recorded as best he knew how, within the very essence of a pair of white doves, plump and placid. The birds bred true, and their children, and their children's children through a hundred generations, carried within them an increasingly complete record of Abaddon's observations and memories for any angel to read. They remained in the wild, in an area free from predators (and well away from humanity), while Abaddon traveled further and further afield. Deep into the territories of Azag-Rhan and Nansheus he went, and to the moon as well, where animals and plants lived amidst the angelic palaces. No one knows how much of it he catalogued or how complete the record was before events intervened.

The Great Debate

Ziana was invited to the Great Debate, but she declined the offer to participate. Like most of her House, she was suspicious of politicking, and she had an idea what this was about — more empty rhetoric about God's unknowable will. Even as news of rebellion flew swift as angel wings across the skies, she declared that the Sixth House would have nothing to do with it.

But it wasn't that simple. Almost none of the angels under her command took up Lucifer's call immediately, but few rejected it out of hand. The words of love for humanity pulled at them, and they found themselves sympathizing with the pleas of higher Houses, for perhaps the first time. Grifiel was the first to accept the call, moving to stand by Lucifer in a simple and powerful display of approval. Liban'isu was next and more eloquent in her reasoning. The supreme spirit of trees declared that this was the most favorable course of action for the angels, humanity, all physical life and, most importantly, the intention of God's decree. Azag-Rhan and Agriel followed quickly, and individuals from lower ranks started declaring their allegiance. Some, such as Hadsharpal and Beelzebub, seemed to join out of a sense of imminent action rather than unsullied love. Many others turned their back on the rebels, asserting that they were as shortsighted as humanity itself. A shiver ran through the entirety of the natural world as colleagues separated with harsh words, and posts were abandoned. (Yet, even in areas that were now free of angelic presence for the first time in eternity, life continued as it had before.) Ashur and Agantyr joined Lucifer's side, while the lieutenants Calentat, Nansheus and Tamanael did not. Ziana maintained her derision and abhorrence for the entire affair.

Abaddon himself was indecisive, watching everything transpire in a state close to shock. He could see both sides of the argument, and both pulled at him, both claiming to be the force that would free humanity and the whole of his House and allow them to achieve their potential. The rebellion offered to educate the humans in the way of the world, but it had the potential to split things apart until there was only predation and nothing else.

The last of his House made their intentions known. Not quite a third of them turned their back upon God, most of them doing so to share the joy they felt in Creation — an almost carnal feeling of flesh running free in a wide, luxuriant land. A great number of the predator angels were among the rebels, but many from the other jurisdictions of the wild were there as well. And so Abaddon made his own decision. He returned swiftly to where his book flew among the trees, but he was too late. Even as he descended, he saw Ningursu flying away with the two birds — descendants of the originals — held carefully in her razor-sharp talons. He saw they were being flown to the new camps of the loyalist angels, and all his hopes went with them.

The Long Night

The time immediately after the rebellion was a confused one for many Angels of the Sixth House. Although they were now able to accompany the descendants of Adam and Eve as they spread far across the world, many were disappointed by humanity's actions. Only a few embraced the wilderness in all its savagery and beauty. Many others congregated in large communities, some of which seemed designed to exclude nature as much as possible.

Reactions to this behavior were mixed. Some recognized humanity's joy in their newfound horizons, so they worked closely with the burgeoning civilization. They endeavored to reminder their charges that nature produced the deepest beauty and the most cunning adaptation to any problem, while sharing with them the wonder of discovery. Others started seeking individuals and tribes who were less at ease in the new cities, and they lured them away to run and swim with the mightiest of beasts. A few angels retreated into the untouched wilderness alone, saying they would return when humanity tired of the folly and cheap baubles of the other Houses.

Some angels had more serious matters to contend with. Alongside Lucifer and a group of other angels, mostly from the First, Second and Fourth Houses, they started planning for the inevitable confrontation with the forces of Heaven. It was difficult, because the concepts were so new, and although the stakes were high — almost literally everything — the consequences of loss were difficult to foretell. Some said that the angels would be as beasts fighting in the jungle, but it was a meaningless comparison that was beyond their comprehension to follow through to any conclusion. In the end, they simply decided to remain loyal and react to changing circumstances as best they could.

When those circumstances became clear as Michael declared the punishment of God, it was far worse than they had imagined. They were Rabisu now — Devourers — constrained to see those they loved fall before the mindless savagery and fickle chance of nature. Even worse was what followed, the touch of God's hand across Creation. Fire, floods and the turmoil of the earth

itself ravaged vast tracts of wilderness. Animals and plants in untold numbers died, many immediately, but more of starvation and panic in the devastated environment.

As the Devourers beheld all this, the thought of bloody war between angel and demon started to make sense to them — and started to arouse many of them as well.

The House at War

Abaddon had not been one of those who had planned with Lucifer during the Long Night, but after the formation of the Crimson Legion, the Grace of Wings came forward to make his own case. He would lead a second legion, inspired not by hope for the future or protection of what precious things remained, but simply by hatred. Hatred for the tyrant God and His destruction meted out beyond all understanding. Hatred for the angels that had timidly stood by while the Creator perpetrated this atrocity — why was there not a second rebellion, in horror if love was so weak? Ultimately, horror turned to contempt for the weakness and ignorance of humanity, which had brought on this ruin. One fifth of the rebels took up this cause, and their company was named for the wood ebony which had survived the conflagration, whose flesh was pale but whose inner core was strong and dark as night.

Five legions were formed and scattered to make their preparations. Many of the Devourers followed Abaddon, including Azag-Rhan, but at least a few joined each of the others. The most prominent Devourer among the Crimson Legion was Grifiel, who was to lead the army of Genhinnom. Liban'isu joined the Iron Legion, while Agriel joined the Silver. Very few joined the Alabaster Legion (and none because of indecision), the highest ranked of them being Beelzebub.

Dûdâêl

One of the first tasks of the Ebon Legion was to create the great fortress that would become its command center, the stark edifice of Dûdâêl. Abaddon and many of the Devourers were ambivalent about this idea. Not only was such a defensive structure an untested idea, but it went against their instincts as spirits of the wild. Maneuverability, speed and camouflage were more important lessons to be learned from the animals over which their House held custodianship.

These were different times, however, and a new environment as well. The devastation of God's touch was still a fresh wound, and no one was sure if it had dealt a lethal blow to the planet wildlife, the first step in a chain reaction of imploding ecosystems, leading toward sterility. To some members of the House, as they surveyed the devastation and their own betrayal by God (as they thought of it), the idea seemed almost comforting.

In the end, Abaddon assigned a group of Devourers and Malefactors from within his legion to solve the problem. The plans for construction of Genhinnom were already known and were one influence on the group. Others were the great trees that weathered storms across centuries and also a consideration of enemy forces. A great proportion of the angels of the Sixth House had remained loyal to Heaven, so relying too much on existing patterns of behavior and struggling to rebuild thick jungles and other natural protections would leave too many advantages to the opposition. Better to build anew. And so, in the center of one of the great and terrible deserts that now stretched across the land, Dûdâêl was built. It had the natural protection of stark rock and treacherous scree (deserts of fine sand had not yet formed), and gaping vents into the Earth brought up tides of magma and choking fumes around the walls. It was an environment that would disorient even an angel of the Lord.

Great caverns were built beneath it, and humans were brought there to labor over struggling plots of vegetation — mostly fungus, but also other plants kept alive by the light of Fiends and the disdainful attention of Devourers — so as to feed themselves and prepare for war.

Those who had designed the fortress were declared its wardens, who would keep the day-to-day running of the fortress as smooth as possible and continue to add to the defenses as new ideas (such as rituals) became available. They were ordered never to leave Dûdâêl's walls, so that they could not be captured by the enemy. These individuals never achieved a great rank during the war, but most of them kept steadfastly to their task, and ensured that the bastion did not fall until the very end. Sauvitar, who had been the Darkness of Leaves, and Salatai, Erosion of Stone, were the principal Devourers assigned to this task.

Before the great battles, Dûdâêl had one unexpected visitor while the walls grew steeply but the chasms had not yet been fully excavated. While Abaddon stood upon the ramparts, a bird flew toward him through the harsh sunlight. It was the male of the pair that formed the current generation of *The Book*

of Abaddon, tired but whole. It rested on the archduke's hand as he studied it carefully. Had it escaped somehow? Was it a sign of peace from his former subordinate Ningursu, or from Heaven itself? Was it some sort of attempt to bargain, in which the female would be available for a price? Abaddon gazed into the essence of the frightened creature, seeing all the potential he had mapped, and he wanted only to close his fist, feel the bird's wet innards squeeze between his fingers.

Yet he let it go and watched it fly back whence it had come.

Other Bastions

The Devourers were involved in the building and defense of the other great bastions as well. There were also smaller forts scattered about the world, created to secure particular areas, provide support for troop movements or just to increase the diversity of fallback positions. In some areas a great deal of life had survived and seemed to be hanging onto its existence grimly, even without angelic support. Malultat, a demon previously under Azag-Rhan, settled in one such area. He disdained walls as a protective device, so he burrowed deep within a maze of thorns and poisonous wildlife. Over the course of the war he conducted numerous experiments to increase the potential of such defenses and turn them toward offense as well. A slow but steady supply of poisons, and the animals and plants that created them, were disseminated from Malultat's Vale to Lucifer's armies. Not only was lethality of interest, but other possibilities such as concoctions to cause debilitating pain, confusion or immobility. Most poisons were created for use on humans, either to harm those loyal to God or to influence — for better or worse — those who remained with the rebels. Potions to deaden the nerves, incite ferocity and induce addiction were created and used to varying extents at different times. More rare were those that could affect angels, and usually they would have to be processed by the demons of the Vale, rather than being produced from a living creature, no matter how twisted that creature might be. It was only many centuries after its creation that the angels successfully destroyed the source of these concoctions, as an aggressive assault by malhim reduced the Vale to ashes and a slippery corrosive sludge.

A different approach had been taken in an earlier age by Banasuel, a demon who attempted to provide plant life more conducive to human wellbeing, within a stockade of tightly entwined living wood. The range and practicality of food and clothing, among many other aspects of life, were evolving slowly but steadily among humans who lived free under demonic protection. But it was one of Banasuel's group who came upon the idea of grains being turned into a simple bread. Development of natural materials as protection (whether from the elements or more immediate threats) was also undertaken. The location was abandoned before even the Time of Atrocities, however, as its resources were requisitioned elsewhere.

Playing to Win

While defensive measures were handled early, it was offensive matters that took up most of the planning within the Ebon Legion and elsewhere. It had been quickly recognized that simply enduring the attacks of Heaven was a losing strategy. The battle had to be taken to the enemy or the enemy lured to a battlefield where the advantage lay with the rebels. However the war would be fought (and it still wasn't clear), an aggressive and proactive policy would be essential, to make up for the disadvantage of numbers and the fractured Faith upon which the demons had to rely.

Obviously not every lesson of nature could be taken advantage of. One big advantage that wildlife had that demons could not emulate was self-propagation. The sheer tenacity of any number of species that were taking over their limited niches in the new world was proof of that. Individuals were weak, but the drifting spore of a single mushroom could bring eventual devastation. While not directly applicable, such behavior was upheld as a model of how even God could be overthrown by the persistence of angels. (The fact that such species tended to deprive themselves of all sustenance was a lesson noted by calmer eyes.)

One characteristic of the animal kingdom that proved more useful was already very much a part of the Devourer psyche — the holding and increasing of territory. The scattering of the legions had spread them widely but thinly across the land (even Hadsharpal thought the devastated sea not worth contesting), and immediate plans were made to control the vast spaces between the bastions. Patrols were made and spread in ever-widening circles, looking for the influence of the enemy. When encountered, loyal angels where set upon quickly, often made to retreat. Combat was bloodless but fierce, as both sides accused the others of treachery and weakness, and great peals of thunder, bursts of fire and sudden floods marked the battles of the so-called Silent War. Any animals in the area would react with howls or cries, and some Devourers tried to influence this behavior, creating a warning

merely at the presence of loyal angels. It was not a strong defense, given the wide areas of desolation and the abilities of angels to fly unseen, but it proved surprisingly effective in some areas. When angels did venture into enemy territory — or even neutral territory — they disdained secrecy, as a symbol of their belief in God's inevitable ascendancy over such an ignominious uprising. Therefore, even the animals seemed to rail against their presence, which sapped their morale and confused their intelligence gathering.

Initial fears by the rebel Devourers that their loyalist brethren would turn nature against them also seemed unfounded. As with their patrols, angelic tactics seemed driven more by pride and arrogance than a serious attempt to undermine rebel forces. Their presence on Earth was constrained to small, well-defended areas, only enough to feed and protect the humans who had sided with God. Otherwise, the angels stayed within Heaven itself, which the rebels could not approach. The Ebon Legion jeered at the Heralds responsible for these tactics, thankful that Lucifer had given them a freer rein (but neither did they abandon their bastions, finding comfort in solidity).

As well as putting their mark on large and diverse areas, the rebels sent more focused and secretive missions into enemy territory. Such guerilla forces used acts of destruction and kidnapping to intimate the enemy, further restrict their movement, and perhaps increase rebel forces. Abaddon cared little who a human had declared allegiance to if that human could be put to work in the caverns of Dûdâêl.

The most successful of the demons involved in these raids was a Devourer called Lirael, who had cared for the plants over a vast swath of plains in Eden, but who now found a calling that better stirred his heart. He was one of the first demons to gain rank for military prowess, and was trusted with more and more elaborate challenges to Heaven's authority on Earth. His victories included the temporary freeing of two human cities from angelic control, plus another that fully declared its loyalty to Lucifer.

Yet even Lirael's successes did not satisfy the frustration within him. "We are waiting for God," he would tell the others of his legion. "Waiting for Him to declare the form of the real conflict to decide our fate. We must be ready."

It was not God who decided, it was a human — Caine the betrayer. When real war came, the Devourers found themselves ready, and they took to it with a vengeance.

The Time of Atrocities

Sagun was the greatest border city of the Heavenly Host, a target Lirael and his comrades had not previously been able to breach. But it was not a guerrilla raid or a well-prepared battalion that now marched upon it. The entirety of the Ebon Legion marched, with the murder of Abel singing through their bodies, crying for revenge, for imitation, for action. Abaddon was first in line, and a lengthy train of humans snaked behind, hurried along by impatient demons.

Not of all them reached Sagun — a third of the demons veered off for targets deeper within Heaven's forces' territory. As the main bulk approached the fortress, demons from the other legions converged upon it as well, although not under any formal command. There was little preamble. Jabniel, a relatively low-ranking angel given command while his generals were occupied elsewhere, gathered his troops and met the amassing throng, declaring God's dominion over all present. Lirael butchered him like a steer, and the rebels swarmed over Sagun with a savage joy in their hearts.

Abaddon's plan worked well. The third of his forces not present had traveled swiftly to harry the retreat, and it plunged fast through human cities toward other fortresses of the Host. They were not enslaving humans as the main group had, nor were they killing methodically, but they created as much death and destruction of property as they could while maintaining their pace. It was their progress that shook the attackers from their pillage of Sagun, and it urged the bulk of them onward to richer targets. Small fortresses such as Catani and Swanan, and even the Library of Zebul, were overwhelmed and destroyed, and the Host only managed to stand its ground in Machonon, Michael's own citadel.

Such success was not to last. The demons were over-extended, unorganized and not prepared for an extended siege. They fell back over the space of a week, and the angels slowly — fearing a trap, still disoriented from the disastrous events — expanded again to take back their territory and count the cost of destruction.

In Dûdâêl the mood was also somber. After the return to headquarters, there had been short-lived attempts at celebration by many of the combatants, but they usually fell into silence. Many looked back at events with a contemplative eye, and many others tried not to think about them at all. Lucifer had expressed his anger at the attack, and the legions had split, no longer working close together. More profoundly, the change from the linguistic parry and

thrust of the Silent War into wholesale slaughter was too sudden to comprehend. Many had previously grieved over acquaintances who were now enemies, remaining loyal to a cruel God. Now they grieved over the death of fellow soldiers cut down in battle, never to exist again — a sharper and more bitter emotion. Mixed with that was the memory of the far greater number of deaths inflicted on the opposition; a heady mixture of grief, pain and joy. Many gave the opinion that the entire event was a temporary aberration, caused by Caine's bloodshed, and — obviously — would not be repeated.

Abaddon and his dukes knew better, and they planned accordingly.

War Machine

There were two main approaches to fighting the war, and the Ebon Legion moved to master both of them. The first was to continue its territorial ambitions and gain control over the widespread human settlements. The second was to kill as many angels as it possibly could.

The Devourers were to be the instruments of the second approach. The history of the House is also the history of the war, or at least the actual fighting of it. Even in other legions, the Devourers were often used as a buffer between angelic raids and the normal business of the group. The Iron Legion was an exception, since every member was concerned with countering Heaven's attacks.

But war was also about much more than swinging swords at an opponent. It was about logistics and maneuverability as much as firepower; knowledge and speed as much as brute strength. The Devourers studied those aspects as well. The idea was to hit the enemy at the right time, achieve an objective and either retreat to fight another day or stay to fortify newly won territory. The rebels were very much aware that numbers were still against them and that they could not rely again on the surprise that had propelled them so far into the Host's territory after Sagun. It was not long after the siege of Machonon that orders were circulated that no one was to press an attack into the heavens, no matter how tempting an opportunity might seem. (Those orders were disobeyed a number of times during the war by over-enthusiastic combatants who were usually never heard from again. The two exceptions were a small company that was executed upon its return for disobedience and suspicion of treachery, and an individual Devourer, the Overlord Pirael, who was exiled into the wilderness for his transgression. Some say he later had extensive contacts within the Silver Legion, though reports were mixed.)

So Devourers started studying in earnest the methodology of attack and defense within the physical realm, supported by the efforts of the other Houses, most particularly the organization of the Devils and the shaping of the Malefactors, both subtle and crude. All the laws of combat that had evolved during the Silent War were examined (these in turn based upon debating technique within Eden), and the inefficiencies were ruthlessly pruned. The caverns below Dûdâêl were cleared of their human inhabitants to host "war games," out of any possible sight of angels. (Whether or not God was a witness to them, no one knew.) These games were often bloody and passionate affairs. While deception by omission was a familiar concept, actually pretending to be a different being was not, and it was difficult for all demons. Often Defilers, Fiends and occasionally Devils were ordered to make up the enemy ranks in these games, because they were found to be more effective at the trick. This introduced inter-House rivalry into the affairs, though.

The optimal physical characteristics of the warrior were pondered — different from the large predators of the animal world, more akin to the smaller beasts that squabbled over carrion. The Silver Legion started developing distillations of Faith that would eventually become the full Lore of the Flesh. Rituals and advances in weapon-smithing also started appearing, though often from outside Devourer ranks.

Humans and animals were also adapted to war. Humans were best at securing ground positions and moving against their counterparts on the enemy side. Animals were created for battle conditions (again the techniques of the Lore of the Flesh became essential), as mounts for humans, and as the focus of certain rituals, such as ones used for spying or camouflage. There was some study of plants as well — particularly concerning their durability, flexibility and ubiquity — but even those who had previously tended them usually preferred something more dynamic.

Advance of the Legions

Although the number of troops that marched on Sagun was never matched by any other event in the war — except the congregation at the very end of it — the Ebon Legion still sent out vast armies to scour the land. Early victories included the razing of Shamayim and Araboth, and many mortal cities also fell before the horde. The angels were becoming better prepared, constructing armies of their own and also learning to snipe at the sides of the great columns and melt away again. The battles became more complex, with great whirling patterns in the sky that were half strategy, half savagery. Smaller units became more important as the Devourers' theories of warfare

matured, and missions changed from attacks on individual bastions to a war of attrition, sabotage and ambush over a vast area.

The Host had a number of generals who became particularly hated by the demons as the battles progressed. Michael and Gabriel were the most senior of them, although they did not participate in battle as much as the former Angels of the Wild Calentat, Tamanael and Ningursu. The latter especially became a continuing problem for the Ebon Legion. The Host was known for predictable but efficient tactics — hard to penetrate, solid in attack, but slow to adapt. Ningursu was the exception. She saw far and flew fast, and in battle, she would create a dizzying weave of maneuvers that would keep the demons looking for room to move. When five demons died in violence in the bowels of Dûdâêl, it was widely rumored that Abaddon's former subordinate had been personally responsible, even after a Devourer called Talanax confessed and was executed for the crime.

Hopes of a personal confrontation between Abaddon and Ningursu grew among the troops of the legion, and then beyond it as well, taking on the air of a myth yet to happen. It was never to be. One of Ningursu's raids on a human city under demon protection was met solidly by a company of the Iron Legion, including Liban'isu herself, who had ruled over the domain of the trees. The battle was short and brutal, and when the Archduke of the Ebon Legion arrived, both Ningursu and Liban'isu were dead among the ruins of the city. It seemed they had not even killed each other, but were taken down by a myriad of blows, some from a human hand. All that was left was divine flesh — never to rot, but never again to hold a spirit — and blood pooling in the dust.

It was not long afterward that Abaddon mounted yet another march against the city of Araboth. The Bastion of Lament seemed to mock all his efforts, and it was rebuilt precisely every time he tore it apart.

Birth of the Malhim

Despite the intensity of battle and the spikes of activity, when a major player was struck down or a fortress burned, the rhythm of war was becoming tedious. All losses became heartbreaking, all victories insignificant, and everything was reduced to a hollow comparison to what had come before.

Yet slowly but surely, over hundreds of human generations, the war was being won. The angels had advanced very little, and their retreats became more and more serious. Many of their human charges deserted them, rather than waiting to be fought over. Gabriel had disappeared somewhere, their



most battle-wise leader was dead and, even more than the demons, the war ate at their souls. Now armed with devastating rituals, the legions advanced, once again hoping to trap their enemy in Machonon for good.

That was when the malhim appeared, deadly angels who could match the demons with ferocity and speed. They did not make themselves known to the troops marching across the lifeless plains before Michael's citadel, but dove immediately toward Genhinnom. It was perhaps the most audacious move of the war thus far, at least on the side of the angels — a lightning-fast assassination attempt upon Lucifer himself. Surprise got them through the walls of the cathedral-city, and only the desperate efforts of Grifiel and others of the Crimson Legion (including Lucifer himself, of course) stayed their hand. One of this new breed of angel was killed by a warrior in Lucifer's envoy called Malakh, who reported that the malhim had murmured an exultation to Ziana, the Seraph of the Cycle, before she died. What this meant was not known, but the troops marching on Machonon scattered again, drawn back to their bastions to consider this new peril.

Other Matters

There were other concerns than battle that took the attention of the Devourers during the Time of Atrocities, and not everyone was lost in bloodshed. One concern was taking care of the wildlife that had survived the cataclysm of God's judgment and the ongoing destruction meted out indiscriminately across the face of the Earth. Contrary to some early predictions, both animals and plants were surviving, although in different forms. Instead of spreading families of flora and fauna that intermingled and rapidly changed over the generations, interbreeding had become a lot more restricted, and distinct species had stabilized. Now there might be thousands of virtually interchangeable members spread thinly out over a vast area. Relations between species had simplified as well, leading to distinct patterns repeating themselves widely, so as to survive in the harsh conditions.

Such patterns were not restricted to the valleys and mountainsides that had survived relatively unscathed. Scuttling over volcanic rock, finding niches in fertile debris, the dominion of the Sixth House was slowly expanding once more.

Some Devourers wanted to help this process, for a number of different reasons. A few, most notably Agriel, wanted to provide wider lands for human to inhabit, populated by edible grains and good-natured creatures. This was a minority view, and Agriel found herself ostracized by many of her peers and former subordinates. Domesticated wildlife was felt to be a necessary shame best left to those demons who had more to do with humans, such as the Defilers.

Others wanted to restore the complexity of Eden. There were rumors mid-way through the Time of Atrocities that Banasuel, who had researched the beneficial uses of natural products earlier on, had taken to this goal instead. More interesting, it was said she had access to at least a part of *The Book of Abaddon*. Since the tome was known to have been destroyed in the siege of Zebul — which would have been thousands of generations previously for the birds that made up the work — this claim was often discounted, but the rumors continued. One popular variation had it that one of the birds had escaped and fathered an impure line of descent before being recaptured. This was all speculation, however, because Banasuel was killed in a dispute over court protocol in one of her rare visits to Tabâ'et', central command of the Silver Legion. No birds were found.

Finally there were those who wished to see nature continue its current unexpected course, but simply help it over some of the hurdles. These demons were more likely to lose themselves in the niches of wilderness, ignoring the progression of the war and the needs of the legions, perhaps going entirely rogue. If they were not careful they were executed for cowardice, but it was said that more than one "casualty" of the war actually ended up in a secluded valley instead.

Within the House

Another concern was the rulership of the House, as various members looked to an internal hierarchy to match the one being developed by others (particularly the Devils). Over half the Devourers belonged to the Ebon Legion and looked to Abaddon for leadership, but he had little time for others outside his command. His harsh views also caused problems for those in different legions.

Agriel and her supporters made a serious bid for the position of autarch, but her unpopularity was entrenched. Of the other lieutenants from the time before the rebellion, Azag-Rhan gave the idea short shrift, and Liban'isu had some interest but was too caught up in her other affairs (before her demise, of course). Grifiel commanded a great deal of respect, and obviously held Lucifer's ear, but he was too impatient with House matters. A strong bid from an unexpected source was a demon called Moiratha, a former subordinate of Calentat and member of the Iron Legion. She had maintained her love of humanity through the betrayals that Abaddon and his ilk

saw, and she spoke eloquently about Devourer self-rule away from the games of the Devils. This position achieved significant support from within her own legion and from others, including a portion of the Ebon. The Devourers found themselves too easily distracted to concentrate on internal politicking for long, however, no matter what the other Houses were doing. Moiratha remained an important figure as an arbiter for a number of in-House disputes, but she achieved little more.

Away from such concerns, the majority of Devourers had an easy relationship with each other, regardless of their legion or former duty. As a group, they had adapted well to the different tempos of war: the discipline, long-term tedium and short-term rage, all while maintaining focus. Their relaxation was another facet of that adaptation, as they wrestled and hunted with each other, indulged their one-upmanship and bravado. These gatherings were often spontaneous and rarely had more than 10 or 20 individuals participating. Sometimes other demons would join in, especially those who had fought in the press of battle. They were made welcome, but otherwise not granted special consideration in the rough and tumble. If anyone did too well — guest or not — then he would likely find himself being ganged up on by everyone else. There was honor in these mock-fights, but it was often the honor of the pack.

When external stresses interfered, sometimes these gatherings would escalate into something more serious, perhaps even a proper duel between two Devourers. These duels were not to the death, except in very rare cases, but anything before death was deemed acceptable. (Almost no demon lost sight of the enormity of taking another's life, even as they planned it for their enemies with grim satisfaction.) Those who did survive a fight to the death were "volunteered" into the most dangerous of surveillance and infiltration duty, and no one refused this punishment.

Humans

Not everyone from the House, not even all those from the Ebon Legion, held up Abaddon's naked contempt for the now mortal race of humans. But even those with a more tolerant attitude kept their distance. Most humans still reacted to demons with awe and acts of worship, and such displays provoked discomfort in Devourers. It often reminded them of their own prostration toward God in the Garden of Eden, as they wove nature's bounty beneath His gaze. At the same time, they would not admit to such a kinship with mortal beings, and so did not use it to break the barriers between themselves and humans. The closest most Devourers got was in training human troops for battle, or gathering them up into the great slave trains that followed the legions into war.

Some did get a lot closer. The madness of war and a self-disgust that was turned against easy scapegoats led some Devourers to terrible crimes against humans. Deliberate torture of the living, and feasting upon the dead, were a common occurrence in battles. In the Ebon Legion at least, there was little punishment meted out for these acts. Less acceptable, but still far from uncommon, were those who slaked these appetites on humans already within rebel territory, in the occasional long stretches between action. These could be sudden flashes of lethal ferocity or drawn-out sessions of torture. Some introduced living organisms into the bodies of their victims, parasites of the gut, lungs or brain, that would slowly cripple them over weeks. (Other Devourers could easily kill such organisms if detected — and if they dared interfere.)

The End Game

To most Devourers, the Long March, in which Lucifer tried to rein in the evil of the legions, was just another twist in a war that seemed to have lasted forever. Despite the fact that their opposition had now finally retreated back into the safety of Machonon, few Devourers considered that the war would ever be over. The war *was* their existence. They had fought angels, humans and the savage malhim, and now they fought demons. They did not understand Lucifer's argument for peace because his words seemed like yet more Devilish deception, in which the real agenda was lost under layers of contempt and contrived trickery. This is not to say they all sided against him, though. When Lucifer ordered Abaddon to submit, it split the House into those who followed the Lightbringer's words because of his status as prince of all demons, and those who saw him as weak and ungrateful. Had it not been they who had pushed the angels back?

But in the end, it didn't even matter much which side they were on, because they fought, as they always had.

It was when Abaddon bowed his head and submitted to Lucifer that things became confusing.

Babel

The Devourers had little to do with Babel. Agriel was chosen to be one of the Ten who were chosen to teach the secrets of Creation to humans, so as to raise them to the level of gods, but most of the others from her House ignored her. There was still action that was needed. Heaven's forces were battered, but they had

not given up the fight. There were rogue human tribes who attacked the spreading cities, not realizing that they themselves had access to the knowledge that the Ten disseminated. There were even some rogue demons who had become so alienated by the Long March or the horrors before it, that they acknowledged no authority but death. The highest ranked of these was Urbatu, who had deserted his post as Baron of the Crimson Legion, killing anyone who crossed his path — even those who tried to follow it. It was Malakh who eventually found him and took his life (though he was not promoted into Urbatu's vacant position for the act).

Many Devourers did not realize at the time that Abaddon was involved in the creation of the nephilim, combining his own knowledge with that of other Houses, rather than relying on the members of his own. He had not succumbed to Lucifer's vision, and he worked in secret while the Devourers were idling in old patterns.

When the abominations did appear, the response of the House was unsurprising: It fought. But now it seemed that every enemy the Devourers had ever fought was arrayed against them. The angels regrouped with a vanguard of malhim, humans in their arrogance, other demons in their confusion, and now the nephilim as well. The end was not hard to predict.

Judgment

The moment of defeat was a strange one. Every demon had been gathered to face the judgment of the ophanim, no matter who they had served under or which bastion or wilderness they had hidden within. There was a great stillness across the entire congregation of rebels, with Lucifer at the very front, on his knees but still proud, proud to have fought. In the stillness was a kind of peace, or so it seemed to most of the Devourers. A promise that there might even be an end to violence.

Then the gates of Hell were opened, and the demons entered their exile screaming, in rage or defiance or fear, and the screams were lost in the terrible silences of the inferno, wherein there was no hope of peace at all.

Out of the Abyss

The first thing many Devourers feel on their release from God's prison is the presence of life. The pressure of blood coursing through mortal veins, bioorganisms in the air, the curling of parasites within flesh. Hell had none of those sensations; Hell is sterile.

Some people in the modern world are also obsessed with sterility — or cleanliness, as they would put it. *Cleanliness is next to Godliness* is their mantra, and the Devourers would not disagree, equating it with the tyranny and disdain for life that they see within their Creator. Back in the world they feel connected again, closer to the biomass than they have ever been, now that they inhabit a body within it. That, as much as the memories of their host, is one of the things that grounds them. It allows them to rise above aeons of torment and the mindless beasts they had become within their empty prison.

Within Civilization

It does not take most Devourers long to realize that the biomass — the aggregate of life on the planet — is stressed almost to breaking. It is a resilient entity, as the Devourers know, and now it is trying to cope with the domineering rule of humanity. Indiscriminate pollution and the deliberate stripping of diversity from the landscape has devastated species, turned seas into deserts and fertile plains into hardpans. The environment is still coping — barely — but it is devolving into ever simpler and tamer forms. The idea that it might become too simple to maintain the rhythms of its respiration and reproduction seems a growing concern.

