



# Wrath

THE OBLIVION™



# Wraith

## THE OBLIVION™

The Storytelling Game of Passion and Horror

**Wraith: The Oblivion** Created By Mark Rein-Hagen, Jennifer Hartshorn and Sam Chupp  
2nd Edition by Richard E. Dansky

## Credits

**Original Design and Concept by:** Mark Rein•Hagen, Jennifer Hartshorn and Sam Chupp

**Second Edition Design & Development by:** Richard E. Dansky

**Storyteller Game System:** Mark Rein•Hagen

**Design and Development Contributors:** Andrew Bates, Beth Fischl, Nicky Rea, Mark Rein•Hagen, Cynthia Summers and Fred Yelk

**Written by:** Bill Aguiar, Jackie Cassada, Mark Cenczyk, Ben Chessell, Richard E. Dansky, Graeme Davis, Ian Lemke, Steve Long, James A. Moore, Joshua Mosquera, Nicky Rea, Ethan Skemp, Wendy Soss, Cynthia Summers, Richard Watts and Fred Yelk

**Original Fiction by:** Rick Hautala

**Editing By:** Cynthia Summers

**Additional Editing by:** Ken Cliffe

**Vice President in Charge of Production:** Richard Thomas

**Art Direction by:** Lawrence Snelly and Aileen Miles

**Art by:** Mike Chaney, John Cobb, Mike Danza, Guy Davis, Darren Frydendall, Michael Gaydos, Pia Guerra, Anthony Hightower, Fred Hooper, Leif Jones, Eric Lacombe, Brian LeBlanc, Vince Locke, Larry MacDougall, Heather McKinney, George Pratt, Jonathan Rhea, Andrew Ritchie, E. Allen Smith, Ron Spencer, Joshua Gabriel Timbrook, Drew Tucker

**Front Cover:** Larry Friedman and Henry Higginbotham

**Layout and typesetting by:** Katie McCaskill

**Playtesters:** Fred Yelk, Ronni Radner, Cynthia Summers, Ethan Skemp (The First Victims); Michael Rollins, Joshua Gorfain, Andrew Bates and Laura Perkinson (The rest of The Cryptkicker Six), Adina Adler, Roger Dingleline, Chris Douglas, Elizabeth Ditchburn, Heather Grove, Jeffrey Howard, David Kern, Larry Lenoff, Harold MacKiernan, Gwendolin Piper, Sybil Shearin and Andrew Twyman (Somerville), Catherine Hackett, Edward Sleight Jr., Brad Alan Townsend, Forrest Marchinton, Catherine Little, Shawn Carter, Stewart MacWilliam and Deena McKinney (Athens), Tad McDivitt, Andrea McDivitt (né Wyatt), Michael Tracey, David Dilks, G. Scott Smith, Charles Gentner, and Cal-loie Reeves Alien Budd (Asheville)

**Dedicated to three men whose work has been instrumental in creating the book you now hold:**

**Edgar Allen Poe**, who has invited so many of us to dance with Ligeia and Annabel Lee at the Masque of the Red Death, and whose words are so seductive that not one of us has thought of refusing the invitation.

**H. P. Lovecraft**, who has shown us how vast, deep and awful the darkness is, and how desirable it is to learn the darkness' secrets.

**Ray Bradbury**, who, more than any other author, has shared with us the guilty secrets: that there is delicious pleasure in fear, and joy in the darkness, and that at midnight even the ghosts and goblins creep onto the playground for a little fun. For "The Fall of the House of Usher", "The Colour Out of Space", "Pillar of Fire", "Israfel", *The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, *The Halloween Tree*, "The Conqueror Worm", *At the Mountains of Madness*, *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, and so many more, I thank you. May this book serve as some small form of repayment for the hours of magic and wonderfully sleepless nights you've given us.

©1996 by White Wolf. All rights reserved. Reproduction without written permission of the publisher is expressly denied, except for the purpose of reviews. **Wraith: The Oblivion**, **Guildbook: Artificers**, **Sea of Shadows**, **Dark Reflections: Spectres**, **Wraith Players' Guide** and all related Storyteller games are trademarks and copyrights of White Wolf Game Studio. All contents are copyrighted by White Wolf unless otherwise noted. The Character Sheet and Shadow Sheet, but no other aspects of this book may be reproduced for personal use.

The mention of or reference to any companies or products in these pages is not a challenge to the trademarks or copyrights concerned.

Because of the mature themes involved, reader discretion is advised. PRINTED IN CANADA



SUITE 100  
780 PARK NORTH BLVD.  
CLARKSTON, GA 30021





# Wrath

## THE OBLIVION™

### Table of Contents

Prelude	4
<b>Book One: Death</b>	12
Chapter One: Introduction	16
Chapter Two: Setting	28
Chapter Three: Rules	76
<b>Book Two: Rebirth</b>	88
Chapter Four: Character	90
Chapter Five: Traits	108
Chapter Six: The Shadow	162
<b>Book Three: The Darker Side</b>	190
Chapter Seven: Storytelling	192
Chapter Eight: Systems	222
Chapter Nine: Drama	242

## Welcome, dear reader...



It is but a short time, in the scheme of things, since my last missive, and yet I am inspired to write again. Would I could say that great and glorious changes in the land of the dead impel me to amend my previous work, but that is only partially the case.

Changes there have been, and it is my fervent hope that they shall continue; yet for now, they are slight compared to the changes one would wish for. They are a chink of light in a cellar door, promising that all need not be blackness.

In truth, my inspiration has largely been the effects that my last writing has wrought upon this side of the Shroud. Such was the consternation of the Deathlords at my breach of their dreaded Dictum Mortuum — their law forbidding truck with those who yet breathe — such the fury with which they have sought to lay their hands upon me, and such the punishments they have sworn to visit upon your humble servant, that I cannot resist the temptation to embrace the path of the gadfly

once more. I have not felt more vital, more joyful, more alive, if you will, since the worthies of England sought to ruin me for my verses, and so prevent my corrupting their children.

And so, through my love of mischief-making and the increasing ease with which I can control these electrical writing machines of yours, I return to pry another stone from the bottom corner of the Hierarchy. My friend Ernest prophesies that, if I continue to elude their vengeful minions, the opium of sedition shall presently have me writing weekly, and he will have made a newspaperman of me. For my part, I solemnly vow to hurl myself into Oblivion before I am content to churn out such dull, dry and unornamented prose as he deems to be the work of a reporter. For all that, though, he is an excellent companion, and we agree on every point except the literary. We shall continue to tweak the noses of the Deathlords for as long as we may, each in our own manner.

To think I taught him to type. I may have created a monster.

## The Dead

Death has always been the greatest mystery of life. That undiscovered country from which no traveller has yet returned inspires fear and curiosity in equal measure. Some try not to think of it; others give over their lives to the contemplation of what might lie beyond the veil of death.

And yet, is death truly so mysterious? Surely, in all cultures from the beginning of time, there have been tales of the dead returning to the world of the living, impelled by some unfinished task, or the well-being of a loved one, or revenge upon some enemy. Equally, there have been those who have, or pretended to have, the gift of seeing and holding converse with the shades of the dead, from the Sibyls of antiquity to the table-rappers and self-proclaimed psychics of more recent years.

Wherefore, then, is death so fearful, and so little known? For certainly there has been ample opportunity for the living to question the spirits of their dead, and to determine their condition and the nature of the world they inhabit. And yet the questions that have been asked are of so little import — the location of a lost brooch, or whether the departed spirit finds the next world to its liking.

Death scares people. What comes after death scares them more. They don't ask scientific questions, because they are afraid of the answers. As George said, it's easier not to think about it. Also, the Hierarchy has this law called the Dictum Mortuum to stop the dead from having too much to do with the living. It's not surprising that the living know so little. Otherwise, we wouldn't be writing what we're writing now. I say we, because I hope to get a word in edgewise every now and then. Someone has to ride herd on Milord here. Otherwise he'll drown us all in his honeyed prose.

By Sappho and Catullus, a metaphor! I swear, my dear Ernest, my company is improving you! Your point is well enough made (if somewhat inelegant in its expression), and I consider myself chastened for straying from the intended course of my dissertation. My intent is to set forth the nature of those dead shades who call themselves wraiths, their various conditions and the operation of those forces which set and maintain them in their lamentable state. To this task I shall now bend myself without further ado.

George without ado? I'll believe that when I see it.

Know firstly that the spirits who become that which we call wraiths are by no means the whole of those who depart the world of the living. Their condition does not constitute the whole of the afterlife, but is rather of the nature of an interruption of the soul's journey to Eternity — whatever Eternity might be. Ironic, is it not, that the seeker after the mysteries of Death should find no answer upon his crossing over the Shroud, but instead another mystery. On this, I shall have more to say presently.

The things that divert the spirit into the shadowed world of these Deadlands are those which wraiths call by the names of Passions and Fetters. Though you knew not their names, dear reader, you will have seen these things in many forms, for there is scarce a ghost story that ever has been told which lacks them.

A Passion is that which prevents the spirit from its rightful progress post mortem, and so holds it fast to the painful lot of ghosthood. The murdered man's desire for vengeance upon his slayer, the doting parent's care for a favorite child — all these and more besides are Passions. It is scarcely an exaggeration to suggest that there are as many different kinds of Passions as there are individual wraiths.

Fetters, by contrast, are material things, which the spirit cannot bear to part withal, and which thus tie him to the Shadowlands. If you will, a Fetter is the object upon which a Passion is spent: the miser's gold, a loved one, still living, a favorite place. Only when the spirit can resolve, within itself, the force of these ties to the living world, may it hope to pass out of the existence of a wraith.

The just-reborn *Enfant*, as a new wraith is called, arrives upon this side of the Shroud as helpless, in many ways, as the living infant arrives in the living world. As he is covered by a Caul of plasm, his senses are dulled and his mind confused, and the whole of the Shadowlands appears to him as a jumbled dream. A few hardy and determined souls are able to tear free of their Cauls by their own unaided strivings, but by far the majority must await inevitable Thralldom.

Souls are upon occasion the food and the currency of wraiths, as well as their population, and the capture of an *Enfant* by removing its Caul enriches the catcher. The lot of the Thrall is as miserable as anything the living slave has endured throughout history, and yet many are often saved from worse abuses than the living mind can frame by the consideration of their material value.

It varies. There are good masters and bad masters. Some are sadists, and some are only in it for the money. There are a few who actually want to help. A Thrall owned by a powerful wraith is safe from other wraiths, and can learn how things work. Some masters see themselves more as teachers. A fair number even set their catches free. Mostly, though, it's business. Some things don't change on this side of the Shroud.

True enough, and the lot of some Thralls is sometimes preferable to the hazardous existence of the Lemures. These are the souls who by various means have thrown off their Cauls, but yet have avoided enslavement by others. Held in the Shadowlands by their Passions, they are still relatively young and weak, and easy prey for elder and stronger wraiths, should those worthies decide to go a-hunting. For all that, the Shadowlands

are as full of free Lemures as a city is full of mice; individually small and weak, yet their kind endures and always shall.

And yet Thralls and Lemures are not the lowliest of wraiths. Drones are the lowest of all, and indeed there are those who hold that they are not indeed wraiths at all, but rather some recurring ripple in the Deadlands, a cunning echo that holds the likeness of a wraith but not much of its substance nor its consciousness. They are poor things, bereft of will, who may do no more than cling to their Passions and endlessly repeat some action, like a caged lion who paces endlessly back and forth in a zoological garden. So tightly bound to their Fetters, these pitiable creatures exist at the very membrane of the Shroud itself, and are more often seen by the living than are other wraiths.

Fetters can be a good thing or a bad thing. Drones are tightly anchored to their Fetters, and they can't do anything away from them. But without Fetters, a wraith can't get into the Shadowlands at all. For all their faults, the Shadowlands are a better place to be than many.

Indeed, and the *Domem* — those wraiths who are denied access to the Shadowlands by the breaking or atrophy of their Fetters — must find themselves some niche of safety, or risk Oblivion. Many embrace the Hierarchy, which — whatever may be said against it — is the very model of stability. Others enter such of the Heretic cults as are convivial to their inclinations and philosophies. It takes a strong spirit indeed to survive the loss of one's Fetters.

Perhaps the strongest of wraiths are those called Gaunts. By retaining some of their Passions, and yet being strong enough to journey safely beyond the Shadowlands, they may come and go as they please. This freedom breeds great authority, for all must acknowledge the strength that nurtures it. Though many entities may be more greatly feared than the Gaunts, only the Ferryman are more respected. Of the Ferryman, I shall have more to say presently, for they are not properly numbered among the Dead, being perhaps something other.

## — The Shadow —

Still, these actors upon a ghostly stage are but half the story of every wraith: there are base lusts as well as noble Passions. What I speak of now is the bestial, grasping, selfish part of each soul that exists only to drag down the purposes of every wraith. It is currently fashionable among certain — dead, of course — circles to label this sinister voice with a variety of psychological appellations: the id, or somesuch. This voice is a tempter, often powerful, and offering pleasures and powers that can prove to be an opium to the dead, making matters worse, it is an exquisitely personal demon. Its whispers can only be heard in the silence of your own mind: its oh-so-reasonable arguments cannot be swayed or refuted by the calming voices of one's associates, and one must struggle with it with neither aid nor assistance.

We've all got a dark side. When we're alive it's a part of us, and we may struggle with it, but we do so silently. For us ghosts, that struggle gets harder because that little voice in your head suddenly gets a mind of its own over here. It's called the Shadow, and it takes a lot of pleasure in tempting you to do things you shouldn't. Of course, if you listen to it, it just gets stronger. Eventually, it may try to take over completely, and when that happens, it's just not pretty. There are ways to keep Shadows under control, but they've got some tricks hidden up their sleeves, too. Every wraith has a personal Civil War going on inside his head, and no prisoners are taken.

# — The Shadowlands —

I must pause in my discourse upon the Dead and their society, and expound somewhat upon the world they inhabit, and its relationship with the world of the Quick. The Shadowlands, as they are called, are the part of our world which touches most directly upon yours.

The Shadowlands and the world of the Quick intermingle with each other at certain points. They are, as it were, mirror images of each other, and yet they occupy, at least in part, the same physical space.

## — The Shroud —

Separating the Shadowlands from the living world is that which we call the Shroud. In a certain sense, the Shroud is the experience of death, for only a very few may pass through it without dying. In some ways, it may be regarded as a membrane, opaque in some places, transparent in others, through which those who know the ways may pass, and at which others must stop.

Although, as I have said, the Shadowlands and the living world may at some times and in some places be almost as one, the Shroud serves always to hamper congress between them. Whatever lies across, the Shroud looks as if it has been tainted by decay, its majesty fallen to rot, and yet it is

too solid for a wraithly hand to caress. Sounds carry through the Shroud only as distant, distorted things: voices are heard but echo with an odd hollowness. Striving to touch something that is on the other side is futile, for one's hands pass through it as if it were mist; yet the desired object remains stoic in its solidity even as ghostly hands penetrate its very substance. How many tears have I shed — I and every other poor new wraith — in trying at first to embrace the beloved Quick, and how bitter the sight of those tears falling through, and not upon, their unknowing hands and faces! I cry you pardon me, despite the passing of years and centuries, it is still a bitter thing to me.

## — Nihils —

George is right. It's a hard thing to accept. But there are places where the dead world can affect the living world. It is seldom for the better, though. Nihils are one example. They are places in the Shadowlands where there is a kind of a hole that connects to the Tempest. Strange things can happen around a Nihil, even in the Skinlands. What happens around a Nihil in the Shadowlands is even worse.

Ernest's measured prose cannot convey the aura of a place that harbours a Nihil. Sight and sound are distorted as the stuff of the Tempest slowly surges into the Shadowlands; to the living, the place will have an ill fame for sudden disappearances and unexplained events. It is the existence of Nihils that reminds the grieving wraith of the necessity of the Shroud, for it at least protects the Quick from the chaos of the Tempest.

## — Haunts, Citadels and Necropoli —

At times, the Shadowlands take their form somewhat from the living world upon which they border, like a dark cloth draped over fine sculpture. Elsewhere, in those places most thickly peopled with wraiths, they are strong enough to stamp their features upon the world of the Quick.

Such places are often gloomy, and the more sensitive of those living souls who go there know with a dread, unspoken certainty that they walk among the Dead. These are the great burying-grounds, the crumbling inner-city, labyrinths and the ruined houses of evil fame, shunned by

the superstitious. We call them Haunts, for there the Dead gather.

If a Haunt may be, as it were, a building — or at most a street — in the Shadowlands, then a Necropolis is a very city of the Dead, composed of collected Haunts as a living city is made of individual buildings. The largest, strongest Haunt in a Necropolis is oftentimes graced with the name of Citadel, and stands like the baron's castle over the city as a symbol of safety and of power. It is a rare Citadel that is not held for the Hierarchy, in fief to the Deathlords and at their command.

# — The Wider Underworld —

If the Shadowlands were the whole of the world of the Dead, then this work would be an easier one. That which lies in so close a juxtaposition with the world of the Quick,

and which both forms and is formed by it, is by its very nature most able to be imagined by the living reader, and most easily explained. The same may not be said of the rest.

## — Oblivion —

If one accepts that in the Underworld darkness is our light, spirit our flesh and entropy our energy, then Oblivion is our sun. All of the Underworld proceeds from Oblivion, and all revolves around it. But to leave the matter thus unqualified would be a grievous understatement.

Living science, so I understand, has concluded that force and matter are one and the same, and that any form of substance is an amount of energy which has in some manner become congealed and taken material form. Conversely, the splitting of an atom (what irony, for those who know their Greek!) causes the matter to re-form itself as energy. By reflecting this principle in the dark mirror of the Shroud, one arrives at the proposition that the plasm which makes up every thing and being in the Underworld is naught but a measure of entropy, which for a fleeting moment takes ma-

terial form. Thus, it is possible to conceive that plasm may at any time dissolve itself and become entropy once more, given circumstances congenial to this transformation.

If this proposition be true — and it is much debated — then Oblivion is that from which we are all made, and to which we must, in all probability, at some time return. As to the Underworld and the plasm of which it is made, there is much to be questioned as to whether it arose spontaneously, or out of some volition of the Quick or the Dead, or indeed whether some dark and unfathomable will that some souls believe resides within Oblivion would have it so. But those questions are for scientists and philosophers, and not for poets, newspapermen and scallawag revolutionaries. In the end, it suffices to say that Oblivion is that dark hunger that tugs at us all, demanding that we spiral, like Icarus, down to join it.

## — The Tempest —

The Tempest is, if you will, the ocean of the Underworld, for it surrounds all and conjoins all, and every other part is somehow or another set in it. Even Oblivion, that titan darkness, manifests itself within the endless storm as a Void set like a jeweler's cut stone into a Labyrinth of darkness.

Beyond that, I must confess that in this particular — and, my dear Ernest, in this alone — words quite fail me. My poor wordsmithing is inadequate to the task of describing the Tempest, and indeed it is only with difficulty that I can remain calm while thinking of it. More than any other part of the Underworld, the Tempest is, quite literally, indescribable. It is in part like the worst and stormiest sea that ever mortal mariner set sail upon, and yet it is more and worse. There are things called Byways, safe paths through the storm's madness, but these avenues take many forms. They appear as rivers, or roads, or straight locomotive tracks, or things that even Ernest cannot put a name to. And yet one may peer out as one travels along this Byway and see into the heart of the Tempest itself, where multi-colored lightnings flick their tongues through clouds of miasmal gases, and hailstorms of shattered crystal rain up from the abyss.

Of all wraithkind, only those twisted, insane creatures called Spectres may travel the Tempest without losing their reason, and that only because they have already lost it. The common belief among wraiths is that the Spectres were once as they are, and became Spectres through surrender to the whispering fragment of Oblivion in their minds. There is a certain amount of poetic justice in this notion, and it saves wraithly theorists from straining to produce another theory of Spectral origins. It is known that during Harrowings, those perilous dramas when a wraith is forced by some great agony into the Tempest, the cast and crew of the nightmare dramas are inevitably composed of Spectres seeking to torment the unfortunate wraith who has fallen into their clutches. Perhaps they are recruiting, or, like Milton's fallen Lightbringer, seeking companions in their torment.

The Ferryman, whom I have already mentioned in passing, seem able to traverse the Tempest without hurt, and to guide others through it if they will. I am reminded that I have not as yet given any account of these extraordinary beings, and beg the reader's patience but a little longer, until my brief *geographia inferni* be concluded in all its parts.

## ----- The Heretics -----

There is surely no greater incentive to piety for the living than the fear of what might befall the spirit once life is over. Let there be a Hell, a Tartarus, a Niflheim or an Apsu, and belike you'll find a contented priest, well-fed by his fearful parishioners. I must own to a chuckle or two when I consider what those living priests would make of the Shadowlands, and how they might react to the discovery that the same system is in operation even here. But I have yet to see a priest here. Perhaps that is significant. I know not.

Be that as it may, it has oft been said that faith succours the spirit in adversity, and there is no less truth in that proposition post funera than ante. Another benefit of strong faith is the pleasure and security of fellowship, dwelling among like-minded souls. And let us not forget the promise of better things to come. The poor wraith has

as great a need of these comforts as the living soul, and possibly greater.

I'll spare you George's further insights on the nature of religion. What he may never come around to saying is this: There are groups in the Shadowlands that are held together by a common belief, just like cults, religions and philosophies in the Skinlands. We call them Heretics, which is what they mostly call each other. In exchange for being loyal, their followers are guaranteed the support of the organization. Some Heresies claim to have the key to Transcendence. That's something that will need explaining in detail, but for now, think of it as similar to living religions offering a short-cut to Heaven.

## ----- Renegades -----

The best way to describe Renegades is "none of the above." Some are freewheeling bandits; some are refugees or dissidents trying to avoid the Hierarchy, some are genuine misfits. On the whole they oppose the Hierarchy, but then the Hierarchy denies their right to exist. Groups

rise and fall, alliances form and dissolve. About the only constant among them is change.

Some people would call me, George and the others Renegades. The Hierarchy certainly does. It's as good a name as any, and they're not the first to use it.

## ----- The Hierarchy -----

The Hierarchy, indeed, merits a wider exposition than it has as yet received in these pages; for good or for ill, its influence is felt in almost every part of the Underworld. With great Charon at its head and ruling in the very model of Plato's enlightened despot, the Hierarchy was all in all a force for good among the Dead, affording some protection to the weak and resisting, to the benefit of all, the Spectres and other horrors that betimes would spew forth from the Tempest.

Of late, though, the strong hand of Charon has been absent from the tiller. Corruption, self-interest and power struggles have run rampant through the fabric of the Hierarchy, turning its beneficent, if paternalistic, rule into a dark and bloody tyranny. The principle actors in this tragedy are of two kinds: the Deathlords and the Guilds.

## ----- Maelstroms -----

Just as the living ocean may, at certain times and in certain places, hurl itself upon the land with terrifying force, so the Tempest may visit upon the rest of the Underworld its own dread typhoon. This appalling manifestation is known to wraiths as a Maelstrom. Oblivion itself seems to vomit forth abominations into, through and by means of the Tempest, razing entire Necropoleis and wracking

others. The appearance of a Maelstrom is often linked to some terrible chain of events in the world of the Quick — the fall of Rome, the Black Death and the World Wars of this past century were all accompanied by these fearful disasters — but a Maelstrom may also visit itself upon the Underworld through the stirring of some dreadful force within Oblivion.

## ----- Stygia -----

Within the madness of the Tempest is set an island, and upon that island stands a great city, whose name is Stygia. More than once, like fabled Atlantis, it has been whelmed by a Maelstrom, and each time it has rebuilt itself from the ruins of its past and scaled even greater heights of glory and grandeur. To many who reside there, Stygia is the whole of the Underworld, just as London is, to many Londoners, the whole of England, and Paris, to Parisians, the whole of France. The whole it may not be, but it is most remarkable.

The history of Stygia you will find set down at length in the pages that follow. I would not presume to do more than allude to the work of the remarkable shade whose hand has wrought it. For now, the reader need be aware only that the city was founded by great Charon, and under his wise

and beneficent rule endured for many centuries, the greatest and the noblest of the Citadels of the Dead. Lately, however, Charon was swallowed by the Tempest while battling a titanic apostle of Oblivion, and without his restraining hand, the Deathlords who played the role of Senate to Charon's Augustus have become a bloody and tyrannical oligarchy, bent on the enslavement of all.

It is chiefly to spite these Deathlords, and the Hierarchy which serves them, that I and my collaborators set down these words. I do this so that the true state of affairs in the Underworld shall be known to the Quick and the Dead, and the despotic Hierarchs shall be seen, once and for all, for what they are. Their eagerness to silence all tongues save their own is reason enough for all tongues to speak, and a very Babel to rise to drown out their lies.

## ----- The Far Shores -----

There is much argument regarding the places known to wraiths as the Far Shores. Many even doubt their existence. Even though I have never myself beheld them and never expect to do so, I accept the existence of the Far Shores just as a living person might accept the existence of, say, the county of Essex without ever setting foot there. And I must say, the existence of Essex never caused me such delight.

George is a little caught up in his gloating. It may be a while before he says anything sensible. I have no idea what he means about Essex, but he seems to think it's very funny. The Far Shores are islands in the Tempest, like the one on which Stygia stands. Depending on whose story you believe, they are either the authentic heavens and hells of about every religion there ever was, or they are shams, pretending to be these same heavens and hells in

order to lure the faithful to some unpleasant fate. The latter view is official Stygian policy, for whatever that is worth.

Personally, I don't know what to think about the Far Shores. On principle, I object to agreeing with official Stygian policy. On the other hand, it seems too convenient to have the genuine afterlife of every world religion just sitting out there in the Tempest. That does sound like sucker bait. Maybe they really don't exist. A lot of wraiths do believe in them. A lot more want to believe. Some take enormous risks trying to reach them on their own. Others search endlessly for a Ferryman willing to guide them. Some wraiths will offer to take others to the Far Shores, but what happens on the journey is anyone's guess. I have seen crooks exploit immigrants and refugees before.

## ----- The Guilds -----

Although the crafts we wraiths call Arcanoi are unlike any practised by a living artisan, they are as central to the scheme of things here as the crafts of carpentry, masonry and iron-working ever were to a living nation. While developing the structure and apparatus of the Hierarchy, Charon found it worthwhile to organise those wraiths who were skilled in one Arcanos or another into Guilds, both for the promotion and development of each craft and in order to impose some kind of order upon the freewraiths who were neither soldier nor slave.

The Guilds were always a fractious lot, quarrelling amongst themselves and scheming against each other, but in that lay perhaps their greatest strength. For although they quarrelled endlessly with one another, their greatest contempt was reserved for those of no Guild — including the Deathlords and their Legions. No sooner had Charon established the Guilds, they themselves will tell you, than they commenced to ignore his commands, and the commands of any others but their own Guildmasters and mistresses. Indeed, many Guild-wraiths claimed their cabals to have formed of

their own volition, and that Charon simply took credit for their initiative. Such hubris is either amusing or infuriating, depending upon one's perspective, but at the very least it is refreshing.

The Hierarchy will tell you that the Guilds were broken, and can no longer use the monopoly of their knowledge as a political weapon. This is but a partial truth. Certainly, the Arcanoi are no longer under their exclusive control and tutelage, but the Guilds persist in secret, much as do Ernest and myself. Perhaps one skilled wraith in ten owes allegiance to a Guild, though there is a high price paid for being found out.

In such times as we now endure, the Guilds are a beacon of hope, even in their presently reduced condition. The nature of the Arcanoi in which the Guilds teach and deal may be found set forth elsewhere in these pages, by a hand more able than my own. While I owe my continued existence in no small measure to Guild protection in time of need, I am no more than a humble journeyman scarce out of apprenticeship, and not suited to write upon the wider mysteries.

## ----- The Deathlords -----

Great Charon founded Stygia upon the model of a republic. According to the conventional wisdom of the Dead, it was upon no less a model than the Republic of Rome. With himself as consul, Charon installed seven trusted aides as Senators, each commissioned with the governance of a part of the Underworld.

As time passed and Stygia waxed mighty, and changes in the breathing world wrought echoes among the Dead, so did it behove Charon, at about the time of the Crusades, to remake his administration on the feudal model. This was the true birth of the Hierarchy, for below Charon and the Deathlords there arose orders and classes of the dead: Knights and Legions, Guilds and Thralls.

As the time since Charon's disappearance grows longer, the Deathlords become bolder and more open in their intrigues.

Amid a maze of shifting alliances, plots and betrayals, they contest the succession to Charon's throne. They are immensely powerful, with many followers and practically inexhaustible resources; and though it has not yet come to open warfare, the effects of their scheming are hardly less destructive to the peace and liberty of the Restless. Each Deathlord spares no effort — in the name of the good of the Hierarchy, of course — to enroll the living in their Legions of the Dead, and to enslave all those wraiths who remain at liberty before a rival should gain control over them. To be free is to be considered an enemy of these despots, and the Deathlords serve their enemies in ways that the Turks, the Holy Inquisition and the Khmer Rouge would envy and admire.

## ----- The Ferrymen -----

At last I can redeem my promise and give account of the Ferrymen. I humbly thank you, dear reader, for your patient forbearance in waiting so long, and trust you will understand that, with the rest of the Underworld sketched out, as it were, in broad strokes, my account of the Ferrymen shall be the more complete and comprehensible.

The Ferrymen are an ancient and powerful order, if order they may be called. To be sure, it is hard to know what to call them, except Ferrymen; for they are neither of one race, nor a Guild, nor do they appear particularly organized

among themselves; yet they all are Ferrymen, each in his or her own right.

Charon was a Ferryman — perhaps the greatest of Ferrymen, though it is hard to compare one with another — long before he founded Stygia. There is a tradition among the Dead that he was indeed the first of the Ferrymen, and the others did at one time serve him; but whether this be truth or invention no wraith can tell, for none has had the tale from the lips of a Ferryman. Only the boldest would dare question a Ferryman, and only the most foolish would expect an answer.

*Among their number, the reader will find other names that are familiar, beside that of Charon. They are Hermes, Brunhilde and her sisters, Namtaru and others. The Ferry-men existed before the Hierarchy, before Stygia and some say they have existed since the beginning of time. No power may command them from their self-appointed tasks, and no power may sway their course: for alone of all the beings in the Underworld, they may traverse the Tempest at will, with no fear of Spectres or of any other thing they may encounter.*

George is getting overenthusiastic here. There have been Ferry-men around for a very long time. However, I don't think they're quite so indestructible as he does. There are plenty of stories of Ferry-men rescuing wraiths lost in the Tempest from Spectres. Still, the Spectres don't just roll over and die in those stories.

They fight back, and my guess is that they win every so often. It's just we don't hear about the ones who don't come back. It's not like the Ferry-men are going to talk about it, after all.

*Have you no faith, Ernest? The Ferry-men are figures of mystery and imagination, yet you insist on reducing them to the role of omnibus-conductors through the Tempest. I'll not let you get away with this: it remains to me to restore their majesty! Now, to the task at hand.... It seems that the only thing greater than their power is their mystery, for they go where they will, speak little to others, and their motives and interests may only be guessed at by us lesser creatures. Though their reed-boats look flimsy and their lanterns throw long shadows, there is neither safer place nor surer course upon the face of the Tempest than may be found in the enigmatic company of a Ferryman.*

Whatever you say, George.

## ----- Transcendence -----

I'm taking this topic, because I dread to think what flights of poetry Milord would cook up on the subject. To cut through all the mystery, Transcendence is to wraiths what redemption is to those living people who believe in it. With life in the Underworld being what it is, there is no shortage of wraiths who are willing to believe in this crumb of hope. It's a little harder to find anyone who has seen it happen.

A lot is said about Transcendence, including a good deal of contradiction. What it seems to boil down to is that by Transcending, a wraith can be plucked out of the Underworld just as if he or she had never been diverted there at the point of death. Just how Transcendence is achieved is also subject to argument. Some say Transcendence is a state of mind, or enlightenment. Others say that letting go of Passions and Fetters can lead to Transcendence if you are ready for it. I must say I would have to be feeling very serene before I would

voluntarily let go of the only things that hold me here in the Shadowlands, and keep me from being dragged off into the Tempest. Still others say that good deeds allow a wraith to pay off whatever cosmic debt led him into the Underworld, though that sounds like wishful thinking. There are other stories beside, not counting the descriptions of the event, with everything from pillars of fire to choirs of angels — or so it seems. George tells me my soul is too small, mean and jaded to appreciate the idea.

Whether Transcendence truly exists or not is really beside the point. It represents hope, and gives many the strength to carry on when otherwise they would give in. It also leads some wraiths to keep on resisting the Hierarchy, when other motives are not enough. I am sure that some people's religion gave them the strength to resist fascist powers in Europe, from the thought that not resisting them would be a sin.

## ----- Valediction -----

For now, we have set down that which we may, as well as we can. It is time to give way to other writers, more knowledgeable in their own spheres. We have set the stage, as it were, and furnished the context within which, it is our fond hope, the reader will more readily be able to digest the matter that follows. If it seems incredible, we make no apology; indeed, we found it so when first it confronted us. Our desire, as before,

is that you should not enter upon this existence unprepared as we did, but should be forewarned in certain particulars, and thus better able to avoid certain hardships and abuses that we would not wish even upon our bitterest enemies.

Fare well, dear reader, and pleasant dreams. May the day not come too early when the passage through the Shroud turns dreams into hard reality.

# Book One: Death

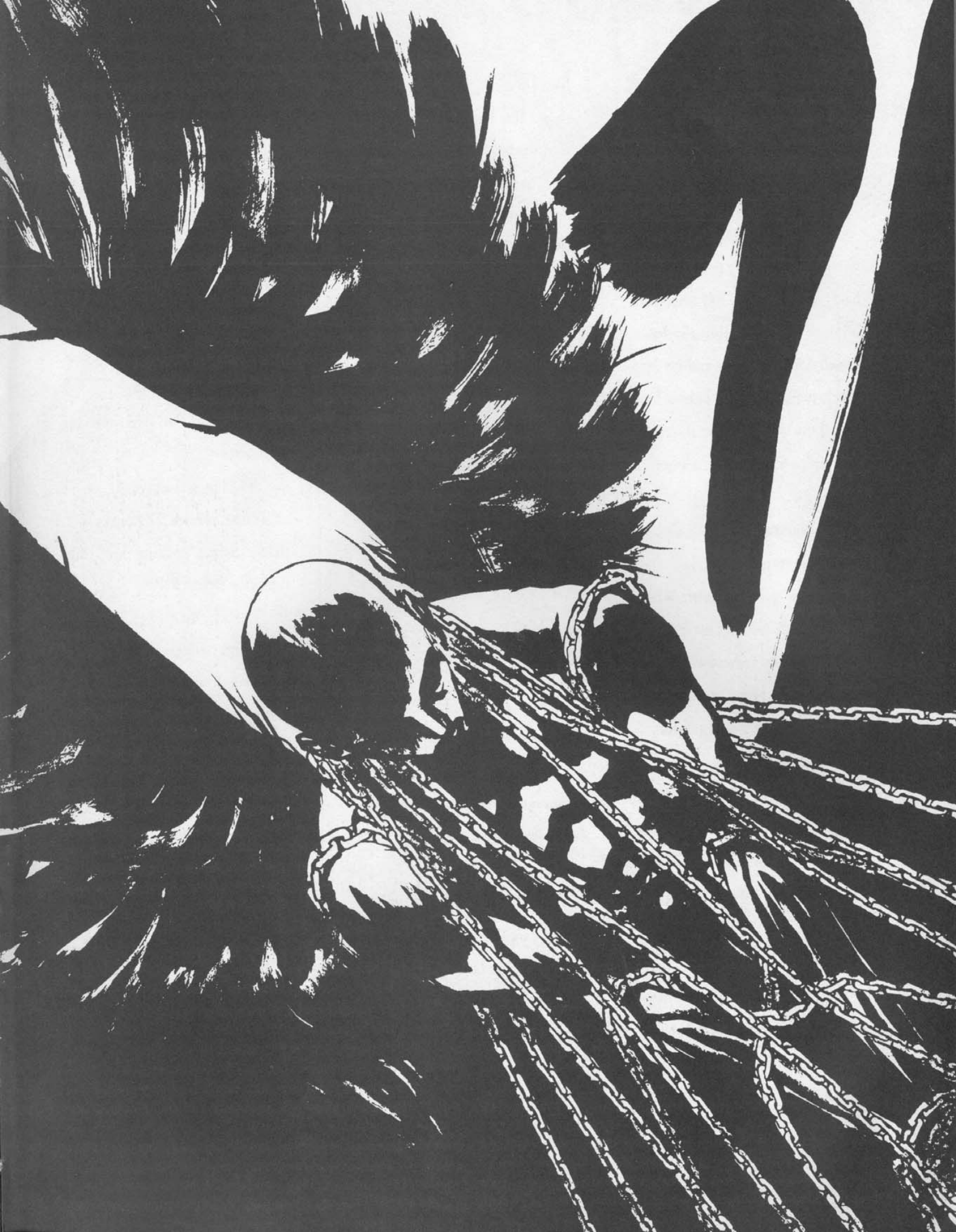
I didn't meet her until after she'd died, but that's all right. I was dead too, at that point. A wraith, technically. A ghost, doomed to haunt my former place of employment until... well, I didn't know until what. It's not like there are instruction manuals on being a wraith, no matter what the movies say. Didn't do much haunting, either — no one even knew I was there. No one living, that is. So I just cowered inside my haunt, eking out my little ghostly existence and praying that eternity would end quickly. There didn't seem to be many other options.

But one night I looked out the window at where the other wraiths were congregating on the street below, and I saw her. And she, well, she looked up and smiled at me. But that wasn't enough to get me to come down.

Then the ghosts of the soldiers came, and she couldn't hide fast enough. Some ghostly butcher maimed her and carried her off. But that wasn't enough to get me to come down. Not in time to help her, anyway.

In the end, I had to force myself out, for my own reasons. Finding her means more than anything now, even though I can feel the old office still pulling at me. But she's still out there, somewhere in these lands of the dead, and I have to go find her. Just thinking of it fills me with strength I never had before. I wish I could explain it.

I will find her. And I will find the man — ghost — who hurt her. And when I do, he'll find that there are far worse fates than being dead.



# Rebirth

Consciousness returns slowly, like dark, heavy drapes being drawn aside by unseen hands....

I can feel my face, chest and belly pressing down against the hard, uneven ground. My fingers are hooked like claws into the loose gravel. A tortured groan gathers deep inside me, but no matter how hard I try, I can't quite release it.

It's as though I've forgotten how.

Darkness blankets me, squeezing and pressing my body mercilessly down against the earth. Whenever I try to breathe, I can't feel even the slightest movement of muscles or ribs expanding my chest, no cool rush of air in my throat and lungs.

What's happening to me?

Cold, stark fear stronger than any I've ever experienced grips me as I stare into the darkness that pulsates behind my eyes.

I can't even tell if my eyes are open or closed.

After staring into this nothingness for a timeless instant, patterns begin to emerge. Veined flashes of yellow and white split the darkness

like lightning. Hazy amorphous shapes like huge, glowing amoebae simultaneously advance and recede.

Faces, their features lost in impenetrable shadow, swirl around me like autumn leaves swept by whirlwinds that pull and tug at me from every direction at once. Vague thoughts and dull, echoing voices flit like phantoms through my mind. Whenever I try to grasp any one particular thought, it slips away from me like fine beach sand, sifting between my fingers.

And then the thought is gone...

Lost forever.

*Lost just as you are*, a tiny voice deep inside my mind whispers.

I think I remember who I am.

My name is David...David Robinson.

Finally, one clear, single image burns more strongly and clearly than any other.

Lights.

I remember seeing two spinning circles of light coming straight toward me from out of the darkness.

My body tenses, and I remember the sensation of ducking to one side as I brace for impact.

Yes! There was an impact!

The thought is as palpable as a stinging slap across the face.

A sudden rushing sound like the tearing of wet cloth fills my ears. I cringe inwardly, remembering a dull, heavy thud, followed by a chorus of wailing voices.

And there is something else, something about a river.

I struggle to sharpen my memories.

It had been late at night, maybe even close to dawn. I'd been on East Bridge Street, looking down into the Stroudwater River.

The sky had been overcast. No moon or stars. In the night, the river looked like slick oil, sliding with a faint, throaty gurgle beneath the cement pillars of the bridge. Whirlpools and eddies dimpled the river's surface, and something — a faint, trilling voice — had been calling my name.

I remember that my hands had been sweaty against the metal railing that still radiated heat from the blistering summer day. The night air had been raw in my throat, thick and burning as I gulped it like water into my lungs.

Dark water...

And I remember hearing a distant, hissing whisper that must have been traffic, passing by on the Interstate. But there hadn't been much traffic on East Bridge Street.

Not at that hour.

I often walked there late at night...to think, to work through story ideas.

Yes, I'm a writer. Well, at least I used to be. Whenever I couldn't sleep, I'd come here to contemplate just what the hell was going wrong with my life, now that — once again — it had changed so drastically.

But tonight, I remember, I had told myself that I had done all the thinking I was going to do. Tonight I had determined — finally — to do it!

And why not?

Sarah, my wife of 10 years, had left me over a year ago, and the divorce had long been finalized. This, combined with a failing career and — worst of all — the death of my only child, Karen, six years earlier, had finally broken my will to live.

I realize that I had withdrawn into a shell of solitude, punctuated

only by outbursts of anger. Most of that anger had been directed at my wife, but I can see now that the real anger — the pure anger — should have been directed against myself.

That's why I had decided to go through with my plans tonight.

What was I supposed to do, pick up my life again and try to carry on?

No. I'd just as soon be dead.

So that's what I must be.

*Dead.*

But if I'm dead, why can I still feel my face, pressing against the ground?

I groan inwardly as fragmented images and memories coalesce in my mind. Some of the things I remember almost make sense.

I'd been standing on the bridge, gazing down into the river and wishing — no, praying to God that I had the courage to go through with it.

I knew that, ultimately, it could be quite easy.

All I had to do was leap over the railing and drop. Let gravity do the job.

So many times over the last year I had tried to imagine what it

would feel like. Perhaps that was one of the drawbacks of being a writer. I could imagine violent and dangerous things much too vividly.

I could almost taste the thick, choking river water gushing into my nose and mouth. I could imagine the river's dark current, strong and dark, channeling between the pilings, beckoning like waving hands to pull me under. I could feel the burning need for air as my lungs filled, choking me, strangling me like unseen hands that had caught me and were wringing the life from my body.

And then ...?

Then I hadn't dared to do it! I'd chickened out.

That single thought burns inside me with a rushing sense of despair that is almost audible. I haven't felt this miserable since Karen died.

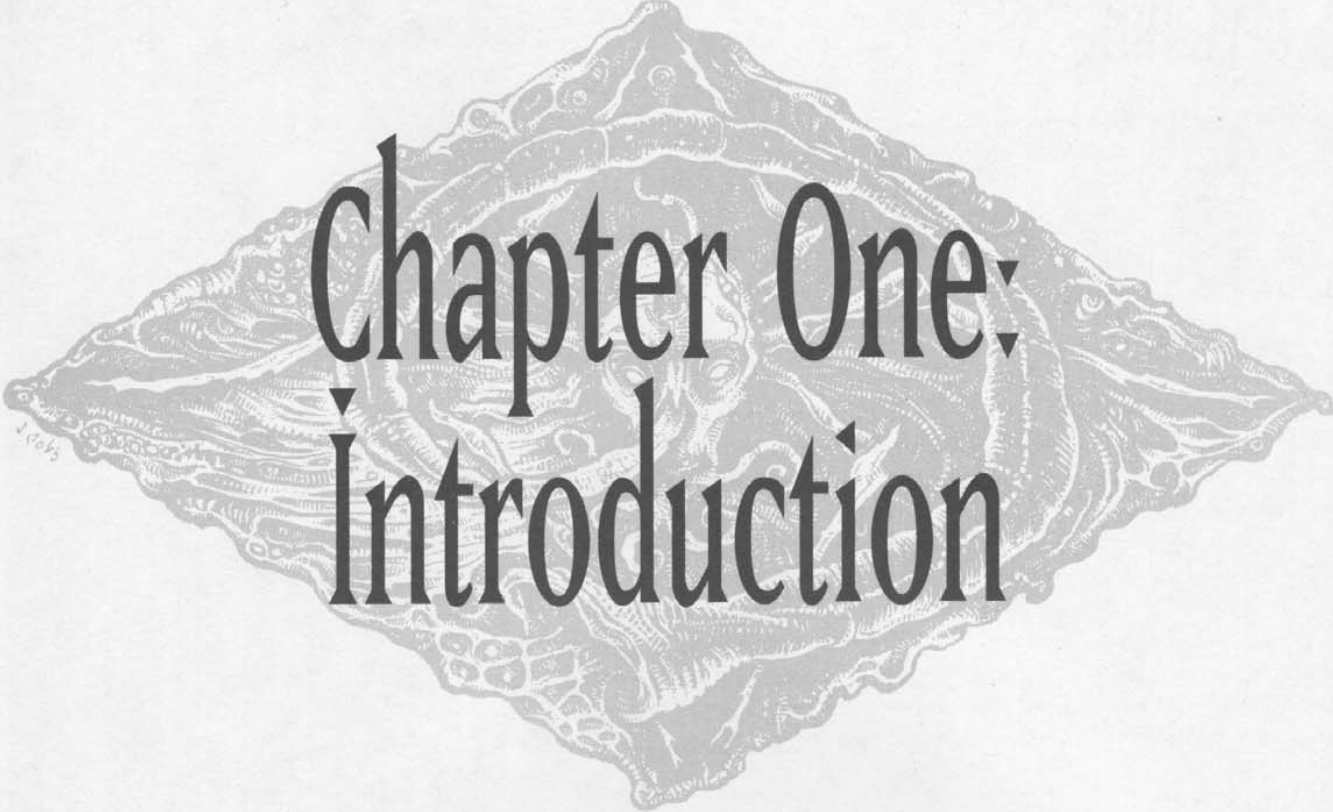
But when it came right down to doing it, to going off the bridge, I hadn't found the courage!

Something else had happened.

Something had gone wrong, but what?

If only I could remember....





# Chapter One: Introduction

*Ghost, n. The outward and visible sign of an inward fear.*  
— Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*



Do you want to hear a ghost story? We've been telling them since prehistoric days, when the cave fires first danced shadows on the walls and gave us time to reflect on the fact that someday, we'd die. Since then, we've been fascinated with death and the hope that, just maybe, something comes after.

What **Wraith: The Oblivion** is about, then, is ghost stories, but ones that are discovered rather than written, and told by a group of players and their Storyteller. By sitting down to play an evening's worth of **Wraith**, you are agreeing to help tell a tale that's never been told before, and to which no one knows the ending.

The book you are now holding is the key to those ghost stories. It provides the basics for a game that's all about storytelling, and gives Storytellers the tools with which to spin their tales within the framework of a game. This book will allow you to become a wraith — a ghost bound by passion to the

lands of the living — and experience all of your character's triumphs and defeats. However, since your character is your creation, those failures and victories are really yours as well.

At its heart, **Wraith** is a game, but a game concerned with storytelling, not with "winners" and "losers." If you've played other roleplaying games, this material is old hat to you, but if you're new to this sort of experience, it may be a bit confusing. Don't worry, it's simpler than it looks, and most of what's involved is something you've been doing all your life.

But now it's time to tell some ghost stories: stories of love beyond death and skeletal hands at mansion windows, stories of hammers ringing in ghostly forges and phantom ships forever sailing the storm-tossed night. At the center of each of these tales, however, is you: the wraith. This isn't like watching a film or hearing something read to you. These are the stories that you help create, and thus those stories are yours in a way no movie or TV show can ever be.

# Storytelling



elling stories is an integral part of the human condition. We've been passing along tales and legends for time immemorial; Greek bards were applauded for merely reciting the lists of ships in Homer's *Iliad*. We have a rich and varied oral tradition, one that has been slipping away from us as television and radio grow ever more pervasive.

Now, instead of telling stories, we listen to them. Instead of creating new adventures for our favorite heroes, we wait for their innumerable sequels to arrive in our local video stores. We have abdicated our rights to create stories, content to be an audience disguised as a culture.

It doesn't have to be this way. We can all still become storytellers, and that's what **Wraith** is all about. This game is a chance to tell stories, not merely to listen to them. It's an opportunity to create something with others, not simply to share a passive experience with them. A combination of game and collaborative storytelling, **Wraith** lets us pick up, in our own way, the mantle of the bards and troubadours of old.

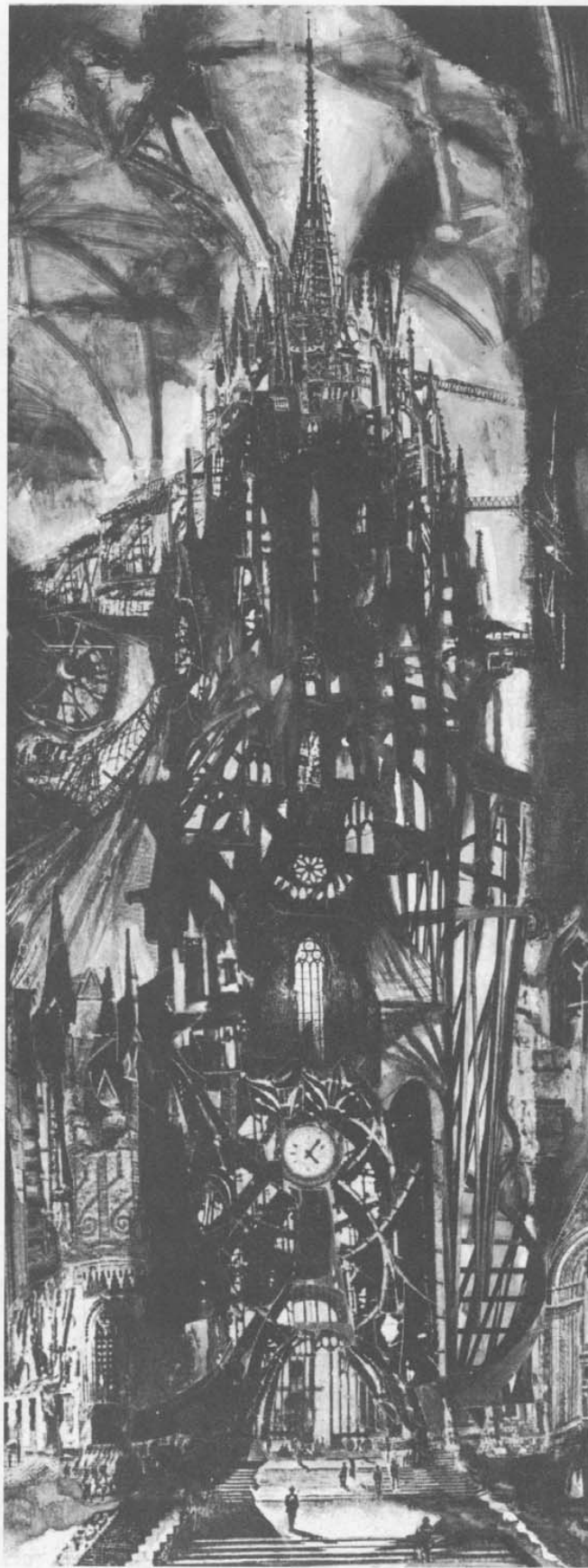
## Roleplaying

In addition to being a storytelling game, **Wraith** is a "roleplaying game." The term is a frightening one for some people, but really, roleplaying is something we've all been doing since we were children. With every game of Cops and Robbers, or every time we stood at the top of the playground slide and imagined that we could fly, we were roleplaying. We slipped easily into other personae, noble policemen and nefarious robbers, brave soldiers or mighty superheroes, until we were told that it was "silly" and "childish." And so we stopped adopting those roles, and let roleplaying recede with the memories of childhood.

**Wraith** calls for you to excavate those precious memories and once again slip into someone else's skin. Of course, it needs more rules than the playground did — "Got you!" "Did not!" "Did too!" is no longer a workable basis for this sort of game — but not many. All the rules of **Wraith** do is set up the parameters of the story, allowing the Storyteller to determine what each wraith is and isn't capable of. Rules guide and direct the story, eliminating conflict over whether or not a character's actions are plausible. They don't dictate the action or restrict it.

All of the rules you'll need to play **Wraith** are located in Chapter Three. Beyond that, the story is the important thing.

There's no real size limit on a **Wraith** game, but no more than a half-dozen or so players is recommended. Beyond that, players are forced to compete for Storyteller attention, meaning that each character has less time to be the hero — or villain.



# The Storyteller

*And will you also hatch out worlds, my son?*

— Neil Gaiman, *The Books of Magic*

**Wraith** may work a little differently than most of the games you are used to. There is no board, nor are there markers, tokens or play money. Instead, the entire game takes place in the mind and narration of the Storyteller, a player who volunteers to create and narrate the stories in which all of the other players star.

Being the Storyteller falls somewhere between playing God and substitute teaching. All the powers of creation are yours, at least within the framework of the story. You describe and create the world, populate it, decide its quirks and produce its grandeur. On the other hand, you are responsible for allowing the players and their characters into your creation, and while you can decide the fate of the characters by controlling the actions of their enemies, you relinquish control over your creation by allowing them free will within it. Still, it's a small price to pay for being the creator of stories and weaver of legends.

The Storyteller's most important role is to ensure that everyone enjoys themselves. That means telling a good story involving all of the characters, treating characters and players fairly and equitably, and listening to what happens in your world as well as creating it. You create the skeleton of a story, then turn the characters loose to put flesh on its bones, balancing between adjudication and narration as the situation demands. You must determine which rules apply and how to apply them to any given situation, and describe the situation vividly enough that the players know how to react appropriately. You must don the masks of every other character in your world, giving each a personality and a voice as the characters encounter them.

Sounds daunting, doesn't it? Perhaps, but at the same time, it is incredibly rewarding. Juggling the roles of entertainer and arbitrator can be difficult, but this book is designed to make that task as easy as possible. Storytelling **Wraith** will never actually be easy, but this book can make it a simpler and more enjoyable process. The reward for Storytelling is, after all, the story itself.

The Storyteller's role is explained in more detail in Chapter Eight.

## Players

Not everyone can be the Storyteller; most people involved with a **Wraith** chronicle will take the roles of players. While the Storyteller sets the stage and creates the scene for the evening's play, it is the players who stride upon that stage and create the action there. Being a player takes effort and preparation, but both of these elements add richness and texture to the story that you and your Storyteller create.

In **Wraith**, you take on the role of a ghost, one of the Restless Dead. You create the character whom you play over the course of a story or stories, and decide what that character says and does. Equal parts actor and director, you move your wraith through the world that your Storyteller creates, acting and reacting as you feel appropriate.

As a player, you are ultimately responsible for your character's words and deeds. Everything that your character says, you say. Everything that your character does, you announce. Your goal is, of course, to help your character overcome the obstacles that face her by having her do and say things which will enable her to surmount any roadblock and overcome any opposition.

Occasionally you will have your character attempt an action for which your Storyteller will demand a dice roll to determine whether or not you succeed. Beyond that, simply think back to your days of "let's pretend" on the playground. That's all there is to it. Create your wraith, put on her personality like a Halloween mask, and suddenly it's time to be somebody else; the hero of a ghost story.

## Characters

In order to play **Wraith**, you must adopt a persona and, within the context of the game, *become* that role. Just as actors play characters onstage, you will play a character in the bounds of the story that you and your friends create.

The difference, of course, is that an actor's character is scripted by a playwright, while a **Wraith** character is created by you. The actual process of creating a character is relatively simple; detailed in Chapter Five, it generally takes under half an hour. The assigning of Traits and other statistics allows you to create a framework as to your character's capabilities. The hard part, laying flesh on the bones of the character sheet, comes next.

As you're going to be donning the mask of your character for hours on end, it makes sense to make that character as real, as fully fleshed out as possible. What does your character like to do? Does she have any phobias or nervous tics? Does she start every sentence with the same phrase, or does she casually flip a knife from hand to hand during conversation? These little details breathe life into a series of marks on a piece of paper, and make the character you create as real as possible. All great stories start with great characters, after all, and you don't want yours to be an exception.

### A Little Twist

One of the unique things about **Wraith** is that you aren't just restricted to playing your character. You also get the chance to play someone else's dark side, called the Shadow. That way, even when your character isn't directly involved in the story, as a player you're still a vital part of what's going on.

As a Shadowguide, you get to tempt another character into doing those things he knows he really shouldn't do, or perhaps you'll just give him enough rope to hang himself with. Remember, though, just as you're playing someone else's dark side, someone else is playing yours.

# Winners and Losers



There are no “winners” or “losers” in **Wraith**; there’s no set goal or victory condition for players to achieve. The idea of the game is not to beat the other players, as cooperating with the other characters will most likely be necessary for your own character’s survival. Nor is the goal to “beat” the Storyteller, since the Story-

teller and players should be working together to create the best story possible. In many ways, it’s not even possible to “lose” a game of **Wraith**. Even if your character is destroyed, there’s always a new role to play, a new mask to pick up, and a new story to tell.

**Wraith**, like all storytelling games, is about an entirely different type of triumph than scurrying around the board and accumulating brightly colored pieces of paper. Success in a game of **Wraith** can be claimed for many different reasons: for triumphing over foes during the course of the story (though this may attract the attention of stronger enemies, and set whole new stories in motion...); for resolving Passions and Fetters in a satisfying way; for uncovering an enemy’s evil machinations and watching him be led off in chains; for achieving hard-won Transcendence; for defeating that last desperate assault by Spectres; for slipping through the fingers of the Hierarchy when it looked like capture was certain; or for simply coming away from the game with stories of what your character did that will put a smile on your face later.

## Playing Aids

You don’t need much to play **Wraith** besides your imagination. This book, some pencils and photocopied character sheets, and some 10-sided dice are about all that’s really required. If your Storyteller is going to draw maps or use miniatures, a table is a good idea, but beyond that nothing’s necessary.

That’s not to say, however, that other props can’t be useful or helpful. Scribbled letters, half-melted candles, newspaper clippings — all can add to the experience of playing **Wraith** and make the game more real. The trick is to remember that, no matter how clever the props you use, they are only props, and the story is what matters.

## Live-Action

As incongruous as the notion of a live-action game about ghosts might seem, it can be an intense and memorable roleplaying experience. Essentially improvisational theater set in the world of **Wraith**, live-action allows you to leave the table and dice behind and act out what your character does and says.

In most roleplaying games, you describe what your character does and roll dice to determine if she succeeds or not. In a

live-action setting, you have the opportunity (within reason) to do what your character does and say what she says, unfettered by the need to roll dice to see if you can pull off whatever feat of daring you’re attempting.

Of course, without dice there needs to be some way to determine whether or not you succeed at what you’re doing, particularly if you’re trying to affect another character. Alternate rules, such as those provided in White Wolf’s **Mind’s Eye Theatre**, or Storyteller adjudication are both possibilities for resolving this sort of conflict; the mechanism doesn’t matter as long as it’s consistent and fair, and everyone has fun in the process.

## The Rules of Live-Action

Live-Action does entail certain risks that aren’t present in a tabletop game (unless one of your friends rolls dice with extraordinary viciousness). While live-action does allow for many more players to interact than would be possible in even the largest tabletop game, it also allows for the possibility of someone getting hurt. With that in mind, always follow these simple rules:

- **Don’t Touch** — While live-action allows you to act out what your character does, there are still some things (such as combat, leaping off fire escapes, high-speed car chases and the like) that are best left to the imagination no matter what. While it’s easy to get caught up in the fervor of the moment and allow your character to sweep you along, you should never lose sight of the fact that this is only a game. Players who get excessively rambunctious should be taken aside and allowed to calm down; if they continually cross the line, they should be removed from the game. No story or in-character triumph is worth the risk of a player getting hurt.

- **No Weapons** — As beautiful as a sword may look as part of your costume, as appropriate as a handgun (even a model) might be for your wraithly hitman, no weapons should ever be allowed in a live-action game. Even models or mock-ups of real weapons (especially guns) are too real, and could lead to someone getting hurt, not to mention suspicions about your game from people passing by.

- **Respect People Who Aren’t Playing** — Either restrict your roleplaying to an area where the players are the only people around (i.e., your house, a reserved room on your college campus, a rented YMCA), or remember that non-players will be walking around the game area with no idea as to what you’re doing. Respect their space and don’t make them a part of the game without asking permission. The last thing you need is for an unsuspecting member of the janitorial staff to stumble across a Harrowing in progress and decide that you’re performing a diabolic rite in the local high school gym. Explaining to local law enforcement that no, you’re really just a Spectre dragging a soul down to Oblivion probably won’t help matters.

- **Know When to Stop** — Always remember that it’s just a game. No matter how deeply you identify with your character, no matter how exciting the action, it’s still just a game. If the gameplay is too intense for someone, it’s time to stop, no questions asked.

# Wraiths

*His life is fled and, deprived of his senses,  
Beyond hope of survival, he suffers his lot,  
Pallid upon the beam, enveloped in the mist of death...*

—*The Fortunes of Men*, S.A.J. Bradley, translator



Deep down inside, most of us believe in ghosts. Many of us want to believe that death isn't the end, that our personalities — our souls — don't vanish forever with the last breath or heartbeat. So we believe in ghosts in order to reassure ourselves that death isn't the end after all.

In *Wraith*, death isn't the end. It's just the beginning. Most souls, upon death, pass on to Transcendence or Oblivion, but a few take up residence in the Shadowlands as wraiths. These souls are special, bringing with them unfulfilled desires and drives, emotions and needs that are so powerful that they are stronger than death itself. Anger, love, fear, hatred — these are some of the Passions that, until fulfilled, can tie a wraith to the shadows of the mortal world. Driven by Passions and anchored by Fetters, wraiths are caught between this life and the next.

Dwelling in the Underworld, between the memories of the lands of the living and the utter horror of the Tempest, wraiths

walk a fine line between worlds. They can affect the mortal world, but only rarely manifest in it; they can travel through the Tempest, but never call it home. Illuminated by passion and shadowed by fear, a wraith's existence can be bliss or terror.

Most wraiths pass quickly through the Shadowlands to their final destinations. Bound only by weak Fetters and driven by half-hearted Passions, they soon resolve the issues from life that held them back. Player character wraiths, on the other hand, have potent Passions and Fetters indeed, making them stand out even in the community of the dead. Tied so fiercely to the lands of the living, they are likely to dwell in the Underworld for decades or more — if Fate permits.

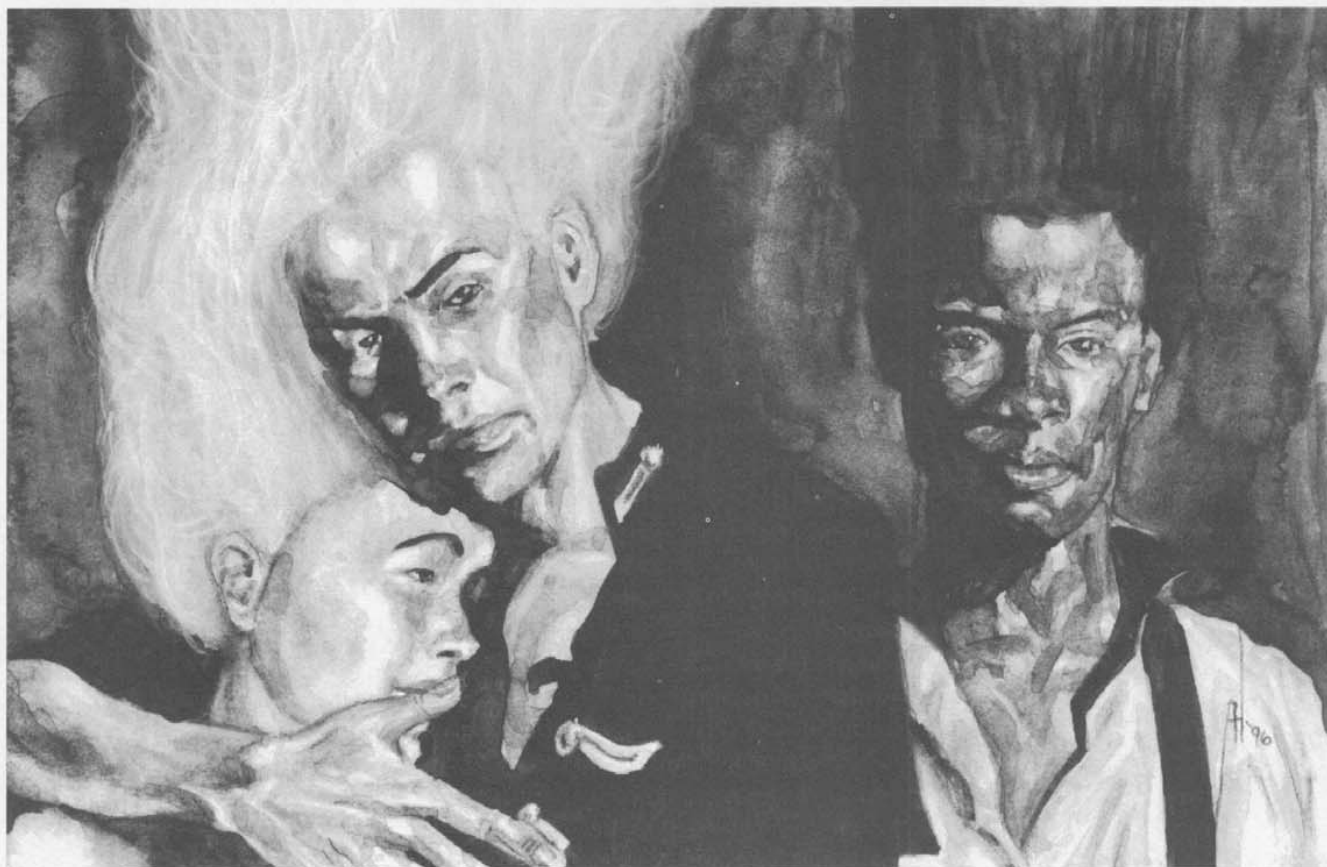
## The Underworld

*This must be the place where you learn what you would not learn on earth.*

—Peter Himmelman, "11 Months in the Bath of Dirty Spirits"

Tempest, Stygia and Shadowlands: these, combined with the Far Shores, make up the realms of the Restless Dead. Collectively known as the Deadlands or Underworld, these define the boundaries of most wraiths' existence.

The Far Shores are the farthest removed from the lands of the living. Existing across the Sunless Sea from Stygia's iron towers, they offer a buffet of heavens and hells to any wraith brave and cunning enough to reach them. *Shaitans* and saviors a-plenty can be found there, as well as cunningly constructed





replicas of every afterlife ever imagined. All are shams, though, according to the monolithic Hierarchy of Stygia, which has forbidden organized traffic across the Sunless Sea.

Beneath that nighted ocean boils the endless storm of the Tempest, in which Spectres roam hungrily. There are islands of safety in this howling eternal Maelstrom; Stygia, capital of the empire of the dead, rests in one such oasis. At the heart of the storm exists a titanic Labyrinth, gnawed from the stuff of Oblivion by the monstrous Spectres called Malfeans. At the core of the Labyrinth is the mouth of the Void: Oblivion itself, the maw of entropy. Few wraiths, if any, have gazed upon that and returned to tell of it. Even Spectres fear it, though it is their master.

There are safe pathways through the storm as well, Byways leading from Stygia to the ruined grandeur of the Shadowlands. Superimposed on the lands of the living (also known as the Skinlands), the Shadowlands are full of memories and echoes given form. A Shroud born of disbelief separates the Shadowlands from the Skinlands, but wraiths can still see through it, dimly, to the living world they've left behind.

Obviously, this geography doesn't correspond to Heaven, Hell or any afterlife with which the masses of the living are familiar, and most wraiths find their arrival in the Deadlands to be something of a disappointment. The fact that a vast majority of mortals who die never appear in the Underworld lends credence to the notion that the Deadlands are a sort of Purgatory, a way station on the way to something better — or worse. More wraiths hold this view than any others, believing that they are “doing time” in the Underworld until they're ready for the next step. Of course, this doesn't say much for those wraiths who have dwelt in the Underworld for hundreds or even thousands of years, and if queried privately, most wraiths would admit to preferring this “Purgatory” to whatever lies beyond. After all, here they can at least touch the lives and loved ones they knew... almost.

## Wraith Characteristics

Being a wraith does come with certain innate advantages. All wraiths, by virtue of their ghostly nature, possess the following abilities:

- **Deathsight** — Existing on the far side of the grave, wraiths see the world through coffin-colored glasses. Buildings appear to be tumbling down, plants are withered and sere, cars look to be dented wrecks years before their time and people close to death bear a corpse's pallor. Wraiths can see how deeply things — and people — have been tainted with the touch of Oblivion. While this may seem to be a drawback, it does allow wraiths to assess an object's weaknesses or the general health of a living being.

- **Lifesight** — Just as they can see the death in beings, wraiths can also see the life in them as well. This ability takes the form of being able to read the auras of living (or at least

animate) beings, the swirling veils of color that surround all things. As auras change color from moment to moment according to the mood and health of the beings generating them, wraiths can often determine the current mood, health and state of mind of someone just by looking at her.

• **Sharpened Senses** — All wraiths have an extraordinary sensitivity to sensory input. Hearing whispers and reading the fine print present no problems to any wraith. Among other uses, this can handy for reading license plate numbers, eavesdropping on secretive conversations and detecting the first whiff of gasoline as an arsonist starts to employ his tools on a Haunt. On the other hand, bright lights, loud noises and other excessive stimuli can be extraordinarily uncomfortable for Restless, dazzling, stunning or even hurting them.

• **Insubstantiality** — At once the great blessing and the great curse of wraithly existence, insubstantiality is what allows wraiths to pass through solid objects with a minimum of difficulty. By expending a small amount of Corpus, wraiths can walk through walls, people or bullets with ease.

## The Shadow

*I'll hurt you 'til you need me.*

— Richard Thompson, "Calvary Cross"

Each wraith carries her own worst enemy with her, and it dwells in the back of her mind. Upon crossing the Shroud, a soul's darker side takes on a separate identity and seeks every opportunity to exercise its malevolent will. While part of the same mind and soul, the Shadow (as this sentient malice is called) maintains an independent, malign existence within the wraith's head. Selfish and sadistic, the Shadow will wheedle and cajole, bribe and threaten its better half. It can offer power, or use its unique gifts (called Thorns) to make its other side (called the Psyche) more pliable to its seductive suggestions.

No matter how pleasant the Shadow's offers are, however, they all lead toward one goal: the wraith's ultimate destruction. The Shadow is the self-centered, self-destructive side of every wraith's personality, the death wish given a voice and a will. The Shadow is all about taking the easy way out, doing what feels good at the moment and to hell with the consequences. To the Shadow's way of thinking, utter annihilation is preferable to paying the piper, and the screams of the Psyche on that last long downhill slide are the sweetest music imaginable.

Of all the conflicts that a wraith faces, her struggle with her own Shadow is the most vicious and terrible. There is no respite from the voice whispering in her ear, no cessation of hostilities possible. The greatest triumphs a wraith achieves and the worst defeats that she suffer will come on the battlefield of her own soul.

More about the Shadow can be found in Chapter Six.



## The End of All Things

To all things, there is an ending. Most wraiths eventually succumb to Oblivion, perhaps serving a tour of duty as a Spectre first or simply being swallowed by the Void. It is against the inevitable downward pull of Oblivion, the gentle gravity of nothingness, that most wraiths struggle. Fear of Oblivion is why the Restless cling so tightly to their Fetters, for while Fetters may tie a wraith to earth, they also anchor her against Oblivion. Most wraiths believe that Oblivion is their inevitable end, and there is nothing to their existence in the Shadowlands save the struggle against non-existence.

Some wraiths, however, believe there is another ending possible. They speak of Transcendence, an ascent into a higher state of being. Yin to Oblivion's yang, it is the deliberate surrender of self as opposed to the destruction of personality that Oblivion represents. To Transcend, one must resolve one's Fetters, and leave the trappings of life behind.

Of course, the doctrine of Transcendence would probably have more adherents if anyone knew what the process actually entailed. After all, no one who has supposedly Transcended has ever returned to share his experience. There are stories, of course, of wraiths taken up to Paradise in beams of pure white light. Then again, there are as many tales that say the whole thing is a sham, concocted by Spectres, that funnels the "Transcending" wraith into the Void. In any case, most wraiths are far too timid to abandon their Fetters willingly, and so Transcendence remains a dream and a rumor for them. Still, it provides something invaluable in the Shadowlands. Even among those who prefer the devil they know to the Transcendence they don't, the very mention of the word can inspire hope.

## At the Heart of Things

At the heart of **Wraith** are passion and horror, inextricably intertwined. Passion is what refuses to allow a wraith to rest easily in her grave, what fuels her post-mortem existence and gives her the strength to resist Oblivion and her own Shadow. Without the passions to do, to protect, to avenge — somehow, to *act* — a wraith is, at best, a memory. Without passion, a wraith is nothing.

Balancing the power of passion is that of horror. The cry of every prisoner has always been, "You can break my body, but my soul is my own!" In the Underworld, that dichotomy no longer exists. The spirit can be broken, or forged, or shaped at a whim. Unbounded by physics and biology, creatures from nightmare are an everyday thing here. Wraiths can deliberately shape themselves into monstrosities if it suits their purposes, and abuses of the Arcanoi allow for violation of both body and soul. Even passion, the driving force of a wraith's existence, can become twisted in the hands of the Shadow, working as avidly toward de-

struction as toward preservation. In the world of **Wraith**, both the living and the dead have much to fear.

Passion and horror, love and fear, action and destruction — these dichotomies collide in **Wraith**. Passion without horror to overcome is wasted; horror that does not inspire passion is weak indeed. Between the two and bound up in them are the Restless Dead.

## Lexicon

A new existence calls for new terms with which to describe it. Below are some of the phrases and names used to define Underworld existence.

**Agency, The:** Slang for the bureaucracy of the Hierarchy.

**Angst:** The negative mental energy that the Shadow (and Spectres) feed upon and use.

**Arcanos:** One of the supernatural abilities that wraiths possess, allowing them to affect the living and the dead. Plural is *Arcanoi*.

**Arcanum, The:** A collection of scholars and ghosthunters among the Quick.

**Arisen:** Wraiths who have Transcended.

**Artifact:** An object in the Underworld that has unusual powers of some sort.

**Body Snatcher:** A wraith who possesses the living.

**Boo Job:** A premeditated attempt to scare the Quick.

**Boojum:** A nasty critter, usually one of the unidentified denizens of the Tempest.

**Byway:** A stable path through the Tempest.

**Caul, The:** The amniotic sac of a wraith's birth into the Shadowlands. The translucent covering made from ectoplasm with which all wraiths are reborn.

**Charon:** Founder and ruler of the Hierarchy, missing since 1945.

**Circle:** A group of wraiths, usually engaged upon common business.

**Citadel:** The central building and stronghold of a Necropolis.

**Cohort:** A Circle composed of Hierarchy-affiliated wraiths. Cohorts are supposed to have 10 members.

**Consort:** A living person attuned to be used as a Host.

**Corpus:** The "body" of a wraith. Plural is *Corpora*.

**Cult:** An unflattering name for one of the countless Heretic sects.

**Deathlord:** One of the seven wraiths currently ruling the Hierarchy. Each has dominion over the victims of a certain sort of death (i.e., violence, pestilence, mystery, etc.).

**Dictum Mortuum:** Charon's decree forbidding trafficking with mortals.

**Domain:** Territory held by a wraith or a Circle of wraiths.



**Doomsday:** The day when Oblivion swallows everything; conversely, the day when the Shadowlands and Skinlands merge. Doomsday features prominently in many Heretic cults' philosophies, even if no two Heretics can agree as to what exactly it is.

**Doomshade:** A Spectre.

**Doomslayer:** A wraith who specializes in hunting Spectres.

**Drone:** The shell of a wraith, doomed to endlessly repeat a single task until claimed by Oblivion. Drones have no mind or will.

**Enfant:** A wraith just reborn into the Underworld, usually encased in a Caul.

**Far Shores, The:** The lands across the Tempest, supposedly corresponding to Heaven, Hell and more.

**Fetters:** Those things that remain in the lands of the living that tie a wraith to her old life.

**Freewraith:** A wraith who is not actively serving in the military.

**Gang:** A Circle of Renegades.

**Guild:** One of the supposedly banned organizations of Freewraiths dedicated to the study and use of one of the Arcanoi. There were 13 Greater and three Lesser Guilds.

**Harrowing, The:** A sleigh-ride through the worst side of a wraith's subconscious, courtesy of his Shadow and the Spectres of the Tempest. More than one wraith has been destroyed during a Harrowing.

**Harvesting:** The act of cutting Enfants free from their Cauls and initiating them into the Shadowlands. Many Harvesters are actually slavers, and the initiation they offer consists of a pair of manacles linked by Stygian steel chains.

**Haunt:** A place where the Shroud is thin and the Restless feel at home.

**Hierarchy, The:** The monolithic bureaucracy of the Dark Kingdom of Iron, a.k.a. the Empire of Stygia. At this point, the Empire and the Hierarchy have become interchangeable in most wraiths' minds. The Hierarchy is the largest collection of Western wraiths in the Underworld.

**Heretics:** Religious fanatics among the dead, though many bizarre religions have sprung up among the Restless. Most Heretics have some sort of central belief based around the notion of Transcendence.

**Hell:** Supposedly, a place of punishment for wicked souls. In the Underworld, a joke of the first order; there are so many false hells that they've become something of a tourist attraction for the more adventurous among the dead.

**Host:** A living person possessed by use of the Arcanos Puppetry.

**Isle of Sorrows, The:** The island in the Tempest which the city of Stygia is built upon.

**Juice:** Pathos.

**Legacy:** Archaic way of referring to a very potent Fetter.



**Legions:** The military and police of Stygia, though technically every Stygian citizen owes allegiance to one of the Legions. Each Legion is overseen by a Deathlord.

**Lemure:** A young wraith, recently deceased but no longer an *Enfant*.

**Maelstrom:** The terrifying storms that sweep from the mouth of the Void out over the Shadowlands, bearing Spectres and destruction in their wake. Growing more frequent in recent years, they either herald or are the result of horrific events in the Skinlands.

**Meat:** Mortal flesh.

**Mitty:** A wraith whose deepest regret is not having lived while he had the chance. Mittys are surprisingly common.

**Moleman:** Wraiths who claim to have experienced the stereotypical "tunnel of light." The term is *not* considered to be a compliment.

**Necropolis:** A city of the dead. Also used to specify the regions of cities of the Quick most thickly inhabited by wraiths. Plural is *Necropoli* or *Necropoleis*.

**Nihils:** Rips in the fabric of the Shadowlands, tearing through the surface reality and exposing the surging Tempest beneath. Some Nihils lead down to the Labyrinth.

**Oblivion:** The manifestation and hunger of entropy, also known to some as the *Great Unmaking*. Oblivion is the final fate of all things in the Underworld, save those who Tran-

scend. The physical manifestation of Oblivion is called the *Void*, and it opens upon the heart of the Labyrinth.

**Obolus:** The Stygian base unit of currency, forged from one soul.

**Onyx Tower:** Charon's palace, now abandoned.

**Pathos:** Pure emotion, which wraiths feed upon and use in their daily existences. The usable essence of passion.

**Plasm:** The physical matter of the Underworld. Wraiths, relics and Artifacts are all made of plasm.

**Projectors:** Visitors to the Underworld from the Skinlands. Also known as *Skinboys*.

**Quick, The:** The living.

**Reaper:** A wraith who removes an *Enfant's* Caul.

**Relic:** The memory of an object, made from plasm.

**Renegades:** Wraiths who stand opposed to the Hierarchy. They have no structure, organization or unified goal other than rebellion. Renegades range from true freedom fighters to the ghosts of ruffians looking for an easy afterlife.

**Restless, The:** Wraiths in general. Also known as the *Restless Dead*.

**Risen:** A wraith who has found a way to reanimate her corpse. Most wraiths believe *Risen* to be legendary.

**Shadow, The:** The darker side of a wraith's personality. The Shadow is selfish, egocentric and sadistic, and directs its efforts toward destroying all the wraith loves (including the wraith himself).

**Shadowlands, The:** The ghostly realm just across the Shroud from the lands of the living.

**Skinlands, The:** The lands of the living.

**Slumber:** The healing sleep that wraiths can indulge in.

**Soulfire:** Crystals of concentrated Pathos, used in soulforging.

**Spectre:** A wraith whose Shadow has achieved permanent dominance. Spectres serve Oblivion. Also known as the *Shadow-Eaten*.

**Stormrunning:** Taking a shortcut across the Tempest, as opposed to using a Byway.

**Stygia:** The Dark Kingdom of Iron, the largest organization of wraiths in the Western world. Also the capital city of the empire of the Western Restless.

**Tempest, The:** The great storm of the Underworld, separating the Shadowlands from Stygia and the Far Shores.

**Thrall:** A wraith who is in service to another. In essence, a slave.

**Tithe:** The amount of Pathos a wraith draws from a Haunt or Fetter.

**Transcendence:** The moment when a wraith reconciles Shadow and Psyche, moving on to a higher (?) existence. Transcendence is considered legend by most wraiths, and feared by many others.

**Underworld, The:** The realms of the dead, from the Far Shores to the Shadowlands and including Stygia, the Tempest, the Labyrinth and the Void.

**Veinous Stair:** The passage from the heart of Stygia into the Labyrinth.

**Void, The:** The abyss at the heart of the Labyrinth.

**Wraith:** A ghost, a spirit who retains such strong attachments to the lands of the living that she cannot move past this level of existence. Also called the *Restless*.



# Reaping

I'm still lying on the ground with my head twisted to one side as I listen to the wind. It roars like a hurricane in my ears, but I can't feel the slightest sensation of it on my body.

That is, if I even have a body!

I close my eyes tightly and stare into the swelling darkness, trying to remember exactly what happened. My mind is flooded with fragmentary images and vague memories that I can't even begin to piece together.

One of the sharpest images, though — and the one that makes the least sense — is of a hooded figure leaning over me. The features of the person's face are lost in shadow. I remember feeling more than seeing his gaze as it burned into me. And I remember how oddly my vision was distorted, as if I were lying on my back underwater, looking up at the faint glow of the sky above the water's surface. Everywhere I looked, hazy blobs of light shimmered and shattered into warped curtains of energy. Everything, I remember, was suffused with a dark,

dense haze until — somehow — this figure did something to me to make that haze disappear.

I feel a faint stirring of fear, and this memory is soon lost. I recall a moment of pain, as if a layer of my skin were being peeled from my face.

I'm positive that this cloaked figure spoke to me, although I can't remember anything he said. I'm not sure I want to remember. Just thinking about it fills me with a cold, clutching dread.

It takes a great deal of effort, but I finally manage to sit up. Hugging my knees tightly with both arms, I look up and down the street, trying to figure out where I am, but nothing looks familiar.

The wind blows with a loud, flute-like whistle. The buildings lining both sides of the street are dark and threatening. Gaping windows and shadowed doorways seem to hold menace in their black depths. The summer night had been warm, the air close and sticky with humidity, but now I have absolutely no sensation of temperature. Even the air feels strangely neutral and...distant.

My sense of time seems distorted as well. I have no idea how long ago it was that I was standing on the bridge, looking down into the river. It could have been minutes ago or days ago...It could have been an entire lifetime ago.

Is that it? Am I dead? I wonder for a minute, but quickly dismiss the idea.

My conception of what death is like didn't include self-awareness. I had always imagined death to be pure, total oblivion, and that's what I had been seeking tonight.

*Oblivion.*

The single word, spoken as if by a different voice inside my head, fills me with such dread that I can't resist the odd sensation that I've been removed from reality, that — somehow — I am floating outside of existence in a bubble and looking in.

"What the hell is going on here?" I whisper, surprised by the raw sound of my own voice.

I stand up slowly and brush my hands together. They make a faint clapping sound that echoes oddly in the night. I frown as I look down at my hands. I can feel them touching

each other, but even so simple a sensation as rubbing them together feels strangely dissociated, as though I'm touching things through thick, padded gloves.

A lonely ache fills me when I realize that I don't recognize where I am. It certainly doesn't look like anywhere near East Bridge Street.

It is still night, I'm sure of at least that much, but I have no way of knowing whether or not it's the same night when I had chosen to go for a walk to the bridge.

The light from the streetlights lining the road fragments into gauzy blue and purple beams that cast multiple ink-wash-thin shadows across the ground. The night sky looks close and dense, like a low-hanging fog bank.

When I raise my hand to my forehead, the multiple shadows my arm cast on the street coil like a nest of writhing snakes at my feet. I shudder as I take a single

step forward, but the effect of the several shadows that I cast moving along with me completely disorients me, and I lose my balance and almost fall.

Bracing myself, I look around and see that I am standing in the middle of a debris-strewn street in what looks like an abandoned city. Everywhere I look, I see signs of decay. I catch subtle hints of motion in the shadows, but whenever I look directly at them, I can't see what might have caused them.

A cold, clammy sensation slithers up my back to the base of my skull. I can't shake the feeling that, unseen in the darkness, eyes are watching me, studying my every move. I want to start walking just to be doing something, but I have no idea which way to turn until I hear the soft scuff of feet on the pavement behind me.

I whirl around and see a dark figure slowly making its way to-

ward me. The silhouette is stooped and frighteningly familiar. One leg — the left one — drags behind as though he is partially paralyzed. The light from the streetlights highlights his features, casting the hollows of his cheeks and neck into deep shadow.

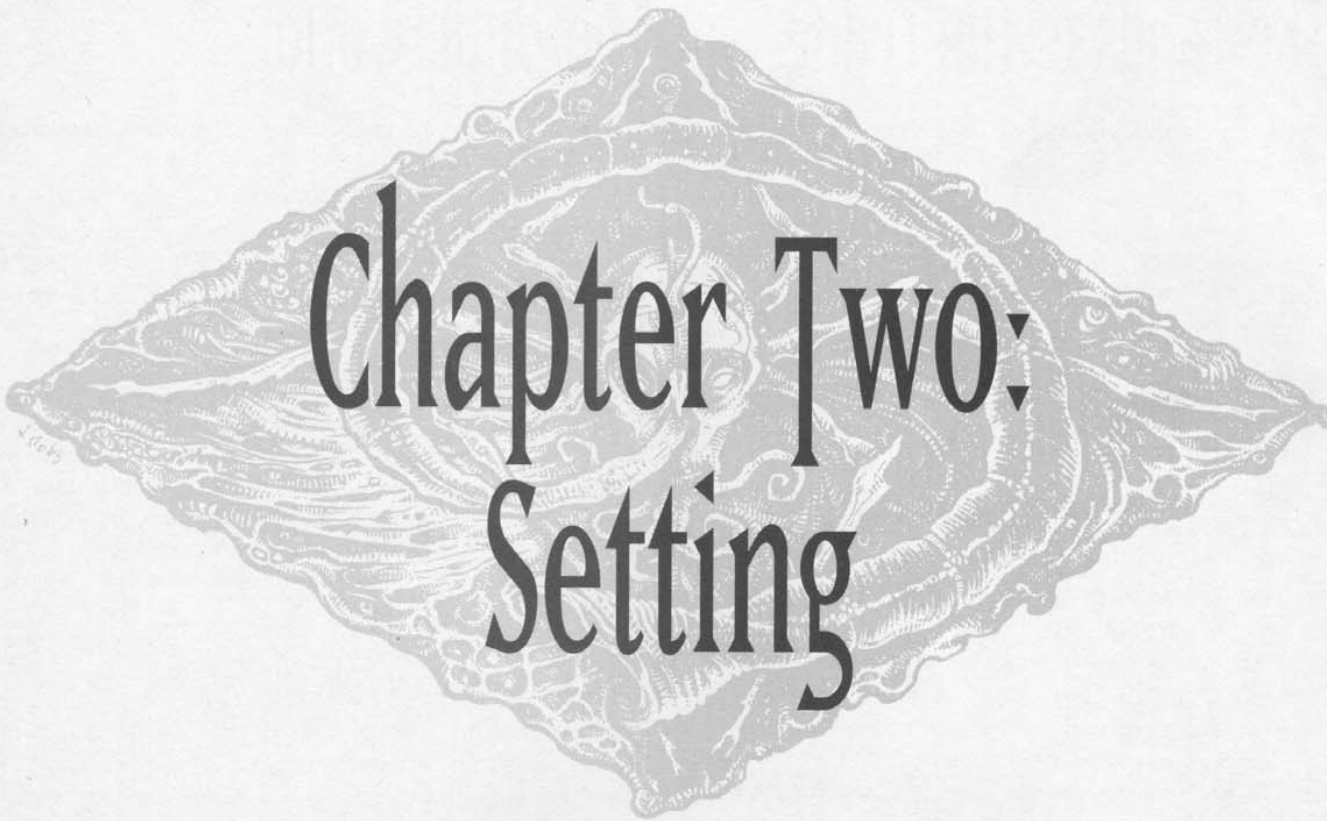

As the figure approaches, I can see that it is a man — or at least what had once been a man. His features appear to be decomposing. White flaps of decaying skin hang from his forehead and cheeks, and sway with every halting step he takes.

"Stop right there," I say, surprising myself by the strength in my voice.

The figure jerks to a halt, leans over to one side, and glares at me. The streetlight catches his right eye, making it glow with an eerie gleam.

"I'll do whatever I like," the man says. "I sure as hell don't need you telling me."





# Chapter Two: Setting

*The flower that smiles today tomorrow dies*  
— Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Mutability"



The world of **Wraith** is not our world. Rather, it is what we are afraid our world could be. All that is beautiful and all that is terrible stand out in greater contrast to the humdrum of everyday life. Faith, hope and love are potent forces in the world, but greed, terror and despair are stronger, and their taint can be found both in the headlines and behind the scenes. **Wraith's** world is a World of Darkness, a world where the sun hurries below the horizon so that the ghosts and monsters can come out to play.

In many ways, the World of Darkness is familiar. The same television shows still command millions of viewers; the same pollut-

ants still give sunsets their brilliant colors; and all of the old landmarks remain in place. In the World of Darkness, however, the mystery and madness beneath the surface can be glimpsed more clearly. The influence of the supernatural is omnipresent, and even the duller and most insensitive can feel its workings.

Certainly, this ambiance of dread is in part due to the nearness of the Underworld, the lands of the dead. The echoes of the Shadowlands can be heard in the lands of the living, and echoes of dead things can be potent indeed.

This chapter describes in detail the world of **Wraith**. Everything from the cosmology of the Underworld to the politics of the isle of Stygia is here, granting you a first look at the geography, culture and history of the lands of the dead.

# The Lands of the Living

*There are sacraments of evil as well as of good about us, and we live and move to my belief in an unknown world, a place where there are caves and shadows and dwellers in twilight.*

— Arthur Machen



We would feel right at home in the Gothic-Punk world of **Wraith**, at least at first. We'd recognize all of the city names, all of the bestsellers and politicians, and far too many of the headlines. The longer we stayed, however, the more differences we'd notice. Cities in the World of Darkness are dirtier and more labyrinthine, their pristine skyscrapers reaching higher above the faceless poor. It is a *film noir* world, where even the detectives standing under the streetlamps aren't comfortable — or safe.

The physical nature of this new world is best described as "Gothic" in the classic sense. Gargoyles and statuary are everywhere, and the impression of age lingers in the air. Things don't want to change in the World of Darkness, perhaps because there are beings in the shadows who don't want them to change. Bureaucracies are even larger and more impersonal; faceless men and women run too many lives from behind identical suits and sunglasses. Superstition runs rampant and threat seems omnipresent.

On the other hand, the irrepressible "Punk" element threatens to smash all of the Gothic edifices. Counter-culture here is violent, anarchy rules the streets, and crime isn't even newsworthy. Aggression and rebellion go hand in hand in the cities, and under overcast night skies the neon lights of the underground clubs promise forgetfulness.

It is a world halfway to being a ghostland, but only halfway. Wraiths can step fully into this realm only briefly, but its misery and pain calls to and feeds them. This is an existence that the dead can always watch, but only rarely touch.

Of course, each troupe will have its own preferences as to which way it balances the Gothic and Punk elements of the World of Darkness. Somber Gothic architecture and clandestine meetings among the gargoyles might suit one troupe's taste; another might prefer running in the wake of a street gang and reveling in the destruction they wreak together. The Storyteller has her choice of the entire spectrum, moving from one extreme to the other as she sees fit. So long as the unearthly mood, so important to a good ghost story, is maintained, the details hardly matter.

# The Underworld

*The place is not good for the imagination, and does not bring restful dreams at night.*

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Colour Out of Space"



The lands of the dead, consisting of the Far Shores, the Tempest (and all things within it), Stygia and the Shadowlands are collectively known as the *Underworld*. Technically the other so-called Dark Kingdoms, those afterlives populated by the dead of Asia, Africa, India and other places are also part of the Underworld, but as they have little to do with the night-to-night existence of most Stygian wraiths, they tend to fall under the heading of "out of sight, out of mind." When a Western ghost refers to the Underworld, he generally doesn't mean the Chinese or Polynesian Deadlands.

## Ambiance: Spitting in Oblivion's Eye

Existence in the Underworld can be horrific, yet wraiths cling to it with undying passion. The landscape of the Shadowlands is filled with tumble-down dreams and decayed memories, yet in the dreams and emotions of the living, wraiths can still find the strength they need to resist Oblivion's pull. The potential for undying horror exists in the Deadlands, but so does the potential for undying love, or for spiritual fulfillment that life didn't offer. Despair is common here, and with good cause, but even in the lands of the dead there are some who dare to hope, to resist, and to dream.

## Oblivion

The passive, patient aspect of destruction, *Oblivion* is a part of the natural order of things. It waits for all things when they break down; everything must die eventually, in order to make way for new things to be born. When kept in check by the forces of creation, Oblivion is an essential part of the cycle of death and rebirth. Mindless and eternal, Oblivion has always waited to swallow those souls no longer Fettered to the Skinlands but not ready for Transcendence.

These days, however, it would seem that Oblivion rages unchecked. Its pull strengthens daily as its appetite for souls increases. Its presence mars the Underworld and the Skinlands to an unprecedented degree, and its tainted touch is everywhere. In the form of Spectres it has more and more servants among the dead, and they ride more and more frequent Maelstroms to make war upon the Restless. Simply put, Oblivion is growing and no one is sure

why. Most wraiths resolve to fight the encroaching corruption; too many surrender to it.

Supposedly there will come a day when Oblivion swallows everything. Quaintly known as Doomsday, this day is dreaded by all wraiths and eagerly anticipated by all Spectres. With Doomsday comes the end, so they say, of everything, both for the living and the dead.

## Souls: Building Blocks of the Underworld

The economy and society of the Underworld are both built on souls. Most objects in the Underworld are made of memories; the remainder are composed of smelted or reshaped souls. Currency consists of coins forged from souls; these *oboli* are said to moan in the hands of those who possess them.

As souls are the basis of the economy, they are regarded less as individuals than as resources. Slavery is a booming business in the Shadowlands, based not on color or creed, but on the simple proposition that the strong enslave the weak because they can. Reapers enthrall as many new, defenseless wraiths as they are able, while mindless Drones are regarded as a bonanza of riches by a Harvester lucky enough to come across them. Enslaved wraiths are then marched off to the Thrall markets or, if they are unlucky, to the soulforges.

It is an inhumane system, and a horrifying one. There are those wraiths who claim that even soulforged or Moliated wraiths are still aware and suffer endlessly; even the possibility of this is regarded as unthinkable by most wraiths. However, the system persists. It has been in place too long, and there are too many wraiths who have too much to lose if the soulforging trade ends. Besides, there are justifications: soulsteel is needed to stand against Oblivion; souls that are smelted or Moliated into workaday objects are no longer in danger of feeding and strengthening Oblivion; some believe that soulforging hammers the Shadow out of a wraith; and so on. Still, the strongest reason for the practice's continuation is a simple one: no alternative exists. And so the Harvesters still bring their prey home in chains, and the soulforges still echo with the screams of the condemned, and the borders of the Citadels are still lit with Thralls reshaped into blazing torches.

## Trading in Souls

The vast majority of souls avoid the Underworld entirely. Swallowed immediately by Oblivion or lifted into Transcendence, they avoid the half-existence of wraiths. For those who do become wraiths, however, their fellow Restless pose a threat almost as great as Oblivion.

Objects in the Underworld are of two kinds: memories and souls. *Relics*, objects that cross over from the Skinlands, are in essence created by the emotional energy invested in them by the living; a much-loved teddy bear or a single sock endlessly cursed over will both reappear in relic form when thrown out or destroyed. However, even with the best efforts of certain wraiths to





pick and choose what comes over the Shroud, the selection is still haphazard, and notably slanted toward non-essential items. For example, relic guns are common, but relic bullets are not. Relic dolls abound, but relic girders or bulldozers are lamentably scarce. In addition, most relics exist as solid state objects, duplicating form but not function unless invested with Pathos. *Artifacts*, objects invested with special powers, sometimes arrive directly from the Skinlands, but infrequently. Thus, there is a need for another source of inanimate objects, one that provides more pliable and versatile materials. In other words, souls.

If a new *Enfant* is unlucky, he'll end up being Reaped by a slaver. These Harvesters roam the Shadowlands, collecting wraiths who are too weak, disoriented or foolish to defend themselves. Wraiths who are enslaved (the technical term is *enthralled*) will find themselves shackled with chains forged from Stygian steel, and herded toward the nearest Necropolis to be sold or smelted down. A fortunate few are simply sold into an eternity of servitude as Thralls; the rest become raw materials in the burgeoning Stygian economy.

Just about anything can be forged from souls: girders, chains, weapons, furniture, etc. Those objects that require a more delicate touch during creation are often created by wraiths skilled in the *Arcanos Moliare*, who can reshape *Corpus* with a thought and a touch. Even the coins of the Underworld are made from souls, with each *obolus* consisting of one soul, hammered into a press.

Of course, not every soul is consigned to the forges. A minimal amount of luck, combined with a modicum of brainpower, will enable a wraith to elude the Harvesters until such time as she is able to ward off their depredations. Many wraiths are Reaped by friendlier guides into the afterlife; some even manage to free themselves from their Cauls. Furthermore, Stygian law prevents the forging of any souls except Spectres, criminals and Thralls. On the other hand, the definitions of "criminal" and "Thrall" are conveniently loose for most Reapers to make themselves a tidy profit. Short of Oblivion, there is no more permanent doom for a wraith than soulforging, and most will take their chances in the Void rather than in the forge.

## The Construction of the Underworld

Known by many names but never mapped, the Underworld does not exist as a "place" in the way that the living view geography. Instead, it is a non-Euclidean nightmare to any who think that a straight line is still the distance between two points. Even most wraiths don't quite understand the nature of the realm in which they dwell; they tend to resort to models of increasing simplicity and inaccuracy in order to explain their surroundings.

Also known as the Dark or Low Umbra to some, the Underworld is best understood as consisting of layers that, like C.S. Lewis' mythical kingdom of Narnia, grow larger the further in you go. The outermost one, called the Shadowlands, is identical in location to the lands of the living. Anywhere the living go the

dead go as well, and only the metaphysical Shroud separates the two. Theoretically, a wraith could walk from Canton, Ohio to Canton, China without ever leaving the Shadowlands. All that would be required would be patience and a good set of relic boots.

Existing just "below" the surface of the Shadowlands is the eternal turbulence called the *Tempest*, a roiling, nightmarish storm that has raged unceasingly for half a millennium. No matter where one goes in the Shadowlands, the *Tempest* is no more than a slight rip in the fabric of reality away. Indeed, the *Tempest* is best thought of as a sort of hyperspace underlying the "reality" of the Shadowlands.

Snaking through this nightmare of a storm are paths of relative safety called *Byways*, leading from point to point within the Shadowlands, or from the Shadowlands to the deeper realms. Travel from point to point through the *Tempest* without resorting to a *Byway* is also possible, and often is faster than taking one of the winding safe paths. On the other hand, travelers in the storm are exposed to its dangers, and the things that dwell within it.

In addition to safe routes through the *Tempest*, there are islands of stability within the storm as well. The city of *Strygia* rests on one such island; the innumerable *Far Shores* rest on others. In these places the *Tempest* is covered by a deceptively placid ocean called the *Sunless Sea*, across which soul-traffic once moved unceasingly. Other islands of safety exist within the storm as well: *Feng-tu*, *Swar*, the *Sea That Knows No Sun*, the *Bush of Ghosts*, and others, the death-realms of other cultures and societies. Some have dealings with *Strygia*, trading souls or waging war across the seas of the dead.

Deep within the storm is the fear-shadowed *Labyrinth*. No one knows what the walls of this horrifying place are made from, though the few explorers who have returned from wandering it report that the very substance of the passages changes as one walks though. Hospital corridors, mirrored mazes, sluggish flows of molten rock—all can be found within the *Labyrinth*. Here, too, can be found the slumbering *Malfeans*, the oldest and most potent *Spectres*.

At the very bottom of the Underworld rests the entrance to the *Void*. Those who place the *Void* at the base of the *Tempest* do so deliberately; entropy serves as gravity here, and *Oblivion's* manifestation exerts a pull on all things in the *Tempest* and its isles. The *Void* is ultimate blackness and destruction, a yawning chasm at the center of the *Labyrinth*. None who have entered the *Void* have ever returned, though the fearful belief of some is that reincarnation awaits on the other side of destruction. Unfortunately, evidence for this hypothesis is sadly lacking at the moment.

## The Shadowlands

The stillborn twin of the lands of the living, the *Shadowlands* correspond exactly to the *Skinlands* in terms of geography. A wraith standing in Times Square in the *Shadowlands* is, in a sense, standing in Times Square in the *Skinlands*, and runs the risk of being trampled by mortals who don't see him and rush right over his position.

Everything that exists in the *Skinlands* exists in the *Shadowlands*, more or less. The more emotion an object or a place inspired in the living lands, the more concretely it appears in the

*Deadlands*, and buildings long gone in the *Skinlands* still rise on the other side of the *Shroud*. At once beautiful and terrible, the landscape of the *Shadowlands* is constructed of memories draped like cobwebs over those places which yet stand in living lands.

Objects in the *Shadowlands* are irreducibly solid to a wraith, but things in the *Skinlands* are less so. A wall may initially pen a wraith into a room, but by expending a minimum of *Corpus* she can walk right through it. A wraith may be able to reach out to a paperweight or a pencil, but without the use of her *Arcanoi* she cannot touch it. It is only the *Shadowland* echoes of these things, once they are destroyed, that a wraith can affect directly.

What goes on in the *Skinlands* is plainly visible to wraiths in the *Shadowlands*. They can watch TV or eavesdrop on board meetings with ease, invisible and intangible. However, these perceptions of the *Skinlands* are often marred by the touch of death, as wraiths see the creeping decay in all things. Still, even the most *Oblivion*-tainted among the living appear healthier and more vital than the lands beyond the *Shroud*, which are gray and somber with rotting majesty.

## The Shroud

The barrier of disbelief and despair that separates the living lands from the Underworld, the *Shroud* is what divides death from life. Spontaneously raised during the mysterious catastrophe called the *Sundering*, the *Shroud* is what limits the ways in which wraiths can touch the *Skinlands*. The stronger the *Shroud* is in a given place, the more difficult it is for a wraith to reach through to the *Skinlands* there.

Strongest in places of disbelief and reason, the *Shroud* is nearly impenetrable in places such as laboratories and lecture halls. Conversely, in places where belief and fear of death are strong, the *Shroud* correspondingly weakens, and wraiths have more play in the lands of the living. Cemeteries and homes with troubled adolescents are often places where the *Shroud* is particularly thin. Also, there are certain nights when, worldwide, the *Shroud* weakens. These are the nights when the living would be well-advised to stay indoors, for all over the world, the ghosts are coming out to play.


## Haunts

*Certain houses, like certain persons, manage somehow to proclaim at once their character for evil.*

— Algernon Blackwood, "The Empty House"

Home sweet home for the dead, *Haunts* are places where strong emotion has frayed the fabric of the *Shroud* thin. Here the *Shadowlands* and *Skinlands* almost overlap; here are the places that the living superstitiously call "haunted."

It is the darker emotions that wear through the *Shroud* most easily, though strong love, hope or courage will do so as well. Even so, *Haunts* tend to be found in places of despair, desperation or sorrow. Graveyards, slums, battlefields, abandoned houses, prisons, nightclubs, lonely crossroads and treacherous curves all frequently serve as *Haunts*.



Most Haunts are vigorously settled by a wraith or Circle of wraiths and defended to the utmost; as wellsprings of emotion and places of shelter, Haunts are hotly sought after. Visitors are usually not welcome. Other wraiths prefer to use their Arcanoi to wear on the Shroud, creating Haunts in places of their choosing. Recently, some enterprising ghosts have experimented with taking their Haunts online, though whether or not they've succeeded is a matter of conjecture.

To the living, Haunts are most often grim and depressing places. No one without severe mental disorders or a depressed poet's mentality would voluntarily live in a Haunt. Those few who try are generally driven out immediately, unless the wraiths who own the Haunt prefer to keep the living around as emotional fodder for their Passions.

Most Domains are centered around a single Haunt, and the more potent the Haunt is, generally the larger the Domain around it. If pressed, wraiths will give up every inch of the rest of their Domain before they give up their Haunt. After all, it is both strength and shelter.

## Stygia

The Eternal Necropolis of *Stygia* is the collection of all of the dead dreams of empire mankind has ever wrought. As Carthage and Gomorrah fell, their ghostly ruins were gathered and brought to construct *Stygia's* courts and towers. When Rome and Byzantium were sacked, their wreckage was salvaged and brought to build *Stygia* ever higher. Jerusalem and Paris, London and New York, every Imperial City that ever was is echoed in the architecture of the capital of the dead. Built upon the seven hills of the Isle of Sorrows, *Stygia* the city and *Stygia* the empire have become synonymous.

Seen from the bottom, *Stygia* is a claustrophobic nightmare. The weight of ages has pressed down upon the oldest buildings, and Maelstrom and invasion have taken their toll. Here the streets are cramped and dirty, and the overhanging edifices are crushed beneath the weight of newer constructions. Only the poor and the desperate can be found here, amidst the wreckage of centuries.

The higher one goes in the city, however, the more astonishing the view becomes. Newer buildings and better-preserved treasures of antiquity are the norm. The Library of Alexandria can be found here, and the shining palaces of the Deathlords. This is where the wealthy and powerful among the dead dwell, in stunning contrast to the despair in the labyrinthine warrens below.

Bounded by a sea wall crafted from thousands of souls, the city is home to millions more. The walls cannot contain all who wish to dwell in *Stygia*, and so bridges have been cast across the waters of the Sunless Sea to the Iron Hills, islands that rise from the waters nearby. Secondary colonies and edifices occupy these smaller isles, but even in the face of such overcrowding, some buildings in *Stygia* stand empty. The Great Temple of the Fishers, for example, and Charon's Onyx Tower are abandoned; even among the dead they have unpleasant reputations.

## The Tempest

To say only that the Tempest is the eternal storm of the Deadlands is to be guilty of gross understatement. Eternally raging with a fury unthinkable in the lands of the living, the Tempest is the raw fury that underlies all of the Shadowlands, separating them from *Stygia* and the Far Shores. Inhabited by shrieking Spectres and other, fouler things, it is a roiling sea of chaos within which time, space and distance cease to have meaning.

The landscape of the Tempest is constantly changing; rains of broken glass, noxious gases, eruptions of boiling pitch and worse are common sights to travelers. Fragments of realities and memories are constantly inflicted upon those who journey through the endless storm, as each wraith who passes through the Tempest leaves something of himself behind. Even those souls who plummet directly to Oblivion upon death leave a memory, a relic or a feeling floating in the storm, to be encountered by an unwary traveler at some later date.

Wraiths passing through the Tempest are often given revelations, many of them unwanted. Visions of Fetters or other lives, premonitions, glimpses of the Skinlands and other scenes will intrude on a wraith's consciousness as she navigates the darkness.

There are a few islands and strands of stability within the Tempest. The former include *Stygia* itself, as well as the myriad Far Shores and the other realms of the dead. Narrower paths of relative safety are called Byways, and they stretch between realms in the Underworld. Some connect disparate locations in the Shadowlands while others stretch to *Stygia* or even the Far Shores. Appearing as rivers or roads wending incongruously through the storm, Byways offer relatively safe and fast travel. The greatest Byway is known as the River of Death, which supposedly winds its way across all of the Shadowlands and even to the gates of the Labyrinth itself.

At the heart of the Tempest is the Spectre-haunted maze of the Labyrinth, which according to legend was gnawed from nothingness by Malfeans at the dawn of time. At the very core of the Labyrinth, far worse than any Minotaur could be, is the mouth of the Void, Oblivion's embodiment. Few wraiths have gazed upon it and returned to tell others of their impressions.

## Nihils

Reality is not solid, particularly not in the Shadowlands. The Shadowlands are constantly splintering and breaking, and where the fabric of this part of the Underworld tears, the Tempest bubbles through.

By strict definition, a *Nihil* is a rip in the Shadowlands, allowing access to the Tempest beneath. Most Nihils are one-time-only events, though many open and close on regular cycles. Some few are permanently open; these are often heavily guarded by whichever wraiths dwell nearby. Just as a *Nihil* allows a wraith access to the Tempest from the Shadowlands, it can allow dwellers in the Tempest a way out. Indeed,

## The River of Death

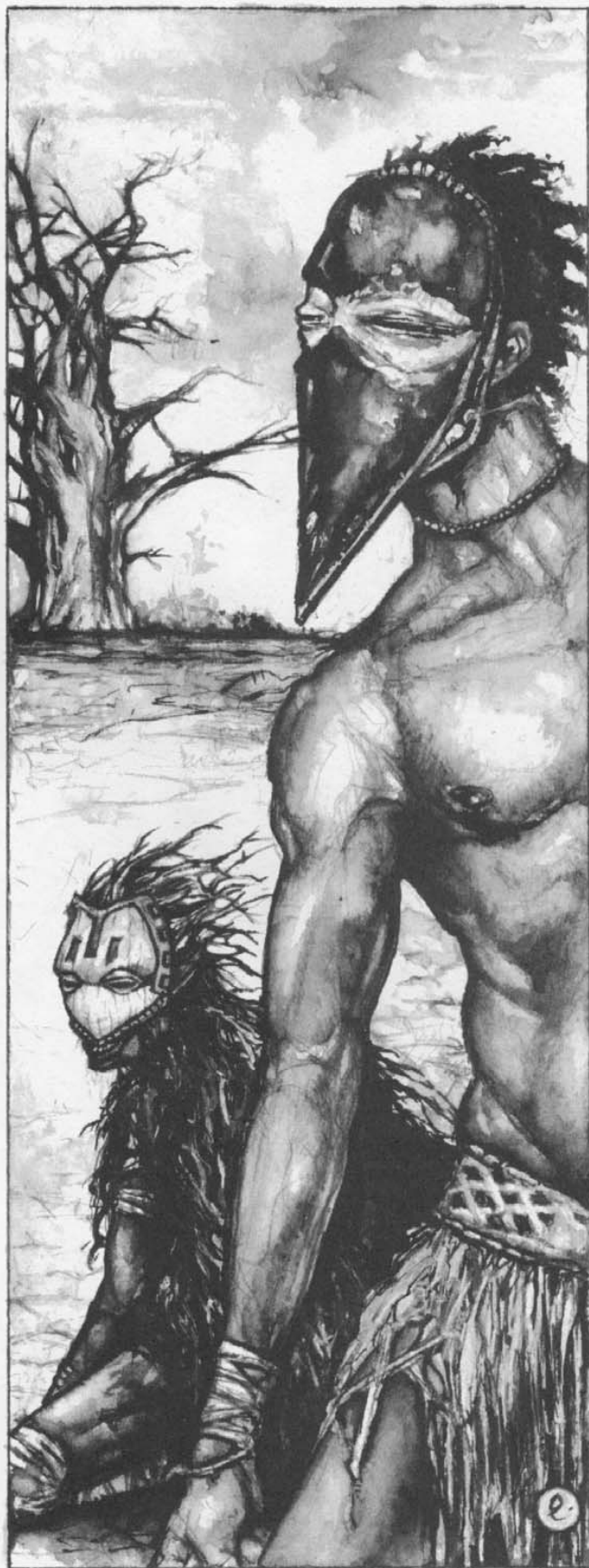
The greatest of all Byways, the River of Death supposedly touches on every point in the Shadowlands. The River of Death has many names, but most denizens of the Underworld simply call it "The River." Wide and meandering in places, rough and rock-strewn in others, it leads inevitably through the Tempest to the harbor of Stygia. Many Renegade and Heretic groups have made their homes on the River, whether along its banks or on the islands that dot its length. Spectres have also been known to lurk along the River, in greater and greater numbers in recent years. Legionnaires in longboats and ghostly triremes patrol the River's length looking for outlaws such as these, but even the most hardened Centurions will defer to the River's true guardians: the Ferryman. More of these enigmatic travelers' rafts can be seen on the River than anywhere else in the Underworld.

Doomslayers do some of their best hunting at the mouths of Nihils in the Tempest; Spectres tend to cluster around such openings in a sort of perverse fishing expedition for prey.

Nihils appear as pools of inky blackness in the Shadowlands. They can open anywhere: elevator shafts, beneath rocking chairs, in cobwebbed corners or in the middle of busy streets. Usually they are no more than a few inches across, but some can be feet or even yards in diameter. Rumors as to the strange powers of Nihils abound; some say that staring into them causes hallucinations or strengthens the Shadow. After all, the warning against gazing into the abyss was issued long ago, in the lands of the living....

## Maelstroms

Seen by some as the fist of Oblivion, *Maelstroms* are monsoons that boil up from the Tempest and wreak havoc throughout the rest of the Underworld. These titanic storms also carry within them hordes of Spectres who use the shrieking winds as a sort of monstrous steed, riding them in order to make war upon the Citadels and Necropoli. Maelstroms sweep away all that lies before them: unprotected wraiths, isolated Haunts, everything. Citadels and strong Haunts can withstand the assault, but pity any wraith caught outside the Citadel gates when the winds from the Tempest start to howl.





## The Veinous Stair

Not quite a Nihil, the Veinous Stair descends directly from the heart of Stygia to the depths of the Labyrinth. Named for the pulsing threads of bloody pink stone that writhe within its black walls, the Stair has been descended to its bottom only once, by Charon, when he retrieved Nhudri from imprisonment at Spectral hands. Work-gangs of Thralls labor on the Stair, mining death ore for use in the forges, but rarely has anyone dared to go more than halfway down. Who carved it, and to what purpose, remains a mystery.

Being caught in a Maelstrom is akin to traveling through the worst sections of the Tempest. Soot fills the air, and a wraith's very Corpus is abraded away by the sandblasting force of the winds. All is dark, if not pitch-black, and there is a constant moaning cacophony from the beasts riding the storm. In many ways, the Spectres *are* the storm, for until they are defeated, the Maelstrom will not recede.

Skinlands disasters and Maelstroms have a peculiar cause-and-effect relationship. One will inevitably cause the other, though which comes first is open to debate. The detonation of the atomic device over Hiroshima triggered the Fifth Great Maelstrom, but a smaller Maelstrom can herald an incipient catastrophe in the Skinlands, such as a building's collapse, a hurricane or an earthquake.

Maelstroms are regarded as the grand units of time in Stygian society. As the hours are counted by the tides of the Sunless Sea, the years are numbered from the last Great Maelstrom. It is currently slightly more than a half-century since the Fifth Great Maelstrom, and older wraiths have noted with concern that the time between these monstrous storms is decreasing.

## The Far Shores

It is said that far beyond the mists of the Sea of Sorrows lie thousands upon thousands of isolated island realms collectively known as the *Far Shores*. Stygian history records that, long ago, the Ferrymen known as the *Shining Ones* laid down Byways leading to each of these realms. Hope and faith drew wraiths to these isles and since have continued to entice them, for these lands promise refuge from Oblivion as they model themselves on the Hells and Heavens, Sukhavatis, Edens, Zions and Valhallas of countless cultures. The afterlives created for, and perhaps by, lost souls can be found in every shape and size throughout the Far Shores.

Ultimately banking on the hope of release from suffering, the beacons of Paradise, Nirvana, Purgatory and thousands of other faith-based spiritual conditions shine brightly in the stories of most of the few travelers who have sojourned there and back. These stories can be heard not only in Stygia, but in other deathlands as well, for the Byways to the Far Shores originate in the death realms of all peoples.

Not all the tales inspire confidence in the good intentions of the Far Shores' leadership, however. Stories abound of tyrannical leaders demanding unquestioning obedience of the faithful and tormenting the "ungodly"; of forsaken wraiths manacled to each other, locked up and long forgotten in tiny antechambers beneath the ground, or thrown into the maws of unnamable creatures as sacrifices to the "gods"; of sadistic fanatics who encase themselves and others in coffins of white-hot soulsteel to purge their iniquities; and of seas choked with Spectre-harried aspirants waiting to be admitted to their chosen island. Demonic beings, probably but not certainly Moliated wraiths, torture victims by thrusting Stygian steel stakes up through their spines and planting them in pools of acid that bubble up from unknown places within the Tempest. For many Stygian wraiths, even the bright promise of Transcendence is not enough to entice them to these places.

Thousands upon thousands of wraiths inhabit the Far Shores realms, often giving rise to the horrific stories of cruel overcrowding and complete loss of individuality that travelers tell on the other side of the Sunless Sea. But the picture is not all bleak. Breathtakingly beautiful island paradises host legions of pearly-limned Angelics and angel-like wraiths. Usually, these beings shelter the travel-worn from the Tempest, heal them and enjoin them to remain. More rarely, they adopt weary travelers and teach them the gentle ways of hope and Transcendence.

Ferrymen, Spectres, soul-pirates, slavers and strange creatures from other realms also make their appearances throughout the Far Shores isles. It is said that many Ferrymen still usher the souls of the dead to their just destinations among the Far Shores, and that some of the isles are nothing more than the Ferrymen's way stations. Some hold that the Shining Ones who forged the original Byways to the realms now rule many of the isles.

Tales of Spectres taking over the fanatical leadership of certain realms modeled after the various hells — and even those modeled after the paradises — may indeed be true, as are the rumors of a brisk slave trade conducted by soul-pirates under the guise of religious recruitment and proselytizing. Soul-pirates often use Stygian Reapers as middlemen in obtaining Lemures for sale as "converts" to various Far Shores realms.

## Necropoli

In all human cities there's one part of town that, when mentioned by the living, inevitably produces the reaction, "You don't want to go *there*." Odds are, that's the local Necropolis.

A *Necropolis* is a city of the dead, a place where wraiths gather and Nihilis open more frequently. In the Shadowlands, it is a teeming, bustling center of activity, as most of a city's wraiths can be found here at some point during the day — or

night. To the living, however, the streets and crumbling buildings that correspond to the Necropolis are unwelcoming and desolate, spotted with abandoned lots and filled with the cries of scuttling rats and other vermin.

Most Necropoli can be considered colonies of Stygia, and are part and parcel of the Hierarchy. Centered on a Citadel and divvied up into Domains, Hierarchy Necropoli are relatively stable places for the dead to dwell. Renegade Necropoli, on the other hand, tend to be more along rough-and-tumble lines, where any service can be purchased (for a price) and unwary wraiths always run the risk of being enslaved or annihilated.

## Domains

A *Domain* is defined as the amount of territory a wraith or a Circle of wraiths can control. The Hierarchy does officially parcel out Domains in Necropoli, often marking the borders of the territories controlled by the local Citadel with immobilized Thralls Moliated into flaming torches.

## The Other Deadlands

Stygia, also known as the Dark Kingdom of Iron, is hardly the only final destination for the Restless Dead. Other cultures besides the Western have afterlives and Underworlds, each as potent and real as Stygia. Generically named "Dark Kingdoms," these other realms are many and varied, and most are so widely separated from Stygia that few Western wraiths even know of their existence.

Of those that are known, the Jade Empire (known as the Yellow Springs to its inhabitants) and the Dark Kingdom of Ivory (a.k.a. the Bush of Ghosts) are the ones with which the Hierarchy has the most dealings. Each has made war on and treaties with Stygia in the past, usually over the disposition of souls taken from their ancestral lands.

Hidden within the Tempest are the other Deadlands: Karta, the Sea that Knows No Sun, Swar and more. Each reflects the nature of death for a different culture, and the laws that govern ghostly existence in Stygia may function differently there, if they function at all.

## The Midnight Express

Screaming through the blackness of the Stygian night, the Midnight Express is a conveyance like none other in the Underworld. Created by the Ferryman from the Artifact of a monstrous steam locomotive, the Express is composed of hundreds of linked railroad cars, most crowded with wraiths seeking passage, employment or just a place to do business away from prying eyes. The cars themselves are pulled from a cross-section of locomotive history, their only common bond being that each was destroyed, violently.

The Express, led by Engine #13, pulls into each of its stops at precisely midnight local time, though how it manages to do this at multiple stops in the same time zone is beyond most wraiths' comprehension. Not all of the cars are "there" at each stop; a wraith wishing to disembark at the New York Necropolis may find to his horror that his car never arrives there, even while the next car in the train is boarding ghostly passengers at Grand Central Station. The train does stop all over Hierarchy territory, as well as in Singapore and the Tempest. Special stops can be requested, but there is a fee for such.

Unofficially, most wraiths claim the area around their Haunts as their Domain (or "turf"), and can back it up *de facto* if not *de jure*. While many of these Renegade Domains aren't recognized by the local Hierarchy authorities, most Legionnaires have the intelligence to go into them in force, or not at all.

## Citadels

The largest and strongest Haunt in a Necropolis is called a *Citadel*, and it serves much the same function as a medieval castle. Strong points of defense against invasion and centers of commerce, Citadels are the hearts and minds of their Necropoli. While most Citadels don't actually appear as castles or fortresses, they still stand as barriers against assaults by Spectres, Renegades or Heretics.

Usually a Citadel will correspond in the Skinlands to an abandoned warehouse or series of buildings, a strip mine, a dump or some other expanse devoted to decay and destruction. In the Shadowlands, however, Citadels are often fortified with relic beams and timbers, or reinforced with soulforged buttresses and bricks. Every Citadel is constructed with Maelstroms in mind; a Citadel that can't survive the fury of the storm is no Citadel at all.

Most Citadels are held by the Hierarchy, and have a strong presence from one or more of the Legions' military side. Theoretically, Hierarchy Citadels are exclusive to Hierarchy citizens, but in the Shadowlands hard-and-fast rules can get conveniently blurry. After all, every hand that can hold a weapon is welcome when the Spectres come calling. Renegade and Heretic wraiths are often allowed in Citadel gates for purposes of commerce, if someone can be found to vouch for them.

There are Renegade and Heretic Citadels scattered throughout the Shadowlands. Most are captured Hierarchy Citadels refurbished by their new owners; others are raised in areas so desolate and barren that it's not worth the Hierarchy's effort to come knock them down.

## The Restless

*My head is heavy, my limbs are weary,  
And it is not life that makes me move.*

— Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Death in Life: A Fragment"



Passion stronger than death and perils that make death seem tame: these are the basics of life after death. In many ways it is an existence of extremes. Ultimate destruction is the price of failure, but eternal love and beatific Transcendence are real possibilities as well.

Life as a wraith, such as it is, can be a compendium of horrors. Visions of the living are marred by death's touch, and even the freshest bloom appears mottled by corruption. The Underworld itself is dreary and deadening to the senses; bright color is rare here, save for the ravenous flame of soulfire crystals or the blazing green of a Solicitor's eye. Nor does all of this go unremarked upon, for the Shadow is omnipresent and always willing to make a bad situation worse. Oblivion threatens without and within, and many wraiths find it easiest simply to give up the struggle and let the Void claim them.

On the other hand, there are those who grasp the opportunity of a second existence. Seeing themselves as given a second chance to correct their mistakes in life, or perhaps just too stubborn to give in to Oblivion, these wraiths make the most of their unives.

Friendship and love forever are often promised in the Skinlands, but in the Shadowlands they can become real. Power and riches can be gathered by wraiths ruthless enough to make those ascents; spiritual transformation is sought by many as well. The lands of the dead beckon some to explore, as do the new realms of Tempest and Far Shores that no mortals ever see. Gifted with the powers called Arcanoi, Restless can spend centuries honing their skills, or using them to interact with the living. Many wraiths frequently cross the Shroud for a multitude of reasons. There are those who seek to finish business left unattended in life, or to protect those things and people that they love. Other wraiths simply meddle, playing poltergeist or invading mortals' dreams for the sheer thrill of it. Possession of the Quick, vicariously sampling their joys and pleasures, is a popular



pastime, while vengeance from beyond the grave is also something that the Restless practice — if they can get away with it. And there is always the struggle against Oblivion and its minions, a fight that some believe is for the sake of all creation. For wraiths such as these, death is only the beginning.

## Metaphysics

Wraiths are caught in a tightrope existence between life and Oblivion, and their perspective reflects this. Just a Shroud's thickness away from the lands of the living, they are nonetheless eternally separated from those they loved. On the other hand, each action, thought and word is a reaction against Oblivion's steady pull, shouting defiance into the Void. It is this balance between life and worse than death that the Restless maintain, for as long as they are able.

Touching the Skinlands is something that most wraiths aspire to, no matter what the *Dictum Mortuum* commands. Doing so, though, is not always easy, as the nature of Restless existence makes reaching across the Shroud difficult. Objects in the Skinlands have an odd sort of solidity to them as far as wraiths are concerned; it is nearly impossible for a wraith to move a real-world object, but for a minimal investment of Corpus, she can simply disincorporate and walk right through it. For example, if a wraith attempts to push on the front of a parked car, her touch will have no effect, and she will find herself unable to affect the car in the slightest. On the other hand, if the car's parking brake

suddenly slips and the car rolls forward, it will proceed to pass (nearly) harmlessly through her as she disincorporates.

Of course, wraiths have long since discovered ways to enforce their wills more concretely on the real world. Certain Arcanoi allow Restless to affect or even enter the Skinlands; hence legends of poltergeists, apparitions and ghosts in the machine. All of these phenomena can be traced to wraiths extending their abilities across the Shroud.

While very little in the real world can inflict lasting damage on a wraith's Corpus, in the Underworld it's a very different matter. Objects existing in the Skinlands can be passed through or bounced off of, while things existing in the Underworld (relics, Artifacts, other wraiths, etc.) are quite solid to any ghost. A steel blade can whirr through the Corpus of a wraith without causing lasting harm; a soulsteel sword in the hands of a Legionnaire, on the other hand, can cleft a ghost neatly in twain. Stygian steel (or other soulforged metals), Artifacts, relics, other wraiths, Spectres, the dwellers in the Tempest, even the spirit magic of the living: all of these can affect a wraith concretely.

## Passions and Fetters

Passions and Fetters are the things that define and maintain a wraith's existence. On a basic level, Fetters are the things in the Skinlands that a wraith cares about most deeply, while Passions are the things that a wraith most wants to do.

*Fetters* are what tie a wraith to the Shadowlands, giving him anchors in the Skinlands that he can use to resist Oblivion's pull. It is in a Fetter that a wraith can Slumber and heal, and often it is easier for a wraith to use his Arcanoi near his Fetters. On the other hand, if a Fetter is damaged or destroyed, the effects can be catastrophic. Furthermore, wraiths without Fetters cannot stay long in the Shadowlands, and so every wraith will strive his utmost to guard his Fetters.

*Passions* are those dictates which a wraith follows in death, the emotional imperatives that drive and fuel his existence. At its core each Passion has an emotion; by following his Passion's dictates (or by being in the presence of the feeling at the Passion's heart), a wraith garners the energy called *Pathos*. Without *Pathos*, a wraith's Arcanoi will not function, nor will he be able to heal. Preventing a wraith from tending his Passions and Fetters, then, is perhaps the worst slow torment that can be inflicted on a wraith.

## Status and Society

*Now that I am dead*

*My agent finally said*

*He wanted to have lunch with me.*

—French, Frith, Kaiser & Thompson, "Now That I Am Dead"

It is almost sadly predictable to note that the dead, having centuries to ponder the dilemmas and grand mysteries of existence, instead throw themselves into rigid social structures, and spend a huge portion of their unlives making sure

that the social niceties are properly maintained. Status in the Restless community is based upon power, of course, but also age, expertise in the Arcanoi, and freedom of movement. An aged and potent wraith who maintains his Fetters and can therefore return to the Shadowlands from Stygia is accorded more respect than a wraith of similar power and vintage whose Fetters are long since dust.

As the decades pass, a wraith can gradually acquire more status among the dead, and social mobility between "ranks" is reasonably common. On the other hand, the intense cliqueishness of some wraiths (particularly the hidebound Gaunts of Stygia) bears a stunning resemblance to the social dynamics of a middle school recess, with wraiths refusing to deal with other wraiths who aren't of the right age, power or Arcanos specialty. It is the Stygian Gaunts in particular who maintain the rigid social distinctions between Domem and Gaunt, Enfant and Lemure, and Thralls and everyone else.

## Social Status

**Enfants** — Enfants are the recently deceased who have not yet acclimated to the Shadowlands. They are usually between a few days and a few weeks old, and are covered by a Caul of plasm which keeps them in a semi-dreamlike state, unable to see or hear fully what is going on. This Caul also obscures the Enfant's thoughts and perceptions, so that her first days of afterlife are a somnolent, confused haze of blurred



images and half-remembered voices. Until her Caul is removed by another wraith, the *Enfant* will be unable to see, hear or think clearly. A lucky few wraiths manage somehow to remove their own Cauls, generally those *Enfants* who possessed extraordinary willpower in their mortal days.

**Drones** — These are the wraiths most *Skinlanders* see at the sites of hauntings. Without sentence or willpower, their mortal identities lost to them, *Drones* are trapped at the site of their death. They are unable to do more than endlessly reenact their demise, robotically repeating their last moments among the living. A *Haunt* populated by *Drones* is considered a gold mine by *Reapers*.

**Thralls** — These are among the most miserable wraiths in existence, held in servitude to other wraiths. Some have been captured and forced into slavery, while others have been sentenced to *Thrall*dom for crimes real or imagined. A few wraiths have voluntarily sold themselves into *Thrall*dom as a means of paying their debts. Although such indenture should have only a limited duration, many *Thralls* discover to their dismay that this clause in their contracts is frequently ignored....

*Thralls* are usually manacled and may not travel freely without their masters. Though some variants on the Code of *Charon* forbid the mistreatment of *Thralls*, such abuses are rarely reported or punished. A *Thrall's* *Shadow* often takes sadistic pleasure at the torment the *Psyche* endures, and far more *Thralls* are lost to *Harrowings* and the machinations of the *Shadow* than are smelted down or freed.

**Lemures** — These are wraiths whose Cauls have been removed and who still retain most of their *Fetters*. They are generally quite young in terms of their afterlives, and are considered to be immature and undisciplined by older, established wraiths. *Lemures* make up the majority of wraiths encountered in the *Shadowlands*, as most wish to stay close to their *Fetters*.

**Domems** — *Domems* are wraiths who can no longer travel freely to the *Shadowlands*, and thus are restricted to *Stygia* and other such places of safety within the *Tempest*. Although most *Domems* are older wraiths, a number of them might just as well be *Lemures*, save for the fact that their *Fetters* no longer exist. A wraith deceased only five years whose *Fetters* are all destroyed in a fire will instantly acquire *Domem* status, as she will no longer be able to maintain a presence in the *Shadowlands*. On the other hand, these "whippersnapper" *Domems* are hardly accorded the respect granted their elders.

The usual recourse of many *Domems* is to travel to *Stygia* to work in the ever-expanding *Hierarchy* bureaucracy. *Renegades* and *Heretics* don't have this option, and their transition to *Domem*hood can lead them anywhere from a full-time search for *Transcendence* to the forges. "*Domemizing*" is a popular tactic among certain *Renegade* gangs, whereby they rid local *Necropoli* of their most competent or vicious officers by targeting and destroying their *Fetters*.

**Gaunts** — Old and powerful wraiths, *Gaunts* have managed to maintain their *Fetters*, allowing them to travel into

the *Shadowlands*. The vast majority of *Gaunts* have also journeyed deeply into the *Tempest*, possibly to the *Far Shores* or even the *Labyrinth*. Feared and respected for their knowledge and power, *Gaunts* wield influence in the society of the dead disproportionate to their numbers.

**Deathlords** — This powerful body of wraiths was originally created to become *Charon's* Senate, following the custom of the Roman Republic. With the recreation of *Stygia* as an Empire, each *Deathlord* was given a *Legion* as his charge and a throne from which to govern his subjects. Without *Charon's* iron guidance, however, the *Deathlords* have fallen into disorder, using their *Legions* to contest with each other as each strives to declare himself the new *Imperator* of *Stygia*. As the *Deathlord* with the most souls is naturally the most powerful, the co-rulers of *Stygia* frequently meddle in mortal affairs to encourage greater numbers of deaths in whatever manners will swell the ranks of their own *Legions*.

## Reapers

A *Reaper* can be an *Enfant's* best friend or worst nightmare, depending upon circumstance. Technically, a *Reaper* is a wraith who cuts another wraith free from his Caul, facilitating his "birth" into the *Shadowlands*. Many are kind souls looking to ease the transition that new *Enfants* are making; others are recruiters for *Heretic* cults, *Hierarchy* *Legions* or *Renegade* gangs. These sorts of professional (and amateur) *Reapers* tend to treat their charges well, indoctrinating them in the laws of the Underworld and helping them adjust to existence beyond the *Shroud*.

Other *Reapers* are less kind. *Slavemasters* of the dead, they *Reap* new souls in order to sell them off to the highest bidder in the markets of the *Necropoli*. Souls are the currency and raw materials of the Underworld, and for many *slavetaking* *Reapers*, harvesting *Enfants* and throwing them into chains is strictly a business proposition.


*Reapers* are often found jockeying for position in places like hospitals, prisons or retirement homes. More enterprising ones like to ride ambulances, while those gifted with the *Arcanos Fatalism* show an uncanny knack for being in the right place at the right time. *Reapers* will constantly seek to establish claims in places that yield rich troves of souls, and when such wealth is at stake, violence is hardly uncommon.

## Grave Goods

*You earth, may you now keep the earls' possessions, now that heroes could not.*

— *Beowulf*, S.A.J. Bradley, trans.

Death can't remove the innate human hunger for material possessions. Just because wraiths can't touch the objects they once owned doesn't mean that they no longer want to, nor does it prevent them from attempting to acquire wealth on the other side of the *Shroud*. Even the dead have a thriving economy, though mutual funds and stock options play no



part in it. Rather, it is an economy of souls and relics, the two things which can be held in the Underworld.

The vast majority of objects in the Underworld are made from souls by one of two processes. Unlucky wraiths — Thralls, criminals, Spectres and those who are simply unfortunate — are sent to the soulforgers, to be hammered into the coins, blades and other implements of night-to-night existence. Sometimes these smelted souls are mixed with what has been termed “death ore,” material mined from the Veinous Stair, creating specialized materials for construction or warfare.

Other victims are given to those skilled in the Arcanos Moliata, to be crafted into torches, furniture or other necessities of afterlife existence. The breakdown between the two forms of transformation is simple; anything that would have been metal or stone in the Skinlands is replaced by soulforged objects, while things whose Skinlands equivalents are wood or softer materials are made through Moliata.

There is another classification of objects in the Underworld: *relics*. These are memories of things, brought across the Shroud once their Skinlands originals have been destroyed. The stronger the emotion a relic generated before its destruction (a much-loved stuffed unicorn, a despised leather belt used for disciplinary purposes), the more perfectly it translates to the Shadowlands after it finally crumbles to dust. Most buildings in the Shadowlands are in fact relics; the remainder are those constructed from soulforged materials.

Some wraiths of recent vintage are horrified by the nature of the Underworld economy, but in the long run most of their moral objections are replaced by a sort of pragmatism. There are multiple moral justifications for this sort of ultimate objectification of souls: every soul forged is another one that can't spiral down to Oblivion; many soulforgers believe they hammer the Shadows right out of their materials; and so on, but in the end it becomes a matter of convenience and desire.

## Souls

Souls are where it begins and ends in the Underworld. Souls are wealth, souls are resources, and souls are what feeds Oblivion. In order to prevent the last, the Deathlords (like Charon before them) have decreed that weak, Passionless and counterproductive souls be smelted down. A wraith who has become a Byway's paving stone is in no danger of strengthening Oblivion; a Renegade who is transformed into a cushion won't ambush Legionnaires and help send them to Harrowings. Pointing out the fact that the soul-trade also makes certain wraiths very wealthy indeed is considered *déclassé*.

## Relics

A relic is a memory given shape in the Underworld. The only objects across the Shroud not formed from souls, relics are those things that inspired great passion in life, and which linger on in death. No longer in existence in the Skinlands, relics can survive for centuries in the Shadowlands.

Just because something is destroyed in the Skinlands doesn't mean that it automatically becomes a relic. In order to cross the Shroud, an object must have inspired strong emotion before its destruction. Love, hate, fear: the specifics are immaterial. Stuffed animals and battered baseball gloves are among the most common relics, but so are knives, handcuffs and buildings like schoolhouses and prisons. It is the strength of emotion that an object invoked that dictates whether or not it will return as a relic even after its Skinlands form has been destroyed or buried.

The creation of a relic is a simple process: An item that provoked strong feeling is destroyed or buried. Things that didn't inspire one way or the other don't become relics; for example, there are very few relic tuna fish cans beyond the Shroud. An object that does become a relic reappears in the Shadowlands after its destruction or burial, usually on the precise spot where it met its maker. Often relics will materialize in the Underworld at the same time their owner does, almost as if they have been waiting for him to come along and take possession of them. It is customary to make a gift of a relic to one's Reaper upon Harvesting, particularly if said Reaper is kind enough to refrain from selling the *Enfant* into slavery.

Even relics fade away, eventually. The stronger the well-spring of care that created them, the longer they last and the more solid they are. In the end, though, all but the most potent lose their solidity and slowly dissolve, unlamented.

Most relics aren't “useful” in the sense of serving as Shadowlands survival equipment. Little things that meant a great deal to someone — a signed copy of *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, a favorite locket, a teddy bear treasured in youth and saved for one's own children — make up the vast majority of relics found in the Shadowlands. Relics of this sort tend not to last more than a few decades before fading.

More potent relics, such as working computers or firearms, functioning automobiles and the like, are much rarer and often have Underworld existences measured in under 10 years. Dismissively labeled “toys” by Gaunts and Domems, relics like this need investments of Pathos before they can function as they did in the Skinlands. A relic computer that hasn't been fueled with Pathos is a rectangular box; a relic computer that's been loaded with juice can work wonders.

There are also relics of legendary status, which have lasted centuries or even millennia. Brutus' dagger and da Vinci's doodle pad are examples of things that have inspired the necessary passion to maintain their existences through the centuries.

## Soulforged Goods

The forges of the Artificers are always hungry for more souls. There are a great many items desperately needed by Stygian society that don't appear in quantity as relics — swords, cinderblocks and the like — and which must be manufactured somehow. The only resource that fits the bill, unfortunately, is the plasm that makes up the Corpora of the dead.

*Soulforging* itself consists of draining a wraith of as much sentience and will as possible without tempting Oblivion, then holding her over crystals of soulfire until her Corpus becomes soft and malleable. At this point, an Artificer will set to work with his hammer, pounding the unfortunate wraith into an entirely new form. Skilled soulforgers (usually those associated with the Artificers' Guild) can create works of amazing delicacy and beauty, as well as the girders and breastplates necessary to fend off Oblivion's assaults.

Occasionally soulforgers will alloy raw soul-stuff with the death ore mined from the Veinous Stair or salvaged from the Tempest. *Stygian steel*, consisting of plasm, death ore and supposedly scrapings from the Labyrinth's walls, is by far the strongest substance known in the Underworld. Other mixtures have different properties, depending upon their ingredients. *Soulsteel* is the slang term for smelted wraiths uncut with any other substance, and this is by far the most common product of the forges.

Soulforged items tend to break down much more slowly than relics, having a permanency and solidity to them that is much valued in the Underworld. On the other hand, many wraiths claim to hear their smelted goods moaning or weeping softly, and a few have gone so far as to swear that they've heard their precious Artifacts speak.

The soulforging process is irreversible, and it is fervently prayed by most wraiths that a smelted soul's consciousness is destroyed forever by the process.

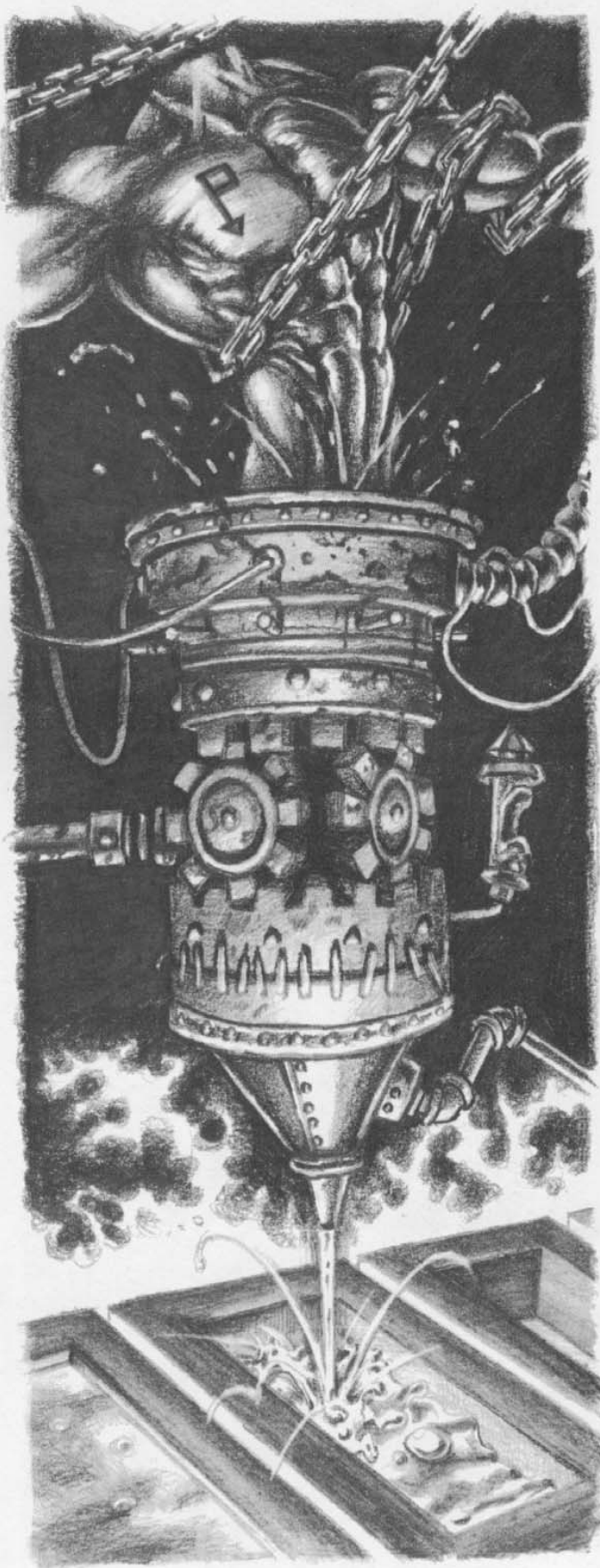
## Artifacts

*Artifact* is a catch-all term for items in the Underworld that possess special powers. Certain relics are also Artifacts, but many Artifacts are created across the Shroud. Exceedingly rare and highly sought after, powerful Artifacts are treasures beyond price in the lands of the dead.

Relic Artifacts are difficult to create and more difficult to hang onto. The passion of multitudes of Quick is needed to empower a relic thus; also needed is the belief on the part of those mortals that the object is in some way special. Then the relic-to-be must be destroyed, freeing it to cross the Shroud and manifest in the Underworld. Excalibur, the Grail, the Ark of the Covenant and the original Mme. Guillotine would all be examples of relic Artifacts. Unlike most relics, relic Artifacts never fade away.

The other variety of Artifact is the soulforged sort. Items crafted in the Artificers' forges and invested with Arcanoi, these Artifacts are more common but only relatively so. Masks of office and Anacreons' swords are often Artifacts of this kind. Because of the great personal cost of making them, soulforgers are very particular as to whom they craft Artifacts for.

Technically, any soulforged item is an Artifact, but no one ever refers to a soulforged brick as an Artifact. Only unique and powerful items are actually labeled "Artifacts."





## Standard Operating Equipment

There are certain items with which every Stygian wraith is familiar. These are the basic tools of existence across the Shroud, and any *Enfant* who evades the Reapers will learn about them in short order.

- **Weapons** — For reasons of economy, it is the classic weapons that work best in the Underworld. Relic guns require an investment of *Pathos*, and relic ammunition is in short supply, so most wraiths fall back on swords, knives and the like. It is simple to craft blades and armor from souls, and many wraiths frankly prefer the panache that comes from having a sword at their hip or a dagger in their boot.

Ornate weapons are seen as status symbols, and relic or Artifact blades are highly prized. Small wars between *Necropoli* have been known to start over the disposition of legendary Artifact weapons.

- **Oboli** — The base unit of Stygian currency is the obolus. Forged from a single soul, an obolus is the only legal tender in Stygian territory. Most *Renegade* and *Heretic* bands use them as well, out of a lack of an acceptable alternative.