But having inflicted this damage, the vast majority of humans are blind to the spreading scars that have resulted. Their own bodily rhythms are at the mercy of a growing phalanx of medication, and the seasons are becoming nothing more than indications of what's on TV. Even those far away from the civilized world are usually blind to anything other than the artificial patterns of domesticated animal and plant life bent to serve human needs.

How Devourers react to humans often depends on how much blame they put on them for this state of affairs and, indeed, whether or not they care. A thousand years of battle and incarceration in Hell has put most of the House a long way from its roots as overseers and protectors of nature. Many Devourers are drawn quickly into the violent world of human and demonic affairs, and, even if they are working toward peace and reconciliation, they don't pay much heed to the blind patterns they once represented. In a way, they have been changed by their very rebellion. They chose to defy God, and in doing so, they declared their allegiance to a realm where sentience — the ability to choose — was king. Therefore humans were the focus of the war, and they remain so now that God Himself is missing in action.

When the spirits of the Devourers first escape and dive toward the Earth, many are drawn to souls that have seen action. They seek soldiers and policemen, for example, but they also look for those with less violent but still aggressive and proactive occupations, such as stockbrokers and activists. They see the world in the terms of cold nature — survival of the fittest — but that very realization puts them above the beasts they try to emulate. A natural predator kills when it needs to feed or to defend itself against a direct threat. A human predator plans his kills, enslaves his inferiors (including nature itself) and chooses to take risks and make sacrifices that benefit him indirectly. Some demons see this planned savagery as the legacy of Caine, which led directly to the Time of Atrocities. To many Devourers it has become as natural as sunlight, and from within a human shell that embodies those qualities, they now turn all their preternatural powers to refining them. The irony is that most do not choose this path but are driven along it by their own God-given nature, and the tortures of the Abyss. The humans and demons around them become pawns in the Devourer's need for action and advancement. They cannot stop fighting, so even those they fight for are simply the means by which the Devourer defines himself.

Others of the House deny this philosophy (or anti-philosophy). They repudiate it entirely, returning to the few natural environs that remain untouched. They try to recapture the spirit of Eden, perhaps as a salve to the world and the depredations of humans, perhaps merely to run from the horrors they have been a party to. Others work within society to turn humanity back from its calculating evil (as they define it), and engender a spirit of global philanthropy and responsibility. These soldiers have seen the true horrors of war, so they work hard to make sure that alternatives are found. Lastly, they might try to channel the spirit of human ruthlessness, rather than be enslaved by it. Such soldiers define themselves by honor and respect for their opponents. They will fight or not fight as the situation requires, and they look forward to a time when all fighting is done.

Among Demons

Many fallen congregate back into the structures they knew from the time of the war, and the Devourers are no different. As infernal courts spring up in many cities, they are there to lend their skills to the defense of their brethren and to help further the aims of the fallen by direct action. Of course, things aren't as they once were. The factions are dividing demons by their hopes for the future, and many Devourers think they too deserve such consideration (even if their preferences are not hard to predict). There is also a matter of numbers. The House of the Wild did not provide the greatest number of rebels at the very start of the war. After centuries of front-line action, the difference is more marked. Simply put, there are fewer Devourers than other Houses, because more of them are dead.

This is not obvious in the early days of the fallen's arrival, because significant numbers are still around, particularly among those who were able to escape through the small cracks of Hell. Many had been close by the boundary as the cracks appeared, even if they did not normally spend time there, although they would not be able to say why — perhaps it was simply a matter of instinct. As the courts coalesce and the relative position of the Houses become clearer, though, and as more attention is paid to bringing those that remain in Hell into the world, the situation will become obvious. It was not something that many thought about during the first war, but their concerns might have been changed by their exposure to human ideas and new types of conflict. How the majority will react is unknown as yet. They might demand to be shown suitable respect and recompense for their sacrifice. They might band together more tightly for mutual survival. Or they might simply acknowledge that such is one of the facts of life in a cold universe, and continue as they have always done.

The Courts

Those who do return to the infernal court system — who do not retreat into the wilderness, give up on the politics of their brethren for more direct action or simply fight anyone who comes close to them — are welcomed warmly. The fallen have shrunk in significance in the world, and they know it. The presence of the Earthbound with their alien priorities, other supernatural creatures fighting for their own niches in the ecosystem and the humans themselves — who are thoughtlessly powerful in their vast masses — all pose a real danger to fallen survival. The presence of the Devourers, who have practiced the skills of direct battle against powerful enemies, is a relief to the other Houses, even though they disdain such methods for more subtle approaches. Whether those demons see the Devourers as valued comrades in the fight or as disposable shields to distract the enemy depends upon the individual. There is often not much difference either way.

The Factions

The five factions and the smaller groups of scattered idealists who have more esoteric ideas are

also glad for a little muscle. Their battles are usually less direct than those of the courts, but there are always missions being assembled to achieve one goal or another, on which a Devourer would be a notable asset. Of course, that is not something most Devourers take into consideration when deciding which utopian ideal they support. Some do — looking to those factions that need them the most, simply so they can be in a better position to negotiate terms. But even within this House, such an attitude is rare, and the faction could decide that, whatever its needs, such opportunists simply cannot be trusted.

Many Devourers join the Luciferans or Raveners. Those who follow Lucifer usually do so for one of two reasons. They are either personally inspired by the Lightbringer's example of bravery, audacity and resistance to the intimidation of Heaven, or they are more comfortable in the structures that Lucifer oversaw — the court system with its well-defined hierarchies and opportunities for advancement. Whatever the case, they continue to believe in the justness of the war, and they will continue to follow the example of their commander. The Raveners are less bound by notions of justice and structure. They risked everything, continuously and repeatedly, for an effort that now seems doomed from the start. Lucifer has abandoned them as God did. Humans are beneath contempt. Now the fight must continue, to see that those that have exploited the Devourers' efforts so mercilessly cannot be left with anything over which to rule.

The third most popular choice is the Reconcilers. Those so inclined often see that not only was the original decision to rebel wrong, there should have been no choice to make. Like blind nature, they should have followed the laws of God, so that while some suffered and died, the whole would remain strong. Perhaps they misinterpreted the command to love humanity — not as free-willed individuals, but as an integral part of the animal and plant life of Eden. Whatever the case, it might not be too late to undo those decisions, even as final destruction looms.

A number of the angels of the Sixth House have achieved success within the Cryptics, often originally from the dominions of Agriel or Abaddon (those who did not follow their leader into hatred). But even so, those Devourers who are skilled in the gathering of information often do so for a practical purpose, rather than for its own sake, as they interpret the Cryptic ideal. Even fewer join ranks with the Faustians. The House has had little to do with humans other than training them for war, and many see the race as one of the great weaknesses of the rebellion. Reducing themselves to an



ongoing deception (rather than a simple feint for military gain) so as to appeal to humanity is a humiliation that few Devourers could stomach.

Within the House

The Devourers naturally fit into most structures in which they are placed, so they quickly find themselves useful within the courts and factions, even if they are not experts (to say the least) at negotiating the politics that is required to keep those structures viable. Interaction between different Devourers is usually a straightforward matter. There is little internal bickering or sustained grudges, and even between factions there is a mutual respect for those of their House who have survived this long. The group that strains that respect the most is the Reconcilers, with whom the other Devourers would rather not associate. Even if they see the argument, they think any capitulation at this late stage can only be base cowardice.

There is also little structure that the Devourers impose upon themselves. The negotiations to replace Ziana, who had remained loyal to God, with a Devourer autarch during the war did not go well. Many see such behavior now as a symptom of trying to be too much like other Houses, so it should be avoided. Between the courts and factions there is already enough structure in demonic society. Adding more would only be contrived and possibly detrimental.

The gatherings of Devourers that occurred during the war — wherein the demons would engage in friendly jousts and contests, both to dissipate tension and keep in shape — are still remembered fondly. Unfortunately, a reduced population and decreased mobility means that modern recreations are small affairs, usually no more than three or four individuals gathering for an evening. Some say that there should be more effort to arrange larger groups and to keep in touch, but the distractions of modern life mean that those plans are soon forgotten.

The most successful congregation of Devourers is a more permanent encampment: a self-styled mercenary army operating out of Mexico. They are under the command of a former Baron of the Ebon Legion called Brejian, a fierce fighter who had worked his way up from obscurity. As well as offering the services of his group to those willing to pay the price in knowledge and favors — although he has refused employment a number of times for no given reason — Brejian actively encourages all Devourers to consider their situation. He ridicules courts as being contrived groups based on the random dispersal of demons from the Abyss, and the factions for concentrating on narrow and impractical ideals that do not assist the fallen's long term survival. Those trying to undermine his renown accuse him of being a hidden Ravener, although the pattern of his employment suggests otherwise. Those who instead nominate him for autarch are told he will not give orders to anyone not under his direct command. Whatever the case, his influence seems to be growing.

The Wilderness

Not all demons who retain their interest in the natural world are running from their obligations to the demonic one. The different ideas about the wilderness that developed during the war are still influential, and many Devourers wish to see the flora and fauna that remains continue to do so, even as they are involved in court and factional business. It is often difficult to balance both priorities, not least because most courts are in heavily populated areas, and the advancing edge of human ruin is far removed into the forests or out at sea. Sometimes Devourers sponsor human representatives who are already interested in fighting for these causes. If one or more of these people are enthralled to the demon, then they are likely to be more effective and provide a source of Faith that is far from her enemies.

Others concentrate on ecological problems that are closer to home. Their methods of addressing these problems range from encouraging the planting of trees in populated areas to physical assaults on the many companies who pour toxins into the environment. Because of their usual lack of skill in politicking, and the many other concerns of court, these efforts are usually solitary. At best they might be carried out by a few Devourers in the one area, or the close colleagues of a Devourer who have been swayed by her ideas. Some of the more ambitious demons of the House think that by organizing members across the world to attack the multi-national companies that flaunt their environmental sins, the effect would be particularly profitable. It would send a clear and frightening message to the companies concerned and also encourage the House to be more internally organized. The best known of these Devourers is Oytacah, more often known by her human name of Susan Nyugen, who travels often between the Americas and Southeast Asia. She speaks plainly, reciting the facts and her conclusions with conviction, but none of the skills of a Devil. Although her words are well known, particularly within her own House, her influence seems minimal.

Notable Devourers

Both the lesser number of Devourers, and the fact that they are less likely to succeed politically than those of most other Houses, means that there are not a great many movers and shakers in demon society. More are known for their skill at arms or perhaps an old myth of achievement in a particular battle, but such reputations are sometimes hard to capitalize on. The most widely known Devourer in the modern world is of course Abaddon himself, one of the five great Earthbound who are attempting to assimilate all fallen into their idea of hell on Earth. Only two other lieutenants of the original seven rebelled and survived the war, and both of them remain trapped in the Abyss. Other notable Earthbound include Manishtusu, now known as the Lord of Murder and part of the complex array of forces in Los Angeles; Elcarakhanal, who has insinuated her deadly ways into the plant life of the Pyrenees; and Beelzebub, deeply entrenched within Sydney, Australia.

The highest ranked of the Devourers who have arrived as fallen is Grifiel, who was the first of his House to reveal himself to humans and now maintains his strong loyalty to the Morningstar as leader of the Luciferans (with the Devil Nazathor). The tyrant of the Berlin court is a Devourer called Lassakine, who leads a strong support for the militant Reconciler cause in her area, while the Devourers who congregate under Shargaz in Osaka espouse a less benevolent philosophy.

The following individuals have less political influence, but nonetheless have made themselves known:

Malakh

For Alejandro de la Vega it always came back to El Campito, the detention center in the Campo de Mayo army headquarters just outside Buenos Aires. He was a child of El Campito, and his memories of it were distorted and inconsistent. Sometimes crowded, sometimes empty. His father had told him more, but they were the ramblings of a man drunk on his own shame. When he slept, Alejandro dreamed of his mother, belly slit open for the sharks, tumbling into the Atlantic from a darkened plane.

El Campito had not caused the extensive scarring to Alejandro's back, nor the broken bones — they were the product of Argentine democracy, the price paid by a precocious activist poking into matters most thought best unturned. Most shocking was the fact that many of the commanders and torturers lived comfortable lives immune from prosecution, while the 30,000 victims of Videra's dirty war were shuffled aside in embarrassment. So he fought the bastards and they fought back, and after years of harassment, threats and scuffles in back streets, they got serious. They dragged him into a cell, beat him bloody, used the cigarette lighter and hung him from a single pair of handcuffs for hours. It was in that fugue state that he realized that this was worse than El Campito, because he had never even known his mother, only been told about it, only read about the electric grill to which prisoners were strapped. This dirty cell and the handcuffs were worse, because they were real.

When they finally let him go, he fled in shame, using his father's brother to arrange passage north into the safe, anonymous masses of the United States. But he could not run far enough, and even as he applied the razors to his wrists, he tried to consider the death flights and the disappeared. But he only felt empty inside.

It was not Alejandro's defeat that inspired Malakh to throw off the memory of Hell. It was the man's struggle, the years of it that he had put aside in his mind. Malakh knew about defeat, but now the man's flesh and the demon's soul were getting another chance to put things right.

Malakh never doubted Lucifer, even during the long years of incarceration. He does not understand the Morningstar's manifestation over Los Angeles, but he works to do so. The flame of injustice burns in him again. Yet it is not only the Earthbound coiling through the city or the corrupt humans living off the misery of the disaster that enrages him. It is the bleating hearts that condemn the misery but refuse to act against it. Most of all, it is the fallen, with all their petty court bickering and flaunting of Lucifer's ideals, even as they hold up his memory as a golden idol. Is it any wonder their Lord mocked them?

Malakh can feel it all sliding down toward Hell again, and he knows that there are not going to be any more chances after this one. He has some influence remaining from his time in the Crimson Legion, and his personal strength, which grows daily. He will take up the fight, because he knows the alternative is worse.

Panatei

Tyson McDowell was not a corrupt cop, just a bully and a bastard. There were accusations made against him, but that was just crap pulled by IA, fed bullshit by the weaklings and junkies in the NYPD. They never proved anything. One day he was shot on the job. Friendly fire — an accident it was later ruled. Whether or not this was true is something Tyson

never found out. He lay there choking on his own blood, his soul fleeing before his body was done. It was Panatei, disoriented from a release from Hell, who beat the offending police officer to death with his own smoking gun.

Now Panatei has calmed down, and Tyson is back in the force. He doesn't always go by that name, but thanks to good contacts, his credentials are always rock-solid as he travels around America, visiting one police precinct after another, in semi-random order. His modus operandi is simple. He uses his inside knowledge of police culture and carefully chosen, true-life anecdotes to garner trust, then he instills a little more fear in the ordinary officers he meets. He makes them fear the ways in which the government is going to screw them, the criminals are going to get at them and how the growing civil unrest is going to be turned against them. In addition, whenever he's in town, two or three incidents of blatant corruption and brutality are usually reported (though not ones that can be traced back to his presence). The reason for this is to spread fear and disorder, at the very place where civilian and authoritarian spheres most often meet. Panatei wants to undermine trust in secular authorities and hurry the social disintegration he sees as a very real part of the near future. Only then will the real issues of the fallen be able to be played out with a national audience. Though he favors the Raveners, he claims that all factions will benefit from his actions.

He is not always welcomed by the courts in the cities he visits, but he begs deference to local custom and is under the nominal protection of the Tyrant of New York. He does not push the issue if he is thrown out of town — he just moves on to another one. He figures the chaos will spread fast enough.

Ezurial

Kalpana Bhatia was a cataloguer of exotic fungi and other rare plant life in the dark depths of the rainforest, though she was quite aware that science no longer considers fungi to be plants at all. She was a member of a team working for a large pharmaceutical company, looking for interesting new compounds and combinations to affect human physiology. As their mission leader emphasized, the cure for AIDS or any one of a dozen types of cancer was probably growing quietly under a shrub somewhere. He also did not hesitate to point out that the first person to find that cure was going to gain the type of wealth that lasts generations.

Kalpana was fascinated by the world she plunged into on a regular basis. The rowdy bird life, silent predators and sun-speckled glades all made up a feeling of sanctity — holiness even — like nothing she had felt in a church. She was also tough; an expert at aikido, and master of some knife tricks that her instructors would blanch at. She needed to be, given the countries she visited. But in the end, it was a plant that got her. An orchid of a hue she had never seen, five days from the nearest town, which paralyzed her at a distance of six inches. There should have been backup from the rest of the team — her GPS coordinates were transmitted on the half-hour. There were probably rebels in the area, hiding out from their government in one of those sordid conflicts she never got involved in. For four days, the only things that found her included a curious opossum, a small line of ants tickling her calves and a wasp that laid eggs in her cheek. Then Ezurial of the House of the Wild did, just as she succumbed to a darkness the same hue as the orchid.

But though feeling oddly at home in Kalpana's body, Ezurial had quite a different lifestyle in mind for it. She returned to the Indian headquarters of the company that employed her and expressed an interest in genetic engineering. Ezurial already knew a great deal about the possibilities of the plant kingdom, and was fascinated that human technology had reached a stage that complemented her own (now diminished) powers of control. She has shown her company enough progress that he bosses are happy to let her continue as she wishes, and she certainly hasn't told them her real agenda. She wants to rediscover the secrets of plant and animal life that will mutate freely across generations, and then release them into the wild. She thinks she can restore some of the diversity of the first Garden, adapted to the modern world, and though she is not entirely sure what the results will be, she is determined to try what she can.

An interesting early success she has had involves a species of dove found in Sri Lanka, which seems to have a lot more information found within its chromosomes than might otherwise be expected.

Relics and Lost Lore

The stereotype of Devourers as unthinking savages is belied by the artifacts and rituals they have devised. In ancient times and the modern world alike, the Rabisu have never been slow to develop any advantage they possess and make fine use of their unique powers over nature.

Relics

The relics of the Sixth House are generally simple and direct in their purpose and design. The nature of the Rabisu does not lie in complexity and sophistication, although their relics — as with all their affairs — should not be underestimated. Most of the Devourers' powers have relevant applications for arcane relics, and a wide variety of artifacts draws on the powers of the Sixth House. The following is a selection.

Caul of Rest

The Caul of Rest was developed by Rabisu scouts and hunters for use on friend and foe alike. A Caul of Rest is usually a tough, transparent membrane that stretches without breaking. When it is placed over a whole body, it slows down the body processes enough that the subject slides into a deathlike trance.

Cauls of Rest were used for any number of purposes in the War of Wrath. They were thrown over allies who'd sustained mortal wounds, to stave off death until a healer could be found. They were used on captured enemies to incapacitate them without having to use violence. A body in a Caul of Rest was almost indistinguishable from a corpse, and several crafty Rabisu used this effect to fake their own deaths for a variety of reasons. One Devourer used this trick to gain entry to a stronghold of the Heavenly Host as a body brought in for examination.

System: Using the power of the Caul of Rest requires the expenditure of a Faith point for demons, or a Willpower point for mortals. Once the item's powers have been activated, the artifact has a pool of eight dice to exercise its shrouding effects, rolled against a difficulty of 9. An unwilling subject — such as an enemy being rendered helpless — may resist the slide into coma with a resisted Willpower roll against difficulty 8. This resistance is possible even if the subject is unconscious at the time, as it is a reflexive self-defense.

For all intents and purposes, people under the effects of the Caul of Rest are barely alive. They are effectively comatose, and they cannot take any action; they have no perception or memory of events that take place while they are in this condition. Equally, while they are comatose they feel no pain, require less food and little oxygen, and they age relatively slowly. An observer trying to detect whether the subject is still alive requires a resisted roll against the effects of the Caul of Rest, using Perception + Medicine (difficulty 8). A subject affected by the Caul of Rest cannot be aroused by normal means. Ordinary physical contact and sensations such as sound, light, heat and so on have no effect. If the subject sustains damage while rendered comatose by the Caul of Rest, he can reflexively make a resisted Willpower roll against a difficulty of 8 to shake off the artifact's effects.

If the Caul of Rest successfully affects the subject, its powers remain in effect for as long as it covers his body. If it is removed, it is deactivated and the subject returns to the state he was in when it was applied — awake, asleep, unconscious and so forth. Once the Caul of Rest has been removed from a subject (or rendered ineffective by a subject's resistance) its powers cannot be reused for the next 24 hours.

Mask of Zaltu

The unity of Devourer and nature is the Sixth House's most defining characteristic, and it is never exemplified better than in the evocations of the Lore of the Beast that allow a Rabisu to take on animal form. Masks of Zaltu were designed both to share the experience of beast-form with others and to provide senior Rabisu with useful allies and resources for the War of Wrath.

Also known as a "shapechanger face," the Mask of Zaltu is a carefully wrought mask in the form of an animal's features. Bears, wolves, tigers and other large predators are the most common animals represented, but masks with the faces of birds, cats, small mammals and a variety of other animals are not unknown. A Mask of Zaltu is usually made of real animal fur and fangs, but it can be designed as a stylized image crafted from bark, leaves, stone, gemstones and other natural materials.

Masks of Zaltu cannot be worn by mortals, and are usually created for Devourers of other visages who have not mastered the Lore of the Beast. They are sometimes given to less powerful Rabisu of the Zaltu visage to show them what lies in store, but such demons are usually encouraged instead to concentrate on developing their own natural abilities.

System: Activating the Mask of Zaltu requires the mask to be donned, and the demon must spend a Faith point *and* succeed in a Faith roll (or just spend two Faith points). Once the Mask of Zaltu is activated, it has a pool of eight dice to effect the wearer's transformation. The difficulty is dependent on the size of the creature being imitated. Becoming the same size as the largest known animal of the particular species requires success against difficulty 8, whereas an average sized adult specimen is difficulty 6. Becoming a young adult (with concomitant reductions in the animal's power) is difficulty 5, and transforming into a pup, cub or other juvenile of the species in question is difficulty 4.

The mask's user can select the size of creature she wishes to become, but the type of creature is fixed — each Mask of Zaltu will transform its user into only one type of animal. The transformation takes one turn, and the effects remain for an entire scene (although the wearer can reassume her normal form at will). The transformation can be maintained for further scenes, but each extension requires another roll with at least one success (against the original difficulty) or the user is transformed back to her normal form involuntarily. Each scene in which the transformation is extended counts as a use of the artifact. It can be used five times every day.

When in animal form, the user is bound by the physical limits of that form. A Rabisu with an owl mask can hoot and fly, but he cannot speak and has no opposable thumbs with which to grasp a weapon. The Devourer can use her evocations, however, unless they require actions she cannot perform in that animal's shape.

Panacea

The Panacea is a simple, yet very useful artifact prized by every Devourer — and many other demons besides. A Panacea could take many forms, usually some kind of talisman, amulet or charm worn as jewelry or affixed to the wearer's clothing.

The Panacea is so valuable because it staves off the pain of injuries. A user of the Panacea had to be careful not to injure himself beyond the limits of his body's tolerance, without the informing pain that would normally help him judge how much was too much.

Naturally, the Panacea was a boon to the more warlike Rabisu. Combat-oriented demons found the ability to ignore the hampering effects of pain invaluable. Artifacts like this were also occasionally used to ameliorate the pain of badly injured victims until healing help arrived.

System: The Panacea has a pool of six dice to determine its effects, rolled against a difficulty of 6. Each success reduces the wearer's wound penalties by one. (He still suffers injury, but he feels no ill effects.) Five successes on the roll would mean that the wearer would feel no wound penalties at all until he fell completely unconscious. This roll is made as soon as the relic is activated, and its effects last for the duration of the scene. The relic can be used preemptively — that is, it can be activated by a demon about to go into battle in anticipation of suffering harm — or it can be used when the wearer is actually injured. Regardless, the amount of protection the relic offers can't be altered once activated. (That is, the relic can't be deactivated and activated again in hopes of getting a better roll in the same scene.)

The player of a demon using a Panacea activates it by making a Faith roll or spending a Faith point. Mortal users — although they rarely had access to powerful Rabisu artifacts like the Panacea — activate the relic with a Willpower roll or by spending a Willpower point. Once it has been activated, the Panacea remains active continuously, though the wearer cannot remove it from his person. If he takes it off or it is otherwise removed, it ceases to function and he must reactivate it when he puts it on again.

Wildsong

The Rabisu were noted for their ability to work their will through animals, and those Devourers who were skilled with the Lore of the Beasts could fully possess one or more animals to use as they would use their own bodies. The Wildsong allows the user to do the same thing, but with one great advantage — it is a demonic relic with the spirit of one of the fallen bound within it. It is this spirit that possesses and controls the beasts, freeing the user's concentration and allowing her to act normally in the meantime.

The Wildsong is a set of incredibly ancient rustic pipes such as panpipes or flutes. The user activates them by blowing their wind across the animals to be controlled; commanding the demonic spirit within the pipes will do the rest. These relics were occasionally found in other forms, but used in a similar way.

System: Activating the Wildsong requires a Faith roll (or a Willpower roll if the user is mortal). It has a pool of eight dice for its effects, and each success allows the relic to control one animal. These successes may be augmented by an Intelligence + Animal Ken roll for the demon trapped within the relic, if it has the Possess Animals evocation from the Lore of the Beast.

The relic can control the targeted animals anywhere within a five-mile radius, and the initial control lasts for five turns. The control can be extended by making another activation roll. The animals do not have to be near the relic's user upon reactivation. If the number of successes on the reactivation is less than the original number of beasts, several beasts will shake off the possession and the artifact will retain control over only a number of animals equal to the new successes. This process can continue indefinitely, although poor results on the reactivation rolls might leave the relic eventually controlling only a few animals. The relic can be deactivated — and the animals freed from possession — at any time.

When the controlled animals are freed from possession, they will revert to their natural mental state and act as they would if they had never been possessed. They might still continue to act as though they were possessed, if the actions they were commanded to perform were those they would do anyway. For example, a tiger freed of possession while in the middle of attacking a small group of humans might still carry on with his attack if a tiger in that situation would ordinarily do so.

The Entrapped Demon: Binding •• (may resist only those orders that are directly contrary to its nature), Empowerment •• (Vessel Control, Spiritual Infusion).

The demonic spirits trapped in Wildsongs were usually Devourers themselves, those who'd fallen to the Heavenly Host in battle and were mortally wounded, or discipline cases worthy of a long punishment. Occasionally other spirits of the Sixth House were used to empower these relics, angels captured in the War of Wrath and put to a more demonic use.

When the relic's creator had a choice of spirit to embed in the Wildsong, demons with Possess Animals (Beast •••) were the obvious choice. Such demons usually had another evocation or two from other lore paths, commonly evocations such as Wilderness Sense (Wild •, ideal for directing the possessed animals to go exactly where they're needed) or Manipulate Flesh (Flesh •••, allowing the demon to amplify the power of the possessed animals). Naturally, the trapped demons were usually commanded by the relic creator to obey any Rabisu who uses the artifact.

Sinews of Speed

The Devourers of the Zaltu visage were admired for the deadly speed of their attacks in combat. Such swiftness would be a boon to any warrior, and it was not long before the artisans and creators of the Sixth House had developed relics that would share that speed with other Devourers.

The Sinews of Speed are long yellowish-white strips used as wrappings for the arms and legs of the wearer. Each set of Sinews of Speed is made from the tendons, ligaments and sinews of an agile and deadly predator — tiger, wolf, cheetah — and is worn by binding it around the hands and feet. When worn, they confer speed in combat to the user, allowing him to act far more swiftly than those around him. He may make several strikes for every one of theirs, and the advantage this speed brings to the wearer and his allies is immeasurable.



System: One activates the Sinews of Speed by making a Faith roll or spending a Faith point. Their nature is entwined with the divinity of fallen angels, and they cannot be used by mortals. Once they have been activated, the user may spend Faith points to gain extra actions in a round. Each action costs one Faith point, and the user may purchase extra actions up to his Faith score.

The Sinews only remain active for one scene. They can be reactivated every scene, but doing so requires a new Faith roll (or spending another Faith point).

Thicket Dust

The Devourers found that the ability to control plant growth was very useful to them, in a number of ways. The first and most obvious application was in establishing and restoring wilderness areas ravaged by the War of Wrath and other cataclysmic events, but the strategic implications could not be ignored. With the power of the Lore of the Wild at their fingertips, the Rabisu could shape the natural obstacles and impediments of a battleground to suit themselves rather than the enemy; they could control their terrain and make marked changes overnight to change the tide of a battle.

Thicket Dust took the form of fine sand with golden and pale green grains. When spread across an area, it encouraged wild, tangling plant growth to leap forth and grow without restraint, blocking passage for any who had not mastered the Lore of the Wild. Unlike most relics, Thicket Dust was not reusable, although the soil it affected was usually enriched for years to come.

System: A demon using Thicket Dust must make a Faith roll (or spend a point of Faith) to call upon its powers; mortals require a Willpower roll or expenditure of a Willpower point. When Thicket Dust is spread over an area of soil, it affects all the plants growing within the area. The dust has 12 dice for its effects. All the plants in the affected area increase in volume by a number of cubic yards equal to the dust's successes against difficulty 7. The growth takes place within a single turn and is rapid and uncontrolled.

Small objects in the area of growth are pushed aside by the burgeoning plant life; larger objects are engulfed, wrapped up or smothered in branches, creepers, vines and roots. Some objects might be completely encased in plant material if they cannot be moved by the explosive growth but are too small to escape being engulfed.

Vines, roots and branches can cause physical damage to structures and objects in the area of plant growth. Each success on the dust's roll counts as a point of Strength for the purposes of Feats of Strength (**Demon** p. 232).

The plant growth is only temporary, and it lasts for one scene. The user of the Thicket Dust may spend a temporary Willpower point to make the growth permanent. If she does so, the plants stay at their new size, and any engulfed objects remain buried in the plant matter. The vegetable matter is ordinary and organic, and it can be damaged or disposed of just like any other plants of their type.

Unerring Map

As some of the finest warriors and generals of Lucifer's army, the Devourers found that having accurate tactical information of their battlegrounds was essential for their success. Information the Asharu scouts and spies could provide was used to good effect, but the Rabisu chose not to be dependent on anyone else for the information they required.

Unerring Maps were developed by Rabisu artificers to provide their fellow Devourers with invaluable information about their terrain. An Unerring Map was commonly a roll of papyrus or tanned hide that usually appears blank. They were prized by scouts and strategists alike, and they were surprisingly hardy given their frangible construction.

System: The Unerring Map provides six dice to determine its effects against a difficulty of 6 for wilderness or natural areas, and 8 for urban regions. Activating it requires a Faith roll (or spending a Faith point). The rare mortals who have used these relics use Willpower as the relevant trait.

If the map's power takes effect successfully, the relic shows the user a detailed map of the surrounding area. Natural and geographical features are marked in brown; people and animals are highlighted in gold and green respectively. In the days when there were angels to see, they were limned in silver. The map can show demons on it — they appear in red — but fallen seeking to conceal their presence can avoid detection with a resisted Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

The artifact shows an area with a radius of one mile plus one mile for every success on the roll. The details remain visible for a scene and then fade until the page is blank again. It can be used three times a day.

Rituals

The Devourers made less use of rituals than many other Houses, since most of their functions were immediate and direct. Acting over the long term or from a distance was less in their natures than it was in

other Houses'. Nonetheless, well-designed rituals were still an advantage that no demon at war could afford to ignore, and any number of extended rituals suited the Devourers' purpose.

Animated Plant

In time, the most senior Rabisu mastered plants and animals alike, and under their watchful gaze the two began to blur. With this ritual and others like it, the Devourers created intelligent and active plants that were far more than mere vegetation. More than once, an unwary group of loyalists paused to rest in a small forest and were never seen again, though the well-fed trees sprouted and grew lush.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Wild •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Beast ••••

Base Cost: 18

Restrictions: The plants to be enchanted must be placed within the sigil and targeted with the ritual when they are only seedlings.

Minimum Casting Time: 81 minutes

System: Spend a Faith point and roll Intelligence + Survival. The seedlings can be planted and nurtured like any other flora once the ritual has been cast on them; they are affected by the Devourer's Lore of the Wild like normal plants. The affected plants are far more than mere vegetation, however. They have rudimentary intelligence equivalent to that of an animal. The effect on the plants is permanent once the ritual has been completed. As they grow, they develop their intelligence just as a wild animal does.