Oboli theoretically can be chopped up for change, but bits of a single obolus that are separated tend to re-form as soon as they can. Scattered bits of random change, on the other hand, never coalesce. Certain more sensitive wraiths have given up on the notion of half-oboli entirely as they ponder the effect of being quartered on smelted souls.

- **Manacles and Chains** — The well-dressed Reaper's tools of the trade, chains and manacles are used in a variety of ways throughout the Underworld. Their primary function, of course, is to bind and imprison wraiths. Many chains are empowered to prevent bound wraiths from using their *Arcanoi* to escape; others are used as fashion accessories by *debonair Domems*. Few objects in the Underworld are as thoroughly loathed as Stygian chains; all *Renegades*, almost every *Heretic* and even a great many Stygian *Lemures* see them as reminders of the ever-hungry forges.

- **Masks** — Extremely fashionable among many wraiths, soulforged masks serve to depersonalize offices. Useful as a way to command allegiance to an office as opposed to an office-holder, the masks of *Hierarchy* officials are passed along to successive holders of posts. Even the *Deathlords* are known only by the masks and other badges of their offices; it matters little which wraith wears them.

## Deathmarks

Centuries ago, the *Ferrymen* noticed that certain wraiths arrived in the *Shadowlands* with strange markings on their *Corpora*, visible through the use of the *Arcanos Fatalism*. These marks were classified according to the patterns they made, and there seemed to be several varieties. Those who could see them suggested they were like birthmarks on the living, although the resemblance ended there. Some marks seemed to be carved into the very *Corpus* of the affected wraiths, some were raised slightly like scars, and others were merely changes in surface coloration, like tattoos.

Originally there seemed to be a distinct correlation between the patterning and the type of person the wraith had been in life, and the Ferryman saw this as being the best indicator of how each wraith should seek Transcendence. Time and circumstance, though, have conspired to change this dramatically. With the banishment of the Heretics and the denouncement of Transcendence as a falsehood, the original purpose of the marks was ignored in favor of classifying wraiths according to the manner of their deaths. Now wraiths are branded with deathmarks as a means of marking them the property of a particular Deathlord. Some Restless have taken this to extremes, Moliating themselves in elaborate patterns to proclaim their loyalty to their masters and mistresses.

## The Society of the Dead

*'Bye, my foolish love. Hear me now. Sleep your singular sleep and dream of the many, the others. They are also part of you, part of us. Die into them and leave me in peace.'*

— Thomas Ligotti, "Dream of a Mannikin"



Human beings are social animals, and a little thing like death doesn't change this fact. There is a complex and ancient society among the Restless, complete with wars, politicking, religious fanaticism, commerce and all of the other things that can be found on the streets of the cities of the living. Wraiths who understand and take advantage of its rules can prosper immeasurably, while those who fail to grasp its basic lessons feed the forges or the Void.

Ghostly society is an odd collection of that which has gone before in the lands of the living. Stygia is based on a classical Athenian ideal, overlaid with a Roman Republic structure with trappings of Empire and coated with modern notions layered over standard European feudalism. Astute political observers have labeled the entire thing "a mess," and few disagree. Complicating matters is the fact that many Stygian wraiths date back centuries and have not seen fit to modernize their viewpoints. A discussion of Restless politics can be a lesson in living — or unliving — history.

### Circles

Circles are tightly knit groups of wraiths, bound together socially for mutual protection from slavers and Spectres. The Circle in many ways replaces the family as the fundamental unit of society in the Underworld, standing by its members through triumphs and turmoil. Wraiths independent of Circles tend to be either the last survivors of Circles that have disintegrated, or suicidal in the extreme. A wraith without a Circle has no one to watch his ghostly back, and will probably not long escape the perils of wraithly existence.

Most Circles range in size from three wraiths to 30, but seldom more. Members of a Circle are usually bound by the Haunt

(or Haunts) they share, not unlike several mortals clustered together in a group house. It is not uncommon for members of a Circle to run the gamut of Underworld factions, often leading to internal dissension strong enough to tear the Circle asunder.

### Politicking

With hundreds of years stretching out before them, wraiths excel at political games. As open warfare among the dead practically embraces Oblivion, wraiths try to move against their enemies more subtly, tempting neither fate nor their Shadows. However, just because the maneuvers of the aged dead aren't overt, it doesn't mean that they can't be deadly. The forges and the Void both receive their fair share of those who underestimated their opponents' power, or the consequences of defeat.

## Factions

**R**oughly speaking, the Deadlands of the Western world are split into three mutually antagonistic factions, though this hardly means that every wraith is up in arms against her neighbor. Most Restless are content to deal with their compatriots on a one-on-one basis, regardless of political affiliation. However, each faction has its fanatics and rabble-rousers, and expressing sympathy for a Renegade in front of the wrong Legionnaire can be a one-way ticket to an eternity as an ashtray.

The *Renegades* are rebels, pitting themselves against any who would fence them in, be that Hierarchy, Heretics or other Renegades. Some are Hierarchs who grew disillusioned by the system, others fugitives seeking refuge, while their brothers in arms may be thugs, political radicals or simply free thinkers. Whatever nobler ideals some may hold about a slavery-free Stygia, an increasing number of Renegades are simply malcontents well-acquainted with violence and its many applications. For every Renegade who will infiltrate a Citadel in hopes of putting its soulforge out of commission, there's another who will gladly sell the returning hero to slavers.

The *Heretics* are those who seek a higher state, perhaps in Transcendence, perhaps in the Far Shores, perhaps somewhere not yet known. The name is a collective term for the many disparate cults that espouse religious beliefs before political ones, and was first given to them by Charon after the Shining Ones debacle. Occasionally these groups band together against violent Renegades or the domineering Hierarchy agents, but these occasions are rare. Heretic cults usually spend more time battling each other over doctrine and potential followers. They run the gamut from fanatical holy warriors and zealots to gentle caregivers and teachers, and everything in between. Their common bond

is their unshakable faith in their beliefs, whether that be in the Mother Goddess, a pantheon, Chaos Incarnate, the Judeo-Christian Yahweh or deities unknown to the mortal world. Above all, the Heretics seek converts, as each group is convinced that it and it alone knows the secrets of afterlife. Sadly, many of these are dupes of Spectres or worse yet, the "gods" of the Far Shores.

The *Hierarchy* is the oldest and most powerful side of the triangle, claiming its authority from the departed Charon. Its lords demand respect from all, and use the Legions to back up such requests. While the Hierarchy may be the most stable, it is also the most stifling and conservative faction. The walls of its Necropoli hold out the Spectres, but at a terrible cost. The average wraith on the street is likely to be a Hierarch, not much different from the average law-abiding mortal citizen. Hierarchy wraiths accept the Stygian laws, along with the offenses and the mistakes of the administration, as the best means of protection from fanatics and the Shadow-Eaten.

## On Renegades

*My whole life I played by the rules. Paid my taxes, obeyed the speed limit — you name it. Now I'm dead, and they're telling me I have to do the same thing all over again, forever? No way, man. No goddamned way.*

— Amos Coulter, Renegade, Doyle's Irregulars

"Renegade" is most frequently used as a broad-brush term to describe those who stand outside the Hierarchy, yet do not belong to an organized Heretic cult. Most so-called "Renegades" find the term insulting, and prefer a variety of names ranging from "Outsiders" to "Out of my way." Generally Renegades run in quote-unquote gangs, though these gangs can take the form of rampaging *freikorps*, street gangs or pacifistic communes.

There is no such thing as the "average" Renegade. There are as many reasons for standing on the outside as there are Renegades. Some are reacting to the Hierarchy's repugnant soul-slavery, while to others it matters little who's in charge... as long as it's not the Hierarchy. Many were rebels in life and simply don't want to change. Some are fugitives from Hierarchy justice, preferring the precarious life of a refugee to the security of eternity as a soulsteel lawn ornament. Among the Renegades is also where one finds the thugs who simply prefer cutting their own paychecks from Byway robbery as opposed to receiving them from a Legionnaire captain.

No small portion of the gangs are mercenary bands, selling their swords and services to any who can afford to pay their fee, including Hierarchs temporarily strapped for Legionnaires. On the other hand, many Renegade communities are peaceful collectives, trying to burrow as far into hiding as possible. It is this very disorganization of

purpose which hamstringing certain Renegades' periodic efforts to present a unified front, and which unwittingly serves the Hierarchy.

A prime source of tension between the Hierarchy and the Renegades is simple class warfare. A certain amount of snobbery is part and parcel with living in Stygia as a member of the obvious "ruling" class, and many Hierarchs believe it to be their right and privilege to give the Renegades hell as they are socially inferior. For some Renegades, the thought of being able to take down a Hierarch just to wipe that superior smile off his face warms the plasm even on the chilliest nights. On the other hand, there is a great deal of barter and soul-traffic between individual members of the factions, and even Legionnaires will often cut deals with local Renegades if they don't think their superiors are looking.

## The Gangs Are All Here

Well-known Renegade groups include:

### The Brotherhood of the Black Rabbit

— A group of former stage magicians, expanded to include psychics and spiritualists in the last century, the Brothers banded together to protect such groups from Hierarchy abuses. Even in death, they continue studies into the occult and supernatural, sometimes assisting worthy mortal mediums and making diplomatic overtures to other Dark Kingdoms to study their spirit lore.

**StormRiders** — Bikers in life, these Renegades have not been slowed by death in the least. The thunder of their relic cycles occasionally shatters the peace of Necropoli, to the dread of many beleaguered Anacreons. StormRiders dislike the stifling authority of the monolithic Hierarchy, and many follow a Robin Hood-like code of helping the weak and hamstringing the strong. However, an equal number espouse no code but their own, which includes mowing down whoever gets in their way.

**The Flying Column** — This Dublin-based group carries on the good fight even in death. Some fought to have the British expelled from Ireland, others were casualties of "the troubles" in Northern Ireland. However they arrived, they now seek to liberate the Dublin Necropolis from the iron rule of the Hierarchy.

# On Heretics

*Look around you and tell me that you do not truly believe yourself in Hell, my friend. Our leader knows the way to a better place, and it would grieve me greatly to sojourn there knowing that you remained here among the damned.*

— Daniel Avrams, Shepherd, The Sons of the New Masada

The term “Heretic” was first used by Charon after the discovery of the Far Shores’ true state. However, as each cult sees itself on the true path to salvation, it simply assigns the name “Heretic” to all of the other, misguided cults with whom it shares the Deadlands. To the Hierarchy and Renegades, of course, it makes little difference what the Heretics call themselves, and the term is used only slightly more frequently than “those loonies.”

If the Heretics could ever iron out their differences and present an ecumenical front, they could prove a formidable foe to the Hierarchy. For many Heretics, the power of their beliefs sustains them as surely as the Pathos paycheck sustains certain of their Legionnaire counterparts. However, the conflict of belief systems between cults prevents this from ever being a possibility.

To outsiders, the reasons the Heretics bicker seem like a simple matter of pigheadedness, a refusal to admit that any other sect’s beliefs could be as viable as their own. However, this is too simplistic an explanation given the variety and complexity of the belief systems at work. No matter how friendly or open-minded a particular cult member might be, she will defend her sect to Oblivion’s doorstep as being the right and *only* way to take the next spiritual step. In a war in which the stakes are so high, there is no room for tolerance toward the enemy. It has often been quoted that the one who controls the religion controls the region. The Heretics carry this creed as a corollary to their own espoused beliefs, and wish to lead their fellow Restless to Heaven — but on their terms.

For now, the various cults squabble as much with each other as with the Hierarchy. The question of Transcendence is the main bone of contention most Heretics have with Stygia, as Charon had all but declared it to be a lie at the unmasking of the Shining Ones. Since then, many Hierarchs have abandoned the notion of Transcendence as a fairy tale and see the Heretics as spreading propaganda that is detrimental to the health of Stygian society. Heretics hotly refute this argument as evidence that the Hierarchy is just afraid of losing power as souls Transcend.

The most famous “heresy” is that of the Fishers, whose involvement with Stygia is well-known and recorded. Since then, a number of other such cults have sprung up, most of them defined according to their proselytizing habits.



## A Chorus of Cults

Well-known Heretic cults include:

**The Host** — These wraiths believe wholeheartedly that they have become angels just as their religious beliefs said they would. Finding themselves in the Shadowlands, they explain their ghostly state by saying they have not obtained Heaven because they are not yet worthy. Therefore, to make themselves worthy, they visit the Skinlands, attempting to guide and assist mortals whenever possible. It is perhaps no small coincidence that the mortal cult of angelic belief rose dramatically not long after this group's formation.

**Children of the Green** — Most of the Children were neo-pagans in life or have since converted in death. In an attempt to reconcile the dichotomy of earthly teachings of the Great Wheel of Life and their own state, they believe that they embody a smaller Wheel that works from the other one in the manner of a pulley. They must travel through the second Wheel to reach Transcendence. Whatever they do on this Wheel could put the first (and greater) Wheel out of balance. Unfortunately, with everyone else so careless of the balance, the Children view it as their sacred duty to prevent violations of the *Dictum Mortuum*, stop soul-slavery and achieve peace, preferably all by lunchtime tomorrow.

**Riders of the Wheel** — Once devoted to the faith of Fortune's Wheel, these wraiths now espouse the following of blind Chance. They maintain the Hanging Gardens casino from the Shadowlands of Atlantic City as a temple to Chance, and see gambling as the sincerest form of worship.

## On The Hierarchy

*We are in a war for the sake of all that exists, and we don't have the luxury of dissent. If you're not with us, you're against us, and if you're against us, you're working for Oblivion.*

— Genevieve Buck, Anacreon of Violence, Manchester Necropolis

This monolithic organization is the oldest and longest-lived of any in the Deadlands. Founded by Charon as means of unifying and ordering the chaotic afterlife, it has grown into a stratified, calcified bureaucracy "led" by the battling Deathlords and based upon the enslavement of thousands of souls for use as Thralls or raw materials. Criminalizing any opposition and crushing those who stand in their way, the armored Legions of the Hierarchy have rolled across the oceans to make sure that Stygian law is maintained throughout the Deadlands. The fact that many wraiths find Stygian law objectionable is not open to debate, as most Hierarchs see themselves as personally holding the line against Oblivion. Renegades are seen as wanting to open the Citadel gates to Spectres; Heretics would have everyone contemplate their navels while the Maelstroms howl. No, no matter how unpleasant some of its aspects might be, according to loyal Stygian citizens the Hierarchy is the best bet the world has not to be swallowed by the Void.

In spite of the many flaws, the Hierarchy is perhaps the best chance an average wraith has to survive threats of Spectres, Maelstroms and other monsters, and one of the few sources of law and order to be found in the chaotic Underworld. Wraiths who had been average, law-abiding citizens in life find that the Hierarchy provide a lifestyle similar to what they were used to, giving them a comforting refuge when all else in their new existence is strange. These common citizens are an unseen face of the Hierarchy, which may be known to other wraiths only through the Legionnaire pointing his relic sword or the sadistic bureaucratic servant.

While the highest levels of the Hierarchy are indubitably corrupt (as any Renegade or Heretic will gladly inform you), the lower levels have managed to escape a great deal of the infection. Here can be found the idealists, the earnest and hard-working wraiths pushing papers or keeping the peace on a Necropolis block. The few altruists who have managed to make it to positions of power view Stygia as a once-mighty empire fallen on hard times. While the Hierarchy has its flaws, Charon still had good intentions and ideas, and they should continue to uphold those ideals, even if the Deathlords have forgotten them.

Most wraiths are part of the Hierarchy, and it controls most of the Necropoli and Citadels in the Shadowlands. Many Byways are Hierarchy-built and maintained, and Stygia constantly sends patrols out to keep these safe routes clear of Spectres and Renegades. Of course, the definition of "safe" depends upon whom is asked, particularly if that person is a Renegade.

# The Legions

In theory, every Stygian citizen belongs to a Legion. Delineated along the lines of each wraith's demise, the *Legions* serve as a way of classifying the dead. Each Legion is ruled by a Deathlord, who commands obedience from all within his troop. Authority descends from the Deathlord or lady in a quasi-military chain of command, with civilian Legionnaires given military ranks in an effort to place them within the Legion's structure.

The bureaucratic side of the Legions is just as important as the military, and most members of a Legion aren't out in armor smiting Spectres and Renegades. Instead, they are processing souls, enforcing laws, taking census, repairing Necropolises, educating Enfants and otherwise keeping Stygian society running smoothly.

Then again, there are the martial aspects to each Legion. Byway patrols, Spectre-hunting expeditions, Renegade-busting and other, similar activities necessitate a standing military presence among the dead, and each Deathlord does his best to oblige. This is the face of the Legions that Renegades and Heretics are most familiar with, and these outsiders often mistake the military side of the Legion for the Legion as a whole.

As the Deathlords jockey for power, clashes between Legions are becoming more frequent. While things are a long way from open warfare on the streets of Stygia, out in the hinterlands bushwhackings and other inter-Legion unfriendliness has been known to happen. A lone Centurion of the Legion of Paupers who wanders into a haunt frequented by soldiers of the Grim Legion can be asking for trouble, depending upon how relations between the Smiling Lord and the Beggar Lord are that week.

There are other, lesser organizations also known as Legions, though these are generally orders of merit. For example, the Fifth Legion, a.k.a. the Legion of the Black Hawk, is an elite military corps created by Charon from the finest soldiers in each of the Deathlords' Legions, while the Online Legion contains Hierarchy wraiths skilled at the Arcanos Inhabit. Some of the Deathlords also have Legions-within-Legions, such as the Beggar Lord who honors his bodyguards with the title of the Legion of the Onyx Tear. It is generally assumed that when the term "Legion" is used, it is one of the eight Legions of the Deathlords that is being referred to. If a wraith wishes to mention one of the smaller organizations, she will usually call it by its full name just to avoid confusion.

## Legion Ranks

- **Legionnaire** — Legionnaires are the grunts of the Underworld, holding the lowest rank in the Legions. Most have no fixed duties, but instead are reassigned from Necropolis to Necropolis as the need arises. Patrols generally consist of Legionnaires as well.

- **Centurion** — A Centurion is a wraith who oversees a patrol and the Legionnaires that serve in it. Centurions are empowered representatives of Stygia, and have considerable leeway in the field. Very few Centurions, once they've begun

the long climb up from Legionnaire status, are content to remain at this post for long.

- **Marshal** — Appointed by the local Anacreon, a Marshal is responsible for a small Domain outside of a Citadel. Marshals usually have multiple patrols assigned to them, and each reports directly to her Overlord.

- **Regent** — Essentially a well-trusted Marshal, a Regent is granted responsibility farther from the local Citadel and hence more independence. Hierarchy Domains that aren't centered on a Necropolis are usually under the jurisdiction of a Regent.

- **Overlord** — The second tier of authority in a Citadel, an Overlord is usually an Anacreon's assistant who is trusted to make policy decisions. Overlords can be assumed to speak for their Anacreons, and often coordinate all of the patrols and lesser Hierarchy officials in a Necropolis.

- **Anacreon** — The Anacreon of a given Legion is the highest-ranking member of that Legion within a Citadel. Each Necropolis is ruled by a council of seven Anacreons (the Legion of Fate disdains involvement in local politics), and an Anacreon has supreme power over members of her Legion within her jurisdiction.

The Legions consist of:

- **The Silent Legion**, ruled by the Quiet Lord from the Seat of Silence, and consisting of the victims of Despair.

- **The Legion of Paupers**, ruled by the Beggar Lord from the Seat of Golden Tears, and consisting of the victims of Mystery.

- **The Emerald Legion**, ruled by the Emerald Lord from the Seat of Thorns, and consisting of the victims of Happenstance

- **The Grim Legion**, ruled by the Smiling Lord from the Seat of Burning Waters, and consisting of the victims of Violence.

- **The Iron Legion**, ruled by the Ashen Lady from the Seat of Shadows, and consisting of the victims of Old Age.

- **The Penitent Legion**, ruled by the Laughing Lady from the Seat of Succor, and consisting of the victims of Madness.

- **The Skeletal Legion** (also called the Gaunt Legion), ruled by the Skeletal Lord from the Seat of Dust, and consisting of the victims of Pestilence.

- **The Legions of Fate**, ruled by the Ladies of Fate from the Seat of Fate and consisting of those whom Fate has marked for its own.

## Barghests

These bloodhounds of the dead were once wraiths themselves before they were selected for the K-9 units of the Legions. Each new barghest is Moliated into an houndlike creature and then lobotomized by having a specially prepared muzzle of Stygian steel grafted to its Corpus. The result is an obedient “dog” that answers only to the person holding its leash and whistle. Many are used to track the Shadow-Eaten, while others are simply used as shock troops, much to the dismay of their targets. When they catch the scent of a Spectre or other quarry, barghests (they always hunt in pairs or packs) will set up a howling so fierce that it can be heard by the living. Renegades with a scientific bent hypothesize that these hounds are actually using a modification of the Arcanos Keening, but very few wraiths who go out to do field research on the matter ever return to publish their findings.

## Charon's Law

*Dream if you will but remember there are iron laws*  
— Johnny Clegg and Savuka, “Jericho”



The Hierarchy has its own law system, with Charon's ancient code of the *Dictum Mortuum* at its center. This code (literally translated, “The Word of the Dead”) was created during the Middle Ages to regulate the traffic between mortals and wraiths. Many wraiths inflicted themselves on the living through Skinriding, nightmares, materializing and any number of other horrors. Others masqueraded as demons to deluded would-be sorcerers. With little organized resistance or threat of punishment, these wraiths continued their games until the Church responded with exorcisms and wardings.

Charon determined to put a stop to this, and instituted the Code of Charon. It sought to protect the living from the abuses of the dead by putting a heavy interdiction on all interaction with mortals. It also made very clear that only Charon and his empowered designates were permitted to gather and dispatch souls.

The Code is continually updated, and the Stygian Hierarchy continues to maintain it. Most Shadowland agents don't have time or energy to read it, let alone enforce it, and simply concentrate on keeping the peace. Many suspect that as long as they keep up the supply of souls to the home office, it won't matter how many infractions they let go.

## The Judiciary

Hierarchy law was created as much to punish as protect. Most Restless follow the dictates quietly, much as they followed Skinlands law in their breathing days. However, there is an element of fear that comes with obedience, a

fear which the Hierarchy does not hesitate to capitalize on in the name of law and order. Stygian officials are quick and frequent to crack down on law-breakers, while many of the overworked Legions and other Hierarchy agents in the Shadowlands tend to ignore minor law-breakers in the interests of keeping the peace and going after bigger fish.

Those who do break the law come before a Hierarchy magistrate to stand trial. A wraith may appeal to appear before a “higher” magistrate, but appeals are rarely heard unless the accused has some standing in the local Hierarchy. In some cases a judgment may be appealed to the Hand of Fate, and should the Ladies of Fate overturn the decision, the Hierarchy will in most cases abide by the new ruling. Few know what happens to the defendants in cases that are not dealt with so politely.

## Sentencing and Punishment

If a wraith breaks a law and is found guilty of a crime, at least in Stygian territory, she is punished for it. Obviously certain punishments, like the death penalty, mean little to those already dead, and exiling offenders to the Tempest only risks strengthening Oblivion further. As a result, the Hierarchy has become a little more creative in its punishments.

- **Enthrallment** — The offender is chained with Stygian manacles, making her the Thrall of another wraith, usually a Hierarchy official. This is the most common punishment in Stygian territory, though by no means the harshest.

- **Imprisonment** — Sometimes criminals are jailed in Shadowland reflections of mortal prisons, with reinforced walls and bars of Stygian metal to prevent escape. This devastating punishment works in several ways. First of all, it keeps the wraith from visiting her Fetters or renewing her Passions, weakening her ability to resist her darker half. In addition, when a wraith is left alone in the dark to brood, her Shadow will inevitably redouble its assaults on her Psyche.

- **Branding** — Branding is a way to mark criminals, effectively ostracizing them from society and warning other would-be miscreants from attempting the same. The size and shape of the brands varies according to the severity of the crime. Serious crimes (assuming the offender escapes the forges or the Masquers) result in the offender wearing her brand on her forehead, exposing her to relentless scorn.

- **Discorporation** — This is the most severe punishment within the Hierarchy's power. The offender is transported to the nearest forges and smelted down for soulgoods. Alternately, some criminals are turned over to wraiths skilled in Moliating and reshaped into other “useful” implements.

# Outsiders

'Can it be,' he thought to himself... 'can it be that these people are the people of the twilight, that they love only at night their real life, and come out honestly only with the dusk?'

— Algernon Blackwood, "Ancient Sorceries"

## The Guilds



he Guilds began as loose "colleges" among the dead to teach the wraithly arts of Arcanoi to those who used or wished to pursue mastery in them. Later, the Guilds evolved into political organizations of Freewraiths, existing outside of the Legions and acquiring enough power in

Stygian society to make even the Deathlords nervous. Like their medieval mortal counterparts, the Guilds guarded their secrets jealously, cloaking themselves in layers of mystery that not even many of their company could see past.

While most Stygian wraiths believe the Guilds are long since broken, there are actually 16 Guilds currently in existence, each specializing in a particular Arcanos. Each has a lingering reputation from days of old, whether it chooses to acknowledge it or not. Members of certain Guilds are still respected from their favored days under Charon, while others are hated for their affiliation with the echoes of the past.

## The War of the Guilds

The *Dictum Mortuum* did much to sour the Guilds' relations with Charon. For Guildwraiths, Charon's decree barring interference with the Skinlands was a terrible blow to their livelihoods and amusements. Sandmen, Proctors, Spooks, Haunters, Puppeteers and smaller factions within the other Guilds who depended on contact with the mortal world suffered the most, and resolved not to take the matter lying down. Their response was to continue their work as if nothing had happened, a move that did not endear them to the Hierarchy. Contention over contact with the living would become one of the stickiest points in relationships between the two groups for centuries to come, and nearly led to open revolt on several occasions.

During the Middle Ages, the Guilds came into prominence. Those wraiths proficient in their chosen Arcanoi organized themselves as mortal craftsmen did, officially codifying themselves as Guilds. Older groups, such as the millennia-old collective of soulforgers, quickly adapted to the new paradigm, and soon the Guilds were a permanent fixture on the political landscape. Tight symbiotic relationships developed between many of the Guilds and Stygia, with Freewraiths providing services in exchange for wealth, power and status. However, since the wealth of Stygia flowed from



the Artificers' forges, they claimed primacy among the Guilds and often subverted other Guilds' agendas to their own. Resentment bred among other Guilds, boiling over into an unofficial war that stretched from the Shadowlands to the streets of Stygia. This conflict, called the War of the Guilds, lasted from 1096 to 1354. While there were never battalions of Guild members on the streets, what happened behind closed doors was another matter entirely. The Mnemoi lured the Sandmen into the war by claiming that Charon planned to raze a number of theatres in favor of soulforges, while the Monitors directed all and sundry to even the best-protected Fetters of their adversaries. A Chanteur who enjoyed the favor of a certain Anacreon would "persuade" him (with assistance from her Solicitor accomplice) to investigate the matter of Artificers forging weapons that were not ending up in the armory, in hopes of sentencing the embezzlers to their own forges. Other Guilds with Skinland contacts (Proctors, Puppeteers, Spooks and Haunters) set them against the main enemy, meanwhile taking advantage of the chaos to tweak their Guilds' secondary enemies. Artificers fought back by creating a number of lovely new *objets d'art* from the Corpora of their enemies, delivering them as their answer to the apocryphal fish wrapped in newspaper.

The war was begun to remove the Artificers from power, but ended up making them stronger than ever. A number of "accidents" needed to be disposed of, and the forges were the obvious choice. Eventually, things ground to a stalemate and with increased interference from the Deathlords looming, a

cessation of hostilities made the best sense. In the latter months of 1354, the Compact of the Guilds was ratified by the 13 Greater Guilds. Of those excluded, the Solicitors and Alchemists were considered to be unimportant, and were therefore not invited to sign, while the Mnemoi were so thoroughly disliked by this point that they were purposely snubbed.

The Compact called for an end to all conflicts between the Guilds. A Council of Guilds would be formed to adjudicate disputes between Guilds or opposing Guild members. The Artificers, as the Eldest Guild, would sit as the leadership of both Compact and Council. This originally caused more hard feelings and anti-Artificer sentiments, but these sentiments were silenced when the Artificers spread a few Artifacts around to "encourage" cooperation.

## The Breaking

Despite the problems in its inception, the Council unified the Guilds as a political force. While they bickered behind closed doors, they presented a united front to the rest of Stygia. They towered over the rest of the Stygian population in power, surpassed only by the Deathlords (no doubt to those august wraiths' collective relief). However, the winds of change were blowing, particularly in the form of unrest among the Heretics and Renegades. Certain Guildmasters saw the instability wrought by these groups as a chance to seize power from Charon's obviously weakened grasp. On April 6, 1598,



the Guilds, led by the Artificers, attempted to stage a *coup d'état*. The Usurers had helped to begin the revolt, but abandoned the project suspiciously quickly. When they left, their closest allies, the Masquers, followed, and the *coup* began to founder. It ended a miserable failure, and many of the offenders were obliterated by the next tide.

In the wake of the rebellion, Charon had concerns that too much power was being concentrated in the Guilds' grasp. Another, more organized *coup* might well have succeeded where the Artificers' clumsy power grab had failed. He decided to remove the threat of usurpation by dissolving that threatening concentration of power, and did so by banishing the Freewraiths' Guilds from Stygia.

The Decree of the Breaking, as it was called, outlined Charon's policy against the Guilds, to wit: The existing Guilds were dissolved as official organizations; any groups calling themselves Guilds were outlawed in Stygian lands; Guild membership was a crime; and specially trained Legionnaires would be taking the place of Guild members in Stygian society. Like the *coup*, the Decree was misguided in intention and doomed to failure. After 20 years of sabotage and work stoppages, Charon discovered the Legions could not replace the Guilds. For that matter, the Breaking had done nothing to slow down Guild members themselves. They still had the tools and the talents for which wraiths would pay handsomely.

Still, it would have made for a bad precedent for Charon to reverse his decision. Such an about-face would have suggested that he could neither create firm policy mandates nor enforce his will, and in the post-*coup* instability, appearing weak in front of the predatory Deathlords would have incited more rebellions. In the end, he chose to reinstate "former" Guild members individually on the condition that they understood the Guilds were no more. However, the fiction that the Guilds were destroyed was still circulated among the populace, and eventually the populace grew to believe it.

## Playing With Others

The Guilds do still exist, regardless of policy. No matter what fictions or party lines are disseminated, the Guilds are still a vital force in the Underworld. Many provide organized access to services that no wraith would want to live without, while others have powers that have become political necessities. In the end, the Guilds maintain that any talent wanted badly enough will persuade a wraith to abandon his higher principles to seek it out, wherever it lies.

Only about one-tenth of the wraiths in Stygia are Guild members, and most wraiths believe the Guilds don't exist. Mere knowledge of a Guild's specialty is not enough to convict a wraith of membership, and it is expected that Stygian citizens know something of at least one or two Arcanoi. However, the Guilds were banished by Charon's decree, and therefore belonging to one technically makes a wraith a Renegade. As criminals are eligible to be smelted in the forges, Guild membership can be a dangerous thing to hold.

## The Decree of the Breaking

On this day, Anno Stygiae 246 Post Secundum, we decree that the Guilds be hereby dismissed and uncreated for the following crimes: That they would attempt to unseat the very power which grants them their place and position; that they would set those powers of their mastery against their Imperator and the populace; that their foul machinations have attempted to unravel the very fabric of Stygia, her colonies and protectorates. Therefore, we decree the following interdictions be laid upon them:

- That the Guilds are hereby banished from Stygia. Let their Masters no more darken my door; let their power be broken and scattered as a captive army. They shall find refuge not anywhere within the city or her lands where our banner floats.
- That any wraith found belonging to a Guild or claiming membership to a Guild is hereby deemed to be a criminal of the worst sort. They shall be subject to the justice of Stygia that lords over every wraith.
- That the Guilds are hereby dissolved of their power, their organization, their membership and their authority. There is no longer such an organization as a Guild, and any claiming contrary will be arrested and sentenced by Stygian justice.
- That our Legions shall fill the vacancies left in the wake of the departure of the Guilds. They shall be trained in the ways of Arcanoi and thereby assume the empty posts abandoned by the prideful Guilds.

This is our will, our law and our decree. Woe unto the wretch who breaks the letter of the law.

Done this day of April 14, Anno Stygiae 246 Post Secundum, wherewith we set our hand and seal.

*Charon*  
*Imperator*

## A Note on Titles

Anyone who practices an Arcanos, particularly if that Arcanos is her primary skill, will be tagged with the "appropriate" name whether she's a Guild member or not. A wraith skilled in Phantasm will be called a Sandman, even if she is not a member of the Dream Union, a.k.a. the Sandmen's Guild. Wraiths who are members of the Guilds tend to go by more specialized epithets, such as Hammerboys or Helldivers, when talking among themselves.

Many ex-Guild members or rogues seek out Renegade groups in which to hide, which is a matter of great concern to those who wish to maintain the Guilds' lock on certain Arcanoi specialties. Some of these Guild dropouts are allowed to run, but those who teach Guild secrets to outsiders are playing dice with their afterlives, as the Guild in question will almost certainly seek retribution for this betrayal. The Artificers and Puppeteers in particular take pleasure in hunting down rogues teaching Guild secrets.

Heretics tend to either view the Guilds as vanished secular groups or they are unaware of them entirely. According to some Heretic cults, the Breaking was divine retribution against the blasphemers of the Haunters, Artificers or whatever other Guild incurred the cult's ire. On the other hand, many cults may also shelter ex-Guild members, but emphasis is placed firmly on the "ex" aspect. Shelter among the believers comes with a price, and not all wraiths are willing to pay that price to avoid chancing Hierarchy wrath.

Despite the Decree, the Council of Guilds continues to meet and squabble, just as it always has. The Artificers, as the Eldest Guild, claim certain rights and privileges due them, demanding respect and obedience. This air of superiority grates on the nerves of Spooks, Haunters and Usurers, among others, making for uneasy relations between the groups. Younger Guilds are frequently at cross purposes in what to do and who has precedence, often turning Council meetings into sheer chaos. On those rare occasions when the Guilds are unified toward a goal, however, they can still exert a frightening amount of influence. With so many Guild members infiltrated into Stygian society, free from suspicion, the Guilds have their fingers on more levers of power than the Deathlords dream.

## The Guilds Today

Most wraiths, be they Hierarchy, Heretic or Renegade, don't actively believe in the existence of the Guilds. Charon broke them centuries ago, after all, and they haven't been heard from since. The soulforger down the street? He's just a soulforger, not a Master-class Artificer. The Sandman across town who puts on dreamshows every Thursday? She's just a street performer, not a

member of the so-called Dream Union. Even in the byzantine bureaucracy of the Hierarchy, there are few who know the truth, and they seem content to let the lie stand uncontested.

For wraiths with centuries to plot, elaborate politics are the rule of the day. The Guilds are no exception. Many Guild members are worried about the disintegrating fabric of Stygian society under the Deathlords, and see themselves as a viable alternative to the petty squabbling that is the rule of the day. In spite of the Guilds' efforts to maintain a low profile, they are as much a part of the political strata as the Legions or Heretics. This runs terrible risks for all involved; if the Guilds' existence were ever unmasked, the depths of their involvement in Stygian politics could send literally thousands of wraiths to the forges (provided there was someone there to work them).

Officially, wraiths are urged to devote their talents with Arcanoi to the Hierarchy, whether they provide entertainment or more vital services. Unofficially, each Guild does have a definite political slant to it, with the talents of the members often providing clues as to its affiliation. Because of the *Dictum Mortuum*, Haunters, Proctors and Puppeteers remain the Guilds on the outside. Never officially sanctioned by the Hierarchy, they tend toward a hard-line Renegade stance. Chanteurs and Sandmen walk a thin line, as their services are valued but their artistic temperaments drive them toward a more Renegade political posture. Their fellow fence-straddlers are: Spooks, Oracles, Usurers and Masquers, all of whom tend to shift according to the way the political breeze is blowing. Artificers, Harbingers, Monitors and Pardoners are still on the inside, relatively regimented and organized in their stand against Oblivion. On the other hand, both the Artificers and Pardoners have displayed some marked Heretic tendencies of late, and their extremism on certain issues unsettles the other Guilds to a remarkable extent.

Seeking out the services of Guild members is not as difficult as one might think. If a Pardoner hangs out her iron lantern (a recognized Guild symbol from the history books of the dead) to indicate she is open for business, it is unlikely a squad of Legionnaires will rush in to shut her down for violating the Decree of the Breaking; everyone needs a Pardoner sooner or later. Likewise, without Artificers, there would be no Stygian steel, no chains and no soulforging of any kind. It is the *organization* of such talent that makes the Hierarchy anxious. Most non-Stygian Hierarchy officials and Legions tend to take a *laissez-faire* attitude concerning the matter of single Guild members setting up shop. An Artificer becomes a soulforger, while a Masquer is a tailor or beautician, and an Oracle is merely the local fortune-teller. Pardoners receive far more leeway than other Guild wraiths by dint of their very necessity. In Hierarchy territory, most wraiths demonstrating a suspicious level of training in an Arcanos are generally given the admonition, "Don't tell me anything that would make me have to arrest you," and left alone so long as they don't do anything outrageous.

# Ferryman

*Stand close around, ye Stygian set,  
With Dirce in one boat conveyed*  
— Walter Savage Landor



standing alone in the Underworld, the Ferryman are equal parts enigma and legend. All wraiths have met one (or know someone who has, or know someone who knows someone...), but no one knows much about them. It is common knowledge that no wraith will interrupt a Ferryman on his journey,

and even the Legions give them free passage. They sweep the Byways clean of Spectral incursions and keep the paths to the Far Shores and Stygia safe, but claim allegiance with neither Hierarchy, Heretics nor Renegades. Nobody knows where they come from, where they are going, or why they wander endlessly.

The Ferryman were originally created and empowered by Charon in the heady days before the Stygian Republic. Charging them to see souls safely to the Far Shores and Transcendence, Charon did his job too well; when the surviving Ferryman felt that Charon had departed from their original, shared mission, the vast majority turned their back on the Emperor of Stygia and became independent agents. Now they travel the Byways and Shadowlands, bound on unknowable missions.

Often, Ferryman will pause in their journeys to take on passengers. While they may not convey their guests to their destinations as quickly as some might like, Ferryman will protect them to the point of self-destruction; the safety of another's soul is something they take very seriously. Moreover, Ferryman have an unstained reputation for fearlessness and honesty, and the word of one of these cowed wanderers is as good as truth anywhere in the Shadowlands.

Ferryman always demand a price for their aid, whether it be an oath, an Artifact or a task. Breaking a promise made to a Ferryman marks the oathbreaker for eternity, and will subject a wraith to his justice.

## And Three More

These so-called "Lesser Guilds" are not considered the social equals of the original 13, a dislike that members of these Guilds return in equal measure. Whether actively hunted, merely disliked or simply condescended to, these Guilds are eternally tagged with lesser status.

Already banned from Stygia when the Breaking went into effect, the Solicitors had enjoyed a reputation of being more of a hermetic cabal than a Guild. Their Arcanos, Intimation, with its powers over desires and hatreds, was one of the most sought-after by clients, but its purchase came with terrible risks. Those who sought out the Solicitors to become their customers could easily become their victims as well. Well before the Breaking, the Guild was driven out of Stygia, and even from the company of the other Guilds. Today, Solicitors are still unwelcome in social situations, but not so unwelcome that individual wraiths will not seek their expensive services.

The Alchemists, an offshoot of the Artificers, sought to understand the energy within objects and how to use that energy to inspire life in non-living objects. They worked in tandem with the Artificers until the Breaking. They might have continued in their researches despite the circumstances, but pressure from enforcement of the *Dictum Mortuum* clamped down tightly on

their activities. Like their other Guild brethren, Alchemists supply a service that wraiths can and will pay for. A wraith wanting to strengthen a Fetter or rot another's can often persuade himself to contact an Alchemist, drop a few oboli at the designated point and rendezvous at such-and-such a time to see the dirty deed done. Unlike their fellow outcasts, the Alchemists still enjoy a friendly relationship with other Guilds, particularly their parent organization.

The Mnemoi once served as detectives for the judiciary of Stygia, their memory-twisting Arcanos allowing them to dig into a criminal's mind to discover the whats and wherefores of a crime. Unfortunately, greed corrupted the Guild, and the elders took to selling their talents to the highest bidders. When they were unmasked by Charon, the traitors were melted down and their followers crushed. The Mnemoi, despised and hunted, were driven far from Stygia. Now they dwell in the darkest corners of the Necropoli, offering their wares to carefully screened clients. So far beyond the pale of polite social contact that any wraith worth his Corpus would rather be smelted than deal with them, the Mnemoi are one of the unpleasant facts of existence in the Shadowlands. Everyone knows they're there, but no one will admit it until they're needed.

In addition to their legendary reputation for guiding questing souls toward Transcendence, Ferryman are powerful wraiths well-schooled in combat and the Arcanoi. Beset by Spectres and beasts of the Tempest every time they set forth, they are forced to conquer as much as sojourn, and a weak Ferryman does not journey far.

All Ferryman can be known by their cowls and scythes, which they use to pole their relic rafts down Byways and across the Sunless Sea. Each Ferryman is dressed in an identical black robe, and clutches the weather-beaten wood of her scythe's handle with skeletally thin fingers. It is said that Ferryman's eyes glow in the presence of Spectres, but most wraiths dismiss this as melodramatic legend.

## The Guilds

The 13 Guilds more or less officially recognized by Charon's government were:

- **Artificers** — The soulforgers, skilled in the Arcanos Inhabit.
- **Chanteurs** — Songsmiths of the dead, users of the Keening Arcanos.
- **Harbingers** — Guides through the Tempest, skilled in the Arcanos Argos.
- **Haunters** — Masters of Pandemonium, the Haunters sow discord and weirdness.
- **Masquers** — Warriors, spies and entertainers, Masquers twist Corpora with Moliate.
- **Monitors** — Specializing in the Lifeweb Arcanos, Monitors work with Fetters.
- **Oracles** — Those who read Fate's web, keeper of Fatalism's secrets.
- **Pardoners** — Those who confront Shadows, Pardoners are masters of Castigate.
- **Proctors** — Blatantly violating the *Dic-tum Mortuum*, the Proctors specialize in Embody.
- **Puppeteers** — Possessors of the living, Puppeteers flaunt the Puppetry Arcanos.
- **Sandmen** — Weavers of dreams and nightmares, the Sandmen know the secrets of Phantasm.
- **Spooks** — Telekinetically meddling with the Skinlands, Spooks understand the Arcanos Outrage.
- **Usurers** — Feared for their abilities to siphon Pathos and Corpus, Usurers practice the Usury Arcanos.

## Spectres

*Gonna step outside*

*What's there to see?*

*Just one big shadow there to comfort me.*

— Oingo Boingo, "When the Lights Go Out"



Every war has its casualties, and the war against Oblivion is no exception. Wraiths whose Shadows become dominant leave the Shadowlands to dwell within the Tempest and Labyrinth; these unclean spirits are collectively known as Spectres. Servants of Oblivion, most Spectres seek to make others join in their torment. They work unceasingly toward the day when the Void conquers all, but until that time comes, they're not above having a little sadistic fun with any wraiths they come across.

Most wraiths know little about Spectres, other than that they should be feared and hated. The Shadow-Eaten assault Byways and Citadels, riding Maelstroms on missions of destruction. Few wraiths are interested in knowing more about them, except perhaps more and better ways to combat them.

Most terrifying of the bits of common knowledge about Spectres is the fact that they seem to be able to speak directly to a wraith's Shadow, working with it in unholy tandem. Spectres often seem to know all of a wraith's weaknesses and fears, and can sometimes empower the Shadow to a frightening extent.

There are rumors and hints of a vague society of Spectres within the Labyrinth, but sociologically-minded explorers have been few and far between. What is known is that some Spectres do still retain their Fetters and therefore can infiltrate the Shadowlands.

Among the many castes of Spectres, the best-known include:

- **Doppelgangers** — Spectres who retain Fetters and a relatively fair appearance, Doppelgangers turn their attentions to subverting Citadels from within.
- **Nephwracks** — Still possessing Fetters but wrought into monstrous forms by the Tempest, Nephwracks dwell in the eternal storm and assault travelers. They rarely appear in the Shadowlands, much to the relief of most wraiths.
- **Shades** — Nearly mindless yet astonishingly powerful, Shades are among the most potent Spectres found outside of the Labyrinth. Shades tend to be twisted into forms that can only be described as inhuman.
- **Malfeans** — The Priest-Kings of the Labyrinth, the Malfeans are so powerful and evil as to be beyond the comprehension of an average wraith. Often called the Never-Born, Malfeans supposedly crawled forth from the Void at the beginning of time and have plotted, slumbered and warred amongst themselves ever since.

More information on Spectres can be found on page 270.

# Historia Popularis Stygiae

## (A Popular History of Stygia)

*Now Muses, whose high Genius hath guided my thoughts and visions in the former, fleeting world of the flesh, reach your beneficent hands through the sable Shroud that blankets this non-world from all others, reveal to me the way of truth, allow my humble stylus to chronicle the deeds of those spirits, both mighty and base, that have brought this empire to its present state.*

### Prologue



In Life I was witness to visions great and terrifying. I saw what I perceived to be the afterworld, Heaven and Hell, and the Way Between, the place of Purgatory. Uncountable legions of souls I saw, their transgressions in Life laid raw and bare before the justice of the Almighty:

kings and commoners, holy men and women, lovers and fools, their unearthly souls stripped clean, flayed, dismembered, submerged in lakes of fire and rivers of boiling pitch, embedded in caverns of ice miles deep, their entrails ripped from their bodies and chewed and swallowed whole by demons and devils and fiendish, many-headed reptilian monstrosities, only to be reconstituted and have the entire disgusting process repeat itself, again and again, over and over, till the sound of the Last Trump.

But what I saw in the lowest levels of Hell and the most revered spheres of Heaven was not enough to prepare me for what I have seen over the last seven centuries and beyond. That of which I wrote in Life and the nightmares which I endured could not gird me for this plane of existence; this gray un-world; this living, and un-living, eternal arduous dance to which we all are condemned.

For you, my fellow wraiths, I write this history. For the truth have I traveled the twisted thoroughfares of this empire, looked into the darkest places of its heart and played the role of faithful scrivener of all I have learned. Where others have shut their eyes and refused to see, I have gazed into the sanctums of power and the sepulchers of Oblivion. Where others have blocked their ears to the unceasing dirges of this gloom-choked place, I have sat vigilant absorbing their sounds. Look you well, reader, upon these words, and know that what I have written I have written plain and unfinished, the way things have been, and the way they are, not as I or others would desire them to be.





## I. The Dark Before Time

There was a time before time, before these shadowed realms came into being. The legends speak of a world where the bounds between living and dead were thinner than they are now, separated by a flimsy arras through which the dead could pass back into the living world. And the living could pass through this insubstantial break to the world of the dead, to receive word of their comrades' well-being on the other side of the void. Some heroic personages came — Gilgamesh, Aeneas — these and others risked the travails inherent in the crossing.

### The Sundering

Then it was that a great rift appeared in the world, and the realms of the living and the dead were forced apart in the period known as the Sundering. The gash between the worlds widened to an insurmountable degree, forcing a great Shroud to be drawn twixt the two realms. The realms split into that of the Quick, known thereafter as the Skinlands, and the Land of the Dead, known also as the Underworld.

As this rip divided the two worlds, there was felt strong in the Shadowlands the presence of Oblivion, a gruesome, furious rage of nonbeing. It is not known from whence Oblivion came, but its true self cannot be ignored, existing always to pull the weak and the despairing into its blackness. The violence of the Sundering birthed from Oblivion the first Malfeans, scaled and fanged and burgeoning with hate and destruction, and loosed them. They dug into the places below the Shadowlands, weaving and burrowing their aimless angry selves until their hellish, maggot-like tunneling created their own prison, the Labyrinth, whose dreaded interlacing of caverns leads nowhere but into the very core of Oblivion.

### The Lady of Fate

It was also during the Sundering that the Lady of Fate emerged from the chaos of the rift between the realms of the Quick and the Dead, and read the skein of Fate and foretold the coming of a great guide, a journeyer named Charon, who would sail the River of Death and lead those souls who had passed over the rift to the Far Shores in safety, away from the minions of Oblivion.

## II. Charon

It was out of the dead of Mycenae that the great Charon emerged to sire this grave realm. Having foreseen his coming, the Lady of Fate welcomed him and presented unto him a reed-boat to navigate the River of Death. Alone, Charon sailed this turbulent waterway for many years, upstream and down, knowing every cove, venturing into every inlet. He came finally to the delta where the River ran to the wide Sunless Sea, gorged with the viscera of stranded spirits. At the delta of the River, the Isle of Sorrows rose up out of the

depths, a jutting crag of perilous ascents and brutal shores dangerous for landing by normal crafts. But the Lady of Fate guided Charon's tiny vessel safely to the shores of the Isle, and appeared to him, her eyes outshining the dark firmament, speaking to him in a voice as sweet as the tongues of angels:

*Behold! After thee shall come the masses of Dead, a throng continual who will wander the Shadow-lands with neither guidance nor light, save with thine aid. And among these wandering shalt thou find the Restless, still fettered to Life as thee. Learn well the power of Life, that thou mayest use it even in Death. Thou shalt take thy tithe from the Dead as they offer it, to brighten thine own existence in this gray world. Help others to find their true light within, that they mayest pass from this place and cross this Sea to the Far Shores, where they mayest find their rest.*

Imbued with the fire of the Lady's command, Charon set forth and presented himself to the wandering Dead in the Shadowlands, and spoke of the Lady's vision to the miserable race, and they acknowledged Charon as their leader. He guided them down the River of Death toward the vast Sunless Sea, and taught the Dead to fashion their own reed-boats like his own, cut from the clustering plants that grew among the marshes of the River delta. Charon taught the Dead to sail the River and the Sunless Sea to the Far Shores, and many of the Dead heard his words and ventured across the great expanse to find their rest.

## The Ferrymen

The Restless, foretold by the Lady of Fate, came to Charon, and he taught them to pole the depths of the River, and the way to navigate its serpentine course through the Land of the Dead. Some of the Restless heard Charon's words and followed him, but others refused to heed his instruction, contenting themselves to wander in faraway places, to court the tempters of Oblivion in their own obstinacy. Some of the Restless also preferred to watch over the Quick, becoming protectors of certain individuals or families on the other side of the Shroud. Those Restless who came to Charon to learn his teachings he bore a special love for, for they were the ones who pledged themselves to assist Charon in marshaling souls down the River of Death to the Sunless Sea.

During this time many souls ventured across the Sunless Sea, some of them so light they could float on the gentle winds that moved over the face of the waters toward the Far Shores. But Charon knew from the Lady of Fate's words that not all souls could reach their eternal rest on their own; for this reason he took those Restless who joined him and made of them Ferrymen, and the Isle of Sorrows their meeting-place. Here on the Isle the Ferrymen would gather to discuss their work and exchange ideas with one another. They offered help to each other in exchange for small relics and snatches of light gleaned from the recently dead, their tithe afforded to them by Charon according to the words of the Lady of Fate. They also banded together and swore an oath to protect the souls in their charge and safeguard the world of the Quick from those Restless who had turned from Charon's ways and set about to wreak unrest upon the living.

It was after the founding of the Ferrymen that the Labyrinth first vomited forth a litany of bizarre and grotesque Spectres, whose fierce yells made tumult through the timeless night. Hence the Ferrymen steadied themselves against the cacophonous assault, and redoubled their efforts to usher their flocks around these beasts and to the Sunless Sea.

Soon after the eruption from Oblivion, several of the Ferrymen embarked across the Sunless Sea themselves, to establish a route to ferry souls all the way to these lands of tranquility. These Ferrymen were called the Shining Ones, for their explorations illuminated the way for others to find the far-off lands. Charon was saddened to see the Shining Ones go, but knew that their actions would help to make the passage to eternal rest all the easier for those who would come after.

## The First Descent and the Coming of Nhudri

The Lady of Fate appeared to Charon a second time, after the Shining Ones left his company to find routes to the Far Shores, and prevailed upon him to descend into the Labyrinth and to confront the vast Utter Darkness beneath, the Shadow of Oblivion, the unceasing dismal entity that forever seeks to sate its hunger on the food of living souls. Charon heard the Lady's words, and traveled to the Veinous Stair, its bloody-veined marble steps pulsing with Oblivion's wrath. With only his scythe and lantern, Charon entered upon that savage path to the Labyrinth. It is unknown for how long Charon made his way through the constrictions of the nether-maze, his lantern

### The Labyrinth

"The descent to Averno is easy," quoth Virgil. The descent to the Labyrinth is even easier, and all the more horrifying, for it is found in every moment of degradation and calumny, every feeling of despondency and worthlessness. Its entrances can be found anywhere, sometimes in the remotest of places in Stygia, sometimes in broad daylight on a heavily trafficked pathway. Descent is wherever and whenever our darker side stabs forth into plain view, buffeting our psyche with its Harrowings, the damnable mental games of our Shadows. The Labyrinth teems with Spectres, ever willing to pierce the souls of the unfortunates who grope their way through its underground veins, goading the wretches further and further on.

## The Oath of the Ferrymen

Based upon the mandate given Charon by the Lady of Fate, the Great Oath of the Ferrymen was conceived by the first group of Restless who heard the message of Charon. It goes as follows:

*I pledge myself as an instrument of safe and secure passage for any and all souls who seeketh aid to reach the Far Shores.*

*I pledge myself to the propagation of the words of our great leader Charon, whose stewardship over this realm was given him by the Lady of Fate.*

*I pledge myself to hold fast as a bulwark of defense for the Shroud that divideth this world from the former, and to ensure the safety of those in the Land of the Quick from those deluded elements in the Land of the Dead, who would work to rend the fabric of the Shroud, and upset the passage of souls from the former world to ours for their own selfish purposes.*

*I also pledge to steel myself against the ever-present threat of Oblivion and its agents, to thwart the actions of those inimical to the peaceful guidance of souls to their eternal rest, and to sacrifice my soul if necessary in the defense of this realm from the powers of darkness and entropy that seek to feed upon the innocent and the weak.*

*I pledge these things and all of their worth and import to our leader Charon and the guardian of this world, the Lady of Fate. By Charon's Oar and the Lady's words shall I find strength and wisdom.*

The phrase in the last sentence, "By Charon's Oar," is used by all Ferrymen as a hail and farewell, in both verbal and written communications, and it has passed into the Stygian vernacular as the highest oath a wraith can give to another, being used on all official Imperial documents to guarantee their authenticity. It is said that breaking this oath will render a wraith marked for the Ferrymen's justice.

— From *Sunless Somethings and Grand High Whatchamacallits: A History of Stygian Vernacular and Slang*, by Everett Edward Fotheringay, d. 1964

the sole pinpoint of light in that hideous place. The Ferrymen, bound by their self-made oath, faithfully patrolled the River of Death, shepherding souls to the Sunless Sea and wondering of their mentor's fate. Sounds of a great battle could be heard from the chasm that housed the Veinous Stair, but no Ferryman was brave enough to descend.

Finally, Charon ascended from that dolorous chasm, his eyes burning bright as the lantern he held, and he brought with him an ancient smith-wraith called Nhudri who had dwelt as a prisoner of Oblivion. Nhudri was long-experienced in the art of the forge, using for his material the stuff of souls, and Charon placed in him the power and responsibility of shaping it in the Shadowlands.

## The Return of the Shining Ones

After Charon returned from the Labyrinth, he sailed the River of Death in his reed-boat to the Isle of Sorrows, and summoned the Ferrymen to the Isle by a great horn. When those sentinels came to the Isle, Charon told of his time below, and that he confronted the Utter Darkness and saw that Oblivion was growing. Charon told his Ferrymen of a great Pit, where the souls of those unheeded and unwatched, and many of the Restless who refused to become Ferrymen and took to their separate pilgrimages to the Far Shores, were whirled down into the Void below.

Charon chided his Ferrymen for being lax in their duty toward the souls in the Shadowlands, and they resolved to heed his words and redouble their efforts toward the safeguarding of souls. Many vigilant Ferrymen set off for all compass-points, in search of a defense against the encroaching threat. After these Ferrymen left, those who had journeyed to find the Far Shores, the Shining Ones, returned. They came to Charon, telling stories of great Halls of the Dead, where fallen warriors and virtuous men and women of all walks of life feasted together. They told Charon that the Far Shores were real places, filled with wraiths who had found the inner peace for which they had for so long struggled.

## III. The Founding of the Empire

Armed with the knowledge gained by the Shining Ones, Charon again boarded his reed-boat and sailed alone across the Sunless Sea, following the charts provided him by those Ferrymen who had traversed it before him and found the Far Shores. Charon was gone for many years, during which the Ferrymen still kept their vigilance against the enemy Oblivion.

When the great Republic in the Skinlands was founded at Rome, Charon returned from the Far Shores, bearing seven great signs from those Shining Ones who had stayed across the Sunless Sea and had taken into their custody those varied realms. By these signs was Charon given power over the dead, the lone magistrate empowered to judge and mete out the fate of all souls who came and would come to the Shadowlands. Charon took these signs seven, and placed them into a great iron tablet in the Shadowlands. By their authority he created the cornerstone of a new City, the Seat Eternal, the eye of civilization in this Underworld of the Dead.

## The Building of the City

Upon the cornerstone of the seven signs of the Shining Ones did Charon start to build his City. From Sodom and Gomorrah, Egypt, Jericho, Babylon, Ilium and Athens and Sparta, from these fallen desolate citadels Charon gleaned the strongest stones and constructed a wondrous fortress on the Isle of Sorrows. Charon built his City in the fashion of the great cities of Athens and Rome: long broad avenues, massive squares, towering pillared structures and monuments to those fallen Ferryman whose sacrifices helped bring the Dead to this new bastion of peace. In the center of the City stood a towering lighthouse, perched atop the highest promontory on the Isle, into which Charon placed the lantern he used in the Labyrinth during his First Descent. The lantern would shine and illuminate the City (which was called thenceforth Stygia), serving witness to the great deeds of Charon and heralding to all souls the promise of safety.

## The Republic

Charon instituted Stygia's first government along the model of the Roman Republic. This grand Republic of Stygia had a Senate of seven seats, filled by Charon with seven of his most trusted lieutenants. Each Senator was given control over a different part of the world of the Dead, with Charon acting as Consul. The Senate's first act was to grant land near the docks that spilled out onto the Sunless Sea to the Shining Ones, which they could use to build their temples as vestibules in which the Dead could gather before setting off on their journey to the Far Shores.

The Senate also received emissaries from the Dark Kingdoms, faraway realms which, like Stygia, ruled over the Dead of the Orient and the African continent. Often did Charon and the Senators meet and negotiate with the Ivory Queen, monarch of the Dark Kingdom of Ivory which ruled over Africa, and marvel at the sight of the emissaries of the Jade Emperor, ruler of the Dark Kingdom of Jade, cutting through the Sunless Sea to the Isle of Sorrows on a wondrous sleek barge of the purest green jade.

## The Pax Romana and the Stygian Golden Age

As the great empire in Rome in the Land of the Quick prospered under the Caesars, so did Stygia mature into a healthy young republic under Charon's tutelage. It is not untoward to declare that these first few centuries under the leadership of Charon were a golden age in Stygia, years when this tiny outpost at the mouth of the River of Death, sole citadel against Oblivion, grew into a just society of the Dead through Charon's works.


As allowed him by the Lady of Fate, Charon took tithe from all of the Dead who passed over into the Shadowlands, requiring two coins for passage down the River of Death; to ensure that the tithes were paid, those who died without payment were required to forfeit their eyes or hands. Wraiths did pass over without payment, and paid the appropriate corporeal sacrifice, but as word spread across the Shroud into the world of the Quick, few who died were not buried without the death-price of two coins pressed into their eyes.

## Stygia

Built upon the seven tallest hills on the Isle of Sorrows, Stygia the city has transformed throughout the centuries, the original fortress established by Charon only barely peeking its skeleton out from the contemporary jumble of mismatched architecture. If it is true that a city is not only a collection of buildings and people, but a living, breathing entity, then Stygia is both the best and worst example of this. As civilizations and empires have risen and fallen, and the consequences of these watershed events in the history of the Quick have been felt in the Shadowlands, Stygia itself has changed with them, often abruptly and violently. Streets have widened and narrowed even as the waters of a flooding river overflow their banks and then recede. Monuments and buildings have had their structures stretched and compacted by the engine of history. It is not an uncommon sight to venture upon a building dating back to the Republic's time and see a patchwork of architectural styles: here, classical pillars; there, flying buttresses; over there, Palladian windows; around back, filigreed rococo tops juxtaposed with *bauhaus* sterility; all colliding in a white noise of building and engineering styles that could exist nowhere else.

The aftershocks of the various Maelstroms and civil unrests in Stygia have also taken their toll on the framework of buildings; many of the great seats of governmental power have had their places of work razed by battles and pockets of rampaging Spectres. Rebuilding and repair are delicate undertakings; many of the oldest structures are Relics composed of stone unattainable in this world, which forces repair and remodeling to be accomplished by hammered soul-bricks. To call the end result eerie would be an understatement — to call it terrifying would be very close to the truth.

— From *The Municipal Metamorph: Being A History of Urban Renewal in Stygia*, by Quentin Andrew Macaulay, d. 1905.



Charon took all the tithes given him and gave them to the smith Nhudri, and bade him create the first weapons and armor in Stygia. Nhudri obeyed, and created three objects with his tithe-ore: Siklos, Charon's blade and rod of office; Lumen, Charon's lantern, the first one being used to light the great beacon in the center of Stygia; and, on Charon's orders, the Masks of the Senators. At this, Nhudri took a piece from each Mask he had forged, and re-smelted the metal into a Mask for Charon, to show the Senators and all wraiths that Charon was a part of them, and they a part of Charon, in the great struggle against the pull of the darkness below.

With Nhudri's aid, Charon built a massive network of roads throughout the Shadowlands, cutting through the turgid blackness that was the primordial Tempest, all leading to the Sunless Sea. For Charon knew that Oblivion was growing, cracking and fissuring into the Shadowlands in the forms of baleful Spectres, and he knew well that if the denizens of the Shadowlands were to find salvation, he would need to secure it. As the glory of Rome spread in the Skinlands, Charon directed Nhudri to follow the mortal legions, laying down roads that webbed Stygia to the Sunless Sea. Charon's roads led to Britain and Gaul, Rome, Thrace, Jerusalem and Damascus, Egypt and Armenia and Iberia. Stalwart Roman militias, felled in battles for the sake of the Empire, became soldiers in the Stygian ranks. They escorted the Ferryman along these newly paved thoroughfares, ever alert for the presence of Spectres.

### *Lux Veritatis*

Charon's second great pronouncement as Consul was the doctrine of *Lux Veritatis*, the Light of Truth. By this doctrine, Stygia pledged itself to the collection and preservation of the great works of humanity. All were beholden to collect, wheresoever it be found, the finest art and sculpture, the great works and thoughts of antiquity, where it would be brought to the City and stored deep within the archival vaults underneath the Senate. For Charon remembered the Lady's words, and took them to heart — Oblivion must be fought wherever it occurred, be it on the battlefield or in the mind. Charon believed that through the precept of *Lux Veritatis*, the best and wisest thoughts of Life would help the Restless Dead find the peace they so deeply desired.

## IV. The Fall of the Republic

Charon had ventured into the Shadowlands at its inception, a land formless, teeming with tumultuary Nihils. Alone did he travel the River of Death, and alone he, war-scarred, emerged as one chosen to bring order to this unwanted place. From this nothingness wrought he a great City on seven hills, this un-world's complement to the grandeur of Rome. From desperate, wandering souls did Charon find brave Ferryman to guide the Restless to the Far Shores and defend the Republic against Oblivion. From a rickety outpost set atop the crags of the Isle of Sorrows did Charon found a Republic that served as this world's lodestar to the blessedness of Transcendence.

## The Renegades

Yet even as the Republic stood against Oblivion, all was not well in the Shadowlands. The first crumbling of the great empire of the Quick in Rome appeared, and were felt in this world. As living malcontents and rebels rose up against Rome and were crushed, they passed over into the Shadowlands, and gorged their appetites of bitterness and discontent on what they saw as a Rome of dead. Too proud, too insolent to accept defeat with death, they carried their grievances against the leadership of Charon, becoming the first Renegades. Roaming Charon's highways like wolfish scavengers, they attacked Ferryman in their transport of souls to the Far Shores. Caravans of souls were intercepted and broken up, leaving innocents blindly groping, the easiest prey for Spectres. Hearing of the Renegades' actions, Charon forthwith instituted a band of cavalry soldiers, called Equitæ, and empowered them to escort Ferryman along the roads of the Shadowlands. These death-knights would serve to police Charon's highways. They would maintain the integrity of the Ferryman's caravans against these new violents against the order created by Charon from the beneficence of the Lady of Fate.

## Decline and Fall

It came to be that the once-Eternal City of Rome soon fell to the lot of all things that by mortal hands are made. An empire on seven hills, once ageless, fell into decrepitude.

Amidst the chaos of the toppling, those who followed the Christ soon came to the Shadowlands. These Fishers came to the Sunless Sea, and constructed their own vessels from the driftwood that collected on the shore. They eschewed the Ferryman's guidance and instead set off for "Paradise," a Far Shore unknown to Charon or any of his Ferryman.

### The End of the World As They Knew it

...it erupted from the earth like a great shrieking black wave, vomiting forth from the Veinous Stair and all of the other portals, its abominable stench of misery roiling upward into the gray sky. The earth shook and cracked open bottomless chasms that led straight down into Oblivion, which swallowed thousands of innocent souls. The highways built by Nhudri and his apprentices broke apart, and the palpable heat from the darkness melted the soul-bricks into fiery trails of pitch. The River of Death did boil, and burned the Ferryman's crafts which sailed it, and Spectres that had ridden the great infernal spouts up from below cascaded down the unpassable River, many-headed and scaled things spewing forth their disgusting inner filth....

— From the journal of Datian Severus, Ferryman

# The First Great Maelstrom

As the Empire of the Quick teetered on its brink, the unrest crossed over to the Shadowlands and made itself plain among all wraiths. Many talked of seeing larger numbers of Spectres, with their glowing hateful eyes. The Shadow-Eaten appeared more in every conceivable corner, sowing hatred and destruction and Oblivion. It soon came that they crossed over into the Land of the Quick, Skinriding the untamed tribes as they descended upon Rome itself. Upon death, the spirits of these barbarians crossed over into the Shadowlands. Seeing another Rome in Charon's Republic, they attacked it as well, with Spectres following in their path like wild rooting boars. Equitæs were summoned to defend Stygia; Ferrymen laid down their oars and punting-poles and took up weapons against the marauders. Even Charon himself appeared on the battlefield, his blade Siklos cutting swathes through the invaders' ranks. Many brave Legionnaires fell, but the invaders were no match for Charon and his men and were pushed back. Sadly, the ensuing siege laid upon Stygia by the accompanying Spectres tested the strengths of Charon's great City to their utmost.


In the Year of Our Lord 476, the city of Rome fell to the invading barbarians. Its great temples and places of learning and government were destroyed, its populace beaten down, killed or enslaved. Building after building appeared in the Shadowlands, packed with droves of Restless. The chaos that ensued proved too much for Charon and his Ferrymen to handle themselves, try as they might to shepherd souls to the Far Shores.

At the height of the madness, a great bellowing was heard from deep within the Labyrinth, and Charon knew from whence it came. His sentries rang the great alarm gongs, vainly resounding the approach of the darkest hour to date — the eruption of the First Great Maelstrom.

The Maelstrom left a burning shambles of Stygia and its environs, but the direst situation occurred when the Spectres, gravitating toward the destruction like jackals starved of misery, attacked the Isle of Sorrows. None were able to prevent their breach of the walls as they spread throughout the citadel like plague rats, dashing monuments, razing temples and mansions, and even putting the Onyx Tower to the torch. Fortunate it was that Charon had vacated his palace to meet the hellish legions on the field of battle, where he and his Ferrymen, through sheer power of will, managed to grasp victory and save the City.

Ah, but what a victory! The City of the Dead a hollow burnt husk! The River of Death dammed up and its polluted waters overflowing its banks! The glorious roads, once connecting all the Shadowlands to the departure-points of the Far Shores, ripped up and broken! And the odor of sad acrid sacrifice! Charon looked out over the battlefields, seeing Oblivion claim his brave Ferrymen, and he did weep for them, for the courage they showed. Charon saw his Republic dying, his Senate destroyed, his wraiths huddling together in their upper rooms and hiding-places in dread fear of another attack, or turning Renegade, rutting in the Darkness for the garbage brought up by the Maelstrom. And he did weep for them, for them all, to the man, and Charon knew well that, once again, he alone





would step forward and build a new City, a new Stygia, stronger and more brilliant than the one before, that all the Restless would find peace and safety in their quests for the goal of the Far Shores.

## V. The Age of Resurrection

From the ashes of the Republic did Charon resurrect his City, so that it rose up out of the despair formed of the quakes of Oblivion. The battered towers of the old Republic served witness to the new foundation, the cracked and falling façades of the glory years even seemed to stand a little straighter, gleam a bit brighter, in the company of Charon's new City.

## The Aftermath

Our great leader Charon set about at once to rebuild his City from the dead bones that then littered the lands. The old Republic was dead, and no will of the spirits could aspire life into it again. Charon knew this well, and commenced the making of a new Stygia, patterned after the leaders of the living world, but built upon the foundations of the Republic of old, keeping true to the words of the Lady.

From the examples of the Caesars, Charon called himself Emperor, and retained his seven Senators, upon whom he bestowed the appellation of Deathlords, and bade them take

## Soulforging

I saw the young acolyte, an Athenian named Aristogeiton, step forward to the legendary forge Kyklops. There the Grand High Artificer Nhudri stood in anticipation, his toil-beaten hammer at the ready, as it always was. After a few choice mutterings and incantations, Nhudri knelt to the base of Kyklops and took the bellows, and pumped up the flame to such a height that I swore I felt its smothering intensity trickle down the back of my spine.

The Artificer Nhudri made more mystic mumblings, almost offhandedly, and then presented his young apprentice with his own hammer, its polished black head gleaming in the light of the forge. Aristogeiton took his new, unsullied tool in his right hand, and then Nhudri seized the young man's left arm and thrust it into the blazing fire. As he held it there, I could only watch in complete astonishment as the young acolyte's hand changed colors faster than light through a glass. Brighter and brighter it turned, through shades of the most virulent colors I had never seen before. The young Greek let out a shriek so unholy that I thought the very roof would fall in on us. He twisted and wrenched and nearly ripped his arm off at the shoulder trying to pull away, but Nhudri held it fast within the fire, the heat not bothering him at all and his placid face never changing.

Finally, after what seemed an eternity, Nhudri pulled the acolyte's arm, glowing like a thing possessed, out of the flames. He led the young man to the smithing-block and on it rested the arm, its shape already beginning to deform and twist like an injured snake. He then placed a template for one Stygian coin next to the arm and bade the young Aristogeiton hammer a piece of his own Corpus into the coin-press that was put there. The young man looked at Nhudri in total disbelief at the self-mutilation he was proposing, his eyes pleading with the old Artificer for any other test of will but this. But there was something in the blank eyes of the ancient Nhudri, some uncompromising look in his unreadable visage, that made the Athenian take up his new hammer and bring its damning weight down on his own flesh. Aristogeiton hammered and hammered, each stroke resounding throughout the chamber, until he had beaten out a small coin from the mold given him. Nhudri brought a vessel of plasm to douse the young man's battered Corpus, and as he stopped the pain the young man fell exhausted to his knees. Nhudri picked up the coin and attached it to a thin chain. He placed it around the young man's neck, saying three words: *Do not forget.*

I am quite sure he has not forgotten. I know I have not, and never will.

— Atrophilos, Ferryman and eyewitness to the first Soulforge Rites

stewardship over the different groups of souls that came to them. Each Deathlord was given authority over certain wraiths, according to the manner of their deaths: the elderly; the weak and sick; the victims of violence, both self-inflicted and otherwise; the wretches caught in the cruelty of nature; all were presided over by their respective Deathlord.

The Equitæ and Legions became the first great army of Stygia, as Charon entrusted to them the primary task of safeguarding the City and the surrounding lands, allowing the reconstruction of the Empire to go on unabated. So precious was the revival of Stygia to stand against Oblivion, and the necessity for its regrowth to continue unhindered, that the ranks of Legions and Equitæ quickly swelled to formidable numbers, their rank and file a great panorama of determination and bravery.

The Ferryman were outraged at Charon's doings, refusing to serve anyone who called himself Emperor. Many resigned their commissions, breaking their oaths and refusing to ferry spirits to the new Deathlords. In frustration and rage, Charon banished the deserters, ordering their names stricken from all records, their awards stripped, their claims invalid. The Ferryman were bound to protect souls against Oblivion; if they would not honor their oath to Stygia and the world of the Dead, they would have to survive the Darkness alone. In light of their hard hearts, Charon had the disruptive Ferryman banished from the Isle of Sorrows. Many turned Renegade, or set off for the Far Shores, or surrendered themselves to Oblivion in final bellicose defiance.

Decades passed, and Stygia was slowly rebuilt. But it proved a grueling task, for great storms wracked Stygia, the effluvia of the Maelstrom still beating down its everlasting rage. Wild Renegades built hamlets along the crashing River and the slashed-up roads, seeking to avoid or defy the authority of Charon and spreading discontent. As the belief in the Christ grew in the living world and the pagan gods' days wound to a close, the Shining Ones found their power dwindling also. The Shroud was breached by malicious and spiteful wraiths, who appeared to frightened mortals as purulent devils, demanding tribute and sacrifice.

## Rebuilding and Reform

It came after centuries that the last of the Spectres spewed forth by the First Maelstrom was destroyed or driven back into the tearful kiln of the Labyrinth, and Charon stepped forward to honor those who had fought for Stygia during the Spectre attacks, and who had stayed vigilant and true against these hellish agents after the fall of the Republic. Charon instituted the Imperial Order of the Sickie, and bestowed it upon all those who had fought on the side of the Republic, including those Equitæ and Ferryman who had not deserted Stygia after its walls had tumbled to the Spectres. Many joined with Charon in praising the deeds of these brave warriors, and soon able wraiths were seen to join the ranks of those still-active militia that continued to patrol the Shadowlands, hoping one day to be received as a member of the Order.

Charon set about during this time to rebuilding the façades of his once-proud City. Nhudri and his apprentices worked feverishly at the forge to repair the roads and the buildings. They put up new structures, including a new sea wall around the Isle of Sorrows and the rebuilding of the great Onyx Tower. The fleeting nature of life in the Skinlands supplied Stygia with many hands for labor, laying roads or recovering antiquities lost in the Maelstrom's torrent.

It was during the rebuilding that the Fishers came to make themselves known in the Underworld. The Fishers' Golden Ship, by which they made transport to their Far Shore of Paradise, was seen frequently off the coast of the Isle of Sorrows, taking on its cargoes of hopeful wraiths. The Fishers also built a great Temple on one of the hills of the Isle of Sorrows, within the great new walls of the City. They came to Charon and demanded that he tithe to their Temple. Charon heard them, but refused to do so, saying that he served the Lady of Fate and the world of Death as a whole, and not the Far Shores. The two sides met and spoke at length, and Charon made a wise proposal to the Fishers, that if they tithed the Relics which they collected, Charon would give all the incoming souls who sought Paradise unto the care of the Fishers. This agreement, called the Treaty of Paradise, served to bring order and cooperation in Stygia between the new Empire and the ever-growing number of Fishers.

## The Hierarchy

The Holy Crusades in the Land of the Quick allowed thousands of wraiths, both Christian and Moor alike, to pass through the Shroud and enter the Shadowlands, bound fast by their faith and collected by the Legions as they fell on battlefields and in siege-towns. It was not an uncommon sight in those times to see the paradox of Christians and Moors on the one hand still attempting to fight each other in this world, but also assisting Nhudri and his followers in repairing and

## The Steeds of the Legions

Normally, animal spirits do not journey across the Shroud. There has been only one exception in the Stygian Deadlands: the great black stallions that once roamed the fens of the River of Death. Tamed in antiquity by Charon himself, they have served for time out of mind as the steeds of the Deathlords and the elite Legionnaires called Equitæ. Oddly enough, these horses neither feed nor Slumber, and none know how they have sustained themselves over the centuries. What is known is that they are swift as the wind, deadly in combat, and utterly loyal to their chosen masters.

## The Code of the Dead

The *Dictum Mortuum*, or Code of the Dead, was created by Charon to halt the abuse of wraith power that had profligated in the Dark Ages. Although it is volumes long, its essence can be summed up in the preamble, of which a portion is reprinted here:

*I, Charon, Emperor of Stygia, by the power of the words of the Lady of Fate, do hereby set these laws down that they may serve to bring order between this world and the former; that no wraith under any circumstances for any reason is to penetrate the barrier that divideth the Land of the Dead from the Land of the Quick; to engage in congress with those that have not yet passed over, or speak to the Quick of events yet to come; or in any way, shape or form harass, threaten, injure or otherwise compel those in the Land of the Quick to do the bidding of those in the Land of the Dead; or impart upon those in the Land of the Quick any desire or compunction to take a life, be it their own or that of another, in order to effect the passing over of one or more to the Land of the Dead, be they friend or foe, parent, child or lover....*

— From Q.A. Macaulay, ch. 7, *ibid.*

laying new roads, or even joining the ranks of Stygian militia, their differences cast away, fighting side by side against roving pockets of Renegades and Spectres.

As the structure of life in the former world changed, so too did Charon re-make the Empire of Stygia in the fashion of the ways of the kingdoms of Europe. He thus founded the Hierarchy, and based it upon the customs and mores of the Quick kingdoms, whereby wraiths could know their place in this world as they had in the former, and not be led into the haunting temptations of Oblivion. Thus the Hierarchy was formed, with Charon and his Deathlords at the pinnacle, followed by the Legions and Knights (those once called the Equitæ), and those Ferryman still loyal to Charon. The lowest place was filled by those called Thralls, serf-wraiths bound in chains of Stygian steel, usable as slaves or payment in kind among the various members of the new upper class.

As the kingdoms of the Quick set about to organize the various trades and craftsmen into societies for the protection and propagation of their crafts among each other and the general populace, Charon too set about to organize those wraiths possessed of special Arcanoi, that they would find themselves

a part of Stygian society and be protected from outsiders. Freewraiths with certain talents and influences were seen to join the membership of these various Guilds, which served to check the use of their talents and power in this world and the former. The Guilds found themselves a place in the Hierarchy, below that of the Knights and Legions.

## The Second Great Maelstrom

In the Year of Our Lord 1347, a great Plague descended upon the kingdoms of Europe, claiming scores upon scores upon scores of lives; heedful to neither prince nor peasant, the Plague took hold of whole families, entire villages, littering the landscape with the fetid air of death and disease. Souls began to pass through the Shroud at an alarming rate which heralded the coming of a second Maelstrom, brought on by the huge increase of suffering. Wraiths amassed in the Shadowlands, classes and trades mixing one with another in a fashion that would never have been tolerated in the former world. Many of them still bore the scars and lesions of the wasting disease that had brought them hence.

This time, Stygia did not fall. Charon and the new Hierarchy appeared as familiar sights to the new wraiths, assuring them thus of their accustomed roles in the Shadowlands. The great sea wall held firm, the roads did not crack and hiss, the Equitæ and wraith-Knights cut quickly and efficiently through the Spectres unleashed. With the new wraiths coming in numbers unheard of, Charon set himself to a census of all of the subjects of Stygia, and took tithes therefrom to help the Empire grow to meet the demands of these new spirits.

## Revolt and Treason

The tithe incensed the leader of the Fishers, called the Archbishop, who had audience with Charon. He demanded that the Emperor reduce the amount asked of the Fishers, who had grown to represent the largest single group of wraiths in Stygia, with their own Crusader-knights and Death-bishops. Charon saw the power of the Fishers, and knew that they could become a threat to the commerce of souls to the Far Shores, for the Fisher agents had employed dubious means and spoken half-truths to souls in order to swell their ranks. Charon refused to accede, ordering the disbanding of the Crusader-knights, and doubling the Fishers' fee.

For many months the Fishers' Temple stood dark atop the hill on the outskirts of Stygia, patrolled by recalcitrant Crusaders openly defying the words of Charon. Then it came to pass that the Crusaders formed a division of soldiers and marched on the Onyx Tower, attacking the palace guard of Equitæ. Unbeknownst to the Crusaders, however, one of their own number was unwilling to go along with his arrogant comrades. He had stolen away and betrayed their coming to the Equitæ, who fortified themselves against the approaching horde, and routed them, stripping them from their mounts and hanging them from burning chains atop the high lighthouse. There, these traitors' bodies burned for seven days.



Charon and his Equitæ traveled to the Fishers' Temple, and found therein great stores of treasure and relics, promised him by the Fishers, but hidden in direct violation of the Treaty of Paradise. Angered by such lawlessness, Charon sent his most trusted Knights to the Far Shores to speak with the Shining Ones who resided there, and issued an order that all Shining Ones who resided upon the Isle of Sorrows were to depart for the Far Shores by the next tide.

Time passed, and the great tide-gong on the Isle was heard to sound across the hills. From all ports and docks, in every boat, skiff and raft available, the Shining Ones left the Isle of Sorrows in the great Evacuation. All crafts crammed to bursting, the Shining Ones put out across the Sunless Sea for the Far Shores, clutching all they could carry, away from the great City, seen only by the light of the barrow-flames inflicted upon their temples.

## The Heretics

It came that the Knights returned from their journey across the Sunless Sea, and their hearts were confused and sad, for they brought back news of the most horrible nature to Charon. The Far Shores were not as they had once been, no longer wondrous realms of tranquillity. The Shining Ones had forsaken the words of Charon and the Lady of Fate, and abandoned their duties over the Far Shores, extracting eternal obedience from the desperate, binding souls in torment and suffering in their mad, whimsical brutality. And the masses of

uncared-for souls, the hopeful that had risked the Sunless Sea seeking deliverance, throngs herded into kraals and long ignored! To think that for centuries these greed-swelled monsters had refused the promised lands to their charges, so that none had found Transcendence, was a great weight upon Charon's heart. He had trusted these Shining Ones, some of them the first Ferrymen, and they had betrayed him, all for the heady drunkenness of fleeting, isolated power.

Charon retired into his inner chambers, and nothing was heard of him for weeks. Many in Stygia feared the worst, that the news of the actions of the Shining Ones had despaired him so much that he was forever lost to Oblivion. Finally, Charon appeared on his balcony, and addressed Stygia with the Proclamation of Reason, damning the Shining Ones and their ilk for all time to come: *Whereas the Ferrymen called Shining Ones hath broken their Oath to shepherd souls to the realms of Transcendence; hath forsaken their duty to stand against Oblivion and instead have abused and tormented innocent souls for their own purposes; hath conspired to deceive, entice and proselytize inimical words to lead the unsuspecting away from the true light within; we will no longer grant them audience, nor safe passage, nor assistance in the Shadowlands. We do therefore brand the Shining Ones and all of their own Heretics, and by the words of the Lady of Fate we do pledge ourselves to their final and ultimate eradication.*

To enforce this Proclamation of Reason, a great Council of Inquisitors was formed, the *Magisterium Veritatis*, modeled upon the agency of the Church in Europe, its agents



empowered to root up and destroy all Heretics and their influences. Its branch militant, the Order of the Unlidded Eye (also known as the "Grim Riders"), roamed the roads and the River of Death, searching for all pernicious influences.

Charon did not forbid those souls who still sought Transcendence from making their own way to the Far Shores, but, alas, what hope did these travelers have? What hope did any soul have, if those whom Charon had trusted all those centuries ago, whom he had met with, had sailed with, had proved traitors to him?

## VI. The Time of Discordance

As Shining Ones transgressed, Fishers attacked, Heretics ffigged at authority's font, the world of the Shadowlands was sicklied over with a pall of mistrust and bile. The unwillingness to follow the words of Charon and the Lady of Fate led many wraiths to rebel, dwelling as cursing voices in the Darkness.

### The Besieged City

As the Proclamation branded all Shining Ones with the curse Heretic, the atmosphere in Stygia began to strain under the force of external unrest. Charon found himself ruler of a City harried upon all flanks. Renegades lived wild outside the City walls, floating down the River of Death and hounding the few loyal Ferryman left. Heretics prowled the unlit places, spreading their noisome doctrines. Citizens of Stygia stole furtive glances at each other, and in fear turned over neighbors, friends and kin to Inquisitors. Only the brave or foolhardy were seen to venture outside the City walls, and soon Stygia filled to its bounds with wraiths. Soul-trade slowed to a trickle; no boats left for the Far Shores. The Empire had folded in upon itself, a cowering foetus, burrowing farther and farther into its womb-walls. From this sprang three Abominations, the first from without, the next from within, and the last from the most horrid of agents imaginable.

The First Abomination happened in the early A.D. 1500s, as the Renegades amassed on the banks of the River delta and attacked, storming the walls of Stygia. Bravely did Charon and his Equitæ fight, but the panic brought on by the Renegades' assault allowed the invaders to storm the Onyx Tower and raid its Artifacts, seizing among other antiquities the Spear of Longinus, the lance that pierced the side of Christ at His hour of death. The Renegades would have pillaged the whole store of sacred objects, had not the ultimate sacrifice of many of Charon's best and most trusted Knights pushed the invaders back and out of the City.

The Second Abomination came from within Stygia, and was the Breaking of the Guilds. It came about that certain vain Guildmasters, seeing the unrest and fear that followed the assault of the Renegades, machinated to revolt and wrest control of the City from Charon and his Deathlords. On the morn of the sixth day of April, in the Year of Our Lord 1598,

the Guilds conspired to attempt an usurpation of power in the City. Yet, as rebellion and treachery soweth the seeds of their own destruction, it came about that the quarrelsome Guilds, linked together by only a tenuous chain of revolt, soon found that chain to be a garrote of defeat. Scores of Guild members were destroyed, including the original apprentices of Nhudri, the Three who had helped build the great roads of the Empire.

The Third Abomination was the most foul in its nature. It was in the Land of the Quick that the peoples of Europe began an age of exploration, with brave mariners from all the kingdoms sailing the vast Atlantic to find a New World, returning with strange gifts and tales of undiscovered lands and new races of Man. Charon and his Deathlords heard of this New World, and sent emissaries across the Tempest to learn more of this new kingdom. Soon reports came back of a whole new Dark Kingdom of Obsidian, ruled by one Ix Chel, presiding over the wraiths in this New World.

But Heretics and Renegades, seeking to flee the righteous force of the Inquisitors, also came to the Kingdom of Obsidian, Skinriding the crews that left Iberian ports. They descended upon the Obsidian lands as hate and fear grew strong within them. Soon their Shadows overtook them, and they made war with the Obsidian wraiths. Decades and decades of slaughter and atrocities gashed the Obsidian lands; reports of wholesale butchery by Heretics and Renegades reached Charon and the Deathlords. And then, all violence stopped. Ix Chel and his wraiths had been hurled into Oblivion, their race massacred, their Kingdom destroyed in this, the Flaying. Emissaries to the Obsidian lands were horrified. The Third Abomination had occurred, the excision of an entire Kingdom from the face of the Shadowlands. The Heretics had committed their greatest crime. They had savaged an innocent world, clawed and pierced out its insides. It could be called bestial, if beasts were given to such dark thoughts. But it was clear that the bloodied paws of the human animal had painted this ghastly mural.

## The Third Great Maelstrom

The Three Abominations built one upon each other, and again the ground quaked, the earth split, and another Maelstrom was loosed. It thundered down from all directions, on all parts of the Shadowlands, a sweeping banshee over the Sunless Sea. Out of the abyss blew foul weathers, whirlwinds smothering the whole of the Empire; overhead the hollow seas closed up, and all were plunged into darkness.

It left a world jostled, an empire torn and frayed. The Tempest had turned crazed; it overflowed everything, separating Stygia from the rest of the Shadowlands. A vile Spectre, called Coldheart, led divisions of his infernal kind out of the cracks, gobbling the hatred left by the Renegades, the Heretics and the rebellious Guilds. He and his minions fear-choked the old River of Death so that it was abandoned by the remaining Ferryman, who chose to use the great roads rather than chance the River.

## The Time of the Flaying

*Even as we reached the shores of the Obsidian lands, it was clear to all aboard that some great evil had befallen this world. Our small landing-craft was nearly swamped by 10-foot-high waves before we even reached the shores. From our vessel, we could see the thick columns of smoke billowing upward into nothingness, and see the landscape ablaze with the black non-fire of Oblivion. I remembered stories about the First Maelstrom, and how the land hissed and burned with these flames of rage. . . . I could not comprehend the sight before us when we made our way inland. I barely can describe it now, it goes so deeply at me. The great temples that were rubble. The seething cracks in the ground that led straight to the center of Hell. And I could hear the weeping, the anguished wracking sobs, from everywhere and nowhere. A world had died — no, it had been slaughtered.*

— From the log of the Sojourner, Henry Moore, captain.

The Shroud thickened and widened; wraiths attempting to poke through were rebuffed. Arcanoi faltered, spirits weakened.

It was the price of hate, the folly of power, the savagery of rebellion, that brought the Third Great Maelstrom upon the Shadowlands. Now the atrocities of past evils surrounded the Shadowlands, wafted through Stygia on prevailing gusts of wind, settled upon all like an oily mist from the surface of the eddied ubiquity of the Tempest. Now all was encased in a patina of darkness, all drenched in the hateful slime of the Tempest. And all this madness had been wrought by wraith hands.

## VII. The Last Three Hundred Years

Enlightenment came to the Land of the Quick; the kingdoms of Europe reaping full fruits of their seeds of knowledge, no longer prone to ascribe the workings of the world to unseen imps and spontaneous, specious logic. Charon once again left the Onyx Tower and moved among the City of Stygia and the wraiths of the Empire, taking his cue from the changes in the Skinlands to rise up after the tremendous jumbling left from the Third Maelstrom.

As science took the throne from superstition in the Skinlands, so too did Charon order that Stygia modify to gain advantage against her enemies and Oblivion. All Freewraiths, bound to allegiance to Charon after the Second Abomina-

tion had caused all Guilds to be outlawed, were allowed to carry swords of soulsteel, symbol of their allegiance and mandate of their duty to fight Oblivion wherever it occurred.

Charon also took it upon himself to move through the avenues of Stygia the City, collecting the wastrels, the true Restless — those who entered the Land of the Dead bearing only slight Passions. Charon arrested Oblivion's pull and made Thralls of these undistinguished. As Industry swept across the kingdoms of Europe, in the Shadowlands Thralls were seen mining the death ore from the rock of the Veinous Stair, furnishing Kyklops with raw material to fashion the machinery of the Empire. Even as the Thralls tired, no longer able to toil for Stygia, Charon kept them from the maw of the Utter Darkness by binding them over to the forges, where they themselves were hammered into necessary things.

## The First Necropolis

As the damage done by the Third Maelstrom had forever scrambled the Land of the Dead, turning the River of Death impassable and breaking many of the bridges that had bound the outer parts of the Shadowlands to Stygia, Charon found that cities needed to be established outside of Stygia, cities where

the main bodies of wraiths could be collected, sanctuaries for newly arrived souls to keep them from becoming prey to the things lurking in the all-encompassing Tempest. Charon went then to his Legions, and bade them found a Citadel of the Dead, a Necropolis, to act as a guiding-place for the Restless.

The first Necropolis was set in London, and served to ease the distending of the walls of Stygia, which was fast becoming gorged with unmanageable numbers of wraiths. Heretics and Renegades tried to destroy the new Citadel, but the Legions proved far too powerful for them. Fiercely they routed all attacks on the Citadel, which soon became the bastion of the Empire in the Shadowlands. Soon another Necropolis was founded, at Rome, and then another at Paris, and others soon sprang up all over the Shadowlands. The so-called Fifth Legion ventured to the New World to found a Necropolis at New Amsterdam, and defended it against the Heretic and Renegade detritus of the Third Abomination. Necropoli at Boston and Philadelphia and other places were soon founded by other Legionnaires as they came to cleanse the Shadowlands of its plague of non-believers and rebels.

## The Age of Industry

Industry grew, as did the Necropoli, becoming great clearing houses for souls, loading them onto great store-carriages and carting them to the Deathlords, who would glean their charges according to their deaths in the Land of the Quick. Great men of science lived, and died, and brought their talents and discoveries to the Empire. Soon the face of Stygia changed again, becoming a land of engines, of coaches on rails, of boom-sticks. And great iron ships were soon seen on the Tempest waters, launched from new ports on the Isle of Sorrows that had once been the temples of the Shining Ones. Massive behemoths they were, slicing through the muddled currents and carrying their cargoes of souls from Necropolis ports to Stygia the City.

As the face of the Empire changed, so too did the character of its populace. Many in the grip of Industry, forsaking the faiths of their ancestors for the new, unchallengeable deity of fact, died without strong Passions. Their shades barely passed through the Shroud, flitting aimlessly in the Shadowlands, pure fuel for Oblivion. Soon the Veinous Stair was crowded with new Thralls, toiling feverishly away at the death-rock. Their tailings rose along the coastline like great mountains of despondency, and the fires of the forges glowed white-hot with the smelting of their drained Corpora.

But such advance cost Charon, and cost all the denizens of the Empire. The Shroud did thicken to impenetrable degrees, virtually imprisoning the Restless in this anti-place, severed from the living world. Charon was himself seen visiting the portals to the Land of the Quick, catching those new wraiths whose ties to the Quick gave them points at which to break the Shroud, and forthwith making them members of the Hierarchy in Necropoli where their threads to the Skinlands would not be easily broken.

## The Practice of Thralls

Many have railed against the practice of using Thralls, calling them tantamount to slaves. In the years of upheaval in the New World, such critics have grown louder and more vociferous. They call Thralls exploited, purposely labored to insensibility, and then made to suffer the ultimate iniquity of being forged. They call Charon's doctrine bestial in the extreme for initiating this practice.

But such is far from veracity. Shall we let these drifting shades ride the whirlpool into the ultimate void of Oblivion, and let the Darkness be strengthened? Shall we turn a blind eye to Spectres bursting up out of the Darkness to gobble these unfortunates whole, shall we shut our ears and hold our tongues when we are beholden to cry, Enough? Our great lord Charon refused to give an inch to Oblivion. He gave these wastrels, these dismal companies of wretched spirits whose lives knew neither praise nor infamy, an alternative to total destruction by the most primeval maleficence. Would that there were more like him.



And then the impossible became truth. Charon took it upon himself to travel to the Shadowlands, and as he reached the realm separated from Stygia by the Tempest, he began to fade away, to disincorporate. Aware of the danger, Charon returned to Stygia. He told no one of this event, not even Nhudri, but entrusted a handful of loyal Inquisitors to discover the truth. As they searched for an answer, other elevated Hierarchs fell to the same fate, Deathlords and Legionnaires and Ferryman all fading as they drew closer to the Shadowlands. It then happened that the Inquisitors discovered the cause: Charon's Fetters had been destroyed, along with those of the Deathlords and many Legionnaires. The Lord of Death himself could no longer walk among those whom he was entrusted to protect. The Deathlords fell to squabbling amongst themselves, accusing one another of purposely destroying each other's Fetters to make themselves more powerful. Legionnaires, frustrated, put it down to Heretics and Renegades, and set out in brute squads to rid the landscape of them.


And so it happened that our lord Charon, Emperor of Stygia, Guardian of the Shadowlands and Protector of the Restless, retired himself into the Onyx Tower in what was to be known as the Second Descent. The Deathlords became the *de facto* rulers of the Empire, forming a hegemony over the Necropoli, which became self-autonomous cities continually supplying souls to Stygia. The Empire continued on as before, but without the customary, fatherly eye of Charon, it seemed a far grayer time.

## Modernity

Alas, without the active presence of Charon as governor, the Empire started to weaken. The Deathlords became petty tyrants, unable to show effective leadership, willing and then unwilling their wills, changing their minds with each prevailing wind that swept across the broad avenues of Stygia the City. They pimped and huckstered the promises of Transcendence just to stack souls upon souls, needlessly competing amongst themselves to grasp at more power as their soul-charges suffered.

## The Fourth Great Maelstrom

On the first day of August in the Year of Our Lord 1914, the lands of Europe began the First World War. It would last for four years whole, producing great fields of havoc and bloody butcheries. Europe's streams ran red, and battles filled the Citadels of the Shadowlands with the litanies of supposed brave and advanced men. These soldiers came in whole divisions, bearing the scars of their deaths upon their Corpora, the names of their doom-places tolling as great bells: Ypres, Gallipoli, the Somme.... Choked by mustard-gas and felled by the new machine-guns, the new Restless boarded railed carriages from the Necropoli of France and the Low Countries and made the doleful journeys to Stygia. The Hierarchy became a great hopper for souls, herding them along to the City Stygia in constant flow.



Soon it was such that the old walls of Stygia the City could no longer contain the numbers of Restless that came after the First World War. Ere long, great bridges of Stygian iron were seen to stick out over the City's great walls, linking the City to the surrounding Iron Hills, where huge towers were quickly erected to house these new dead. One could stand on any high point in the City and see cargoes of wraiths moving along the railed bridges to these massive armories of the dead.

And as peace came to the Land of the Quick, again a Maelstrom moved across the land, as the gorging of the Empire with such dead whipped up the hell-winds of Oblivion. The storm drove the Hierarchy into its Citadels, huddling and shielding themselves from the torrents of deathly hail and rain and anguished screams of Spectres. The Maelstrom buffeted Stygia the City, breaking against the old walls and lashing its fury against the new iron walkways, but the City survived, its towers and structures polished by the winds to a mirrored brilliance.

## Necropoli Invaded

But if Stygia the City survived, the various Necropoli did not fare as well, as Spectres unleashed by the chaos found the new roads to the Citadels in the Shadowlands. They went in amidst those living therein, and broke through the Shroud to skinride in mortal cities. Spectres seeped through into the Necropoli of New York and Chicago and other places, infesting the underworld elements and sparking the fires of crime and murder. Whole sections of mortal cities became fields of battle for Spectres, who annihilated rivals of their own kind and sometimes fought each other in the roles of the mortals whom they latched onto, killing each other for the experience of death and misery.

And after the First World War, the merchant houses of Europe and America collapsed, and a great Depression settled upon the hemisphere in the Land of the Quick. It cast many out of their trades and homes, forcing destitution, sowing untold misery as the Spectres reveled in the force of the people's hurt and sorrow.

## Charon Emerges

Charon emerged from his self-imposed exile in the Onyx Tower, and looked upon the Empire. He saw the chaos in the Necropoli, and the Spectres rampaging through the mortal lands, and he offered bounty to any and all wraiths who would go out and destroy the Spectres, and bring back their ears, their teeth, or other suitably convincing parts of these foul beasts. And thus were founded the Doomslayers, hunters for bounty of all Spectres in the Necropoli.

## The War of the Dead

Spectres also wormed around the capitals of Europe, and their invisible dances were present in the downfall of the czar in Russia, and the slaughter in Spain, and in the misery of the people of Germany. There one called Hitler worked on his people's insecurities and plunged the kingdoms of Europe into another clash on the battlefields, and again thousands upon

## The Price of Our Hate

It makes me shiver to the bone to recall what I saw of the Restless during the Second World War. Along with the legions of the men of war, there began to appear in the Shadowlands scores upon scores of other wraiths, from the outer realms of Poland and Russia, whole families of men and women and babes and elder grandparents. They came, and came, and would not stop coming, breaching the Shroud, naked, heads shaved, scarred and cut and whipped and broken. Their arrowy shrieks pierced me through. And there was an abhorrence in the air when they came, a stink of burning.

They were the children of Abraham, of Moses and David and Solomon. They were all coming to the Shadowlands, and no one knew why. And then we discovered why, and I was chilled like the fantastical hell-ice I had envisioned in life. They were being killed, slaughtered whole, their bodies stacked in rotting heaps and carted into great charnel-houses where they were burned. That was the burning in the air, and it would not go away. I looked upon them all, and breathed deep the stink of hate, and remembered the time of the Abomination, when the Heretics and Renegades had done the Flaying upon the Obsidian lands and erased a people. I could not fathom such a thing could ever happen again. I was horribly, horribly wrong. Who shall tell of these agonies, heaped thick and new before our shuddering glance?

thousands of wraiths were sent through the feeders of the Necropoli in the Second World War.

War also came to the Pacific, and Charon saw fit to make war upon the Jade Emperor, who had made attacks upon certain Necropoli. Great warships, dreadnoughts of Stygian iron, sailed the Tempest and did battle with the jade ships of the Dark Kingdom. The Tempest washed with the broken bodies of ships, and the skies exploded with the sound of their missiles, a contest for the fate of all those Stygian souls who would die thousands of miles from the Isle of Sorrows, that they might be delivered to the aegis of Charon's great City.

## The Fifth Great Maelstrom

The Second World War lasted for several years, filling the Shadowlands with souls from places with names of Anzio, Okinawa and Normandy. And then it happened that a new weapon was created, an explosive that caught the very building-block of life, and turned it around and perverted it, making it the ultimate instrument of death. Two of these explosives were used, at places named Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When they were exploded, the roar and shock could be felt all the way through the Shroud into the Shadowlands. The flames of a million suns illuminated the dark skies of the Empire for a brief second, before the Labyrinth screamed as one being and again split open, releasing the Fifth Maelstrom.

The Fifth Maelstrom was by far the harshest, for it billowed across the skies with such heat and intensity that any caught in its path immediately were sucked down into Oblivion. And after the main storm subsided, thousands of lesser Maelstroms were seen to break out across the land, sending many souls screaming into the Darkness below. None could travel from Stygia to the Shadowlands, by roads or rails or rivers, for the abundance of storms. Spectres appeared everywhere and flung themselves at the Necropoli. The Citadels became tiny outposts fighting for their very survival in the torrent-wracked Shadowlands.

## Gorool

The destruction wrought by these new explosives, which twisted the power of life into unspeakable death, had created a Maelstrom that shook loose the Labyrinth and released an ancient Malfean from its depths, a beast called Gorool. This vile giant rose up from the depths of the Tempest, strengthened by the storms and death, unfurling his stinging tail and polluting the whole wide world. All ships sent out to fight this demon were destroyed, as the beast smashed weapons and crafts and consumed whole the crews. Charon saw this pestilential thing, as it threatened to devour the entirety of Stygia, and went to the Deathlords and Necropoli for help, but none came. None would accompany Charon against the creature, none would endanger their seats of power by leaving them.

And so it was that Charon put aside his Mask, and picked up Siklos his blade, and set out in his tiny reed-boat, as he had done so many centuries ago, to face the spawn of Oblivion alone. As Charon sailed into the Weeping Bay, he first saw Gorool, the great wormy beast gaping its mouths with all fangs a-gloat, clutching and rending the souls it had captured. And Charon attacked the beast, drawing its baleful shadow away from his beloved City Stygia, and opened a great whirlpool in the Sunless Sea. It was then that Charon managed his Third Descent, and flung himself and his craft down into the great eddy as the beast Gorool followed him. As Stygia watched, the whirlpool closed, and neither the beast nor Charon emerged from the depths of the Sunless Sea.

## Epilogue

O great Stygia, shining beacon in the grayness, I weep for thee. I weep for all of my fellow wraiths, now cursed to live in a world without Charon. His disappearance has been felt from the first instant when the great whirlpool closed on that fateful day.

Spectres have run rampant after the Third Descent, gleeful in the knowledge of Charon's disappearance; their infernal cackling has been heard in the jungles of Indochina, on the burning sands of Persia and Arabia. They have been seen smirking over the new plague in the Land of the Quick, called AIDS, and have watched mortals waste away painfully with perverse amusement. The Hierarchs have finally accepted the danger of these monsters, calling general alarms for all wraiths to ferret out and vanquish these foul underworld devils.

The Deathlords have realized that Charon has been gone, and sadly may be forever, and seen that they now must show some leadership. But the soul-traffic has been slow, and the Deathlords sit in the great Senate building, and worry and rail against the treacherous Anacreons but do nothing: a league of frightened men, their masks hiding far more than their identities.

And what of you and I, my fellow wraiths? What is to be done? The skies are darker than ever now; Maelstroms build up and unleash their accursed downpour. Heretics still spew their poison, Renegades attack and destroy the roads, dam the River, and abduct us for their own ends. Some souls even die in the Skinlands with such violence and horror that they are instantly changed to Spectres. The long sad themes drive me hard, and everywhere the truth outstrips my staggering pen.

Indeed, what of you and I? What hope is there?

It is in our numbers, my fellow wraiths, in our hearts and minds, in the fealty we show to the memory of Charon and the Lady of Fate. Look about you, my fellow wraiths, look about you at the great City of Stygia, at its storehouses of learning and wonder. Look well about you at what was once nothing, so long ago, a formless wasteland, before the coming of Charon. Remember the words of the Lady of Fate. Look well at what Charon has done for us, and continues to do for us, so long as we keep his memory and his ideals alive among us. Charon gave us, all of us, this world, that it might stand against the Utter Darkness and defeat it, that all may find their final peace. It is our true light within that Charon has tapped, a great reservoir of vivifying hope, where we shall find the final rest for our wandering selves. We must steel ourselves to keep alive the hope within. The bitterest woe of woes is to see around us the corruption and danger and mourn for the old happy times. Such fatal reminiscences will surely make us fodder for Oblivion.

Here I cannot be silent, Readers. Hear me swear to you, as you go through this world, do not forget hope. Feed it, nourish it, conjoin with one another and encourage it, make it a powerful, lively thing. Do not forget the words of Charon, or the Lady of Fate, who have promised for us the path to eternal peace. I charge thee all, be faithful to the great goal, and there shall we all find Transcendence.

*By Charon's Oar.  
Dante Alighieri*

# Barghests

A tightening sensation of fear grips me by the throat and gets steadily stronger as I stare at the old man's glowing eye. Less than 20 feet separate us, but I have the unnerving impression that he is somehow insubstantial, that he might not really even be there.

"Who are you?" I ask, once I can no longer bear the lengthening silence. "Where am I? What the hell is going on?"

The only response the old man gives is a dry snort of laughter, but then, as though reacting to a sound which I can't hear, he stiffens and casts a wary glance over his left shoulder.

"It's not safe out here at night. I can tell you that much," the old man says softly.

"And just where is here?" I make no attempt to disguise the nervous quaver in my voice.

The old man turns slowly and faces me again. His face is in shadow, but his eye is shining like it's lit from within.

"Maybe you'll recognize it come morning," he says, sniffing

with laughter. "Although, truth to tell, it doesn't get all that much brighter around these parts even when the sun's out."

I am suddenly filled with a violent urge to grab this man by the throat and throttle him until he tells me everything he knows. Instead, I clench my fists tightly and manage to control the hot rush of anger that sweeps through me with surprising force.

"No need to get all hostile about it," the old man says calmly as though reading my mind. "I'm just trying to help you out... if you want it."

"I don't need your help," I say, my voice still tight with anger. "All I want is for you to tell me where I am."

"Why, you're in the Shadowlands," the old man says. "You're dead, but I figured you already knew that."

*Dead!*

I don't know if I say the word out loud or merely think it, but once again, a paper-thin voice deep in my mind whispers the word Oblivion.

The old man glances warily over his shoulder, and this time I hear something, too — a faint

echoing sound of dogs, baying in the night.

"I'll bet they're coming this way, too," the old man says. He snorts as he looks at me. "Maybe they smell the new meat."

I look past the old man, trying to see what is making such a horrible noise, but the night is too dark, too dense. I can't see anything beyond the dull glow of the streetlamps, which disappear like a string of Christmas tree lights into the misty distance.

"You can come with me, if you'd like," the old man says. "But whether you do or not, I'd suggest you don't get caught outside when they get here."

"What are...they?"

"Barghests," the old man says, and I'm pretty sure I hear a tremor in his voice. "The Legions of the Hierarchy use them. Intimidation patrols, mostly, but sometimes they drag the barghests out to hunt."

I feel compelled to ask him what they hunt, but I'm afraid I already know.

They hunt "new meat."

The old man turns and starts walking away, moving slowly toward

one of the dark buildings across the street. His left leg drags behind him, leaving a scalloped trail in the dirt.

"You coming or not?" the old man calls out, but I stay where I am. The baying is definitely getting closer. It echoes from the surrounding buildings, sounding like a pack of wolves howling inside a narrow stone canyon.

"The streets aren't safe, I tell you," the old man calls back to me over his shoulder just before he disappears into the darkened doorway of one of the buildings. Like an apparition, he fades from view, leaving the distinct impression that he had never really been there.

The howling sounds, though, they're all too real. Angry howls and snarling cries fill the night. They seem to be coming at me from every direction at once.

I glance across the street to the building where the old man disappeared and feel the urge to run after him, but still — even with the threat of these barghests bearing down on me — I hesitate.

I have no idea whether or not I can trust the old man, and the truth is, I'd much rather fend for myself. I may not realize the full extent of the danger here, but I'm willing to take my chances alone in one of the other buildings. Just like in life after Sarah left me, I prefer to be alone. I figure, once the sun comes up, I'll have a chance to look around and figure out what the hell is going on. Of course, that plan is based my surviving the rest of the night. Seeking shelter starts to look like a very good idea.

Off to my left, not more than a hundred yards down the street, I see a building that strikes me as vaguely familiar. I can't place it, but I no longer care. The howling sounds are almost deafening now. After casting a quick glance over my shoulder, I start running toward the building. My footsteps echo from the pavement like distant gunshots.

Just before I duck inside the shadowed doorway, I look back into the street and see...something.

I'm not sure what it is — what they are.

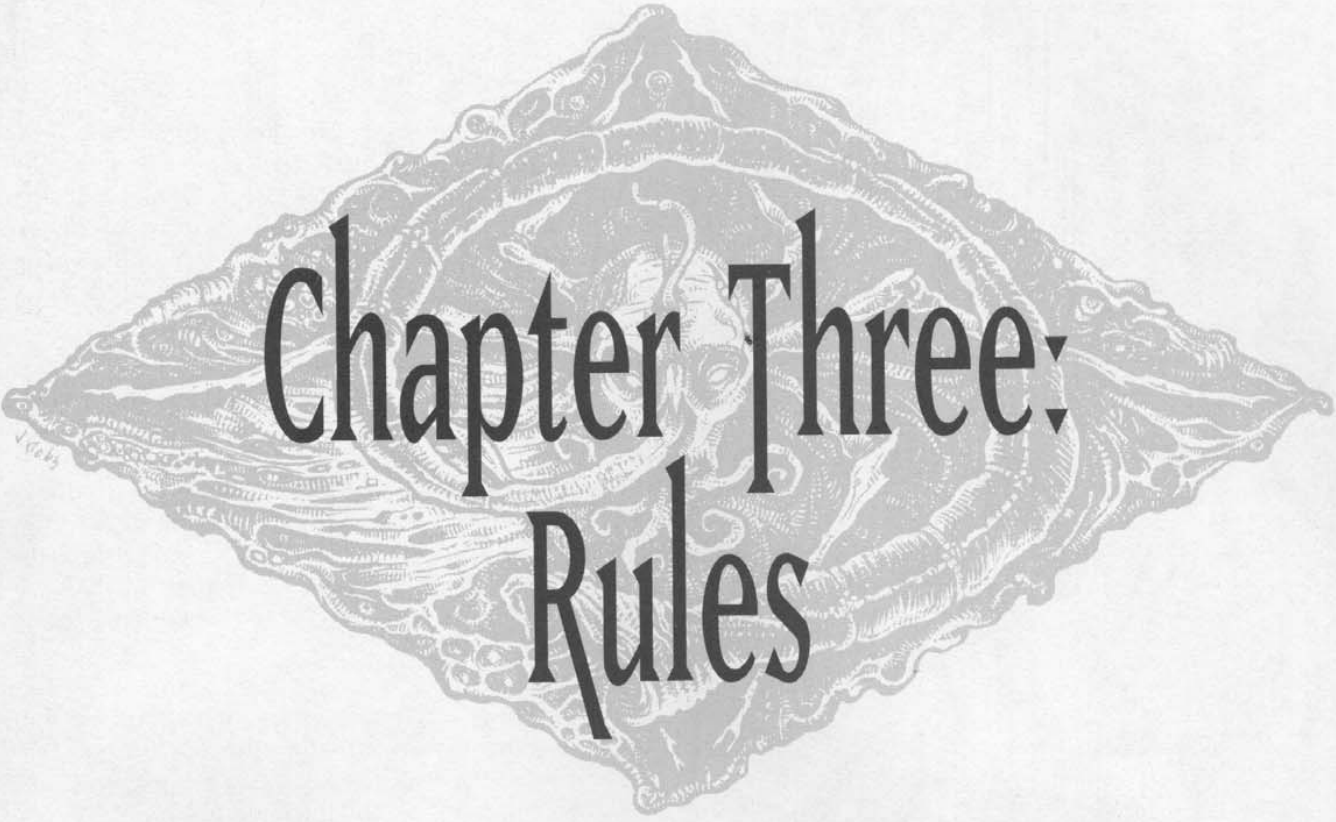
Under the glow of the streetlights, a writhing mass of huge, indistinguishable shapes appears, as black as holes punched in the night. The chorus of their wailing cries is so loud it hurts my ears. Behind them is a huge shadow, holding what can only be a leash, and he's howling as loud as the hounds he's running.

I'm trembling with fear as I feel my way through the darkness to the back of the building. Rubble litters the floor, tripping me on nearly every step. When I bump into the far wall, I turn around and slide slowly to the floor. Still trembling as though gripped by fever, I sit hunched up with my arms wrapped tightly around my legs.

Lost as I am in the darkness, I realize that my only hope is that these barghests — whatever they are — won't see or smell me hiding in here.

I close my eyes and start to pray.





# Chapter Three: Rules

*Then came the churches, then came the schools,  
Then came the lawyers, then came the rules.  
—Dire Straits, "Telegraph Road"*



**W**raith is a game, like chess, baseball or poker, and like any other game it has rules. Its rules exist so that people can play it without spending too much time arguing about what goes on. You know the scene — “Bang! Bang! You’re dead!” “Am not!” “Are too!” The rules in this chapter provide a structure for all the players of the game to follow, hopefully avoiding as many arguments as possible.

The basic rules of **Wraith** are simple and should only take a short time to master. However, many permutations of these rules exist, allowing you to tinker with them to your satisfac-

tion. You need only learn the basic rules at first; later you may decide which variations work best for your game. In **Wraith** the story is always the most important aspect of the game and the rules come second, no matter what. Thus, **Wraith’s** rules are pretty abstract; use them as you see fit.

It should always be remembered that the rules are for the most part suggestions. Be warned, though — the more you depart from the basic rules the more open to debate your game becomes. Don’t feel constrained by the systems this book offers, but be prepared to get flexible if the rules go out the window. (See **Chapter Seven** for more about **Storytelling**).



## Rules and Storytelling

Storytelling games are very different from most other games in that “winning” is not the objective. In fact, there are no winners and losers — only players. Even if your character should “die” during the course of a story, you haven’t lost; as long as you’ve enjoyed playing, you’re still a winner.

Although it may sometimes be hard to tell, the players and the Storyteller are not adversaries — they are collaborators. The players and the Storyteller work together to weave a tale. Over time several of these tales may link together to create an even larger story known as a *chronicle*, but it all stems from cooperation between players and their Storyteller. Furthermore, there is no official end to a game. Once begun, it goes on until the story comes to an end or the session ends. The next time the players gather, the action can pick up right where it left off, just like it’s an on-going TV series or a new chapter in a novel.

Because the goal of storytelling is to create a story rather than to win, the rules are less important than they are in other games. In *Wraith*, the rules should support the story rather than govern it. By playing this game, you are entering a new world, one of your own creation. You should never let something as petty as a rule spoil your fun.

The rules of this game have been designed to be simple, yet still take the vast possibilities of this complex setting into account. The players and the Storyteller should feel free to experiment, using what rules work for them and discarding the rest. You can always create rules of your own, though always remember to be consistent with everyone in your troupe. The Storyteller should be the final arbitrator in such matters, and should feel free to approve rules changes so long as they make sense for the troupe.

### The Golden Rule

The most important rule of *Wraith* is what we call the Golden Rule. It can be summed up as follows: If you don’t like it, don’t use it. The most important part of the game is the story. As a wise man once said, all the rest is commentary. Feel free to use, ignore or add commentary (in the form of rules, creatures, Guilds, Arcanoi, Necropoli or whatever else you feel appropriate) to your heart’s content; after all, it’s your story.

## Time

Time is one of the first concepts you must understand when playing **Wraith**. There are five different ways to describe divisions of time, progressing from the smallest unit to the largest all-encompassing one.

- **Turn** — A *turn* is the smallest unit of time within a game of **Wraith**, anywhere from three seconds to three minutes in length. A turn is enough time to take one *action* (discussed below).

- **Scene** — One compact period of action and roleplaying that takes place in a single location. A *scene* can be compared to a scene in a movie or in a play. It takes as few or as many turns as are necessary.

- **Chapter** — One independent part of a *story*, often played in one game session, made up of scenes connected by *downtime*.

- **Story** — A complete tale, with an introduction, buildup and climax, that often takes several chapters to complete.

- **Chronicle** — A whole series of stories connected by the lives of the characters and perhaps a broadly conceived theme and plot. Your *chronicle* is the ongoing narrative your troupe creates.

- **Downtime** — The period of time between scenes, which characters can spend resting, recuperating or possibly even learning new skills. Anytime the characters are not actively participating in a story it is considered to be downtime.

## Rolling Dice

**Wraith** requires a few 10-sided dice, which you can buy in any game store. If you're the Storyteller, you'll want to have at least 10 dice all to yourself. Players may need fewer dice, depending upon their characters' Attributes. The system we use is a pretty simple one, although it may seem complicated at first.

- Your character has a certain amount of dice in each of her *Traits* (see below). These dots reflect how good she is at certain things. When you (or, more precisely, your character) take an action, you roll one die for every dot she has in the Trait or Traits she's using.

- You'll want to roll a certain number of *successes* to accomplish things. A success is when you match or exceed a *difficulty number*. This difficulty, which the Storyteller assigns, is a number between 2 and 10 which reflects how hard the task is. The harder the task you're trying to accomplish, the higher the difficulty of the roll. It's that simple.

- Modifiers may add to or subtract from the difficulty number on a roll, or affect the number of dice you have

in your *Dice Pool*. A + 1 difficulty, for example, adds 1 to the difficulty number you must match. On the other hand, subtracting one from your Dice Pool gives you one fewer die to roll, making it harder to achieve the required number of successes.

- The more successes you roll, the better your character does. On the other hand, if you don't roll any successes, your character fails at whatever she is attempting. If you gain negative successes (also known as a *botch*), not only does your character fail, but she does so spectacularly and may suffer dire consequences.

That's it. The rest is all variations on this basic idea.

### For Example...

*Having stolen a sack of oboli from a group of Heretics, Erik is running for his afterlife. Unfortunately, the Heretics have cornered him on a rooftop, leaving him no escape other than to attempt a leap across to the neighboring building. The Storyteller determines that the difficulty for the leap will be 7, and that Erik will need at least three successes to land on his feet. He also notes that the difficulty of the leap will be raised by one (making the total difficulty 8) if Erik tries to jump carrying the bag of coins. More concerned about his safety than the oboli at this point, Erik flings the sack over his shoulder at the oncoming Heretics and leaps into the air....*

The Storyteller asks Erik to combine his Strength and Athletics Traits (since these seem the most appropriate to the situation) and then roll to see if he makes the jump. Erik has a 3 Strength and 2 Athletics, allowing him to roll five dice. He rolls: 2, 3, 3, 5, 7. Since Erik only got one success the Storyteller decides that he made it most of the way, but is holding onto the rooftop edge by his fingertips. Fortunately for Erik, the Heretics are too busy picking up the scattered oboli to worry about him — for now.



Mon Spencer '96

## Actions

During the course of a story, characters will take many *actions*. Players may act out character conversations or describe character actions to the Storyteller, just so long as the point gets across. An action can be anything from having a simple conversation to fighting for your life against a powerful Spectre.

Many actions are automatic: walking across the street toward a warehouse, for instance. All the Storyteller needs to do is keep track of the character and what she's doing. However, if the character were attempting to sneak across the street to a warehouse which was being guarded by several watchful Legionnaires, the Storyteller might require a die roll to determine whether the character was spotted or not.

## Trait Ratings

A character's *Traits* — his innate and learned abilities and aptitudes — are defined by a number of dots. Each Trait has from one to five dots, which describes that character's level of ability in that particular Trait. One dot is amateurish, five is superb.

You should consider the normal human range to run from one to three, with two being the average. However, some people can have Traits of four (exceptional) or five (superb), or even a Trait rating of zero.

x	Abysmal
•	Poor
••	Average
•••	Good
••••	Exceptional
•••••	Superb

For each dot your character has in a particular Trait, you get to roll one die. Thus, if you have four dots in Strength, you would roll four dice when attempting a Strength-related feat. If you have one dot in Perception, you would roll one die when attempting to notice something. However, you only rarely roll just the number of dice you have in an *Attribute* (your innate capabilities). Usually, you get to add the appropriate Attribute's number of dice to the number you have in an *Ability* (things you know and have learned).

So if the Storyteller wishes the players to see if their characters notice the Reaper sneaking up behind them, he would have them roll their Perception + Alertness (an Attribute + an Ability). He would then assign a difficulty for the roll, which would be the number the players would need to get on each of the dice in order to gain successes. The Storyteller might also decide that they need a certain number of successes, depending upon how stealthy the Reaper is.

This combination of dice for Attributes and Abilities is called a *Dice Pool*. This Pool is the total number of dice a player rolls in a single turn, usually for a single action, though a player can divide his Dice Pool if he wants his character to perform more than one action (see “Multiple Actions and Splitting Dice Pools,” below).

Some Traits (Willpower and Pathos, for example) have both permanent and temporary ratings. The latter can go up and down during a story, while the character's permanent rating usually stays the same. Most changes are marked in the squares, which represent a character's current rating. A character's Dice Pool in these Traits is usually based on his permanent rating (the circles), not its current score (the squares).

Some actions don't require or even have appropriate Abilities. These are actions that rely on a character's innate capabilities (Attributes) or strength of character (Willpower or Pathos). If a character were trying to lift a heavy object, for example, his Dice Pool for the roll would consist of a number of dice equal to just his Strength rating.

There is absolutely no situation in which more than two Traits can be combined to form a Dice Pool. Generally only one Trait can be used if it has a potential value of 10, and Traits like Willpower are rarely combined with another Trait. It is generally impossible for a normal character to have more than 10 dice in a Dice Pool.

## Difficulties and Successes

Now you've got to figure out what you need to look for when you roll the dice. The Storyteller will give you a *difficulty rating*, which is the *minimum* number you need to roll on each die for it to count as a success. A difficulty is always a number between 2 and 10. You must roll that number or higher on at least one of the dice in your Dice Pool to succeed. Each time you do so is called a *success*. If the difficulty of a roll is a 6 and you roll a 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9, you've scored two successes. Though you usually need only one success to perform an action, the more successes you achieve, the better your character does whatever she's attempting to do. Scoring only one success is considered a marginal achievement, while three is considered a complete success, and five a momentous event.

### Difficulties

3	Easy
4	Routine
5	Straightforward
6	Standard
7	Challenging
8	Difficult
9	Extremely Difficult

### Degree of Success

One Success	Marginal
Two Successes	Moderate
Three Successes	Complete
Four Successes	Exceptional
Five Successes	Phenomenal

The lower the difficulty, the easier the task, and vice versa. The Storyteller may decide to let some actions succeed without a roll (automatic success) if the number of dice in your character's Dice Pool is higher than the difficulty rating of the roll.

Though they're not on the list above, your Storyteller can also assign difficulties of 2 or 10. This should be rare; difficulty 2 is pathetically easy, and difficulty 10 is so impossibly hard that you're more likely to screw it up than you are to succeed. Any 10s a player rolls are successes, no matter what. Unless the Storyteller says otherwise, the standard difficulty for any task is always 6.

## Complications

It's usually easy to score a single success, even with only one or two dice. You have a 75% chance of a marginal success when you roll only two dice with a difficulty of 6. Sounds easy, doesn't it? Of course there are a few complications for those who wish to use them. If your group is heavily into roleplaying, simple rolls and automatic successes are usually enough.

## Botches

Whenever you roll a “one,” it cancels out a success. Remove both the success die and the “one” die, and pay them no more heed. If you roll more “ones” than you do successes, you *botch*, meaning that some sort of disaster happens. Don't count the “ones” that canceled out successes, but if even a single “one” is left after all the successes have been canceled, a botch occurs. If there aren't any “ones” or successes left, you've just failed at whatever your character was attempting to do.

Some troupes count extra “ones” as really bad botches. This is an entirely optional interpretation, and can get to be more trouble than it's worth (even if it is occasionally amusing...).

## For Example...

*Jackie the Renegade Netrunner and her Circlemate Casey are cruising through the Tempest in his relic 1974 Nova when she hears a strange scraping sound coming from the underside of the car. She leans out and looks underneath, only to see that a Spectre has attached himself to the vehicle and is about to claw through the floorboards. Wisely, Jackie informs Casey of the danger, and he immediately makes for the nearest Byway, hoping to find safety there. He guns the engine....*

Casey announces he's headed for the Byway, which is visible up ahead as a two-lane stretch of blacktop. He decides he wants to try to crash onto the Byway, hopefully scraping the Spectre off and turning it into ectoplasmic roadkill. The Storyteller decides that due to the delicacy of the maneuver, Casey needs to make a Dexterity + Argos roll (difficulty 8) and achieve two successes. Casey's got three dots in Dexterity and three more in Argos: six dice. He rolls: 10, 6, 4, 3, 1, 1. The first 1 cancels out the success; the second 1 counts as a botch. The Storyteller rules that Casey has missed the Byway entirely and

in fact sent the Nova into a spin. Helplessly, Casey watches the Byway blaze past; meanwhile the Spectre has punched through the bottom of the car, and Jackie is hacking at it with her knife. It doesn't look good....

## Multiple Actions and Splitting Dice Pools

If you want your wraith to perform more than one action in a turn, you can elect to split the Dice Pool between her actions. The number of dice you assign to each action is up to you, but if one of your potential Pools is smaller than the other (a Perception + Alertness of four dice against, say, Dexterity + Brawl of six), the smaller Pool is used as the total number of dice available for both actions. In the above example, a character would have only four dice to split between his two actions.

### For Example...

*Desperately clinging to the ledge, Erik attempts to pull himself up onto the rooftop. Given plenty of time and less stressful circumstances, the Storyteller would probably allow him to do this without resorting to a roll. Unfortunately for Erik, one of the Heretics decides to take a shot at him with a relic pistol, just as our hero is swinging up over the edge.*

The Storyteller informs Erik that he may either attempt to pull himself onto the rooftop, or try to avoid the bullet. Erik wants neither to fall nor get shot, so he opts to split his Dice Pool instead. The Storyteller decides that the Traits Erik would use for pulling himself up onto the roof are the same as for jumping (Strength + Athletics), while the Traits for dodging the bullet would be Dexterity + Dodge. Just as before, Erik's Strength and Athletics total five dice, while his Dexterity and Dodge dice total seven. Therefore, Erik has five dice to split between his two Dice Pools. Deciding that getting onto the roof is actually the most important task, Erik chooses to roll three dice for that and only two dice for the dodge.

## Automatic Successes

Rolling dice all the time gets in the way of roleplaying. During most scenes — especially when you're deeply involved in the story — you may wish to not roll dice at all, and roleplay through without interruptions. *Automatic successes* keep players from making rolls for actions that characters could perform in their sleep.

Most groups usually use a combination of dice rolling and automatic successes. These work like this: If the number of dice you have in your Dice Pool is equal to or greater than the difficulty of a roll, you succeed automatically. It's a marginal victory, just as if you'd rolled one success; sometimes you'll want to roll anyway to try for a more favorable result. But for simple, common actions, automatic successes eliminate a lot of wasted time. The story is what matters, anyway.

You may also spend a Willpower point (see Chapter Four) to earn an automatic success. This automatic success is in addition to any successes gained by rolling the dice. You will

not want to do this too often, however, for once a Willpower point is spent it is gone for a while. You may only spend one Willpower point per turn to gain free successes.

Extended actions are more complicated than simple actions, and shouldn't often be employed in the middle of intense roleplaying. As the Storyteller, you decide what type of action is called for. A little bit of experience will be your best advisor.

## Extended Actions

Simple actions only require one success. Some tasks, called *extended actions*, require more than one success to fully complete. You may need to accumulate three, or seven, or possibly even 20 successes (on rare occasions).

An extended action allows you to roll over and over on subsequent turns in an attempt to collect enough successes to succeed. In extended actions, successes are cumulative; if you need 10 successes on an extended action, and score two on your first roll and three on your second, you're halfway to being done.

During an extended action, you can keep trying to obtain successes for as long as you want, or at least until the Storyteller decides that you've been at it long enough. If you botch during an extended action, your character may (at Storyteller discretion) have to start over from scratch, with all of her accumulated successes wiped out. On the other hand, the Storyteller may decide not to let your character try again at all.

### For Example...

*Christine's Shadow, the Perfectionist, has temporarily taken her over. This causes her to engage in self-destructive behavior and abuse other wraiths in her Circle. Trapped inside her own head, Christine decides to make a desperate attempt to break the Shadow's control.*

The Storyteller tells Christine that she may try to overcome her Shadow by rolling her Willpower with a difficulty of 6, but that she will need to gain a total of at least five successes to regain control. On the bright side, she may gain these successes over time. Christine's Willpower is 8, allowing her to roll a total of eight dice. She rolls: 1, 2, 2, 4, 5, 5, 6, 9, giving her only one success (remember that the botch rule causes her to lose one success for each 1 rolled). Unfortunately, Christine's Shadow is still in control, but the Storyteller decides that she can continue the struggle. She rolls again: 9, 9, 7, 6, 4, 4, 3, 2, giving her four successes. Christine adds these four new successes to the one she'd already achieved, and suddenly she's got the five successes she needs. The Shadow is banished once again, and it's left to Christine to apologize to those whom her dark side has wronged....

## Resisted Actions

Sometimes your character's efforts will oppose another's, just like in a tug-of-war. Each of you will make rolls, often with one of the other character's Traits as the difficulty. The character who scores the most successes in this sort of contest succeeds at her intention, while the other character fails. However, you are

considered to score only as many successes as the number by which your successes exceeded your opponent's. Your opponent's successes eliminate your own, just as "ones" do. Outstanding successes in this sort of contest are both difficult and rare, and even if your opponent can't beat you, she can diminish your efforts.

On actions that are both extended and resisted, one of the opponents must collect a certain number of successes in order to win. Each success above the opponent's total number of successes in a single turn is added together. The first opponent to collect the designated number of successes wins the contest.

## For Example...

*Lord Ember, Master Soulforger, has picked up McKenna, a Renegade who's been caught and sentenced to the forges. McKenna has other ideas and starts to struggle, trying to break Lord Ember's grip.*

The Storyteller rules that this is an opposed action. Both McKenna and Ember must roll Strength + Brawl with a difficulty equal to their opponent's total Dice Pool. If the soulforger wins, he maintains his hold, allowing him to slam McKenna's Corpus down on the anvil next turn. If McKenna succeeds, he may attempt to flee. Unfortunately the Renegade's Dice Pool in this instance is only four while the soulforger's is eight — McKenna is going to have to get very lucky to escape.

## Teamwork

Characters can work together to collect successes, most often during an extended action. At the discretion of the Storyteller, two or more characters can make their rolls separately and combine their successes. They may never combine their separate Traits for one roll, however. Teamwork is effective in some circumstances such as combat, shadowing prey, collecting information and repairing devices. During others, it can actually be a hindrance; in many social situations, a tag-team approach can actually confuse the subject.

## Trying it Again

Failure is frustrating. If you're having trouble with your computer and can't figure out why it won't work, you're in for an evening of increasing frustration and decreasing productivity. **Wraith** reflects this frustration with failure by increasing the difficulty of any action that is tried again after an initial failure.

Whenever a character attempts an action she previously failed, the Storyteller has the option of increasing the difficulty of the action by one. So if a first attempt at picking a relatively simple lock (difficulty 5) fails, a character's embarrassment at his initial failure could make him press too hard on his second attempt. To reflect this, the Storyteller would raise the difficulty of the roll to 6. Of course, if the character fails yet again, things will continue to get worse....

In some instances, such as in combat, the Storyteller shouldn't invoke this rule. Missing someone with your first shot isn't going to fluster you so much that you'll never hit your target.



## Examples of Rolls

Each Attribute can be combined with each Ability, allowing for 270 types of simple rolls that can be made (and that's not counting Willpower). Admittedly, you will not often have cause to roll Dexterity + Enigmas, but it just might come up. The following are some examples of rolls that may be called for during the course of a story.

- Monica is attempting to sneak into the Hierarchy haunt at the Old Post Office Pavilion. Several Legionnaires stand about, keeping a silent vigil for possible intruders. In order to avoid detection, Monica must roll Wits + Stealth (difficulty 7) in an opposed roll against the nearest Legionnaire's Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6). In order to get close, she must gain more successes than he does.

- Moshe has been sent by his Hierarchy superiors to spy on a local Renegade Haunt. Captured by the Renegades he had been sent to spy on, Moshe tries to convince them that he has come to join forces with them. The Renegades' leader, an Artificer who would like nothing better than to hammer Moshe into a piece of flatware, will take some convincing, so Moshe must roll Wits + Subterfuge (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how much of his story the Renegade leader will believe — if any.

- Sharon's mortal lover has died in a sudden accident. She learns that he has recently been taken by a Hierarchy Reaper and sent to the forges for his plasm. In attempt to free him, she approaches the local soulsmith with an offer of relics in exchange for her lover. The soulforger is short on new souls, however, and drives a hard bargain. Sharon must roll Manipulation + Bureaucracy (difficulty 7) in an attempt to get the price down.

- Jane is attempting to convince a group of Lemures that the Hierarchy is a bunch of petty dictators who create rules that serve only their own purposes. She must roll Manipulation + Expression (difficulty 7) in order to sway them. If she gets four or more successes she may cause them to riot, but if she botches they may turn on her instead.

- While returning to his Haunt, Karl is suddenly attacked by a Spectre. Not being in the mood to fight, Karl attempts to run away. He must roll Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6) in an opposed roll against the Spectre, or else be attacked before he can flee.

- Sveyn has discovered a relic volume about exorcisms. Unfortunately, the book is written in a deliberately archaic style. Sveyn must roll Intelligence + Occult (difficulty 8) to extract any useful information from the dense prose.

- Fai Chin is attempting to repair a relic sword that was broken during a battle with a Spectre. Fortunately, as an Artificer Fai has access to a soulforge. The sword is rather badly damaged (it broke in three places), so the Storyteller rules that Fai must roll Dexterity + Repair (difficulty 9) and gain at least six successes to repair the sword completely. She also rules that Fai may only make one roll per day, but that the successes are cumulative.

- Kenneth is being brutally interrogated by Hierarchy inquisitors about the location of a Renegade haunt. A fanatic to his Renegade cause, Kenneth summons all his strength to resist them. The Storyteller tells him that he must roll Stamina + Subterfuge (difficulty 8) to maintain his story. Five successes will allow him to convince the inquisitors fully that he is telling the truth, but if he fails he just might crack.

- Yuri has recently joined a group of Renegade Haunters known as the Soulscreamers. Unfortunately, he feels as though many of the gang don't really trust him. He asks the Storyteller if he can make a Charisma + Streetwise roll in order to impress his fellow Renegades and get them to trust him. The Storyteller agrees, deciding that the difficulty will be 6, but that he must roll at least four successes to impress the most distrustful member of the gang.

## Lexicon

This is a list of terms you will encounter, both in reading this book and during the course of your gameplay, that can be used to describe how **Wraith** works.

**Ability:** An *Ability* is a Trait that describes what a character knows, learns or can do. Abilities are divided into Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Examples of Abilities include *Dodge*, *Security* and *Bureaucracy*.

**Action:** An *action* is a deed that a character performs. Actions range from walking down the block to using Arcanoi to swinging a weapon. When a player tells the Storyteller what his character is going to do, this is called *announcing an action*.

**Advantages:** These are additional Traits that characters possess besides Attributes and Abilities. *Backgrounds*, *Arcanoi*, *Passions*, *Fetters*, *Willpower* and *Pathos* are considered *Advantages*.

**Angst:** The negative emotional energy that powers a wraith's Shadow. Angst is gained by obeying Dark Passions.

**Arcanoi:** The unique powers that wraiths possess. The singular is *Arcanos*.

**Attributes:** Traits that describe a character's innate potential for Physical, Social and Mental tasks. Examples of Attributes include *Strength*, *Charisma* and *Perception*.

**Backgrounds:** Traits that reflect a wraith's experience and place in society, purchased separately from Abilities. *Status*, *Mentor* and *Eidolon* are examples of *Backgrounds*.

**Botch:** A *botch* is a catastrophic failure on a die roll. A player is said to have botched if he rolls more "ones" than successes.

**Catharsis:** When a wraith's Shadow attempts — and sometimes succeeds at — taking over her Corpus.

**Character:** A *character* is the persona a player adopts in order to play **Wraith**. Much like an actor's role, the character is the player's surrogate on the stage that the Storyteller sets.

**Corpus:** The "body" of a wraith, equivalent to how healthy he is. Every success on a damage roll removes one level of Corpus from the victim.

**Demeanor:** The personality a wraith presents to the Underworld, which may differ vastly from his true Nature.

**Dice Pool:** The number of dice you have available for a given roll, equivalent to the number of dots your character possesses in the Traits being tested.

**Difficulty:** The target number for a success on a die roll. The more difficult the action being attempted, the higher the *difficulty*. Difficulties range between 2 and 10.



**Downtime:** *Downtime* is the time when the characters aren't actively in gameplay. This includes time spent Slumbering, studying or turning large rocks into small ones — all the things it's no fun to roleplay.

**Eidolon:** The purest aspects of the Psyche, in many ways the wraith's higher self. In game terms, a Background that a wraith can purchase in order to resist the effects of her Shadow.

**Extended Action:** This is an action requiring multiple successes in order to achieve the desired effect. Multiple rolls can be made in pursuit of this effect.

**Fetters:** Objects in the lands of the living that tie a wraith to the Shadowlands. The more dots a wraith has in a Fetter, the more important it is.

**Nature:** A wraith's true, archetypal self.

**Passions:** The purposes which drive a wraith, based around a core emotion. Wraiths are able to gain Pathos by following their Passions.

**Pathos:** The pure emotional energy that fuels wraiths' Arcanoi. Pathos is gained from fulfilling Passions.

**Points:** The temporary ratings of such Traits as *Willpower*, *Pathos*, *Angst* and *Corpus*; the squares on the character sheet, not the circles.

**Psyche:** A wraith's core personality, also known as the character.

**Rating:** The permanent value (i.e., the number of dots) a wraith possesses in a Trait.

**Regret:** Used strictly for storytelling purposes, a character's Regret is the thing that she wishes most she'd done during her living days. Used to define a character during the generation process.

**Resisted Action:** An action that two characters take against each other. Both characters roll and compare their number of successes. The one with the greater number of successes is considered to have "succeeded" at her action.

**Scene:** A single moment in a story, which may be composed of multiple turns, and which may be thought of as comparable to a scene in a play or TV show.

**Shadow:** A wraith's dark side, the Mr. Hyde half of his personality.

**Shadowguide:** The player who, in addition to playing his own character, also takes the part of another character's Shadow.

**Simple Action:** An attempted action that requires only one success (though more can be obtained).

**Storyteller:** The person who creates and guides a **Wraith** chronicle, describing what the characters see and taking the parts of their adversaries and allies.

**System:** The rules covering any given situation in a game of **Wraith**; more specifically, what sort of roll is appropriate for what sort of action.

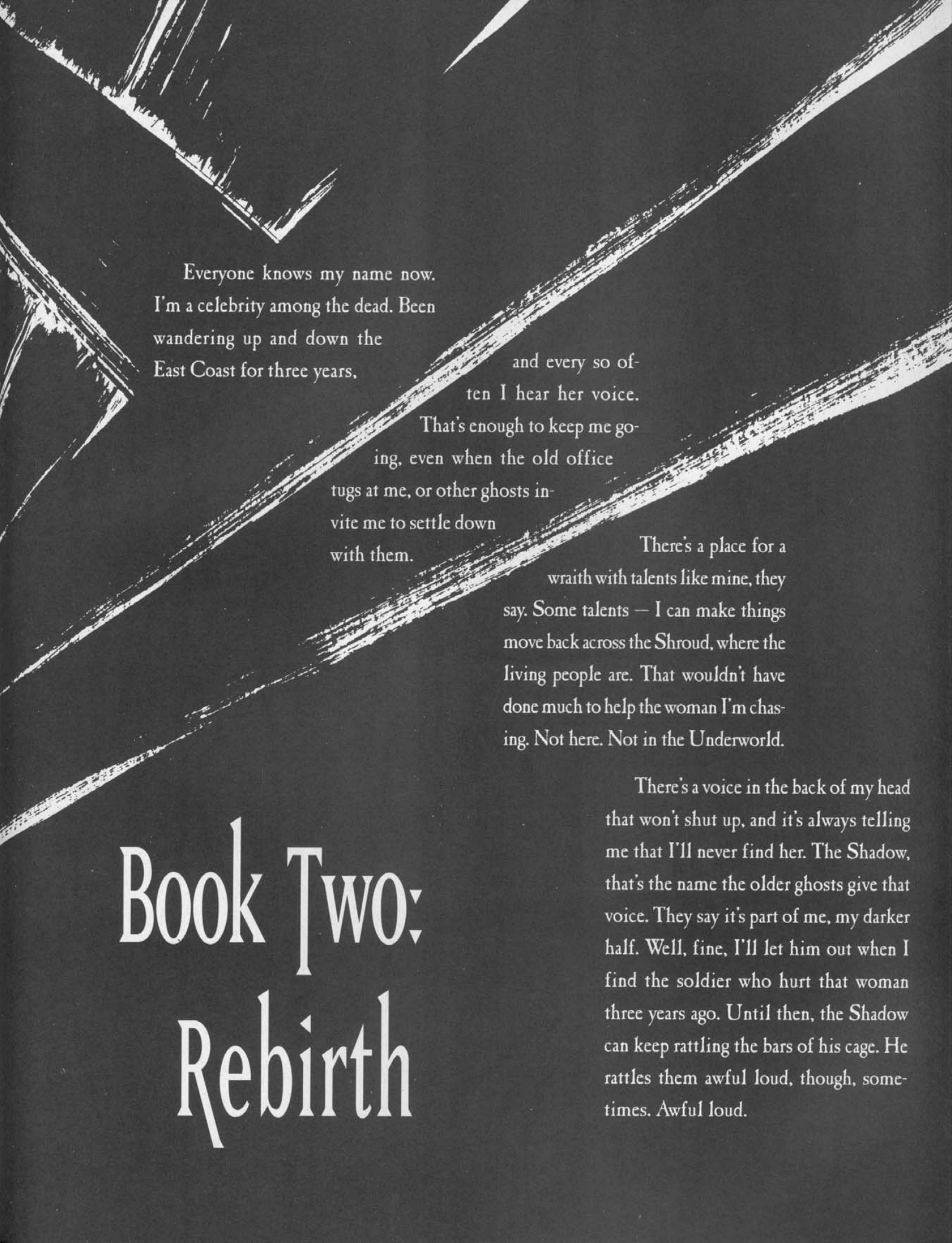
**Thorns:** Special abilities possessed only by the Shadow.

**Trait:** Any Ability, Attribute or other measure of a character's capabilities that can be measured in dots.

**Troupe:** A group of people who gather to play **Wraith**

**Willpower:** The Trait detailing how much self-possession and purpose a wraith has, often used to defend against attacks that are emotional or mental in nature. Unlike most Traits, *Willpower* is often spent instead of rolled.





Everyone knows my name now.  
I'm a celebrity among the dead. Been  
wandering up and down the  
East Coast for three years,

and every so of-  
ten I hear her voice.

That's enough to keep me go-  
ing, even when the old office  
tugs at me, or other ghosts in-  
vite me to settle down  
with them.

There's a place for a  
wraith with talents like mine, they  
say. Some talents — I can make things  
move back across the Shroud, where the  
living people are. That wouldn't have  
done much to help the woman I'm chas-  
ing. Not here. Not in the Underworld.

# Book Two: Rebirth

There's a voice in the back of my head  
that won't shut up, and it's always telling  
me that I'll never find her. The Shadow,  
that's the name the older ghosts give that  
voice. They say it's part of me, my darker  
half. Well, fine, I'll let him out when I  
find the soldier who hurt that woman  
three years ago. Until then, the Shadow  
can keep rattling the bars of his cage. He  
rattles them awful loud, though, some-  
times. Awful loud.

## The Hierarchy

A thin, gray wash of morning light seeps into the building and slowly bleeds away the shadows. I am still huddling against the wall, as far away from the door as I can get. At first I barely notice the change in light, but eventually I realize that I can see my hands. Pale and thin, they're clasped tightly together around my bent knees.

Maybe it's just paranoia, I tell myself, but when I take a quick personal inventory, I realize that several things are wrong.