The plant also develops natural weapons it can use for hunting or combat. The plant's attack and damage dice pools are equal to the Ankida's Faith rating. The damage the plant inflicts is lethal.

Devourers who wish to command these animated plants must use evocations such as Command the Wild (Wild •••) to do so. Without this control, the plants are as wild and feral as any untamed animal.

Torment: If the ritual is affected by Torment, controlling these plants — which develop a vicious and bloodthirsty will of their own — requires a demon using Command the Wild to also succeed on a Willpower roll with a difficulty equal to the Ankida's Torment score. In addition, when the plants successfully cause damage to someone, they also inflict an additional lethal health level of damage. Their sap is caustic and toxic, highly dangerous to mortal, animal and demon alike.

Variations: Unconfirmed rumors told of plants that could speak with men, created by incorporating the Lore of Humanity • into the ritual.

Beast Tongue

The demons of the Sixth House had easy access to the minds and hearts of the animals with which they worked, but their human allies had no such advantage. The ability to converse with animals in tactical situations was invaluable to the Rabisu, and the Beast Tongue ritual was developed to extend this ability to the mortals who aided them. The animals the Devourers worked with were almost always ordered not to harm a certain group of designated humans, to allow the mortals to talk with the animals in the absence of the Devourers without risking life and limb.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Beast ••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Humanity •

Base Cost: 6

Restrictions: The sigil must be drawn with a solution infused with woodbine and robin.

Minimum Casting Time: 9 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Empathy. The ritual can affect a number of mortals (or demons) equal to the Ankida's Faith score multiplied by the number of successes rolled. Once it takes effect, the subjects can converse with any natural animal that is ordinarily capable of communicating with others of its kind. The animal will perceive the ritual subjects to be communicating with it as others of its kind would.

The ritual's effects last for a number of hours equal to the Ankida's Faith score.

Torment: The ritual's subjects can still communicate with animals, but their "speech" comes out hostile and aggressive. Animals will react as if threatened to anything the subjects say while affected by the ritual. A mortal or demon must rely on a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll against a difficulty equal to the Ankida's Torment score to overcome this effect and be understood normally.

Variations: Increasing the Humanity rating to •• causes animals who are being spoken to by a ritual subject to be naturally predisposed in her favor, regardless of whether they have been previously commanded by a Devourer to be friendly.

Wild Path

Speed and mobility on the field of war were essential for victory. Where others used their wings, many Ninurtu used the plants they had nurtured from infancy to burgeoning adulthood. Using the Wild Path ritual, Devourers could step into a stand of trees and step out a mile away, an unpleasant surprise to the enemy with their backs turned.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Wild ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Paths ••

Base Cost: 12

Restrictions: The subjects must stand within the sigil, which must be inscribed in a natural clearing in a copse of trees or forest.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Spend one Faith point and roll Stamina + Survival. The ritual affects a number of subjects — mortal or demon — up to the number of successes rolled. The ritual lasts for 12 hours, and during that period the affected subjects can step into one tree and emerge from another just as if they had traversed a path. This effect works anywhere within the Ankida's Faith score in miles from the ritual's sigil. In effect, the ritual spontaneously creates paths for the beneficiaries of the ritual between the trees in the ritual's area of effect, as and when the paths are needed.

If a subject tries to step out of a tree that is outside the area of the ritual's influence, she is automatically diverted to the nearest tree that is within the Ankida's Faith in miles of the ritual sigil. Identifying the correct tree to step out of requires a Perception + Survival roll (difficulty 7). If the roll fails, the person steps out of a random tree in the ritual's area of effect.

Torment: If the ritual is affected by Torment, the demons' taint irritates the trees and provokes resistance. Stepping into a tree requires a Willpower roll against the Ankida's Torment score, to push one's way past the Torment-induced barrier.

Variations: None

Character Creation

Weavers and warders, gardeners and harrowers, the Sixth House has produced some of the greatest paradoxes of demonic — and angelic — history. Commonly discounted as mindless and bestial, the Devourers exemplify the merging of reason and instinct by bringing nobility to the unification of knowledge and nature. The darker side of the Devourer's essence revels in the beast within, as the fallen angel falls further into savagery and violence. The dichotomy of the nature of the Rabisu — the delicacy of their attention to nature, and the fiery devotion to its defense — allows the creation of interesting and playable Devourers. The following sections provide some advice to guide you.

Concept

Like every angel, the Devourers were created to serve several specific purposes, and even after the Fall these integral motivations resonate strongly with the Rabisu. Most members of the Sixth House can be characterized by one of the following concepts, although exceptions are always possible.

Beast: In many ways, bestial Devourers are the warriors who have slid into indifference, rage or depression. Their moral decline began during the atrocities of the War of Wrath, when it became so much easier to fight without stopping, to destroy without questioning, to stop resisting the urge to smash every obstacle in one's path. The beasts of the Rabisu were once as careful and nurturing as any of the Sixth House, until weariness and blood wore them down into unthinking violence. Bestial Devourers are drawn to those who deal in violence as easy currency — criminals, law enforcers, soldiers and anyone for whom brutality is the first response rather than the last.

Warder: Where other Devourers focus on the act of fighting — whether for a cause or just because it's the easy option — the warders of the Sixth House are motivated by what they're fighting for. These are the Devourers who retain the strongest connection to the natural world they were originally charged to create. Warders are drawn to mortals who are intimately involved with the wild as scientists, activists or even — in the case of demons wracked by Torment — despoilers. In the modern world most Devourers of this bent are found working with typical Rabisu dedication to protect the natural environment, but not every warder is motivated by altruism and high-minded devotion. Just as many Devourers are involved with the wild out of simple self-interest. Their natural affinity for the harsh places of the world gives them an advantage they would not willingly give up, and it would be foolish to allow their favored environs to be overrun by urbanization.

Warrior: The Devourers were stalwarts in the War of Wrath, prized by every legion for their devotion to their cause and their unfaltering readiness on the field of war. Warrior Devourers were usually those who felt a personal calling to defend the ideals of Lucifer's rebellion, who felt that the best way to succeed was to stand and fight with all the resources at their command. Most tend to be direct and definite rather than subtle or manipulative. Warriors are usually drawn to the most resolute and steadfast among human hosts, though these traits can also be characterized as stubbornness and moral absolutism. Less obvious hosts are drawn from those mortals who stand in the face of overwhelming odds to achieve goals they consider important.

Nature and Demeanor

If Devourers can be characterized in one word, it's "resolute." Rare is the Rabisu who carelessly abandons something he's set himself to. Devourers choose a cause and stick to it until the bitter end. For many, admitting defeat or giving up is as shameful as it is useless. As such, most Devourers have Natures chosen from among Autocrat, Bravo, Competitor, Fanatic, Masochist or Perfectionist.

Most Devourers do respect the hierarchy of the Sixth House, and of demonic society as a whole, but few are interested in playing at politics or sacrificing the causes they hold dear for the sake of an organization. As a consequence, few Devourers have Natures such as Conformist or Conniver, instead finding themselves more comfortable as Loners, Rebels, Rogues or Survivors.

A Devourer with a Nature such as Addict, Bon Vivant, Deviant, Gambler, Monster or Thrill-Seeker is probably best suited for the Beast concept. Such demons are prepared to ignore all the dictates of convention and conscience in exchange for gratification and satisfaction.

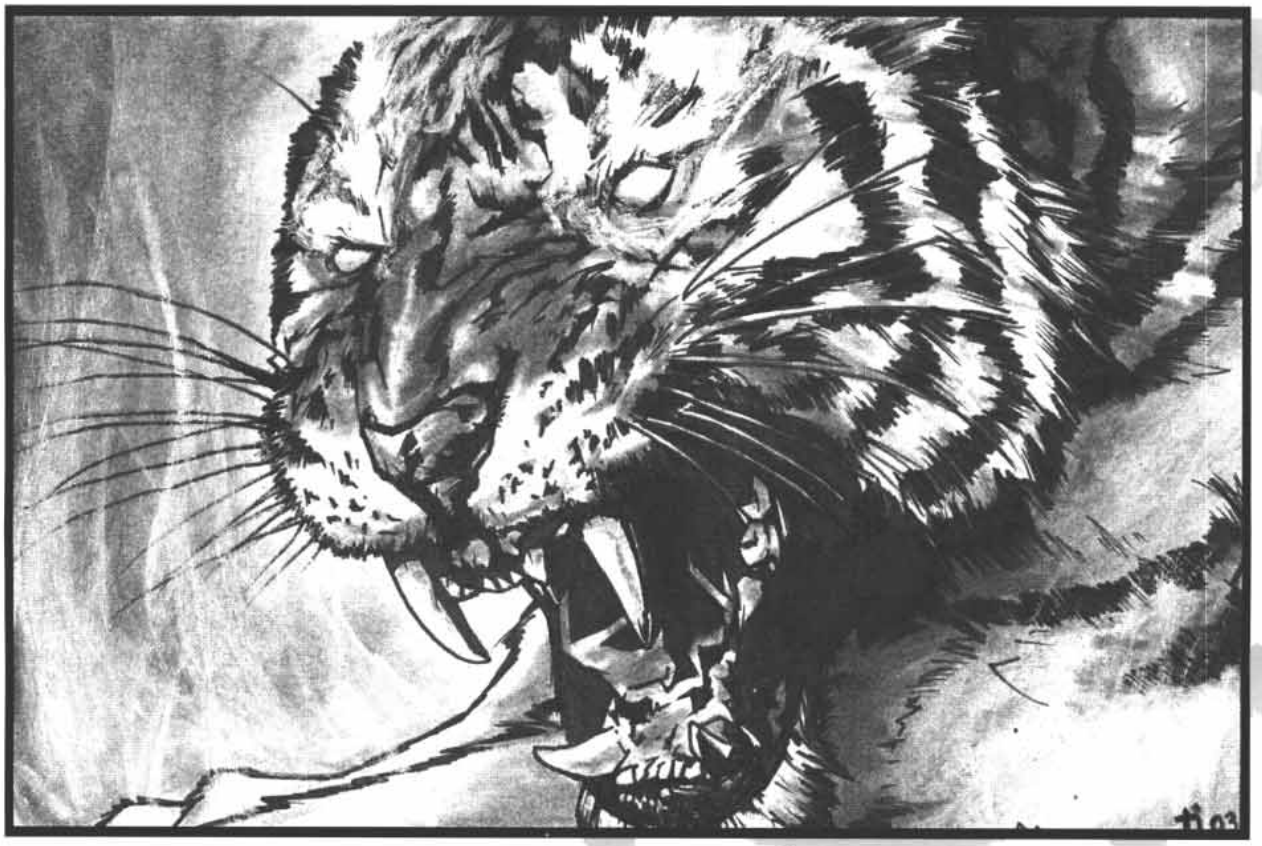
A rare few Devourers exhibit the restraint and patience for the Architect, Director, Pedagogue and Visionary Natures. Most of these are careful and considerate gardeners of the warder category, or prudent and meticulous strategists and planners best described as warriors.

Most Devourers do not care enough for deception and manipulation to bother with showing a false face to the world. Few Rabisu have Demeanors that differ more than marginally from their true Natures, although the steadfast determination characteristic of the Devourers can sometimes be concealed behind a mask of apathy or false cheer. In many such cases, the demon is trying to fool herself as much as the rest of the world.

Primary Lore

Your character's visage and primary lore are quantified at a later stage in the character-creation process, but it's worth making some decisions as you begin fleshing out the character's other details. A demon's primary lore reflects the celestial purpose for which he was created, and it will have a significant impact on his abilities and aptitudes. The lore of the Devourers is discussed here, along with suggestions for appropriate choices for each broad character concept.

Lore of the Beast: This lore allows the demon to affect the realm of animals, and its evocations all center around communicating with, controlling



and manipulating animals. The Visage of the Beast provides bonuses to all Physical Attributes and to the physical senses. It also makes the character far more effective in combat, with the ability to inflict aggravated damage and to take more than one action a turn. The Lore of the Beast is appropriate for warriors, who can gain significant advantage from the Zaltu visage's combat applications, and is particularly well suited to bestial Devourers who prefer the simplicity of animalism to the complex moral issues of the world of reason. Warder Rabisu will derive less benefit from the Lore of the Beast, since its evocations have no influence on the physical world, merely a subset of the creatures who live in it.

Lore of the Flesh: The last of the Devourer lore paths to be developed, the Lore of the Flesh is also the most direct. Its evocations are the only powers of the Devourers that work straight on other mortals and demons, and they can be used to cause significant weal or woe. Aruru, the Visage of the Flesh, is less combat-oriented than Zaltu, as it bestows bonuses to Social traits and defensive advantages in the form of increased Initiative and immunity to poisons. This is a good primary lore for warriors who wish to inspire others to follow their example or for bestial Devourers who wish to transcend the limits of their forms. It has less to recommend itself to warders, who are usually less self-centered than this lore implies and who have less use for its evocations.

Lore of the Wild: This lore is the companion to the Lore of the Beast. It provides mastery over the plant kingdom instead of the animal, and its evocations allow significant control over the environment. The Ninurtu visage is well suited for less combative characters; it provides significant bonuses to stealth abilities and the same enhanced senses as the Zaltu visage. It also provides extra health levels, which will suit any character, and combat-oriented characters who do suit the Lore of the Wild will find this a useful boon. Overall, the Lore of the Wild is most appropriate for warder characters, as it provides the most control over the ecology as a whole. It might suit bestial Devourers, since the destructive potential of unchecked plant growth is considerable, but its powers are not directly confrontational and Rabisu of a warrior mindset will gain less advantage from this than from other lore.

Attributes

Despite the stereotype of Devourers as unthinking killing machines, the Devourers who excel in their chosen specialties must needs be well balanced in their aptitudes.

Physical

Devourers often tend to be physically oriented characters, and good ratings in Physical Attributes are required for the prowess in combat for which Devourers are reputed. They are not essential for many of the Devourers' evocations, however. Nonetheless, you should probably assign at least the secondary priority to Physical Attributes, as few Devourers are content to sit back without physically reacting when things go wrong. A Devourer who cannot look after himself when required is a rare creature indeed.

Of the Physical Attributes, Stamina is by far the premier choice. Not only does it represent the quintessential hardiness of the Rabisu, but it's the basis of a number of their powers. It's particularly important for Devourers of the Ninurtu visage, who have several evocations requiring Stamina.

Dexterity and Strength are of roughly equal importance, though there is one high-level evocation in the Lore of the Flesh that's based on Dexterity. The choice between these Attributes is largely a matter of the character's style and standard tactics.

Social

By and large, the Rabisu have never been creatures of social graces, which is reflected in their powers. Few of their evocations are based on Social Attributes; the Lore of the Beast has one — Command Animals — that relies on Manipulation, but as a rule, the Social Attributes are the Devourer's lowest priority.

The exception to this rule could be the Rabisu of the Aruru visage, whose Social Attributes are amplified in their apocalyptic form. In general, Manipulation is the least important Social Attribute to the Devourers who live in the modern world. Charisma represents the animal magnetism that Devourers can understand, and many perfect physical specimens of the Sixth House have impressive Appearance ratings, but the drawn-out process of Manipulation seems like too much effort to a demon who's used to direct action.

Mental

Devourers might not be noted for their love of intellectual pursuits, but those who hope to master their lore cannot afford to neglect the arena of the mind. All three Mental Attributes are important to Devourers, and you should probably put Mental Attributes at least second in priority when allocating Attribute dots.

Intelligence is of paramount importance for Devourers of all visages. The Zaltu and Ninurtu visages each have two evocations based on Intelligence, while Aruru has three. Each visage also has one evocation that relies on Perception. Finally, although none of the evocations are based on Wits, the Attribute reflects the simple and instinctive mental reflexes that are appropriate for instinctive people like Devourers, and high ratings in Wits are appropriate for most Rabisu.

Abilities

Unlike the balance between different categories of Attributes, Devourers do tend to be fairly specialized in their Ability choices. The following are some suggestions for allocating dots of Abilities:

Talents

Many of the Devourers' strengths lie in their instinctive, ingrained reflexes — such aptitudes are usually quantified as Talents, and most Devourers should have Talents as at least their second priority for Abilities.

No Talents are essential for Devourer evocations, but a number are important to the typical role of a Devourer. Most Rabisu will have high ratings in Alertness and Dodge. Combat-oriented Devourers such as warriors and some bestial Rabisu should put as many dots as possible into such Talents as Athletics and Brawl. These demons should also have several dots in Intimidation, particularly bestial Devourers. Warriors might wish to put some points into Leadership; they might not be naturals like the Devils, but many Devourers were notable war-leaders during the War of Wrath.

Skills

It's on Skills that Devourers should focus, since most Rabisu evocations use Skills rather than Talents or Knowledges. Devourers of the Zaltu visage should take as many dots in Animal Ken as they can, since every evocation of the Lore of the Beast uses this Skill. Similarly, the Lore of the Wild uses Survival at every turn, and Ninurtu visage Devourers should aim for the highest rating they can.

Survival is appropriate for every Devourer character, although it's only those who choose the Lore of the Wild as their primary lore who need to max it out. Most Rabisu are used to operating without a comfort zone, and Survival is essential for this.

Warriors who continue their role in the modern world should take several dots in Firearms, Melee or both, depending on how the character chooses to operate. Similarly, combat-oriented bestial Devourers should have good ratings in Firearms and Melee, and perhaps Demolitions if they've chosen the path of mass destruction and collateral damage.

Knowledges

Although specific information is vital to a Devourer's success, most Rabisu do not particularly need to be generally well educated, and you can probably afford to make Knowledges the lowest priority of the Abilities.

The one obvious choice is for Devourers of the Aruru visage. Every evocation of the Lore of the Flesh relies on Medicine for its effectiveness, and consequently such characters should take as high a rating in Medicine as they can.

Computer and Linguistics are useful for every character in the modern world, and warder Devourers should have high Academics, Research and Science ratings if they come from academic or scientific backgrounds. Other than these, your choice of Knowledges is best made when considering the history of the Devourer and that of her mortal host.

Backgrounds

Most Backgrounds will be useful to Devourer characters, but some are more appropriate than others. Eminence is useful for status in modern demonic society. While the Sixth House as a whole had relatively low status during the War of Wrath, a great many individual Devourers were admired and respected for their dedication and their abilities.

Legacy and Paragon are both very useful for warrior types and bestial Devourers, since Legacy gives them access to invaluable memories of their first lives and Paragon makes the evocations of their primary lore into much more reliable tools. Pacts are also useful to fuel the inferno of Faith whenever a warrior needs to heal his wounds.

Warders — particularly those with activist backgrounds — will find that Allies, Contacts, Followers and Resources are useful for promulgating their cause in the modern world. While their social network might not rival that of a Devil or Defiler, many warders and a number of other Devourers find that mortal power is a potent weapon to wield.

Virtues

The warriors of the Sixth House tend to have strong ratings in Conviction and exemplary ratings in Courage, while Conscience remains at a lower level. Most Devourer warriors do what they do out of a sense of duty rather than compassion. It's possible for Conscience to have a higher rating, though,

since the laws of nature that the Devourers embody can be kind as well as cruel.

Bestial Devourers tend to have very high Courage ratings, variable Conviction ratings — some act out of genuine feeling, while others have simply given up caring — and very low Conscience ratings. A high Conscience rating would make it very difficult for a bestial Devourer to act the way he does for long. Sadly, most bestial Devourers slide toward Torment rapidly thanks to their brutal and battered ways, and they must change their nature to arrest the moral decay.

Warders tend to have much more evenly spread ratings. Some have high Conscience while others have lower ratings. Their Conviction ratings tend to be the mirror image of their Conscience, whether they act from compassion or duty. Their Courage is at least moderate, though displays of bravery whispered down the ages tend to be the purview of other kinds of Devourers.

Lore

By now you've probably decided what your character's primary lore will be. Now you need to quantify it and decide how many evocations of each lore you really need. Some lore is worth putting all your dots into, but with other character focuses you're better off selecting your evocations across a number of lore paths. Since your starting evocations are few in number, it's worth being very careful where you spend your dots.

Lore of the Beast

Bestial Devourers who choose the Lore of the Beast as their path are advised to put all three dots into it. Doing so gives them the evocations of Summon Animals, Command Animals and Possess Animals, which provides a wide range of powers over natural creatures and puts them in a good position to get Animal Form very soon. For Devourers without too many demands on their freebie points, an extra dot of this lore makes for a very powerful and dangerous character as play begins.

Warriors of the Zaltu visage should definitely put all three dots into this lore and aim to buy a fourth dot with freebie points if at all possible. The combat advantage of Animal Form is overwhelming, and it is the best direct-combat evocation in the Devourer's arsenal.

Warders can find a dot of this lore handy. It is complementary to the Lore of the Wild, and although they should not focus on it to the exclusion of their other lore, such demons will find any evocations they acquire to be useful.

Lore of the Flesh

This is an appropriate lore for bestial characters to choose as their primary lore. Putting two dots into it gives the demon access to Body Control and Manipulate Nerves. The potential for atrocity in the latter power — even without resorting to the evocation's high-Torment effects — is appropriate for bestial Devourers, and spending a further point gives the Manipulate Flesh evocation. This power is very useful for combat-oriented characters, providing an easy way to amplify their existing capacity for brutality.

Equally, warriors can derive significant combat advantage from specializing in the Lore of the Flesh. If they make it their primary lore, they should spend all three dots on it to gain access to Manipulate Flesh. Spending the freebie points to get another evocation — Restore Flesh — can also be a good idea, as it is very useful for healing terrible physical trauma in combat situations.

Lore of the Flesh is less useful for warder characters than any other lore, and as a starting character, the utility of an evocation like Body Control is offset by the sacrifice of a dot in another evocation from a different lore.

Lore of the Wild

This is the obvious lore for warder Devourers to focus on, and they should take at least two dots in it. It gives them Wilderness Sense and Quicken Growth. The fine control in Command the Wild is a useful tool, but is not essential for a starting character, and warders of the Ninurtu visage are advised to diversify to strengthen their character. Progression in the Lore of the Wild is advantageous eventually, however, as Possess Plant and Mutate Plant are very powerful evocations that can be invaluable both in combat and out of it.

Some bestial Devourers may find this an appropriate visage to take, particularly those whose own wildness is impelled by the damage done to nature and the environment. These Devourers, in many ways embodying the darker side of the warders, should take as many dots of Lore of the Wild as possible. The sooner they learn Possess Plant and Mutate Plant, the quicker they can begin reshaping the world according to their own twisted ideas. In the meantime, the rampant uncontrolled destructive power of evocations such as Quicken Growth is very useful and appropriate for bestial Devourers.

Warriors may find this lore path less appropriate. It is less direct and long-term than most of the Devourers' powers, and it suits warriors

less well than other lore paths. The most independent of the warrior Rabisu find that some measure of control over nature is advisable, however, and they should take a dot of this lore. This leaves them with Wilderness Sense, and the tactical information it bestows is invaluable for combatant-types.

Common Lore

The mobility provided by the Lore of the Fundament is very useful for any combat-oriented character — in this case, warriors and some beasts. The Manipulate Gravity evocation bestowed by one dot is very useful for combat situations, but increasing the lore rating further would require freebie points better spent elsewhere.

The Lore of Humanity, on the other hand, is not particularly relevant to the Devourers. The Sixth House as a whole had less to do with humans directly than most of the other demonic Houses did, and its interactions usually came about when dealing with nature and natural environments. The Devourers have never focused on winning friends among humanity, and although that might be a nice goal, there are more important things for most of the Rabisu to concentrate on. As such, dots in the Lore of Humanity are probably dots that could be better spent on House lore.

Freebie Points

A high Faith rating is very useful for Devourers, since it helps them shrug off damage they sustain in combat. Battle-oriented Devourers — warriors and some beasts — should spend several freebie points on improving their Faith rating by at least one point.

Like other demons, Devourers are immune to mental control, so Willpower is mostly useful for ensuring the success of mundane actions. Being able to purchase automatic successes makes a marked difference to combat effectiveness, and all Devourers will find increased Willpower useful. Of them all, warders probably have least use for a high Willpower rating and are better advised to spend their freebie points elsewhere.

Warriors should consider pumping up their combat Abilities and Physical Attributes where possible, although buying an extra dot of Lore of the Beast (for those of Zaltu visage) is almost as useful. Bestial Devourers can make their choices according to the path they've chosen, but they should generally focus on destructive and violent Abilities. The less specialized focus of bestial Rabisu means they might be better served by purchasing a dot or two of lore other than their primary. Warders should focus on increasing their Survival Skill as much as possible and improving any Mental Attributes they can afford.



Chapter Seven: The House of Falling Night

Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored...
—Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*

From the moment God created the House of the Second World, it was set apart from the others. Every angel that served in His hosts devoted its existence to one thing: the creation of this new First World that He was devising. The Angels of the Second World were devoted to the ending of life, a concept that only entered the world with their coming. After God created the angels of Seventh House, they moved quietly across of the face of the world, examining each organism and deciding when it had fulfilled its role in Creation. When that moment came, they ended its life and sent its remains for reuse in the ongoing work of creation. The Reapers, as the elder Houses named them, had access to a plane of reality unique to the last House. It was a place of death, a land only a cessation of bio-chemical reaction away from the mundane world. There the angels of the Seventh House dealt with the spirits of the departed, the part of its existence that could not be quantified by the physical laws. The other Houses called this place the Second World, confusing the Reapers' name with their workshop. They were wrong, though. The dead lands were very much part of the First World, God's creation.

At first, the coming of the Reapers surprised the other angels. Their whole existence had been devoted to the business of Creation. Now, things were dying. An embassy of thrones from all the Houses went to God and humbly asked Him to explain the reason for the new House. God told them that Creation was merely the beginning of His design, not the end of it.

Before the Fall

The Seventh House was the first step toward a grander vision of Creation, a Second World growing from the first, whose purpose would become clear in time. God's plan was far from done, and the first hints of this Second World would appear in the days to come, in the form of a new creation of living beings, a species above all others, to be called mankind. True change required the ending of some things, rather than just the continual growth of existing things. The angels of the Seventh House were the harbingers of the move from creation to growth and change, or so God explained.

This vision of the future was to be a secret, though, so as not to distract the lesser angels from the current work. The thrones returned to their fellows, told them that God had his reasons for the Seventh House and most accepted it without question. It was the word of God, after all. A few questioned what the meaning and purpose of this Second World could be, though, or what their role in it might be.

The confusion over the dead lands and the Second World created worries. Given that only the Seventh House was granted access to this realm, the others had reason for disquiet. Never before had the six Houses been barred from an aspect of reality. It is possible that those mutterings of discontent, the first Creation had seen, were the seeds from which the rebellion later spouted.

Isolation

While the other Houses accepted God's word, they were under no obligation to welcome the members of the Seventh House. Contact between the lower ranking members of the House of the Second World and those of other Houses was minimal, and God's other servants shunned the Angels of Death. The Reapers did not mind. They saw their calling as a noble and demanding one, requiring them to understand more than just the creation of living beings. They had to track an organism through the whole of its life, watch its interaction with its environment and decide when it had done all it was meant to do. They had to understand the whole life cycle of a creature, so they could see when its influence on the world was done, leaving it ripe for their touch. The Reapers worked alone, each tracking a group of organisms, flitting quickly through the layers of reality, tracking the progress of their charges through time. Each and every creature that died was met at the end by one of the Angels of Death, its passing marked by one of the forces of the universe.

Remembering and Understanding

The members of the House took great pride in their work. Their role was akin to that of a modern gardener, helping improve the raw beauty of nature by removing those things that were no longer needed. Deep in their hearts, the Reapers saw themselves as those who perfected God's creations, smoothing the rough edges of the other Houses' work and honing their own skills in preparation for the next stages of God's divine plan. Their charge wasn't always an easy one. Before the Fall, the world was a place of incomprehensible beauty, and the death of even one living component of this great tapestry of life was something to mourn. The Reapers took it upon themselves to remember all the living things that they had to kill. Each had had its own place in this undertaking, and each should be remembered for it, even as its very substance was returned to the world. The Reapers learned to focus on the moment of death with all of their inhuman concentration, remembering every aspect of the being as they stripped it down to its raw materials on every level of reality. This intense concentration gave the House an understanding of the nature of living beings that none of the other Houses possessed. While the House of the Firmament understood their creation and the House of Spheres could see something of their destiny, only the Reapers really understood that these creatures changed through the course of their lives, becoming something a little more than they were at the moment of their creation.

Slowly, it dawned on the Reapers that the world was changing without the direct intervention of the angels. Creation was no longer the preserve of the angelic choir alone; it seemed to be a characteristic inherent to God's work.

Usiel, Throne of the Sundered, brought this revelation to the throne of God, who smiled as he listened. "Now you start to understand the Second World, as I knew you would," He said. "It is not a place, and certainly not your world of death. It is a new era of Creation, one that will not be ready for a long time to come. It must be prepared for, though, and your understanding tells Me that the time has come for the next day of creation. Thank you, Usiel. You and your House have pleased Me."

Usiel left His presence, glad that God had granted him, at last, further knowledge of the House's eventual destiny.

Communication

It took time for Usiel's news to spread throughout the House. While the Reapers were just as capable of talking to each other wherever they

were in Creation, they rarely took advantage of the ability out of respect for the moment of death. An ill-timed message could disrupt an angel's concentration at the critical moment of dissolution. Instead, virtually all communication between House members took place at the moments when they met through their duties. Occasionally, members of the House would meet when God's plan called for several creatures to perish at once. After a warning from an angel of the House of Spheres, the Reapers would gather and do their duty. Before they dispersed, though, they would take the opportunity to discuss the creatures they had dispatched, share memories of their other works and share news of the general work of creation. It was through such meetings that news of Usiel's discussion with God spread, and news of the coming of humanity, the work of the next day, filtered out to the whole of the House.

On occasion, God called for whole orders of organisms to be wiped from creation, their part in the ongoing production of Creation finished. The Reapers descended *en masse* at such times, to perform their duties and to bear proper witness to the end of those organisms. Those moments were masterpieces of coordination, with the highest-ranking members of the House making sure that all their subordinates were in position at the exact moment that the mass extinction struck.

Such events, of course, did little to endear the Reapers to the other Houses. Whole orders of beings, many of whom were under the watch of the Sixth House, the House of the Wild, were wiped from the Earth in one stroke. Without any understanding of what the Second World might be, the other Houses could not understand the purpose of such destruction. The lack of social contact between the Reapers and the angels of the other Houses prevented any word of the work the Reapers did to remember those creatures who had perished from reaching the elder angels. The isolation the Angels of the Second World felt from their fellows increased with each such event.

The Secret

The one thing that the other Houses never realized, and which Usiel kept to himself, was that the Reapers did not understood the nature of the Second World either. When God created Usiel and the rest of the House, He told them that their role would be to prepare for the Second World that would follow this one, but He told them no more than they needed to introduce death to the world. With each creature that died, the shadow of the world that the other Houses erroneously assumed was the Second World grew, bolstered by the spiritual remains of the creature that had perished.

This evident declaration of a great destiny was enough for the House, though, and its members did their job with an assiduous dedication that kept them from socializing with the other Houses. As they worked, they looked forward to the day when God would reveal the rest of their destiny. So was the way of the House, until the coming of humanity.

Pain

Of all the living creatures that filled Creation, the only ones that were outside the jurisdiction of the Angels of Death were humans. At first, this didn't bother the Reapers at all. They had no wish to practice their skills on these, the most perfect of God's creations. Instead, the House of the Second World relished each glimpse of humanity even as its members speculated on these beings' role in the days of Creation yet to come. Humanity's limits and relative ignorance puzzled them for a while, until they realized that humanity's destiny might well be tied up with God's future revelation of the Second World, their own understanding of the world's ability to change and the Reapers' role in the future of God's work.

As the Reapers watched the humans from afar, however, they found themselves feeling the same frustration at the limits God imposed on these creatures as the other angels did, but with a vicious, painful twist. God's favored creations formed attachments to the animals and plants around them easily. When those creatures died, as all things but angels and humans had to do, the humans were wracked with pain and incomprehension. They lacked the capacity to rationalize the deaths, to create meaning for them and move beyond their pain. The loss was forever, in humanity's eyes, and like children deprived of a favored toy, they wept. The Reapers longed to reveal themselves to the men and women and explain the reason for death and its place in the cycle of the world.