For one, I have the distinct and frightening sensation that I can't breathe. No matter how hard I try, I can't feel the slightest motion in my chest or throat when I try to inhale.

Fragments of thought flit through my mind, but most of them still don't make much sense. The most vivid memories — especially the one of a hooded figure with a skeletal face, leaning over me and whispering — are too frightening to contemplate for long. I want to dismiss them as the products of panic and my overworked imagination, but I can't.

I groan as I stretch my arms over my head, my muscles and joints crackling like dry paper. My bones and tendons seem about to snap as I shift my weight forward and shakily stand up. After a moment, I pick my way through the debris and move toward the exit. As I get closer to the doorway, my eyes begin to sting from the brightening daylight. When I look outside, I have to lean against the rotting door jamb for support.

The city, or wherever I am, looks like the bombed-out ruins from some old World War II newsreel. The sun is low in the sky, swollen and red as it rises above the distant buildings. Its light casts long, thin shadows across the uneven ground where rubble and debris are strewn everywhere. Broken bricks and stones, piles of trash, uprooted trees, dented and rusted street signs, and other trash litter the area. Hulks of abandoned cars and trucks line both sides of the street.

A steady breeze that I can't feel on my face blows sheets of yellowed newspaper that flap like broken bird wings down the street until they fetch up against a building or rusted

chain-link fence. I expect to see packs of mongrels rummaging through the garbage in the alleyways, but everything is strangely quiet. As I look around, all I can hear is the low, hollow whistle of the wind and the high hiss of dust blowing about. I feel compelled to call out, but immediately remember the barghests from the night before and decide that it's best not to draw attention to myself.

Feeling drained of all energy and moving stiffly, I start walking up the street, looking from one side to the other, trying to find anything that looks familiar. When I stop and look back at the building where I spent the previous night, a cold blade of panic slices through me.

Above the arching doorway of the building is a sign. The painted letters are chipped and faded, but I can still make out what's written there. I shudder as I say the name out loud.

"Pine Knoll Elementary School."

For an instant, I feel completely disoriented as I try to look past the building's rot and decay to see the school I had attended more than 30 years ago.

"It can't be," I mutter, pressing my hands against the sides of my head. "What the hell is going on here?"

"I might be able to explain."

The voice, suddenly coming from so close behind me, is startling. I turn quickly and see the old man standing less than 10 feet away. He smiles at me with a grin that exposes a row of blackened, rotting teeth.

How could he have gotten so close without me hearing him? I am filled with a sudden surge of rage and fear, but — somehow — I control it.

"Yeah, I — I'd appreciate that," I manage to say.

The old man turns around slowly. Glancing over his shoulder at me, he hooks his forefinger and beckons for me to follow.

"Come on, then, if you'd like." His voice is almost lost beneath the wickering whisper of the wind.

"Where are we going?"

"We certainly can't stay out here," he replies, shaking his head

as he casts a furtive glance up and down the street. "We don't want to be seen."

"Why? Who will see us?" I look around, frowning. "Far as I can see, there's not another living soul within miles."

The old man's smile widens. Cocking his head back, he laughs out loud.

"That's it! That's *exactly* it." His voice rises in a high, wavering cackle. "Not another *living* soul! Oh, that's rich! Still —" He lowers his gaze and scans the street again. "Someone from the Hierarchy might see us, and we wouldn't want that, now, would we?"

"The Hierarchy?" I repeat.

I have no idea what he means by this, but just the way he says it fills me with a twisting apprehension.

"You have a deathmark on you," the old man says, his eyes gleaming insanely, "but the Hierarchy doesn't much care. If they find you, they'll

brand you with their own mark. That's what those beasts were doing last night. Hunting for souls to enslave. They were once human, like you, but now they're hounds for the local Anacreons."

None of this makes any sense to me, but I suddenly feel ill at ease being out in the open like this. The sound of the wind fills me with a deep sense of loneliness and despair.

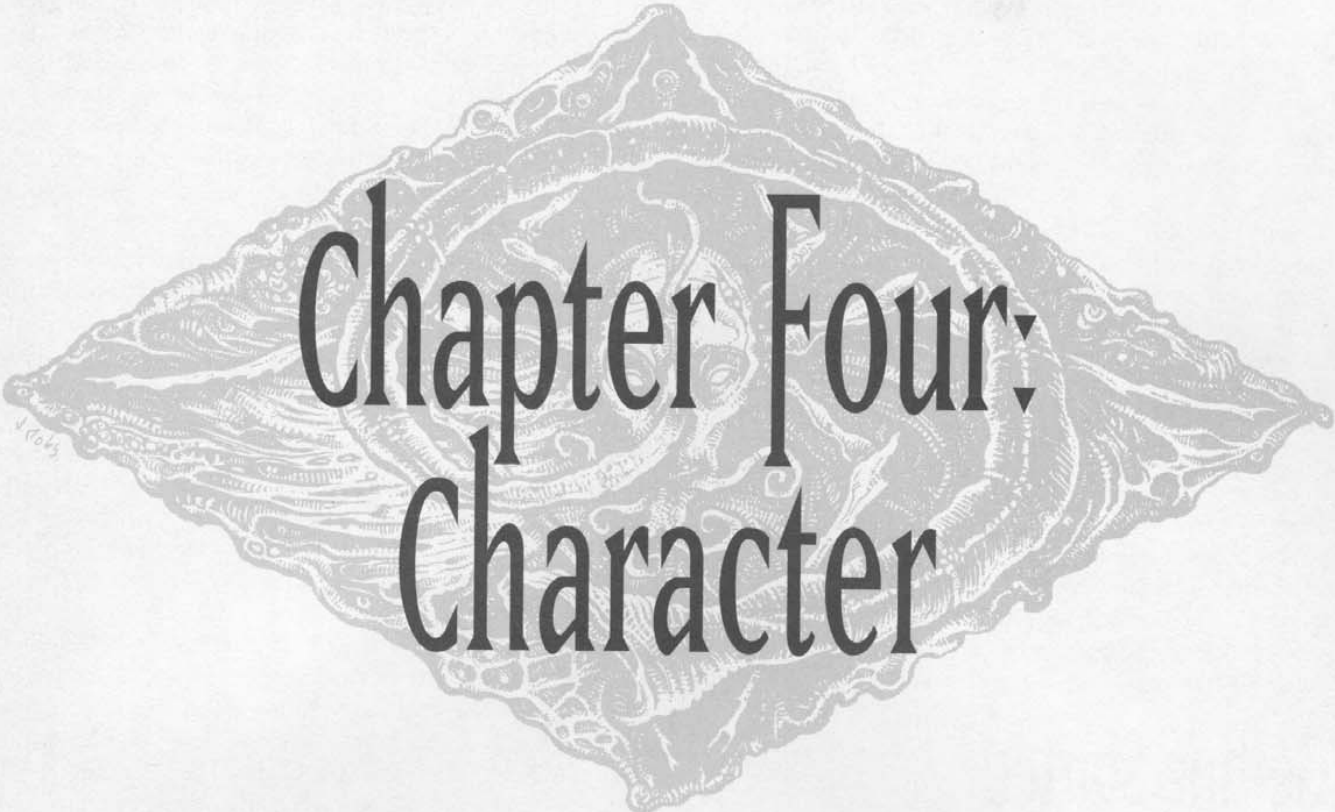
"Come along, then," the old man says, and he starts walking away.

"How do I know you're not a member of this...this Hierarchy, and that you're going to enslave me?"

He looks back at me over his shoulder and smiles wickedly.

"Because if I was with the Hierarchy, we wouldn't be having this conversation. I'd be counting my bounty for bringing in a new soul, and you'd be getting slow-roasted in a forge somewhere. Don't dawdle."





# Chapter Four: Character

*Oh blessed puppets, receive My prayer, and teach Me to make  
Myself in thy image.*

— Thomas Ligotti, “Mad Night of Atonement”



Before you can enter the world of **Wraith**, you must first create a character. The process of character creation, however, has more to it than just saying, “I want to be a....” Before you can start to play **Wraith**, you need to know who your character is and what she has the potential to do, what her likes and dislikes are, where she came from, and more. All of this is worked out during character creation, which gives you the chance to create a wraith whom you feel comfortable playing.

This chapter details how to create a character for **Wraith**. It has step-by-step instructions for building your

wraith from the ground up, as well as a sample of the creation process to serve as a reference. Essentially, this is how to take a character concept that excites you and turn it into numbers that are usable within the rules of **Wraith**. It's both easy and quick to do.

In the real world, nobody has a Charisma of 4 or three dots in Brawl. We have capabilities and potentials, not statistics. However, for a game like **Wraith**, those capabilities need to be translated into numbers for the sake of game play; the trick is not letting the numbers get in the way of the story. After all, a character with a Charisma of 4 may be vivacious, charming, magnetic or just plain cool. The Trait rating is just a way that you can fit your character into the rules of **Wraith**.

Usually character creation follows a definite pattern. You start with a basic concept for your character, assign Traits to determine what he can and can't do, and then fill in the blanks and details of the story of his life (and death). The idea is to use this process to create a character who will be interesting for you to play, for your friends' characters to interact with, and for your Storyteller to work into your troupe's plot. The idea is *not* to create an überwraith who can pick up the Labyrinth with one hand and shake out the Spectres; if you beat the tar out of literally everyone you come across, your chronicle is likely to be extremely boring. Characters with strengths and weaknesses are far more interesting, if for no other reason than success is always sweeter when you snatch it from the jaws of failure.

Cooking up your character is likely to take a little time and a lot of thought if you want to do it right. You start by deciding who you want to play (A vampire hunter who got a little too close to his prey? A programmer Fettered to his old office and trying to escape? A victim of a drive-by who wants revenge on her killer?), and then what your character is capable of. Once you have an idea that works, you can start assigning Traits that fit that concept, and you're on your way.

## Getting Started

*This narrative begins with the death of its hero.*

— Ambrose Bierce, "A Jug of Sirup"



here are a few things that you should bear in mind before you start creating your character. Specifically:

- Your character can be of any age, from any culture, of any religion, color, orientation or whatever else you chose. What matters is that the character makes sense and doesn't unbalance the rest of the chronicle. It's often easiest to play a character who was Reaped within the last three decades; characters who are older tend to know a little too much about what's going on in the Underworld.

- The **Wraith** character creation process is a means to creating all of your character, not just her statistics. Ideally, you'll figure out who your wraith is at the same time you determine what she's capable of. If, at the end of this chapter, you're left with a collection of dots and words on a character sheet and no clear idea, something's wrong.

- There is nothing random about character creation in **Wraith**. There's no rolling dice to pick all of your basic statistics, nor are there any random generation tables. Your character is something you build from the ground up to your specifications. You assign Trait ratings and choose everything about your character. That way, you're certain to play a character whom you find interesting.

- Traits are rated numerically from one to five in most cases; in rare instances they range from one to 10. The scale works much the same way that a movie reviewer's scale does: five stars (or dots in a Trait) is excellent; one star (or dot) is miserable. Two is average, which is something to bear in mind when you're determining Trait ratings. After all, you don't have to be excellent at everything; sometimes decent is as good as you're going to need.

- It's a very good idea to sit down with your fellow players and make sure that all of your characters are compatible with each other. Having a Hierarchy Reaper and an anti-soulslavery Heretic in the same Circle may sound like fun, but when all of your **Wraith** games turn into sitting around and watching two characters trying to throw each other into a Nihil, things can get boring pretty fast. That doesn't mean that your Circle needs to be all Hierarchs or all Renegades, just that the characters should be able to stay in the same room without starting a localized Maelstrom. In addition to mere compatibility, it often helps to figure out beforehand why the wraiths in your Circle are hanging around together. Sharing a Fetter, Passion or Haunt works; weaving together their back stories does as well. For example, Erik may have a Passion to find a woman he fell in love with after he died; one of his Circlemates might have known the woman back when she was alive; another might have seen her on his way to the Circle's Haunt; a third could have lost true love before he died and therefore will try to help Erik find his. If your character doesn't fit in with the rest of the Circle, you may find yourself sitting out of a lot of the action, or splintering the party. It's a lot easier and a lot more fun if all of the wraiths in the Circle have a good, strong reason to be there, and the best way to do that is to set it up beforehand.

## For Storytellers...

It falls to the Storyteller to guide the players through the character creation process. There are many reasons for this: to answer any questions players might have about the process, to offer suggestions and ideas when players get stuck, to make sure that the characters fit into her chronicle with a minimum of fuss, and most importantly, to make the whole character creation as simple and fast as possible.

The first step for you as Storyteller involves passing out the character sheets to your players, then asking if they have any questions about the sheet itself. Then walk them through the basics of character creation step by step, helping your players create characters who are well-rounded and neither too powerful nor unlikely to survive long.

Sometimes character creation can take most or all of a session. There's nothing wrong with this, so long as your players are taking that time to create real, vital characters. If you don't want to spend an entire roleplaying session on making characters, you can encourage your players to have their character ideas ready beforehand. After you've been playing for a

while, you'll find that this whole process gets faster and faster, as your players get more and more familiar with what makes a Wraith character work.

Once all of the lines are written out and the circles filled in, you can take the time to start running Preludes for your brand-new wraiths. These serve as introductory stories, allowing both you and your players to get to know their characters a little better. **For more on Preludes, see page 105.**

Part of your job will be making sure that all of the characters fit your planned chronicle. A katana-wielding samurai from the Jade Empire might make a sensational character, but if the rest of your players have decided to play no-nonsense Legionnaires, your samurai is going to feel distinctly out of place. At the same time, you should make sure that one character won't be able to bully the others into doing what he wants by virtue of his statistics. This is called Munchkining, and it's the surest way to get the other players to leave your campaign. It's no fun at all to play when you know you can't win, whether it's against a non-player character opponent or one of your fellow wraiths. Making sure that everyone's on more or less equal footing is vital, otherwise the imbalance will quickly wreck your whole chronicle.

## Character Creation

### Step One: Concept

*Here I sit in my bones, on the bones upon the hill  
Staring out at the wild, blue yonder*  
— Fish, "MR 1470"



he first thing you as a player need to do in creating a character is coming up with a basic concept for her. At this point you don't need to know all the details of her life and death, just a few of the highlights that will give you a rough idea of who she is. You can fill in the whats and wherefores later on in

the character process. The more time you spend creating and playing your character, the more fully fleshed out she'll be.

However, for right now you're just interested in the very basics. Your character can be from any culture or time period (though if you're playing a wraith who's a thousand years old, you should have a pretty good explanation for why she's no more powerful than someone who crossed the Shroud yesterday). Playing characters who haven't been wraiths all that long is generally easier, but if you want to play the ghost of a Civil War soldier or a medieval alchemist, there's nothing to stop you.

All you really need at this stage in character creation is the answer to a series of three questions: Who were you, how did you die, and what is keeping you a wraith?



## Who Were You?

What did you do when you were alive? How did you live your life from day to day? It's usually best to play characters who were relatively normal — rock stars or actors can create problems — but in the end it comes down to what you want and what your Storyteller will permit. Among the possibilities are:

- **Artist** — There was one truly great work of art in you that would have amazed the world (if you'd lived long enough to complete it).

- **Blank Slate** — A real *tabula rasa*, your life is a mystery to you.

- **Cop** — Perhaps you were a beat cop who watched his beloved neighborhood hit the skids. Or, you could have been with the narcotics squad, a SWAT team or even trapped behind a desk in a precinct house.

- **Crook** — Crime certainly did pay for you, at least for a while. Then again, maybe you got caught.

- **Dabbler** — There wasn't enough time when you were alive for you to follow all of your interests. So you did a little of this and a little of that, and never found a true calling.

- **Disestablishmentarian** — You lived to subvert the system however you could. Maybe you were a hacker, or perhaps you thought you were the new Robin Hood.

- **Drifter** — Nothing held you down for long. Maybe a hobo, maybe an artist looking for inspiration, maybe just a free spirit, you didn't stay still long enough to put down roots.

- **Politician** — You went to Washington with a mandate for change, and got changed instead. Perhaps you never even got elected, or were drummed out of office.

- **Punk** — Anarchy! If it stood up, you knocked it down; you saw the way it was looking at you!

- **Slacker** — You never did much of anything in your breathing days.

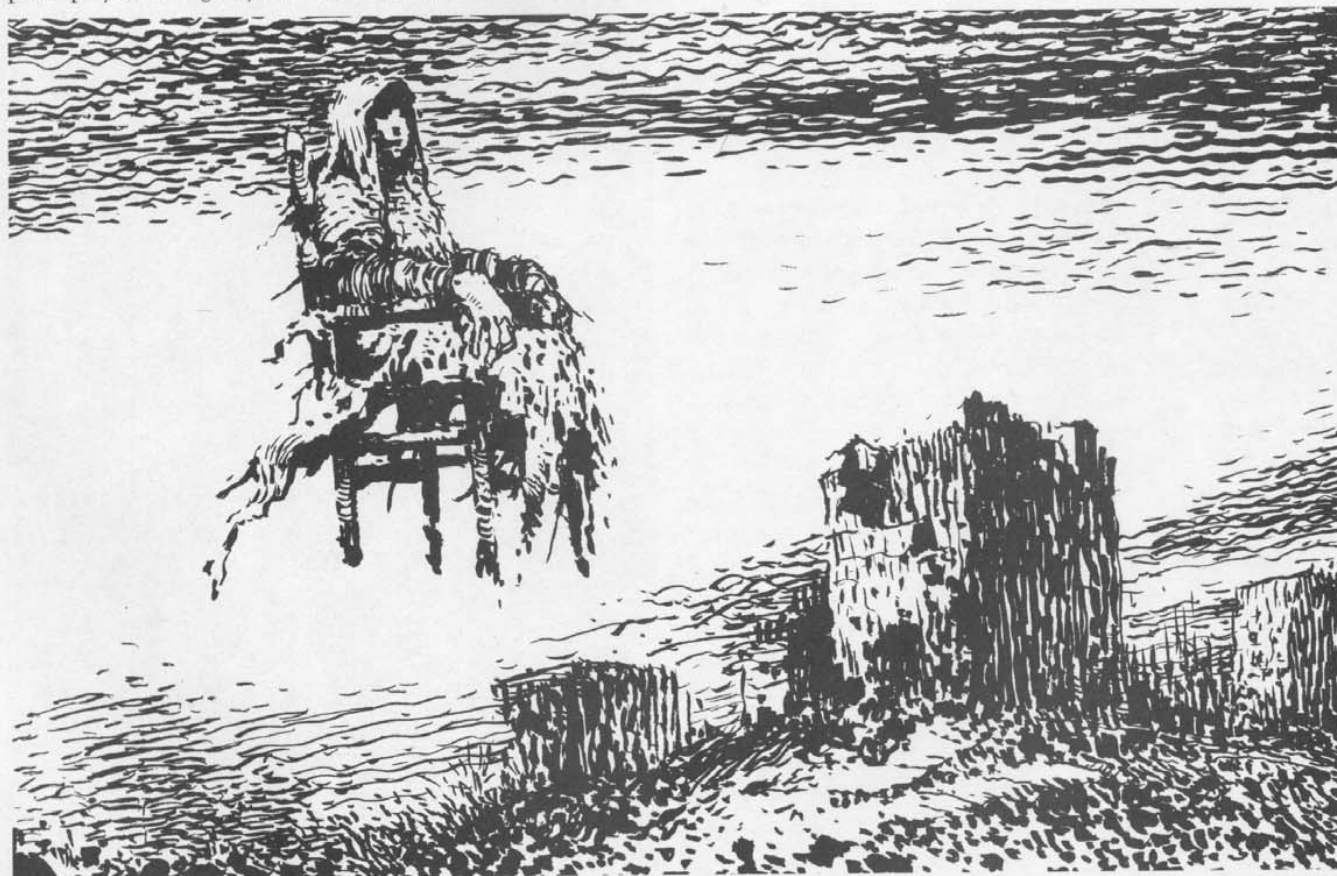
- **True Believer** — Your faith sustained you in life, but this isn't the heaven you were promised.

- **Victim** — You just let life happen to you, always reacting instead of acting.

- **Workaholic** — 80-hour work weeks and 2 a.m. planning meetings swallowed your life; now you're wondering what you missed.

## How Did You Die?

The way in which you died determines a lot about your perspective across the Shroud. After all, a wraith who slipped away peacefully and one who has his own murder to avenge are likely to have very different viewpoints on dealings with the living. Here are a few possibilities:



• **Accident** — Maybe the driver's side air bag on your new car didn't inflate, or the power wasn't shut off before you tried to rewire your apartment. At the funeral everyone said that it was just one of those things, and wasn't it a shame....

• **Illness** — Maybe it was sudden, or it could have been a slow spiral down to death. Perhaps you were given cancer by that chemical plant on the outskirts of town, or you're convinced the government tested a new biological warfare agent on you.

• **Mystery** — You don't know what happened to you, and you have a sneaking suspicion you're better off that way.

• **Old Age** — You lived a long, full life and went gently. Then again, maybe you kicked and screamed for just one more minute.

• **Overdose** — You went looking for oblivion in the form of drugs or alcohol. They took you a lot closer to Oblivion than you thought possible.

• **Something Strange...** — You were a one-in-a-million victim. Perhaps you were struck by lightning, or had a rare allergic reaction to your cold medication. Either way, you never saw it coming.

• **Suicide** — Everyone said that you were just trying to get attention, but what you were really trying to find was help. It's too late now, though....

• **Violence** — From the battlefield to the home, violence claims victims everywhere. Perhaps you were a soldier, or were killed during a mugging. Someone might even have had you killed.

## Why Are You Still Here?

Your Regret sums up why you became a wraith, instead of quietly moving on to the next level of existence. What is it that you never said or did that means so much to you now that you've moved on? Here are a few ideas:

• **Failure** — You died knowing that you'd failed at something you'd set your hand to. Maybe it was a lack of confidence, or perhaps just a lack of talent, but you weren't good enough then. Now, though, it's a different story.

• **Guilt** — Your sins were too great, and they won't let you rest

• **Legacy** — You wanted to leave something behind you, and now you feel obligated to protect it from the other side. Perhaps it's your children, perhaps it's the company you founded, but you will see your legacy live on.

• **Love** — Maybe you never told the one you loved how you felt, and you need to rectify this from beyond the grave. Or, perhaps there are still those left alive whom you loved more than life — or death.

• **Missed Chances** — All the trips you postponed, the lovers you never took, the opportunities you passed up; you want a second chance at them.

• **Mission Possible** — You had a mission in life — maybe an environmental crusade, or a mandate to take back your government — and you're not going to let a little thing like death stop you now.

• **Revenge** — Someone made your life a living hell, or even ended it. Now it's payback time, and you've got all eternity.

• **Unfinished Business** — You never got a chance to take back those last harsh words you spoke before your death, and now it's too late to heal the wounds. Or is it?

• **Unfulfilled Destiny** — You were meant for great things which you never quite achieved while you were alive.

## Nature and Demeanor

Next comes choosing personality Archetypes that best suit how you view the world, and how you present yourself. They may or may not be the same thing.

## Personality Archetypes

• **Architect**: The creation of lasting works is your goal.  
• **Avant-Garde**: If it's not new and exciting, you're not interested.

• **Bon Vivant**: Death doesn't have to end your party.

• **Bravo**: Bullying others isn't a habit, it's a calling.

• **Bureaucrat**: Everything according to proper procedure.

• **Caregiver**: Even the Restless — especially the Restless — need your love.

• **Child**: You never grew up, and look to a parent figure for direction.

• **Conniver**: There's got to be an easier way to do everything.

• **Critic**: Nothing's perfect, and that's just not good enough for you.

• **Explorer**: New Deadlands, new wraiths, new civilizations...

• **Follower**: You're happy not making any decisions.

• **Gambler**: Death may have upped the ante, but the game isn't over.

• **Jester**: What's so funny about being dead? Everything!

• **Leader**: When you speak, you expect others to listen.

• **Martyr**: You'll sacrifice for others, but won't suffer in silence.

• **Mediator**: You believe an agreement can always be reached.

• **Rebel**: Authority just rubs you the wrong way.

• **Scientist**: You look at the universe rationally, even if you are dead.

• **Survivor**: You think this existence is worth hanging on to, no matter what.

• **Traditionalist**: As far as you're concerned, the old ways are the best ways.

• **Visionary**: You have a dream for something better that only you can see.

Your *Nature* is the Archetype that best fits your true personality. This is how you really see the world, and also how you regain Willpower. By acting in accordance with your deepest-seated beliefs and feelings (your *Nature*), you can refuel your belief in yourself and your determination (your Willpower). Your *Nature* shouldn't be restrictive, as a character with the *Nature Critic* can still have a nice thing to say on occasion. Rather, it should serve as a basic guide to your perspective on the world of **Wraith**, and how you act in and react to that world.

Your *Demeanor* is the public face you wear, the mask that you show to the world. For some wraiths, their *Natures* and *Demeanors* are identical. Others feel the need to hide their true feelings behind false façades for purposes of protection or deception. *Demeanors* can be changed rapidly, and have no effect on the rules of **Wraith**. Rather, they're intended to serve simply as an aid to roleplaying.

## Step Two: Choosing Attributes

*She said I'd rather die than look like a loser...*

— Oysterband, "Elena's Shoes"

Your *Attributes* are your innate potentials. How strong you are, how quickly you think, how good you are at getting people to do what you want — these are all examples of *Attributes*. Although you no longer have a living body, you still have a physical form with physical — not to mention mental and social — capabilities. This is the part of character creation where you determine those capabilities.

*Attributes* are broken down into three categories: *Physical*, *Social* and *Mental*. You must prioritize those categories for your wraith. Which is most important? Which is least? This determines how many points you have to spend in each of those categories.

- **Physical** — Physical *Attributes* determine how strong you are, how much endurance you have, and how dexterous you are. They are the primary *Attributes* for characters built for action — cat burglars, bouncers, soldiers and the like. These *Attributes* detail the strengths and weaknesses of your *Corpus*. **Strength** describes how physically strong you are, and also tells you how much damage you do in hand-to-hand combat. **Dexterity** is a measure of how agile you are and how fast you move, and is useful for acrobatic maneuvers and using firearms. **Stamina** details how well you endure trauma and pain, and lets you resist damage via soak rolls.

- **Social** — Social *Attributes* are the measure of how well you function in social situations. They indicate how well you work and play with others, not to mention how well you manipulate and coerce them. **Charisma** is the rating of your personal charm and force of personality. **Manipulation** describes how good you are at getting others to do what you want, and **Appearance** is a measure of how good — or

impressive — you look. Social *Attributes* are primary for characters coming from political or high society backgrounds, and are useful in chronicles that focus on intrigue.

- **Mental** — Mental *Attributes* are the rating of your brainpower and ability to think quickly. Used to determine what you might know and what you can deduce from your surroundings, Mental *Attributes* are primary for scientists and other intellectual characters, as well as for street hustlers and anyone who has to think on their feet. **Perception** lets you know how well you can assess your environment — everything from hearing a tell-tale floorboard creak to noticing a clue that others have missed. **Intelligence** is the rating of how much brainpower you have, and how efficiently you can put your knowledge to work. **Wits** measures how quickly and efficiently you react to new or rapidly changing situations, such as combat.

The concept you've chosen should be of some help in determining which of your *Attribute* categories is primary, which is secondary, and which is tertiary. However, your concept should be more of a rough outline than a strict character map, and any combination that makes sense to you is fine.

Each character starts with one dot in each *Attribute*. Prioritizing the *Attribute* categories details how many more dots you have to spend in each of the *Attribute* breakdowns. You have seven dots to distribute among your primary *Attributes*, five dots for your secondary *Attributes*, and three dots for your tertiary. However, you don't have to spread the dots out evenly. Instead, choose them as you see fit. If you've chosen Physical *Attributes* as your tertiary, you may want to give each *Attribute* one dot, or you could put all three in **Strength** and not put any more in **Stamina** or **Dexterity**, or you could put two in **Strength**, one in **Dexterity**, and none in **Stamina**. It's up to you.

If you don't have as many dots in *Attributes* as you want, don't worry. Later on, you'll have the opportunity to raise your *Attributes* with what are called freebie points. For the moment, just go with what seems right and worry about rounding the numbers out later.

### Note

There is a space after each *Attribute* and *Ability* on the character sheet. This is for filling in your specialties, assuming you have any. A *specialty* is an area of a *Trait* at which you are especially good. You don't have to take a specialty, but sometimes they come in handy. For more information on specialties, see Chapter Five: Traits.

## Step Three: Choosing Abilities

Just as Attributes are your innate capabilities, *Abilities* are the things you picked up along the way in your life (or afterward). As Attributes are divided into three categories, so are Abilities. In this case, they're called *Talents*, *Skills* and *Knowledges*.

Your rating in any given Ability determines how good you are at it; four dots in Dodge means that you might have been a matador, while a single dot in Repair means that you probably gave your local auto mechanic a lot of business.

- **Talents** — These are intuitive Abilities, knacks that you've honed through experience. Talents aren't picked up from books, nor are they generally the sort of thing that you can practice. Usually they're picked up over time, as opposed being taught.

- **Skills** — Skills are Abilities that you can learn from rigorous training. Anything that can be taught, studied and practiced falls under the heading of Skills.

- **Knowledges** — Knowledges tend to be the more classically intellectual Abilities. They're learned from books, classes and rigorous studies, but can also come from experience in one's chosen field.

Abilities get prioritized just as Attributes do. The difference here is that you have 13 points to put into your primary Abilities, nine points for your secondary, and five points for your tertiary. Again, there will be the opportunity to boost your Ability ratings through freebie points later on, so fill out your character as best you can at this point and worry about the fine details later.

You are not permitted to put more than three dots in any Ability during this aspect of character generation. If you wish to raise an Ability rating above 3 with freebie points later, that is allowed, but for the moment no Ability can have a rating of more than 3.

## Step Four: Advantages

Unlike Attributes and Abilities, you don't have to prioritize your *Advantages*. Rather, you've got a set number of points to spread out in each one. Again, you can increase this number later through the use of freebie points.

### Arcanoi

Arcanoi are the unique powers that wraiths possess. You have five dots with which to purchase Arcanoi, though a starting character can't have more than three dots in any given Arcanos. More Arcanoi can be purchased later with freebies.

### Backgrounds

*Backgrounds* measure your place in Restless society and culture. They're a measure of who you know, what resources you can draw upon and what other wraiths think of you. You have seven dots to allocate among your Backgrounds, but your choices should reflect your character concept.





## Passions

What matters most is us  
 What matters most is now  
 What matters is this  
 How it comes, and where and how  
 Passion

— Hothouse Flowers, "Isn't It Amazing?"

Passions are what fuel a wraith's existence. Each Passion has three parts to it: A statement of the Passion (i.e., **Protect my lover** or **Avenge my death**); a core emotion for the Passion (such as **Love** or **Vengeance**); and a rating from one to five.

You have 10 points to divvy up among your Passions however you see fit. You can choose to have 10 Passions, each with a rating of one, or two Passions that have ratings of five. As your Passions are very much tied into who you are as well as what you can do, the Passions that are most important to you should have higher ratings than general or incidental ones.

For more on Passions, see Page 216.

## Character Creation Chart

- **Step One: Character Concept**  
 Choose concept, Nature and Demeanor.
- **Step Two: Select Attributes**  
 Prioritize the three categories: Physical/Social/Mental into primary, secondary and tertiary.  
 Choose primary Attributes (7 points).  
 Choose secondary Attributes (5 points).  
 Choose tertiary Attributes (3 points).
- **Step Three: Select Abilities**  
 Prioritize the 3 categories: Talents/Skills/Knowledges into primary, secondary and tertiary.  
 Choose primary Abilities (13 points).  
 Choose secondary Abilities (9 points).  
 Choose tertiary Abilities (5 points).
- **Step Four: Select Advantages**  
 Chose Arcanoi (5 points), Backgrounds (7 points), Passions (10 points) and Fetters (10 points).
- **Step Five: Finishing Touches**  
 Record beginning Pathos (5 + Memoriam) and beginning Willpower (5).  
 Spend freebies.
- **Shadow Creation**  
 See Chapter 6.

## Fetters

Fetters are the physical things that tie you to your former existence. A Fetter is a person, place or thing that has special importance to you, and that will continue to anchor you to the Shadowlands until either it is destroyed by outside forces, or it loses its meaning to you.

You have 10 points to assign to your Fetters, which can have ratings from one to five. The more important the Fetter is the higher its rating, and vice versa. Fetters can have some mystery to them — you may not remember why they are so important to you, and whole chronicles can be built around the quest to uncover a Fetter's significance.

Your Passions and Fetters can work together. For example, you can have the Passion **Finish My Novel (Determination) 5**, and the Fetter **Incomplete Manuscript: 4**.

## Step Five: Finishing It Off

The devil's in the details, it is often said, but other things can be found there as well. It is the finishing touches that really humanize a character, giving her the quirks and personality features that truly bring her to life (or as close as a ghost can get).

This is where you detail your character's Pathos and Willpower, as well as spending your 15 freebie points. Take the time to look things over before spending your freebies, however. You'll find that there a lot of things you'll want to spend them on, and nowhere near enough to go around. Besides, Pathos and Willpower come first.

## Pathos

Pathos is the pool of emotional energy that you can call upon to power your Arcanoi or heal your Corpus. Your initial Pathos rating is 5, plus however many dots you have in the Background Memoriam. This is just your starting rating, and your Pathos pool will go up and down throughout your chronicle. You can add to your Pathos pool with freebies, but your rating in this Trait can never exceed 10.

## Willpower

Willpower is the measure of how much determination and force of will you have, sometimes enabling you to will a success on a roll. In addition, your Willpower is instrumental in helping you resist the effects of your Shadow. Your base Willpower rating is 5, and can be increased with freebies. Your Willpower can never exceed 10.

Willpower has both a permanent and temporary rating. Your temporary (or current) Willpower measures how much force of will you have at the moment, while your permanent rating indicates your maximum. During character creation, all references to Willpower refer to the permanent sort.

## Freebie Points

Your 15 freebie points are used to fill in the blanks left during basic character generation. You can spend them on any Traits you desire, though the cost of different Traits varies. Freebies can raise an Ability over 3, but can't raise an Ability or Attribute above 5.

You can use freebies to purchase Arcanos Basic Abilities at this stage. Each Arcanos has Basic Abilities, not as powerful as the one-dot art for that Arcanos. If you wish, you can purchase just the Basic Abilities for an Arcanos at a reduced point cost, which also makes it easier to purchase the regular levels of the Arcanos with experience.

Freebie points can also be used to subtract points from your Shadow's freebie pool on a one-for-one basis, or you can take up to seven extra freebies by also granting those extras to your Shadow. Once you're done creating your character, you'll need to turn your attention to creating your dark side, and now is the time to begin thinking about it. **Shadow creation rules can be found in Chapter Six.**

Attributes — 5 points per dot  
Arcanoi — 5 points per dot  
Arcanoi Basic Abilities — 3 points per Arcanos  
Willpower — 2 points per dot  
Abilities — 2 points per dot  
Passions — 2 points per dot  
Backgrounds — 1 point per dot  
Fetters — 1 point per dot  
Pathos — 1 point per 2 dots

## Spark of Life

*am i alone in this? am i alone? i am your waiter and i am ordinary and i'm the wildest in the world*

— David Baerwald, "The Waiter"

There's a lot more to a character than just dots and Traits. This is your chance to get into who your wraith is and was, and what's driving her. This is where you can really personalize your creation and make her uniquely yours. You don't have to write these details down, as they've got no impact on the rules of the game, but having them available makes it easier for both you and your Storyteller to know who your wraith is and where she fits into the chronicle.

## Appearance

A wraith's Corpus tends to reflect her self-image. Many wraiths appear as they did at the moment they died; others find themselves looking as they did in the prime of their lives. Some find that they've somehow twisted their forms to reflect their fears or hopes; angelic wings, blazing eyes, skeletal hands and other such alterations are common. A wraith's clothes also manifest in this way; they reflect the way your character subconsciously wants to appear.

Your relevant social Traits and concept should be brought into play when you decide your character's appearance. A wraith who was a welder in life is unlikely to manifest in a tuxedo, and there should be a reason that a ghost with an Appearance of 1 is so unattractive. On the other hand, that welder may well find himself clad in a stylized version of his work-mask in the Shadowlands, and the wraith with Appearance 1 could be described as having a hideous scar that runs across his entire face. Your Traits are just numbers; you decide what the numbers stand for.

## Quirks

What makes you unique? Do you whistle the same tune wherever you go, or do you affect a Humphrey Bogart drawl? These are the little details that humanize your character, and which will make her more interesting for others to interact with. Again, these have no bearing on game mechanics, but go a long way toward establishing your character as more than just a series of dots.

## The Circle

It's often a good idea to sit down before character creation with the other players and make sure that all of your character concepts are compatible. Chronicles run more smoothly if the characters have a reason to be working together as opposed to trying to feed each other to Oblivion immediately.

# Example of Character Creation



Annys wants to create a **Wraith** character. Starting out with only a rough idea, she uses the character creation guidelines to develop a believable, enjoyable personality.

## Step One: Concept

Before she makes any decisions about spending points, Annys has to decide what kind of character she'll be playing. Specifically, Annys wants to explore what might have happened to an alternate self, with certain of her own personality aspects taken to extremes and certain radically different choices from those Annys has made in her life. She envisions a character whose life has been devoted to academics and teaching; this wraith didn't put down roots anywhere but rather drifted aimlessly from college to college across the country, never lasting more than a year or two as a professor at each stop.

She decides this character might be more interesting to play as a man, and picks the name Robin. Annys then considers an appropriate Nature and Demeanor for Robin — his fundamental mindset and the façade he puts on to face the world. She has some trouble deciding between personality Archetypes. Robin

could be a Follower, given his years of blending in various schools and quietly yielding to deans, but Annys doesn't think she'd enjoy playing him that way. Critic seems more appropriate somehow, and Annys decides that Robin never achieved anything lasting or really connected with anyone because he was too busy finding fault with himself and everyone around him. Annys decides that in order to cover up the doubt that has paralyzed him all his life and to better follow his academic pursuits, Robin adopted an Analyst Demeanor. In his guise as a calm, impartial observer he can coolly dissect anything from a Jacobean drama to the subconscious motivations of his research assistant.

## Step Two: Attributes.

Now Annys has to assign Attributes to her character. She prioritizes Robin's categories as follows:

Mental is Robin's primary category. He thrives on challenging other people's theories, breaking them down and refuting them point by point.

Physical is Robin's secondary category. Slightly vain and reluctant to seem too nerdy, he had forced himself to work out regularly for years.

Social is Robin's tertiary category. He's capable of making superficial acquaintances and no one ever truly dislikes him, but the closest he ever got to real human contact was sleeping with the occasional student who found his reserve intriguing.

Out of the seven points allotted for Robin's Mental Attributes, Annys assigns three to Perception (this added to the one free point automatically given per Attribute makes Robin's total Perception a 4). The last four points she breaks down into three for Intelligence and one for Wits. Robin is an extremely sharp observer and has the brains to use the information he gathers, but lacks something as far as common sense is concerned.

Two points out of Robin's five Physical points go to his Strength and two to his Stamina; Annys spends the other point on Dexterity, deciding that while muscles can be acquired through working out, general deftness is harder to come by.

For Robin's weakest category, Social, Annys spends two of her three points on Manipulation and one on Appearance. That means Robin's Charisma is only 1, but Annys thinks that's about right. Robin is acceptable as far as looks go, just decidedly short on charm. She might throw another point into Charisma if she has any spare freebie points kicking around later (see below), but isn't putting it high on her list of priorities.

## Step Three: Abilities

Now Annys ranks and chooses Abilities for her character. Knowledge is Robin's most obvious strong point, so that becomes his primary category. Talents beat out Skills for secondary, as Annys decides that Robin never had much interest in forcing himself to master anything he didn't see an immediate need for.

With the 13 points she has to spend on Knowledges, Annys puts three into Science (Psychology in this case) and three into

# Wrath

## THE OBLIVION

Name: *Robin*  
 Player: *Anny*  
 Chronicle:

Nature: *Critic*  
 Demeanor: *Analyst*  
 Shadow: *Perfectionist*

Life: *Professor*  
 Death: *Automobile accident*  
 Regret: *Not having published his masterpiece*

### Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●○	Charisma	●●●●○	Perception	●●●●○
Dexterity	●●●●○	Manipulation	●●●●○	Intelligence	●●●●○
Stamina	●●●●○	Appearance	●●●●○	Wits	●●●●○

### Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledge	
Alertness	●●●●○	Crafts	○○○○○	Bureaucracy	●●●●○
Athletics	●○○○○	Drive	●●○○○	Computer	●●●●○
Awareness	●○○○○	Etiquette	●○○○○	Enigmas	●●●●○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	●●○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	●●●●○	Meditation	●●○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	●●○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Repair	○○○○○	Politics	●●●●○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Science	●●●●○

### Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions	
<i>Memoriam</i>	●●○○○	<i>Keep anyone from discovering my secret (Pride)</i>	●●●●○
<i>Mentor</i>	●●○○○	<i>Keep my greatest rival from succeeding (Envy)</i>	●●●●○
<i>Haunt</i>	●●○○○	<i>Protect my favorite book (Love)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Status (Hierarchy)</i>	●○○○○	<i>Learn about mages (Curiosity)</i>	●○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○

### Arcanoi

<i>Castigate</i>	●●○○○
<i>Phantasm</i>	●●○○○
<i>Puppetry</i>	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

### Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

### Pathos

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ □ □ □
---------------------

### Fetters

<i>Favorite book</i>	●●●●○
<i>Mix tape</i>	●●●●○
<i>Protégé</i>	●●○○○
<i>Coffee house</i>	●○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○

### Experience

Politics (Robin's academic niche consists of writing revisionist history based on his radical new analyses of important figures' psyches). Two points go into Computer, now a necessity on most campuses. Annys, thinking about the way most colleges are run as well as the multitude of administrators that Robin has dealt with, gives a couple of points to Bureaucracy. Finally, the Enigmas Knowledge seems an obvious choice for Robin, so Annys puts her last three points into it.

Next, Annys has nine points to spend on Talents. She starts by assigning three points to Alertness, which is equally good for keeping a close eye on your surroundings and for noticing subtle changes in companions' body language. Annys puts three more points into Empathy, not because Robin is a particularly sympathetic person, but because of his insight and keen interest in other people's motivations. One point goes to Athletics, and the last two points to Dodge (when he was young, he had to deal with those schoolyard bullies somehow).

Finishing up, Annys divides the five Skills points into two for Drive, one for Etiquette and two for Meditation (Robin often chooses to gain some perspective by withdrawing from the world).

## Step Four: Advantages

Annys is aware that this character could become rather antisocial, but she thinks Robin's perceptiveness will keep him from being entirely a loner. He sees the irony in every situation, including his own, and is often willing to share the humor he finds in this. However, Annys isn't taking any chances on having Robin isolated from the rest of his Circle, so she also decides to pick Backgrounds that will keep him connected to other people. She starts by giving Robin two points of Memoriam; the last college where he taught planted a tree and put up a little plaque after his untimely passing. Fortunately for him, the college chose a popular meeting point for his memorial, and students are frequently reminded of what's-his-name the professor who got hit by a car. She decides that Robin makes a point of knowing who's influential in any given situation (plus, he doesn't seem like the type who would have anything to do with either Heretics or Renegades), so she gives him one point in Hierarchy Status. Annys then assigns two points to Mentor; a professor who taught Robin in grad school and had high hopes for him has learned a few things in the Shadowlands and is willing to pass on some of his secrets. Finally, Annys puts the last Background points into a Haunt, giving Robin an attachment to the small, unused room near his office where he used to go for "private meetings."

Annys doesn't have much of a problem when she goes to choose Arcanoi for Robin; peering into other people's souls is just what he's always wanted to be able to do, so he gets two points of Castigate. In order to keep manipulating the living by affecting their dreams, he needs two points assigned to the Phantasm Arcanos. Annys puts Robin's last Arcanos point into Puppetry, the ultimate form of nosiness. This makes Robin a somewhat specialized character, and Annys briefly debates making him a member of either the Sandmen or the Pardoners, but decides against it. She'd rather keep Robin's social options open.

Robin's Passions require a little more thought, though. With 10 points to spend, she has to decide not only what his reasons for existence consist of, but also how important each one is to him. It seems to her that one of Robin's chief goals is to protect his posthumous reputation. He's desperate to make sure that no one ever finds out about the students he slept with — the first dalliance involved far more initiative on the student's part than on his, but he was becoming more aggressive over time. This Passion is clearly a function of Pride; Annys rates it at 4, since the revelation of Robin's dirty little secret would really shatter him. Joshua, the Storyteller, points out that this could be a difficult Passion for Robin to follow up on, but Annys likes the idea of a continuing Skinlands involvement and thinks it will be playable with help from Joshua and from the other members of the Circle. With that in mind, Annys writes it down on Robin's character sheet: **Keep anyone from discovering my secret (Pride) 4.**

Robin's next Passion is to "help" his chief academic rival understand the shallowness of his arguments (i.e., essentially ruin his professional life). Annys spends three points on this Passion; it has a focus of Envy, and should be within Robin's ability to accomplish. A few nasty dreams will set that pathetic excuse for a scholar straight, not to mention the dean who thought of giving him tenure. The Passion is written down as **Keep my greatest rival from succeeding (Envy) 3.** Annys likes the possibilities this Passion offers, and decides that indications of success might even encourage Robin to tamper with other scholars.

Another of Robin's desires is to make sure that his most prized text, the one with the notes crucial to his unfinished masterpiece, winds up in good hands (ideally his own, but preferably those of someone worthy of Robin's respect. He probably won't be happy until the book is enshrined in some private collection, out of the reach of grubby undergraduate paws). Annys writes this down as **Protect my favorite book (Love) 2,** as this book is one of the few things Robin has ever been able to express concern for openly. With the last point left, Annys gives Robin a burning interest in finding out everything he can about mages. This Passion is driven by plain and simple Curiosity; it's just Robin's urge to collect information kicking in again. She fills in **Learn about mages (Curiosity) 1,** and moves on.

With Robin's Passions established, Annys now has to choose his Fetters, the material objects that keep him tied to the Skinlands. The first one she thinks of is the not-so-trendy coffeehouse where he was known for easily crushing all opposition in debates. Robin was fonder of the place than he'd like to admit, and he got more than his fair share of ego-boosting from the reactions of the always-present philosophizing crew. Annys assigns it a rating of 1. She decides there's also a mix tape, made by the last student with whom he was involved. Since his death it has fallen down, unnoticed, behind a file cabinet in his office. This tape is tremendously important to Robin as a symbol of what he's lost, although as a Fetter it's relatively fragile. Realizing the risk that the tape will be re-recorded, stepped on or even thrown out, Annys still gives it three points. She then puts four points into Robin's ancient, well-worn copy of his favorite textbook, a leather-bound edition of *Holinshed's Chronicle of English History*. Filled with scribbled notes in the margins, this book was his wellspring of inspiration, and also the source of one of his Passions. Finally, Robin's own protégé, whose career he avidly promoted, becomes a Fetter rated at 2.



Gy/DND/76

## Step Five: Finishing Touches

Next, Annys notes that Robin's Willpower starts at 5 and his beginning Pathos is 7 (5 plus his two points of Memoriam).

Annys now has 15 freebie points to spend. The first thing she does is spend four points to raise Robin's total Willpower to 7. Then she breaks down and puts five more points into raising Robin's Charisma to 2. Two points go to give Robin one dot in the Awareness Ability. Annys belatedly assigns her last four freebie points to two dots of Expression when she realizes how much Robin needs that Ability to get his ideas across.

At last the numbers are all set. Although technically that's all Annys needs to play the character, there are a few more details she wants to settle. While she's already come to the conclusion that Robin was killed when he was hit by a car, she takes a minute to fill in the details of the accident for herself and her Storyteller. Next, she decides that Robin's Perception specialty is best described as Probing. On the back of her character sheet, she writes down a few words about Robin's childhood growing up with parents who traveled extensively (that explains his lack of attachment to family or place), and a brief description of his appearance. She pictures him as tall and a little too thin, with sandy blond hair and a rather conservative haircut. Still, he's not too stuffy, so Annys decides that his wardrobe runs to T-shirts and slacks.

She also wants to give him a few more distinguishing characteristics. At first she thinks one of his mannerisms will involve constantly citing authors (the more obscure the better), but decides she doesn't want to put in the kind of research effort that roleplaying such

a mannerism would require. A better quirk, she concludes, would be having Robin relentlessly flaunt his cynicism toward all things religious and spiritual. That ought to get him into some very interesting discussions among the dead.... She also decides that he has a rather disturbing habit of unfocusing his eyes and humming barely audibly (this comes from his Meditation Skill — it's the method he uses most often to distance himself from his surroundings), which will probably drive at least one of the other members of Robin's Circle absolutely batty, and make for good interplay between the two wraiths.

Finally, Annys is satisfied with her mental image of Robin. Now she has to work with the Storyteller and, since she knows who it will be, the person who'll be playing her Shadowguide to generate Robin's Shadow character. For an example of creating the Shadow, see page 173.

## What Now?

### Roleplaying the Prelude

*'Death doesn't hurt,' said one of the twins. 'Death is dark, death is sweet.'*

— Poppy Z. Brite, *Lost Souls*

While your wraith character isn't quite finished at this point, she's ready for you to start roleplaying with her. Your first time playing a new character is called a Prelude, because it sets the stage for all of the action to come later. Most Preludes include the end of your character's life, her death and her rebirth into the world of the Restless.

## For Subversive Storytellers...

If the Storyteller's players trust him enough to willingly play whatever he wants to run, it is sometimes more effective for him to announce that he will be running a game of **Project Twilight** or mortals against the World of Darkness. He then oversees the players as they design living mortal characters for what they believe will be the game the Storyteller announced. At some point during the Prelude, the Storyteller then finds a way to take the characters across the Shroud.

Most good roleplayers become very attached to their characters. They begin with ideas for characters they want to play, customize the ideas during construction, get a real feel for their personalities from the Prelude and emerge with full-blown characters during interactions with the Storyteller and other players' characters. These first few opportunities for roleplaying are critical in the development of the character, providing you with the chance to get inside your character's head and react to things as she would. This is also a critical time for setting up relationships to people, places and things that will become the wraith's Fetters and Passions, making it easier and more natural for your Storyteller to work them into the chronicle.

Passions and Fetters should never just be numbers on a page. Each should represent something gut-wrenching, powerful and undeniable. You should not be able to ignore a Passion when you choose, but must become thoroughly involved with it. The only way you can do this is if your Storyteller makes it real for her, and one of the best ways to do this is through a Prelude. It is always tempting, particularly if you have played Storyteller system games before to "skip to the good part," ignoring the individual Preludes in favor of a quickie group introduction or a jump-start right into the game. Don't give in to the temptation.

## The Before-Death Experience

It is absolutely essential for you to become fully involved with who your character was *before* her death for anything after it to have real meaning. Having a Passion of **Pay back the boyfriend who betrayed me (Anger) 2** on your character sheet has no real emotional impact. Playing through a scene in which you go to your boyfriend's house two hours early to put up streamers for his surprise birthday party and walk in on him while he's with another woman has impact. More than that, it allows your character to react to the situation, and brings you into closer communion with your character's feelings. If a prior scene had been played through in which her boyfriend gave her a ring and pledged his love to her, the betrayal scene would be all the more effective and affecting.

All the people who will become Fetters, or who have a great deal to do with who the wraith is (parents, teachers, friends, etc.), should be depicted sometime during the Prelude (which can be run as a series of vignettes from the character's life leading up to the moment of her death). Places your character frequents and things that mean something to her should likewise appear,

not necessarily in a starring role. It's enough to mention them as part of the scene, though it's more effective later if they too are emotionally charged. Though you might write on your sheet that you have a key as a three-point Fetter, it means nothing in and of itself. Conversely, in the above example, the wraith who discovered that her boyfriend was cheating on her might find that she is Fettered to the key to his apartment.

The key now means something, whether it symbolizes a time when there was trust between them, or is now perceived as a hated possession without which she could never have entered the apartment and discovered his perfidy. The importance is not in the actual object, but the *emotion* invested in it. Fetters need not be something the wraith cherishes. They can be things that plagued the wraith in life, and which she wishes she could rid herself of in death. Of course, losing a Fetter brings the wraith nearer to dissolution, so can she afford *not* to hold it to her or try to resolve it?

Working back and forth from the preliminary concept of your character to the Prelude to the character's construction is the best way to make certain that all the Fetters and Passions are honest ones. Obviously, the concept of the character should mesh with the Passions and Fetters she chooses. An Olympic-quality figure skater would be unlikely, for instance, to have a horse as a Fetter; she just wouldn't have enough time left over from practicing to go riding. On the other hand, if the skater had left home to work for the gold medal, but terribly missed her horse that she had ridden every day when she was younger, the horse might qualify. Your Storyteller would then need to incorporate something about your character's riding and the way it made her feel into the character's Prelude.

## The Death Concept

In much the same manner, though it is not a required step, you and your Storyteller should determine your character's death concept. While the life concept might be "actress" or "firefighter," the death concept would be "romantic suicide" or "hero." Each would define the way in which the character died. Though it is best if this comes about as a result of the Prelude, you might want to define the manner of your character's death, then play to bring it about. Naturally, Storytellers have a way of plotting the action that might conflict with what the player had planned, meaning the "romantic suicide" might become the "murder victim," and the firefighter who wanted to die heroically might be thrown off his truck and run over, thus becoming the "hit and run accident." These circumstances might even become a part of your character's personality, a resentment that she didn't get to choose the manner of her death or the fact that her death seemed so pointless.

## Awakening

The first few moments across the Shroud are also crucial in establishing who your wraith is. The manner of her Reaping will have a great deal to say about her later views on the Underworld. A wraith who gets enslaved and barely escapes the forges is likely to have a different take on the Hierarchy than someone who died and was instantly recruited into a Legion. This part of the Prelude also allows you to establish your character's Backgrounds realistically. If

your character has two dots in Mentor, here is where the Mentor can introduce himself and offer an in-game reason for the character knowing what she does about the Underworld. At the same time, this prevents players who are a little overeager from saying things like, "I died and was apprenticed to a Ferryman for 30 years, so I should know where Charon's Mask is."

Not every character needs to be among the recently deceased, but even if your wraith became one of the Restless in 1776, it's still a good idea to run a Prelude. After all, there's nothing says that the Prelude needs to roll directly into the chronicle; you can fast-forward from your Prelude to the present with no trouble at all. Just make sure that you're not tempted by long character experience in the Shadowlands to bring knowledge that you have (but which your character might not) into the game.

## Q&A

*In time, the Deity perceived that death was a mistake; a mistake, in that it was insufficient; insufficient, for the reason that while it was an admirable agent for the inflicting of misery upon the survivor, it allowed the dead person himself to escape...*

— Mark Twain, "Letters from the Earth"

There are a lot of questions still left unanswered about your character at this point, and you might want to take the Prelude as an opportunity to answer some or all of them. Even if you don't run through all of the questions listed below during the course of the Prelude, you should at least be thinking about them. In the guise of your character, you should attempt to know the answers to all of these.

### • How old were you when you died?

Were you a child robbed of a full life, or were you struck down in your prime? Maybe you were on the edge of adulthood, or you might have seen seven decades. This determines the experience you've got to draw upon from your breathing days, and also can say a lot about your appearance.

### • What were your family and friends like when you were alive?

Did you have a happy home life, or did you run away from home? Were you one of those folks who needed to get out of the house more, or were you a social butterfly? How did your friends and family react to your death?

### • What was the most shameful thing you've ever done? The best?

Everyone's done things that they regret, some more deeply than others. Figuring out what pains you most (as well as what you did that you're the most proud of) goes a long way towards defining your character. Did you cheat on your lover or steal from those who trusted you? On the other hand, did you finish your masterpiece, or did you accomplish some greater good?

### • What places mattered to you when you were alive?

Some of these places will become your Haunts or even your Fetters, but even those that have somewhat less importance should still matter. If they're important to you, you'll return to them and they'll provide scenes for later stories.

### • How did you die?

You may have already figured out your death concept, but the details can be important. "I was robbed at gunpoint as I tried to get into my car, shot twice, then left to die on the curb. None of the neighbors even came out to look," carries a lot more impact than, "Umm, I got shot, I guess."

### • When did you die?

Both day and date are important here. Did you die on your birthday, or on some other day that was important to you (besides the obvious). Did you die yesterday or a hundred years ago? This determines how much Underworld experience you've got, not to mention what sort of attitudes you're likely to have on things like politics and equality between the sexes. It also might have a bearing on what sort of technology you're comfortable with; very few Napoleonic-era wraiths are comfortable with computers, for example.

### • How did you meet the rest of your Circle?

Were you just sitting around the local relic bar when you struck up a conversation with the wraiths next to you? Did you all die together, or did you know the rest of your Circle when you were alive? Are you in the same Legion, or members of the same Renegade gang? How you and your Circlemates hooked up helps explain what keeps you together, and what you can and can't be expected to do together.

### • How were you Reaped?

Your entrance to the Underworld can permanently color your perspective on Restless existence. Was your Reaping gentle, accomplished by a Mentor or a loved one? Or were you taken as a Thrall and rescued at the last moment? Perhaps a Ferryman Reaped you, and will call upon you for repayment at some future date. Your affiliation (Hierarchy, Heretic, Renegades) should be taken into account here.

### • What do you do for fun?

The old joke goes that Saturday nights in the Shadowlands are really dead. Wraiths don't just sit around and brood over their twilight existences; they like to have fun as much as the living do. So, do you like to tamper with the Quick (Skinriding for fun and profit!), or perhaps just sit in front of an electronics store and watch TV. Maybe you've got a collection of relics (there's one Renegade whose collection of mateless socks is legendary) that you attend to, or perhaps you prefer to dive into the Tempest and go hunting for Spectres. Here's a good chance to make your existence as a wraith a little lighter; take advantage of it.

### • Where does your Circle meet?

Haunts are valuable places; you might not want to have the rest of your Circle invading yours every evening. So instead you might have a common hangout, a bar, club or other social site that offers either Pathos, entertainment or both. Every Necropolis has places where the dead can gather and unwind — what's yours like?

### • What are you after?

What makes you angry — or ecstatic? Are there certain issues that will just set you off, or are you as mellow as a ghost can get? What do you believe in, and what are you willing to fight for?

Once you know all of these things, you'll know your character. In the process of deciding the answers to these questions, you'll breathe life (or a reasonable facsimile thereof) into your wraith, meaning that you'll be ready to play her properly.

## Fetters

"So you're telling me that I'm stuck here? That this is what being dead's all about?"

Time no longer seems to have any meaning, so I'm not sure how long I've been pacing back and forth across the floor of this abandoned factory where the old man has led me. The basement room is huge, dank and gloomy. Outside, powerful gusts of wind buffet the building like heavy hammer blows. Wherever there's a crack or hole, the wind whistles in with a high shrillness. Dust and fine grains of sand filter down from the ceiling overhead. The floor, walls and ceiling are caked with a cancerous black rot.

All the while, I keep a wary eye on the old man who sits cross-legged in the center of the floor. Through the narrow, grimy windows at ground level, I can see that the sun is shining, but my view of the outside world looks like an antique sepia photograph.

Although I haven't seen or heard anybody else since the barghests went past, every now and then I catch a flutter of motion out of the corner of my eye. When I turn to look, though, there's nothing there.

"Hell, no!" the old man says.

"No one knows what being dead's all about. You're a wraith in the Shadowlands. Far as I know, this is just the beginning."

"A wraith?"

"A ghost. A phantom. Remember? You're dead."

"Yeah. Sure, but if I'm dead, then what's this?" I say as I extend my hand and wave it in front of his face.

"That's your Corpus, smartass. It's different from your body. It's what's left after the physical part...sloughs away."

"Okay then," I say weakly as a wave of dizziness sweeps over me. "What can you tell me about the Shadowlands? Why am I here? I sure as hell never wanted to end up here."

"It's your Fetters. There's something holding you here, something keeping you from moving on."

"Look — as far as I'm concerned, I've got nothing to keep me anywhere." I shudder as fragments of my former life stir in my memory. "Not since she...after my daughter died, and then the divorce...." I start to say, but then my voice chokes off, and I fall silent.

The old man looks at me questioningly, silently urging me to continue.

"I...there wasn't any reason to keep on living," I whisper. "My daughter's death ruined my marriage, my career...everything."

"So, you had a daughter?"

The old man's eyes glisten with sudden interest as he says this, stretching out the last word. I barely have the strength to nod.

"Then she might be here, too," he says. "'Course, my money's on your wife..."

"Ex-wife," I interrupt.

"Ex-wife," he continues without skipping a beat, "being your big Fetter. Recent divorce, right?" He plows on without looking up to see me nod in agreement. "Hmmp. She might serve for your daughter, too, now that you've kicked it. Let me tell you, it's no fun when a Fetter dies. No fun at all."

A feeble spark of hope flares up in my breast, but it's so small it quickly sputters and fades.

Karen is dead and gone, I tell myself, and that's all there is to it.

But then another, softer voice deep inside my mind whispers, *But what if she's spent the last five years here, alone in this dangerous place? Waiting for her daddy?*

I have to close my eyes tightly to control the storm of emotions that rage in my heart.

"Maybe you should try to find her," the old man suggests so softly that I almost mistake his voice for my own thoughts. I look at him, wanting to ask him if he has any idea how I can go about finding her, but suddenly I know.

Just as, somehow, without knowing how or why I ended up at Pine Knoll Elementary, I know where to start looking for my dead daughter — at Riverside Cemetery, where she's buried.

"I...I have to go outside," I stammer, and without waiting to hear if the old man has anything more to say, I turn and walk up the concrete stairs, back out into the world of oddly diffused sunlight and shadow.

"You can't go outside!" the old man shouts, limping along behind me. "It's too dangerous!"

"I didn't ask for this, all right?" I say, turning to him. "And I sure as hell don't want to stay here!"

"You don't really have much choice about the matter," he says. "Not unless you *want* to embrace Oblivion."

Without really knowing what he means, I shake my head. I don't

like the sound of that word. My first thought is that Oblivion sounds like death for the dead.

"So as long as you're here," the old man continues, "you might as well make the most of it. You might consider joining in with me."

I shake my head, confused. I'm having trouble processing what's happened so far, but who could blame me? How can I be expected to accept the fact that I'm dead?

"Why should I join you?" I ask after a moment of silence broken only by the fluting of the wind.

The old man doesn't respond immediately. I watch his eyes shift like oiled beads to one side, then the other, like he's keeping a watch on someone that I can't see.

"Because the Shadowlands are very dangerous," he says at last.

"How can they be dangerous?" I say as an icy coil of tension slithers through me. "We're already dead! What could possibly hurt us now?"

"Plenty, believe me," the old man replies. "For one, there's the slavers. If the Hierarchy don't get you, the Renegades will, the minute you drop your guard. 'N there's other wraiths around who'd just as soon cart you off in chains."

Leaning forward, the old man casts another cautious glance back and forth and then in a low voice adds, "And, of course, there's always the Spectres, and the holy roller-type Heretics, and...Ferryman."

He whispers this last word so softly I'm not quite sure I hear him correctly.

"Ferryman?" I echo, taking a step closer.

As if on cue, the wind outside gusts suddenly louder, shaking the foundation and causing something on the upper floor to fall with a loud crash.

The old man nails me with a piercing stare, then says, "As a matter of fact, I understand that you were seen talking to a Ferryman."

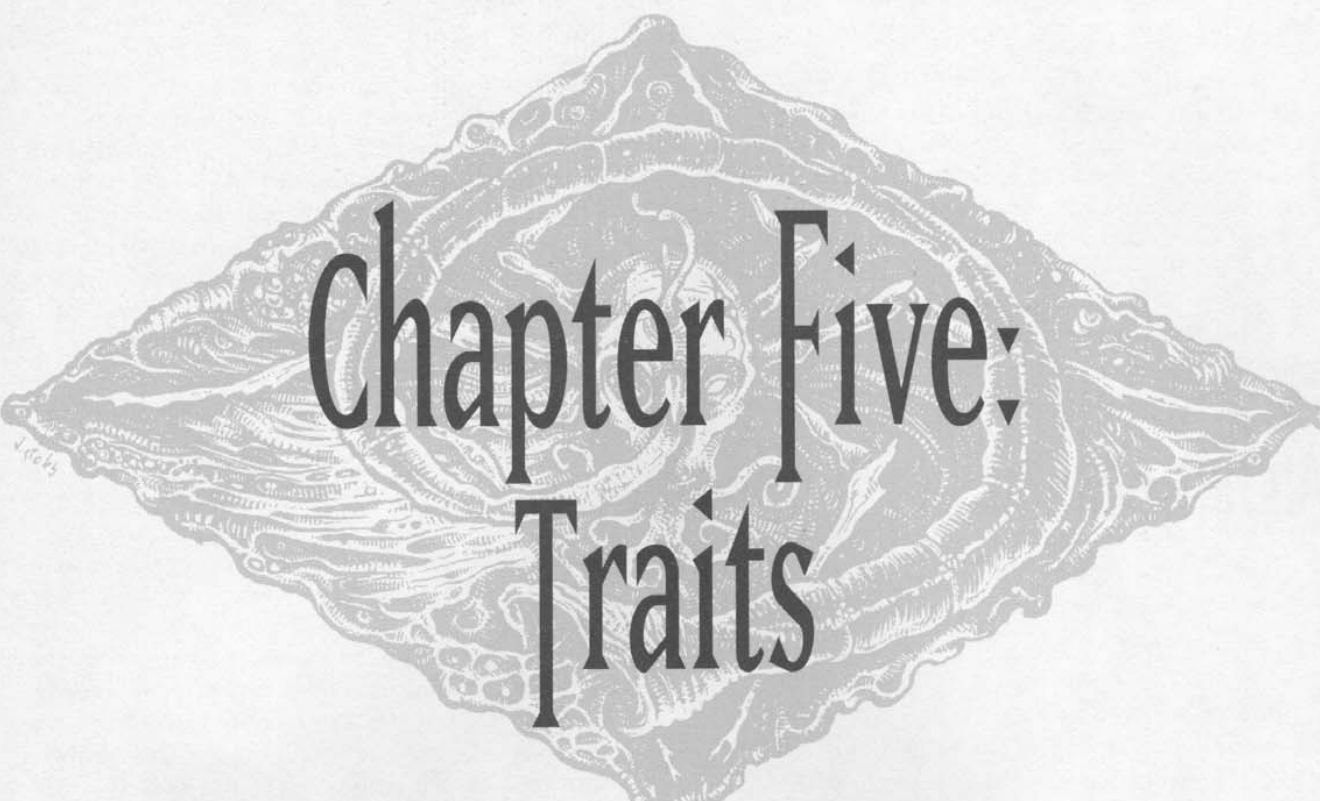
"No, that's not possible," I say, shaking my head in adamant denial. "I haven't seen anyone else, much less spoken to them."

"Well, now," the old man says, rubbing his hands together, "maybe you won't admit it, or maybe you don't remember it, but you were definitely seen with one, and that ain't good. Not good at all."

"Why's that?" I ask.

"Because if this Ferryman Reaped you, then eventually he'll be coming back for you."





# Chapter Five: Traits

*White...It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed.  
The white page can be overwritten....*  
— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring*



Traits are the way you detail a **Wraith** character's capabilities, strengths and weaknesses. They allow you to translate a character into game reality by means of dice rolls, as well as helping you understand and develop your character.

Traits are only the framework that a character concept is built upon, but frameworks are important things. Your character's Traits delineate the general parameters of what he can do, but what he actually does comes through your roleplaying and imagination.

**Wraith** Traits are intentionally left broad and open to interpretation, so that more time is spent on the character than on the character sheet. The idea is to take the Traits you select and use them as a basis for how your character acts, as opposed to plugging numbers of dots and dice into prefabricated situations.

In this chapter is a description of all of the basic Traits you'll need to weigh in creating a **Wraith** character. Your character won't have all of these, but the descriptions that are provided here allow you to judge which ones will be right for the particular character you have in mind.

## Specialties

Certain types of Traits (Attributes and Abilities) can have specialties. If a wraith has a rating of 4 or higher in a Trait, he may choose a specialty — an aspect of that Trait in which he has a particular aptitude. A specialty in Dexterity could be described as Speed; a specialty in Drive could be Rush Hour Traffic or Off-road. A wraith with the Rush Hour Traffic specialty would thus be a very good driver normally, but especially adept at weaving through the 5 o' clock traffic snarls.

Every time a wraith uses his specialty, he has the opportunity to re-roll all 10s on the initial roll in an attempt to gain additional successes.

## Archetypes

*Would you like my mask?  
would you like my mirror?  
cries the man in the shadowing hood  
You can look at yourself,  
you can look at each other  
or you can look at the face of your god.*

— Loreena McKennitt, "Marrakesh Night Market"



Archetypes are rough personality types into which wraiths can fall. They are basic descriptors for the wraith's personality, both her true one and the one she lets the world see. No wraith fits any Archetype exactly, but usually there is one that describes her character concept well. This Archetype should be chosen as the character's Nature, while the one that best fits how she faces the world should be marked down as her Demeanor. The conflict between these two Archetypes helps define the character, as do the actions she will take in order to remain "in character" for both her Nature and Demeanor.

In game terms, Archetypes are important because acting in accordance with her Nature is a way for a wraith to regain precious Willpower points. If the character has just performed an action that the player feels is appropriate for granting her character a point of Willpower, based upon her Nature, she should inform her Storyteller. If he feels that the justification for the request is valid, he can allow the character to regain between one and three points of Willpower. However, Storytellers should always feel free to disagree with players' requests for Willpower if they feel the logic behind the request is flimsy, or if it appears that the character has been performing certain actions solely to regain Willpower. Archetypes should encourage roleplaying, with the Willpower gain serving as a reward for expressing the concept of the character well within the structure of the story.

If players wish, they should feel free to create their own character Archetypes, as the ones listed here are but a small sample of the many faces of humanity. **Additionally, Archetypes for the Shadow can be found on page 166.**

## Architect

Creation is the Architect's focus, the process of creating something out of nothing. He denies Oblivion by continually creating new things, whether they be social structures, actual objects or even just plans for the future. An Architect's driving goal is to create and order the uncoordinated elements that surround him. Chaos drives him to distraction, as does the notion that all of his carefully planned creations will come tumbling down someday. Someday isn't here yet, though, and in the meantime there's so much that needs his hand to order it.

— Regain Willpower every time a plan of yours comes to fruition.

## Avant-Garde

The Avant-Garde has an interest only in the new. If it's been done, it's not of interest to her. Order doesn't matter to her so much as discovering or creating what's new, or at least being the first one she knows to discover something. The thrill of experimentation is a major lure to the Avant-Garde, and she's not afraid to take risks to achieve a new effect. Every Avant-Garde dreads the day she falls behind the cutting edge, but each one will also work like mad to make sure that never happens.

— Regain Willpower whenever you find a new approach to something old.

## Bon Vivant

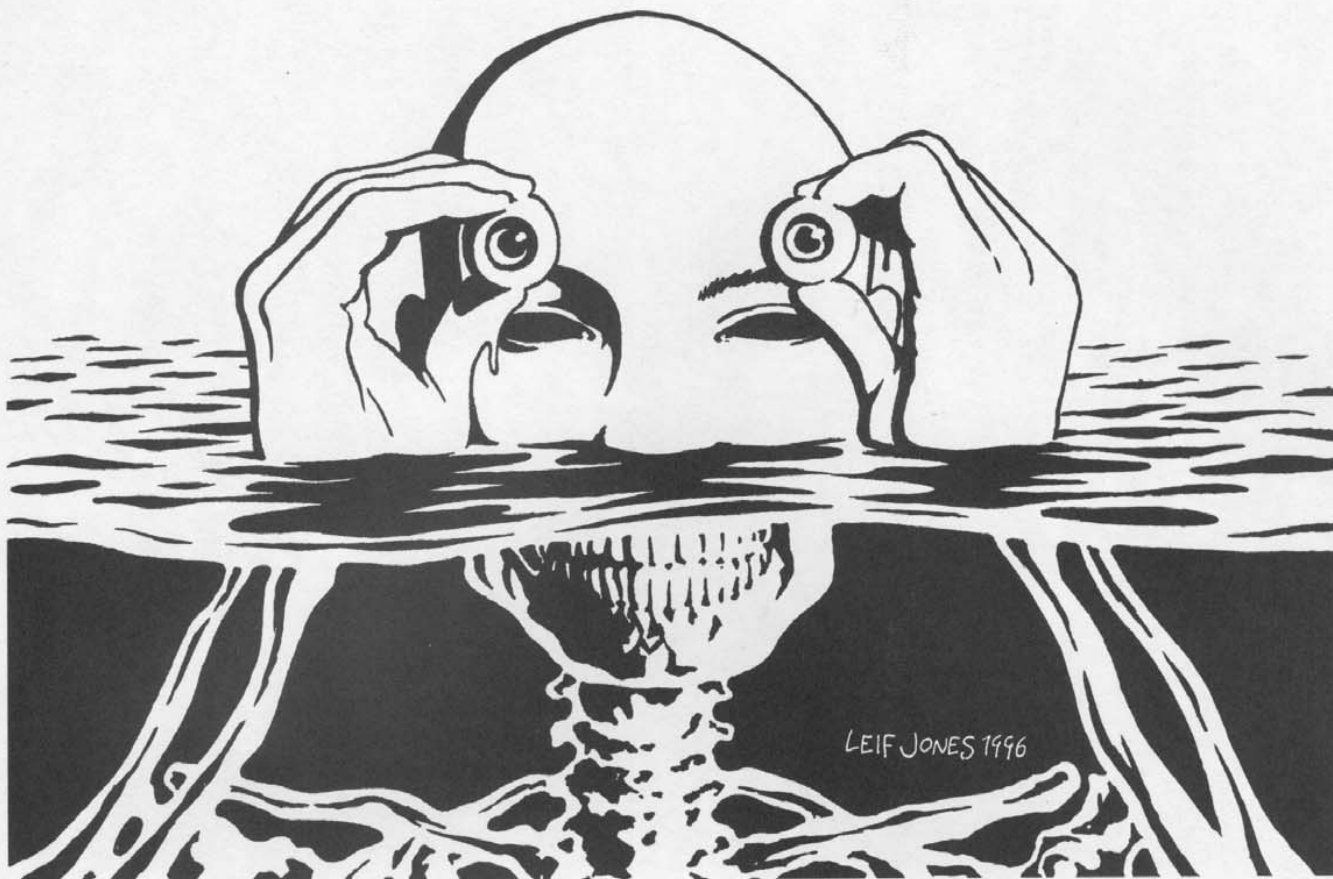
The Bon Vivant looks into Oblivion and sees the negation of all things. To avoid confronting this horror, he escapes in the only way he can: by deadening his senses with pleasure. There is nothing immoral about the Bon Vivant's hedonism, as it serves to reaffirm the power of existence in the face of Oblivion. While the Bon Vivant worries about the day when he runs out of new pleasures and is dragged down by ennui, he's got better things to concern himself with in the meantime. Bon Vivants are often short-sighted, focused on nothing more than the next thrill.

— Regain Willpower whenever you have an unadulterated good time.

## Bravo

The Bravo reinforces her own self-worth by pumping herself up and denigrating others. Fear is to be faced, and doubt must never be shown in front of the enemy. Failure is not an option for the Bravo, but unfortunately, neither is compromise or strategy. The Bravo is constantly trying to achieve dominance in any situation she encounters, and will keep on pushing for it until she either gets it or is soundly defeated.

— Regain Willpower every time you make someone else back down.



## Bureaucrat

The Bureaucrat fits perfectly into the System. It nurtures and protects him, even as he maintains and serves it. Bureaucrats are most often found among Hierarchy ranks, to no one's surprise, and will subvert all other considerations to process. It doesn't matter if a dozen Spectres are camped out on the front steps; the Legionnaires to fight them must be requisitioned properly. While this may seem inefficient, the Bureaucrat knows that order is the key to resisting Oblivion, and he will cling to that order no matter what.

— Regain Willpower every time disaster is averted (or a crisis resolved) by following correct procedures.

## Caregiver

The Caregiver is well-loved in the Underworld, as her concern for others bulwarks many wraiths against the pull of Oblivion. She will make sacrifices, but always with a purpose and a clear goal of reducing others' suffering in mind. That doesn't mean that Caregivers are unstintingly generous, naive or impractical; many have a discerning eye for whom they'll make an effort. Just because the Caregiver worries about others doesn't mean that she's blind to their faults.

— Regain Willpower every time you receive tangible proof that you have helped another.

## Child

A combination of naiveté and egomania, the Child has a wide-eyed innocence about existence in the Underworld. He also has a steely determination to have things his way no matter what, and will answer the most logical argument for abstaining with, "But I *want* to!" Wraiths with the Child Archetype are not necessarily children; a great many adults who reach the Shadowlands never matured emotionally while they were alive. While the Child's innocent faith can be inspiring to other wraiths, his narrow vision and stubbornness can be infuriating and even dangerous.

— Regain Willpower whenever you get your way through mulish determination.

## Conniver

The Conniver seeks to get ahead through judicious subversion of the System. She may need the System to advance and accrue status, but to her way of thinking, the System is there for her benefit and not the other way around. When the System can help her, she's glad to play along; when it keeps her from doing what she wants, she'll blithely ignore it. The Conniver is excellent at getting others to do what she wants, but lives in terror of the day when no one will listen to her and she must act, inexperienced and unprotected, on her



own. Worse, many Connivers know themselves well enough to suspect all other wraiths of behaving the same way, and thus have tremendous difficulties with trust.

— Regain Willpower every time you convince another wraith to take on a difficult or hazardous situation for you.

## Critic

The Critic finds purpose in death by revealing weakness and faults in others, whether in artwork, an organization or in a person's habits. He strives to perfect others by pointing out their flaws so that those flaws might be corrected. Of course, some wraiths see him as merely self-aggrandizing, but what he does he does for their good and the personal consequences be damned. Occasionally the Critic will do his job too well and convince others that they are not just flawed but actually worthless; the spate of self-loathing this can inspire in the Critic can have unpleasant repercussions.

—Regain Willpower whenever you point out a flaw in someone or something else that would have been harmful had it not been detected.

## Explorer

The Explorer finds her purpose on the road of discovery. The prospect of finding new places, people and things fires her gray existence with excitement, and she will wander from

the darkest jungles of the Flayed Lands to the heart of the Labyrinth on her quests. She exists in dread of the day when everything is discovered, but does her part to bring that nearer by searching out the new and exciting whenever she can. This does sometimes get her companions in trouble as they get dragged off, willy-nilly, into a quest for the Lost Treasures of Gorool or some such, but in the Explorer's eyes, it's more than worth it.

— Regain Willpower when you come across something no one else ever has.

## Follower

The Follower is a curious Archetype, and a common one in the Shadowlands. The average Follower is not necessarily a Hierarchy citizen; charismatic Heretics and Renegade demagogues need Followers as well. The Follower does recognize, though, that no matter who he follows, his leader knows better than he does. His best bet for survival is to take orders; to demonstrate initiative is to step out of place. This sometimes leads to disaster, as the Follower will stand silent rather than point out to his leader that trouble is looming. On the other hand, in the fractious Underworld there's much to be said for loyalty and obedience from someone besides a barghest.

— Regain Willpower if you survive a hazardous situation by following orders to the letter.

## Gambler

The Gambler does things, not for the ends, but for the thrill that the means provides. By risking herself time and again, she energizes and re-affirms her unliving existence. Boredom is Oblivion, and the stakes are never so high that they can't be made higher. A Gambler tends to have a very active Shadow, but sometimes an oddly sympathetic one, as if even her dark side needs an adrenaline-esque rush every now and then. Of course, taking so many risks does have its inevitable price, but to the Gambler, it's more than worth it, just for the thrill.

— Regain Willpower every time you place yourself in an existence-threatening situation and then wriggle your way out of it.

## Jester

To the Jester, everything is a joke. And well it should be, because he's dead, so is everyone else, and the only sane reaction to that is humor. While a Jester may not know when to quit, continuing to make jokes at all (and especially at inappropriate) times, his presence and antics serve to lighten the gloom that can easily overwhelm those who dwell in the Underworld.

— Regain Willpower whenever you can lighten the mood and improve a tense situation.

## Leader

The Leader is the one who takes up the cause and convinces others to follow her. It doesn't matter if the cause was originally hers or not; what matters is that it's hers *now*. Getting others to follow her lead isn't an *if*, it's a *when*. While there always exists the possibility of leading others to their doom, a Leader is always convinced that she knows the best way into — and out of — any given situation.

— Regain Willpower when others follow you without questioning your orders or decisions.

## Martyr

The Martyr is always willing to throw himself into the breach in order to solve the problem. He is ready to put himself at risk in order that others or a cause survive or succeed, even when a sacrifice isn't necessary. Workaholics and perfectionists, Martyrs don't seek rewards, only recognition of their sacrifices. Other wraiths often deride the Martyr as suicidal, but in his heart the only thing that bothers him is the idea of sacrificing himself in vain. Unfortunately, many do.

— Regain Willpower whenever you sacrifice yourself or something of yours to a higher goal.

## Mediator

The Mediator focuses on solving the problems of others. She mediates disputes, acts as a friend to help a person get through difficulty, or even serves as an arbitrator or judge. Compromise and unity are vital to a Mediator, and she'll often emulate the Martyr in self-sacrificing to encourage others to reach an agreement. Conflict is abhorrent to a Mediator, especially combat, and she will try every option available before resorting to force. A Mediator's greatest fear is that her failures will sweep up and doom hundreds or thousands of other wraiths. This overdeveloped sense of responsibility gets many Mediators in trouble.

— Regain Willpower anytime you convince others to compromise.

## Rebel

The Rebel believes that the current system is in need of replacement, even if he doesn't know what that replacement should be. A force for change and activism, he works instinctively to overthrow authority. The world is black and white to a Rebel; the enemy has no good points and must be destroyed, while his own cause is pure and spotless. Many Rebels do harbor nagging doubts as to whether or not they're doing the right thing, dreading a revelation that they are actually working for Oblivion. Still, those fears only come rarely, and the rest of the time most Rebels can border on fanaticism.

— Regain Willpower whenever you act to overthrow an established authority.

## Scientist

The Scientist approaches the world as a riddle to be solved. She takes the world and its problems, breaks them into discrete steps, and solves them in a rational manner using logic and deduction. Her ultimate goal is to understand every detail and mechanism. The process may take some time, though, for she is as likely to get distracted by an interesting tangent as she is to answer the original question. Scientist Archetypes are not always actual scientists; instead the name refers to the analytical approach which this Archetype brings to its perception of the world. Of course, all Scientists know that entropy always increases, but that doesn't stop them from fighting Oblivion anyway. Unless, of course, they get distracted....

— Regain Willpower whenever a rational, scientific approach to a situation helps to solve it.

## Survivor

The Survivor has dedicated his afterlife to saving his own Corpus, minimizing his concern for others in order to protect himself. Existence, at any cost, is what the Survivor values, and he will cling to it with a frightening tenacity. On one hand

this makes him willing to throw his companions to the wolves to save his own skin, but on the other it makes for a wraith who will never surrender, no matter what. Most Survivors are self-centered and dislike taking risks, but a few are daredevil-types.

—Regain Willpower whenever you escape a situation that threatens your very existence.

## Traditionalist

The Traditionalist believes that the solutions for today's problems can be found by the application of the methods of the past. She resists Oblivion by working to preserve old institutions, anchoring herself against entropy's pull by attaching herself to existing structures. Rejecting the new and innovative, the Traditionalist exists in terror that by abandoning tradition, her fellow wraiths are willingly surrendering a potent defense against Oblivion.

—Regain Willpower whenever a tried-and-true method proves effective, especially in thwarting Oblivion.

## Visionary

The Visionary has as his goal something that only he can see, something to which he has dedicated his existence. The exact details of this vision are unimportant; it is enough that it has never been done before. It is through the Visionary's efforts that Oblivion can forever be thwarted, for in his dedication to creation he denies the destruction that Oblivion represents. Of course, many Visionaries secretly harbor the fear that their great goal actually serves Oblivion, but they will deny this even to their Pardoners.

—Regain Willpower whenever you take a concrete step toward achieving your overarching goal.

# Attributes



Attributes are the basic descriptors of a wraith, and affect all of his interactions with others and the Shadowlands. Based partially upon a wraith's self-perception, Attributes still rate how the wraith's Corpus compares physically (and how his Psyche compares socially and mentally) with those of his peers in the Underworld. A wraith's Corpus and capabilities are based on his long-standing knowledge of what he is capable of, and are no more susceptible to change than the Attributes of the living are.

## Physical Attributes

Why any wraith *should* be stronger, weaker or faster than another is unknown, but a wraith's Corpus conforms to his preconceptions of it, which mold it and its capabilities to match his mortal body even before the Caul has been removed. Physical Attributes are the easiest of a wraith's Traits to define and comprehend, and are the ones most often used in terms of game system mechanics.

## Strength

Strength is the measure of the wraith's physical ability to change the world around him, whether by damaging another wraith, lifting something or trying to displace a resting object. How much physical damage a wraith can do is based upon his Strength score, and this Attribute is also used for jumps, leaps and other activities that draw on raw physical power. Strength is used to determine the base number of dice used in physical attacks.

Specialties: Buff, Ripped, Mighty, Puissant, Wiry, Large, Husky, Able-Bodied

- Weakling: No comment necessary.
- Average: You could bench-press your own weight.
- Good: You were exceptionally strong.
- Exceptional: Boxers envied the force of your haymaker.
- Outstanding: Olympic-caliber powerlifter.

## Dexterity

Dexterity is a matter of both fine and large motor skills. It rates how fast you run, how well you handle a needle and thread, and everything in between that relates to speed, grace and control. Dexterity is also used to set the base number of dice in order to determine whether or not you hit a target in combat.

Specialties: Fast, Quick, Delicate, Steady, Deft, Catlike, Lithe, Flexible, Sure-Footed

- Poor: You routinely cut yourself while shaving or making salads.
- Average: You could handle sharp objects and emerge unscathed.
- Good: You could juggle easily.
- Exceptional: You could juggle knives easily.
- Outstanding: You had the grace and liteness of a jungle cat.

## Stamina

Stamina is the Attribute that determines your Corpus' coherency, basically how well your body stays together when outside forces are trying to rip it apart. It also determines just how long your body can maintain physical exertion and how well you resisted disease, torture and pain while you were alive. In game terms, Stamina is used to determine the base number of dice in order to soak damage.

Specialties: Tough, Tireless, Enduring, Determined, Tenacious, Relentless, Resilient

- Poor: Colds routinely kept you home from work.
- Average: Insurance companies deemed you an "acceptable risk."
- Good: Broken bones barely slowed you down.
- Exceptional: Marathons were a hobby; triathlons a calling.

..... Outstanding: You survived being given enough poison to kill an elephant, being shot three times, getting stabbed over 10 times, beaten by at least five people, tied up, placed in a sack and dumped in a freezing river.

## Social Attributes

Social Attributes determine how a wraith is able to deal with others. They help define how the wraith places himself in society and how he relates to other wraiths, regardless of political affiliation or social standing.

### Charisma

Charisma defines the wraith's overt presence with other wraiths. Charisma determines how well the wraith attracts others, persuades them or leads them willingly. Unlike Manipulation, wraiths who are affected by Charisma feel that they are acting of their own free will; Charisma works by appeal, not through tricks.

Specialties: Smooth, Eloquent, Classy, *Savoir-Faire*, Genial, Well-Mannered, Urbane, Sophisticated, Folksy, Captivating

- Poor: Even on the playground you were shunned.
- Average: People liked being around you, more or less.
- Good: You could get dates quickly and easily.
- Exceptional: People felt guilty about disagreeing with you, even slightly.
- Outstanding: You could have led a nation — or a religion.

### Manipulation

Manipulation is the flip side of Charisma, for it is the ability to bring wraiths onto your side without them realizing it, rather than convincing them through the force of your personality. It is the ability to get others to perform actions without their initial consent, and does carry risks. People do not like to realize that they have been fooled, so a failure on a Manipulation roll does carry consequences.

Specialties: Glib, Persuasive, Cunning, Logical, Remorseless, Bravado, Forked Tongue, Witty, Legalese

- Poor: You couldn't talk Mom into letting you stay up late.
- Average: Occasionally you got your way.
- Good: You *always* got your way.
- Exceptional: You could have been a politician.
- Outstanding: Lawyers took notes when speaking with you.





## Appearance

The Appearance Attribute is not merely your physical looks, but also your ability to create a definite impression. While the other two Social Attributes require time and conversation to function, Appearance allows basic concepts to be communicated instantly and silently through the nuances of body language, facial expression and other subconscious cues. Despite the widespread use of masks in the Shadowlands, your ability to give and receive impressions is unhampered, for it is not just the face that communicates.

Specialties: Stunning, Gorgeous, Sexy, Honest-Looking, Noble, Dignified, Pleasing, Handsome, Luminous

- Poor: Usually people didn't scream when they saw you.
- Average: A face in the crowd.
- Good: Reasonably attractive.
- Exceptional: One of the "25 Most Beautiful Wraiths" of the year.
- Outstanding: A face and physique for the ages.

## Mental Attributes

Mental Attributes relate to a wraith's mental capacity: memory, perception, thoughts and base knowledge. They measure a wraith's actual sentience and detail how fast he can think, how much he can think about, and whether he knows what he should be thinking about.

## Perception

Perception determines how much you notice of the world (or Underworld) around you. Your Perception rating describes how well you pick up incidental details, how much you actually garner from conversations with others, and how much more beyond the obvious you are generally aware of.

Specialties: Insightful, Attentive, Probing, Patient, Detail-Oriented, Astute, Observant, Clueful

- Poor: You often walked into trees.
- Average: You were aware of the basics of your surroundings.
- Good: You could find subtext in advertising and novels.
- Exceptional: The smallest details caught your eye.
- Outstanding: Needles? Haystacks? Child's play.

## Intelligence

Intelligence is the sum of both your knowledge and your ability to reach new conclusions. It is your ability to take discrete pieces of information and fit them together into a coherent whole, as well as a measure of how complex the ideas you can comprehend might be. Intelligence is not a measure of how fast you think, it's a measure of how well you think and, to a lesser extent, what you already know.

Specialties: Knowledgeable, Smart, Bookworm, Researcher, Clear Thinker, Astute, Pragmatic

- Poor: Adding numbers higher than 10 was difficult.
- Average: You could count your change and know if you'd been ripped off.
- Good: You could calculate tips in your head.
- Exceptional: Quantum physics and macroeconomic theory made sense to you.
- Outstanding: An IQ of 200 — or more.

## Wits

Wits is your ability to react to the information that is presented you. Essentially, your Wits Attribute determines how well you think on your feet, how fast you can use information you process and how efficient you're likely to be under stress. It also includes, to a degree, humor, and could well be described as the "baud rate of the brain."

Specialties: Clever, Shrewd, Sharp, Quick-Witted, Level-Headed, Creative, Free Association

- Poor: What was that "tick — tick — tick" sound, anyway?
- Average: You knew when to hold or fold in poker.
- Good: You could guess the punchlines of jokes you heard for the first time.
- Exceptional: You could follow Shakespearean dialogue without skipping a beat.
- Outstanding: Your thought processes were supercomputer-quick.

## Abilities

...to do that voodoo that you do so well...  
Cole Porter, "You Do Something to Me"

## Talents



Strictly untrained and intuitive, Talents are the things you have a knack for from the day you are born. Most Talents can't be picked up through training (though Brawl and a few others are exceptions), only through direct experience and native-born ability. There's no penalty for trying a roll on a Talent you don't possess, as these Abilities are so natural that everyone has at least a very basic idea of how to perform them.

## Alertness

This Ability displays how aware you are of your physical surroundings. It has nothing to do with eerie feelings or the supernatural; it's just a measure of knowing what's physically out there. Alertness extends to sounds, smells and touches as well as sights.

A wraith has the option of hyperattenuating her senses (see "Sharpened Senses," page 23) at will, and sometimes this requires a roll of Perception + Alertness to see things in the Skinlands.

- Novice: You know which side to look on when someone taps your shoulder.
- Competent: You could see how a stage magician did his tricks.
- Practiced: Pickpockets knew to avoid you.
- Expert: No one's managed to sneak up on you in decades.
- Master: You can hear a pin drop and know what type of grenade it came from.

Possessed by: Night Watchmen, Sentries, Paranoiacs, Hunters, Secret Service Agents

Specialties: Vigilance, Traps, Bodyguarding, Ambushes, Crowds, Spectres

## Athletics

Athletics is a measure of general physical fitness and skill at using one's body in ways other than combat. This Ability measures how good you are at climbing trees, leaping chasms, walking tightropes and hitting fastballs.

Athletics are complex Talents, requiring the combination of Physical Attributes and motor skills. Any roll that requires only an Attribute, such as powerlifting, does not involve Athletics.

- Novice: You weren't the last kid chosen on the playground.
- Competent: You were the terror of the company softball league.
- Practiced: You almost made the big leagues.
- Expert: You could have made the Olympic team.
- Master: You signed a \$7.4M contract and the fans didn't think you were overpaid.

Possessed by: Professional Athletes, Fitness Nuts, Aerobics Instructors, Dancers

Specialties: Acrobatics, Gymnastics, Specific Sports, General Fitness, Swimming

## Awareness

Awareness is the psychic equivalent of Alertness. With Awareness, you instantly notice when things are not as they should be. This is useful in detecting evidence of Arcanoi or Spectres, seeing if other supernatural beings have been about, and sensing when something contrary to the laws of nature is about to happen.

- Novice: You can tell if a photo of Bigfoot looks genuine.
- Competent: Some say you had second sight.
- Practiced: You made money on the side by dowsing.
- Expert: Little that is odd escapes your eye.
- Master: You can sniff the breeze and know when the next Maelstrom is coming.

Possessed by: Tarot Readers, Occult Investigators, Parapsychologists, Psychics

Specialties: Animals, Magic, Supernatural Creatures, Haunted Houses

## Brawl

Brawl is the gentle art of hitting something and watching it fall down. It serves as a catchall term for any form of unarmed combat, from martial arts to two drunks blindly wrestling on a pool table. This Ability covers everything from haymakers to eye-gouging to spinning side kicks, pretty much any combat maneuver that doesn't require a weapon. Brawls are generally less lethal than armed combat, but this Talent can be quite deadly.

- Novice: Little kids on playgrounds feared you.
- Practiced: You could hit someone and he'd know it.
- Competent: Professional legbreakers left you alone.
- Expert: All the muggers would leave a subway car that you entered.
- Master: Two sounds — you hitting them, them hitting the floor.

Possessed by: Big Guys Who Ride Harleys, Soldiers, Cops, Martial Artists, Thugs

Specialties: Martial Arts, Boxing, Gratuitous Violence, Wrestling, Grappling

## Dodge

Dodge is the Talent that some possess for getting out of the way. One can dodge oncoming traffic, bullets, flying fists or just about anything else, but the principle remains the same. This Ability covers avoiding missile, melee and brawl attacks.

- Novice: You could cross the street without becoming roadkill.
- Practiced: When the bullets flew, you knew where to hide.
- Competent: The playground was your turf during dodgeball.
- Expert: Why buy a fan when you got the breeze from people swinging at you?
- Master: Jackie Chan.

Possessed by: Cowards, Martial Artists, Survivalists, Cat Burglars, Military Personnel

Specialties: Acrobatic Leaps, Ducking for Cover, Dive, Sidestep

## Empathy

This Talent is related to sensing and understanding what others are feeling. This is not to say that using Empathy automatically makes you sympathetic to what you pick up from others, but you do get an accurate reading of what they are really feeling. Empathy is also useful in allowing you to get a general feel for your surroundings, and whether the vibes in an area are good, bad or indifferent.

- Novice: You can keep your foot out of your mouth.
- Practiced: Everyone cried on your shoulder.
- Competent: You know why others do what they do.
- Expert: It's almost impossible to slip a lie past you.
- Master: Your psychiatrist told *you* about his mother.

Possessed by: Parents, Teachers, Psychiatrists, Actors, Salesmen

Specialties: Deep Motivations, Truths, Personalities, Emotions

## Expression

Expression allows you to get your point across clearly, concisely and accurately. It's the measure of how well you can speak or write, regardless of topic. Characters with high Expression ratings can be extremely memorable for what they've said or written, even if there's nothing else remarkable about them.

- Novice: You wrote for your school paper.
- Competent: You successfully contested parking tickets.
- Practiced: You were published professionally.
- Expert: You hit the best-seller list.
- Master: You rank with Cicero and Daniel Webster.

Possessed by: Writers, Columnists, Stand-up Comedians, Talk Show Hosts, Actors, Demagogues

Specialties: Poetry, Off-the-cuff Remarks, After-Dinner Speaking, Rabble-Rousing, The Dozens

## Intimidation

Intimidation allows you to gently — or not so gently — coerce another into doing your will. Uses of Intimidation range from subtle threats to making examples to causing severe physical pain, and each of these techniques has a time and a place. Wraiths with a high level of Intimidation can cow others with a look, and often seem to radiate authority.

- Novice: You could take candy from babies.
- Competent: You never lacked for other kids' lunch money.
- Practiced: "Nice place you got here. Be a real shame if something happened to it...."
- Expert: You could terrorize writers into making their deadlines.
- Master: You frightened off IRS auditors.

Possessed by: Thugs, Mafiosi, Businessmen, IRS Agents, Bouncers, Babysitters

Specialties: Icy Stare, Implied Pain, Veiled Threats, Massive Property Damage

## Streetwise

On the streets, everything can be had — information, drugs, guns, you name it. Streetwise is the art of knowing what you want, who has it, and how you can get it from them safely. With Streetwise comes a knowledge of slang and street custom, as well as an instinctive way of fitting in. Wraiths without Streetwise who attempt to enter the street scene are easily identified as being out of their element; wraiths who do have Streetwise are given an automatic sense of belonging.

- Novice: People saw you and didn't scream "Narc!"
- Competent: You could get connected with a few hours' effort.

- Practiced: You know where the bodies were buried.
- Expert: You know where the bodies were buried, who buried them, and where they rented the equipment.
- Master: You could get anything, at any time, in any place.

Possessed by: Hustlers, Pimps, Runaways, Crime Novelists, Cops, Reporters

Specialties: Finding Info, Panhandling, Trashpicking, Dealing, Fencing

## Subterfuge

This Talent allows you to bend, mangle or break the truth and get away with it. In addition, you also can sense when others are doing the same or trying to hide their motives. At your best you could dissect a dissembling witness on the stand; at your worst you could make a fortune selling used cars.

- Novice: You could cheat on a test in high school and get away with it.

- Competent: You could have made a living at door-to-door sales.

- Practiced: You had your pick of law schools.
- Expert: You promised to lower taxes and increase spending, and people believed you.
- Master: What DNA evidence?

Possessed by: FBI Agents, Accountants, Lawyers, Little Kids, Casanovas

Specialties: Baldfaced Lying, False Testimony, Financial Scams, Seduction, Little White Lies

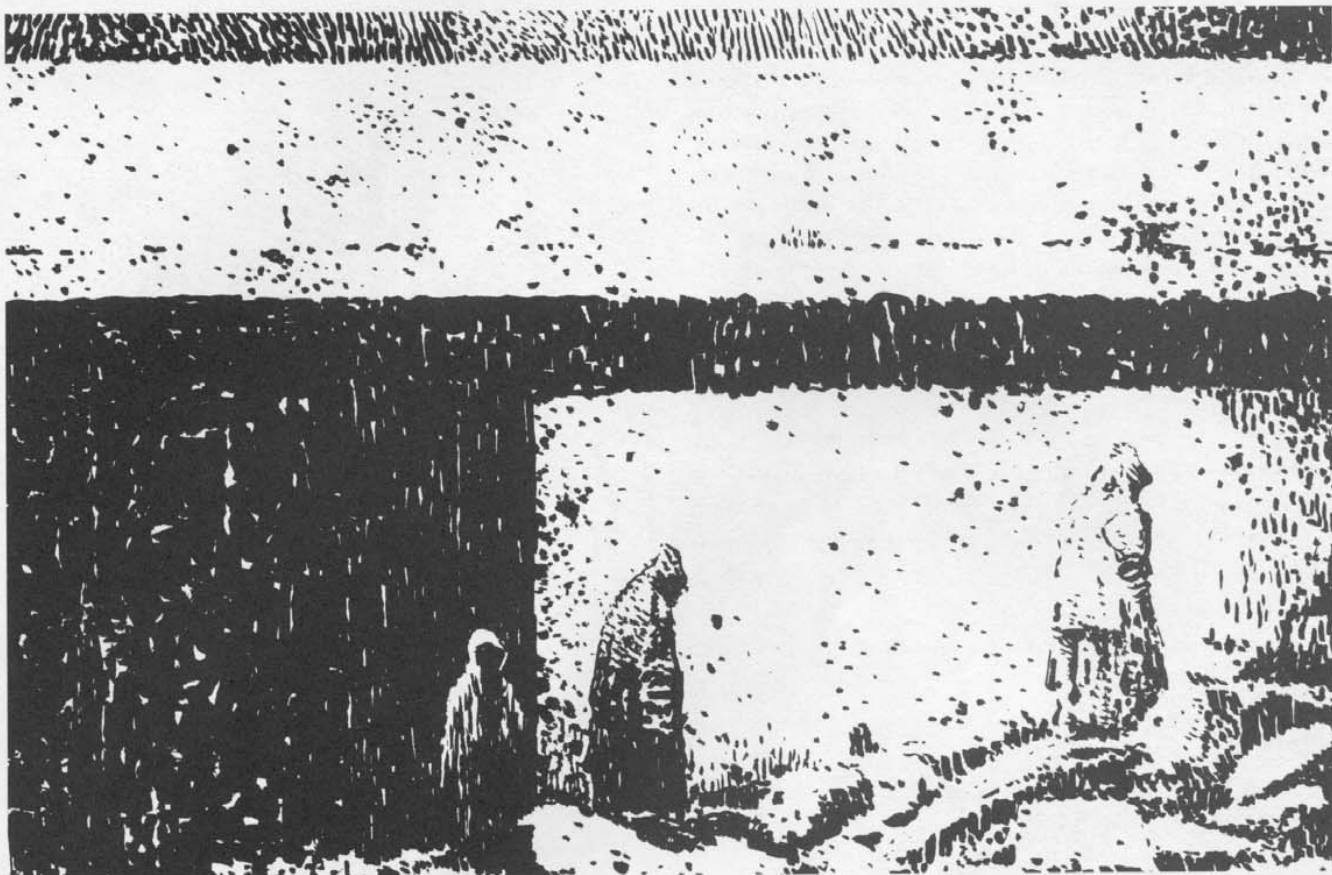
## Additional Talents

Search, Scrounge, Guile, Intrigue, Instruction

## Skills

Skills are Abilities that can be acquired through rigorous training or apprenticeship. Part intuition, part learned information, Skills are equal halves talent and training. If you attempt to make a Skill roll relating to a Skill in which you have a rating of zero, the difficulty for that roll is increased by + 1, to reflect the fact that you don't have more than a vague idea of what you're doing.





## Crafts

Crafts involves taking raw materials and building something useful from them. It refers to the skills of master artisans — gem cutting, glass blowing, leatherworking, woodworking, etc. The number of successes on a Crafts roll indicates how well-made the object in question is.

- Novice: You could make a birdhouse from popsicle sticks.
- Practiced: You made something in shop class that you could actually use.
- Competent: You were a regular on the local craft fair circuit.
- Expert: You taught advanced classes at arts centers.
- Master: Collectors instantly recognize your work.

Possessed by: Artisans, Potters, Artificers, Scout Leaders

• Specialties: Woodworking, Sewing, Candlemaking, Stonemasonry, Blacksmithing

## Drive

It is assumed that all modern characters have a base familiarity with the Drive Skill, allowing them to handle an automobile with reasonable ease in normal situations. Instead, Drive allows you to perform tricky maneuvers, drive at high speeds and engage in car chases. On the other hand, just be-

cause you're familiar with one type of land vehicle doesn't mean that you can handle another; there's a world of difference between a sub-compact and a troop carrier. The difficulty of a Drive roll can increase or decrease, depending upon how familiar you are with the vehicle you're driving.

Older wraiths can be considered to have base familiarity with wagons or horseback riding in the same way modern characters are familiar with cars.

- Novice: You could handle long highway trips.
- Practiced: You could drive stick shift.
- Competent: You survived driving in Boston in winter.
- Expert: You could have been a professional race car driver.
- Master: New York rush hour traffic? You could handle it backward.

Possessed by: Taxi Drivers, Auto Racers, Teenagers, Chauffeurs, Bagmen

Specialties: City Traffic, Off-Road, Stunt Driving, Bad Weather, Ice

## Etiquette

Etiquette is the measure of your understanding of the nuances and delicate balances of polite society in a myriad of social circumstances. Such a Skill is useful during diplomatic engagements, gatherings or encounters with higher society.

- Novice: You know when to keep your mouth shut.
- Practiced: You know the difference between formal and black tie.
- Competent: You knew which utensil to use for which course.
- Expert: You can get along with — or at least not offend — anyone.
- Master: You should have made room on the mantel for that Nobel Peace Prize.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Hereditary Nobles, Mediators, Psychiatrists

Specialties: Formality, Correspondence, Negotiation, Compromising, Soirees

## Firearms

This Skill covers both how well you can shoot and your skill at maintaining and repairing firearms. Artillery pieces, mortars and so on are not covered by this Skill, nor are archaic weapons such as bows or slings.

- Novice: You could hit the broad side of a barn with a shotgun.
- Practiced: You didn't embarrass yourself at the rifle range.
- Competent: You can hit a moving target.
- Expert: Sniper could have been a career choice for you.
- Master: "Blast! I was aiming for his left nostril."

Possessed by: Snipers, Soldiers, Mafiosi, Hunters, Petty Criminals, Deranged Postal Employees

Specialties: Sniping, Shoot-outs, Pistols, Rifles, Automatic Weapons

## Leadership

Leadership is more than barking orders. It measures how well you can get others to obey your decisions, whether they be issued as memos, orders or polite requests. It also covers how willingly people accede to your wishes, as reluctant followers are worth far less than willing ones. Leadership is most often used in conjunction with Charisma or Manipulation.

- Novice: You decided where your carpool was going for lunch.
- Practiced: When you yell, people listen.
- Competent: People routinely look to you for their marching orders.
- Expert: Others will follow you into the jaws of death — or worse — without questioning.
- Master: You had the makings of another Alexander the Great.

Possessed by: Military Personnel, Gang Leaders, Educators, Executives, Police Chiefs

Specialties: Field Leadership, Long-Term Planning, Military, Nobility, Commands

## Meditation

In an existence in which the voice of your Shadow is a constant threat, Meditation, the ability to focus and center one's thoughts, can be an essential skill. To meditate, one does not necessarily need to be in the lotus position. This is a very personal Skill, and one for which you develop your own technique.

Meditation can be used to catch up on lost Slumber. To do so, a wraith rolls Stamina + Meditation (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how many effective hours of Slumber are gained per hour of meditation.

- Novice: You could block out the sound of your neighbor's stereo.
- Practiced: You can achieve a peaceful repose.
- Competent: You can relax in any position.
- Expert: Your concentration is almost impossible to break.
- Master: You are glacial in your calm, totally centered and imperturbable.

Possessed by: Zen Masters, Buddhist Monks, Athletes, New Age Gurus

Specialties: Biofeedback, Relaxing, Zen, Centering

## Melee

Melee is the broad term for all sorts of combat that involve hand-to-hand weapons. The definition of a hand-to-hand weapon is a loose one, as it includes knives, swords, broken bottles, chains, saps and just about anything else than can be used to inflict damage on another wraith. With the Melee Skill comes knowledge of proper care of your chosen weapon as well.

- Novice: You've been in a few fights without getting Harrowed.
- Practiced: You have basic military training.
- Competent: Any object becomes a weapon in your hands.
- Expert: Fencing masters in Heidelberg feared you.
- Master: Orange seeds and paper airplanes were deadly in your grip.

Possessed by: Fencers, Muggers, Martial Artists, Policemen, Soldiers

Specialties: Fencing, Heavy Weapons, Blunt Object, Martial Arts Styles, Found Weapons

## Performance

Different from Expression in that it involves more than just spoken or written words, Performance covers the entire gamut of live artistic expression. Singing, acting, dancing, playing musical instruments and similar skills are all covered under this rubric. In addition to actual performing ability, this Skill also measures how well you know the society surrounding your particular art form and how you fit in. Advanced levels of Performance usually require some form of specialization.

- Novice: You weren't kicked off stage during company karaoke night.
- Practiced: You got parts off-off Broadway.
- Competent: You could get speaking parts in films.
- Expert: Your handprints were on sidewalk in front of Mann's Chinese Theater.

••••• Master: You were one of the legendary artists of your time.

Possessed by: Actors, Musicians, Mimes, Singers, Dancers, Choreographers

Specialties: Voice, Instrumental, Acting, Dance

## Repair

Restoring anything mechanical, electronic or solid state that is broken is under the Repair Skill. This Skill covers everything from advanced electronics to shoring up a sagging beam — assuming, of course, that you have proper tools with which to do so. Among the Restless, this Skill allows you to find your way around systems that you Gremlinize, or understand where the best place might be to whack a device with Outrage.

• Novice: You hit it with a hammer and hoped that would fix it.

•• Practiced: You could wire a house, or steal cable TV.

••• Competent: You didn't need to call mechanics.

•••• Expert: You could have made a tidy living as a professional handyman.

••••• Master: Anything not broken down to the molecular level, you could fix.

Possessed by: Mechanics, Carpenters, Weekend Putterers, Plumbers, Repairmen, Technicians

Specialties: Wood, Electricity, Appliances, Automotive, Computers

## Stealth

Stealth is the Skill that covers both moving silently and hiding unnoticed. Usually Stealth rolls are made against another character's Perception.

• Novice: You were a master at "hide and seek."

•• Practiced: You blend in with shadows.

••• Competent: You're not noticed unless you want to be.

•••• Expert: You could move through the woods and not crunch a dry leaf.

••••• Master: Ninja Master, one who moves like a ghost. ...

Possessed by: Ninjas, Spies, Saboteurs, Cat Burglars, Reapers

Specialties: Lurking, Camouflage, Shadows, Silent Approaches

## Other Skills

Soulforging, Cooking, Boating, Archery, Disguise, Other Weapons (Heavy, Ancient, Medieval)

# Knowledges

Knowledges are those Abilities dependent upon rigorous application of the mind. There may be a physical element to their use, but the key component is acquiring, assessing and using information. Knowledges can be learned inside or outside of a classroom, but study at them is necessary. Learning from someone is the best way to acquire a Knowledge, but there are many self-taught wraiths.

Without a Knowledge in a specific field, you may not even attempt to make a roll relating to that Knowledge. The only exceptions are when the roll in question refers to trivial knowledge that any wraith might know, or when special circumstances arise.

## Bureacracy

Bureacracy, a.k.a. the System, is theoretically an organization for getting things done more efficiently. With the proper knowledge of how that System functions and how to utilize it to achieve your ends, you can get permission to do what you want and prevent others from getting theirs. Bureacracy is also a measure of your organizational skills and knack for getting things done, and of your efficiency at manipulating the System in both the Underworld and the Skinlands.

• Student: You could file a tax return.

•• College: You could file a tax return and expect a refund.

••• Masters: You could stall a debate — or an angry citizen — indefinitely.

•••• Doctorate: You could make whole branches of the government operate efficiently.

••••• Scholar: The System is your toy, and you could get whatever you want out of it with a single phone call.

Possessed by: Bureaucrats, Accountants, Personal Assistants, Anacreons

Specialties: Governmental Regulations, Taxes, Requisitions, Accounting

## Computer

This is a general measurement of a wraith's aptitude with computers and all things related to them. It takes into account the skills necessary both to program new software (or create new hardware) and the mental dexterity required to use existing equipment and programs. There's more to this Knowledge than just hacking into mainframes. In a world where the operation of basic word processing software is still a mystery to many adults, even a modicum of knowledge of how to use a computer can be a very powerful thing.

Wraiths with computer knowledge find the electronic superhighway an easy way to access the Skinlands. Maneuvering through systems, gathering (or deleting) data, printing out messages to the living and manipulating computers for their own purposes through the higher levels of Inhabit are ways in which this Knowledge is useful to Restless.

• Student: You didn't hang your disks from the fridge with a magnet.

•• College: You could use a PC without calling technical support immediately.

••• Masters: You could code your own software.

•••• Doctorate: Your name is legend on the Internet.

••••• Scholar: The Net was your playground, and your dreams were all in C++.

Possessed by: Hackers, Engineers, Programmers, Comp Sci Professors, Students, TinyMUDders

Specialties: Hardware, Software, The Web, Netsurfing, Coding

## Enigmas

The Enigmas Knowledge concerns your ability at solving mysteries and puzzles. In essence, it is a measurement of your problem-solving skills, how you combine vital details into a coherent solution. Enigmas comes in handy when solving mazes, answering riddles and the like.

• Student: You could do jigsaw puzzles.

•• College: You guessed the secret of *The Crying Game*.™

••• Masters: You did crossword puzzles — in pen.

•••• Doctorate: You know what happens if a tree falls in the forest and no one hears it.

••••• Scholar: Zeno's Paradox was nice for a warm-up.

Possessed by: Zen Masters, Stage Magicians, Logicians, Mystics, Gamers

Specialties: Koans, Ancient Riddles, Visual Puzzles, Wordplay

## Investigation

Investigation allows you to call upon basic knowledge of criminology to locate evidence and perform forensic analysis. At sufficient levels, you can conduct a proper criminal investigation, deduce *modus operandi* and reconstruct a crime scene. Particularly in conjunction with a few Arcanoi, this Knowledge can be invaluable to wraiths seeking to protect or rescue their Fetters.

• Student: You've seen a few Bogart movies.

•• College: You have a police officer's knowledge.

••• Masters: You could have been an insurance investigator.

•••• Doctorate: A spot in an international espionage agency was yours.

••••• Scholar: Elementary, my dear Watson.

Possessed by: Private Eyes, Police Detectives, Insurance Claims Investigators, Intelligence Agents, Forensic Doctors

Specialties: Quick Searches, Tailing, Detective Work, Deductive Investigation





## Law

Law is the measure of how well you understand the legal system in which you are entangled. A knowledge of Law will allow you to manipulate the legal system to your ends, confounding your enemies and helping your friends.

- Student: You knew the absolute basics.
- College: Public defender just out of law school.
- Masters: You could have been a judge.
- Doctorate: A multimillion dollar legal practice was yours for the taking.
- Scholar: You have the makings of a Supreme Court justice — or a Deathlord.

Possessed by: Law Students, Judges, Petty Bureaucrats, Accountants, Attorneys, DAs

Specialties: Criminal, Civil, Tax, Copyright, Litigation

## Linguistics

More a record of how many languages you speak than how well you understand the theory of languages, Linguistics measures how many languages you are fluent in besides your native tongue. Linguistics also allows for identifying accents, reading lips, picking up slang and a certain amount of linguistic mimicry.

- Student: One additional language.
- College: Two additional languages.
- Masters: Three additional languages.
- Doctorate: Four additional languages.
- Scholar: Five additional languages.

Possessed by: Interpreters, Grad Students, Foreign Language Teachers, Travelers

Specialties: Cursing, Diplomatic Language, Technical, Romance, Translating, "Dead" Languages

## Medicine

This Knowledge details how well you know how the human body works and how to repair it in case of injury. Of course, that also implies a knowledge of what is harmful to the human form as well.

While Medicine might seem to be a useless Knowledge to the Restless Dead, there are multiple uses for it, both benign and malicious. Understanding of this field, combined with Death sight, can help determine what steps need to be taken to protect a living Fetter, while an appreciation of physiology could combine with Outrage to produce some devastating results.

- Student: You passed a Red Cross first aid test.
- College: You could have been a paramedic.
- Masters: You're knowledgeable enough to have been a G.P.
- Doctorate: Other doctors came to you for consultation.

..... Scholar: Artificial hearts and organ transplants were child's play.

Possessed by: Doctors, Registered Nurses, Field Medics

Specialties: Pharmacy, Surgery, General Practice, Emergency, Specialized Field (Pediatrics, Neurology, etc.)

## Occult

There are many supernatural secrets in the World of Darkness, and with the Occult Knowledge, some of them are yours. Occult implies a general knowledge of things such as *voudoun*, curses and fortune-telling, as well as information more specific to the supernatural beings that inhabit the world.

• Student: You can pronounce "Tarot" properly.

•• College: You've read Gardner, Cunningham and Crowley.

••• Masters: You know about more than just ghosts.

•••• Doctorate: The World of Darkness is an open book to you.

••••• Scholar: Nostradamus and Albertus Magnus could crib from your notes.

Possessed by: New Agers, Mystics, Occult Shop Owners, Mages

Specialties: Qaballah, Hermetic Magic, Spirits, Channeling, Wraiths

## Politics

This Knowledge covers the theory and practice of politics. With points in this Trait, you can figure out who's on top on the local system and how they got there. Politics covers both human and Restless political structures, and can be essential in dealing with both living and dead authorities.

• Student: You were senior class president.

•• College: You've worked the campaign trail.

••• Masters: You've held local office.

•••• Doctorate: A career politician, you were notable enough to appear in political cartoons.

••••• Scholar: The fate of nations rested in your hands.

Possessed by: Diplomats, Career Politicians, Advisors, Spin Doctors, Lobbyists

Specialties: Realpolitik, Coalition Building, Grass-Roots, National, International

## Science

This Ability measures not only theoretical knowledge but also how well you can put it to practical use. It puts equal weight on knowing the difference between a boson and a quark and being able to whip up a Molotov cocktail from chemicals used for scrubbing bathrooms. Lower levels of Science indicate a general familiarity with modern science; higher ones usually involve some sort of field specialization.

While the science of the living doesn't always apply to the Underworld, knowing how things work in the Skinlands can help a wraith to manipulate them from across the Shroud.

• Student: You watched PBS regularly.

•• College: You could make explosives from common household chemicals.

••• Masters: You could teach a high school honors course.

•••• Doctorate: Your research got grant money without your breaking a sweat.

••••• Scholar: Feynman, Einstein, Galileo — and you.

Possessed by: Scientists, Mad Scientists, Graduate Students, Science Popularizers

Specialties: Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Geology, Practical Applications, Theory

## Additional Knowledges

Psychology, Finance, Art, Philosophy, Theater, History, Military Science, Genealogy, Geography, Theology, Specific area of knowledge/trivia

## Backgrounds

*...and as we pass by some ruined mansion or moonlit abbey at nightfall, we know that within the crumbling walls there still lurk dark spirits from the distant past...*

— Simon Marsden, *The Journal of a Ghosthunter*

Backgrounds are Traits that lie beyond the direct physical and supernatural capabilities of the wraith. They help define a character's history and context, and you should choose them to enhance and solidify your wraith's concept. Backgrounds can also complement each other, and the suite of Backgrounds chosen reveals a great deal about a character. Characters with a lot of Allies but few Contacts are completely different from characters with few Allies but loads of Contacts, though they may know the same number of wraiths. The former has a great many wraiths upon whom she can rely on in a crunch, but few acquaintances; the latter knows wraiths who will converse with him, but who won't back him up in a time of need. Often, a character's Backgrounds, particularly those like Memoriam or Status, help define the limits of what a Storyteller character (or newly met player character) might know about a wraith upon first meeting her. With this in mind, it is vital to pick Backgrounds that work well with your wraith's character concept.

Your Storyteller should have input into your choice of Backgrounds. For example, in a chronicle that begins with the your character's death (and subsequent rebirth in the Shadowlands), it might be inappropriate for a character to possess certain Backgrounds — Mentor or Status, for example. Other chronicle concepts, such as a story in which the wraiths are agents of the Hierarchy, might require that the characters possess at least two dots in each of these Back-

grounds. Backgrounds are a good way for Storytellers to ensure that the characters devised by the players fit smoothly into the chronicle and work well together.

On certain rolls, a Background can be combined with an appropriate Attribute. For example, your Storyteller might call for a Charisma + Allies roll to determine how many of your Allies rally to your current cause, or a Manipulation + Status roll to decide if you can bully a Centurion on rank alone.

## Allies

Life among the dead is, of necessity, bleak. It would be bleaker still were it not for the tendency of wraiths to associate with one another and seek company and solace from their Restless colleagues. Creatures of passion, wraiths are prone to making and breaking strong and intense friendships with others in the Shadowlands. Such unions are represented by the Allies Background. Allies need not be close friends (and should not include members of a wraith's Circle), but may instead represent comrades in arms, like-minded individuals, fellow mourners or any wraith (or other inhabitant of the wraith's world) who has reason to feel kinship with the character.

Allies often aid a wraith when called upon, although like any friend they become tired of repeated demands on their time and resources. Allies need to be maintained, and a wraith who takes but does not give is likely to find his Allies deserting him. Spending points on buying an Ally does not ensure the services of an infinitely tolerant, infinitely generous individual. Also, most Allies have needs of their own, and a wraith may find himself being called upon to help his friend in her time of need.

The Storyteller and player should cooperate in detailing the Ally, and many stories can develop from the relationship between a wraith and his Allies.

None: A character with no Allies is unusual, and you should decide what it is about your character that drives others away.

- A single Ally, probably highly valued for her uniqueness.
- Two Allies; are they jealous of each other?
- Three Allies; one may be special in some way.
- Four Allies; do your Allies know of each other's existence?
- Five Allies; why are you so popular?

## Artifact

Commonly fueled by Pathos, Artifacts have certain functions or powers that aid the wraiths (most often the servants of the Hierarchy) who carry them. Artifacts are highly valuable, and greedily hoarded by the authorities. Any wraith

who chooses the Artifact Background must create (in conjunction with the Storyteller) a story explaining reasonably where she obtained the Artifact, and why she has been allowed to keep it.

Characters who take this Background can purchase it more than once with each purchase representing one Artifact of the appropriate level. Conversely, multiple points spent on Artifacts can instead grant a character a more valuable and potent item.

None: Like most wraiths, the character has acquired no Artifacts. Is he opposed to material goods, unlucky or merely poor?

- A seemingly insignificant Artifact.
- A minor Artifact, such as a Moliated torch.
- An Artifact of some purpose, like a sword of Stygian steel.
- A major and unique Artifact, which the Hierarchy would dearly love to possess (e.g., a gun that doesn't need relic bullets).
- The most useful and powerful of objects, the envy of all other wraiths.

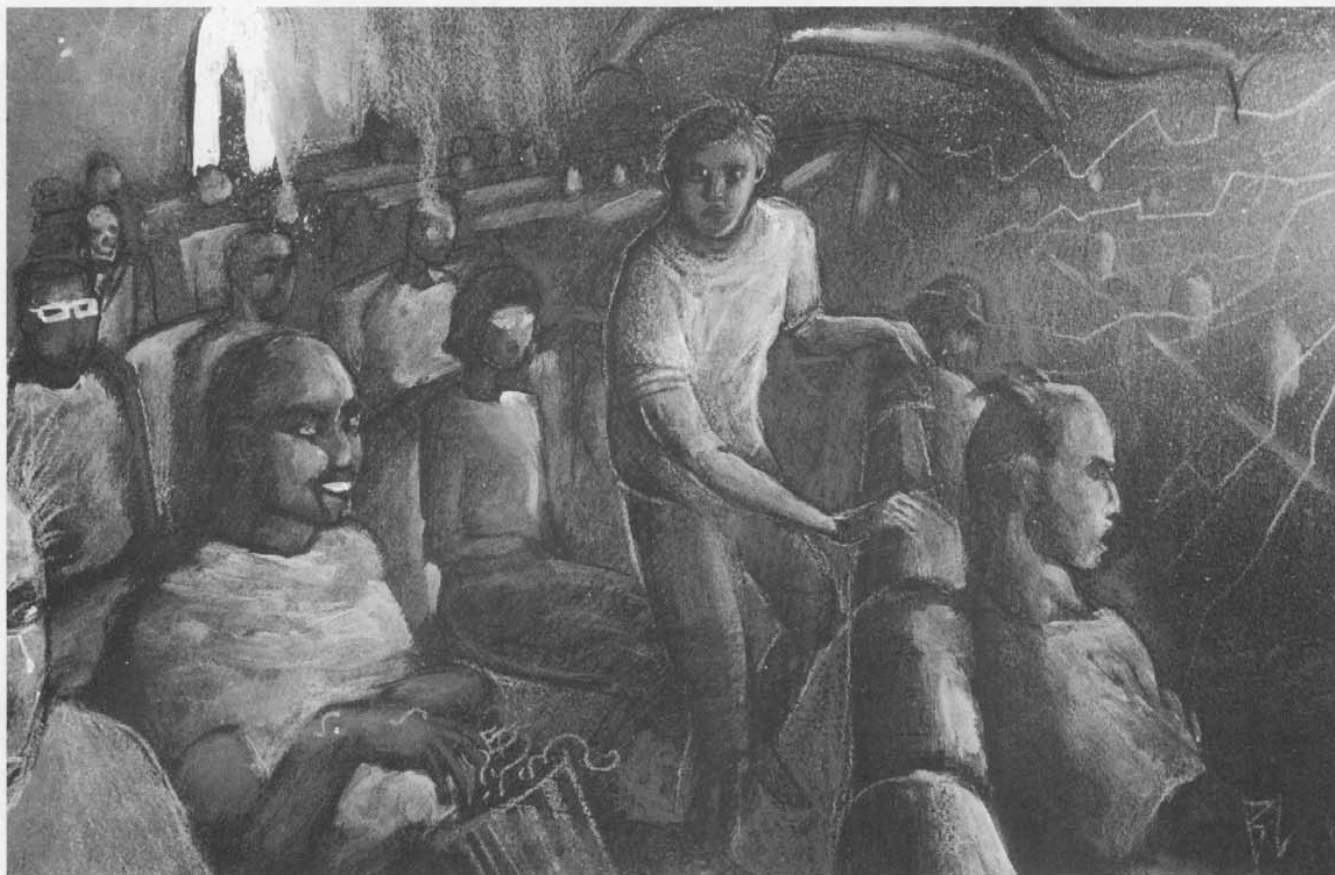
## Contacts

Distinct from Allies, Contacts are people (or wraiths) whom the character has encountered and who are willing to work with him. They are individuals who are prepared to do the character a service, or furnish him with information or aid, but in general they have a price. That price may be as simple as a promise of a later favor, as complicated as a political maneuver or as base as a financial debt, but it generally matches the value of the service rendered fairly.

A wraith's Contacts score represents two things: major Contacts and minor ones. Major Contacts are the individuals, detailed by the Storyteller and/or the player, with access to the services and information that the player desires. These can be wraiths in the Shadowlands, Spectres in the Tempest or living people from the character's time among the Quick, but all will recognize her and be willing to cut some kind of deal. There are also minor Contacts, who also specialize in the same general field of influence as the major Contacts. These individuals can prove useful to a wraith if a successful roll against her Contacts rating (difficulty 7) is made, but minor Contacts are generally less well-informed, less helpful and less friendly than major ones.

None: No useful Contacts. However, perhaps you are a Contact for some other wraith (not a player character).

- One major Contact and few others. You probably have a special arrangement with this Contact.
- Two major Contacts in different areas and a scattering of associated minor Contacts.



••• Three major Contacts and a fair helping of minor ones.

•••• Four major Contacts, all in different areas, although you could double up and cover one particular field completely.

••••• Five major Contacts and an associated minor Contact on almost every street corner.

## Eidolon

Eidolon is a measure of spiritual fortitude. It is an indication of special potential in a particular wraith to resist the temptations, assaults and insults of the Shadow. While it does not necessarily suggest that a wraith is objectively good or even moral, it does reveal a wholesome metaphysical resistance to the manipulation of the Shadow. Eidolon is tied to a wraith's Psyche, and some Eidolons are so strong as to manifest occasionally as a separate entity, much like the Shadow does. Most, however, are firmly integrated into a wraith's Psyche. A wraith with a high Eidolon rating does not necessarily possess special insight into the workings of her Shadow (although she may), but instead some special ability to stave off the Shadow's attempts to drag her to Oblivion.

Each point of Eidolon represents one extra die per session that a player can add to any roll which resists some intent, plan or ploy of her Shadow (including the Shadow's

Thorns). A player may use one, some or all of his Eidolon die in any roll but not more than his total Eidolon rating each session. Eidolon can also be used during a Harrowing to exercise some control over the course of events.

None: Like most of the wretched, you are a canvas on which your Shadow paints.

- You can sometimes second-guess your Shadow.
- There are days when you are firmly in control.
- Spiritually tough; your Shadow must work hard to influence you.
- You see through all your Shadow's ploys.
- Your Shadow must choose its moment carefully or waste all its efforts.

## Haunt

Not by chance do ghost stories refer to the tendency of spirits to inhabit certain buildings, crossroads or other locations. Wraiths are often tied to a spot in the Shadowlands that corresponds to a place of special import for them in the Skinlands. In these places the Shroud wears thin and a wraith can establish a Haunt, which serves as home, sanctuary and refuge. When in her Haunt, a wraith may more easily employ Arcanoi and more comfortably and privately confront her Shadow.

Sometimes Haunts are shared between several wraiths, but these groups are invariably small as the trust involved in sharing the privacy of a Haunt is seldom found in the Shadowlands. Haunts are usually tied to a single physical place, and the corresponding Skinlands location is inevitably run-down and decayed. A Haunt, if belonging to a single wraith, is often connected with a particular Passion or Fetter, and a Haunt which is itself a Fetter is both rare and potent.

The Shroud is lowered by the Haunt's rating inside the Haunt itself, and many Haunts also gather Memoriam, which is available to any wraith who spends time there.

At the Storyteller's discretion, players can combine their Background points to purchase a shared Haunt. The details of such a place are left to the Storyteller to determine. Other wraiths may wish to have both communal and private Haunts. In this case, the Background must be purchased twice, once for each type of Haunt.

None: You have no Haunt and probably Slumber on the run. Are you a nomad by choice or circumstance?

- A small domicile, perhaps a closet or phone booth.
- A Haunt large enough for you to survive in, but hardly luxurious.
- A fair-sized Haunt which can accommodate you and several guests comfortably.
- An opulent Haunt, ample accommodation for up to four wraiths. Alternatively a special Haunt, such as a mobile or well-defended Haunt.
- A majestic Haunt in good repair, perhaps the haunted mansion on the hill. No doubt this Haunt is the envy of many and powerful wraiths not blessed with such a home themselves.

## Legacy

It might be the desire of every living person to be remembered, but human memories are the very lifeblood of wraiths. Some individuals are remembered by few, some by many (this is covered by the Background Memoriam), but there are cases where a wraith's works are remembered long after her name has been forgotten. The Legacy Background covers this sort of memory, representing a wraith's creations which have lived on after her death. A Legacy can represent a variety of different things, from hard objects — buildings, statues, a thousand planted trees — to less tangible things such as an art collection, a political theory or a word which has become common usage.

Once per story, a wraith can try to gain focus and comfort from her Legacy. To do so, the wraith must travel to the site of the Legacy (or some important place associated with it in the case of intangible Legacies) and roll a number of dice equal to the level of the Background (difficulty 7). The number of successes represents the number of levels of damage that the wraith can heal. Normal damage is regenerated



instantly; aggravated damage takes approximately one hour of attendance upon the Legacy per Corpus Level healed. This represents a process of confirmation and affirmation for the wraith, the physical manifestation of which is healed Corpus.

None: No trace remains that you ever lived.

- A painting of yours hangs somewhere on the wall of an obscure gallery.
- You funded a building on a college campus.
- You re-seeded a devastated forest area through which people pass every day.
- You designed the Eiffel Tower or the Statue of Liberty.
- An important idea in modern life is attributed to you. Perhaps you founded a religion or a political movement.

## Mentor

The relationship between a character and his Mentor is different from that between a character and either an Ally or a Contact. A Mentor is sometimes a patron, sometimes a teacher, sometimes a protector, and sometimes all of these things. While a Mentor will not always respond to requests for help from a wraith, she always acts in what she believes are the wraith's best interests (though the wraith might see things differently). A wraith's relationship with his Mentor is complicated and personal, and should be the subject of detailed roleplaying. Such a relationship is not usually an even or casual one, and entails responsibilities on both sides.

Some Mentors teach Arcanoi to wraiths in their charge, but always the Mentor chooses what is taught and what is not. A Mentor may do more than teach Arcanoi; perhaps serving as an advocate for the character in Stygia, perhaps teaching new Abilities, or perhaps physically bailing the wraith out of trouble.

None: Perhaps you have a problem with authority, or you seek a master worthy of your attention.

- A Mentor little older than yourself, but with a few connections.
- A Mentor of some importance, but little power.
- An old and wise Mentor, with a modicum of clout.
- A politically powerful Mentor who can pull strings.
- An almost omniscient Mentor, perhaps a Ferryman or a high-ranking Hierarch.

## Memoriam

The essence of the dead is hard to define, but Pathos stems directly from emotion, and the emotion which the living feel for the dead is expressed as memory. After all, memory is the way in which the living interact with the dead. People

have a tendency to remember those who are lost in strange ways, or to project thoughts and feelings onto those who are no longer there to represent themselves.

Some wraiths can take comfort from the fact that they are remembered by many people (though not necessarily fondly). Others are recalled by few, one or even none. There is an argument among the dead as to whether it is better for one person to remember you well than for an entire nation to recall your life with hate, envy or resentment. However, Memoriam makes no judgments.

Memoriam allows the wraith to access extra Pathos. By invoking the feelings that the living have for her, once per session a wraith can roll her Memoriam rating (difficulty 8), with each success granting one point of Pathos. If a botch is rolled, one point of Memoriam is permanently lost, as the inevitable process of forgetfulness and myth obscures memories of the wraith.

None: You lived and died alone. Few, if any, even remember your name. Alternatively, you lived so long ago that all memories of you have faded.

- One person remembers you. Maybe that is enough.
- A handful of people remember you on occasion.
- Your family and a few others remember you and some things you did together.
- A community, organization or company has you on its roll of honor — or curses your name.
- You have legendary status for an entire nation (or more). This level of recognition is far easier to achieve in a negative light than in a positive.

## Notoriety

Fame is an important issue for most of the living occupants of the Western world. Those who are not actively pursuing or attempting to preserve it are constantly bombarded with images of those who are. Among the dead, mortal fame has little impact, though there are those who die with such a reputation that the Restless await them.

However, it is also possible to cultivate a reputation, good or bad, beyond the grave. Renegades and other dissidents soon earn themselves reputations, and not ones to be envied. Notoriety is a measure of how well a wraith is known, how much he is talked about and what expectations other wraiths have of him. A wraith with a high rating in Notoriety may find that it can be a curse — other wraiths talk about him a great deal, project hopes and grievances onto him and demand favors and attention simply by virtue of his role as a public figure. Fame in life does not guarantee Notoriety after death, nor does a quiet and low-profile life preclude a rise to prominence in the Shadowlands.

None: Like most of the Restless, you are a face in the crowd. Do you deliberately keep a low profile?

- You have made some impressions.
- Perhaps your Haunt is visited regularly.
- Your name has traveled farther than you have.
- Every wraith in the Shadowlands recognizes your name (but not necessarily your face).
- For whatever reason, you cannot escape being recognized everywhere you go.

## Relic

Relics are things that once existed in the Skinlands, and which have persisted in the Shadowlands after their destruction. The reasons for this psychic durability vary, but all invoked enough strong emotion while they existed to cross the Shroud on the strength of that memory. Some relics were important things in themselves, such as national treasures or badges of office. Others were articles that were acutely important to one person and acquired enough emotional weight from that individual to persist in the Shadowlands — wedding bands, stuffed animals and the like. A relic need not have belonged to the wraith in life or even to have had some great significance to her; property can be acquired by the Restless as well.

Characters who take this Background can purchase it more than once with each purchase representing one relic of the appropriate level.

None: You have nothing. Are you a recent escapee from Thralldom, or just not attached to material things?

- A seemingly insignificant relic, like the keys to a treasured car.
- A minor relic, perhaps a small work of art.
- A relic with some usefulness, a telescope or knife.
- A major relic with moving parts, often powered by Pathos.
- A huge or invaluable relic, a sophisticated device or famous object.

## Status

Status is a more concrete recognition of power than Notoriety. It does not, however, measure actual worth or achievement. Many in the bureaucracies of the Underworld, just as in the Skinlands, have done little if anything to deserve the authority they have. Status can also be used to gain favors from authorities, of whatever kind.

Status does not necessarily relate to the Hierarchy, although most Hierarchy members possess at least some Status. It can also represent a ranking in the Renegades, the

Heretics or one of the many Guilds. It is possible, though uncommon, for a wraith to possess Status in several groups. In this case the Background must be purchased multiple times. With Status comes duty and responsibility, and wraiths with high Status find themselves responsible for decisions which affect the existence of many lesser Restless.

None: No organization recognizes you.

- An initiate of a some kind. You are most likely responsible for unpleasant duties, but are at least recognized as part of the group.

- After demonstrating your devotion to the group, you have been chosen for a position of some responsibility.

- You are in the murky middle ranks. Not low enough to be pushed around or high enough to do the pushing, this is a dangerous place to be, but has many rewards.

- This level of Status represents the level of management and privilege. You can access the resources of the group and are trusted by its leaders

- Player characters are unlikely to ever rise higher than this. Having gained significant power and respect, you are a leader.

## Corpus

*What he touched was, according to his account, a mouth, with teeth, and with hair about it, and, he declares, not the mouth of a human being.*

— M.R. James, "Casting the Runes"

A wraith's Corpus is her body, her physical manifestation in the Underworld. In addition, the term also refers to the relative health of that form. The more levels of Corpus a wraith has, the more solidly her ectoplasmic body holds together and the "healthier" she is. Wraiths who lose all of their Corpus tumble into a Harrowing, or sometimes Oblivion. Still, as Corpus is so easily regained, wraiths can absorb a tremendous amount of punishment.

The appearance of a wraith's Corpus is determined largely by his subconscious image of himself. While most wraiths look as they did in life, some look better, some look worse, and some find themselves in Corpora that are utterly inhuman-looking. However, just because a wraith's Corpus has wings does not necessarily mean that he can fly; most modifications of this sort are strictly cosmetic, not functional. Furthermore, a wraith's clothes are also part of his Corpus — he awakens as a wraith wearing whatever he would subconsciously deem appropriate. Many wraiths will find their wardrobe changing to suit the situation without conscious effort or thought on their part, reflecting how thoroughly a wraith's form is drawn from his subconscious image of himself.

## Permanent Corpus

Permanent Corpus is the measurement of the maximum number of Corpus Levels a wraith can possess. All wraiths begin with a permanent Corpus rating of 10, but this can go down if the wraith fails or botches Harrowings. This creates a vicious cycle: a wraith loses permanent Corpus, limiting his maximum temporary Corpus. This means that he loses all of his temporary Corpus more easily, pulling him into another Harrowing in which he can lose more permanent Corpus, and so on....

There is no known way to increase permanent Corpus, though some rumors have crept out as to the abilities of the Usurers and Masquers in this regard. As certain Malfeans and other dwellers in the Tempest demonstrably have Corpus ratings in excess of 10, there would seem to be some secret to regaining — or even increasing — permanent Corpus.

## Temporary Corpus

The Corpus track on the **Wraith** character sheet allows you to track how healthy your character is. The squares represent permanent Corpus; the circles represent temporary. Temporary Corpus can never exceed permanent.

There are two basic ways to lose temporary Corpus: Interaction with the Skinlands and violence in the Underworld. Every time a wraith interacts violently with an object or structure in the Skinlands (a bullet, a rock, a wall, etc.), he checks off one circle on his character sheet, indicating that one level of Corpus damage has been taken. A wraith only takes one Corpus Level of damage no matter how severe the Skinlands impact; a wraith takes as much damage from a baseball as from a grenade's detonation. Immediately upon that impact, the wraith becomes Incorporeal and cannot be harmed by Skinlands objects for a number of turns equal to his Stamina. This explains how wraiths can walk through walls, parked cars and whatnot.

Violence in the Underworld is a different matter; the number of successes a wraith's opponent achieves on his damage roll is the number of Corpus Levels the wraith must check off (subject to modification via a soak roll). This sort of damage does not cause a wraith to become Incorporeal, and wraiths are always solid to one another and all objects that exist in the Shadowlands.

Wraiths can normally heal Corpus either by Slumbering or by spending Pathos. As each level of damage is healed, the check in that circle is erased. **For more information on losing and regaining Corpus, see "Injury," page 231.**

## Arcanoi

*Trick-or-Treat old style. But tricks from the dead...*

— Ray Bradbury, *The Halloween Tree*



Death opens the door to things unknowable by the living. A wraith is Fettered and limited, but also holds great potential to change herself or her surroundings. Those who know, who can unravel the secrets of death, find themselves capable of strange powers called Arcanoi.

### Alternate Arts

While the Arcanoi do not have art ratings above five, they do have many variations on each of the lesser art levels. These so-called "Ancient Arts" and "New Arts" can be learned instead of the basic arts listed here for the same point cost. A wraith with the level one Ancient Art Lightning's Bite (see **Guildbook: Artificers**) instead of the regular level one art Surge.

A wraith who chooses to learn an alternate art instead of the "normal" one for a given Arcanos simply makes a notation on her character sheet as to which alternate art she has studied. If she later wishes to go back and learn a different art with experience, the cost is as follows:

#### Arcanos Level Point Cost

One	1
Two	3
Three	6
Four	9
Five	12

A wraith can only pick up alternate arts of a level less than or equal to her highest current level of training. Alternate arts in an Arcanos cannot be purchased unless the wraith already has at least one level of expertise in the Arcanos in question.

Arcanoi are secrets that can be either learned at the foot of another or acquired through experience. They are ways of using a wraith's spiritual being to alter other aspects of the Underworld, or in some cases the Skinlands. In many ways, an Arcanos is as much a philosophy as a craft, made of equal parts viewpoint and skill. Most wraiths demonstrate aptitude for one or two Arcanoi immediately upon their rebirth, and quickly learn the first few powers, or arts, of those Arcanoi. In game terms, the higher the art level (represented by the number of • characters before its listing), the higher its cost is likely to be, the more difficult it is to learn, and the more powerful it is.

## The Variegated Heritage

Like all skills, Arcanoi are constantly evolving. Wraiths often put their own interpretations on their arts, customizing their Arcanoi with nothing more than their outlook. Active experimentation can be dangerous, but highly rewarding. Storytellers are free to allow players to invent new arts for any Arcanos. If the proposed art is appropriate and of a similar power level to the current arts listed, she may allow her players to bring it into play. There are also older, more obscure arts that the Storyteller may devise and allow the players to learn. Examples of these Ancient Arts can be found in the Guildbook series of supplements.

Submerging oneself in the practice of an Arcanos can mark a wraith with a trace of that power. These marks make her recognizable as one who is well-versed in a specific arcane skill, and cannot be removed by cosmetic alteration. The details vary from Arcanos to Arcanos.

## Arcanos Markings

Excessive use of an Arcanos will mark a wraith permanently, whether or not she is a member of the Guild associated with that particular Arcanos. A wraith diving into the Tempest with Argos on a regular basis will acquire jet-black eyes, even if she has never met an "official" Harbinger. It is the Arcanos itself (or the environment associated with its use) that creates the markings, not any sort of Guild affiliation.

However, there are many wraiths who have learned more than one Arcanos to such an extent that they start developing more than one set of distinctive marks. This is no longer uncommon in a Stygia where average citizens are encouraged to learn multiple Arcanoi. Usually, the multitasking wraith will manifest the distinctive patterns of all of the Arcanoi she uses, unless there is some conflict between the developing marks (i.e., Argos and Intimation modify the appearance of the user's eyes in mutually exclusive ways). In this case, the markings of the Arcanos that is used more frequently will predominate, though some evidence of the less commonly used arts will manifest as well. For example, a Harbinger with some knowledge of Intimation (which stains its user's left eye bright green) will have the traditional set of jet-black eyes, but with a distinctly green sheen to his left one.

## Wherefores

In practical terms, using an Arcanos means pairing its dice with those of an attribute (Perception + Outrage, for example). A wraith's most primal strengths and weaknesses are inextricably linked with the secret arts she knows. She must also usually spend Pathos to activate an Arcanos (see "Pathos," page 101). Any cost, whether it be spending Pathos, Corpus or Willpower or gaining temporary Angst, must be paid whether the attempt succeeds or fails.

Environment also affects an Arcanos' use. The living can deny death's power, making Arcanoi more difficult to activate. This barrier is the Shroud, the wall between the lands of the living and the dead. For many Arcanoi, the difficulty of most rolls equals the local Shroud rating. Indeed, unless specifically stated otherwise, the difficulty for an Arcanos is the local Shroud rating. The Shroud is usually rated at 9, but weakens in some places or at some times. For example, the Shroud lessens in cemeteries, on Halloween or on other occasions popularly linked with the dead. The Shroud is also less powerful in a wraith's Haunt. Whatever the circumstance, though, the Shroud rating never falls below 4. (Storytellers' rules for the Shroud are found on page 240.)

## Botching

With every secret comes danger, and the Arcanoi are no exception. Those who lack mastery of their arts run terrible risks. If a character botches an Arcanos roll, the Storyteller should devise some form of effect. For example, a wraith who botches a Moliarte roll may be stuck in her current form, unable to shift further for the duration of a scene. A botched Argos roll may cast the unfortunate wraith into the Tempest, and a botched Castigate attempt is dire news indeed. A description of possible outcomes for botched rolls is included with each Arcanos. These should not be taken as holy writ; rather, the Storyteller should select an effect, mild or severe, in keeping with her chronicle. (After all, sometimes failure itself is punishment enough.) These suggestions are here only as possible ways to flavor your game and represent the risks inherent in the ancient secrets of the dead. Be creative.