As Usiel, viewed by many as the voice of the House since his audience with God, moved through the world discharging his duties and greeting the members of the House, he was asked again and again why God had not explained to humanity the necessity of the House's work. A few members of the House voiced a more worrisome idea: Why had God not granted humanity the ability to comprehend the reason behind death or the capacity to develop some answers for themselves? Why was He imposing these limits on mankind's intelligence,

forcing people to remain unchanged while Creation continued to develop? Usiel had no answers, and he was reluctant to go to God with nothing but questions. He tried to have faith that God would make the answers plain in time, but doubt grew even within him.

Decision

Those very doubts made it inevitable that Usiel would find himself part of the meeting that led to the rebellion. As he listened to the other angels debating their next course of action down through all the layers of reality, he felt a fear growing within him, warring with his doubts and strengthening both. It was evident that none of them truly understood the world of death and indeed, why should they? Only the angels of the Seventh House could access it. They confused it endlessly with the Second World and talked of the storm to come, and its possible effect on both, without really understanding either. Ahrimal outlined his vision in great detail, singing its chaos, describing the mathematics of its destruction and catalyzing chemical reactions that hinted at its raw power. Yet, his hymn of science and fear was incomplete, and Usiel's own harmonies went unacknowledged by the other angels. The very prospect of rebellion on such limited knowledge and understanding chilled Usiel to his core, and that fear crystallized into resolution. He would not stand with the others, and he would not induct the humans into the world of death until God said that it was time to do so.

His stand against the rebels surprised many of them. Whispers of his questioning of God had spread from the Reapers and into the other Houses. He was considered to be among the most likely to stand against Him, should the debate come to that. Instead, he walked away from the discussion, angered by the words of the Lightbringer and haunted by the visions of a storm tearing through the world of the dead.

He was convinced that he was right and that the House would stand with him. One thing worried him, though. Why, as he walked from the chamber, could he sense incredible sadness and not a little fear emanating from the Lightbringer as he watched Usiel leave?

Reaction

Usiel glided from the meeting, light shattering around him. He took flight, down through the levels of reality, his mind turning over what he had heard and secretly dreading the results of Lucifer's intervention. He opened his mind to his lieutenants and told them of the decision made at the meeting. He ordered



them to break with House convention and make sure that all Reapers knew of the rebellion before the day was done. His duty done, he left the world of men and returned to the bastions of Heaven, absenting himself for the rebellion to come.

The word of rebellion spread quickly through the ranks of the Reapers. Many of the House rejected the idea instantly. They knew well that God had yet to reveal the entirety of His plan to them. Any rebellion before that point was premature, they argued. Until the true purpose and meaning of the Second World was revealed, they would stand with God.

Those who had worked around the humans found it harder to reject Lucifer's message. The pain and incomprehension in humanity's eyes lurked in their hearts, distracting them from their duties. The Thrones of the other Houses had questioned God before, they reasoned. What harm could come of this one request? Azrael, a Throne of Release, and Madisel, the Archangel of the Unseen Past, were the champions of this viewpoint. In Madisel's name, Azrael evangelized the cause of rebellion throughout the House. Madisel went in person to pledge her service to the Lightbringer in the name of humanity. Lucifer asked Madisel three times if she was sure, and each time Madisel answered with conviction that she was.

"So be it," said Lucifer. "Now that the representatives of the Second World have spoken, members of all seven Houses stand with me. It is time to do what must be done."

The House at War

The rebellious Reapers were punished for the presumption before any of the other angels, and their curse drove them even further from the other Houses. The rebels has defied God for a love of humanity, so to see mortality imposed upon their charges as a punishment for the Halaku's actions made the newly named Slayers an easy target for anger. The fact that Lucifer struck the first blow of the war with Madisel's scythe mollified the other rebels a little. The first of the angels wielding a weapon of the Seventh House against the most powerful angel seemed to grant the Seventh House some respectability.

The other rebels were relieved when the Lightbringer largely isolated the Slayers by placing them in the Alabaster Legion, under the command of Azrael. It allowed them a degree of isolation from the nasty business of human mortality and its constant reminder of their punishment and exile.

Not all of the Halaku joined the Alabaster Legion, of course. Madisel remained in Genhinnom as an advisor to Lucifer, a silent figure avoided by the other fallen in the corridors

The First Murder

Although humanity's mortality was imposed at the moment of rebellion, it was some time before the rebels felt the impact of that curse. The watchfulness of the fallen angels helped keep accidents from becoming fatal and the early stages of the war were fought in ritual and structure between angels and not humanity. The Slayers knew that this escape from death's touch would not last, though, because they could sense humanity starting to grow old. Before the rebellions, humans aged until they reached maturity, and then they simply stopped developing in adulthood. They grew no older and thus had very little concept of old age. Still, the prospect of immediately ushering humanity into the world of death had receded. It was decades before the effects of aging became apparent. Humanity was aging slowly, far more slowly than modern man does.

That changed in a single moment of anger. Caine, son of the first man, raised his fist in anger and slew his brother. Abel's spirit passed through into the world of death, but any attempts to reach it were thwarted by a sudden storm that erupted in shadow of the world, carrying Abel's spirit away before Slayer or loyal Reaper could interfere.

The storm changed everything. It changed the world of death, but the Slayers would not discover quite how much for some time yet. It changed the hearts of men, who turned on each other with anger, jealousy and most of all, brutality. Animals in the wild killed each other through necessity, to eat or to defend themselves. Through awakening humanity, the angels had also given mankind the ability to kill because they wanted to. In the centuries that followed, some Slayers speculated that the storm was nothing more than a manifestation of that change in humanity in other aspects of reality. Others dismissed the idea, saying that it made mankind too significant in Creation: The angels were the shapers of reality, not the humans.

Whatever the cause was, there was no questioning the changes in the angels themselves after the storm broke. Where once their skirmishes had been more like philosophical debates conducted on multiple layers of reality simultaneously, their battles became desperate struggles for existence. The Time of Atrocities had begun.

of the Palace of Shadows. Indeed, those Slayers who joined the other legions were few enough in number that their fellow legionnaires were able to take little notice of them. After all, the other Houses had never paid the Slayers much attention in the time before the rebellion. That certainly didn't change as the war got underway. Oh, they noticed the champions of the House of Falling Night cutting swathes of destruction through the ranks of angels and men alike during the fiercest confrontations of the war, and the quiet wisdom of Madisel in the war councils of the rebels was hard to ignore. Still, few among the other Houses realized just how few Slayers were actively involved in the main business of the war and exactly how they were pursuing its execution.

The Mortality War

So, where were the Slayers? They were on those battlefields, too, only a death rattle away from their fellow rebels, but fighting a completely different struggle. The other side of a stilled heartbeat from the rest of the battle, a few aspects of reality down from the normal perception of humanity, a second battle started as the Reapers and Slayers fought for the newly freed souls of the dead. Angels who had once worked side by side fought with a ferocity that would amaze even the Devourers. Caine's brutal act had ushered a new age of violence into the world, where angel destroyed angel and man slew man.

The tone of the struggle was set the moment the first human died. A Slayer waited for his soul, with a Reaper standing opposite. The two circled each other warily, waiting for the exact moment of the man's death. Then, the loyalist moved just a fraction more swiftly than the Slayer, separating soul from base matter and gathering it to himself.

"What happens to that soul?" asked the Slayer.

The loyalist gave no reply. He took the soul into himself and twisted away through the layers of reality. The Slayer gave chase, twisting into hidden aspects of the world as quickly as she could manage. Then, unexpectedly, the Reaper twisted into the world of death in a way the Slayers could not match. The Slayer hovered there a moment, her wings slowly beating as she considered what had just occurred. She tried to make the transition to the world of death again and found it barred to her. God had taken even that from the House of Falling Night.

Each confrontation between the loyalist and rebel Angels of Death went the same way. The Reapers would not tell what God had decreed as the fate for mortal souls and the Slayers could no longer access the world of death to find out.

Deprived of the knowledge of the fate of humanity's souls, the Slayers had no choice. They fought over every human soul. Every battle had its second front as Slayer battled Reaper on the edges of the world of death, trying to win the mortal soul from the uncertain judgment of God. Those they rescued they found ways of binding to objects or to the place of their death as a temporary measure, while they worked on a more permanent solution: Kâsdejâ.

Kâsdejâ: City of the Dead

While the other legions built upward, creating great citadels and bastions in defiance of Heaven, the angels of the Alabaster Legion went down, deep into the bowels of Creation. On one level, this was a molten core of rock, but in a multiplicity of the other levels of reality, it had the potential to act as a spiritual sanctuary. The Slayers went to work, building walls between manifestations of reality and carving a great cavern in the heart of the world. In that cavern, they built a city, ostensibly as a headquarters for the Alabaster Legion and its follower, but also a final home for the rescued spirits of the dead.

It might have been love that drove them or guilt or even compassion, but regardless of the motivation, they worked to make Kâsdejâ even more beautiful than the living lands. They surrounded the city with the memories of plants that had withered and animals that had perished. They built homes that outshone the best that humanity had constructed and vast walls and bastions to protect the city should the forces of Heaven ever find it.

Once the city was complete, the Slayers set out to collect the souls that they had left anchored to the earth. The battles to protect them against Reapers who came to steal away the dead had been long and hard. It was with a great sense of relief that the Angels of Death brought the dead to their new homes.

Assault

For a while, all was well within the walls of Kâsdejâ. The Alabaster Legion was able to spend time with humanity as its members had long dreamed. The spirits of the dead were content in this facsimile of the living world, often delighting in their reunion with the spirits of long-dead animals. Some, though, missed the living world and its sun. They missed the company of friends still living

and loves that endured the separation of death. They hid their sorrows from the Halaku and sought a way of escape. Finally, a small group followed the paths the angels took back to the living world as best they could.

The journey was long and arduous and not quite what the dead had expected. The cavern of Kâsdejâ was not precisely aligned with the living world, merely overlapping it in a few of the more obscure layers of reality. As the spirits followed the angel path into the living world, they found themselves twisting through layers of reality they were not equipped to understand. Without the Halaku there to shield them, the journey took its toll on the sanity of the ghosts. By the time they reached the world they recognized, they were only a step away from madness.

What they found there helped them take that final step. The path back was designed for Slayers, not for ghosts. They lacked the skill and understanding of reality to take the final step back into the living world. Trapped in a layer of reality adjacent to the physical plane, they could perceive living people at work, but they couldn't interact with them. The ghosts' minds snapped, and they howled out their pain to the cosmos.

The Reapers answered, swooping down to take these errant shades to their final destiny. Before they removed these lost souls from the world, though, they learned of Kâsdejâ and the path there. Within days, a horde of Reapers, and angels of all the loyal Houses swept down that passageway and into the cavern of Kâsdejâ. The Alabaster Legion had scant time to prepare for battle, and attack shortly became a near-rout.

Then, from the citadel at the heart of the City of the Dead, Azrael charged into the battle with his lieutenants Charon and Cerberus. Their anger was terrible, especially that of Charon who seemed possessed of a fury that had never been seen in any of the Slayers. The vanguard of the invading army crumbled beneath assault of the fallen dukes and barons, who drove them back toward the passage to the living world. The other Slayers had the chance to regroup, and they launched a massive counterattack that drove the invaders from the cavern. The legion hastily destroyed the safe passage into Kâsdejâ and rested for a while.

Inspiration

Charon shut himself away from the others in the aftermath of the battle, refusing all visits from lesser Slayers. Finally, Azrael himself went to demand an explanation for his behavior. The archduke and duke talked through the night and into the next day, as the lesser Slayers set about reinforcing the walls of the city and finding other routes back to the living world under the direction of Cerberus. Charon explained how his love for the soul of a mortal woman had gone far beyond the love he felt for all of humanity. He had come to love this woman as human couples loved each other. Azrael was amazed. Angels did not suffer from lust or passion. They did not reproduce like humans, instead relying on their names being called into being by God himself. For an angel to develop a relationship like this was unheard of and utterly unexpected. Charon's love had nearly been lost, caught outside the city walls as the Reaper host invaded. Charon's furious charge had been focused entirely on freeing her before the Reapers could send her soul to its God-ordained destination.

During that night's long discussion, Charon persuaded Azrael that the Slayer's first and most important duty in this war was not to seek the overthrow of Heaven. After all, there were six other Houses doing that. Instead, the Slayers' priority must be rescuing the souls of the dead and creating a haven for them that no angel of Heaven could ever reach. "They have their world of the dead, from which we are barred," he said. "Let us build our own, where those we love may be safe and we can rest from the battle." At length, Azrael agreed.

As leader of the Alabaster Legion, though, Azrael's primary concern was for the secrecy of the project. He could not risk the loyalists discovering the plan until after Haven was complete. To that end, he bade Charon take no more than a quarter of the Alabaster Legion to create this new shelter for the dead. Such a number could have easily fallen in the massive assault they had just repulsed and would not be missed by their enemies or allies.

The rest of the Alabaster Legion would continue as before, waging the Mortality War and seeking to preserve as many souls as they could in the confines of Kâsdejâ. Azrael would try to keep the project a secret until it was complete, even from Lucifer himself, although he soon needed to seek aid from select members of other legions. Protecting the human soul was the Slayers' first responsibility, above and beyond their commitment to their fellow rebels. The angels whom the elder Houses despised as agents of destruction were now on a path of creation, the most ambitious since the creation of the world itself.

The Time of Atrocities

The few Slayers who served in the other legions remained as loyal to their House as they did to the legions in which they served. Like most of the angels, they spent much of their time either with their human followers, coaching and educating them, or in conflict with the forces of Heaven. As the tides of the war ebbed and flowed across the face of the Earth, so too went the Slayers, usually playing the role of elite troops in the battle, typecast in their role as the Angels of Death. Most would spend short periods of time in Kâsdejâ, apprising their fellows of the course of the war and likely flash-points. These discussions allowed the Slayers to arrive at the major battlefields of the war in time to fulfill their commitments to the Morningstar and to claim as many souls of the human dead as possible.

All that changed with the destruction of Jabniel and the coming of the Time of Atrocities. The battles between Slayer and Reaper for the souls of the dead took on a new significance, as angel destroyed angel. The numbers on both sides diminished, and as the years passed, confrontations lessened as both sides struggled to reach the site of each and every death.

Then came the malhim, who seemed concerned with nothing but the destruction of the rebels. Many Slayers, caught up in their duties, fell beneath the onslaught of these terrible creatures. Soon humans were dying with no angel from either side involved. One by one, the Slayers in the other legions quit and rejoined their Slayer comrades in the fight for human souls. Lucifer noticed this, as well as the withdrawal of Azrael from the politics of the rebels. Many demons still wonder why the Alabaster Legion drew attention to itself by splitting from Lucifer, prompting the Crimson and Iron Legions' assault on Kâsdejâ in the Long March. After all, the whole Haven project was built on the idea of secrecy and discretion. Why did Azrael draw attention to his legion at that crucial point?

The reason was simple, but well concealed. It became apparent to Charon and Azrael early in the Haven project that the particular skills of Malefactors and Fiends of the Ebon and Silver Legions would be needed to make Haven. Azrael approached Abaddon and Asmodeus, his fellow archdukes, and petitioned for their aid. They gladly granted it — on the condition that the Alabaster Legion joined their rebellion against Lucifer. Reluctantly, Azrael agreed.

The Slayers did not forgive Lucifer for violating their city, though, and as their former leader ushered in the Time of Babel more and more Slayers quietly left the rebellion for the creation of Haven.



Haven: Sanctuary of Shadow

Charon took with him a host of the Slayers, and they set to work making the vision of a safe haven for the dead a reality. The true world of the dead was barred to them, so the Slayers undertook the greatest and most ambitious project in Creation not directed by God Himself: the creation of a new pocket of reality, tied to but separate from the rest of the world.

Charon and his assistants isolated themselves from the rest of the Slayers and cleared their minds of everything but the task ahead of them. They wove a Veil around themselves built of the pain and suffering of death and used that to hide their actions from the other rebels as well as the loyal Heavenly Host. They started the work in the barrier between the First and Second Worlds, at the very limit of their ability to push into their old domain. Then they pushed outward from that barrier into the void beyond Creation, trailing the Veil in their wake and singing the songs of all those things that had died but which they still carried within themselves.

As they worked, the void slowly became a space, and then the space became a place, and finally that place became a reflection of the beauty of everything that has been lost to death in the First World. Where the original world of the dead was a place of transition, where the dead paused on their way to new use in God's plan, Haven (as the Slayers took to calling their work) was a repository of things that had passed, kept secure from the ravages of time and the workings of God's Creation.

After their years of labor, the Slayers rested only a short while, knowing that their work had only started.

Like the world of the dead, this Haven was built in the shadow of Creation, yet was apart from it. The Veil was the thinnest of barriers between the living world and Haven, yet it cast a pallor of decay over everything it revealed, the legacy of the pain the Slayers used to built it. Despite this flaw, the Slayers set about reinforcing the barrier, ensuring that only they and the spirits of the dead could pass through it. No living thing could pass through without the aid of a Slayer, a restriction that was trivial to impose on the Veil. Creating a barrier that was impervious to the loyalist angels proved more challenging, and even after years of work Charon could only just satisfy himself that it was so by inviting Azrael himself to attempt to breach the Veil. After days of struggle, eventually Azrael conceded defeat, and Charon declared Haven to be safe.

A Colony of Death

For the first time in decades, Charon and a few of his workers crossed the Veil and returned to God's Creation. They made their way to Kâsdejâ and starting bringing favored souls back with them into their new world. At first, the shades were delighted. In Kâsdejâ, they were always aware that they were cloistered away from the living, trapped in a cavern and isolated from the world. In Haven, they had the chance to peer through the Veil and see the living world again. It was not ideal, but it was better than Kâsdejâ, and it was enough to prevent further attempts at escape, like the one that nearly brought down the underground city.

Charon explained that once the war was won and the decree of mortality revoked, the shades could cross the Veil again and return to the living world. His words reassured the dead, and they soon started flooding into Haven, guided into their new world by a group of Slayers who took the nickname the Ferrymen, for they ferried the dead through the layers of reality to this hidden realm.

Over time, though, the shades grew restless again. Haven was an empty place, devoid of much in the way of substance. The Slayers had no real understanding of material possessions being, by their very nature, creatures of transition and change, not permanence. It was as if the act of creating a permanent place had exhausted the House's reserves of permanence. Creating structure within it was beyond their capability. The souls of the dead grew bored and started experimenting with reaching across the Veil. Charon forbade them from doing so, in fear that Haven would be discovered. Yet still the ghosts persisted.

Finally, one of the souls came to Charon and explained that the dead humans were lost without the things of the world that they had left behind. She, the first woman to die, slowly made the Slayers see the significance of material objects to mankind. Charon listened and, in a fashion, understood. He summoned his council and formulated a solution over many weeks of debate. The problem was easily identified: Haven was designed so that only the souls of the dead could cross into it. If he changed that, he risked either weakening the Veil or having to re-create Haven.

Haven, however, had been built from each angel's memories of what he had helped pass from the world. Its very essence was memory, and the Slayers found that they could, with a little effort, re-create the things that each ghost most valued from their memories. Over the time, they managed

to subtly bend the Veil so that each new soul that passed into Haven would bring with her the few objects she treasured the most.

From those principles, the Slayers worked with Malefactors to form Haven into a repository of all that passed from the world. As the war raged in the living world, the cities of the angels and the towns of men burned. Each building that fell found new life in Haven as a memory of itself. After all, no House understood the layers of reality that dealt with the passing of existence like the Slayers did, and the Malefactors had an understanding of the nature of the physical world that surpassed all others. The Slayers understood that death or destruction was never truly and end, but the transfer of an aspect of reality to another aspect of reality. With the Malefactors' willing aid, they subtly changed facets of Creation so that aspects of the material world transferred into Haven at the moment of their dissolution. They could not risk doing that for living souls, though, for that would risk alerting the Reapers to the existence of Haven.

Charon's City

The ghosts were content, and Haven seemed secure even as Kâsdejâ came under siege from the forces of the Lightbringer himself, seeking to bring all the fallen angels under his banner once more. Yet, still Charon worried that Haven was not secure enough. Eventually, he left his home in Haven, gathered his most trusted lieutenants and began the work of creation once more. He pushed deeper and deeper into the void, now creating a vast sea of memory under Haven with the aid of a few Defilers of the Alabaster Legion he had drawn into his confidence. Then he called upon the Malefactors to raise new island in that sea, refuges far, far from God's Creation that surely the angels would never find.

Secret Byways linked these islands, known only to a few of the Slayers. Without knowledge of those routes, any invader could be lost for centuries in the depthless tracts of the sea of memory.

On one of those islands, Charon made his home. He invited the oldest of the ghosts to join him and his lieutenants, Slayers, Malefactors and Defilers alike,

The Time of Babel

What part did the Slayers play in the grand experiment to elevate Adam and Eve? As ever, the Seventh House was forced to do what little it could in the shadow of the elder Houses. None of the Watchers who Lucifer chose to educate the humans were from the House of Falling Night. In what seemed almost a calculated insult, Lucifer appointed the Devourer Sharaael to help humanity find the secret of its lost immortality, rahter than one of the Halaku. Azrael was at once insulted and pleased: insulted that Lucifer seemed to think so little of his loyal Slayers, and pleased that the Slayers would escape the notice of the other Houses at this crucial point in the creation of Haven.

Many Slayers did participate in the education of the humans, either working with Sharaael to explain a little of the true nature of death or approaching humans independently, sowing the seeds of legends about the afterlife. Both groups shared a purpose, to prepare the humans for their transition into Haven.

Of all the stages of the war, however, the Slayers participated least in this one. Azrael, still bitter from the assault on his city by Lucifer's forces, saw a way of turning Asmodeus and Abaddon's creation of the nephilim to his advantage. He went to his fellow archdukes, this time to offer aid rather than beg it. His proposition was simple: the aid of the Alabaster Legion in sabotaging the Babel project, in return for the souls of any nephilim who perished.

It was a good trade. The souls of the nephilim, part human, part demon, proved particularly adept at navigating the Veil between the living world and Haven. They quickly swelled the ranks of the Ferrymen, bringing a martial edge to that group, that helped allay Charon's concerns about the safety of his realm.

The Haven project required increasing numbers of Halaku, who attended to its construction rather than finding and ushering souls through the Veil and into their new home. The nephilim souls filled that gap.

Some Halaku became permanent residents of Haven, guiding the dead and helping them overcome the psychological damage done by living their lives in a time of terrible conflict. The very fabric of Haven itself was shaped to allow it to play out psychodramas that aided the soul's understanding of itself. The Slayers even found a way of temporarily splitting the soul in two, to allow the dead person to discuss her own worries, desires and problems.

In effect, a second attempt to elevate mankind took place hidden from the eyes of the other rebels, beyond the Veil. Would the Slayers have achieved anything through their efforts? They never had the chance to find out, for the war was rapidly drawing to an end, and the Haven project was always designed as a long-term aid to humanity.

on this island. Here, further from the world, reality was more malleable, so they were able to shape the island to their liking. The Malefactors shaped the city and its streets, while the Defilers created lakes, harbors and rivers throughout the island. A single Devourer shaped animals from the stuff of memory and set them to wander the island. Here, deep in Haven, far from the struggles of the war and the Time of Babel, Charon's work seemed done.

Yet, still he worried. His mind was haunted by the memory of the loyal Reapers storming into the Cavern of Kâsdejâ, and he dreaded this happening to Haven. The very reality of the world around him would sometimes twist to bring these fears to momentary life. Finally, he could take it no more, and he started digging under his palace into the void once more, seeking to build a fortress far, far from any touch of man, angel or God, where he and those he loved could be safe forever.

The Fall of Haven

In those final days before the Veil fell and Haven was invaded, the Slayers finally admitted greater numbers of the other Houses into the Lands of Shadow. Malefactor worked with Slayer to forge weapons for the dead from the material of memory and even from a few brave souls who volunteered to become sentient weapons in the hands of the Slayers. Cerberus, who had taken charge of the defense of Haven, suspected that it would eventually fall. Citadel after citadel of the rebels had fallen beneath the assault of the malhim and the other angels. It was only a matter of time before the loyalist forces extracted the secret of Haven from a rebel on the brink of destruction.

On the day the Veil finally fell beneath the onslaught of Heaven's Host, the Reapers who led the charge found themselves facing armed and angry mortal souls as well as their fallen brethren. The battle was fierce and terrible, and the dead wreaked an unexpected amount of damage on the angels. This was the ghost's environment and they could manipulate it in ways that caught the Reapers by surprise. The slain nephilim turned Ferrymen had proven particularly adept at teaching the souls of the dead ways of manipulating both their own substance and the environment, around them. Ferrymen and ghosts alike were actually destroying angels. For the first time in centuries, the loyalists were facing the truly unexpected.

One by one, though, Haven's town fell under the onslaught, and Charon ordered a great retreat into the sea of memory to the bolt-hole he had prepared for just such an eventuality. Azrael, Charon and Cerberus together guarded the gate to the Byway that lead into the sea, keeping it clear while the Slayers ferried as many souls as they could deep into the sea. Finally, as Usiel himself approached, a sword of sorrow in one hand, a shield of pain in the other, the archduke threw himself at the host, ordering his deputies to flee and smash the gate behind them. Charon stepped through the gate, turned and saw Cerberus swing his ghost scythe through the material of the Byway, sundering it completely. Charon fled down the Byway as it unraveled and was never seen by angel or demon again.

Azrael was captured and bound, and Cerberus destroyed by a dozen malhim minutes after he severed the Byway. The rebellion was over. The oldest of the dead, who had refused to flee until it was too late, stood at the head of the group of captured spirits, her face streaked with spectral tears, waiting for their punishment. It never came. The Reapers simply took the captured Slayers and left Haven, leaving the souls of the dead alone for the first time.

With their beloved Haven shattered and mankind's immortality gone forever, many Slayers felt the smallest sense of relief as they fell into the Abyss. At last, they would be spared the continued pain of humanity's mortality.

The second the doors of Hell sealed, the Slayers suddenly became aware of God's final punishment upon them. The walls around them were shaped from the substance of Haven itself, yet twisted and altered in such a way that they couldn't pass through it. That meant that the ruins of Haven, and all the souls within, lay just outside the Abyss, well within the reach of the Slayers' senses.

Once more the Slayers isolated themselves from their fellow demons, clustering around the walls of their prison, trying to reach out to the souls they could sense. They had some little success, in that they could send the barest of impulses to those around them.

Missing

All the demons trapped in the Abyss knew that the Lightbringer was missing. Only the slightest handful of mid-ranking Slayers who worked with Charon knew that others were missing, too. Those demons that fled deep into Haven had not found their way into the Abyss along with the others. For a long time, Azrael and his closest associates hoped that these missing brethren would be able to find a way to crack the gates of Hell and allow the rebels to escape. As the centuries turned to millennia, though, eventually the consensus became that these missing demons had been destroyed and slowly they passed from the hate-filled minds of the rebels.

Out of the Abyss

What role is there for Angels of Death in the modern world? For many, the days and weeks following their return to Creation are an extended battle against despair. The horror the Slayers felt when mortality was imposed on humankind comes flooding back as the newly returned demons face the casual attitudes toward death in the modern world. Where once humans died as part of a grand struggle for the destiny of mankind and all of Creation, now they kill one another for the pettiest of excuses.

In the days immediately following their escape from Hell, the Halaku fragmented. Most of the Slayers found themselves in the bodies of the newly dead, murder victims or people in the process of committing suicide. They gravitated toward such hosts because the moment of death calls to them, a reminder of a duty they haven't been able to perform for untold ages of the world. In those first seconds back in the living world, the lesser demons of the House of Falling Night experienced death as never before, from the inside. The experience changed them and their relationships to both each other and their imprisoned masters.

The realization that shook the House was this: Death continues around the world without the intervention of angel or demon. People die and move on to whatever fate God has in store for them, or they remain trapped in Haven, without any interference from angel or demon. Some of the Halaku tried to immediately return to their old calling and follow the siren song of duty and the pull of the dying. Yet they quickly realize just how futile this can be. Mankind has grown too numerous and the escaped Slayers are just too few to make any real attempt to be there at the demise of any but a fraction of those who die each day. Sure, the Halaku can bind a few ghosts to objects or direct them to Haven, but they can do precious little about thousands of others all over the world. The human forms they wear are just too limiting.

This revelation has brought the House of loners together. It simply never occurred to most members of the House to turn to other demons. Instead they sought out others of their kind to talk and exchange experiences of the world as it has become. The old ritual exchange of memories that the Slayers used as part of their duties before the Fall has become part of their day-to-day existences once more.

Ironically, then, one of the most scattered of the House before the escape has rapidly become one of the most tightly knit in the months since the escape from Hell. The House has two major goals, both of which can be summed up in a single word: information. It wants information about the current status of Haven. More than that, though, it needs information about the way death works in the modern world. Without that, without a way of understanding its calling once more, the House is utterly cut off from its defining purpose.

The only way the Halaku will achieve that is by working together. A Halaku will trust another Slayer long before she will trust a member of any other House. A common bond of need unites the House — a side effect of which is the almost complete breakdown of the pre-existing hierarchy of the House. Simply put, without a task to do, the pre-existing ranks make no sense. The Halaku are not at war, so they have no immediate need of generals. Their God-given role is taken from them, possibly forever.

Now a new order is emerging in the House, based on capability. Those individuals who are adept at leadership, often through characteristics inherited with their hosts, are taking charge of other Slayers and directing their efforts. Those with investigative skills are also rising in the estimation of their fellows as they seek to gather and collate the information gathered so far.

There is also an emergent split within the House, however. The defining characteristic in this split is ease of access to Haven. Those Slayers whose Lore of the Realms is returning faster tend to be sucked into the struggle to regain control over the Halaku's great work (see p. 183), rather than understanding the great mystery of modern death.

The Mystery of Death

As the Halaku struggle with their relative unimportance in the new order of death, their human hosts have proved a good starting point for their investigations. Every human being has had to deal with the knowledge of her own mortality at some point, as well as curiosity about their post-death fate. The Slayer who has taken up residence in the body often finds that curiously reassuring and a guide to ways of understanding the modern world. The pain that humanity suffered before the Fall remains, but the intelligence that the rebels granted them allows them to find meaning in death, a flowering of the seeds the Slayers planted in humanity's minds back in the Time of Babel. The

House is making a concerted effort to follow the same lines of investigation, but from its own unique perspective. The Halaku are attempting to expose themselves to as many human religions and methods of death as possible, hoping to find some inkling of the truth through those experiences.

Some groups of Halaku have found solace, and balm for their old wounds of guilt and failure, in aiding those who are terminally ill. They ease the pain and worry of the dying and help those in serious pain by granting them a quick and easy death. Some Slayers even offer the dying the chance to linger in ghostly form once their bodies have expired, the better to understand the process.

One group just seeks to understand death by experiencing it. Not personally, of course — that carries too much risk of a rapid trip back into the Abyss. No, these Slayers expose themselves to the moment of death as often as they can. The form of death matters little: natural, accidental, murder or even death induced by the Slayer herself. All that matters is the chance to understand the new mechanism of death, as well as how spirits find their way beyond the world, into Haven or back into their old bodies.

Despite all these efforts, the Halaku are no nearer to understanding the reality of death in modern times than they were the moment they escaped from Hell. Few dwell on this fact, though, for it is an easy route to growing Torment.

Saved by a Slayer

A few Halaku have abandoned the idea of understanding death, seeing that comprehension of modern death seems to be beyond their grasp while trapped in these limited human bodies. Instead they seek to keep death from happening needlessly, hunting down those humans who kill wantonly and punishing them. A killer who is caught and interrogated by a Slayer often gains a new and terrifying perspective on death. More than a few policemen were delighted to find the perpetrators of unsolved murders turning up at the station with terror in their eyes and a full confession on their lips. Death is the Slayers' business, and humans who claim it for themselves risk drawing the attention of the Halaku.