## Strength of the Chains

Fetters can also alter an Arcanos' difficulty. It is often easier to affect the living world with the strength of a previous attachment fueling a wraith's Passion. To change the difficulty of an Arcanos roll, the Fetter must play some vital role in the art (usually that of the intended object). One way to reflect this is by rolling the Fetter's rating against a difficulty of 6; each success reduces the art's difficulty by -1 for the remainder of the scene. More simply, the Storyteller may reduce the difficulty by -1 or -2 depending on how well the Fetter is integrated into the art's crafting. The difficulty of an Arcanos roll can never be lowered below 4.

## Attunement

*Attunement* is a process of gradually practicing an Arcanos on a certain subject, investing Willpower so that the Arcanos becomes easier when dealing with that person or object. This process is mainly used with Embody, Puppetry and Inhabit, although the Storyteller is free to allow her players to attune other Arcanoi (such as Usury or Pandemonium). People that a wraith has attuned to are usually called *Consorts*.

Each time the wraith successfully manifests to, Skinrides or hides in the object, she may spend one Willpower point, carefully identifying with it. The closer the wraith was in life to the object, the easier attunement is. Attuning to a stranger costs five Willpower; attuning to a close friend or lover may require only two or three. The results vary by Arcanos; for instance, certain Puppetry arts can only be used on Consorts. If no attunement results are given under the Arcanos, the Storyteller should pick whatever effect seems most reasonable — if she decides to allow it to be attuned at all.

## The Others

The following are not the only Arcanoi that were taught by the long-banished Guilds. Three were banned from Stygia, their practitioners driven out into the storm. The Alchemists, masters of Flux, found themselves the targets of persecution for their Arcanos' effects, which could strengthen, rot or animate objects in the Skinlands. The sinister arts of desire that make up the Intimation Arcanos are both sought after and feared, but teachers of them are few and far between. As for Mnemosynis' arts of recalling and reweaving memory, they were banned entirely. For more information on these three Guilds and their Arcanoi, see the *Wraith Players' Guide*.

# Argos Harbingers



*ear that? That howling behind the shadows in the alley and under the concrete skin of the city lots.... Hear it? Take my hand, and hold tight. That's where I'm taking you....*

Argos is an Arcanos of travel, specifically of travel through the Tempest. It enables wraiths to "swim" through the Tempest's substance, find secret pathways from place to place and journey reasonably safely between the realms of the Underworld. Masters of Argos can go virtually anywhere in the Tempest and arrive without being molested by Spectres.

Without Argos, though, travel in the Tempest is very hazardous. Wraiths with no Argos knowledge drift about in the storm, and can only change direction by spending a Pathos point. Spectres, especially Shades, are often drawn to such easy prey. Also, it is almost impossible to find a Byway without some Argos knowledge. (For more information on the Tempest, see page 36.)

A character with Argos can usually "carry" a small group of companions with her, so long as they don't resist. As long as all link hands, the one can guide the rest. However, passengers can increase the difficulty of Argos actions.

## The Guild

The Harbingers' Guild came together as a collection of messengers, heralds and explorers. They never submitted to the same levels of dreary bureaucracy as the more formal Guilds did. They occupied a niche on the periphery of Stygian government, working for the Hierarchy without actually becoming a true part of it. Their sense of honor led them to serve as a sort of "Coast Guard" for the Tempest, rescuing the lost and besieged. This honor also lent itself to Stygian loyalty, and the Harbingers joined the Great Revolt reluctantly. When the Masquers and Usurers backed out, the Harbingers followed soon after.

Following the breaking of the Guilds, it was simply business as usual for most Harbingers, albeit on an individual rather than a Guild-centered basis. It is worth noting that the Harbingers still command respect, and wraiths consider it bad luck to interfere with a Harbinger's duty. Perhaps to earn this respect, Harbingers will always stop to rescue souls they see lost in the Tempest. Of course, Spectres know this as well and take full advantage when laying traps for unwary Harbingers.

Harbingers are exceptionally calm, swift, quiet and collected. The time they spend in the Tempest gradually but invariably stains their eyes jet-black.

## Botches

If a wraith botches an Argos roll, she may become stranded in the Tempest for a time. She may also hallucinate, seeing things in the Tempest's fabric that are not really there or overlooking the otherwise visible. Generally speaking, an Argos botch will lead the hapless wayfarer into some sort of danger — Spectres, the Labyrinth or whatever the Storyteller can devise.

## Basic Abilities

**Orienteering:** Distance and time have little meaning in the alien storm of the Tempest. Orienteering allows a wraith to determine his location in the Tempest and find the route to his destination. Those with Orienteering can travel to their destinations via the quickest and easiest path (usually a Byway), dodging most obstacles along the way.

Only the foolish attempt to navigate the Tempest with Orienteering alone, but it is an excellent way to find a safe path out in dire emergencies.

Wraiths moving through the Shadowlands without resorting to Tempest shortcuts move at normal walking or driving speed; the standard travel times referred to above are for this sort of normal ground transportation.

**System:** The number of successes on a Perception + Argos roll (difficulty 8) indicates the length of travel time to the wraith's destination. Clever wraiths can sometimes use the fluctuating dimensions of the Tempest to their own benefit.

1-3 successes Standard travel time

4 successes Half standard travel time

5 successes One-quarter standard travel time

**Note:** Travel time depends upon how far a wraith is traveling and whether she is moving between the levels of the Underworld. It usually takes two to seven days to travel between the Shadowlands and Stygia; two weeks to reach the Far Shores. Moving through the Tempest from point to point in the Shadowlands rarely takes more than a day, but there are no guarantees.

If the wraith fails an Orienteering roll, she has gone in the wrong direction and may become lost. This (as well as the perils that a botch brings on) could even turn into an adventure, at the Storyteller's discretion.



**Tempestpeek:** This art allows a wraith to look into the Tempest, observing any beings or things drifting nearby. He can be seen by any beings in the near Tempest, and can even communicate with them if need be.

**System:** With a successful Perception + Argos roll (difficulty 6), the wraith may observe the immediate area of the Tempest. The number of successes indicates how clear a "window" the wraith peers through.

**Tempest Threshold:** Most wraiths can only enter the Tempest through Nihilis. Those with Argos can open their own portals, however. The portals are usually small, and iris closed immediately after the wraith passes through.

**System:** Opening a threshold requires a Strength + Argos roll (difficulty 7).

## • Enshroud

To avoid the hazards of the Tempest, those with Argos learn first how to hide themselves from unfriendly eyes. This art allows the wraith to pull shadows around herself, making herself unseen in both Tempest and Shadowlands. When first activated, Enshroud causes the wraith to suddenly vanish. She is thereafter cloaked in shadows.

**System:** After spending a point of Pathos, the player rolls Dexterity + Argos (difficulty 7). Each success allows the wraith to remain Enshrouded for a turn. Enshrouded wraiths can act on others, even violently, without being revealed.

## •• Phantom Wings

A wraith using this art may fly in both the Tempest and the Shadowlands. Flight is not terribly fast (resembling gliding more than anything else), but can be a convenient way of getting around. Wraiths may hover using this art, but can never accelerate to more than jogging speed.

**System:** The player rolls Stamina + Argos (difficulty 6). Each success grants one turn of flight. The Storyteller may call for Dexterity + Argos rolls to maneuver through or stay aloft in particularly sticky situations (say, above a Nihil or in a cramped Stygian tower). A character must be Incorporeal to fly while in the Shadowlands (see "Corpus States," page 232).

## ••• Flicker

A character with Flicker can harness the natural distortions of the Tempest to quickly travel from one place to another. These mini-jumps are only good for short distances, generally line-of-sight. Flicker is also a good way to blindside opponents in combat.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Argos (difficulty 6). Each success reduces travel time by one turn. For example, if Henri was trying to climb a fire escape, and the Storyteller decided it would take four turns to get to the top, two successes with Flicker would mean he could make the climb in only two.

If the desired destination is out of sight, but still within a city block, Flicker is still possible. The difficulty of the roll is 8, however, and any failure maroons the character in the Tempest. Similarly, any Flicker botches usually strand the character in the Tempest, and this art will not permit the wraith to emerge. Flicker supersedes Tempest Threshold, and can be used without the lesser ability.

Each "leap" costs 1 Pathos.

## •••• Jump

The wraith with this art may rapidly travel to any of her Fetters, riding secret pathways to the familiar destination. She may Jump any distance to a Fetter, but only to a Fetter. Rumor has it that the eldest Gaunts can instantly travel anywhere in the world without the aid of Fetters, but this as yet is only hearsay.

**System:** The player rolls Stamina + Argos (difficulty 8). Each level of the destination Fetter reduces the difficulty by -1. The more successes, the more the travel time is reduced, and five or more should allow practically instantaneous transit. As with Flicker, Tempest Threshold is not necessary for use of this art.

Jump costs 3 Pathos per use.

## ••••• Oubliette

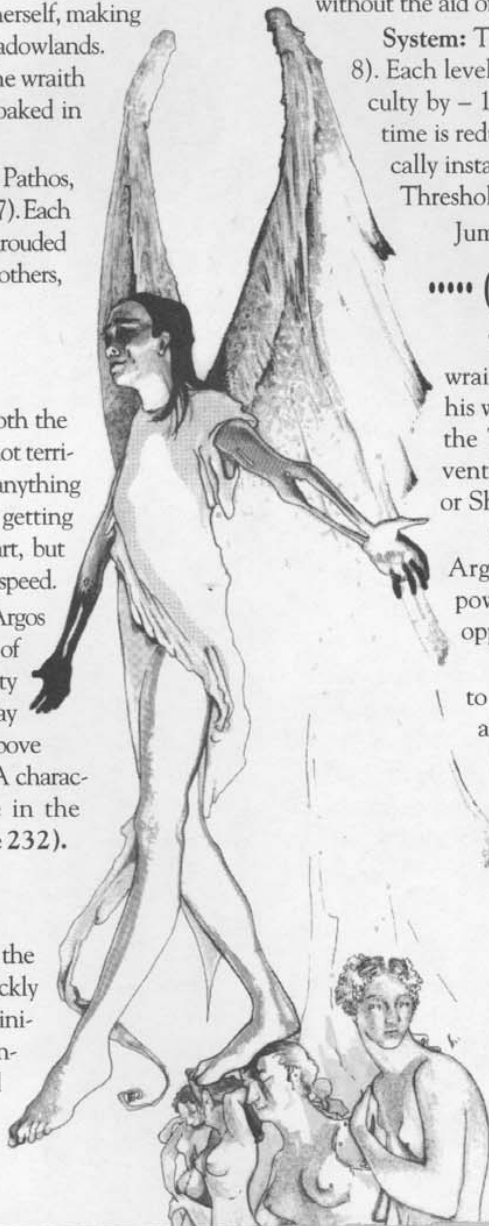
This art is the terrifying ability to cast other wraiths directly into the Tempest. By focusing his will, the wraith may either hurl others into the Tempest, or hold them in one spot, preventing them from escaping into the Tempest or Shadowlands.

**System:** The player makes a Strength + Argos roll (difficulty of the target's Willpower.) The target may choose to make an opposed Willpower roll.

Wraiths cast into the Tempest are free to use any Argos arts they possess, but they are in serious trouble if ignorant of such secrets. The sheer force of the banishment tears a Corpus Level from the target, in addition to the other effects.

If the wraith is trying to hold his target in place (in either the Tempest or the Shadowlands), the target is imprisoned for one turn per success. The imprisoning wraith must maintain some minimal concentration to keep his victim in place.

Either use of this art costs 3 Pathos and grants the user 1 point of temporary Angst.



# Castigate Pardoners



*ou're never alone. Never. Not while the Shadow squats on your back. I can help you. I can hurt it. For a price, yes, but I take far less than it would.*

If not for Castigate, the Shadow's power would be unchecked. Those who master this Arcanos learn what drives and feeds the Shadow, as a prelude to learning what weakens its grip.

Castigate is a highly personalized Arcanos. A Pardoner may use physical force, psychology, meditation, sermons, ritual purification, drumming, taunts, sensory deprivation or any of a thousand other methods to fight the Shadow. The exact details depend on the Pardoner's tastes and beliefs. Most favor a kind of dialogue based on the target Shadow's Nature, a process called the Devil's Dialectic.

Storytellers should keep their players from abusing Castigate. This Arcanos grants some minimal control over Shadows as well as great insight, and can thus be misused. Keep in mind that dealing with a wraith's dark side is a dangerous business — those who dabble in Castigate often meet dire fates.

## The Guild

The Pardoners' Guild was almost a Heretic cult; indeed, the Pardoners themselves looked on their work with a pseudo-religious zeal. In the Guilds' heyday, the iron lanterns marking a Pardoner's available services were everywhere. The Pardoners joined the Guilds' rebellion mostly to correct the Stygian mistreatment of Heretics and other prisoners, and were not severely punished when Charon crushed the revolt. Even today, no Hierarchy soldier arrests a Pardoner for hanging out her iron lantern. The Pardoners are indispensable — without them, Oblivion would have swallowed Stygia long ago.

The older Pardoners tend to describe Castigate in almost religious or spiritual terms; newer wraiths prefer a more psychological approach to the Shadow. Pardoners are recognizable by their inky fingers, stained from the contact with wraiths' dark sides.

## Botches

Botching a Castigate roll can be quite dangerous. A Shadow may gain temporary Angst from the muddled defiance, or exert more strength when it next rides its subject. The severity is left to the Storyteller's discretion; however, the Shadow will almost always be angered by a Pardoner's clumsy interference.

## Basic Abilities

**Bulwark:** The wraith can briefly guard herself and her companions from a Maelstrom. Her Castigate acts as a shield wall, deflecting the Maelstrom's storm winds and protecting her from the attention of any passing Spectres.

**System:** The player rolls Stamina + Castigate (difficulty of the Maelstrom's rating + 3). The character must spend 1 Pathos for each level of the Maelstrom, but may extend the Bulwark over herself and anyone she touches.

**Soulsight:** Those with Castigate can examine another wraith and see the Shadow on her soul. With careful study, the wraith may measure a Shadow's rough power level, and how close it lies to the surface. The user cannot examine her own Shadow. Soulsight can also detect Spectres (such as Doppelgangers) by gauging the terrible strength of their Shadows.

**System:** The wraith rolls Perception + Castigate (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines how much insight she gains. The Storyteller will describe the Shadow's strength as weak, nominal, fairly strong, strong or eminent (depending on the character's current Angst score), and may give more details if the player rolled well.

## • Coax

This art grants some power over the user's Shadow. A wraith using Coax may call on her Shadow's power with greatly lessened risk.

**System:** A Shadowguide may offer a player a fixed number of Shadow Dice (see page 175) to assist in any task. A wraith may use Coax to modify this number either way. The player rolls Charisma + Castigate (difficulty 6); every two successes allows the player to add or subtract one die from the offered amount.

The character pays no Pathos, but gains 1 Angst for each use of Coax.

## •• Dark Secrets

This devious art allows the user to learn another wraith's dark secrets by studying her Shadow. Of course, the Shadow may feed the Pardoner false information — spreading lies can be in the Shadow's interest. Generally, the weaker the Shadow, the more honesty the Pardoner can force or manipulate out of it.



**System:** The wraith carefully examines the target's Shadow, and rolls Perception + Castigate (difficulty of the target's Willpower). Each success allows the Pardoner to ask one question of the target's player (Storyteller when appropriate). The target's player must answer fairly truthfully, but may indulge in cryptic responses or half-truths (a Shadow's favorite tricks). The target character may let his Shadow make an opposed Angst roll; nobody likes having his darkest secrets ferreted out.

This art costs 1 Pathos to use, and gives the user 1 Angst.

### •• Purify

By focusing her will, the wraith may directly attack the power of another wraith's Shadow. The actual methods vary from Pardoner to Pardoner, and can entail sermons, song, esoteric chants or even flagellation. This is an extended, careful process, and cannot be rushed without grave risk.

**System:** The Storyteller rolls the character's Charisma + Castigate in secret. The difficulty is the subject's permanent Angst score; the subject may also assist the roll by spending Willpower. Each success reduces the subject's temporary Angst by one, but also causes one Corpus Level of damage to the subject. The Castigator receives a temporary Angst point for each "one" on the Purify roll.

### ••• Housecleaning

By cloaking himself in his purity, the wraith may drive away Spectres and keep them from

entering his immediate area. This art can shield an entire structure from Spectres (within reason — only the greatest Pardoners could guard an entire skyscraper). Any Spectres in the area, hidden or no, are driven away. Particularly, this art cannot keep Doppelgangers at bay.

**System:** Each success on a Charisma + Castigate roll (difficulty 7) will keep the ward up for one turn. Any Spectres already present must be defeated in a resisted roll (the player's Housecleaning roll against the Spectre's Angst) before being banished. A banished Spectre stays banished for the duration of the art, even if other Spectres in the vicinity are not affected.

### •••• Defiance

Those who know this art can fight against their Shadows' bids for control. If the Shadow tries to take over a wraith with Defiance, the Pardoner may try to beat her dark side back into place. This art can be used to help other wraiths in their struggles as well at an additional cost of 1 Angst.

**System:** To resist her Shadow's attempts to gain control, the character rolls Charisma + Castigate (difficulty of her current Angst). Each success reduces her Angst by 1; the Shadow is powerless to prevent this. Defiance can be used against another wraith's Shadow, but the difficulty becomes the subject's current Angst + 3.

Using Defiance costs 1 Pathos, plus another Pathos for every success. Failing this roll adds 1 point to the character's temporary Angst; a botch will add 1 permanent Angst.



# Embody Proctors



*Open yourself to the warmth. Forget the Shadowlands, forget your Corpus, forget even me. Just concentrate on the warmth — it should bake you like sunlight used to. Remember? Remember sunny days in the park and loose cotton clothes? That's it...*

Embody is the art of physically manifesting in the mortal world. Like many Arcanoi, it defies Charon's Code by its very existence; only the Deathlords have authority to reach across the Shroud with impunity. Still, the lure of the flesh is strong. The change in a wraith's very senses when she manifests is powerful, and heady enough to tempt the most stoic Centurion.

The best way to learn Embody is to open one's senses, focusing on the most intense sensory input available. Loud music, the heat from a radiator, the shimmering reflection in a lake — all can be the anchor with which a wraith can pull herself across the Shroud.

If a wraith Embodies physically, he opens himself up to mortal injury. Immaterial wraiths lose only one Corpus Level from a blow or gunshot, but those physically materialized take as many Corpus Levels of damage as they would have lost in Health Levels in life. If "slain," an Embodied wraith is thrust into a Targeted Harrowing as the Quarry.

Attuning oneself to a Consort is particularly useful with Embody (see "Attunement," page 135). Once attuned, all difficulties for Embodying to that person (and that person alone) are reduced by - 3. It also costs no Pathos to manifest to the subject. However, only the Consort can see or hear the wraith. This is a double-edged sword. Other mortals might consider the Consort crazy. Conversely, the subject may convince others of the wraith's existence, making it easier for the wraith to attune herself to them.

Unless otherwise noted, the difficulty of any Embody roll equals the local Shroud rating. Embody is virtually useless in the Tempest.

## The Guild

For obvious reasons, the Proctors' Guild had extremely tenuous relations with Stygian authorities for centuries. Although they did find Stygian employment, Charon's Code prohibited Proctors from practicing their arts on their own. Most chafed at the restrictions, interacting with mortals whenever they could anyway. Among the revolt's most enthusiastic supporters, the Proctors

received a lion's share of the blame when it failed. For centuries, Legionnaires were encouraged to hunt down Proctors and force them into Thralldom — or worse. Since Charon's disappearance, this has eased somewhat, but demonstrating a talent for Embody in Hierarchy territory is still a poor tactical decision.

A Proctor's voyages through the Shroud gradually mark her body with peculiar patches of light and dark. Experienced Proctors often wear patterns on their skin akin to light dappling through trees.

## Botches

Strange things happen to those who misuse Embody. A character may lose her voice in the Shadowlands by botching Whisper, or fall into the Tempest while attempting other arts. Proctors also run the risk of gaining Angst; when the sensation of the material world is offered and then snatched violently away, the despair is often overwhelming.

## Basic Abilities

**Ghostly Touch:** The wraith can exert a tiny whisper of a touch to the material world, weaker even than Ping (**Outrage** •, see page 152). The character may not even move anything larger than dust — about the most she can do is gently write on a fogged window, and this takes all her concentration.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Embody against the local Shroud.

**Maintain the Material Form:** This is not so much an ability in itself as the capacity to maintain an Embodied form for a longer duration.

**System:** The player rolls Stamina + Embody (difficulty 7). Each success adds to the number of successes already gained for the Embody power being used.

This ability costs 2 Pathos. A failure immediately disperses the Embodied form.

## • Whispers

The wraith may whisper across the Shroud, letting her voice be heard faintly in the Skinlands. This art is not necessary to speak with supernatural beings who can ignore the Shroud, such as sluagh changelings.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Embody. Each success allows the wraith to relay one short sentence.



## • Phantom

The wraith may manifest as a hazy, translucent figure, only vaguely reminiscent of his mortal body. Mortals noticing this intangible form will react with intense fear, and are fully affected by the Fog (see page 241).

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Embody. The wraith manifests for one turn per success. If the character wishes, she may also attempt to frighten onlookers by rolling Manipulation + Embody against the target's Willpower. Horrific Molation or other creative use of Arcanoi can modify this roll.

Phantom costs 1 Pathos.

## •• Statue

This art permits the wraith to take a solid, if immobile, form. The Embodied wraith seems to be an idealized version of himself, but with cold, hard flesh. While using Statue, the wraith cannot move, speak or even breathe. Still, this art can be useful when avoiding Spectre or wraith pursuers. In a crowded subway, for example, hunters may overlook the "sleeping mortal vagrant" in their haste to find their wraithly prey.

**System:** Each success on a Stamina + Embody roll indicates how many times the character can be touched, or how many scenes he may remain solid (whichever comes first). The player may be harmed as if he were mortal (see above).

This art costs 2 Pathos.

## ••• Life-in-Death

This art allows the wraith to manifest as her mortal body, more or less. Her appearance reflects her mildly spotty memory of her living self; most wraiths tend to idealize their appearance, becoming more beautiful when Embodied than they were when alive. This form has darker hair and paler skin than before, but otherwise generally won't appear odd. The wraith using Life-in-Death has flesh colder than it should be, and will seem constantly distracted (a side effect of the concentration necessary to maintain this

form). Although most onlookers won't notice anything wrong with a wraith using this art, those close to her in life may pick up on the differences.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Embody; each success allows the wraith to remain solid for one scene. This form can only be used if the character currently holds a humanlike form (those Molated into objects cannot use Life-in-Death). The player may opt to substitute her character's Manipulation score for her Appearance while Embodied. The wraith takes damage as mortals do while in this form.

The art costs 2 Pathos.

## •••• Materialize

The wraith can assume an almost fully human form, briefly duplicating his mortal life. While Materialized, he breathes, bleeds, sweats and enjoys his former warmth. The wraith can do anything he could do while he was alive. The only restriction is time — this form's cost in Pathos and concentration is staggering. The sensation of this form is almost overpowering, especially to wraiths who have been dead a long time.

**System:** The player must roll Manipulation + Embody. Each success allows the character to be solid for as long as it takes to draw one breath. If the character is attuned to the person viewing him, he may manifest for one hour per success. While Materialized, the wraith suffers any damage as if he were still mortal.

Each use of this art costs 3 Pathos and 1 Willpower.



# Fatalism

## Oracles



*h! Forgive me, my lady, for I did not recognize you. Of course I shall advise you. No, there is no cost; all I ask in return is that you remember me when your time comes.*

Some claim that Fate's mark is on everything, even (and especially) the souls of the dead. Fatalism is the

Arcanos that allows wraiths to read Fate's tapestry, to the extent of interpreting someone's past or future.

Fatalism is a dangerous Arcanos; those who tamper with Fate's weaving can find themselves horribly ensnared in its webs. There should be stiff penalties for abuses of this power; Fate does not take kindly to meddlers in her works.

### The Guild

The Oracles' Guild enjoyed steady business in its heyday. Some say they directly served the Lady of Fate herself, others that even higher powers commanded their allegiance. Rumor aside, Oracles were prized as advisors on most matters, and were sought after as counselors by many Stygian lords. Their good fortunes lasted until Serena, the Grand High Oracle, told Charon his fate was to be lost to the Tempest. In anger, he levied great punishments upon her, causing her to refrain from relating the remainder of her prophecy and angering her Guild. It was at this time that the Oracles threw in behind the Artificers' and Usurers' mad scheme, precipitating the coup.

Despite knowing the inevitable price to be paid, the Oracles abandoned the other Guilds soon after the Usurers and Masquers withdrew from the revolution. These days, Oracles tend to associate with Chanteurs, Sandmen and even Spooks. Many find it best to not advertise their calling, advising only those clever enough to seek them out. There is a fierce unspoken loyalty between Oracles, but they avoid long associations with one another.

Oracles prefer gaudy attire, and most have arcane markings or symbols of Fate inscribed on their foreheads and arms. These sigils appear on their own and cannot be removed, and many appear to dance or move on their own.

### Botches

Although many Fatalism botches result in misinformation, the Storyteller should not feel limited to simple misreadings. Perhaps the character sees a horrible omen, and his ability to concentrate is badly shaken for a scene or two (+ 2 to all difficulties). Or maybe Fate withholds its answers, and Fatalism itself will not work for the wraith for an hour or so. Remember that those with Fatalism trust deeply in Fate's inevitable will, and dread losing what control or insight they have worked hard to possess.

### Basic Abilities

**Kismet:** This is the ability to gauge a person, situation or thing's importance in the grand weave. A practiced Oracle can easily perceive the forces at play around those with great destinies.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 6), thereby determining how vital something is to the "overall scheme of things." This ability is handy for discerning Storyteller characters and those of the other players in a given scene.

### • Fatal Vision

Those with Fatalism can read a person's deathmarks, the marks on wraiths and mortals fated to die soon. Deathmarks hint at the manner of a person's death, and appear on mortals shortly before they die. Some mortals, those doomed to die in particularly tragic fashion, manifest deathmarks months or even years before their deaths.

**System:** The player must roll Perception + Fatalism (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). Each success offers greater insight into the person's manner of death. If a wraith uses Fatal Vision just before an Interpretation (see below), each success on the Fatal Vision roll adds a die to the Interpretation. Fatal Vision also reveals if the subject has been previously targeted by Fatalism.



## “Foreshadow

The wraith's attunement to Fate's interweaving strands allows her to sense when danger approaches, much as a spider perceives vibrations along its web.

**System:** The Storyteller may secretly roll Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 6) when the character becomes endangered. The difficulty of the roll varies with the subtlety of the threat. The number of successes reflects how effectively forewarned the character is (generally one turn per success). This art costs no Pathos, but the uneasiness it inspires grants the character 1 Angst for each successful use.

## ““ Interpretation

The wraith can interpret a person's fate or read into her past by means of this art. Interpretation is typically used with some form of divination paraphernalia (the Tarot or I Ching, runecasting, astrology or the like); attempting this art without such props is far more difficult and likely to backfire.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Fatalism (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). Both the interpreter and subject may spend Willpower to aid this roll. The player may then ask the Storyteller one short question about the subject for each success gained. The Storyteller need not answer openly; cryptic or incomplete answers are perfectly acceptable.

Attempting this art without any divinatory tools increases the difficulty by + 2.

Interpretation costs 2 Pathos.

## “““ Guesswork

As a wraith masters Fatalism, she can learn to read the interplay of Fate's forces more quickly, even in stressful situations. Guesswork allows a wraith to “read into” someone else's actions, and intuitively respond even before the target acts.

**System:** In combat, a player may roll Wits + Fatalism (difficulty 8). Each success on this roll adds another success character's initiative roll (Wits + Alertness; see page 257). If the player gets twice as many initiative successes as her opponent, the Storyteller may tell her something of her foe's intentions (“He's going to try to force you into the Nihil.”), allowing her character to act appropriately.

This art costs 2 Pathos

## ““““ Luck

The secrets of the final level of Fatalism permit a wraith to make minor adjustments to Fate itself. By invoking Fate's blessing, a wraith can enjoy greater success in her efforts.

**System:** At the beginning of each story, the character may roll Wits + Fatalism (difficulty 6). The number of successes equals the number of “ones” (potential botches) that the player may choose to ignore for the duration of the story. This art cannot affect Harrowings, however, and may only be activated once per story.

Activating Luck costs 2 Pathos and 1 Willpower.



# Inhabit

## Artificers



*I used to be a skin sack filled with warm blood, same as you. I just traded up for a better model. Now I have a motor for a heart, electricity in my veins, my hair is fiber-optic, and my copper fingers snake through cities. It's the ultimate upgrade, my friend. Get with the program.*

Wraiths skilled in Inhabit are masters of the inanimate. They can infuse their very essence into an inanimate object, attuning themselves to its every inch, in time even learning how to animate their "home." If an object is destroyed while a wraith occupies it, the item immediately becomes a relic. Masters of Inhabit can even imbue an object with their own Arcanoi, gradually pouring Corpus and Willpower into the item to create a form of inexpensive yet powerful Artifact.

Inhabit is a textbook example of how Arcanoi evolve to fit the times. Many of Inhabit's arts are recent creations, deemed more useful in the Information Age than the antiquated arts they replaced. It is entirely likely that older wraiths still practice the Ancient Arts of Inhabit, never learning the new-fangled tricks of the modern age. (For more information on Inhabit and its lost Arts, see *Guildbook: Artificers*.)

There are some advantages to attuning Inhabit to a specific object. By preparing an inanimate Consort, a wraith can exert more control over its functions when Inhabiting it. Wraiths must spend Willpower while Shellriding an object to attune it. (See "Attunement," page 135.)

## The Guild

The proud Artificers claimed to be not only the richest of Guilds, but also the eldest. Nhudri himself, the Artificers say, created their Guild in order to train helpers for his forge. The practitioners of other Arcanoi quickly recognized the assets of such organization, and followed the Artificers in forming their own Guilds.

In the social unrest following the Third Great Maelstrom, the Artificers fomented rebellion against Charon. They rallied the other Guilds around them, and led the battle to overthrow the Hierarchy. They failed, and paid the price. Although many ex-Artificers are still employed as soulforgers, it is illegal to use or teach Inhabit in many places. While soulforging is a vital part of the Stygian economy, those Artificers who know only Inhabit's secrets dwell in squalor a far cry from the glory of the first Guild.

Most Artificers are charred or marked with reddish patches from their work at the soulforgers. Younger Artificers specializing in computer-based arts have charred traceries of circuit-board patterns instead.

## Botches

Inhabit mishaps are an excellent way to become trapped in an inanimate object far longer than one might like. A wraith might likewise accidentally short out a valuable device, delete important computer files or have her senses overwhelmed by the input suddenly available. Botching some of the newer arts might even cause the host object to explode...

## Basic Abilities

**Sense Gremlin:** "Gremlin" is a slang term for wraiths who possess machines. A wraith may carefully examine an object with this ability, determining if any wraiths are currently in residence.

**System:** The player need obtain only one success on a Perception + Inhabit roll (difficulty 6) to determine whether or not a machine is Inhabited. More successes are useful for determining the Shellriding entity's nature (or numbers). With three or more successes, the wraith can even tell if a machine has been recently Inhabited.

**Shellride:** The wraith may slide his Corpus without harm into a machine or object, hiding there from other wraiths. He has no control over the object only remaining within until he chooses to leave.

**System:** The wraith rolls Dexterity + Inhabit to slip safely into an object. While there, he can be only detected by Sense Gremlin. However, if the host object is destroyed, the wraith immediately takes a Corpus Level of damage and is forced out. The number of successes on the initial roll determines how many successes are needed for a rival Shellrider also seeking shelter in the same object to force the first wraith out. Multiple wraiths can Shellride the same device, assuming it is large enough.

## • Surge

By passing his hand through an electronic device, the wraith may cause a temporary short, briefly cutting its power. This disruption of the electron flow can actually damage computers and other delicate instruments, especially those without surge protectors.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Inhabit. The number of successes indicates the number of devices that can be shorted simultaneously.

## • Ride the Electron Highway

This art allows a wraith to slide into wires and transmit herself across communication networks and computer satellites. This mode of travel, called the Electron Highway, is like riding a bullet train through tunnels, barriers and gateways of light. If the wraith can get past the tollbooths and barricades that represent computer security systems, the world opens up before her.



**System:** The player rolls Intelligence + Inhabit (difficulty 8). The more successes obtained, the further and faster the wraith can travel. This art costs a Pathos point, while failure gives the wraith a temporary Angst and may well strand her someplace unpleasant.

### \*\*\* Gremlinize

The wraith may possess and control machines. True control comes only with attunement. Spur-of-the-moment Gremlinization allows only minor, clumsy effects, such as turning a machine on or off.

The wraith must spend 2 Pathos to Inhabit a machine, plus 1 Pathos per effect evoked.

### \*\*\*\* Claim

The wraith may Shellride an object and possess it as her own body for a scene. Her senses are unaffected, save that they are spread out over the entire object she is Claiming. For example, a wraith Claiming a car can see, hear and feel everything happening to it, within it and around it. She may even exert some control over the host object while Claiming it.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Inhabit. The number of successes determines the maximum size of the object that may be Claimed. She needs only one success to possess a book; five to Claim a house. A wraith may exert some control while inside (turning pages, locking windows, etc.); the exact extent of her control depends on whether or not she is attuned to the object and how many extra successes she scored on the roll above and beyond those needed to take control of the object.

If the object is destroyed while Claimed, the wraith may spend Willpower and Corpus to form it into a relic. One Willpower and one Corpus must be spent per success required to Claim it in the first place.

Claim costs 3 Pathos.

### \*\*\*\*\* Empower

Wraiths with this art can create a form of inexpensive Artifact by placing one of their Arcanos arts into a relic. Other wraiths thereby are able to use the art by activating the relic. The relic usually must be appropriate to the Arcanos involved; a calculator makes a far superior vessel for Usury than an umbrella, for instance.

**System:** First, the player rolls Wits + Inhabit. Like other Inhabit arts, the difficulty equals the local Shroud rating; most Artificers Empower relics in the safety of their Haunts. The number of successes indicates the highest level of Arcanos the wraith may invest.

Next, the wraith activates the appropriate Arcanos art while focusing on the relic. The wraith makes the roll and pays the appropriate cost, although no obvious effect results. If successful in this roll, the wraith imbues the relic with the Arcanos. Next, he fuels the relic with Pathos (up to as many points as the number of successes on the Empower roll). He then chooses whatever command activates the relic (a phrase, gesture, whistled note, etc.), and seals it with three Pathos.

The result is a minor Artifact. Anyone who uses the activation command and spends the appropriate cost for the art (Pathos, Willpower or Angst gain) may use the Arcanos sealed within, expending one of the stored Pathos points. When the invested Pathos (excluding the three used to seal the relic) are expended, the relic becomes "normal" once again.

**Example:** Journeyman Christine Andreas wants to place the art of Imitate (she knows Moliere ••) into her relic of a hand mirror, allowing the owner to mimic a local Centurion's face. She travels to her Haunt and begins the Empower effort. Her player rolls Wits + Inhabit (eight dice for Christine) against a difficulty of 6 (the Shroud rating in her Haunt). She scores four successes, more than enough. She focuses her will, rolling Dexterity + Moliere (getting one success against difficulty 8) and spending one Pathos to activate Imitate. Next, she invests four Pathos to give the mirror four "charges." (She would have liked more, but only got four successes on her Empower roll.) She decides that the owner must whisper, "Mirror, mirror," to activate the relic, and seals it with three more Pathos points.

She passes the mirror to Dmitri. By whispering the command, Dmitri can roll his Dexterity + the mirror's Moliere ••, spend a Pathos point and assume the Centurion's appearance. He can do this only four times before the mirror's Pathos is expended and it becomes a normal relic once more.

Empowered items cannot be "recharged," only Empowered a second time. There is no known way to create a permanent Artifact with this art.

This art costs no additional Pathos, but 2 Willpower.



# Keening

## Chanteurs



*Do you think that because we no longer draw breath, our voices lack power? Hush. Hush and listen.*

Keening is an Arcanos of emotion transmitted by sound. The ancient legends of banshees and ghostly mourners have at least some basis in Keening's arts. Those who have mastered this Arcanos can sing emotion into their listeners, living or dead.

It is not absolutely necessary for a wraith to sing to use this Arcanos. If a wraith wishes to touch others' emotions through dance, oration or even laughter, she may. In such cases the difficulty for all Keening rolls is raised by + 1; after all, the Arcanos is taught through song.

Ultimately, the emotions Keening instills are artificial, and cannot compare to the heady rush of true feeling. Gaining Pathos from a Keening-fed emotion is possible, but the difficulty is 9, and the energy is far blander than usual. Masters of Keening often prefer to infect one person with an emotion, then feed on the feelings he engenders in his companions.

## The Guild

Haughty and arrogant, the Chanteurs prided themselves on being the ones who brought music to the Underworld. With an artistic *hubris* exceeding even the Masquers', they hired themselves out as troubadours to the Restless' elite. At the height of their pride, they joined the Guilds' revolt enthusiastically, and the shock of their actual defeat took decades, if not longer, to recover from. Still, individual Chanteurs retained influence and access to the high and mighty of Stygia — the Stygian nobles would do anything for such potent diversion, and for centuries the Chanteurs were deemed to be one of the few "acceptable" entertainments in certain social circles. Even today, many wraiths search out Chanteurs to feel the depth of mortal emotion once more.

All Chanteurs play a musical instrument of some kind; even those who perform a *cappella* use noisemakers or rhythm keepers such as finger cymbals, castanets or drumsticks.

## Botches

Keening botches usually involve emotional feedback or fallout of some kind. Mishaps can feed a wraith's darker emotions (feeding Angst to their Shadow), drive friends to distraction (raising their difficulty numbers for a scene), or possibly even drive the singer temporarily mad as his attempts to meddle in the emotions of others are turned back upon himself.

## Basic Abilities:

**Perfect Pitch:** This is the ability to notice when another wraith is actively using Keening.

**System:** The player must roll Perception + Keening (difficulty 6). Perfect Pitch can be resisted with Sotto Voce (below).

**Sotto Voce:** With Sotto Voce, a wraith may hide her Keening arts in normal singing or casual conversation.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Keening (difficulty 6). Sotto Voce can be detected by Perfect Pitch; whichever wraith scores more successes on her roll wins.

## • Dirge

This art allows a wraith to catalyze a listener's "darker" emotions: despair, anger, fear, loneliness, grief, lust and so on. This art has proven excellent for removing unwanted mortals from a particular locale.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Keening (difficulty 8). The number of successes determines the depth and duration of the feeling. Five successes will afflict a mortal with a negative emotion for a week.

Wraiths, however, are not as affected. Dirge is an easy art to learn because it draws on the knowledge and sensation of death, a sensation familiar to all wraiths. However, that familiarity weakens the impact of this art, and the number of successes on the Dirge roll indicates how many turns a wraith will be affected.

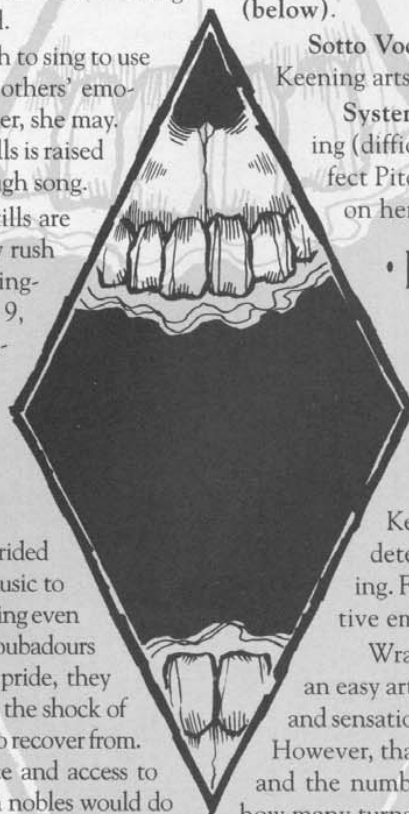
This art costs 1 Pathos, but gives the user 1 temporary Angst.

## •• Ballad

The wraith may inspire the "higher" emotions: serenity, joy, mirth, loyalty, love, inspiration, vigor, faith and so forth. This art is highly useful for protecting Fetters and swaying other wraiths into alliances.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Keening (difficulty 8). The number of successes indicates the depth of feeling and its duration. Five successes can flood a mortal with cheer for an entire week. Wraiths are less easily cajoled; the number of successes equals the number of turns the emotion lasts.

Ballad costs 1 Pathos.



## ''' Muse

This art allows the wraith to make a suggestion into the subject's subconscious, inspiring him with an idea he will believe to be his own. This is useful for those who continue to compose music, art or literature after death, but want a medium to bring their works to the living. More commonly, the art is used subtly to manipulate other wraiths.

**System:** The more successes gained on a Manipulation + Keening roll (difficulty of the target's Willpower), the better the target interprets the suggestion. Three or fewer successes indicate that he gets the general idea, but puts his own spin on it. Four successes mean that he will follow the suggestion as long as it isn't directly harmful; five or more compels him to do as the Chanteur pleases. This art works equally well on wraiths, mortals or other supernatural beings.

Muse costs 2 Pathos and grants the user a point of Angst.

## '''' Crescendo

The wraith can scream a musical blast capable of damaging plasm at close range. The sound carries a great distance; wraiths within a mile or two will hear the Crescendo.

**System:** Roll Stamina + Keening (difficulty 8). The singer inflicts one Corpus Level of damage per success on every wraith in normal hearing distance. The damage is not aggravated, and can be soaked. Crescendo cannot be concealed with Sotto Voce.

Singing a Crescendo while Embodied inflicts all listeners with a terrible, heartstopping fear that inflicts one Health Level of damage per two successes. This damage may also be soaked, but will affect vampires, werewolves and other supernatural creatures.

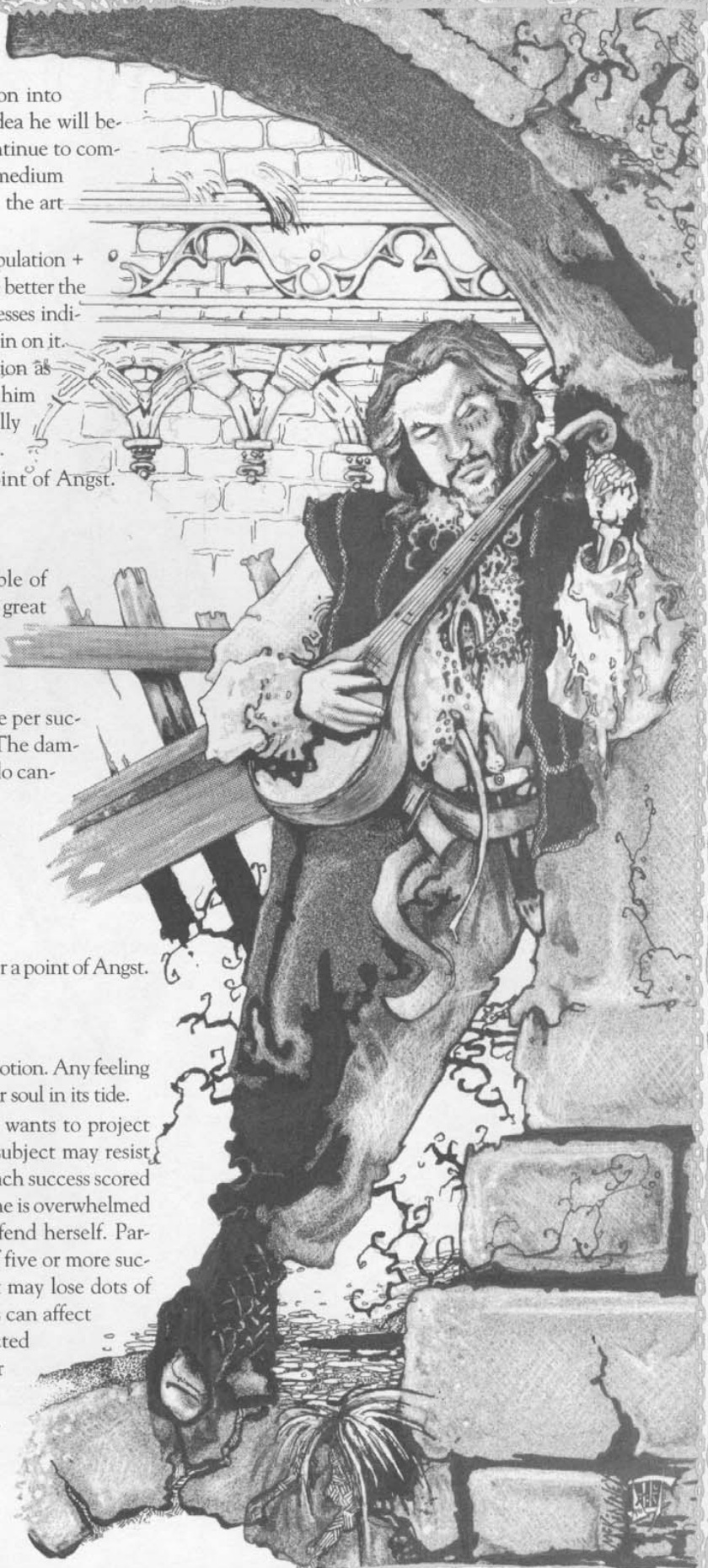
This art costs 3 Pathos, as well as granting the user a point of Angst.

## '''''' Requiem

This art floods the subject with raw, undiluted emotion. Any feeling the wraith wishes will pour over the target, burying her soul in its tide.

**System:** The wraith chooses the emotion he wants to project and rolls Strength + Keening (difficulty 7). The subject may resist with a Willpower roll, but only if she is prepared. Each success scored by the Chanteur paralyzes the subject for one turn; she is overwhelmed with emotion and cannot move, act, speak or defend herself. Particularly dark emotions can scar the target's soul. If five or more successes are scored with a dark emotion, the subject may lose dots of Mental Attributes or go insane. Pleasant emotions can affect the subject harmfully, too. She may become addicted to the powerful feeling, willing to do anything for its rush again.

This art costs 3 Pathos plus 1 Pathos per success. If the projected emotion is "dark," the Shadow gains 1 temporary Angst per success.



# Lifeweb

## Monitors



*How did I find you? Love, it was easier than you think. We had a bond in life; in death it's even stronger.*

Lifeweb is the study of the ties between wraiths and the living world. A master of this Arcanos' secrets can sense and manipulate the bonds of the Fetter, handling their energy as a weaver manipulates her shuttle and loom.

Lifeweb allows a wraith to monitor her Fetter's energy, keeping track of them even at a distance. Some sit at the heart of these web, extending their senses to any "trouble spot" as it is disturbed. Others actively walk among people, places and things, marking some as temporary Fetter in order to watch over them more efficiently.

### The Guild

The Monitors were not as vital to Stygian society as the Pardoners, Masquers or Artificers. They often trained their Guild members as Reapers, and as such had considerable influence on the Lemure population. However, their focus on the mortal world kept them from achieving as much influence in Stygia as some of the other Guilds.

Since the fall of their Guild, the Monitors have become even more defensive than before. They refuse to teach other wraiths any but the most remedial arts of Lifeweb, unless absolutely convinced of their pupils' trustworthiness. Current rumors accuse certain ex-Monitors of running protection rackets, threatening other wraiths' Fetter unless bribed, and linking wraiths to objects that are about to be destroyed.

Monitors never close their eyes, not even in Slumber, and by this they may be detected.

### Botches

Misreading the delicate net of Lifeweb can have several side effects. A botch on a simple sensory scan might lead to a garbled or misread reading. If the character is trying something particularly powerful, a botch might mean he loses track of one of his own Fetter for the duration of the story. Some say that horrible mistakes have led to wraiths accidentally severing their own Fetter, but this has yet to be proven.

### Basic Abilities

**Locate Fetter:** The wraith may "check up" on any of his Fetter, scanning its surroundings. This ability also permits the wraith to sense a Fetter's distance and direction.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Lifeweb (difficulty 6). Each success allows him to use one die from his Perception + Alertness pool to survey the Fetter's area. He may also roll Intelligence + Lifeweb to get a general estimate of how far he is from the Fetter and in which direction it lies.

### • Sense Strand

The wraith can scrutinize the patterns of energy surrounding wraiths and Fetter. He may perceive the links between a wraith and her Fetter, sense whether something is in fact a Fetter or not, and if so, identify the wraith attached to it.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Lifeweb (difficulty 8) to study another wraith. Each success reveals one clue about a Fetter belonging to the subject. This study must be done firsthand, and with a successful Perception + Subterfuge roll, the subject will realize she is being analyzed. Forewarned subjects may make a Willpower roll to resist Sense Strand.

To scrutinize a possible Fetter, the player rolls Perception + Lifeweb (difficulty 6). To trace a Fetter's connections in either direction, the player rolls Intelligence + Lifeweb (difficulty 6). The number of successes determines how accurately the wraith may gauge direction and distance. A wraith may only examine a Fetter once per day.

Sense Strand costs 1 Pathos.

### •• Web Presence

The wraith may use this art to affect a Fetter's immediate area from a distance. She may use Arcanoi, communicate with any wraith there, or make any roll involving Mental or Social Attributes.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Lifeweb (difficulty 8).

This art costs 1 Pathos per turn of use.



## ... Splice Strand

The wraith may create an attachment with a person, place or thing, making it a temporary Fetter. Both the wraith involved and the object must be touched in some manner by the Monitor doing the splicing, at which point the connection is made. The Fetter may be maintained from day to day, but only one temporary Fetter at a time can be maintained with this art.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Lifeweb (difficulty 7). The new Fetter has a rating of 1. This art can also be used to reattach another wraith to a Fetter that has been Severed, although the difficulty becomes 8.

The affinity costs 1 Pathos to create and 1 Pathos per day of maintenance. The maintenance cost is paid by the wraith attached to the Fetter.

## ... Sever Strand

The wraith exercising this dread art can tear another wraith from his Fetters. She can only accomplish this in the presence of the target Fetter, but can rip it away through raw force of will.

**System:** Once the wraith has identified and arrived at the target Fetter, the player rolls Strength + Lifeweb (difficulty of the Fetter owner's Willpower). The target may resist this roll with Willpower.

A wraith whose Fetter has been thus severed may reattach it by two methods. First, he may simply expend one *permanent* Willpower while in contact with the former Fetter. Alternatively, he may use Splice Strand (or have another wraith use it on him)

to reconnect the link. This cannot be done with Fetters severed by Harrowings, or otherwise lost "naturally," but only those which Lifeweb has separated from him. He may spend a Willpower point to make the Splice Strand effect permanent, but only if the object was previously one of his Fetters.

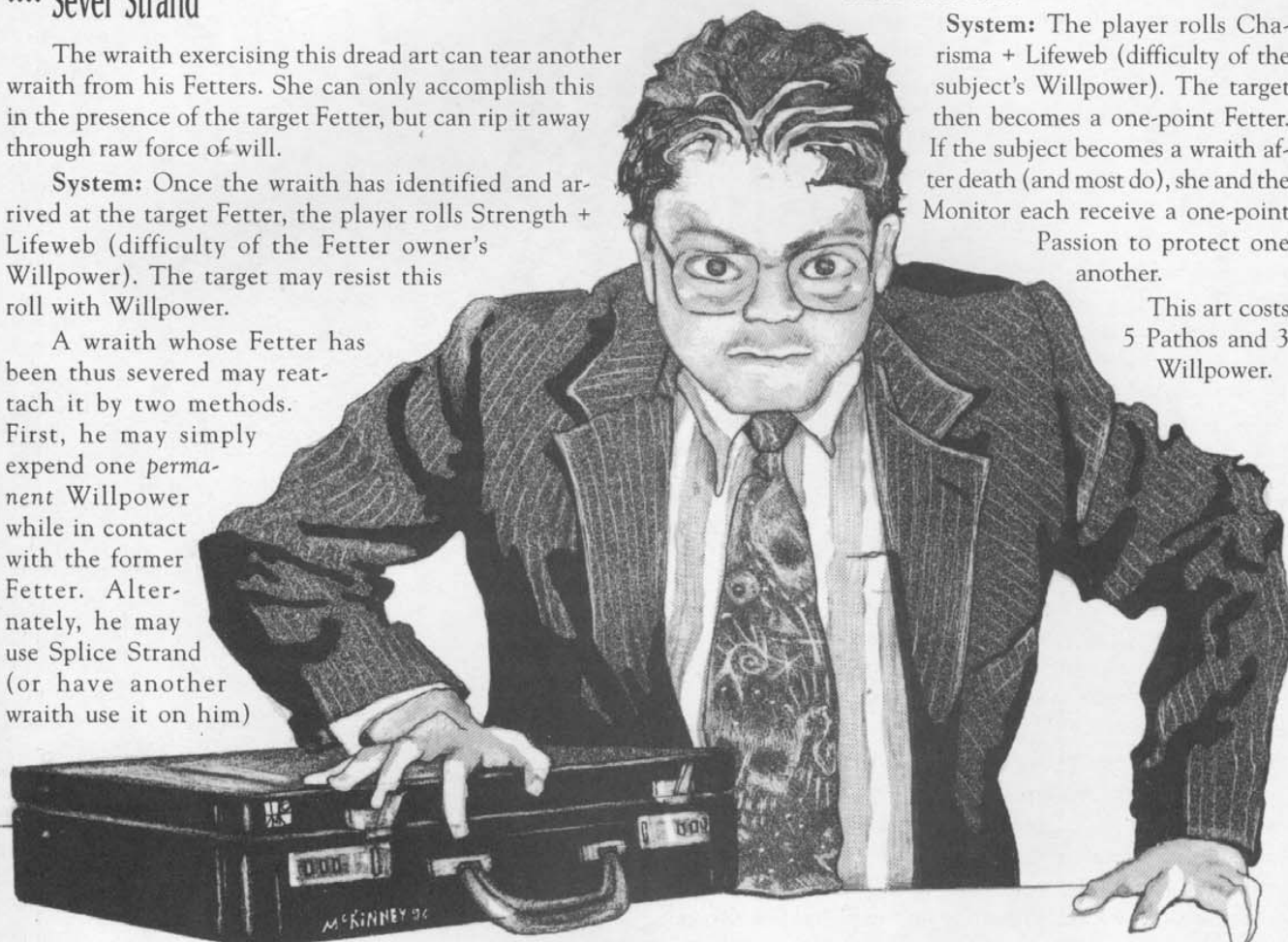
This art costs 2 Pathos and 1 Willpower.

## .... Soul Pact

The wraith who has mastered this art can claim a willing mortal's soul as his own. This is usually done as part of a contract where the mortal promises her soul in exchange for help from "the other side." Thereafter, while the mortal lives, she becomes a Fetter of the wraith. When the mortal dies, the wraith becomes instantly aware; if the mortal becomes a wraith, she and the Monitor continue their link.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Lifeweb (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). The target then becomes a one-point Fetter. If the subject becomes a wraith after death (and most do), she and the Monitor each receive a one-point Passion to protect one another.

This art costs 5 Pathos and 3 Willpower.



# Moliate

## Masquers



*top twitching, this is delicate work. You paid heavy Pathos for quality, and I'm the best you'll find. Ah, there we go. Excellent. Now try not to get those wings torn off — I can't promise that anyone else could mend them and keep the incandescence going.*

The soulstuff of wraiths, called plasm, is a far more malleable substance than flesh. Moliate, sometimes called soulshaping, is the power of sculpting and rearranging that plasm.

Wraiths who know the secrets of Moliate can make plasm beautiful, cause it to shimmer or glow, and even make it look vibrantly alive. They can also sculpt it into any horrific disfigurement imaginable. With the expenditure of Pathos, Moliate turns plasm ever-so-briefly fluid, just long enough for a talented shaper to create a vision of beauty or a thing out of nightmare.

The more complicated the effect sought with Moliate, the longer it takes. Simply ripping off a chunk of an opponent's plasm or drawing a clenched fist into a club is nearly instantaneous, while reshaping a wraith into a finely worked seat cushion or reworking the appearance of one's entire Corpus can take minutes or even hours.

### The Guild

The Masquers' Guild, back in the bygone days, was a sprawling house of fashion and beautification. The Masquers devoted much of their time to filling the heavy demand for custom Moliation, and enjoyed a lofty position among Guilds. Whether it was shaping a wraith into her ideal self-image or drawing terrible weapons from her very Corpus, the Masquers claimed they would meet every request and create true art while they were at it.

Of course, the masters of Moliate were also warriors, spies and assassins of the highest caliber. When the Masquers decided to withdraw from the Guilds' attempted coup, the other wraiths' distrust of them grew stronger. While practically every Citadel has a former Masquer on the payroll, any wraith talented at Moliate is watched very carefully these days.

Masquers are exceptionally attuned to their art, and have a near-obsession with perfection. In addition, their Corpora are extremely malleable, and Masquers often appear to be just a bit too perfect. Occasionally, two or more Masquers who work well together adopt precisely the same visage.

### Botches

A botched Moliate roll can result in any number of grotesque slip-ups, none of which are easily fixed. Perhaps the wraith to be shaped loses points of Appearance, or the enemy to be Rent actually gains Corpus Levels from the clumsy sculpting. Any undesirable change in appearance or capabilities should probably last for a scene, although the Storyteller may allow the character to spend a Willpower point to try fixing the careless soulshaping before then.

### Basic Abilities

**Glow:** The wraith can use this art to cause herself or another to glow with an inner light of whatever color and intensity she chooses.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Moliate (difficulty 7). The number of successes indicates how many scenes the glow lasts.

This art costs 1 Pathos.

**Return of Death's Visage:** This ability brings the wraith's form back to her original visage, making her appear as she did when her Caul was first removed.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Moliate. The difficulty varies depending on the amount of change the wraith has undergone since her death (minor change 6, moderate change 8, drastic change 10). The number of successes determines how accurately the wraith assumes her original shape.

This art costs 1 Pathos.

**Shapesense:** Those with Moliate can detect whether or not another wraith has been Moliated, and if so, in what manner.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Moliate (difficulty equal to the original shaper's Dexterity + Moliate). The number of successes determines the amount of information gleaned, possibly even giving the character an idea of the reshaped wraith's original form.

### • Imitate

The first art taught to students of Moliate is the ability to change one's face to mimic another's. This is obviously easiest when the wraith is looking at the face to be Imitated, though Imitate may be done from memory. The wraith may only change her face, not her whole Corpus.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Moliate. The difficulty varies: 5 if she can see the face, 8 if working from memory. If the wraith has a skinmask of the target in her possession



(see **Rend** below), the difficulty drops to 4. The number of successes indicate the difficulty of penetrating the disguise.

This art costs 1 Pathos.

## •• Sculpt

A wraith may use Sculpt to alter the Corpus however she chooses. She may devise new appendages, shape jagged teeth, grow new sensory organs, adorn herself with markings or patterns, or cause parts of her body to glow or shift color. The only effect Sculpt can create that mimics weaponry is the creation of enhanced teeth, allowing the wraith to perform the bite maneuver. Apart from this, the wraith retains her original physical capabilities regardless of her number of appendages; actively using new appendages requires Martialry (listed below).

**System:** The character may Sculpt himself or another wraith. The player rolls Manipulation + Moliat (difficulty 7). The Storyteller sets the number of successes necessary for the goal. Any Sculpting effects are permanent (until negated by another Sculpting). This art cannot cause damage; it just changes the target's shape.

This art costs 1 Pathos to use, and the subject loses a Corpus Level.

Sculpt may also be used to heal aggravated damage; a wraith using Sculpt can replace lost Corpus Levels by reworking the wounds. The healer must obtain one success for each level of aggravated damage to be healed; this use of Sculpt costs a Willpower and a Pathos, plus 1 Pathos per success.

## •• Martialry

This art permits the wraith to shape her limbs into weapons or form her skin into armor. Any weapons created are automatically usable by one who knows how, but armor tends to be stiff and inflexible. The wraith simply molds the chosen limb into the desired weapon, hardening it as she goes. By the same token, the wraith trying to make armor works her Corpus into a formidable carapace with a mirrorlike sheen. Many Masquers deliberately make their bodily arsenal as ornate and personalized as possible without detracting a whit from utility.

**System:** To create weaponry, the player must roll Intelligence + Moliat (difficulty of the character's Stamina + 3). Each success allows the weapon to inflict an additional die of damage in hand-to-hand combat. The shape of the weapon matters little, although many wraiths prefer swords for ease of use.

To sculpt armor, the player rolls Stamina + Moliat (difficulty Strength + 3). Each success adds one die to the character's soak roll, but each success after the first adds + 1 to the difficulty of any Dexterity-based roll from the armor's stiffness.

Using Martialry costs 3 Pathos. Weapons and armor cannot be created at the same time; Martialry must be used twice to create both effects. Furthermore, a wraith can only use Martialry on himself; girding others for war is one of the lost arts of the now-banished Guild.

## ••• Rend

Masters of this art can tear apart the Corpora of other wraiths. Creative use of Rend allows one to dismember, disfigure or otherwise mutilate another soul, even going so far as to permit tearing off a victim's face and keeping it as a souvenir. Such a grisly trophy is called a skinmask, and can aid the use of Imitate.

**System:** The character using Rend must first contact her target, generally by making a successful attack roll. The player rolls Strength + Moliat (difficulty of the victim's Stamina + 3). Each success inflicts one die of aggravated damage, plus one die per extra point of Pathos spent. Five or more successes permits the wraith to tear off a portion of her opponent (e.g., face, hand, knee or just a random handful of plasm).

Rend costs 1 Pathos to activate, plus whatever the player spends to gain extra dice. Each use of Rend gains the character 1 Angst.

## •••• Bodyshape

The character with this art may transform his or another's Corpus into practically anything imaginable, from a supermodel to a bookcase or chunk of modern sculpture. It is dangerous to stretch one's plasm too thin; the relative volume of the final form should be roughly equal to the wraith's normal volume.

**System:** The player rolls Wits + Moliat, at a difficulty depending on the final form. Taking the form of an oily puddle is very easy (difficulty 5), while mimicking a Hierarchy Anacreon in full regalia is much harder (difficulty 9). The wraith can only maintain a full-body change for a limited time (one scene per success) before his Corpus reverts to normal.

This art costs 4 Pathos. If Moliating an unwilling wraith into a torch or similar object, the wraith also gains 2 Angst.



# Outrage Spooks



rrrrraaaaaaAAAAHHHH! Scared you, didn't I?!

There are several ways to affect the living world from the Shadowlands. Outrage is the Arcanos that manifests a wraith's strength of will as kinetic force. Its arts are all physical or violent in some

form or another, as are its practitioners.

## The Guild

The Spooks Guild was almost not a Guild at all; its members were such fractious troublemakers that they had difficulty relating even to each other. Their lack of internal structure hampered their ability to deal with other Guilds, and they enjoyed only moderate demand for their arts. Only the Artificers found constant employment for the Spooks, enlisting them in the creation of relics.

Consequently, the Spooks weren't hit that hard by the disbanding of the Guilds. They drifted back into their usual activities with little difficulty, and ex-Guild members can still be found starting fights and fires in the roughest parts of cities. They enjoy brandishing blunt weapons such as maces, and often spend time in the company of their fellow miscreants, the Haunters.

The typical Spook has oddly knotted, powerful muscle groups and a somewhat misshapen look.

## Botches

A botched Outrage attempt might strike the wrong target, or play over the wrong area of effect. The wraith might put too much of herself in the effort, losing some Stamina or Willpower for a scene or so. Even worse, excessively violent effects might well feed the Shadow large amounts of Angst.

## Basic Abilities

**Leap of Rage:** By focusing his emotion and will in the Shadowlands, the wraith becomes capable of extraordinary leaps and jumps.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Outrage (difficulty 6). The wraith may add any successes to those he

would normally score when making a leap or jump. This art can also be used to change direction in the Tempest.

## • Ping

This basic level allows the wraith to manipulate the smallest objects in the material world. The wraith may only move objects about the size of a bottle cap, and these just a small distance in any direction. This tends to be useful for attracting the living's attention or pressing small buttons.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Outrage.

This art costs 1 Pathos per use.

## •• Wraithgrasp

This art permits the wraith to affect the Skinlands more fully. Wraithgrasp may only be used to lift things, although a powerful wraith may lift sizable objects (and then drop them at his leisure). The object can be lifted to a fair height before the wraith releases it.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Outrage. The number of successes indicates what can be lifted (see "Feats of Strength," page 249). Objects may only be lifted, not pushed around, manipulated or moved in any other way.

Each use of this art costs 2 Pathos.

## ••• Stonehand Punch

The wraith summons his anger and lashes out across the Shroud, striking his target with raw force. This art can also be used on objects in the Underworld, including other wraiths.

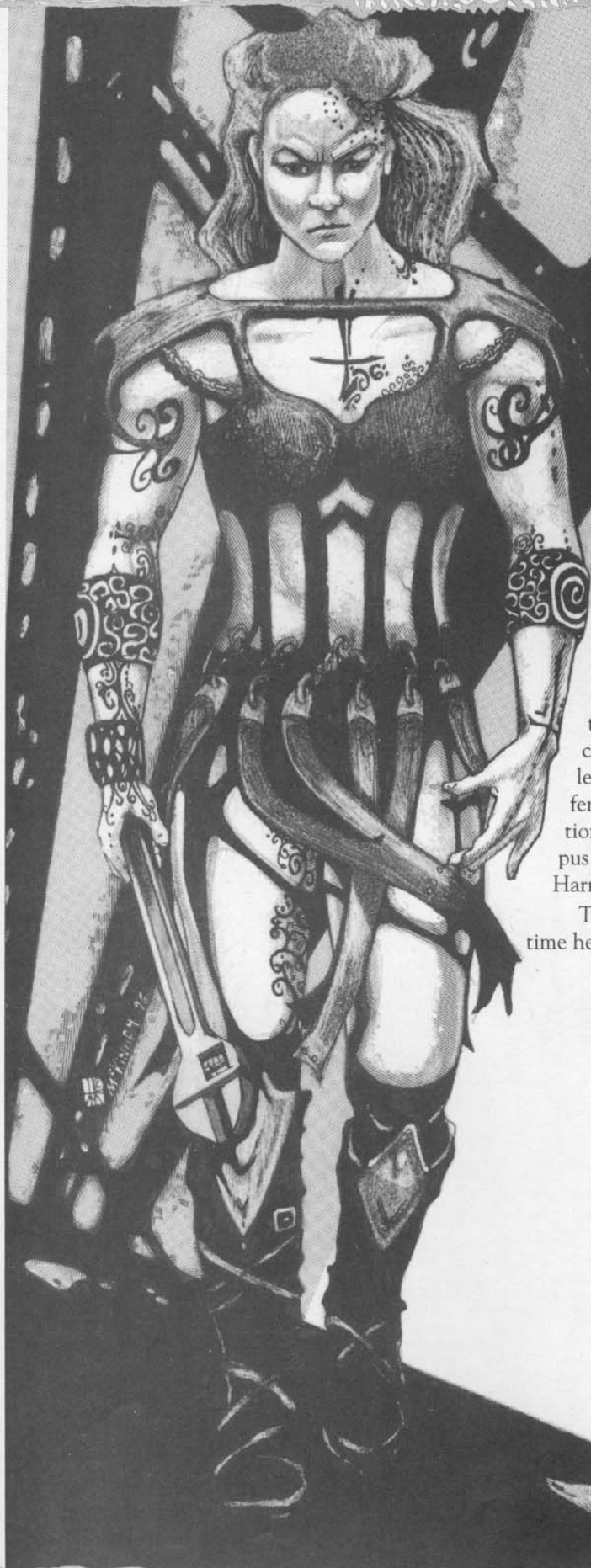
**System:** Each success on a Strength + Outrage roll inflicts one Health Level (or Corpus Level, if the target is a wraith) on the subject.

This art costs 2 Pathos per strike.

## •••• Death's Touch

The wraith may now manipulate objects in the physical world. This art permits typing, opening windows and so on, just as if the wraith were solid. The wraith may alternately





choose to create friction, starting fires without any sort of material source of flame.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Outrage. The wraith's delicacy and control depend on the number of successes rolled. The power lasts up to one minute per success.

•To start a fire, the wraith rolls Strength + Outrage (difficulty 8). The number of successes indicates the heat and extent of the fire.

This art costs 3 Pathos.

### ..... Obliviate

This hideous art allows a wraith to damage someone or something so severely that it can be sent to Oblivion. Material objects thus destroyed vanish into Oblivion, unless Inhabited by a wraith (in which case they become relics). Using this art on objects or relics in the Shadowlands sends them directly into Oblivion.

This art can also destroy wraiths or mortals, forcing their souls into Oblivion.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Outrage against the local Shroud. If trying to affect another wraith, the difficulty is the target's Stamina + 3. Each success inflicts one level of aggravated, nonsoakable damage. Living creatures suffer Health Levels of damage, but their souls fall into a Destruction Harrowing if they are slain. Wraiths reduced to zero Corpus through this art also immediately fall into Destruction Harrowings.

This art costs 3 Pathos. The wraith also gains 2 Angst each time he uses Obliviate.

# Pandemonium

## Haunters



Look at that! Look at those folks scurry for safety! Who says there's no beauty in discord? Wheee!

Pandemonium is the ability to tap into chaos itself, releasing the strange and eldritch upon the living world. Some call this Arcanos the Wylding,

an appropriate name considering that it releases forces rather than controls them. Other wraiths tend to avoid masters of Pandemonium, as the distorting effects of the Wylding can be detrimental to one's sanity.

The Fog obscures most of the more flagrant effects of this Arcanos. Sudden mists, blood seeping under doors, swarms of spiders and clocks running out of control tend to send most people into a state of panic or disbelief. Even video recordings of some of these effects will be questioned; videotapes are becoming easier to modify....

The difficulty for any Pandemonium effects equals the local Shroud, unless otherwise noted. Most mortals will not remember the details of this Arcanos (see the Fog chart, page 240).

### The Guild

Back in the time of the Guilds, only the Spooks would regularly associate with the Haunters. The two Guilds cooperated to clear mortal intruders away from buildings they were hired to "clean." However, no other Guild would gladly mingle with the misanthropic, half-crazed Haunters. Their harness of the Wylding seemed to bend their minds as much as it distorted reality, and nobody could be sure that the Haunters were fully in control of themselves or their powers. These days, Spooks and Haunters are nearly inseparable, and other wraiths are quite happy to leave them to each other.

Haunters are recognizably quirky, adopting all manner of peculiar mannerisms (inappropriate giggling, affected speech, staring just a bit too intently at your left ear, and so on). Many have adopted billowing black cloaks as a sort of badge of honor or theatrical device.

### Botches

Pandemonium botches often result in some sort of backlash, distorting things the wraith meant to leave alone. They can cause temporary chaos in the wraith's Shadowlands vicinity, or steal the wraith's Pathos or Corpus without causing any Skinland effect.

### Basic Abilities

**Sense Chaos:** The wraith's attunement to chaos and the Shadow allows her to detect if something has been manipulated by Pandemonium or a Shadow. This is also helpful for detecting if a mortal has been tampered with by Spectres.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Pandemonium (difficulty 7).

### • Weirdness

The wraith may invoke some small, strange effect on a single target. The object of this art may feel suddenly cold, or his hackles rise, or he might suffer a momentary hallucination.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Pandemonium.

This art costs 1 Pathos.

### •• Befuddlement

The wraith may momentarily confuse a target, disorienting him and making him temporarily forget who he is and what he's doing.