Why do they do this? Guilt. There are few Slayers who don't feel some guilt for the fact that humans have been dying throughout the aeons of their imprisonment. This futile campaign to prevent death is an attempt to quell that guilt with action.



The Infernal Courts

As the last and least of the Houses, the Halaku suffered the disdain of the older demons during the war. While that disdain allowed the House to build Haven in relative peace, even a few millennia trapped in the Abyss weren't enough to heal the inherent separation between the Slayers and their demonic brethren. The Slayers are at the bottom of the heap, and the older Houses aren't prepared to let them forget it. Therefore, the perception the Halaku is that the courts offer little more than a brand new opportunity for other demons to boss them around and ignore them.

For the majority of the House, infernal courts are bodies best dealt with from a distance. They might have friends or allies among the other Houses who are active in the courts, so they learn thus what's going on in demon society. Many courts are happy to leave the Slayers in peace, as they have always done. This lassitude is usually withdrawn when a battle for control of the court begins. The players in the struggle seek as much support as they can, and that means approaching the Slayers to gain that little bit of extra support. Gradually, even the most independent of Slayer can find himself getting involved with court politics without really meaning to.

Curiously, the bodies that the fallen Slayers typically possess seem to have both exaggerated their tendency to hold themselves apart from the hierarchies of the demons and given them a greater inclination to socialize with other fallen. Humans are social beings by nature, and all of the fallen (Slayers included) are attracted by the idea of human existence. Even the most reticent of Slayers, hosted in a shy body, will eventually find the idea of human interaction irresistible, especially as it can act as a good bulwark against rising Torment. This natural desire to socialize, which springs from their human hosts, can lead to them spending more time with the members of other Houses than they did in the whole of their pre-Fall existence. Of course, desire rarely equals skill or competence, and many Slayers find dealings with their fellow fallen to be frustrating as they are shunned and ignored by other demons through sheer force of habit.

Consequently, those Slayers who do get involved in infernal courts stick together and take advantage of their numbers to have some influence in the courts. A large group of organized Slayers can be a major political force in a court, even if the individual members are considered to be of very little consequence.

Playing Their Part

Some individual Slayers are active in the infernal courts, though, although they remain in service to the commonly held goals of the House. Just as the original builders of Haven eventually had to seek the aid of other Houses, so now the Halaku striving to understand their new place in the world have to acknowledge that other demons might have insights that will aid in the struggle. As you might expect, they rarely seek or are awarded high ranks, and only in one town — Buenos Aries — has a Slayer actually managed to win the rank of tyrant and hold it against several challenges.

Slayers often join the Ministry of Eagles, where they find themselves working as supernatural security and intelligence, a job they're ideally suited to, and one that furthers their information-gathering agenda. Their understanding of ghosts and ability to glean information from them makes them the best choice to deal with threats to the courts that don't come from humans or other demons, or so most tyrants believe. That has pushed the Halaku into contacts with many of the strange creatures that have appeared in the world in the years of the demons' imprisonment. It has also put them into the front ranks of the fight against the Earthbound. Ironically, the least social of the Houses is often the one to make first contact with the other supernatural creatures that lurk in the World of Darkness.

Few Ministries of Lions have less than two or three Slayers in the ranks, unless the court itself is tiny. The nickname "court assassin" is entirely appropriate for a Slayer. The Slayers' reputation as the best problem eliminators among the demons is growing month by month. Likewise, the Slayers are welcome in the Ministry of Lions. One of the great strengths the Halaku have as warriors is their ability to travel at great speeds through Haven. This ability allows them to call reinforcements quickly if a situation should arise which a lone Slayer could not deal with alone.

Halaku are rarely found in the ranks of the Ministry of Dust. The other Houses are often uncomfortable with the idea of Slayers dealing with humans. After all, the Slayers have only one duty with regard to mankind, do they not? A Slayer in this ministry is likely to find himself subject to intense scrutiny.

A surprising number of Slayers are found in the ranks of the Ministry of Dragons, especially in courts ruled by cunning infernal tyrants. The Halaku's lowly status and ability to communicate with ghosts who can spy on most demons unseen makes them ideal censors. Slayer censors tend to go unpraised and

unacknowledged, though, as to make them known would destroy their usefulness. Well used to this behavior, the Slayers expect nothing more.

Slayers who were active in the legions during the war gravitate toward the Ministry of Aurochs. The House's reputation as the home of some of the most deadly warriors of the war has not diminished, and Slayers are often dispatched to deal with individual threats to courts or to guard the high-ranking members of the court.

Slayer Solidarity

During the war, the Slayers were the most close-knit of the Houses. The Alabaster Legion, Kâsdejâ and Haven were all good reasons for the House to stick together. Sadly, this unity did not survive in the Abyss. The final House was well aware of the location of Hell, as its members were able to sense the souls they had sought to shelter and protect just beyond the walls of their prison. As each Slayer fell to Torment, the others would turn on her, seeking to prevent her torturing the souls they could all sense. For the first time since the rebellion itself, the House experienced internal strife and conflict.

The memories of those early days in the Abyss are often the most vivid that high-Torment Slayers possess on their return to Earth, which leads to an inherent mistrust of the less troubled Halaku. The tensions between low- and high-Torment Slayers are growing more noticeable. Lore that was designed to help and protect the spirits of the dead can all too easily harm and destroy them. As a result, a small group of fallen, low-Torment Slayers has taken to policing its fellows, sending those whose disrespect for the dead has grown too great back to Hell with all due dispatch. These same Slayers have taken a particular interest in the Earthbound and their servants. Magdiel, a Slayer based in London, has become the unwilling leader of this small movement within the House. Her experiences with a Defiler Earthbound under the city, as well as resolute stand against others of her House who abuse their lore, has made her a minor celebrity among the fallen Slayers, much to her own annoyance. Deep inside, she just wants to be with her mortal husband.

A growing body of evidence, however, points to a Slayer Earthbound — possibly Azrael himself — residing somewhere in the Upper Nile Delta. If the numerous death-obsessed legends of the country were not enough, the growing number of walking corpses and angry ghosts found in the region in the last year point to Earthbound activity. The first groups of Slayers and allies to investigate never returned. Reluctantly, Magdiel herself is attempting to organize a second expedition.

Fallen Haven

If the fallen thought that the situation in Creation was bad, their first trips into Haven following their bonding with mortal bodies soon put that in perspective. The quiet lands of memory, where the souls of the dead could grow, develop and learn from the mistakes of their lives, have become a nightmare. Terrible storms of flesh, blood and bone sweep across the face of Haven, bearing aloft tormented souls who seek to ease their pain by destroying others.

Other pathetic souls of the dead, tormented by their own failings in life, cling to the remnants of their old lives and seek what shelter they can from the storms in the memories of cities.

Many Slayers spend much of their time in these shadow cities, trying to understand and aid the dead. The longer they spend with these troubled souls, the more the Halaku realize that Haven has changed beyond all recognition.

The Fate of Charon

To many Slayers, and particularly those who were involved in the Haven projects, Charon is nearly as important a figure as Lucifer himself. The House managed to largely conceal the fact of his absence from Hell from the other Houses, aided by the general lack of interest their fellow rebels showed. Finding Charon became a major priority for a significant proportion of the returned Halaku. These Charonists, as they've become known, spend significant amounts of time among the spirits of the dead collecting stories and rumors about Charon, inspired by the stories of him that threaded through human and wraith legend. They could not believe their luck. Ghosts all over the Western world were talking about Charon, his return from a long absence and valiant fight in defense of the dead against invading hordes. He sounded exactly like the Charon they had last seen fighting the invading forces of Heaven.

At first, rumors of Charon's recent return to the shadow lands filled the Slayers with hope. Was their ancient leader free and able to aid them? As weeks became months, however, and the Slayers shared their growing body of knowledge about the current state of Haven, they learned that something had happened to Charon and that many believed that he

had ascended to Heaven. This news in turn sparked wild hopes that perhaps God had offered the chance of redemption to the fallen, and that Charon's ascension had opened the way for others to follow.

A few Slayers suspect that the situation is not that simple, or even a fraction as hopeful. For one thing, the more they learn about Charon, the more it seems that he was a normal ghost like any other, albeit it a far more ancient one. Certainly few of the deeds attributed to him seem to reflect the power he would really have if it were the Charon they had followed. The lack of a suggestion of his missing lieutenants in the tales troubles them as well.

Those few Slayers who have directly encountered one of the Earthbound, including Magdiel in London, have spotted some uncomfortable parallels with beings who reside deep in Haven, according to some of the elder ghosts. Underneath the shadow lands, monstrous creatures move through a storm-wracked sea of memory with twisted souls following in their wakes. A few of the fallen harbor the terrible suspicion that these bloated, hate-filled creatures of destruction are the few rebels who escaped into the depths of the Haven and changed utterly by the untold millennia that have passed since their defeat. Like the Earthbound, they have become something incomprehensible to the fallen, and the Slayers who regularly deal with Haven are afraid. (With very good reason.)

Charon Redux?

A group of Slayers in Greece has come to the conclusion that its first priority upon returning to Earth is to repair the damage done to Haven. Uriminial, the Slayer who leads this group and one of Charon's workers during the war, believes firmly that, as the angels who created the shadow lands, it is the Slayers' duty to return peace to the fallen Haven and the tortured souls within. As the Slayers' powers grow once again, they are making some little headway in dealing with individual souls, but they are failing to make any significant difference to Haven itself. Actually manipulating the substance of the realm they created in a lasting manner is beyond the ability of any Slayer who has yet escaped from Hell. Until the more powerful Halaku are released, there is only so much that the Slayers can achieve.

Some Slayers have come to a worrying conclusion: Only one demon really understands how the Haven is constructed, and he is still missing. Lucifer's brief appearance in Los Angeles has given them hope that Charon and his lieutenants still survive somewhere deep in the far reaches of Haven. If the Slayers are to return order to the Maelstrom-ridden death lands, Charon must be found — freed if necessary — then helped to return order in Haven. Many Slayers hope that if Charon escaped God's judgment, he might yet have the full power that the rest of the Slayers lost when they were consigned to the Abyss.

The main obstacle these extreme Charonists face is that they have only the slightest clue as to his likely hiding place. As the forces of Heaven stormed Haven, Charon was in the midst of creating another layer to reality, one that could act as a permanent home for the dead. Through many conversations with the long dead, two possibilities have emerged.

The first is an area known as the Far Shores. This near-legendary collection of realms is viewed as a promised land by some of the dead and a place to be feared and avoided by others. The problem with that possibility is that the Far Shores lie deep in Haven, through the storm-wracked tempest. The returned Slayers' power is growing, though, and a few feel that they might soon have the strength to outfit an expedition deep into Haven to find these places. Those who undertake this mission will be in severe danger of falling back into the Abyss, but a few of the Halaku, despairing of their attempts to aid the spirits of the dead, see that they have little choice.

The other possibility ties in rather too neatly with the worrying suggestion that Charon and his lieutenants have become alien, dangerous beings. The ghosts talk of a place called the Labyrinth, where they were taken to be tested at times of stress and where those specters that were consumed by their own hatred reside in a twisted parody of the demons' own existences. Most dismiss this realm as the part of the underworld closest to Hell, but a few wonder if it might not be the secondary Haven that Charon was building. No Slayer has yet volunteered to explore somewhere that could be the very walls of the Abyss.

The Dead Shall Walk

The dead of the shadow lands are not the only spirits the Slayers deal with. The Veil itself is tattered and broken in places. If the circumstances are right, the dead can return to the world of the living. Some anchor themselves in objects and torment humanity. Others actually find bodies and rise again, stalking through Creation in a mockery of their former lives.

Some of the Slayers have taken it upon themselves to deal with these wayward souls, though few can decide on exactly what to do. The spirits them-

selves show a marked reluctance to be returned to Haven and are even more afraid of the idea of being liberated from the living world completely. The Halaku are reluctant to force that fate on a soul because, loath as they are to admit it, they still have no real idea of what happens to a soul that is freed of its bonds to the world. With the angels vanished and God apparently gone, the Slayers have no idea where to start looking for answers.

In a few places around the world, including the town of New Dijon in Canada and Thessaly in Greece, the Veil appears to have been completely destroyed. Both Slayers and ghosts flock to these anomalies, the ghosts seeking entry to the world once more and the Slayers seeking to close the tear and mend the Veil as part of the efforts to restore Haven.

Turiniel's Crusade

A few Slayers, led by Turiniel, have raised their voices in dissent. Haven was built to protect the dead from God's loyal angels, he and his followers argue. With the angels gone and Haven ruined, surely it is better to help the ghosts back into the living world and, if possible, back into bodies? This growing faction of Slayers has set up a base in a village a few miles from New Dijon. The few living people in the village are exclusively thralls and the recently deceased inhabitants still serve the Slayers in one form or another. Followers of Turiniel are easily recognizable by the walking dead followers they create and maintain once they can recall enough of their lore to make it possible.

While the movement is growing, many Slayers take issue with Turiniel's ideas. For one, ghosts in Haven are actually freer than those on Earth who have to be bound to objects or living bodies. For another, large concentrations of the walking dead seem to draw the attention of demon-hunters of various sorts, making Turiniel's followers liabilities to other demons in the neighborhood. Turiniel, however, who returned in the body of murdered Ed Atkins, is well aware of these problems and is taking advantage of the New Dijon rift to further his researches. His aim is nothing less than the creation of a whole new set of lore to deal with these earthly ghosts. The Slayers created new lore once before as they created Haven. Why shouldn't they do it again?

The Faces of Death

The words "prominent" and "Slayer" seem utterly incompatible. The Halaku are, by their natures, quiet and solitary beings, looked down upon by other demons. Some few, however, have risen to a position of note in their short time back in the world, through either some qualities inherited from their host body or simply ruthless pursuit of their own agendas. Four of the most prominent Slayers are profiled here.

Magdiel

Anila Kaul just wants to be left alone. She has moments when she is more Magdiel than Anila, and then she finds herself caught up in the infernal life of London, but much of the time she'd much rather be Anila Kaul, social worker and wife to Tony Dotchin. Anila has a better life than Magdiel, after all.

The major problem Magdiel has is that she remembers precious little of the war. She has brief glimpses, little more than images really, but nothing more. She suspects that she served in the Crimson Legion, for she has vivid memories of fighting near Lucifer, and certainly of seeing him fighting the final battle of the war. Her rapid recovery of lore that gives her access to Haven suggest that she was one of those Slayers who owed allegiance as much to the Alabaster Legion as to Lucifer's Legion.

Her memories of Hell are vivid, though, and she seeks to repress them in the experience of Anila's life, without realizing that she is re-creating her torn loyalties between Lucifer and Azrael in her family split between her Hindu Pakistani-born father and agnostic, white husband. Magdiel feels an intense sense of guilt for possessing the badly wounded Anila, possibly ending her life unnecessarily and is sublimating that guilt by trying to be the best *faux*-Anila she can manage. If she were left to her own devices, she'd probably be living as mundane a life as she could get away with. It's a shame other demons won't leave her alone. An Earthbound living under London has made repeated attempts to recruit her and the London infernal court has tried to draw her in, to capitalize on her knowledge of this alien demon. Her conflicts with high Torment Slayers attached to the court ended that relationship quickly enough. News of those conflicts have spread, though, and she has become the leader of a small group of Slayers dedicated to preventing their fellows making things worse for the spirits of the dead than they already are, by disposing of those demons. She's just about managing to hold on to Anila's life, but relations with her husband grow more and more strained the more time she spends away pursuing Halaku business. She constantly fights the temptation to enthrall her husband, but she has resisted the urge so far.

Turiniel

The stereotype of a Mountie both pleased and annoyed James Scott. Even as a lad, he'd been drawn to the idea of the upright, moralistic and competent lawman, and some small part of him still believed in the ideal. A couple of dozen years working the street of Montreal didn't do much for his sense of justice though, and the steady diet of violence, drug abuse and general disdain for morality he experienced slowly chipped away at his soul. That didn't make him the perfect host for Turiniel, though. The sharp cudgel to the back of the head and the week in captivity being tortured by a gang of dealers in a basement in a village well outside the city did that.

The gang didn't survive long past Scott's sudden recovery from the abuse he'd suffered. In fact, he now keeps a couple of them bound into the cudgel they used to beat him with, as a little keepsake of his return to the world.

Scott returned to work for a little while, but he found himself spending most of his time dealing with the spirits of the dead he found trapped all over the city. After a while, he handed in his notice, severed links with his friends and few remaining family members and headed toward the town of New Dijon, to investigate the rumors of a major breach in the Veil there. He found the place sealed off by the government, yet still crawling with ghosts for miles around. He summoned a cabal of like-minded fallen Slayers and set up home in a village some miles from the exclusion zone around the town.

Turiniel's guilt over the suffering of the ghosts was more than he could bear. Something had to be done to get them back into bodies. Haven was no longer safe. In the months since, this passion has consumed him. The locals, however, are becoming aware of the strange goings on at his home on the outskirts of town. The "vandalism" of local mortuaries and body thefts from nearby hospitals has put everyone on edge, and it is only a matter of time before Scott and his allies find themselves under investigation by the authorities.

Uriminial

Cancer kills some people quickly. For others, it is a slow lingering process of chemotherapy and radiotherapy followed by periods of remission, then new tumor growth. Selene Diomedes was in her fifth year of a battle with lung bowel cancer for the best part of five years when her spirit finally broke, not long after she drove the last of her family away in her misery. Uriminial was drawn irresistibly toward this broken body, slowly failing under the metastases of the cancers spreading rapidly through its whole system. It took the best part of three months before Selene realized what she had become, but what a three months they were. The cancers went into remission and then disappeared entirely. The doctors were amazed, calling it a miracle. Selene's estranged family agreed, thanking God repeatedly for her healing. Once Selene revealed her new true self to them, they quickly agreed to serve her.

Her lore returned rapidly in the following months, as she dealt more and more with the local ghosts, aiding some and destroying others. Selene crossed into Haven as often as she could, learning as much about the fate of the Slayers' greatest achievement of the war. Her growing range of dead contacts drew the attention of Athens' tyrant, who put her to work in the Ministry of Eagles, to remarkable effect.

The impressive amount of offered Faith that Selene gets from her family allowed her to rise quickly through Athens' infernal court, actually reaching the rank of Minister of Eagles, a rare honor indeed for a Halaku. As her memories of the war slowly returned, however, she grew obsessed with discovering the fate of Charon, with whom she recalled working closely throughout the construction of Haven. Each trip into Haven increased her misery as she saw just how badly their work had fallen into ruin and how much the dream of a sanctuary had been replaced by a nightmare of a torture chamber.

Selene's memories seem to present some hope of finding Charon, though. His survival is strongly suggested by his presence in the myths of her host's country. While still holding her position in Athens' Pentarchy, Selene has been developing a network of Slayers through contacts in Haven, each of which is searching for new of the lost Slayer duke and elements of his True Name. She hopes to enact a ritual within the next year or so that will summon him back from whatever part of the Underworld he hides in, ready to marshal his followers and rebuild Haven once more.

Sauriel the Releaser

For want of a better term, Xavier Cortez is a complete and utter bastard. The noble calling of killing has become a sheer joy to him, and he's only just getting started. Before Sauriel's arrival, though, Xavier was much less impressive, not that anything was ever his fault. It wasn't his fault that his dad and brothers used to knock him around. Hell, it wasn't his fault that he couldn't get it up with his wife, so he took to beating her around instead. It might have been his fault that Consuela was cuckolding him with several young men in their town, though, as a form of very public revenge for his abusive behavior.

Such public humiliation can only go so far, and in Xavier's case, it went as far as a bullet in the face, with his own finger on the trigger. For Sauriel, his first memory of returning to the world was a really bad headache and the overwhelming desire to kill someone. He got rid of the former quickly enough, by dealing with his wife, her lovers and a few interested passers-by, but the latter feeling has grown and grown until it consumes Lucifer's former archduke.

Sauriel was originally a low-ranking Slayer who worked his way up the ranks through sheer effectiveness in combat. He was one of Lucifer's most trusted archdukes in the latter stages of the war, thanks to the number of malhim he managed to dispatch. Hell was not kind to Sauriel, and his experiences in Xavier's body keep his hatred well stoked. He took one look at the corrupt, murderous world in which his host had lived and decided that it all had to go. In the demons' absence the world has gone to ruin, and any chance of saving it has long gone. Time to wipe the slate clean and start again.

Of course, Sauriel's talent is ending lives. He's become damn good at getting other demons to destroy things, plants and anything else under his direction, thanks to his host's extensive skills at bullying and intimidation. Other Raveners rapidly flocked to him, looking for the direction that he's happy to provide. His dad taught him well: Hit hard, where it hurts. The passage of Sauriel and his crew through an area is easy to spot if you know the signs — gang warfare, serial killers, natural disasters and terrorist activity. Never more than two in the same area, of course. That would take the fun out of it.

Relics and Lost Lore

Just like the other Houses, the Slayers developed a range of relics and rituals during the war. Unlike those of the other Houses, however, Halaku creations tended to be focused around a single idea: assuaging their guilt at mankind's new mortality. Those objects and rituals that aren't directly linked to the Slayers' duties as angels of death are usually designed to preserve or protects humans souls in some way, or to further the development of Haven. If you have a whole new reality to create, you don't have much time left for other matters, even if you are Elohim.

Relics

The Slayers are not the most material of Houses, being acutely aware of the transitory nature of most things. Many of the relics that they created during the



war were built for the aid or convenience of mankind and not the Slayers themselves. The great work of Haven also required that high-ranking Slayers create various devices to allow their less able brethren to participate fully in the massive task of creating a new realm. The thought that such items might still exist gives those fallen who intend to restore the shadow lands to some semblance of order hope that they can achieve it without the help of those demons still trapped in Hell.

Haven's Gate

In the last days of the war, Charon found himself faced with a near-impossible decision. The swelling numbers of human casualties and the dwindling number of Slayers led to an inevitable decline in the percentage of souls reaching Haven. He could create new gateways into the realm of the dead to help other demons bring souls through, or he could relinquish those souls to the hands of the Reapers. In the end, the guilt and pain he felt for mankind outweighed his growing paranoia about Haven security, and he authorized the construction of a number of direct gates from Haven to the living world.

The gates did allow the numbers of souls entering Haven to grow significantly, but not spectacularly. Each gate was buried away in hidden caverns, deep in isolated forests and, in one notable case, undersea. This necessary security measure did slow the flow of souls, but it proved effective. In the end, Haven wasn't breached through one of the gates, but directly through the Veil.

The gates endured the fall of Haven. Humanity's legends hint at their occasional rediscovery as well. Orpheus's descent into the underworld from Greek legends, Gilgamesh in Mesopotamian myths and the Thunder Twins of Hopi folklore all suggest that the gates remain active throughout the Slayers' imprisonment. Many returned Slayers are keen to find these gates again, because they have not yet managed to recall the lore necessary to enter Haven without assistance. Even the most recent of legends, however, suggest that the gates are buried far away from human eyes, in long forgotten caves, deep under ancient cities or possibly under the seas and deserts of the modern world.

The frame and gates are made of a dark metallic substance that seems to eat all light that falls toward it, leaving them perpetually wrapped in deep shadow. Even light from torches seems to skitter away from the location of the gate. The knack of finding a gate is looking for something that you can't see however hard you look. That was a relatively simple task for a fallen angel traveling to a familiar gate, but a much trickier one for a demon in a human body trying to find one in a foreign landscape.

System: Each gate is unique, reflecting the aesthetics of the team of demons that created it, but all have some elements in common. The gates are wide enough for three men to pass through at once and tall enough to allow a demon's wings unhindered access. The gates can only be spotted by demons in their apocalyptic forms and only then after a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 9). Once spotted, the gates allow instantaneous transit through the Veil into the shadow lands. Crossing a gate in either direction requires a Faith point in the case of a fallen or a Willpower point in the case of a mortal. Once across the threshold, both demon and mortal alike are at the mercy of the Maelstrom and the other perils of the shadow lands. See Chapter Four of the **Demon Storytellers Companion** for more details.

Death's Promise

The Death's Promise is an amulet given to favored humans to ensure that their spirits could not easily be lost to the loyalist Reapers. Fiend and Slayer members of the Alabaster Legion, working in concert, created dozens of these amulets, made of amber suspended in a circlet of silver on a platinum chain.

The original Death's Promises are all but useless now, and they will remain so unless the location of the City of the Dead is ever found. That has not kept Fiends and Slayers from working together to re-create these useful relics, however.

System: The Slayer places the amulet around the neck of a beloved mortal. The amber gem changes color very slightly when it is likely that the wearer will be killed in the near future, at the Storyteller's discretion. If nothing is done to remove the danger, the other two evocations within the Death's Promise come into effect the moment the wearer dies, binding the soul to the amulet and then opening a hole in reality that drops the Death's Promise into a secure room deep in Kâsdejâ, or another location if these circlets are successfully re-created.

Soul Anchor

During the Mortality War, the Slayers sought every little advantage they could find over their loyalist rivals, the Reapers. The Soul Anchor was one of their most successful creations. A Soul Anchor is a large block of rock, carved in the shape of a recumbent human, hands clasped over his chest and eyes closed in the repose of death. These anchors were

placed all over battlefields and activated as the battle began. Small groups of Slayers would stand over each anchor, defending it against any Reapers who tried to steal it. The anchor would draw the spirits of the newly dead toward it at great speed, and then temporarily bind them to the Anchor. When an anchor revived a full complement of 15 souls, it was carried by its guardian Slayers back to Kâsdejâ or, later in the war, to Haven.

Since their escape from Hell, the Slayers have found the Soul Anchors to be a useful source of ghostly servants and assistants, capable of sucking in ghosts over a range of several miles. Other Slayers use the items to ensure that their victims' souls do not escape the mortal realm at the moment of their death, but are captured for study or torture instead.

It is possible that some Soul Anchors still have the spirits of ghosts from the days of the war trapped within them. Such spirits are likely to be utterly insane by now, but they might just remember some crucial details from the war that could be useful to the characters.

System: To activate a Soul Anchor, the player must spend between one and three points of Faith. The effect of the relic works over a circular area whose radius is equal to the number of points of Faith spent in miles. The nearest 15 ghosts are sucked in, and are trapped there until the demon who activated it chooses to release them.

Madisel's Scythe

When Madisel threw her scythe to Lucifer so that he would have a weapon to wield against Michael, it was nothing more than a standard Slayer's scythe. It would be foolish to expect it still to be so after the Morningstar had used in battle. Where once the weapon simple ceased biological processes and separated soul from body, now it burned with a terrible fire of anger and righteousness. Where once it only moved through a handful of the layers of reality, now it could pass through the levels of Creation with ease.

Madisel did not join the Alabaster Legion, choosing instead to stay at the side of Lucifer throughout the war, until she finally fell in the closing stages of the Time of Atrocities. Throughout that time, she wielded her scythe, reshaped by Lucifer's touch, as a symbol of the Morningstar's might and the inevitable victory (or so they thought) of the first angel over the forces of God. Demon and mortal alike die terrible deaths at the touch of the scythe, slowly burning to death as flames spread out from the wounds it inflicts. Mortals rally around the bearer of this weapon, inspired by its terrible puissance to greater heights of violence in the name of what they believe to be right.

Rumors abound that the scythe has been located, deep in what is now the Red Sea. If these rumors are correct, one of the mightiest weapons the Slayers ever possessed could be within the House's grasp once more.

System: Madisel's Scythe inflicts Strength + 3 lethal damage when not active. Activating the relic requires two points of Faith if the wielder is one of the fallen, or two points of Willpower in the case of a mortal, though a human wielder is also subject to the weapon's deadly touch.

When activated, the Scythe inflicts Strength + 3 aggravated damage. Additionally, its touch inflicts the low-Torment effect of the evocation Extinguish Life (Lore of Death ••••) on mortals (not fallen) — including the wielder, if she is human. The scythe was never meant for human hands, and to hold it, even for a moment, is to embrace the chill of death itself. Finally, the activated scythe ignores all forms of armor (including armor provided by apocalyptic forms) with the exception of enhanced, enchanted or demonic armor types. Even then, the armor protection for such relics is halved.

Haven's Light

The Sea of Death was designed to be the ultimate defense against an invasion of Haven by God's forces. The absence of Charon and his lieutenants from Hell suggest that the sea performed as it was designed to do. Although paths through the sea existed, these Byways could not easily be found without a lamp, specially crafted by Charon and the Malefactor Nhudriel. Charon's Ferrymen used these lamps, known as Haven's Lights, to lead chosen souls to the islands far out on the sea. The lamp is made of a black iron-like substance, looking much like a traditional ship's lantern, complete with shutters and a guttering spirit candle within. That sea has now been transformed into a nightmarish Tempest, tossed by spirit storms and plagued by shards of memory. The Haven's Lights are proving just as effective as they did during the war, though, allowing brave Slayers to start exploring the levels of Haven beyond the shadow lands adjacent to the living world.

System: When the light's shutter is opened, the path to the chosen island in the sea becomes visible as a clear, calm path, illuminated by a beam of light from the light. As soon as the

shutter is closed or the light is put down or covered, the clear path immediately disappears. Anyone who follows the bearer closely can also find the same path. It is only useful for parties of 10 or less. Larger parties will slowly lose members along the way, unless the bearer of the Light succeeds in a Charisma + Leadership roll (Difficulty 8) for every hour of travel.

Siklos

Charon's own scythe was the only weapon to rival Madisel's Scythe in potency. While Siklos is probably the more powerful, it was one of the best kept secrets of the war, and it was used in only one major battle: the invasion of Haven.

At the behest of Azrael, who wanted to reward his loyal lieutenant for his centuries of toil, members of the Alabaster Legion from several Houses designed this scythe, including the Malefactor Nhudriel and the Scourge Kamoseous for the Duke of the Dead Lands as a fitting status symbol. Siklos was crafted from the souls of three willing humans, all warriors who wished to continue to fight. Their faces can still be detected in the blade and shaft of the scythe, composed and peaceful when it is not in use, and full of fury when an enemy of the wielder approached. The forging process took months, as slowly the souls of the dead were shaped into their new form, and mixed with the memory of weapons destroyed in the long centuries of the war. Finally, the memory of the loyalty and love many men had for their angelic benefactors was coated onto the blade, to give it the status it deserved.

The blade was rarely used in anger. On occasions, Charon used it to silence dissenters and, in the late stages of the war, those who disagreed with him. It was only as the loyalist forces broke through the Veil and surged into Haven than Siklos finally was used as intended. Charon led the armies of the dead with Siklos singing a hymn of battle as it cut a swath of destruction through the loyalist front ranks. Somehow, the demons who forged the weapon had tapped into humanity's potential in such a way as to create a weapon perfectly suited to destroying angels.

Siklos was last seen in Charon's hands as he retreated along the Byway into the depths of the Sea of Death. Slayers who have started exploring the Tempest, however, have reported hearing snatches of Siklos's distinctive hymn of battle as they move through the storm-tossed sea. It seems that either Charon is abroad with his old weapon, or that he has lost it and it calls for a new wielder to help it fulfill its only purpose: the destruction of angelic (or demonic) souls.



System: Siklos is charged by Faith gleaned from willing ghosts. Each ghost may donate up to half his Faith potential in a ceremony of obeisance to the wielder of Siklos. When Siklos is fully charged with 10 Faith, the blade and shaft comes to life as the souls within start to sing their battle hymn. When used in combat against demons, Siklos always inflicts Strength + 3 aggravated damage. If the wielder chooses to spend a point of the stored Faith, it inflicts Strength + 5 aggravated damage, and the difficulties to hit and wound targets decrease by two. Damage inflicted by Siklos cannot be soaked, and the weapon ignores *all* forms of armor. Against all other targets, it merely inflicts Strength + 1 lethal damage, with no modifiers, even if the blade's Faith is used. Siklos may be wielded only in Haven. The blade cannot be carried through the Veil into the living world.

Rituals

The key discovery that Charon made that allowed the creation of Haven was that the lore of the other Houses could be coupled with that of the Slayers to manipulate the stuff of souls and memory as if it were the matter and energy of the first creation. The Slayers suspected that some insight into God's plans for the Second World lay in that discovery, but the chance to ask Him was now long gone. This discovery allowed for the creation of some powerful rituals that shaped Haven and began to explore the nature of human mortality. Who knows what the Slayers might now achieve with the immediate pressure of the war gone?

Reborn in New Skin

This ritual was one of the few useful results of the Slayers' constant experiments to overturn the curse of death. In one sense, the ritual is a failure because it doesn't actually prevent death. It merely takes life from one soul and gives it to another. This long, demanding ritual rips a soul from a living body, and immediately replaces it with the soul of one of the dead. Potentially, through repeated use of this ritual, a soul could enjoy near immortality through repeated switches of body. The imprisonment of the Halaku prevented that, and the original beneficiaries of the ritual, friends, servants or lovers favored by powerful Slayers, have long since disappeared from the world.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Spirit •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Death ••••, Lore of the Winds ••

Base Cost: 33

Restrictions: The ritual may be performed only in an underground chamber, such as a cave or cellar. It also requires a living human and a ghostly soul bound into an object. It will not work on dead bodies or on unfettered ghosts.

Minimum Casting Time: 121 minutes

System: Roll Stamina + Awareness. The number of successes achieved must be greater than the living man's Willpower. For this reason, most donor bodies are beaten and abused for some time before the ritual takes place. If the roll succeeds, the Ankida can command the two souls to switch places. The ritual forges a link between the two souls, which lasts while both endure. Should the reborn every be killed, or his soul removed from his body by supernatural means, the original, bound soul snaps immediately back into the body, returning the replacement spirit to its anchoring object.

The reborn ghost gains the Physical Attributes and Appearance of its new body and retains the remainder of its own Attributes and Abilities. The transfer is permanent.

This ritual does not work on demon souls, and will not work on any type of supernatural person or creature.

Torment: The high-Torment version of the ritual puts the two spirits involved through excruciating pain as one dies and the other is reborn. This pain will halve the Willpower of both ghosts and give them both a single derangement each.

Variations: An alternative version of this ritual allows the ghost to reclaim its former features as well as a new body. As the soul slips into its new body, the flesh melts and runs like wax before settling into the original face of the newly resurrected spirit. This variation adds Lore of Transfigurations •••.

Haven's Peace

This is one of the few new rituals developed since the escape from Hell, based on the old Haven-creation rituals. These rituals worked by channeling the world creation and shaping lore of the other Houses through the filter of the Lore of the Spirit. The whole of Haven is composed of spirit — usually not sentient souls but the unaware souls of the plants and animals that died after the Fall. The Charonist group within the Slayers has reworked one of the old creation rituals used while building Haven to create Haven's Peace. It brings peace and calm to an area of Haven, erecting conceptual barriers against the spirit storm and providing shelter for both ghosts and demons within.

Primary Lore: Lore of Storms ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Spirit •••, Lore of the Earth ••••

Base Cost: 33

Restrictions: This ritual can only be carried out in the shadow lands, the portion of Haven closest to the living world.

Minimum Casting Time: 121 minutes

System: Roll Intelligence + Science. The difficulty of the roll depends on the strength of the spirit storm at the time the ritual is preformed. It should be between 6 and 9, at the Storyteller's discretion. A single success creates an area of peace 100 yards in radius from the point where the ritual sigil is carved into the ground. Each additional success beyond the first adds an additional 50 yards to the radius. The spirit storm does not appear within the circle, although any soul that steps outside immediately becomes prey to the flaying effect of the Maelstrom (**Demon Storytellers Companion**, p. 53).

Torment: The high-Torment version of the ritual creates the same area of calm, but with terrible consequences to any ghost within the ritual's effect area. Instead of gently forming around the area of peace, the protective ritual drives all spiritual material out into the Tempest beyond the shadow lands and into the severe Maelstrom blowing there. Any soul caught in this ritual is immediately dropped into the Tempest and suffers five dice of lethal damage per turn until destroyed or rescued.

Variations: This ritual can also be used to create a fortress within the shadow lands, if required. Adding Lore of Portals •• makes the barriers around the ritual site impervious to demons and ghost as well as the Maelstrom, as per the Evocation's normal effect.

The Veil of Cerberus

As the Thousand Year War turned into a rout, the rebel Elohim had to adopt more defensive tactics. Cerberus, an accomplished Ankida, conceived this variation on another Haven-building ritual to allow groups of rebels and mortal servants to escape pursuing loyalist forces. If the refugees had a sufficient head start on their pursuers, this ritual allowed them to swap themselves, and their immediate landscape, with their counterparts on the other side of the Veil. While this had the unfortunate effect of sacrificing a few ghosts who were in the wrong place at the wrong time to the loyalist angels, it saved many Slayers from destruction in the closing days of the war.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Realms •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Portals ••••

Base Cost: 18

Restriction: This ritual cannot be cast in the presence of any observers except those participating in, and affected by, the ritual. It also requires a small scrap of dried skin and some fresh blood.

Minimum Casting Time: 81 minutes

System: Roll Stamina + Awareness. The difficulty varies based on the strength of the Veil. It will be 6 in a place like a graveyard or deep in the countryside, 7 or 8 in a village or town, and 9 in a major city. Each success adds another two meters to the radius of area transferred into Haven, from a base of a radius of three meters. Should the number of successes fail to extend the radius far enough to bring everyone within the transfer area, then the ritual fails. Not surprisingly, the ritual is normally conducted in a small, huddled group, just to be on the safe side. If the ritual succeeds, the area within its effect is enclosed with mist for a few moments. When the mist clears, the whole landscape within the ritual's effect, and all things on it, have crossed the Veil. Back in the living world, the landscape has been replaced with its shadow land equivalents, a gray, lifeless facsimile of what was there before. The landscapes will swap back gradually over a period of several hours.

Torment: The high-Torment version of this ritual kills any humans who travel with the demons. They pass over the Veil, but leave their bodies behind. From that point onward, they are treated as normal ghosts. The landscape in the living world never really recovers from the effects of a high-Torment use of the Veil of Cerberus. The ground remains forever barren, and animals avoid it.

Variations: In a bid to make things even more difficult for pursuing loyalists, a variation of The Veil of Cerberus was devised which incorporates Lore of Flame ••••. It causes the transferred portion of the shadow lands to burst into a terrible conflagration as it emerges in the living world, blocking the progress of the pursuers and erasing all traces of the fleeing demons. There is a rumor that Lore of Patterns ••••• has also been used, to create a time bomb effect, but no fallen have yet been able to recreate that effect.

Character Creation

So, now you know what the Slayers are, what they did in the war, and what their current agendas

are following their escape from Hell. What else should you bear in mind as you carefully craft your own Angel of Death? While the nature of the demon's host shapes her personality to some degree, there are certainly points of similarity between all members of the House of Falling Night that can give your character a distinctly Slayer flavor. We'll look at a few of these, but first of all, it's worth thinking about the type of concepts that work well as Slayer characters.

Concept

There are three main ideas to keep in mind when coming up with a character concept for a Slayer: death, isolation and pride. Each of those is a profound part of the Slayer character and it is worth considering which of those resonated most strongly between the host and demon, making the possession possible.

Death: Without a doubt, death and mortality is the most obvious concept around which to build a Slayer. The Halaku are the Angels of Death charged with ending life in all its forms. The link with death can take several forms, though. The simplest is just unexpected death. Slayers are attracted to the bodies of the recently dead more than any other demons are. More than a few murderers, drunk drivers and careless workmen have found themselves face to face with someone they thought they'd just killed. A character whose only resonance between human host body and demon is likely to find the early weeks on Earth difficult as the Slayer's nature wars with the incompatible memories and lingering emotions of the host. Such characters can use that conflict as a bulwark against her Torment, though, using the human impulses to resist the contradictory demon ones.

Those who live lives associated with death, such as cops, doctors, nurses, soldiers and murderers, also make good Slayer hosts. This is a complementary resonance, though, forcing the Slayer back into a variation of the role she played during the War, but in mortal society. If the character chooses to remain in her old life, she's going to have to face the reality of death in the modern world repeatedly, which might inspire or depress the character, depending on her attitude to her own ignorance.

The last group are those who have lived a life tainted with death, such as the terminally ill who are struggling to cope with their diagnosis, the depressed, the bereaved and the suicidal. These characters have had their spirits broken by their experiences and so make easy targets for Slayers. The nature of their descent into soullessness can exaggerate the demon's own feelings of guilt, however, so this form of character concept makes an ideal choice if that's an angle you want to explore in the game.

Isolation: As the last House and the only House concerned with ending and not creation, the Halaku were always kept apart from others. The curse of mortality and the nature of the Haven project conspired to keep the Slayers apart from their fellow rebels during the war, too. Therefore, those humans whose spirits have been broken by abject loneliness can make very comfortable and familiar hosts for your character. A character who plays on the isolation resonance allows you to explore the relationship between the demon and humanity from the Slayer's perspective. Your character needs to interact with humanity for Faith, but neither the demon nor the host's memories are skilled at dealing with people. Such a character is a challenge to play, and tricky to play in a group, but can be very rewarding because it cuts right to the heart of the Slayer concept.

Pride: Last, and least obvious, of the Slayer resonances, is pride — pride in her work in particular. The other Houses might have looked down on the Slayers, but the Halaku did their job nonetheless. They worked alone, but made sure that the job was done well and that the things they killed were remembered. When push came to shove, and the souls of the dead were in danger, the House of the Falling Night, the least and last of the Houses dared to do something no other House even considered attempting: a work of creation outside God's plan.

Choosing a human host whose spirit was crushed by his commitment to his trade can reflect this aspect

Elementals

Slayers are creatures of shadow and smoke, hidden from the world and working just out of sight. Even the most social of the Halaku feels the urge to work alone occasionally, an echo of the ages spent working alone, bringing death to those whose time had come. Slayers are self-contained and independent, but often antisocial and downright uncommunicative.

As well as those mortals with whom they have an ideological affinity, Devils might gravitate toward mortals who have felt lonely or isolated, such as the bullied, the mentally ill and socially inept. They might also be attracted to mortals with solitary night jobs, such as security guards, criminals and reporters.

of the Slayer character. A skilled typesetter whose trade disappeared with the advent of desktop publishing, a corner shopkeeper driven out of business by the local supermarket or man in his 50s forced to retire from a job he loved by a firm that favors younger employees are all examples of the sort of character that has the pride resonance as a human host.

Nature and Demeanor

Now that you've got an idea of who your character's host body was, it's time to think a little about the demon inside. Perhaps the defining aspect of the Slayer character is the pain and guilt that God's curse of mortality for humans induced. Most of the Halaku feel, deep in their spirits, that they are to blame for the fate that has befallen humanity. They spent most of the war trying to correct that guilt, and now they have the additional guilt of millennia spent torturing humans souls from within Hell to atone for, too. It's no wonder that certain Archetypes are common within the House. Penitent is perhaps the most obvious Slayer Nature, reflecting the character's desire to put right the curse. Those who feel the guilt could end up as Fanatics or Architects instead, depending on their approach to redeeming themselves. Caregiver is another possibility, reflecting the desire of some Slayers to care for and, in a twisted way, nurture their ghostly charges.

Of course, this guilt and pain can have less positive effects, creating Martyrs and Masochists who believe that their own suffering will help assuage the guilt. A few spiral into the Monster Archetype, the pain more than they can easily handle. That Nature is frequently found among Ravener Slayers.

Demeanors vary wildly, and usually reflect the human host's original Nature if the demon spends much time in human society. Slayers were never social creatures at the best of times and many find it easier to fall back on their host's memories and habits when dealing with other people. These inherited Demeanors are often found in Slayers whose hosts were killed outright before possession, rather than just suffering from a broken spirit.

Primary Lore

You usually choose the primary lore (and thus visage) of your character toward the end of the character generation process, after choosing Attributes and Abilities. It's worth thinking about the character's primary lore *before* you assign other traits, however. Primary lore and visage have a significant effect upon the character's abilities and style, and some character concepts will suit particular lore paths more than others.

Lore of Death: Despite the name, this lore is more concerned with the living than the dead, allowing a Slayer the opportunity to hasten the end, see the last moments of a person's life or even give the semblance of life to a corpse. It's a good choice for characters oriented toward the living world, who interact with mortals frequently. If your character is a physical type who enjoys a fight, this lore is your best bet.

Lore of the Realms: This lore is the Haven lore path and is the ideal choice for a character whose interest lies primarily beyond the Veil. Indeed, this lore is a necessity if the character is going to be part of the Halaku's great effort to reclaim their creation and restore it to its original purpose.

Lore of the Spirit: This lore allows a Slayer to interact with ghosts, and it makes a good choice for a more socially oriented character. It provides the character with a ready stream of assistants and lackeys, as well as information sources few other demons can match. It's the most likely choice for a character looking to further the Halaku agenda of understanding death, too.

Attributes

The particular nature of the hosts that Slayers find attractive means that there are very few generalizations you can make about Attribute choices.

Physical

Physical is often the secondary category for a Slayer character. Still, a high Stamina is common to many Slayers. The instinctive understanding of human physiology that comes with an understanding of death often leads Slayers to reshape their hosts slightly in the first moments of possession, making them more resilient and less likely to die easily. Dexterity can also rise: Scythes are difficult weapons at the best of times, and slicing through several layers of reality to separate a soul from a body is no work for the butter-fingered. Strength often decreases, though. The pale, ethereal angels of death are creatures of subtlety and grace, not brute strength.

Social

While many Slayers possess the lonely, suicidal and terminally ill, suggesting weak Social Attributes and fairly poor Physical ones, too, many just end up in the bodies of people who have been killed unexpectedly. That flash of death draws Slayers like moths to the proverbial flame. Many people who die in accidents and murders are perfectly

happy, healthy and socially viable. The host's Social characteristics usually take a dive when the demon sets up residence, but a dive from a high level can sometimes result in an unusually gregarious member of the House. That situation is particularly appropriate if you want your character to become a significant player in the local infernal court. Few (if any) Slayers, however, have a Charisma of 4 or more. The lonely Angels of Death can drag down even the most charismatic body. The randomness of these bodies also means that a few Slayers end up with high Appearances, something they find both appealing, for the much-longed-for contact with humanity it gives them, and uncomfortable, for much the same reason. Manipulation often rises, too, as Slayers are often more used to dealing with people through intimidation and fear, even if they don't realize that they're doing it.

Mental

Mental Attributes usually take the top spot in Slayer character creation. The House was designed to watch, analyze and take action only at the perfect, apposite moment. The Halaku have not lost those skills in the ages since. Perception is vital, with Intelligence snapping at its heels. Wits is less important. Halaku watch and wait before they act, rather than relying on impulses and feelings.

Abilities

Choosing Abilities is a relatively straightforward task. Most of a Slayer's Abilities will reflect her host's own experiences, rather than the demon's past existence. Most of the Halaku lived very narrow existences, focused on death, Haven and spirits. Nearly all Slayers possess some Medicine, however, the result of their intuitive understanding of human biological process and how they can go catastrophically wrong. The Slayer's experience of dealing with ghosts will probably give her some dots in Occult, too.

Awareness, Intuition and Stealth are a common threesome for Slayers who were active in the Mortality War. The battle of wits with the loyalist Reapers encouraged the Slayers to develop those skills through the course of the war. The experience is often retained and exploited even in a host body. Slayers who were heavily involved with the legions and their battles are more likely to retain high levels of Intimidation and Investigation. High-ranking Halaku in the legions ruled through fear and knowledge, rather than Leadership and Empathy. Neither of the latter two are Abilities that come easily to the Slayers. Even if the host was skilled in those areas, they will usually decrease upon possession.



Backgrounds

Allies and Pacts are fairly rare Backgrounds for Slayer characters. On the whole, they lack the requisite social skills to build and maintain such relationships. Fame? Forget it. Even in the Slayer's host body was famous in its previous life, that fame fades rapidly as the Slayer disappears into seclusion. Followers, on the other hand, are not uncommon. Angels of Death can create death cults with startling ease, especially if they are prepared to show off their skills in handling ghosts. Humans fear death terribly, and anyone who can guarantee them a post-mortem existence is a fair bet as an object of veneration. Influence is a more interesting one. Any influence on society that is carried over from the host body's past life is likely to require the Slayer to work at maintaining it. If the host wasn't prone to intimidation and manipulation as techniques for maintaining power, however, then people are going to notice the style change the character undergoes.

Legacy, Mentor and Paragon are no more or less common than in characters of other Houses, while Resources tend to slip slightly after a Slayer possesses a character. It takes work to keep money coming in, and most forms of work involve regular social interaction with the living. Not all members of the House are prepared to put themselves through that to keep up their supply of material goods, which never really interested them in the first place.

Ritual Knowledge (**Demon Players Guide** p. 179) is a good choice for Slayers who were involved in the creation of Haven. Examples of variations on Haven-creation rituals have been given already, and you are heartily encouraged to work with the Storyteller to develop further ones, using the rules given in the **Players Guide.** Only a fraction of the vast collection of rituals used to create this new realm is available to the escaped Halaku, but that is changing as they start to gather, exchange memories and compare notes on their experiences.

Virtues

Those Slayers who spend much of their time around humanity tend to have high ratings in Conscience. The constant reminder of the effects of the House's rebellion on humanity acts as a catalyst for a strong moral compass in many Halaku. Many Slayers have low Conviction, though. Their sense of the order of the world is damaged because they don't understand their primary calling anymore. Deprived of a true understanding of death, they lack a surety in their worldview.

Courage, on the other hand, is a quality few Slayers are lacking in. While they might be loners with poor social skills, once they find a cause they have the guts to pursue it, no matter what obstacles lie in the way. It was this Courage that led them to build Haven, and it drives them once more in the modern world.

Lore

If you didn't pick your primary lore up front, now is the time to do so, along with secondary lore. Your choices of lore for your character are likely to reflect the way she spent the war. A Haven-builder of Ferryman is likely to find Lore of the Realms and of the Spirit the easiest to recall initially, while a Mortality Warrior or *legionnaire* is more likely to remember her Lore of Death and the Fundament. Your character will almost certainly not start the game with any Lore of Humanity. The House never found the lore particularly easy in the first place, and it rarely springs back to the mind of one of the fallen.

Haven-builders are the most likely to have a lore from one of the other Houses. Knowledge of those lore paths were vital in the creation of the Lands of the Dead, and some Slayers will recall them more easily that less-used House lore.

Common Lore

The common lore paths are not, well, common, among the Halaku. The Slayers are more used to dealing with the dead than the living, so few learned the Lore of Humanity, even during the war. Equally, the Lore of the Fundament was of little use to the House, whose members were more concerned with manipulating Haven than Earth.

Freebie Points and Finishing Touches

Freebie points are really your chance to fine tune your character. You've probably got a clearer picture of what role your character played in the great work of creating Haven and rescuing the dead through the decisions you've made, and you can now reflect that in other ways.

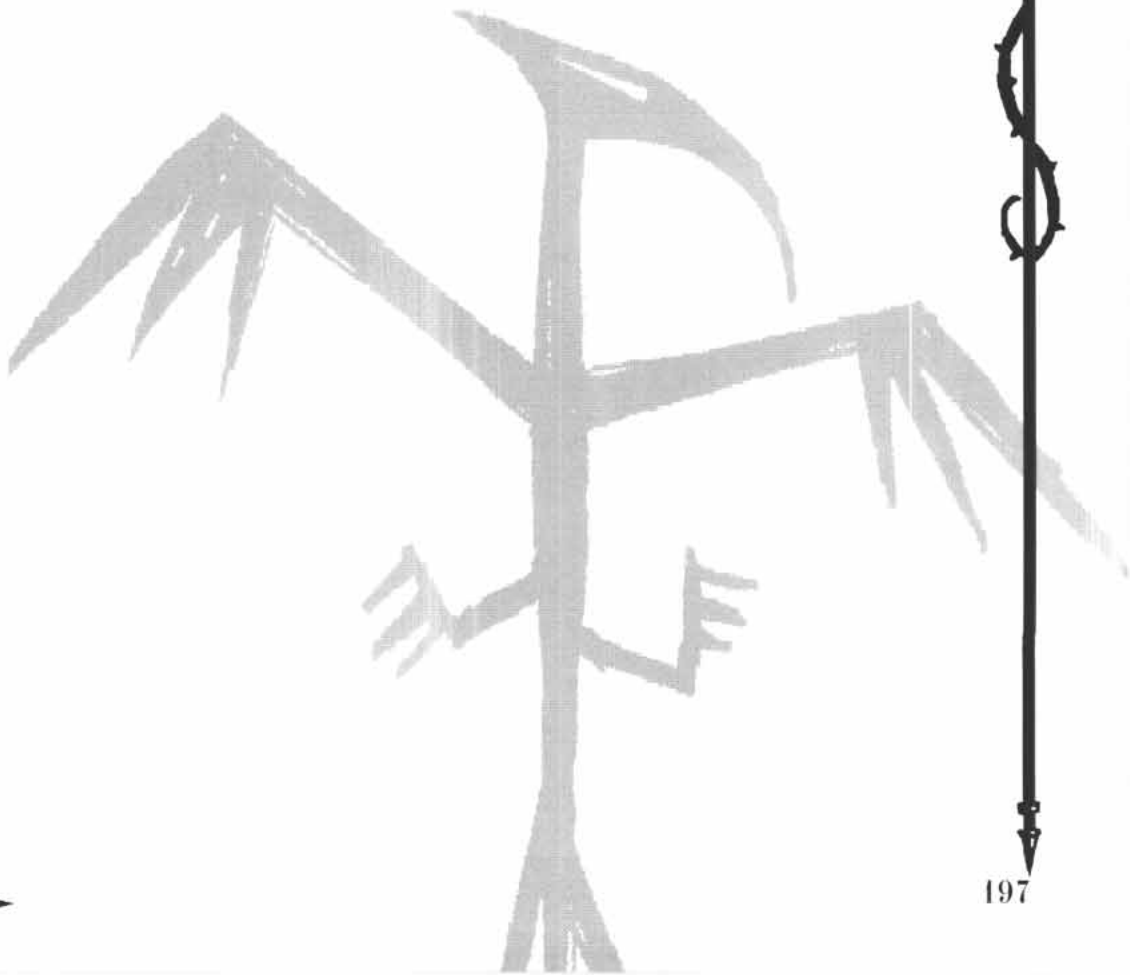
A high Faith rating is useful for any demon, it's just not very likely for a Slayer at the start of the chronicle. The House's lack of familiarity with living humans, social hesitation and ten-

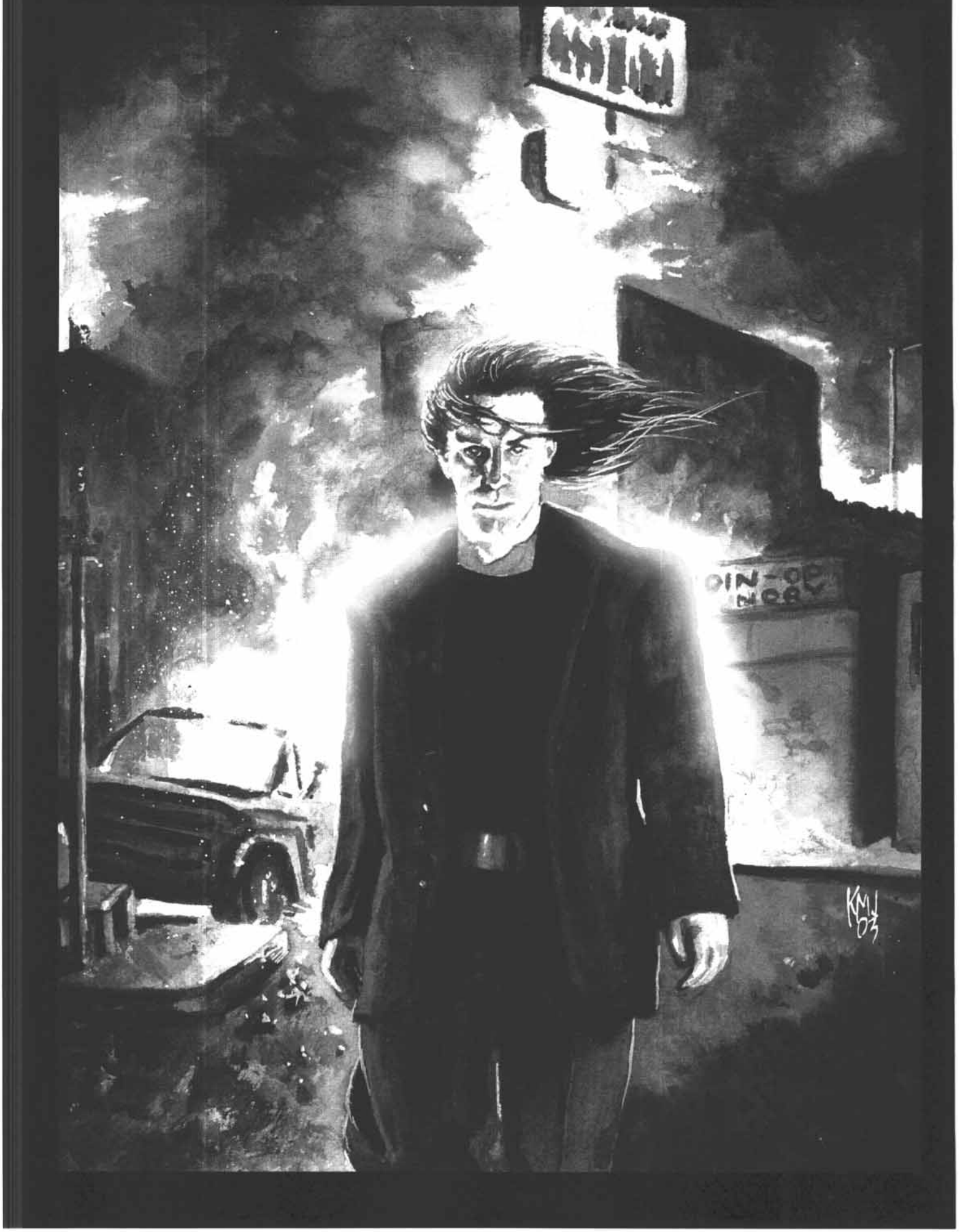
dency to possess loners means that it is often a while before they have the chance to build up their Faith reserves.

Slayers tend to have high Willpower. After all, as a House, they defied the disdain and arrogance of the other Houses to such an extent that they undertook a secret project of creation, an act reserved for God Himself until the Fall. This bloody-minded determination remains a characteristic of the Halaku who have escaped Hell. Those people who knew the host body prior to its possession often note a massive leap in the person's determination and focus once the demon has set up shop.

A Mortality Warrior might well need a few more points in Stealth or Melee, to reflect her time creeping around the battlefields and scythe duels with the Reapers. A Haven-builder might benefit from a few dots in Science to reflect the understanding of the nature of Creation she gained, or even another lore from another House.

It's worth skimming through the Social Flaws in Chapter Three of the **Demon Players Guide** if your Storyteller is allowing them in the game. The ones that deal with isolation or social ineptness are particularly appropriate for Slayer characters, both as aspects of the host body's original character or as new problems introduced by the possessing demon.





Chapter Eight: The Game of Houses

Upon this a question arises: whether it be better to be loved than feared or feared than loved? It may be answered that one should wish to be both, but, because it is difficult to unite them in one person, is much safer to be feared than loved, when, of the two, either must be dispensed with.

—Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*

A demon's House is an intrinsic part of her existence. It was the very first way in which she was defined, and although it does not dictate how individuals think or act, if influences almost everything. This chapter shows you how the concept of House can be used to increase the intrigue in your game — from the complex relationships between Houses and the possible reemergence of autarchs to the possibilities and advantages of limiting the options available. In addition, the eternal battles of demon politicking are explored in depth, showing you how to bring intrigue and power-plays to the fore, and involve the players every step of the way.

House Intrigue

Almost all demons in the modern age have a multitude of obligations and allegiances. They are likely to be attached to a local court, and most hold factional ideals that make them part of a much wider network. In addition, they need to interact with the mortal world — perhaps only to maintain their thralls, but probably at a much deeper level. Among all these different levels, their membership of a particular House adds another layer of complexity. Loyalty between House members is not guaranteed, but it does call to the fundamental nature of their being. This section

explores how you can add such interactions to a chronicle, complementing the other aspects of the game rather than simply confusing them.

Ancient Patterns

Demons are political creatures by nature. Being agents of Creation, they were not designed for physical conflict, nor to respond emotionally to events around them. Both capacities would come — the former almost the direct result of the latter — but from their first moments of existence, they learned to shape the world with their wills alone. The intricate task that they have been set required a great deal of coordination between individuals and large groups. The size of the undertaking was enormous of course, both in breadth and in the exacting detail required on many different levels of reality. Although their senses were keen and their powers intuitive to them, they were still individuals dwarfed by the scale on which they were working. There were no "blueprints" to Creation. The will of God was interpreted by the Heralds, and its implementation was in the untold numbers of decisions made by every angel, each decision having to be kept within some sort of consistent framework. The negotiation required to make it all work was extraordinary.

Despite this complexity, almost all communication was kept within the separate Houses. Most other interaction — other than the discussions made at the highest levels — was usually a matter of quickly completing a particular task together and leaving it at that. There were no social occasions. Each House experienced the environment in very different ways, which made the actions of other angels seem obscure. In some cases, there was actual disdain (if not, indeed, contempt) in the dealings between Houses, although it was very rarely anything more than hidden undercurrents to communication.

The fact that the House that was designed to facilitate interaction, cooperation and inspiration — the Angels of the Deep — were among the most isolated of all their kind, did not help the situation.

After the rebellion, however, things became a great deal more intermingled and confused. For the first time, the angels had chosen their own comrades, and they did so because of their ideals rather than their identities. Often, any discomfort between Houses was overwhelmed by the enmity felt by the rebels to those of their same House who had remained loyal to God. The five legions were created with this attitude still fresh in everyone's mind. Although some demons remained under the command of those they had followed before the rebellion, the majority were swayed by their ideas of what needed to be achieved, rather than the remnants of loyalty from a very different time.

Of course, an individual's membership of a particular House influenced his decisions — Devourers were more aggressive than Fiends, simply because of their nature. But how that aggression might be utilized was less obvious.

The Return of House Loyalty

Over the course of the war, that will to take individual responsibility eroded steadily. Under the pain, heartache and confusion of battle conditions — and the degraded state of a world far removed from Paradise — all decisions started to look like bad decisions. It was more comfortable to rely on unthinking instinct rather than debate morality, when it seemed no such thing could possibly exist. This hardening attitude contributed greatly to the atrocities committed, and finally the battles that saw legion fighting legion, comrade fighting comrade. House membership started to become more important again for many demons. One consequence of the tight integration of the legions was that many demons saw that others were more alien than they imagined them to be (a perception not helped by the horrendous circumstances around them). The orders of the Devils started to grate. The farsightedness of the Fiends was seen as unnecessarily contrived games played with more honest lives. (Plus, hadn't they started this whole thing in the first place?!) Defilers were unreliable, Slayers unreachable. Whatever possible complaint could be made, even against a mere individual, could and would be applied to entire Houses.

Many demons started to fall back to their original hierarchy, even if only unofficially. They looked for guidance from their immediate superiors from before the rebellion, and beyond that to the high ranks that had led each House as a whole. Of course, the dispersal of the Houses among different legions and the fact that only one-third of the angels had rebelled to start with (and more had fallen in battle) made it difficult, if not impossible. Others would simply congregate with those they had known previously for similar reasons. Not everyone was so enthusiastic. Some saw this as a deliberate act of treachery, undermining Lucifer's orders and group cohesion. Others saw the previous hierarchy as an institution created by tyranny, and they refused to abide by it. Certainly, the idea was more popular among the unranked companies or those that had fallen afoul of the current political system (whether by conspiracy or their own incompetence).

Amidst all these competing ideas, a set of new autarchs slowly evolved, with varying attitudes toward the function of their role. These were not official positions, although in all cases they were filled by high-ranked members within the current system, and usually by the original autarch or one of the lieutenants of the old one. The position was usually symbolic, though it was used to affect official decisions in rare circumstances (particularly if the autarch was part of the Crimson Legion). In some cases, competing demons would try to claim the position, as a form of inter-legion conflict. In other cases, the House was simply not alienated enough (or cohesive enough) to look seriously at such an alternative hierarchy.

The Modern World

As events are still unfolding, the attitude of individual demons caught within them varies widely, and there is as yet still a lot of confusion about how political structures are going to be rebuilt. Many demons have fallen back onto the court hierarchy, but that is through force of habit rather than any particular advantage the structure offers fallen in modern cities. This is particularly common in areas where demons are more populous — memories of the time of the rebellion are still fractured, and in many cases the details of court ranks and duties can only be reconstructed through the memories of many different individuals. When they first return to Earth, most fallen concentrate upon their House instead, if only because such a fundamental part of their being is the hardest thing for them to forget. How much that attitude changes when they start to meet others of their kind depends upon the individual and the circumstances.

The best place to start thinking about House politics is with the attitudes of your group. The choice of House is the most important aspect of character creation for almost all players. It determines the character's essential nature and powers, as well as what stereotypes can be used or overcome. This focus on House identity reflects the state of a newly arrived fallen well. The more complicated aspects of politics and factions only become apparent once enough other demons have been found and the wider situation becomes clear, and even then loyalty to House remains an intuitive feeling for most. As such, the court system is vulnerable if at an early stage, and there are many opportunities for politically minded characters to have a significant effect on their surroundings. Your players might want to take those opportunities (particularly if you demonstrate that they exist), or an antagonist within the chronicle might try to undermine the existing structures.

The return of a strict hierarchy based upon Houses, each under a particular autarch, might still be possible. Just the proposal of such a system will likely receive a lot of opposition, especially from the better organized fallen. Some will claim that the "retreat" into individual Houses was part of the disintegration of order that cost the rebels the war. Others say it is a needless distraction from the far more important ideas around which the factions are forming. Certainly those whose power is based upon a local hierarchy will resist such a globally focused effort. (They might resist the efforts of factions as well, for the same reason.) It is still a powerful idea, however — one not easily countered.

Birds of a Feather

The best way to present the current state of play is by using the actions of the other characters within your chronicle. If an important contact for the group is a Scourge, and she is more comfortable talking to the Scourge within your troupe, then the idea of like calling to like is reinforced. Likewise, the politics of other demons in the area also have their effect. It is unlikely that a faction dedicated to House sovereignty (or even segregation) will appear. More likely it will be an undercurrent to the normal political games. Minor demons will socialize with others of their House but try not to aggravate any factional concerns. Those who are out of favor often gravitate toward the most powerful member of their own House, to regain their political standing in friendly company. This behavior is natural, and most individuals in that position will be exploited mercilessly by their superiors.

If it does become more than an undercurrent, however, it could be a cause for concern. If your players' characters see that ideas are going to waste and potential allies are being ignored just because of House politics, they might wish to fight for more justice. If the local hierarchy is being dominated by a particular House — most likely the Devils, although any of them could do it with sufficient numbers — then your characters may be motivated to empower other individuals, quite possibly using House identity as a standard to fall behind. It is a simple and often effective tactic, in contrast to the often controversial and complex issues surrounding factions and other political agendas that might exist. Even if the "oppressors" (that is, whoever the enemy of your troupe happens to be) are not from a single House, using House as a focus can turn attention away from matters that are more difficult to counter.

The actual approach your troupe uses is up to the players, of course. They are dependent, however,

upon the descriptions of your world and the reactions of the Storyteller characters to determine what is or isn't possible. Encouraging them to think about such matters, perhaps with mentors, with other allies or with your presentation of the problem at hand, can only help.

House Loyalty

Even the decision to support the re-emergence of autarchs and any attendant hierarchy depends to an extent upon which House is involved. The two groups most opposed are the Devils and Defilers. The Devils believe it is their natural position to organize the members of other Houses. Perhaps an autarch could prove a stabilizing force so that the Devils can become more effective, but most see the position as simply undermining their own power. Defilers are also concerned with organization, not as rulers but as facilitators. They can work well within either a hierarchy of rank or one based on ideas, but one that deliberately restricts contact between them and others will be unpopular with almost every member of the House.

Other demons are likely to be more in favor of the idea. In general, the lower the rank of the House is — i.e., the later it was created by God — the better the idea of self-determination sounds. Slayers are well used to being ignored, patronized or pitied, and many prefer to pursue their goals without the interference of other demons. Many Devourers are uncomfortable with too much politicking, so they prefer the simplicity of a House-based hierarchy. Scourges, Malefactors and Fiends do not have a broad consensus on this idea one way or the other.

Factions

Those who are particularly involved in faction politics will discourage any formation of a competing global hierarchy. Nonetheless, it is not clear that House loyalty and faction loyalty need to be at odds with one another. In fact, there is more likely to be opposition to factions from the ranks of a local court. After all, the ideas at the heart of factions are closer to the issues around which court politics are being made. If a particular court is concerned with security breaches and must order direct action against certain humans in the city, having the lower ranks made up of Faustians or Reconcilers is going to complicate matters more than any internal House organization.

Some factions see the possible re-emergence of autarchs as an opportunity, rather than a problem. If it was to happen, a demon's House would determine how she reacts to internal demonic issues, while her faction affiliation would determine how she reacts to the outside world — the bigger picture. In a sense, it would mirror the human notion of a separation between church and state. For demons, many of whom take worship of themselves by humans almost for granted, it is a radical idea.

While the principal component of demon politics remains the local court, however, most consider there is simply not enough room for any further fracturing of loyalty.

A Unified House

Just because the players' characters, or members of some other faction in the local area, are concerned with House allegiances and interactions, doesn't mean you have to expand the issue up to the level of autarch. That would make for a truly global chronicle. Many demons are interested in affairs of that magnitude, but nonetheless have to concentrate on more local issues just to survive against a potentially hostile mortal population and any nearby Earthbound.

Even if the characters wish to support an individual candidate for autarch (or wish to pursue the position themselves), the challenges that need to be faced are immense, not the least of which is communication and control over such a vast area. If someone declares herself autarch without the capability of responding to threats against her "subjects," wherever they are, she will be little more than a laughingstock. Even if the majority of House members want to support an autarch, the chance they agree on the same individual for the position is remote. The last section of this chapter discusses the effect scale has on politics, so you should think about the issues raised there before attempting such a widespread chronicle.

Summoning

One of the problems of pursuing unification behind a single fallen is that most of those currently on Earth are only of low rank, whichever hierarchy you consider. The obvious solution to those who want a powerful leader is to summon a suitable candidate from the Abyss. The **Demon Storytellers Companion** has rules for how difficult it is to summon individuals of any particular rank. The decision to call anyone from the Pit is a difficult one for many fallen, particularly those who see their ideals (in most cases, their faction affiliation) trampled under the presence of such powerful beings. The summoning of an autarch to unite a particular House might seem a worthier goal. The conspirators might argue, if only to themselves, but if they can successfully forestall the effects of Torment, it will not matter what their lord's factional stance is. They might overlook the problem



of Torment altogether in their eagerness (or under the effects of their own).

Of course, many of the "unofficial" autarchs who arose during the war are on Earth already. The five great Earthbound — Belial, Abaddon, Dagon, Asmodeus and Azrael — were among the most powerful of their kind, although some had more concerns than House politics during the war. No fallen could rationally consider them suitable leaders in their current state, but Torment might distort their vision. The Earthbound themselves see no kinship at all with the weak creatures appearing around them, but that does not mean they will not capitalize on attempts to reach out to them in the name of their House.

A Smaller Conflict

The stakes don't have to be anywhere near that high to be useful in your game, however. Regardless of what anyone thinks about a system of autarchs, the concept of House is still likely to have a large effect on local matters.

One area that is likely to be affected is the pursuit of opportunities that take advantage of House interests. Say, for example, that an influential Defiler determines the policy of the Ministry of Dust (see page 207 if you are unfamiliar with the ministries), which happens to focus principally on the docks area and other maritime interests. If the majority of the ministry consists of others of her House, then this could simply be efficient. Otherwise it could be working to the detriment of the court. If this problem is affecting your troupe, the players might find it hard to counter. If the characters complain, they will likely be accused of playing inappropriate House politics. If one of them is a Defiler, she will be told (privately) to show more loyalty.

This pattern could repeat itself on a number of different levels and to varying effect. Most times it will be a more subtle bias — perhaps little more than the side effects that any political system might have. It could be useful to your players, or a source of frustration. Whatever the case, it is a good way to get them to think about their characters' House, and how it might relate to the larger world.

Another impact of House at the court level is as a fallback position for any demon who finds herself on the receiving end of persecution. If she cannot influence others with her ideas or authority, she can at least appeal to others of her House for assistance based upon that connection. A Reconciler Fiend

might not be able to talk the other Fiends around to her point of view, but she can have some confidence that they will plead leniency if she is brought before a Luciferan judge. The level of cooperation that can be expected is the most basic, and it cannot be stretched too far. At best, such a politically awkward individual might be treated as a somewhat backward family member, to be protected from harm (from herself most of all). In the worst case, the other Fiends in the court might declare her a traitor to her House because of her strange ideas, and they will be keen to punish her themselves.

This expectation of House solidarity is somewhat tenuous for another reason. If the concept of House becomes one that is simply a refuge for the unpopular, then the whole idea can become so devalued as to be worthless. Anyone who is keen on seeing her House become a political entity in its own right (on whatever scale), will demand the best from all those around her, to set an example for others to follow. Of course, what one demon considers worthy behavior could be very different from anyone else's expectations. Returning to the analogy of the separation of church and state, it might be declared that faction politics is not a House concern. This leaves the Reconciler Fiend in the previous example without any recourse, but also makes it a lot easier to define a code of conduct that does not exclude too many members. Others would argue that this makes the concept of House about as effective as an informal social group. It is a fine line to tread, and anyone involved in local politics should consider it carefully. It is expected that members of the same House will socialize with each other, as someone who ignores her fellows gains a reputation of being contemptuous of demonic tradition, which can affect her life in the wider court. Equally, though, someone who puts too much stock in such relationships can be branded naïve or even a security risk.

House Versus House

If events in your chronicle do start to set one House against another — either because politics has devolved to that state, or because certain members wish to push it as a significant issue — then eventually it will come to blows. This might be a purely bureaucratic attack, but under the pressure of modern times, with Torment gnawing at every demon, armed conflict is always a real possibility.

It is in almost everyone's interests to see that such conflict is minimized (assuming that it has not been aggravated by someone as a way of weakening her opponents). Faction battles tend to be short and decisive. If not fatal, the losers are invited to leave the area. It is carefully emphasized that this request is not because of their House, since it would be pretty bold to show public prejudice toward the concept of the Sebettu. Instead, it is declared that those individuals have been disruptive and are not worthy of the protection the court provides. Only very rarely would *all* the members of a single House be exiled (which would both be politically unwise and an unnecessary drain on court resources). Usually, only the troublemakers are made an example of; the rest are required to renew their allegiance and perhaps pay some recompense. How welcome an exiled member will be in a different court depends upon her standing and any political ties that already exist.

There is no set form for inter-House battles. It might be an undermining of the opposition's standing at court or a war of attrition against its resources. It could be an all-out attack. Obviously, which Houses are involved, among other factors, will influence the form of the offensive. As long as the parties are careful not to undermine the dignity of the court, expose it to external scrutiny, or enmesh it in a drawn-out conflict, they can usually get away with quite a lot. If the infighting does start to have wider consequences, the entire court will likely intervene to calm things down — and perhaps exile the ringleaders of both warring parties.

Outside the Courts

Of course, if the demons come into conflict outside the usual court system, then anything goes. In the absence of other political forces, House loyalty becomes more important, so any battles are likely to be split along those lines. Torment and frustration boil down to the oldest divisions that have ever existed, as well as the most obvious differences between one individual and another.

Not everything needs to be so antagonistic. The stereotypes of demon interaction (as presented in Chapter Five of the core rulebook) are also closer to the surface outside court, which makes for unusual alliances. Two demons with nothing in common — from the status of their hosts to their opinions on matters that split factions apart in the wider community — may come together simply because they feel that they should do so. If they are lucky, they can learn enough from their relationship to overcome their Torment when interacting with other demons toward whom they are not so powerfully drawn.

You can use this idea to provide motivation for Storyteller characters in your game. An interesting approach is to have the antagonist of your chronicle relate to members of your troupe differently, based upon their House. A monstrous demon heavily under

the influence of Torment might be reasoned with by someone of her own House or of a House she regards as an ally. She might not even recognize anyone else as real, believing them to be tormenting spirits or phantoms of the Abyss. This is a potential method for involving a member of your group in negotiation who would not normally do so.

Note, however, that this approach does not work with the majority of Earthbound. They have been on Earth too long to hold to allegiances from before their imprisonment. Also, a demon who has only recently escaped, but has now given in completely to Torment, cannot be reasoned with in any way. He might use the powers of his House instinctually to harm as many people as possible, but that is the extent of it. The only response available to another demon is to subjugate her or destroy her.

The House Chronicle

The Sebettu — the seven celestial Houses of Creation — provide a rich and varied number of options. Most players will be able to find their preferred character type or choose something very different from what they have played before. It also allows you as Storyteller to provide a rich background against which the events of your chronicle can be set. Sometimes, however, it's interesting to forsake some of that variety for a sharper focus. One reason could be to emphasize a particular theme. For example, a game exploring humanity's dependence upon technology and whether or not technological advancement impacts upon demons, could be strengthened if all the characters, or at least a majority of them, are Malefactors. Similarly, a very political game might involve a majority of Devils. One emphasizing isolation, misunderstanding and the nature of death would be more relevant to a group of Slayers.

Such a theme might be a deliberate decision on your part, in which case you should advise the players what their options are at character creation. Sometimes a united group appears more or less by accident, because the players all lean toward a similar concept. If that is going to cause you problems — you are planning a political chronicle and are presented with five chunky Devourers — you should talk it over. In particular, talk about your perceptions of the game and what your players are expecting to get out of it — simply describing something as "a game of **Demon**" covers a vast range of possibilities. Perhaps a compromise will need to be reached. (Needless to say, you should not resort to the extreme tactics talked about in the last part of this chapter!)

Emphasizing a theme, however, does not have to stop with the players' characters. You can also restrict the Houses that your characters will interact with during their adventures. Doing so can be complimentary to the composition of your group — for example, a game in which almost all characters are Fiends could explore the potential and limitations of Fate in extreme detail — or provide a contrast to it. Those five Devourers could find themselves facing a court fall of Devils, and nonetheless have to remain true to their own ideals and nature while subjected to political manipulations from several different directions.

This section discusses the possibilities and issues relating to games with a limited number of Houses, and presents a number of options.

Strengths and Weaknesses

Each of the seven Houses was given by God a particular function to perform. There are similarities shared by all angels, but when it comes to those things they excel at, the Houses are very different. Not only will this difference impact upon the theme of your chronicle, but on many other aspects of it as well. In a game with no Scourges, the ability to heal becomes a lot more problematic (and valuable). Similarly, a group of Defilers is going to be in trouble if its deceptions are penetrated and they are threatened with immediate violence. Then again, this could be part of your idea. A group that cannot rely upon healing at the end of the day might approach combat in a more cautious, and ultimately more interesting, way. Likewise, if they do not have the ability to fight their way out of trouble, they will have to be all the more careful with their preparations. After all, in the World of Darkness, the possibility of failure should be close, and potentially catastrophic.

This can be offset a little by the fact that demons can learn the lore of different Houses. Since they need a teacher to gain access to that different lore, however, that also becomes more difficult, perhaps even impossible, for them to rely upon. It is a good thing to keep in mind when designing your background that even a single individual can be a source of widespread knowledge. A related area is that of rituals, first described in the **Demon Players Guide** (and with various examples included in previous chapters of this book). Most of them are purposefully designed to take advantage of the capabilities and differences between Houses, although there are exceptions, when all the requisite lore comes from a single House. Without

these flexible and powerful tools, the full potential of the characters might not be possible to achieve.

This is not to say that members of the same House need to be alike in their capabilities. The three different visages (possibly more, if you are using the more flexible rules for demonic forms, as presented in the **Players Guide**) of each House are useful in very different ways, and a player can always choose from either common lore.

In addition, the worth and expertise of a demon is not measured simply by the lore to which she has access. Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds and of course Nature and Demeanor all differentiate what the characters can and cannot achieve, and what she will or will not attempt to do. Indeed, those aspects will most likely be emphasized by the similarity of abilities within the group (which might give you another incentive to limit the choice of Houses, depending on your players).

It is often easier to write a scenario for characters of a single House, simply because you have less options to account for. The characters, however, are still likely to use their abilities, both supernatural and inherited from the host, in new and unexpected ways, so you shouldn't feel complacent.

The Single House Group

Having a small group of demons from the same House is not a rare occurrence. Although many demons have been scattered almost randomly across the world, it is quite possible for several similar individuals to arrive close together. They might have been drawn there by some concentration of the traits that their particular House looks for in a host body, or just by chance. Another possibility is that they arrived some distance or time apart and have come together out of preference or necessity. The fact that demons can contact each other regardless of distance means that finding old friends from the war is an easy matter. (How friendly they remain is a different problem, though.) If your game is centered around a court, individuals within the hierarchy might be assigned to missions for which they are particularly suited, meaning again that Houses will tend to congregate.

More deliberately, they could be individuals who have come together to advance the fortunes of their House. Doing so usually involves quests to find information, resources and/or artifacts that will be of most benefit to themselves and others of their kind. Alternatively, they might be trying to resist attacks made by xenophobic demons of a different House. As well as the usual challenges involved in these pursuits, they will also be beset by demons who think they are betraying the cohesion of the modern court system (whether or not that is the case). If the characters are particularly successful, they will likely attract more of their kind, and perhaps have a chance at encouraging the rise of an autarch. See the next section for details on larger groups from a single House.

As a Storyteller, you should be looking at making sure each of the characters is unique and can contribute to the adventure (just as you would otherwise). As explained previously, it is certainly possible for them all to be very different in both their abilities and their attitudes. Nor are they automatically cooperative — there are many examples of feuds within Houses just as bloody-minded as those existing between them. (As with any intra-troupe conflict, though, you should provide an escape valve for the potential aggression to be diverted elsewhere, lest you risk the entire exercise dissolving into acrimony.) Even if the differences are not quite so marked, it is a good idea to concentrate on areas where they do have different backgrounds or capabilities. Doing so makes it easier for you to distribute the challenges among all the individuals, and it also encourages them to interact with each other as they try to work out the best approach to a problem.

The Single-House Court

There are fewer examples of entire courts or other large institutions consisting solely of a single House. While House ties are strong, factional interests and geographic constraints are often more significant factors. (Many demons try to stay close to where they were reborn into the world, particularly if it is a place their host was comfortable in.) In addition, the mixed composition of the legions from the war is something almost all demons have become used to. House business, if it exists at all, is usually carried out on a large scale, by individuals who can communicate freely over long distances and who have no great need to regularly meet.

Nonetheless, a single-House court could develop for any number of reasons. The following are just a few examples:

Political: As explained in the previous section, it is possible that new autarchs will develop to lead their Houses. (Competing candidates might even all be vying for the position.) While most House business would still be carried out in the various courts around the world (and in most cases only makes sense in that environment), the position of autarch is a significant one that attracts its own local hierarchy. Individual demons of that House who are

displaced for whatever reason might travel to serve their leader. Certain fallen make the journey of their own volition (and some are be compelled to do so by the power of their True Names or otherwise). As more members of that House congregate and mold the environment — both physically and socially — to better suit their tastes, other demons will likely depart, seeking somewhere else where they can make a more significant contribution.

Of course, some distillations toward a single House are considerably less smooth. Under the influence of Torment, or just xenophobia and paranoia, violent inter-House conflict can break out in a particular court. If one side has the numbers, the power or the base cunning, it might prevail well enough to drive all others from the area.

Geographical: Many of the demons are elemental creatures and are often comfortable in a particular environment related to their House jurisdiction. For reasons of security, a Malefactor might set up a base deep within the earth, and he would be likely to attract other Malefactors by doing so. Similarly, a group of Defilers might wish to set up some sort of marine headquarters, while Devourers might be more comfortable in a thick jungle. It is unlikely a large group will take residence in such locations, given the difficulty of interacting with humans if nothing else. Isolated tribes might become useful sources of Faith (and be a comfort to those demons overwhelmed by modern civilization). In addition, many demons maintain their thralls in other parts of the world.

The geography does not have to be physical. A group of Slayers might congregate where the Veil to the shadow lands is weak (perhaps so much so that others find it uncomfortable to remain).

Goal Orientated: Even if the terrain is not suitable, there could still be a good reason to be there. The most common is to retrieve the contents of, or otherwise take advantage of, a significant location from the war. Such things are usually inter-House affairs, and it is almost certain that other Houses would be at least interested. If the location, or cache, was a legacy of a particular autarch's reign, that would be one reason only members of a particular House would be welcome. If the individuals who found the location are particularly untrusting, they might spread the word only among others of their kind and repel all others.

Alternatively, the demons might have a very good reason to be as isolated as possible — perhaps they are in hiding from some other group, be it human, fallen or Earthbound. This is especially likely if there have been some particularly brutal conflicts between Houses — or a powerful demon believes that was the case, thanks to Torment or some other factor.

The Nature of the Court

The standard hierarchy of a demonic court, with its five ministries under a tyrant (as is the formal name), is based upon the model established within significant bastions during the conflict with Heaven, when the Houses were well mixed. See page 211 for more information.

The different ministries each have particular requirements, and different Houses are better in some positions than in others. This does not mean it would be impossible to fill those ranks if the complete hierarchy was maintained by a less varied court, but it does mean that the tyrant simply might not bother implementing every detail. This could be because she knows of a more efficient arrangement that better suits the homogenized group and suits the purpose for which the court was created. Alternatively, it could be in the belief that such a strict regime is not necessary because of everyone's shared goals (in which case, she is likely to be in for a surprise).

This assumes that enough people are available to set up the full hierarchy — many smaller and more isolated demon communities make do with a single line of command, regardless of their nature.

Devils: As could be expected, a court composed of a majority of Devils, or exclusively from that House, would still bear a great resemblance to the standard hierarchy. Depending upon the needs and size of the court, not all the ministries may exist, but the Ministry of Eagles and the Ministry of Dragons almost certainly will.

Scourges: A court of Scourges would be among the most casual of organizations. A hierarchy of ranks will exist, but they will be fluid as decisions are made by those in the best position to do so. This gives the organization a flexibility and speed of response that can be truly impressive. The trouble comes if there is a significant amount of internal politicking. Without the structures to compensate for these differing opinions and to keep the business of the court an ongoing concern, things can start to disintegrate rapidly.

Malefactors: This House has a wide focus and an attention to detail that combine to make it an effective group in organizing itself. Malefactors will strip away unnecessary structures and not indulge in politicking for the sake of politicking, while maintaining an effective response to changing conditions.

Fiends: A group of Fiends will usually replicate the structure of a more normal court, down to the

different ministries and positions within them, as much as possible. This will be almost instinctual behavior as the Fiends continue to be more interested in gathering knowledge from the outside world, rather than designing a more effective solution for themselves. This might leave members of the Ministry of Aurochs and Ministry of Lions somewhat ineffectual and frustrated. On the other hand, if (and when) the group is involved in any conflict, the characters can congratulate themselves on their forethought.

Defilers: A group of Defilers will very likely find itself extremely badly organized. Without an external force to influence, the Defilers will either attempt internal politicking — which is likely to descend into a spiral of ever-changing and arbitrary factions — or just lose interest altogether. At times, members of the House do retreat into each other's company, but now that they have lived among both demons and humans, they cannot return to an existence where they only live among themselves.

Devourers: Although not political by nature, the Sixth House has the discipline to organize itself well. In most cases, the Devourers will be able to put factional politics aside when the need of the group is paramount. They will only rarely set up a Ministry of Dragons, or its equivalent, which means they can be vulnerable to less obvious forms of internal dissent. Careful agitation might not be noticed until the entire court is in flames.

Slayers: Angels of the Second World are used to solitude. They create their own internal hierarchies without the artificial constructs of the ministries, and they can usually handle differences of opinion in an appropriate and non-destructive manner. It will still likely remain a loose-knit group, and it will not respond quickly to external events. In many cases, one or more of the Slayers might discover these events early but not realize the implications for the group as a whole.

Limited Houses

Most of the options discussed in this section can still apply if you wish to simply limit the Houses available (whether at the level of the group, the court or the world itself), rather than reduce them to one. Certain Houses mesh well together, and the combination can enhance the effect you are after. For example, Devourers and Defilers make good partners and can contribute toward a theme of freedom and responsibility. Devils and Fiends are another good match, obviously more suited to a game of complex machinations.

The Single-House World

If you want a more radical background to your game, or you *really* want to concentrate on a particular House, you might conceive of a world where that House is the majority or even the only one in existence. It is a good idea to come up with some justification for this, though, to allow yourself a consistent and believable background. Perhaps the original Heralds, who would become Devils, were the only true angels. The functionality of the other Houses was performed by lesser spirits under close supervision, mere tools who are no longer available.

Alternatively, perhaps the cracks in the walls of Hell were thinner and more treacherous. Because they were connected to the lowest level of the Shadowlands, only the Slayers had the knowledge and skill to escape their prison — leaving it with orders to free their "betters." Other rationales may also be created.

Usually, such sweeping changes are better used in game of limited length. A particular theme or idea can be explored in depth, and then the group can move on to something else. This limits the amount of work you as a Storyteller have to do to present such a different world than supported in the **Demon** game line (after all, the history, organization and outlook of the protagonists is probably quite different). Then again, you and your group might be quite comfortable in such a situation and can continue indefinitely.

Instead of this approach, you can also make a more antagonistic selection. Devils and Slayers, for example, would be an interesting mix. Even if you do not make the disparity so obvious, it is often a good idea to include one or two conflicting elements to an otherwise consistent group. Doing so provides another point of view, it can be used to fill an obvious deficiency, and it makes it easier to accommodate players who want a little more freedom of choice.

The Game of Houses

Although demons often have impressive physical prowess and destructive capabilities, it is their cunning manipulation and twisted intelligence that they are better known for in the traditional tales. With so many agendas and levels of loyalty, a chronicle revolving around politics on a grand scale is a natural

fit for the background. This section shows how to bring out the power plays in your game, explaining what is at stake, what tools are available and how they can be used.

What is Politics?

Politics, especially as used by demons in the modern age, covers a wide variety of activity. It has been described as the art and science of government, and for the fallen — surrounded by enemies, beset by fractured personalities and the ongoing effects of damnation — almost all their effort is being turned toward that goal. Individually they are usually strong but very vulnerable. By banding together and creating structures that allow them to impose order on themselves and others, they may come to rule the Earth as they have done before. In short, politics is about getting things done. Intrigue, manipulation, bribery and violence are all tools that can be used to further demonic aims. Politics is about how and when to use them.

Politics as a Genre

Such a broad definition is accurate, but it does not help much. If *everything* is political, why do you need to worry about it? It is better to think of politics as a style of play, another option for you to consider when choosing the tone of your chronicle.

This style emphasizes grand schemes of conflicting ideologies, but in a way that focuses on the details. Hidden agendas, shrewd manipulations, big stakes, rapid shifts in fortune and the usually petty (if not sordid) concerns of the individuals caught up in it all. Everyone plays with a poker face until they are left screaming in the streets or dispatched with an unexpected bullet through the brain (metaphorical or not).

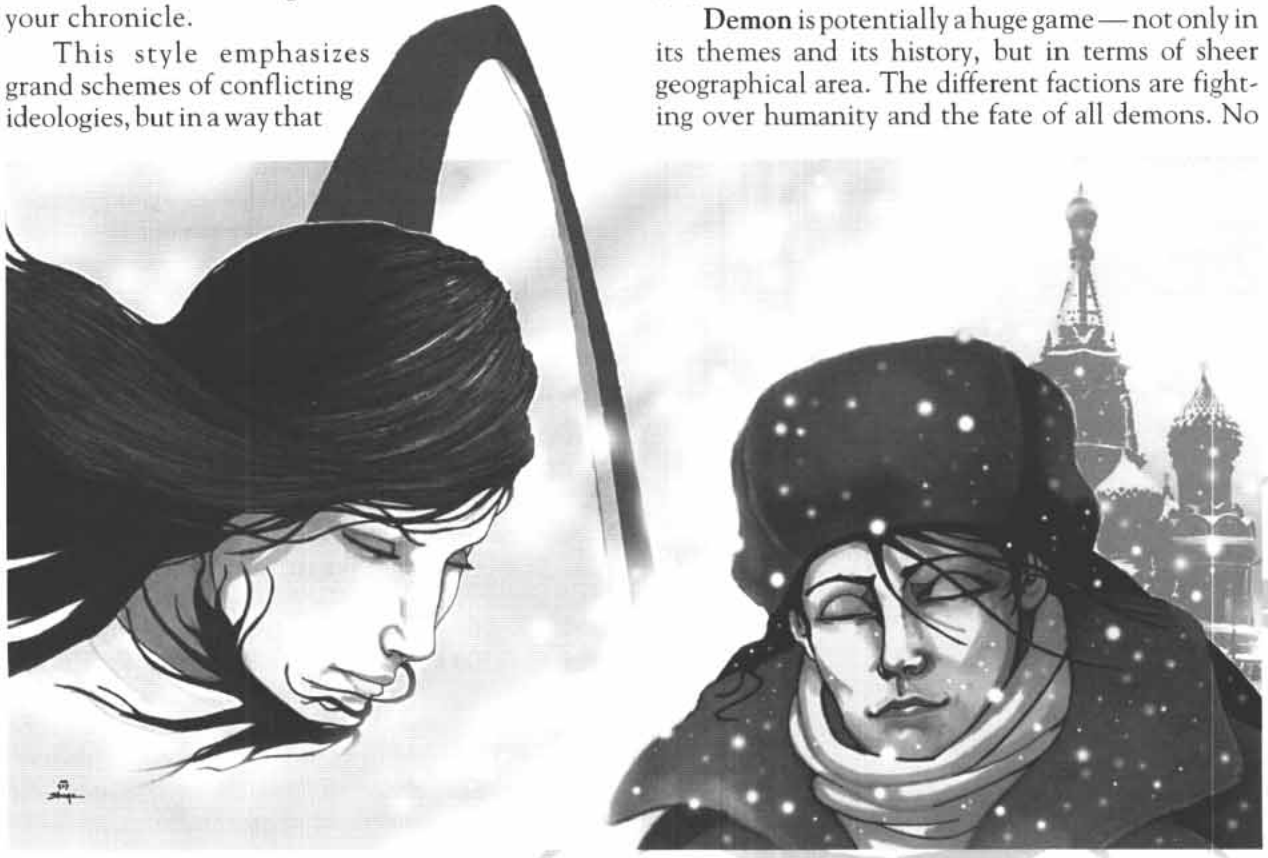
It is a style perfect for **Demon**. With multiple levels of allegiance, large-scale conflicts about philosophical issues and very real dangers, and the individual focus provided by your characters, all the tools are there already in the background.

Politics in Your Game

If you are interested in running a political game, whether it is the main focus or the part of the background, there are a number of things to think about. If you make decisions about these issues early, it will leave you better prepared for unfolding events. You don't necessarily have to know the details as you start playing. In fact, it's a good idea *not* to know everything, to spread out your workload and allow you to adapt more easily to player actions. But if you know what scale you are working with, for example, then it makes it easier to prepare the right information at the right time.

Scale

Demon is potentially a huge game — not only in its themes and its history, but in terms of sheer geographical area. The different factions are fighting over humanity and the fate of all demons. No



country has been spared the dispersal of the fallen into human hosts, and no culture has been singled out as being of particular interest to those seeking Faith. Caches of artifacts can appear anywhere, from the Gobi Desert to a buried vault under Washington DC. Not only is the scale potentially large, but demons are equipped to handle that size. In particular, they can instantly communicate across these distances without much difficulty. It would be quite possible, and natural, for allies to work closely together on a related goal and yet be on different continents. At times, those separated parties might each contain players' characters. (The mechanics for gathering Faith also provide an advantage to those whose thralls are spread far apart.)

Just because it is possible, though, you don't have to use such a scale. You might be much more comfortable working with a limited area, perhaps a city or small group of cities, up to the size of North America or continental Europe, for example. Even in the field of politics, which is ultimately about the Big Picture, there are good in-game reasons to justify this restriction. First, there are the limitations of human perception. Each fallen is resident in a human body and is profoundly affected by the memories and experiences of her host. For many humans, culture is very important, and differences cannot be bridged easily. A demon in San Diego might have a good reason to talk to one in Pakistan, but a common reference point is likely to be hard to find. Second, physical location is still important. The world is not as mutable as it once was, and demons cannot travel over it as freely. Even the Lore of Portals has its limitations. Important artifacts that once were portable might no longer be. The demons have to focus on their immediate environment just to protect themselves from all the forces that would uncover and attack them.

Sometimes these reasons overlap. That Pakistani demon might have more trouble communicating with one just over the Indian border.

So when you think about politics, think about what is at stake, who — and where — the interested parties are likely to be and also how much detail you might need to research to do your ideas justice. A continent-spanning game can really convey the theme, scale and majesty of **Demon**, but your own stories (and time) might be better served on a smaller canvas.

Timing

Another consideration is how quickly it takes demons to get themselves organized, and how long it takes your players to become a part of that. When any fallen returns to Earth, she is reeling from her extended incarceration in Hell. By relying upon the memories of her host can she start to regain some rationality and, from there, some control over the wider world. Her own memories are fragmentary and painful, but it is only out of the combined efforts of individuals under these conditions that any sort of fallen society can exist.

Depending upon the needs of your game, that larger society composed of individual courts and the politics that bind them might already be well established. Alternatively, a game set very early after the arrival of the first fallen would play out against a background when those structures are still being built. The first option gives the players a better-defined setting. The second gives them more chances to affect the development of a modern demon culture. Factions are also significantly affected by this decision. Some of them were established within the Pit (such as those who remained loyal to Lucifer), while others developed only after the state of the modern world became obvious. An early game could explore how these factions develop, and perhaps some of the competing ideas that didn't quite make it (at least in the official setting — your game might be a different matter).

As well as deciding upon a starting point, you should also think about how often you want larger effects to be felt. For example, you might be following the four-act metaplot as outlined in the **Demon Storytellers Companion**. If so, think about how those unfolding events will affect your game and the likely direction it will take under the influence of the players. A good approach to take is that if they succeed in one act, they should be in a good position to step up into the next. This is especially important in a political game, as the nature of politics changes depending upon the state of the world. It is also to your advantage to maintain a consistent set of Storyteller characters to both emphasize the changes, and smooth over the transition.

Involving the Players

Any game you run should involve your group of characters intimately, but they need not be politically motivated for you to present politics in your game. Few people in the modern world are interested in lawmaking and affairs of state (beyond who is invading who this week). Even fewer are interested for reasons other than blatant self-interest. That disinterest could easily be transferred from a mortal host to the demon inhabiting it. As such, your troupe might be more interested in more limited or better-defined goals — the defense of humans in the area, the acquisition of artifacts, or whatever. But politics can

still define what challenges they are presented with. They are likely to have relationships with at least one faction of the local court, which could fall into or out of favor. If not, court policies are still going to have an effect on such things as the attention of Earthbound and the mortal population.

Likewise, you should show that by succeeding against the challenges they face, they are affecting the politics. Once they have an artifact, people are going to come looking for it, perhaps only with suggestions how best it might be used. If they create a stable area, other demons might wish to muscle in — or wish to have their thralls live there. It could simply be that the better they do, the more influence their allies have. **Demon** is a game of personal horror and global redemption, so things are usually not that clear-cut. There is certain to be betrayal, tragedy and hard decisions. Nonetheless, by succeeding, your players' characters are strengthening the resolve of those who would turn against them. Failure, of course, has its own problems.

In a game where politics is prominent and the characters are motivated, they have even more chances to affect wider affairs. If they want to protect an area, they might do better by diverting others rather than fighting them off. If they want a particular ideal to be taken seriously on the world stage, or even in their home city, they must not only fight their battles, but persuade their allies and confuse their enemies so those battles are not in vain. If they are having any affect at all, someone out there is trying to turn it to her own advantage. If your characters don't want to be pawns, they should at least know what the rules are. Running a political game gives them a chance to write a few of their own.

Perhaps the best way to get the players thinking in the right frame of mind is to have them select important goals for their characters over the course of the chronicle. These might be achievable (although goals with no clear route to success work best) or simply ideals they wish to see advanced. They might not be idealistic at all — gaining the position of minister or tyrant of a court is a good example.

These goals should not distract from the level of detail they put into character creation, grounding their character with all the small-scale baggage of a newly escaped fallen in a human body — the contrast is important. The size of them should depend upon the scale and timing of politics in your game, as already discussed. It is better, however, to err on the side of grandeur. They might not be able to convince all demons of the worthiness of Faustian ideals, but if they attempt it in a suitably intelligent and clear-sighted way, they could nonetheless achieve great things. These goals could be individual or shared among the entire group (depending in part on how much division you want between them). Each player could also decide whether or not her character is interested in her goal at the beginning of the game, or if that interest develops over the course of it.

As a Storyteller, you should take their goals seriously when designing your game, but you should not feel constrained to have all your ideas revolve around them. The complexity of politics, combined with the necessity of surviving in a dangerous world, means they will be doing a lot of things seemingly unrelated to the larger picture. A classic dilemma of the political genre is that the actions they take in pursuit of their dream could well undermine (if not destroy) the reason for taking them. Perhaps their goals will change when they are confronted with pragmatic reality. If they are idealists, they might decide that being tainted by politics is a small price to pay for the benefit of others. They might find themselves so adept at the politics that their ideals get lost altogether. These sorts of issues are at the heart of a political chronicle.

It is also important not to become too abstract in the session-by-session challenges that your players find themselves up against. Many of the ideas in this chapter are very broad, because they can be applied to large subsections of the fallen all around the globe. You should take the ideas you are interested in, and then see how they are reflected in the individuals encountered in your game. Using immediate and pressing dangers, and characters with a self-interested point of view, is a great way of exploring how such abstract concepts work in the real world.

Political Elements of Demon: The Fallen

There are many different elements that go together to make the political style of play. Although not all of them are necessary in any one game, using multiple effects in strange new combinations helps present the feel of the genre. Unexpected lines of attack and clever manipulation of resources is the key to success.

Political Institutions

Politics is all about achieving things through interaction with others. All these interactions create networks, and the most stable networks become actual institutions. They have their own internal

rules and power plays, but when dealing with others, they are usually treated as distinct bodies. This allows for the creation of even larger units and hides all the petty details and backstabbing of individuals behind a (usually) polite façade. Most character goals are expressed in terms of these institutions, or groups of them.

There is not enough room here to treat all of these institutions in great depth. Instead they will be summarized, and you will be pointed toward books were more information can be found. If you do not have the other books, there is still enough information to give you an idea what political manipulations might be like at that level.

The Court: The structure of the modern infernal court is at the heart of local demon politics. It has been designed to take advantage of the many capabilities of demons from all Houses and provide both stability and a quick response to external threats. Each court is ruled by a tyrant and a council (or pentarchy) of ministers. In summary, the five ministries are the Ministry of Eagles (for the gathering of information); the Ministry of Aurochs (which organizes the court's defenses); the Ministry of Lions (which organizes its offensive strategy); the Ministry of Dust (concerned with humanity); and the Ministry of Dragons (which ensures the internal running of the court is free from corruption and dissent).

In theory, each court is an autonomous body with jurisdiction in a specific location. There is no hierarchy of courts, there are simply courts of different sizes in different places, and thus with different levels of political influence. In some cities, however, rival courts have been set up in direct opposition to each other (if not always with open violence). In other places, small courts have been made subservient to others nearby — usually having to pay tribute, in one form or another.

Despite their central status, many courts have surprisingly few resources, and what they do have is more likely to be contacts and favors rather than money. Although some demons have turned their talents to exploiting mortal financial systems, the infernal court system has not caught up. In short, no position of the traditional hierarchy is in charge of court funds, and no one is collecting taxation. Such things were not necessary in the past. Whether they are necessary now (perhaps as a temporary measure) is subject to debate. A select few courts have set up their own treasury for the management of mortal currency, but the individuals skilled in that area have often accrued private wealth, and they like to keep it. With a few exceptions, most courts are maintained to a level that will impress mortal eyes (if not demonic memory), but they have little extra revenue or reserves to fall back on.

The internal workings of a court are described in the Los Angeles sourcebook, **Demon: City of Angels**, in great detail.

Factions: The five great factions, and a number of smaller ideologies, have no real precedent in demonic politics. They are not equivalent to the five legions of the war against Heaven, although some demons treat them as if they were. Perhaps in time, especially if the majority of demons can shrug off their local concerns, the five factions will each solidify into monolithic institutions such as Lucifer created. Until then, faction members are spread throughout the world, using their ideas to influence their surroundings and to help others like them. Although each faction has nominal leaders, there is no real chain of command. All have collected significant resources that could be made available to members. (With access to great wealth, demons are usually more generous toward their faction than toward anyone else.) But since ideology is not that hard to fake, a careful eye is kept upon how they are distributed and used. Although the factions are far larger than any court, faction interests can affect court policies only through the actions of individual members within that court.

As well as information about factions in the core rulebook, the **Demons Storytellers Companion** has a lot more detail about what they are all up to, which could be very useful in a political game.

Houses: The earlier parts of this chapter have plenty of information for using Houses in your game. In summary, none of the Houses are organized, but some demons wish to see the position of autarch reinstated and strengthened. Apart from the fact that it is often easier to make contacts with others from the same House, there are currently no significant resources to be drawn upon.

Other Demons: Not every demon is a part of a court or faction. Each is part of a House, but not every one is interested in others of its kind. Such free agents can still all have a significant effect. They can destabilize structures with unexpected decisions; they can be recruited as mercenaries by one side or the other, or otherwise used as pawns. Some of them are well attuned to the political system and willing to provide services as intermediaries between courts or other bodies.

And then there are the Earthbound. They do not follow the rules of demon society, but they often have

complex and alien laws of their own. Almost all demon institutions strictly forbid attempts to negotiate with these monsters. More details can be found in the book **Demon: The Earthbound**. The book **Demon: City of Angels** has a chapter on demons living outside the court system.

Humans: Humans are treated in two different ways by most demons. As individuals, they are sources of Faith, convenient targets, political pawns, contacts, amusements and otherwise useful. When they come together into groups of their own, they are still useful, but suddenly dangerous. Apart from the occasional church, almost every human institution has reason to be threatened by demonic activity (and even the demonic worshippers might get concerned if they knew what was rarely going on). As such, any negotiation has to be handled very carefully. In most cases, subtly influencing one or two key personnel is far safer than the traditional means of negotiation between courts — not that the courts don't try that on each other as well.

Any level of human interaction that could be of interest to a non-supernatural political or espionage game could also affect **Demon**. Different levels of government, police and other enforcement agencies, non-government organizations, secret societies, terrorist groups, philanthropic trusts — all might be manipulated by demons or provide significant opposition to their plans.

Other Supernaturals: The World of Darkness hides a number of supernatural races, usually existing in separate spheres of influence. Whether or not you use them in a **Demon** game is up to you, although you should carefully consider the effect this decision will have upon the mood and themes of your game. Vampires occupy a niche similar to the one demons covet — integration within the political systems of cities — and they might be open to negotiation. Mages and hunters are usually hostile and dangerous, but they can be tempting targets as pawns and sources of worship. Werewolves, on the other hand, are usually best avoided altogether.

Political Concepts

Here are a number of concepts that help define the situation for modern demons. Although few of them can be used to create concrete goals for your players' characters (though some people find a search for arcane legislation just as exciting as one for powerful rituals), they show the sorts of concepts that underlie political arguments. Tips have been included to show how to use these ideas in a game.

Law: Although many courts have been set up around the world, and the hierarchy is reasonably well known (if not always consistently applied), detailed legislation applying to these institutions is far more mercurial. The original set of laws was vast and covered many eventualities and loopholes that are no longer relevant, while ignoring basic matters that are now very important. In addition, very few demons remember more than the bare outline of these laws, such as the general categories of crimes and punishments (in part because of Torment, in part because the lawmakers were of higher rank than most demons now on Earth). This makes the setting and enforcing of laws very difficult. Simply making up ones is a possibility, but doing so undermines credibility both internally and externally. Some courts are communicating so as to compile the information that is available, but there are rumors that many treat this as an opportunity for personal advantage. The Cryptics have become involved, but they see it as a low priority task.

As a Storyteller, you can turn this to your advantage. It allows you to introduce arcane and dubious legislation, rife with potential loopholes and bizarre interpretations — and it gives another avenue of attack for individuals who can argue that the very law being applied is inappropriate if not an actual forgery. A good goal to aim for is to present a system that is alien and evocative of the background, but it is not totally incomprehensible or anarchic. Using a small selection of laws and showing the strange effects that follow on from them, while keeping the rest of the legal system implied, is usually a manageable and effective solution.

The Right to Rule: The problem does not stop at arguments over crime and punishment. The very basis of the authority with which the tyrant rules a court is very much an open question. Often, of course, the tyrant is the most powerful individual at court — in terms of personal strength or political ability — which is how he got the position in the first place. But with differing agendas and fickle fortune, that can change rapidly. If the tyrant has to expend all her resources quelling rebellion, then the court becomes little more than a self-destructing quagmire of competing interests, with no chance to influence anything beyond its own members. What stops this chaos is that demons *like* structure. There will always be jockeying for position and backstabbing, but very few individuals forget that the court hierarchy exists for a reason. The existence of the ministries in particular is a stabilizing force. Although there might be conflict over what the ministries are supposed to be doing, and who should be running them, almost no one would undermine their current tasks.

One possible advantage this has for your game is that the middle to high ranks (but not the very top) of the ministries are usually relatively stable. They are good positions for characters who want some influence over politics but protection from the full force of it. It is also a good opportunity for you to provide interactions between the characters and the outside world, since those levels are often involved in the real intrigue behind the public face of diplomacy. If successful, they may then vie for the position of minister (or higher), giving themselves both increased opportunity and risk.

The Legacy of War: Although the courts were developed as fully legal entities with intricate rules and regulations, they were still developed in a time of war. Therefore, the system has been set up for maximum speed of response, and the punishment for dissent is harsh — often fatal. This gravity is another curb to over-ambitious or blatant conflicts within the hierarchy. Once again, however, times have changed. Multiple factions within a court and the low population of demons means that a little more tolerance is necessary. How much tolerance depends upon the ministers and tyrant concerned.

You can present courts as being ultra-militarist, or far more relaxed. In either case, there will be individuals who think things should swing in the other direction. This is another potential tool for players, or a way in which they can be attacked.

Modern Politics: Despite their memories of a strict feudal hierarchy, most demons have more immediate memories of a very different political system, inherited from their hosts. Knowledge and passion for the implementation of these systems is far rarer, but the shared idea of democracy, for example, is a pervasive one nonetheless. An interesting approach to a political chronicle could be to see how these ideas start to change traditional demonic practices. Your players may be champions of democratic ideals (or socialism, capitalism or whatever they like), or they may be drawn into such a struggle and have to decide whose side they are on. Opinions might differ over whether this is best achieved within the factions — with their still evolving hierarchy — or by influencing more liberal courts and working from there.

Political Methods

Politics is not just people sitting around tables writing treaties. It can provide just as much danger as a cinematic game, but the stakes are usually better defined, with more opportunity for clever strategy and creativity. Here are some of the techniques that

Inspiration: Virtù and Wise Guys

Perhaps one of the strongest images of political intrigue is the system of city-states in Renaissance Italy. This was the time of Machiavelli, the Medici and the Borgias, set amidst atrocity, great art, city-based courts and the birth of humanism. As such, it could provide a fascinating source of ideas for a political **Demon** game.

Niccolo Machiavelli's work, particularly *The Prince*, is known (sometimes unfairly) as the bible of ruthless politicking. It was his idea that the *virtù* of a successful prince was not the traditional Christian virtue, but composed of such qualities as vigor, pride, courage and ruthlessness, under the façade of morality. He says that it is better to be feared than loved, but being hated is very dangerous. He recommends acts of cruelty as sometimes necessary (but also that prolonged cruelty only turns everyone against the prince).

As well as the broad lessons, the work is an interesting summary of what types of conflicts and solutions might be found at that level. For example, he discusses the use of mercenaries (and does not recommend them). Another section talks about the relationship between the prince, the nobility and the common people. Machiavelli recommends that the nobility be treated sternly, while the people treated well. One thing to consider in a **Demon** game is the class structures involved. In effect, *all* demons are the nobility, while the people have to be kept oblivious, at least in the short term. Class is a hidden source of tension in the setting, because most demons take their superiority for granted, but it could be interesting to explore.

A more modern source of inspiration for complex schemes, sudden violence and hidden agendas can be found in the gangster genre, such as the *Godfather* movies and *The Sopranos*. The latter is especially useful, as it shows its lead character caught between the traditional laws of the Mafia and life in the modern world. The details of politics between rival families and within the local hierarchy, communication in the face of constant surveillance and how the two spheres of Tony Soprano's life interact with each other make it great for sparking ideas about similar issues in **Demon**.

might be used. Any of them could be relevant on the scale of factional battles, or that of a single individual undermining his own court for personal gain.

Negotiation: Actually talking to people is always a good start, and negotiation is just as important with allies as it is with enemies, if not more so. A successful negotiation can find out many things, help maintain friendships, clear up misunderstandings, put resources to better use (see the next section) and provide a good cover for more covert activity.

The key to most negotiation is the ability to make a deal with some sort of confidence that it will be kept. Many demons dislike lying, for aesthetics if not principle, but the twisting of words is far more common. Both parties are likely to ask for some sort of benefit up front, or other show of sincerity.

Negotiation occasionally requires some sort of neutral ground. This might be provided by a third party, either one that provides the premises or actually does the delivery of messages. In most cases, aggression is not so blatant that simply entering an opponent's court is dangerous (but it's the exceptions you have to worry about).

Violence: Politics is about changing systems and ideas, and violence is as good a method as any — but only if it is carefully directed. The display of force to instill respect or fear, the removal of key personnel from the enemy, a negotiated agreement to attack a third party — all these are times when violence might be useful. But many demons realize that too much violence is as self-destructive as total passivity against dangerous opponents. If the only possible response — or just the easiest response — to violence is more violence, then things degenerate into a war of attrition and barbarity.

Unrest: This could be accomplished with violence, but there are other means as well. The object of promoting unrest is to weaken your enemies, hopefully in a way that does not lead back to you. Once again, care has to be taken that things don't get out of hand — especially since secrecy is still an important protection for all courts. Stirring up the mortals in an enemy's jurisdiction (or, say, the werewolves) and standing well back is a tempting option. Ensuring that unrest stops at the enemy's border is more difficult.

Spying: There are various methods of finding out what your enemies and friends are up to. Undercover agents, informers and bugging equipment can all be used. (Even paranoid and resourceful demons can overlook simple electronics because of an unfamiliarity with technology.) Another method is to



make sure that a third party or piece of information enters enemy territory, then analyze the response. Not getting caught is of prime concern, although some level of spying is almost expected, and the exchange of captured agents could simply be another part of negotiation.

Misinformation: Spreading false information has a number of possible uses, and for modern demons it is often hard to guard against. At the same time, discounting or double-checking everything of dubious origin is dangerous and time-consuming. This is one reason why many courts have remained focused on their local area, as they try to gain experience with the mortal world, and better detect interlopers who could undermine those efforts (in the court's own safety).

The best way of using misinformation in attack is to hide the lie amid a much larger truth. Sometimes a big lie is all that is needed, especially if it is hard to check and time is of the essence. If a good source of information has been found, protecting it with an elaborate cover that offers an alternative explanation for knowing that information is a good idea (and can offer many strange and dangerous challenges to the characters).

Assets

In any negotiation there is give and take. This section talks about what you are giving and taking. Many of these things — if not all of them — might seem trivial compared to the ultimate prize. **Demon** is a game concerning the rebellion against Heaven, the ascension of humanity and, perhaps, the end of the world. Compared to these issues, a few Picassos here or there are not going to matter much. But you cannot play on such a rarefied level for long without everything becoming far too abstract and arbitrary. If your players do keep their eyes on the final goal, shrugging off all the temptations and distractions you throw at them, they will be surrounded by others with a more venal nature. And even human artifacts can be symbolic of greater things.

One of the underlying tenets of negotiation is that different things are worth different amounts to different people. By moving assets from where they are at least prized to where they are coveted, you can actually keep everybody happy. More significantly, you can reward your allies and confuse your enemies (and undermine the influence of both while they are distracted).

Wealth: The global economy — which increasingly comprises entries in databases rather than physical coinage — can be of huge benefit to those who can play it properly. Money, or even the appearance of money, impresses a lot of people, and that includes many fallen who should know better. Direct transfer of dollar amounts is usually considered gauche and a sign of desperation, but cash can usually provide an environment where negotiation becomes a lot smoother.

Whether a demon is relying on her host's assets, generating wealth with supernatural means or resorting to high-tech larceny, there is a lot for the taking. Those whose hosts were not born to luxury (which is the vast majority of fallen) might take some time getting used to the change of perspective required. Whatever the case, human wealth is going to attract human attention, so care has to be given to covering the money trail.

Land: The acquisition of territory is an important measure of status for the fallen. In effect, it provides one of the most obvious ways of comparing achievement. It is also an almost purely political construct. No demon owns the sections of the human city that might be assigned to her. Despite the terminology many of them use, they are not feudal lords living off the toil of their peasants. Although some fallen believe that they should aspire to such status, many do not. A demon's territory is an agreement by the local court that none of its other members shall pursue interests in the area without that demon's consent. In return, the demon agrees to protect it from the influence of Earthbound and other hostile forces. The demon may spend much of her time there, taking all her thralls from the area and influencing local councils and businesses. Many, however, see such an act as leaving themselves vulnerable to attack and too localized to be of much interest. (If their territory happens to include Wall Street or Silicon Valley, it might be a different story.) In reality, a complex network is maintained of individuals having influence in other's territories, with or without permission. This is duly used when other political forces come into play and, in the meantime, the size and affluence of one's territories is a measure of skill at court intrigue.

Some demons have acquired land outside the cities, usually for a particular purpose rather than an abstract concept in the Game of Houses. The area might contain bunkers, armories, places for training servants or a thousand other things. The demon might simply have acquired some of her host's ambitions and diverted her new earnings into a comfortable ranch.

Faith: Simony is the sin of trading for holy artifacts or salvation, and many demons participate eagerly. Trading living Faith is more difficult. A pact is a binding agreement between a single demon and a mortal, and it is not easily broken. A time-honored and effective method of punishment or attack against another demon is to kill her thralls or break their wills. Actual trade is also possible, however. With care and the agreement of both demons (freely given or not, though too much reticence will spoil the effect) a new pact can be negotiated. In addition, the identity of mortals who would make valuable thralls is sometimes used as a currency of exchange. This commodity is most useful if some aspect of the human particularly appeals to the demon being dealt with, such as business contacts who will assist her other endeavors or a style of artist she greatly favors.

Knowledge: The Cryptics are obviously a faction for whom this resource is valuable, and almost all others understand the value of information — if it's the right information. Knowledge is a strange class of asset. Although it can be freely and widely given, its value still depends upon its scarcity. It can be easily forged and difficult to check. It may be a condition of trade that the information is not given to others. Alternatively, the deal might be that the information will only be disseminated under certain conditions (blackmail, for example).

Knowledge of lore and rituals is also important, but all that fades against the value of the True Name of a demon — one of the most valuable assets that can be brought to the table. It is not traded lightly, and only a foolish or desperate individual will distribute one widely. The rest of demon society will see that the same is done to her.

Contacts: Politics can be like an elaborate dance, when the participants are constantly changing partners, and so all move circuitously toward their goal. Many deals are done just to establish credentials and contacts in a wider field. As always, this can be positive or negative — betraying someone to impress her enemies is a classic. Of course, once you betray someone in these circles, nobody will trust you again — but then, they weren't going to trust you in the first place.

Artisans: In theory, the mortals in a particular location are the charges of the demon who has claimed that area as her territory. This not only isn't true in practice, but there are loopholes in the theory as well. One of the rules of court that is widespread is that talented individuals whose work can benefit demonic society can be claimed by the individual who discovers them. For example, a demon is supposed to gain consent before enthralling somebody from a different territory, but he could persuade him to work on the interior decoration (or stock portfolio) of the court without that consent. The credit of the discovery then belongs to the interloper, but the local consequences — such as smoothing over a kidnap investigation — belong to the territory itself. The actual definitions of "discover" and "benefit" (and also "persuade") are flexible enough for multiple interpretations. Some infernal courts rule on this strictly, others loosely — as politics dictates.

Politics in Play

Exactly what appeals most to players about any sort of game can vary enormously. Some like to sift their way through minutiae, looking for subtle clues and unraveling complex agendas. Others like a more James Bond approach to international diplomacy, as their characters follow leads from one location to another, with lots of witty dialogue and flashy fight scenes. In any sort of storytelling, you should respond to what the players want while drawing them into your vision of the chronicle.

Whatever the case, you should probably allow a sense of achievement — or of missed achievement, if things didn't work out — at regular intervals. Real world politics often seems an unending series of bland reassurance, untruths, blunders and ineffectual tit-for-tat. You need to make things larger than that — draw forth the drama. Show the ideals and grand schemes that are intrinsic to the setting of **Demon**, and contrast them with the flaws and aspirations of individuals fighting their own fights — be they petty or noble, inspired or doomed. Give them villains to hate and people to protect, and mix them up occasionally.

Combat can still be a part of the game, and if it is presented as stark, frightening and lethal, it will encourage the players to plan more carefully to avoid it. Pacing and some sort of rising conflict are important, even without any physical melee (which often becomes the default lynchpin to structure in more straightforward games). Making certain encounters self-contained, in the same way that minor battles might be. A lengthy and important negotiation and/or spying mission in a foreign court could be broken up by more entertaining red herrings and unexpected excursions. The relevance of them might not be immediately obvious, but they are a good way to sprinkle clues and foreshadowing of larger events. Provide a mix between the steady pace of actual negotiation and planning, and

the often frenetic consequences when a plan comes together — or the enemy gets in first. Sometimes opportunities can come out of thin air — perhaps when an enemy demon in a rage of Torment invokes a character's name without realizing it. The easy communication between demons and their supernatural awareness can be effective tools for you to provide information and links. (You might have to limit their effectiveness sometimes for plots to work, though, in which case you should come up with a good in-game reason for that.)

Another important attraction of a political game is that it should allow your players' characters to be as proactive as they want to be — and you allow them to be. Having the players come up with a plan and then try to bring it to fruition amidst the complexities of the World of Darkness can be a very satisfying experience for everyone concerned.

Position

One of the important decisions to make is the position your players' characters take in any hierarchy. Are they taking orders or making them? Are they doing the spying themselves or using gathered information to send more spies out into the field?

The section on court politics mentions that a mid- to high-level position in a ministry is a good solution, but others are possible. It is likely that the characters start off outside the infernal court system (as all demons who are not specifically summoned do), so you can follow their journey through acceptance into the hierarchy and then rising up the ranks. This gives the chronicle a good deal of variety. At each level — the street, functionaries, minor officials, policy-setters and leaders, if not beyond — they will see what sort of challenges are available and have to rise to meet them. As they advance, former problems become more political. It's no longer a matter of surviving against a gang of monstrous demons, but one of trying to utilize their destructive power. Beyond that, the characters can start to affect how the court reacts to any such threats and makes pacts with others to lessen their impact (while the rise of the local Earthbound is another cause of concern).

You don't need such a steady rise. Demons who are sent to negotiate agreements could suddenly find themselves under fire in unfamiliar streets — and still need to carry out their mission. If things go badly they could be exiled from court and have to present themselves to a former enemy, offering information for protection. (Or is it all a ruse?) As their power grows, they might also need to offer greater protection to their thralls and the people from the life of their host. Any or all of these positions and changes of fortune can provide challenges to keep the game fresh.

Note: Relics are listed in *italics*. Rituals are in **bold**.

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Note: Relics are listed in *italics*. Rituals are in **bold**.

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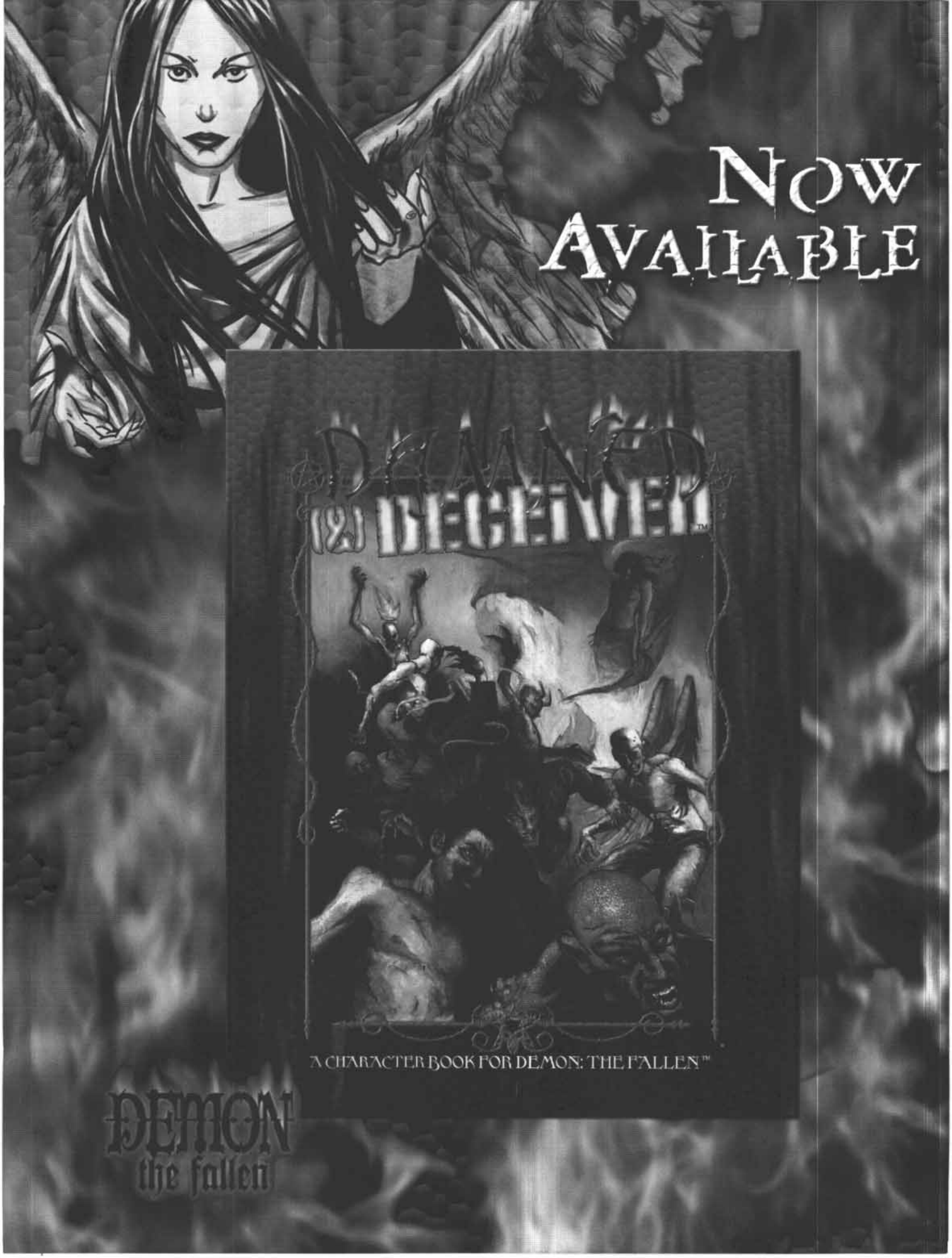
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