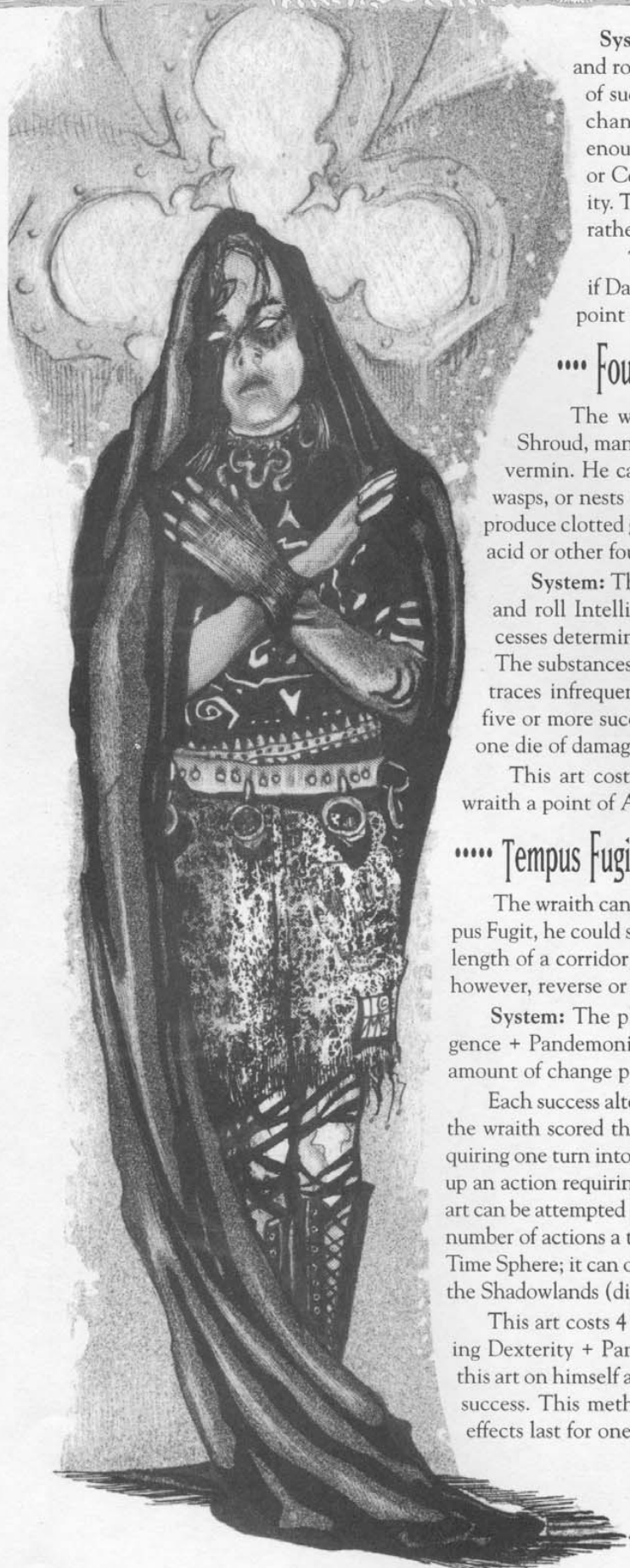
**System:** The player rolls Intelligence + Pandemonium (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). The effects last for one turn per success. The victim must make an Intelligence roll (difficulty 8) to think clearly. This art works equally well on mortals and wraiths.

Befuddlement costs 1 Pathos.

### ••• Dark Ether

The wraith may tamper with the weather or light conditions in a small area. She may radically change the temperature, summon mist and darkness, modify the humidity, or even evoke a glow akin to St. Elmo's Fire.





**System:** The player declares the effect she wants and rolls Intelligence + Pandemonium. The number of successes defines the degree and duration of the change in environment. Five successes calls up enough turbulence (if desired) to inflict one Health or Corpus Level of damage on beings in the vicinity. This is rare; most Haunters use this art to terrify rather than injure.

This art costs 2 Pathos to invoke. In addition, if Dark Ether is used as an attack, it gives the user a point of Angst.

### .... Foul Humour

The wraith may channel his Corpus through the Shroud, manifesting noxious substances or swarms of small vermin. He can create plagues of frogs or locusts, clouds of wasps, or nests of snakes, rats or spiders. He can alternatively produce clotted gore, raw flesh, blood, muck, reasonably strong acid or other foul matter.

**System:** The player must state what effect he is trying for and roll Intelligence + Pandemonium. The number of successes determines the extent and detail of the manifestation. The substances or vermin usually vanish after a scene or less; traces infrequently remain, particularly if the wraith scored five or more successes. Any caustic or damaging effects inflict one die of damage for every two successes on the initial roll.

This art costs 1 Pathos and 1 Willpower, and grants the wraith a point of Angst.

### .... Tempus Fugit

The wraith can distort distance and time itself. By using Tempus Fugit, he could slow or hasten the passage of time, or make the length of a corridor seem like a footstep or a league. He may not, however, reverse or repeat time.

**System:** The player declares his intentions and rolls Intelligence + Pandemonium. The number of successes determines the amount of change permitted in his immediate area.

Each success alters the flow of time by one turn. For example, if the wraith scored three successes, he could draw out an action requiring one turn into four turns of effort. Conversely, he could speed up an action requiring six turns, letting it be finished in three. This art can be attempted once per scene. (**Note:** This does not add to the number of actions a target gets from Celerity, Rage, or Effects of the Time Sphere; it can only subtract them.) Tempus Fugit also works in the Shadowlands (difficulty 7).

This art costs 4 Pathos and 1 Willpower. Alternately, by rolling Dexterity + Pandemonium (difficulty 7), a wraith may focus this art on himself alone, gaining an extra action per turn for each success. This method costs 2 Pathos and 1 Willpower, and the effects last for one scene.

# Phantasm

## Sandmen



*Surprised? You shouldn't be. Are not all things possible in dream? Here, sit back under the Clockwork Tree. Have a sip from the flask of liquid daylight beside you. The Pageant of the Oneiric Ossuary is about to begin!*

Phantasm is the Arcanos of dreams.

Those with mastery of its arts can slide a sleeping mortal's soul out of its flesh and bring it along on a Shadowlands journey. The sleeper will remember the events he engages in as a vague dream, if at all, but on a dreaming level they are real indeed.

This Arcanos is a good way to involve mortals directly in a wraith's doings. A vivid dream can inspire or frighten a person into changing his behavior. The wraith can even alter elements of the dream to her tastes, instructing or horrifying her audience.

Dreamers brought into the Shadowlands are treated as wraiths with particularly solid forms. They may only be damaged by special Artifacts or attacks that inflict aggravated damage on wraiths. Attacked dreamers slip instantly back to their bodies, almost always waking up unharmed. Only the mightiest Sandmen can permanently damage or kill mortals in their dreams.

**Note:** The arts of Phantasm can be used to beneficial or malefic effect, and this has a direct effect on the price of using the Arcanos. With the exception of Agon, any Phantasm art that is used to harm another's soul also grants the user a point of Angst. The same art can be used for healing and entertainment without giving the Sandman in question Angst; what determines the cost is the Sandman's intent.

## The Guild

The Sandmen's Guild was once a glorious place to work. Charged with artistic fervor and a love for the dramatic, the Sandmen sculpted stages of dreamstuff and performed great works in the theatres of sleep. Deathlords and Anacreons bartered for their services, and the arts of Phantasm granted considerable prestige.

When the Guilds were broken, the Sandmen did their level best to carry on the show. Phantasm was more than a job to them, it was an labor of love. Even today, wandering troupes of Sandmen bring their shows to Necropoli across the

world, recounting tales and rumors because they love nothing better.

Sandmen clothe themselves in gossamer, a faintly incandescent material borrowed from dreams. They are also distinguishable by their often over-dramatic mannerisms and bearing.

## Botches

Botching Phantasm usually has a horrible effect on the dreamer (unless, of course, that was the wraith's aim). Woven illusions can spin rapidly out of control, sometimes inflicting recurring nightmares on the subject. The wraith's Shadow may also take control, tormenting the dreamer with its twisted imagination. Creating such ravaging visions typically add to the offending wraith's Angst.

## Basic Abilities

**Sleepsense:** The wraith may watch a mortal's dreams, or tell where he is along his sleep cycle (of REM sleep, deep sleep and transition).

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Phantasm (difficulty 6). The wraith may watch the mortal's dreams for one turn per success.

## • Elysia

The wraith may gently take hold of a sleeper's soul, pulling it free without harming it. When the soul is loose, the wraith may carry it with her as she likes.

**System:** The player rolls Dexterity + Phantasm. The difficulty depends on the target's current sleep cycle: REM sleep (6), transitional sleep (7) or deep sleep (8). The mortal may remain in the dreamscape for one scene per success. Elysia may be used on subjects watching television or in a similar hypnotic state. However, the difficulty is 10, and the target may stay in the dreamscape for two fewer scenes (i.e., if the wraith rolls one or two successes, the Elysia attempt fails).

This art costs 1 Pathos.

## •• Lucidity

The wraith may alter details of a mortal's dream. Say she enters a dream where the dreamer is surrounded by croco-



diles in his grandfather's swimming pool. The wraith could remove the crocodiles or change them to sharks, change day to night, or transform the pool into a swamp. If she changes enough details, she can twist a pleasant dream into a nightmare or vice versa.

**System:** First, the Storyteller assigns a difficulty, based on the extent of the desired changes. The player rolls Manipulation + Phantasm; the change becomes more vivid and lasting for each success.

This art costs 2 Pathos.

### ... Dreams of Sleep

The wraith may make other wraiths fall asleep and dream, just as if they were alive again.

**System:** The player need not roll if the subject is willing. If he is unwilling, the player rolls Charisma + Phantasm (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The target may resist with an opposed Intelligence + Subterfuge roll.

This art costs 1 Pathos.

### .... Phantasmagoria

The wraith may weave Pathos into illusions. Phantasmagoria affects all five senses, but the duration is limited. These illusions are only solid to other wraiths if she invests Corpus in them. If she Embodies, she can craft these illusions in the material world.

**System:** The player rolls Charisma + Phantasm (difficulty 6). The number of successes equals both the number of successes needed (on a Perception + Alertness roll) to see through an illusion and the number of turns it lasts. The wraith must invest at least one Corpus Level to make the illusion quasi-material (and dangerous). The illusion can take as many Corpus Levels of damage before being destroyed as the player is willing to invest. A wraith may not "heal" a damaged illusion; he must craft another one.

If the illusion is potentially damaging, the player may roll Dexterity + Phantasm (difficulty 7) as an attack roll. The victim may dodge. The damage roll is Strength + Phantasm (difficulty 7), inflicting one point of soakable damage per success.

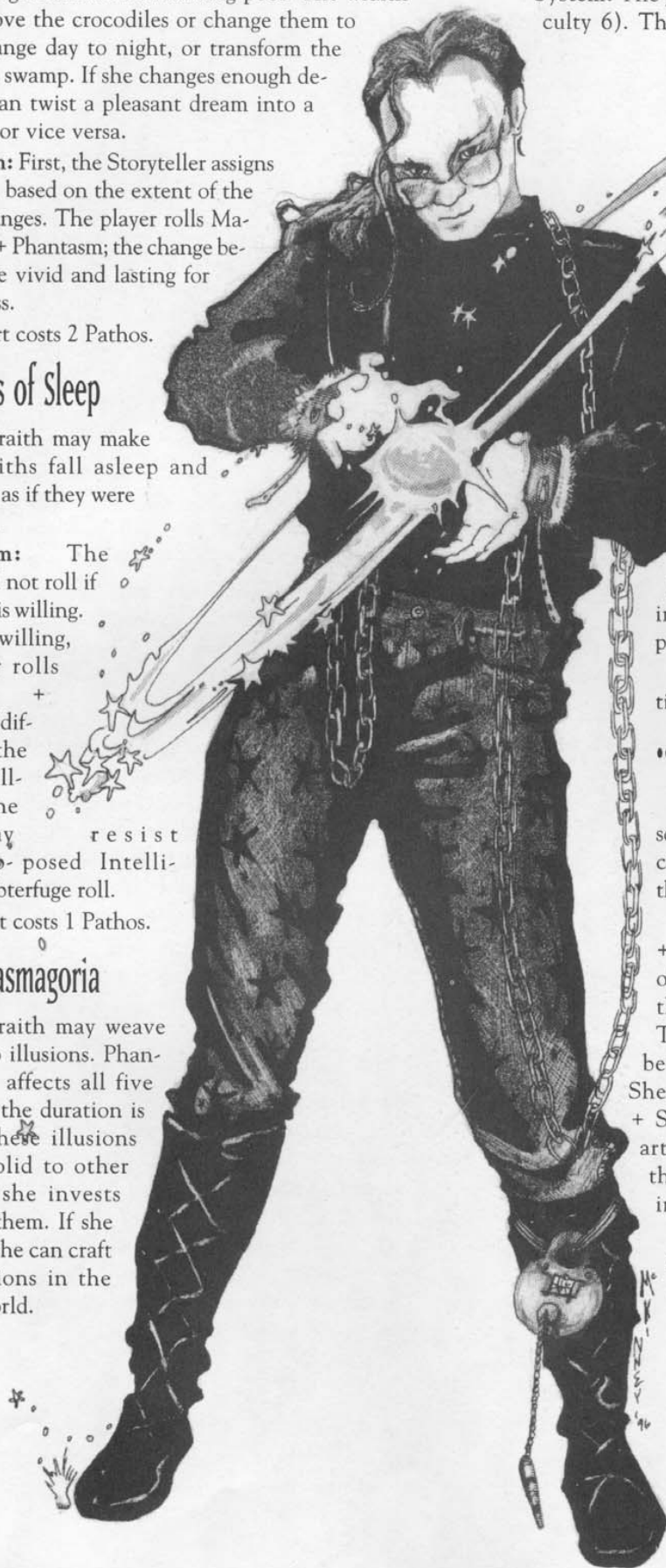
Phantasmagoria costs 3 Pathos to activate, plus 1 Pathos per turn.

### ..... Agon

The wraith may directly rip a mortal's soul from her sleeping body. This is excruciatingly painful and often debilitating to the dreamer.

**System:** The player rolls Strength + Phantasm (difficulty 8). The number of successes indicates how many scenes the wraith may hold the dreamer's soul. The dreamer also loses an equal number of Health Levels upon awakening. She may resist the wraith by rolling Wits + Subterfuge (difficulty 8), making this art's use a true struggle. Botches on either side are best left to the Storyteller's imagination.

Agon costs 3 Pathos, and the wraith's Shadow gains 2 Angst per use. Botching usually bestows more Angst.



# Puppetry

## Puppeteers



*mmm. Don't tell me you don't remember what it felt like to be warm, to have blood pounding in your body. Oh, I see you remember. Wonderful, wasn't it? We can feel that again, and more. Try holding someone else's fluttering heart in your hands, or hearing her lover moan in your ear. I can never get enough of that....*

Of all the 13 Greater Arcanoi, Puppetry is the one that Charon forbade most sternly. Only the Deathlords and their Hierarchy were sanctioned to ride the mortals, to possess them and thus affect them directly. But like all forbidden fruits, Puppetry has its devotees, those willing to risk Hierarchy sanction for another taste of the Skinlands.

Wraiths riding a subject are not truly part of the Shadowlands, and as such are immune to the normal dangers of that place. However, they take damage as their hosts do. Also, the host's Physical Attributes and Talents take precedence over the wraith's unless the wraith is in direct control. The Puppeteer is a back-seat driver, and usually nothing more.

Most aspects of Puppetry require the wraith to attune himself to a Consort by spending Willpower while Skinriding (see "Attunement," page 135). The wraith may try these arts (at the Storyteller's discretion) on unattuned mortals, but the difficulty increases by +2 (to a maximum of 10).

## The Guild

The Puppeteers' Guild was never an official part of Stygian society. Though even Charon used their services on occasion, he tolerated their presence in Stygia because of their affiliation with the other Guilds and not for any intrinsic merit they might possess. Their participation in the attempted coup was the excuse Stygia had been waiting for, and the Puppeteers were among those wraiths most fiercely persecuted after the coup's failure. Today, those Puppeteers who practice their art must do so well away from any Hierarchy representatives.

Most Puppeteers feel a great fondness for mortals, acting protectively toward their wards. Many try to avert wars among the living and guard their favorite Quick. Of course, the occasional bad seed feels quite the opposite; mortal bodies, they argue, are the perfect entertainment, ripe to use and abuse.

Puppeteers unconsciously exhibit strange mannerisms and often accents picked up from assorted mortal hosts during Skinrides.

## Botches

A Puppetry botch might trap the wraith inside her host, an unwilling passenger without any sort of control. Perhaps the long process of attunement is irretrievably fouled, and must be begun again. In the case of a drastic error, the wraith might unwittingly force her host to do something quite the opposite of what she'd intended (for example, accidentally firing a gun or triggering alarms with the wrong access code).

## Basic Abilities

**Detect Possession:** The wraith may tell if another wraith is currently Skinriding the target, or even if the target has been attuned for Puppetry.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Puppetry. The difficulty is 7 to detect a current possession, 9 to perceive the intricate pattern of the Consort.

## • Skinride

Skinriding is the most basic art of possession. It is the capability to slip into a mortal's body, thereby joining with him for a brief ride. The wraith can exert no control with this art, and the host acts of his own free will. However, any more sophisticated Puppetry art requires the wraith first to Skinride the host.

**System:** In order to slip into a host's body, a wraith must roll Dexterity + Puppetry (difficulty of the subject's Willpower). The number of successes rolled determines how many successes another wraith must produce in order to supplant the first in that body.

## •• Sudden Movement

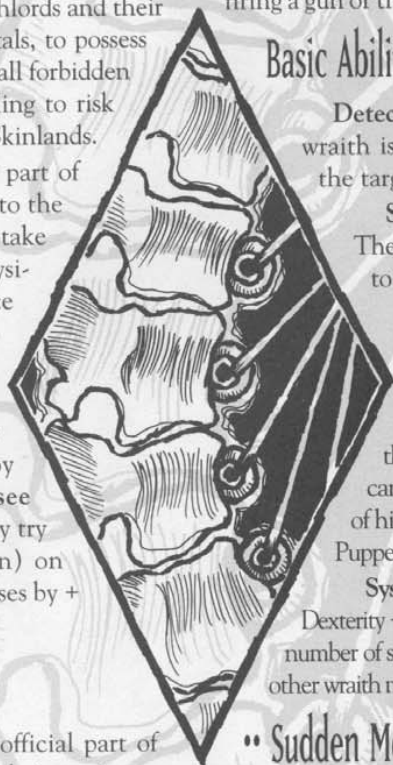
A wraith using this art may take fleeting control of her host body's arm or leg. Subtle use of this art can make a host manipulate an object in some way without realizing it.

**System:** The wraith must first Skinride the host, then roll Strength + Puppetry (difficulty of her host's Willpower). The victim may resist by rolling her Willpower. The more successes the wraith gets, the greater her control.

This art costs 1 Pathos per use. If the victim resists, the wraith also acquires 1 Angst.

## ••• Master's Voice

The wraith can briefly override his host's speech center, causing him to speak. The resulting voice is a strange blend of the wraith's and host's voices.



**System:** The player rolls Intelligence + Puppetry (difficulty of the target's Willpower). The wraith may speak for one breath per success. Master's Voice costs 1 Pathos and gives the wraith 1 Angst.

## .... Rein in the Mind

This art allows a wraith to possess someone without the host's knowledge. In most cases, this can only be done to a Consort.

The host remains semiconscious, though passive, throughout the art's effect, and will regain control when the Puppeteer releases her. She will immediately try to rationalize her actions; failing, she may seek out therapy or mental health testing. Any pain the host feels feeds back to the Puppeteer as Corpus damage, however. Electroshock therapy is useful for driving out wraiths, but cannot keep them out forever.

**System:** The player rolls Manipulation + Puppetry (difficulty of the subject's Willpower or the local Shroud, whichever is higher). The art lasts for a number of scenes equal to the Puppeteer's successes. The host may spend a Willpower point to try to resist the possession. In this case, the host rolls Willpower versus the Puppeteer's Manipulation + Puppetry. Each success indicates one fewer scene that the wraith may remain in control.

This art costs 4 Pathos and bestows a point of temporary Angst.

## ..... Obliterate the Soul

After conditioning a Consort through extended use of Rein in the Mind, the Puppeteer may begin to live full-time within the mortal's body. The host's personality is devoured by the Puppeteer's Shadow. Whenever the wraith leaves a body thus possessed, it becomes catatonic, responding to nothing and taking no action on its own.

**System:** Once the wraith has conditioned a Consort (by using Rein in the Mind at least 10 times), the player may make an extended roll of Strength + Puppetry (difficulty of the target's Willpower or the local Shroud, whichever is greater). When the wraith totals enough successes to equal the host's Willpower, she succeeds. Botching at any point should have the gravest of effects on the Puppeteer; she may fall immediately into a Harrowing or gain enough Angst to allow her Shadow a Catharsis roll (see page 177).

Two weeks after its original soul's removal, the host body will begin a slow process of decay. Before too long, it is useless. Therefore, most wraiths with this art use it only in the direst circumstances. This art is ineffective against supernatural beings, and can only be used once a month, on the new moon. If the first attempt to Obliterate the Soul gains no successes, the wraith must wait another month to try again. On the other hand, even one success on the initial roll will allow for followup attempts whenever the Puppeteer feels up to it.

This art costs 5 Pathos and 2 Willpower, and the wraith gains a number of Angst points equal to the host's original Willpower.



# Usury

## Usurers



*I'm glad we could come to an agreement. Seal the deal with a handshake, and I'll get you what you need. I'm nothing less than fair, friend.*

In death as in life, nothing's free. Pathos is the currency of the afterworld, and Usury is the Arcanos of barter. It is the delicate dance of the deal, of shifting Pathos and Corpus from one source to another. Those with Usury can act as healers, mendicants, merchants or extortionists, and sometimes all at once. It all depends on how reputable they choose to be.

Usury involves power over death energy, and is accordingly mistrusted in some circles. Many point to the Shadow as the source of this Arcanos, citing innumerable "deal with the Devil" stories as proof. They are not so mistaken; repeated use of Usury can raise a wraith's Angst to unhealthy levels rapidly. When used upon the Quick, Usury is nothing less than the theft of life itself.

A wraith must touch his subject to use Usury. To affect mortals, this requires another Arcanos, such as Puppetry, Embody, Inhabit or Phantasm. The life energy thus stolen is visible to other wraiths as a vivid light, which dims as it is absorbed.

## The Guild

In their heyday, the Usurers were a Guild of considerable repute and political power. Ever alert for the next opportunity, they cast in their lot with the other Guilds when the Artificers led the coup against Charon. However, as it became clear that the attempt was doomed to failure, the Usurers quickly reversed their position, stranding the forces of the other Guilds without desperately needed resources of Pathos and Corpus. This betrayal, more than any of the others, doomed the revolt.

The Usurers have since had to resort to secrecy to protect themselves, both from zealous Stygian patrols and from vengeful Guild members who resented their "treachery." Even now, those in need of quick Corpus or Pathos must follow a series of clues on a wild and unorthodox hunt to find a Usurer. If nobody follows the client, and if she seems reliable, the

Usurers will see her. Although this tends to restrict business somewhat, the Usurers console themselves by being able to charge higher prices to clients whom they don't particularly care for.

Usurers tend to speak in precise, numerical terms. All carry some form of scales, allowing them to keep track of the balance of energy transferred.

## Botches

Botching a Usury roll usually reverses the path of transferal; if stealing Corpus, a wraith might suddenly find herself pouring her own Corpus into the target. If trying to heal a mortal, the wraith might find herself stealing Health Levels. The Storyteller should feel free to have the wraith's personal energy levels fluctuate as another possibility.

## Basic Abilities

**Assessment:** The wraith can gauge the relative levels of life and death within an individual. Careful scrutiny can reveal some idea of the person's relative Stamina, Health or Corpus. Wounds appear as vivid black slashes in the person's form, and the observer can estimate their severity. The wraith may also perceive life energy in general within a specific area.

**System:** The player rolls Perception + Usury (difficulty 6). The more successes on the roll, the more accurate the Assessment.

## • Transfer

The wraith may transfer Pathos between herself and another wraith. She may lend her Pathos to the subject, or steal her victim's Pathos away. This transferal is always visible to onlookers as a vivid halo around the wraith receiving the Pathos.

**System:** The player must roll Manipulation + Usury. If the wraith is donating Pathos to her subject, the difficulty is her client's current Pathos score. If stealing Pathos, the difficulty equals her target's Willpower. The number of successes equals the amount of Pathos that may be transferred.

When stealing Pathos, this art grants a temporary Angst.



## •• Charitable Trust

By infusing a mortal or wraith with his own Corpus, a wraith may heal wounds. The wraith breathes out his Corpus into his target. This art can even be used on mortals without using any other Arcanos to manifest.

**System:** The player rolls Stamina + Usury. The difficulty equals his subject's current Corpus or Health Levels. The wraith may transfer one Corpus Level for each success on this roll.

This art costs 1 Pathos per use.

## ••• Early Withdrawal

The reverse of Charitable Trust, this art allows a wraith to steal another person's life energy with but a touch.

**System:** Once the wraith is in contact with her prey, she rolls Manipulation + Usury (difficulty of the victim's Willpower). Each success steals a Health or Corpus Level; the victim marks off the levels on his sheet while the Usurer adds them to hers. The wraith may only use this art as long as she is below her maximum Corpus; if she is unharmed, she has no place to "put" any stolen Corpus unless she possesses the Exchange Rate art (below).

This art gives the Usurer a temporary Angst point.

## •••• Exchange Rate

Any wraith may convert Pathos to Corpus Levels (see "Healing," page 232). Wraiths who know this art may do the opposite, transforming their Corpus Levels into Pathos. They may simply convert their own Corpus, or use this art along with Early Withdrawal (above).

**System:** Each success on an Intelligence + Usury roll (difficulty 6) allows one Corpus Level to be converted into Pathos. There is a cost of one Pathos for each time this art is used, sort of a metaphysical transaction fee.

## ••••• Investment

This art allows a wraith to pour Corpus and/or Pathos into a relic, storing it for future use. The wraith must focus on the relic in question, channeling and carefully sealing his energy into it. The energy may then be accessed by anyone who knows the seal's gesture or command phrase.

**System:** The player spends 2 Pathos, then marks off the number of Pathos or Corpus points that he wishes to invest. Each success on a Intelligence + Usury roll (difficulty 7) invests one point (up to the set limit) into the relic. All excess points "gambled" are lost. To seal the points in place, the wraith must spend a Willpower point and assign a command phrase or gesture to "unlock" the stored reserve. A given relic may only store one type of energy. This art is the means by which soulfire crystals are created and maintained.



## Passions

I have only a hazy memory of walking down Deering Avenue and out Congress Street toward Riverside Cemetery. I experience an odd sensation of time passing and of distances being crossed, but I can't seem to remember anything clearly or in any detail. Time and distance seem much slipperier, less well-ordered and defined than they did when I was alive.

Along the way I notice several other people. Some of them glance my way and move on, while others ignore me completely, either on purpose or because, I assume, they are alive and *can't* see me.

In any event, I decide that it would be futile, possibly even dangerous to speak to any of the people I'm passing. The old man has me convinced that the Shadowlands are dangerous, and I can feel a sense of danger as distinctly as I can feel — and see — the darker emotions of the people I pass by. I hope that, if I ignore them, they'll ignore me.

When I arrive at the cemetery, I am surprised to see that Sarah, the woman who was once my wife, is there. It's with an odd sense of dissociation that I watch her walk up the

hill to our daughter's grave, her hands clasped in front of her, her head bowed. Tears stream down her face, but more than that, I can see and feel the dark waves of emotion that are swirling around her. Shifting rays of energy pulsate, and as I move closer to her, I seem to experience some of what she is feeling in ways I never could when I was alive. Uncomprehending, I drink the feeling in.

Only after I see Sarah do I begin to understand how to distinguish the living from the dead. To my eyes, the living, even those few who look like they're harboring some deep-seated sickness inside them, shine with an energetic glow. Some of them appear almost translucent. I laugh, imagining them as "ghosts" dwelling in this dead world.

All of the dead people that I see (and the closer I get to the cemetery, the more of them there are) appear to have a pale, gray pallor about them that is far more than the lifeless tone of their skin. Their "essences," or what New Agers might call their "auras," appear wilted and faint as though tainted by the corrupting touch of Death. Their eyes are hollow and blank, and seem to focus on some unseen middle distance.

I follow Sarah up to Karen's grave at the top of the hill, and watch as my wife kneels beside the grave to stare at the polished pink stone. Her eyes glisten like quicksilver in the eerie light of the day.

I find it curious that I feel no exhaustion from the effort of walking out to the cemetery, even though I know it is more than four miles from Pine Knoll Elementary to Riverside. As soon as I am at my daughter's grave site, though, I feel absolutely drained, both physically and emotionally.

I wonder how I can feel physically drained when I no longer have a body. Everything I feel and think are still my own emotions and thoughts, but being dead and free of physical restraints seems to *strengthen* such feelings. My Corpus trembles violently as I raise my hands and clasp my fingers together. No matter how hard I try to squeeze my own hands, I can't get rid of the uncanny dissociative feeling. There is almost no feeling in my hands. It's like watching someone else move my fingers.

Powerful, conflicting emotions almost overwhelm me as I watch Sarah lean forward and whis-

per something. Her words, faint and echoing, are lost to me.

Grief swells inside me, but no matter how strong it surges, tears don't form in my eyes. My emotions are bottled up inside me with no way to find release.

I want to reach out and touch Sarah, but I'm afraid to try, afraid that the cascade of energy I see shimmering around her might cause harm either to me or to her.

"Sarah... Sarah," I call out as I move closer to her and reach out with one hand.

I can't stop my hand from shaking as it draws nearer to her, but then I watch in stunned horror as it passes through her like an insubstantial whiff of smoke.

Knife-sharp pangs of dread and agony fill me when I see her startle and look around. Her lips move, and she says something, but once again, I can't hear her clearly.

"Yes, Sarah! I'm here! I'm standing right here beside you!" I call out. "It's me — David!"

I'm almost overwhelmed by a sense of loneliness and abandonment. Does she even know what's happened to me? Has she been notified yet that I'm dead?

A small corner of my mind whispers that it's impossible for her to hear or see me, but I experience a slim ray of hope when she seems to react to my efforts. She stands up slowly and, frowning deeply, looks around the cemetery.

I follow her gaze and see other wraiths. Most of them seem to be paying no attention to her, but I notice that several of them are staring in our direction as though responding to our emotions. They almost look hungry.

Desperate to communicate with her, I lunge forward. My Corpus moves in maddening slow-motion as I reach out to her with both hands, wanting desperately to embrace her just so I can let her know that I intend to find and protect our daughter if she is still here in the Shadowlands. My view of the world is strange, like I'm watching everything through an inches-thick plate glass window. Dimensions and distances are oddly warped, and a dark, tugging swell of vertigo rushes up inside me. Once again, I have the sensation of falling backwards, of spinning out of control into a vacuum or a void.

"Please, Sarah! Listen to me... Look at me!" I wail, but even to my

own ears, my voice sounds no stronger than a puff of wind that wouldn't even blow out a candle.

Tormented beyond belief, I watch Sarah shiver as she nervously glances around the cemetery. Then, wiping the tears from her eyes, she starts down the slope back to her car.

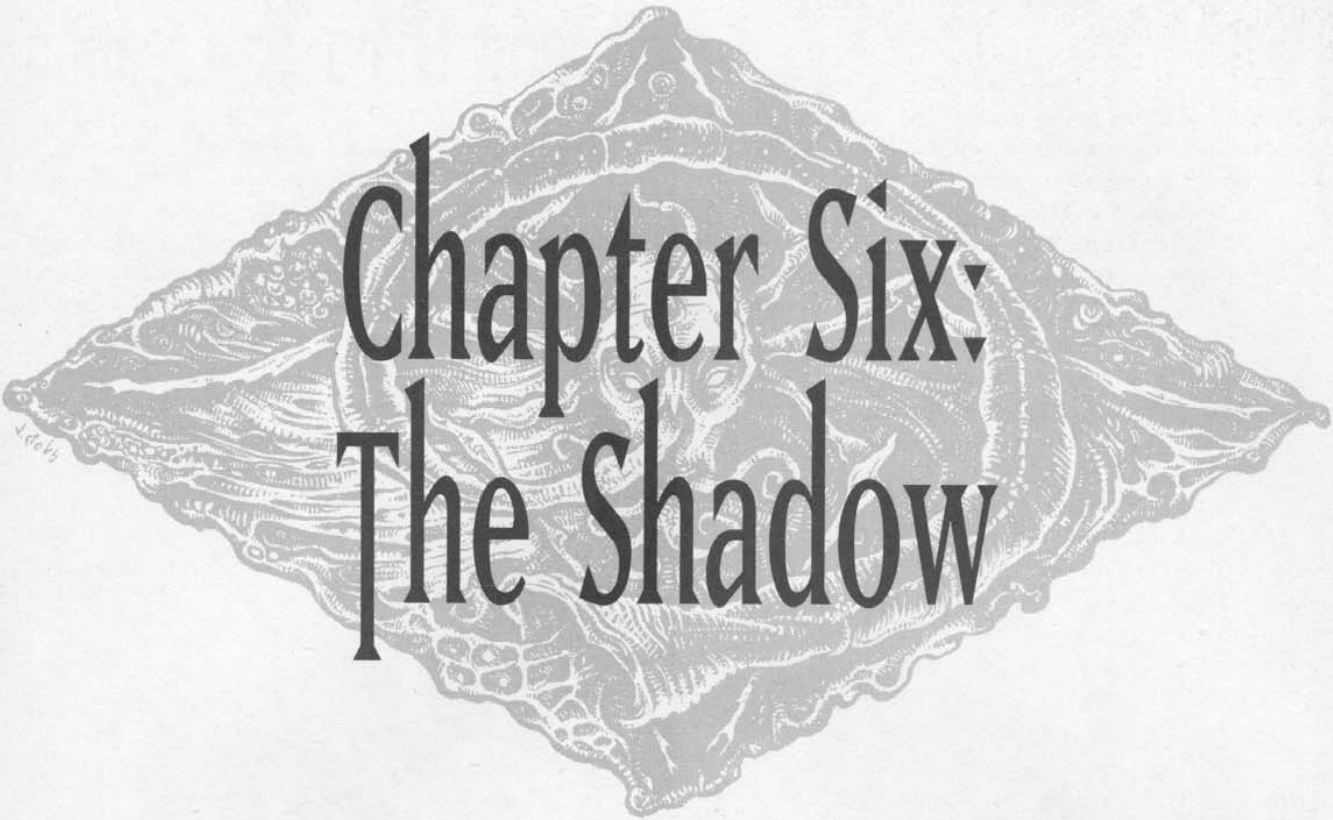
Inexpressible longing fills me as I follow after her, still crying out and reaching for her, trying to touch her. I know that it is useless, and after one last, tearful glance up the slope at Karen's grave, she gets into the car and drives away, leaving a cloud of dust in her wake.

I'm left standing in the dappled shade of a tree, feeling more alone and desolate than ever. The receding sound of her car reverberates in the dense air like the fading patter of a distant drum. As soon as Sarah's car is out of sight, the deep, lonely ache inside me grows so intense that I wish I could simply will myself to dissolve into it...to fade away into...*Oblivion*.

Standing alone in the cemetery, watching the fine dust settle like gently falling snow to the ground, I slump forward and cover my face with my hands.

I would cry if I could.





# Chapter Six: The Shadow

*...I thus drew steadily nearer to that truth by whose partial discovery I have been doomed to such a dreadful shipwreck: that man is not truly one, but truly two.*

— R.L. Stevenson, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*

## A Personal Demon



Every wraith has his own worst enemy living in the back of his head. Though the wraith's original personality, the Psyche, is the face that a wraith presents to the world, his Shadow is always there, seeking to twist and defile all that it can. The whisperer in the dark, the bringer of temptation and scorn, a wraith's Shadow is all of the malice and selfishness in his soul given a voice that can never be stilled.

Just as the Psyche strives to follow its Passions, the Shadow has Dark Passions to fulfill. A wraith's existence is fueled by the pure emotional energy of Pathos, but his Shadow feeds on its opposite, Angst. While Shadows aren't exactly evil, they are relentlessly negative and destructive. A combination of the classic Freudian id and the bully from the elementary school playground, the Shadow is possibly the worst thing about being a wraith. After all, external voices can be drowned out somehow. No one can quiet the tempter within.

## The Shadowguide

While you may know your character's dark side, you certainly can't control it. That's why the job of playing your Shadow is turned over to another player in your troupe, who serves as your Shadowguide. This allows for real conflict and discussion between Shadow and Psyche, and having the Shadow offer up its twisted perspective on your situation just might lead to a few revelations that you missed. After all, it's no fun if that voice offering those tempting extra dice is your own....

Besides, it's not just your Shadowguide who gets to have all the fun. Just as someone else is controlling your character's dark side, you get to control someone else's. This serves both to balance the game and to make sure that as many players as possible are involved in the action of the game at all times. Without Shadowguiding, if a Circle of wraiths splits up, half the troupe faces the possibility of sitting and doing nothing while the other half has all the fun. With Shadowguiding, however, the half of the troupe whose characters aren't currently involved in the action can still be a vital part of what's going on by playing the active characters' Shadows.

## The Shadow's Face

*Who knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men...*

— Lamont Cranston, a.k.a. The Shadow

A wraith's Shadow is an implacable, inescapable foe, common to all of the Restless but uniquely personal. Selfish in its desires, the Shadow is all of the malice, hate, greed and darkness that is part of all of us, but refined, distilled and allowed to stand on its own. It wants what it wants, selfishly, and it chooses to act without concern for the fact that its actions will inevitably drag both Psyche and Shadow down to the Void. Indeed, most Shadows would rather face annihilation than pay the piper for what they've done.

In the meantime, however, there are other goals to achieve: perverting and corrupting the Psyche; taking over from the Psyche when circumstance permits; feeding other wraiths to Oblivion; spreading negative emotion; and thwarting the Psyche's goals whenever possible. A shadow has reserves of strength that can offer to the Psyche in times of need, but this help often comes with a terrible price, and the wraith who starts to count on his Shadow's assistance may find that aid revoked at the worst possible time.

A Shadow is a personality distinct from the Psyche, and many go so far as to give themselves a name. It is a personality without conscience or restraint, though it can fake both of these should the need arise. There is also a definite sadistic streak in most Shadows, and some will forgo a quick and easy victory in order to prolong the Psyche's agony.

# Shadow Character Creation



Character creation isn't finished when you're done with your character's Psyche. The Shadow is just as important a part of a wraith's persona as the Psyche, and deserves as much consideration and attention in its creation. A Shadow who's an afterthought won't be interesting for a

Shadowguide to play, and without strong Psyche/Shadow interaction, some of what makes **Wraith** unique is lost.

Shadow creation should take place in conjunction with your Storyteller, and possibly with your Shadowguide as well. It's difficult to judge how strong your dark side should be, and a Storyteller's assistance in balancing Psyche and Shadow is invaluable. Still, it's your character's Shadow; nobody knows his dark secrets better than you do.

## Step One: Archetype

*I'm the one who knows your secrets*

*I'm the one who loves you best*

*I'm the thirteenth at the banquet*

*I'm the uninvited guest*

— Marillion, "The Uninvited Guest"

The first step in creating a believable Shadow is coming up with a character concept. Merely taking your Psyche's concept and turning it upside down doesn't always work; after all, the Shadow is its own personality. A character's Prelude is often a good time to garner clues as to what sort of Shadow she will have, as whatever negative traits she displays in real life will literally take on a life of their own in the Underworld.

Below are a few sample Archetypes for Shadows. Some are variations of existing Psyche Archetypes, others are unique to a wraith's dark side. It is quite possible for a wraith to have the same Nature and Shadow Nature; Psyche and Shadow can share an attitude toward the world even with wildly differing perspectives.

## Sample Archetypes

These are just some of the most common Shadow Archetypes, and players should feel free to modify these or create ones of their own. When it comes to this sort of thing, the darkness holds infinite variety.

A Shadow's Archetype serves as a method of interpreting how that Shadow will assault its Psyche. A Shadow with the Leech Archetype will whine and cajole in order to get its way, while a Monster Shadow will be obscene and direct.

• **The Abuser** — Hurt terribly once, this impatient and jealous Shadow exists to inflict his pain on others. He scrutinizes the failures of everyone around him, heaping scorn upon

them whenever he can. This is done partially in order to bolster his self-image, but primarily to make everyone else hurt just as much as he does. The Abuser will often goad you to attempt the impossible, just to watch you fail so that he can dine upon the self-loathing failure engenders. Chaotic and crazed, the Abuser will lash out at any target other than his favorite one: himself.

When dominant, the Abuser will spew his vitriol in all directions. Any excuse will set him off, and if no excuse is provided, he will create one. Demands for obedience, absurd requests and systematic verbal or physical abuse are this Shadow's hallmarks. After all, why should the rest of the world hurt less than he does?

• **The Director** — Quiet and organized, the Director will take you apart with clockwork precision. Icy in her hatred, she will strip your defenses away layer by layer, taking pleasure in the surgical nature of the torment she inflicts. There's nothing personal in what the Director does; she's just setting the record straight by removing any delusions you might have about goodness, sanity or any other worthwhile qualities you thought you had.

The Director's usual *modus operandi* is to rifle through the back drawers of your mind, cataloging every weakness, every painful memory and every personality flaw, no matter how minor. This ammunition isn't randomly flung about, either, but is hoarded for special occasions. When your grasp on reality starts to falter, the Director knows just how much pressure to apply in order to push you over.

When in control, the Director likes to lay long-range plans for the next time she is dominant, and to prepare nasty little revelations for you to discover at carefully timed intervals. She also enjoys picking apart your companions, making cutting observations that will poison any friendships you had made on the other side. The fact that the Director is usually quite accurate doesn't help matters, either.

• **The Freak** — Everything that you ever were ashamed of wanting to do is what the Freak lives for. Gleeefully perverse, the Freak is an expression of pure self-hatred. It revels in taking each of your imperfections and holding it up to the light, so that it can be ridiculed by the rest of the world. Anything you're ashamed of doing, the Freak will encourage you to do, and the more you resist the more insistent he'll become. Once you give in, though, he'll turn around and point out how perverted you are, how sick your wants are, and how no one else would sink as low as you. This won't keep him, however, from reminding you how good all of those perversions felt, and how enjoyable it would be to taste their pleasures again.... Shame and abandon are the Freak's favorite weapons, and he uses them as often as he can.

A Freak in control is a frightening thing. He'll take your darkest desires and play them out for the rest of the world, leaving you to explain your actions when his control fades. Of course, excavating others' dirty little secrets is almost as much fun, as far as the Freak is concerned.





• **The Leech** — Wearing on the will and nerves like sandpaper, the Leech gets its way through whining and cajoling, begging and throwing tantrums. It's a black hole for attention and affection, and no matter how often you give in to its demands, it's never enough. No matter how much you give the Leech, it will want more, and won't relent until its wants are satisfied for the moment. Of course, the price of giving in again — and again, and again, and again — is to go deeper and deeper in debt, sliding slowly toward Oblivion. Childish and selfish, the Leech can never be satisfied, and every time you give it what it wants, it's that much harder to say no the next time.

When the Leech takes control, it attempts to work its wiles on others in order to extract whatever sustenance they offer. If permitted, it will drain everyone around it dry, then discard the husks and set out to look for new victims. As far as the Leech is concerned, everything others have and more is just its rightful due. It's *owed* the world on a silver platter and more besides, and woe betide any who try to tell a Leech otherwise.

• **The Martyr** — Noble self-sacrifice has its place, but what the Martyr offers is a shallow mockery instead. By constantly demanding that you give of yourself because you can take the pain better than anyone else can, the Martyr cheapens your faith and indulges your arrogance. Claiming your sacrifice will bring about a greater good, the Martyr will then

take pleasure in demonstrating that your pain didn't do anything at all, and that all of your suffering was pointless. Still, that won't keep it from urging you to give up yourself for others every chance it gets. After all, it's just looking for a good excuse to take the easy way out.

When the Martyr takes control, it will attempt to maneuver you into situations where, no matter what, in order to escape you'll have to give up something important. The Martyr also tries to arrange for witnesses whenever possible, so that its very public sacrifices can be used to shame others into similarly self-destructive acts.

• **The Monster** — Brutally direct, the Monster is all about pain and greed. Whatever it wants, it will command you to take. Whatever it hates, it will demand that you destroy. If you refuse, it will try to destroy you as well, for it cannot stand to be balked in any way. There's no compromise or subtlety in the Monster, and often it's the most dignified and delicate wraiths who have a Monster lurking behind their eyes.

To see the Monster dominant is to see a foreshadowing of Spectrehood. It will lay waste to anything in its path, taking what it wants and destroying everything else out of sheer spite. Guttural and vulgar, the Monster rarely has anything to say that isn't an obscenity. Why bother being polite to anyone else when they're nothing more than obstacles to your pleasure?

• **The Parent** — No one else can love you as much, or as well, as the Parent. No one else can take care of you as well, or make you as happy. The Parent even accepts all of your little imperfections, which she'll harp on endlessly in order to prove to you that she loves you despite your nearly infinite flaws. She'll protect you from people who don't have your best interests at heart, and only she can decide who those are (usually, it's everyone else you know). You're her darling baby, so naturally she'll help you with those hard decisions, and even make them for you. Mother knows best, even if you break her heart by never listening to her and running around with those Renegade hooligans....

When in command, the Parent will seek to insulate you from any corrupting or dangerous influences (i.e., anyone and anything else). To accomplish this, it will do and say anything to alienate those who care about you, using the fact that they could be driven off as proof that they weren't really your friends, anyway. It just goes to show that she's right, and that no one else can love you the way that she does.

• **The Perfectionist** — Nothing you do will ever be good enough for the Perfectionist. Perform seven impossible things before breakfast, and he'll be screaming at you for not having pulled off eight. Any imperfection can serve as a launching point for a tirade; any flaw will be a magnet for withering sarcasm. By playing up your inevitable errors, the Perfectionist inspires your self-hatred and saps your confidence in your own abilities. Then, once your confidence is shot, he'll be more than happy to step in and show you how to do things right. If you had any sense at all, you'd turn things over to him permanently and make sure that everything got done properly the first time. It's not like you're capable of it, after all.

When in control, the Perfectionist will take every example to criticize whatever or whoever catches his eye. He'll also take the opportunity to embroil you in impossible scenarios, anxiously awaiting your inevitable failure. Still, at least he doesn't play favorites. When everyone around him is equally flawed, one target's as good as the next.

• **The Pusher** — The Pusher will always be glad to help you achieve the impossible. He wants you to think of him as a friend, a friend you can always ask for help. Of course, the price for the Pusher's help is always too high, and if you don't pay, he'll extract it with interest. Every so often when you're counting on him, he'll decide that you need to appreciate him more, and he'll withhold that support you were counting on so desperately.

When the Pusher is in charge, he'll do everything he can to put you in situations you'll need his help to escape. The quicker he can make you rack up a debt to him, the happier he is. Then again, an unhappy Pusher can be unpleasant indeed....

• **The Rationalist** — The Rationalist will give you all of the right reasons for all of the wrong decisions. Calmly leading you down the path to Oblivion, it offers rationales and explanations for why you should do what it says. It offers proofs for the wisdom of everything it tells you, making all of its suggestions seem so *sensible*. The more you argue, the tighter its bonds of logic become, and the more

foolish you feel for resisting. In many ways the Rationalist is similar to the Director, but without the Director's personal involvement. As far as the Rationalist is concerned, sending the Psyche to Oblivion is an intellectual exercise, albeit a challenging one.

When dominant, the Rationalist takes precise, well-ordered steps toward the Void. It will sabotage your long-range plans and set in motion ones that superficially look better; it will systematically make you enemies and alienate or eliminate your friends. There's no sense in taking one's time giving in to Oblivion, is there, when it's assured of winning in the end? The Rationalist is just making the surrender more efficient.

## Step Two: Angst

Just as Pathos fuels a wraith, Angst powers her Shadow. A wraith's Angst rating is indicative of the amount of negative emotional energy she is carrying around with her. Angst is the measure of a wraith's fear, pain and alienation, and the more of these counterproductive energies a wraith harbors, the higher her Angst score is. The higher the Angst score, of course, the more powerful the Shadow is.

A wraith's permanent Angst score always starts less than or equal to her permanent Willpower score. To determine a Shadow's starting Angst, roll a number of dice equivalent to the wraith's Willpower against difficulty 6. The number of successes indicates the number of permanent Angst points the wraith starts play with. For purposes of this roll only, "1s" do not cancel out successes, and every wraith must start play with at least one point of permanent Angst. Wraiths without permanent Angst immediately Transcend, leading to very short chronicles.

Like Willpower, Angst can be spent (by the Shadow only) in order to achieve automatic successes. Unlike Willpower, however, temporary Angst can exceed its permanent rating, up to a maximum of 10. When a wraith's temporary Angst exceeds her Willpower, the Shadow can attempt to usurp control of the Corpus by means of a Catharsis roll (see page 176). On the other hand, the Shadow can elect to keep stockpiling temporary Angst. When temporary Angst reaches 10, the Shadow immediately trades it in for another point of permanent Angst. When permanent Angst reaches 10, the Shadow assumes command permanently, and the wraith becomes a Spectre. Of course, the change may not always be obvious to her friends....

Temporary Angst ratings tend to vary wildly during play. Shadows use Angst to power their special abilities, called Thorns, and can expend vast amounts of energy in their war against the Psyche. On the other hand, a great many Arcanoi give their wielders temporary Angst, and all Shadows have Dark Passions which can be fed as well. It is up to the Shadowguide to keep track of how much temporary Angst a wraith has, and to convert it to permanent form if necessary. It is also the Shadowguide's responsibility to call for Catharsis rolls when appropriate. A wraith should never know quite how strong her Shadow is, after all; the uncertainty is part of what keeps life interesting.

## Step Three: Dark Passions

Just as a wraith has Passions, her dark side has *Dark Passions*. These function in roughly the same manner that Passions do, feeding the Shadow instead of the Psyche. Each Dark Passion should be phrased in the same way a Passion is, with a brief imperative description of the Dark Passion and its core emotion following in parentheses. Each Dark Passion also has a rating to indicate how strong the obsession is. For example, a wraith who was a frustrated artist in life might have the Dark Passion **Destroy works of art better than those I could have made (Envy) 3**. Dark Passions often reverse a wraith's regular Passions, driving the Shadow to hurt those the Psyche wants to protect, etc. On the other hand, some Dark Passions can parallel normal Passions, and many have nothing to do with a wraith's Passions at all.

Dark Passions can be increased during the freebie points section of Shadow creation, but each wraith starts with seven points.

### Creating Dark Passions

One of the most difficult aspects of creating a Shadow is coming up with appropriate Dark Passions. Often, it's enough to take a wraith's normal Passions and invert them. A wraith whose Passion is **Protect my wife (Love) 5** might well have a Dark Passion of **Destroy my wife (Hate) 4** to reflect both that the Psyche is stronger than the Shadow, and that the Shadow usually wishes to counter the Psyche's desires on general principle.

On the other hand, not all Dark Passions are linked directly to Passions. A Dark Passion based around the emotion Self-Hatred, for example, could be **Dive into a Nihil (Self-Hatred) 2**, while a Rage-based Dark Passion could simply be **Cause random destruction (Rage) 3**. Other emotions that commonly serve as the core for Dark Passions include Envy, Lust, Twisted Love, Greed, Hate and Fear.

Some Dark Passions stem instead from what the character does. A wraith skilled in Argos might have a Dark Passion that reads **Lose people in the Tempest (Hate) 3**. An Artificer could have a Dark Passion like **Soulforge all of my Circlemates (Greed) 3**. In the end, the most important thing is to draw an emotion that the character is likely to feel and suppress, and a logical action for them to take in connection to this emotion.

## Step Four: Freebie Points

When the basics of Shadow creation are finished, there are still 10 freebie points left with which you can round out your Shadow's personality and abilities. Freebies can purchase additional Angst (permanent or temporary), new or stronger Dark Passions, or special abilities Shadows have, called Thorns. A wraith's permanent Angst score can never exceed her permanent Willpower score at the start of play, but temporary Angst can be bought up to nine. Furthermore, while additional dots in Dark Passions can be purchased with freebies, the number of dots in Dark Passions can never exceed the number of dots a wraith has in her regular Passions.

### Thorns

Thorns are certain, unique powers the Shadow has at its disposal. These range from minor tricks to potent abilities that can threaten a wraith's very existence, and their use is entirely up to the Shadowguide. The Shadow can also use Thorns (when applicable) during Catharsis.

**Spectre Prestige: 1 point/level** — Many Spectres have the ability to communicate with wraiths' Shadows. Shadows with this Thorn have garnered the respect of the Shadow-Eaten, and will be treated accordingly.

**Dark Allies: 1 point/level** — A Shadow with Dark Allies regularly communicates and plots with Spectres, and can call on them for aid.

**Tainted Relic: 1 point/level** — This is a relic that only manifests during Catharsis, and the number of points indicates its potency. A Tainted Relic will always manifest when the Shadow does, even if it has been "lost" or "destroyed." A wraith's Tainted Relic will always have some significance to him, even if he doesn't admit it.

**Infamy: 1 point/level** — Memoriam for the Shadow, Infamy is the measure of how much fear and loathing the wraith still inspires in the living. Just as Pathos can accumulate for the Psyche, Angst can collect for the Shadow.

Every time a wraith with Infamy falls into Slumber, the Shadowguide rolls one point for each point of the Thorn possessed. The difficulty on this roll is 6, and each success gives the Shadow a point of temporary Angst. Botches remove temporary Angst, and just might cause the living to think more kindly of the wraith...

### Freebie Point Costs

- Permanent Angst — 5 points per dot
- Temporary Angst — 2 points per dot
- Dark Passions — 1 point per dot
- Thorns — Variable

No more than five points of Infamy can be taken, and an Infamous wraith had best be prepared to deal with the consequences of the hatred of the living.

**Death's Sigil: 1 to 3 points** — Death's Sigil is a prominent sign of Oblivion's touch on a character that manifests no matter where she goes. Each Sigil is unique; one wraith might have wings of choking smoke, another might leave footprints of sea water in the Skinlands, and a third could exude the odor of a charnel house. This Thorn naturally makes a wraith very distinctive, with all of the advantages and disadvantages this offers. Only by spending a Willpower point can a wraith turn off the effects of this Thorn for a scene.

The more points put into the Thorn, the more pronounced its effect is. A one-point Sigil might not be that noticeable, while the three-point version could go so far as to alter the effects of the wraith's Arcanoi.

**Shadow Traits: 2 points** — The Shadow can purchase one dot of any Attribute or Ability, but these extra points are only available during Catharsis. This Thorn can be purchased as many times as freebie points permit during Shadow creation.

**Aura of Corruption: 2 points** — Through this Thorn's effects, the Shadow somehow defiles the wraith's presentation of herself, making her presence unpleasant to other wraiths. The effect of Aura of Corruption is generally not grotesque; instead it is subtly disturbing. Indeed, it may have no overt impact, merely serving to make others uncomfortable.

If a wraith has Aura of Corruption, all difficulties on social interaction rolls are raised by + 2. This Thorn can be purchased only once.

**Shadow Call: 2 points** — Shadow Call allows a wraith's Shadow to summon nearby Spectres. This Thorn can only be used when a wraith is in the Tempest or standing at the mouth of a Nihil, otherwise it has no effect. The Shadow Call is audible on the edge of a wraith's consciousness as a thin, piercing shriek; in time most wraiths will come to recognize its significance.

To make a Shadow Call, the Shadowguide spends a temporary Angst point and rolls against his permanent Angst score (difficulty 7). The number of successes indicates the number of Spectres summoned, however, the type of Spectre that answers the Shadow Call is entirely up to the Storyteller.

**Pact of Doom: 3 points** — This Thorn is the apocryphal deal with the devil. If a wraith has this Thorn, she and her Shadow can negotiate a pact by means of which the Shadow will teach her a predetermined number of levels in an Arcanos. In exchange, the Shadow acquires permanent Angst equivalent to the number of levels taught. The terms of the Pact must be agreed upon by both Psyche and Shadow, as the arrangement is entirely consensual.





The knowledge that the Shadow imparts under this Thorn comes from the vast Spectral hive-mind, and does not reflect the knowledge of the Shadow itself. Only Shadows with Pact of Doom can access this knowledge, and only when empowered by a Pact. At no other time can a Shadow call to the hive-mind for this sort of knowledge or power.

**Trick of the Light: 3 points** — By using this Thorn, the Shadow subtly alters the Psyche's perception of the scene. When the Thorn is invoked (at a cost of one temporary Angst per scene), the Shadowguide should inform the Storyteller what exactly the wraith perceives. The Storyteller then relays this to the player.

Trick of the Light is not limited to sight, and any of the other senses can be affected by its use. However, only one sense can be affected per scene.

**Bad Luck: 3 points** — For each Angst point a Shadow with Bad Luck spends, the wraith's player is forced to re-roll one die (Shadowguide's choice). The use of Bad Luck does not have to be announced until after the original roll has been made.

**Shadowed Face: 3 points** — With this Thorn, the Shadow completely changes its Psyche's appearance when it takes over. Shadowed Face allows the Shadow to have one other visage (*not* a variety), which can be either known or unknown to the wraith's associates.

For an additional freebie point, the Shadow can have the option of assuming the Shadowed Face or retaining the wraith's original appearance during Catharsis.

**Tainted Touch: 4 points** — This Thorn makes a wraith something of a Typhoid Mary among the Restless. When afflicted with Tainted Touch, a wraith spreads Oblivion with the brush of a finger.

Whenever a wraith with Tainted Touch comes in contact with another wraith's Corpus, he must roll three dice (difficulty 6). The number of successes equals the number of temporary Angst points that the victim takes. However, the victim can make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) to resist, and every success on this roll cancels one of the offender's successes.

A wraith with Tainted Touch can spend a Willpower point to turn the effect off for a scene.

**Shadowplay: 5 points** — Shadowplay allows a wraith who has used up all of his actions during a turn to get another one, but at a cost. If the Shadow offers, the wraith can take an additional action, but he loses a point of Pathos and gains a point of Angst. The wraith cannot ask for the additional action; the decision as to whether or not it's available is entirely up to the Shadowguide.

While the cost of activating this Thorn is deceptively low, a wraith who comes to rely upon it can feed her Shadow's strength very quickly, and also can find herself in dire straits when the extra action she was counting on isn't forthcoming in a crisis.

**Shadow Familiar: 5 points** — While the Shadow stays within a wraith's consciousness, a Shadow Familiar can serve as its eyes, ears and feet. A minor servant of Oblivion, the Shadow Familiar remains in constant contact with the Shadow and feeds it information and suggestions. Shadow Familiars can come in any form, but all are both small and harmless. If threatened, a Shadow Familiar will run away; if attacked, it will dive into the Tempest.

If a wraith's Shadow Familiar is destroyed, another one will arrive within a week to take its place. However, this one will be considerably more circumspect in its dealings with the Shadow, as even creatures of Oblivion have a sense of self-preservation. Most Shadow Familiars take the form of ravens, rats or other creatures of the carrion heap.

**Freudian Slip: 5 points** — At the cost of one Angst point, the Shadow can force a wraith to make a sudden, involuntary action or make a quick, unedited statement. Freudian Slip can also be used to put an unbidden thought into a wraith's mind. To resist this Thorn, the wraith must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Two successes are necessary to counter the effects of Freudian Slip.

**Shadow Life: 5 points** — Whenever a wraith with this Thorn Slumbers, his Shadow takes control of their shared Corpus and sets out to do its worst. This will lead to no end of trouble for the Psyche, as he will constantly find himself encountering situations his Shadow has created and people whom his Shadow has wronged. Of course, all of the blame for the Shadow's actions will land squarely on the Psyche.

Wraiths with this Thorn are aware that their Shadows do get up and walk around, but have no way of knowing what precisely their dark halves do.

If characters wish, they can invest an additional freebie point in this Thorn and have their characters be unaware of their Shadow Life.

The player, not the Shadowguide, controls the character while Shadow Life is active.

**Devil's Dare: 7 points** — Devil's Dare is the emotional equivalent of a game of "chicken." To use this Thorn, the Shadowguide invests a number of temporary Angst points (marked off immediately) and writes down something that she dares the Psyche to do before the end of the session. The difficulty of the dare determines the cost, and if a player feels that the number is excessive, she can petition her Storyteller to have it lowered.

The dare itself consists of an action that the Shadow is daring the Psyche to take. It must be within the wraith's capabilities to perform; (i.e., "Tell the Centurion off to his face" would be acceptable while "Map the Labyrinth" would not) and an impossible dare simply loses the invested Angst. If, by the end of the session, the dared Psyche has not managed to work the dare into her actions, she loses a number of temporary Willpower points equal to the number of Angst points invested in the dare.

## Example of Shadow Creation

*In the darkness the shadows move*

*In the darkness the game is real*

— Richard Thompson, "Shoot Out the Lights"



he Shadow Archetype that immediately leaps out at Annys for Robin is the Perfectionist. This Shadow is Robin's Critic Nature with no restraint and no qualms; the same intelligence that searches out hidden flaws can also relentlessly exploit buried fears.

To establish Robin's Angst rating, Joshua rolls seven dice (equal to Robin's Willpower). Against the difficulty of 6, he comes up with five successes; the Shadow will start out with five permanent Angst points. Next, Annys talks about potential Dark Passions with David, who's going to control Robin's Shadow. Robin's most obvious weakness is his paranoia about his series of affairs with students. Therefore, Annys and David conclude that the Shadow will do its best not only to get Robin's secret out in the open (while constantly assuring him that of course he can and must keep it hidden), but also to reinforce his sense of remorse over his repeated losses of control. Joshua distills that into **Ruin Robin's reputation among the living (Self-Loathing)**, and assigns it a rating of 3. David then suggests that whereas Robin wanted to demonstrate his superiority to his fellow scholars, the Shadow would rather reach out to destroy all rivals. This produces a Dark Passion of **Hurt competing scholars (Hate)**, with a rating of 2. After a little more joint brainstorming, Annys puts the last two points into **Ruin Robin's protégé's career (Jealousy)**. After all, to the Shadow's way of thinking it's not fair she lived while Robin died.

With the 10 freebie points allotted for the Shadow's Traits, Annys first purchases Pact of Doom. Robin's eagerness to expand his areas of knowledge makes him particularly vulnerable to this Thorn. She spends three more points on the Trick of the Light Thorn, knowing how heavily Robin relies on his behavioral observations. David then encourages her to put two points into a Dark Passion opposing Robin's desire to safeguard his beloved copy of *Holinshead*. Annys does this, deciding on the Dark Passion **Destroy Robin's favorite book (Spite) 2**. With the two points she has left, Annys gives the Shadow one dot of Temporary Angst. Robin's Shadow is now effectively complete. Annys, David and Joshua then continue to discuss both the character and the Shadow until all three of them are sure that they understand the interaction of Robin's two personae and are comfortable with the roles that each of them will play.



# SHADOW

Psyche: *Robin*

Archetype: *Perfectionist*

Shadowguide Player: *David*

## Thorns

<i>Pact of doom</i>
<i>Trick of the light</i>

## Angst

●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□

## Psyche Willpower

●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	○	○	○
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---

## Dark Passions

<i>Ruin Robin's reputation</i>	○○○○○
<i>(Self-leathing)</i>	●●●○○
<i>Hurt competing scholars (Hope)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Ruin Robin's protégés</i>	○○○○○
<i>Career (Jealousy)</i>	●●○○○
<i>Destroy Robin's favorite book (Spite)</i>	○○○○○
	●●○○○

## Angst

*The wretched are the faithful; 'tis their fate  
To have all feeling, save the one, decay,  
And every passion into one dilate,  
As rapid rivers into ocean pour;  
But ours is fathomless, and hath no shore.*

—George Gordon, Lord Byron, *The Lament of Tasso*



Angst embodies the inner torment of unfulfilled passions, self-doubt, guilt and unfinished business — all the things that result in the formation of a wraith. It is the nightmare that hovers on the edge of dreams, the devouring worm of defeat that eats away at hopes and desires, the unimaginable doom that lurks just around the corner. In short, Angst is the mind's own bogeyman, always ready to spoil the party. It is the negative energy that drives a soul toward self-destruction. Just as the Psyche thrives on Willpower, the Shadow needs Angst to power its ambitions. Because of this need, a wraith's Shadow is ever on the alert for opportunities to garner Angst.

## In the Beginning

A wraith's initial Angst rating is determined during the generation of her Shadow. This score represents the number of permanent points of Angst a new wraith character possesses, and also indicates the relative strength of the character's Shadow. During the course of play, a character's Angst rating may increase or decrease in response to the events of a story and the actions of the character (or her Shadow).

There are two kinds of Angst: temporary and permanent. Unlike most Traits, a Shadow's temporary Angst score may exceed its permanent rating, up to a maximum of 10 points. When a Shadow has accumulated 10 points of temporary Angst, it may trade these points for one point of permanent Angst, thus increasing its own strength.

The player of a wraith character should never know for certain how many points of Angst her Shadow possesses. Either the Storyteller or the player's Shadowguide should keep track of a wraith's Angst. A Storyteller may give a player vague hints as to how powerful her Shadow is, but the exact Angst rating should not be given out. This reflects the uncertainty of a wraith's tenuous existence on the borders of Oblivion and her ignorance of just how powerful her dark side really is.

# The Pitfalls of the Harried Soul

Angst symbolizes the power of Oblivion working within a wraith. The more Angst a character possesses, the stronger her Shadow grows and the easier it is for the Shadow to assume control of her actions. Since the Shadow's ultimate goal is nothing less than the destruction of the pesky Psyche which prevents it from fulfilling its darkest desires, it will attempt to place the Psyche in situations that offer high Angst potential. Because a Shadow uses Angst to power its activities, the more times it can force the Psyche to compromise itself, the more Angst the Shadow garners and the easier it is for the Shadow to work its will.

## Acquiring Angst

The continual torment of life in the Shadowlands makes acquiring Angst inevitable, and opportunities for doing so are numerous. The natural condition of a wraith character's existence embodies internal conflict, and it is this inner war that results in the consistent accumulation of Angst. A wraith character may gain Angst in one of several ways. Unless otherwise specified, all Angst gained is temporary Angst, which remains until spent or until converted into permanent Angst points.

- **Arcanoi:** The use of certain Arcanoi by a Psyche-controlled character automatically results in the accumulation of either temporary or permanent Angst (see Chapter 5). For example, a wraith who uses Castigate • (Coax) to acquire additional dice from her Shadow gains a point of temporary Angst each time she uses this Arcanos. Likewise, a wraith who uses Puppetry ••••• (Obliterate the Soul) to permanently possess a living human runs the risk of drastically increasing her Angst rating due to the exploitative and inhumane nature of the action.

**Note:** If the Shadow dominates a character when these Arcanoi are used, however, the Angst that would normally be gained is, instead, deducted from the Shadow's current Angst rating.

## Harrowing and Angst

A wraith who survives a Destruction Harrowing may receive a reduction in temporary Angst as a reward for good roleplaying or clever handling of her situation. This reflects the increased confidence and sense of relief experienced by emerging victorious from a situation which threatens the character's very existence. Because a wraith rarely goes looking for an opportunity to experience a Harrowing, it should not be considered as a natural way to lose Angst.

- **Shadow Dice:** In critical situations, a wraith's Shadow can offer her Psyche extra dice to increase the chances of successfully accomplishing some action. Each one on those Shadow Dice results in one point of temporary Angst. The Shadow can offer up to five extra dice to any single roll.

- **Shadow Passions:** When the Shadow indulges its own Passions, a character's Angst score may increase. A roll against the appropriate Dark Passion (difficulty 7) results in the addition of one point of temporary Angst for every success. For example, if Morgan's Shadow has the Dark Passion **Acquire as many relics as possible (Greed)**, when Morgan looks a little too enviously at his friend Sascha's relic knife, Morgan's Shadowguide would be free to make a Dark Passion roll. Note that in this case, however, Morgan is acting greedily of his own volition, and not because the Shadow forced him to.

The Shadow may also attempt to impose on someone else an emotion that powers one of its own Dark Passions (difficulty 9), gaining one point of temporary Angst per success. If Morgan's Shadow pestered him into ogling Sascha's knife against his better judgment, then this sort of Dark Passion roll could be made.

- **Storyteller Discretion:** The Angst rating of a character should also reflect the ongoing struggle to deal with the external and internal torment of wraithly existence in ways that are not as clearly defined by a system of rules. Roleplaying scenes in which a character confronts doubts, fears or external dangers may warrant "awarding" a point of temporary Angst to the character by the Storyteller. The player must agree that such an increase in Angst is appropriate to the situation, since such a decision is not determined by the result of a roll but is, instead, achieved through mutual consent.

## Losing Angst

Gaining Angst is easy; losing it is hard, but not impossible. There are a number of ways in which a Shadow can lose Angst (usually at the instigation of the Psyche):

- **Botching a roll when the Shadow is dominant:** Shadows hate failure. A botch on any roll made by a Shadow-dominated character results in the loss of one point of temporary Angst per one rolled above the number of successes.

- **Castigation:** Once the exclusive province of the Pardoners Guild, this Arcanos is specifically geared toward the reduction of Angst. Unless a wraith possesses Castigate ••••• (Defiance), however, she may not use this Arcanos on herself, but must seek out another character to perform the appropriate rituals or actions necessary to rid her Shadow of some of its Angst. In the Shadowlands, confession really is good for the soul.

- **Shadow-dominated use of certain Arcanoi:** Some Arcanoi automatically increase a character's Angst. Use of these Arcanoi when the Shadow is dominant, however, causes the amount of Angst that would normally be gained to be lost instead. Similarly, when a Shadow-dominated character fails or botches a roll involving any Arcanoi, Angst is lost rather than gained.

The following actions *may* lead to the accumulation of Angst by a wraith character. In some cases, performing certain activities automatically results in increasing a wraith's temporary or permanent Angst. In others, a roll determines whether or not Angst is gained.

- Being forced into an action that contradicts a personal code of morality or honor.
- Experiencing a situation that arouses a state of inner turmoil or external helplessness.
- Failure to succeed in accomplishing a vital task.
- Inaction due to indecision at a critical moment.
- Involuntary destruction of a Fetter.
- Loss of a Passion through neglect.
- Making a decision that later proves to be disastrous.
- Using Arcanoi that cause an increase in Angst.

**Note:** Losing Angst in this fashion is never intentional. It is up to the Storyteller to monitor carefully those situations in which a Shadow-controlled character seeks to use an Arcanos in order to make certain that the action is not primarily directed toward the possible reduction of Angst.

• **Storyteller Discretion:** When a character is making a serious effort to rid herself of unwanted Angst, the Storyteller may decide to reduce the character's temporary or permanent Angst rating in response to good roleplaying. This kind of reward should be used sparingly, so as not to devalue the difficulty of losing Angst. As usual in situations that do not involve dice rolls, this should be a mutual agreement between player and Storyteller.

## Catharsis

Sometimes a wraith's Psyche is not strong enough to sustain the continual battle against her darker impulses or her will to self-destruction. Oblivion's temptations are many and subtle, offering a wraith release from the perpetual torment of her existence in the Shadowlands. When a wraith's tenuous hold on her higher self (her Psyche) begins to weaken, the Shadow is quick to take advantage.

Whenever a Shadow's temporary Angst rating exceeds her Psyche's permanent Willpower, the Shadow may attempt to seize control. If the Shadow is successful, it assumes control over the actions of the character. Although the player continues to run her character, she must now conform to the nature and motivations of her wraith's Shadow.

**The Catharsis Roll:** In order for the Shadow to take control of a character, the Shadow and the Psyche face off against one another. The Shadow spends a point of temporary Angst and rolls on her adjusted temporary Angst rating. The Psyche may resist by rolling her permanent Willpower, plus any Eidolon dice she may possess (see "Eidolon", page 129). The difficulty for both rolls is 6, and the side with the higher number of successes gains (or, in the case of the Psyche, retains) control of the character. If the Shadow succeeds in seizing control, it dominates the wraith's actions for the entire scene following the takeover attempt. Afterward, control of the wraith reverts to the Psyche.

While the Shadow is dominant, it may pursue any of its own ends without interference from its Psyche (the character's normal personality). The Shadow may seek to fulfill its Dark Passions, making use of its Psyche's Arcanoi in addition to its own Thorns. Its actions will not result in gaining Pathos for its Psyche, although it must use the Psyche's Pathos to power any Arcanoi it uses. It cannot, however, expend Willpower, nor may it reduce the character's Pathos below 1.

When the Shadow is in control, it may attempt to keep its actions secret from the Psyche. A wraith can only attempt to resist this effect by rolling her Eidolon dice against difficulty 7, assuming that she has any. Wraiths who do not possess Eidolon or who have used up their Eidolon dice for a session do not get to make any sort of resistance roll, and they (along with any wraiths who fail their Eidolon roll) will often find themselves haunted later by the actions taken by their Shadows during Catharsis.

## A Suggestion...

Some troupes may want to keep the Shadowguide of a character undergoing Catharsis involved in the action, even after the Shadow has assumed control. In this instance, it is suggested that while a character's regular player is portraying the Shadow, the Shadowguide take the part of the subdued Psyche and offer that part of the character's perspective on events.

A Psyche involved in this manner can not offer "Psyche Dice," nor can it do anything but advise. However, this does allow the Shadowguide to remain a part of the action. Plus, the experience of playing the Psyche, even under such difficult circumstances, will aid in the Shadowguide's understanding of the character she is trying to subvert.

This is by no means a mandatory rule, and is recommended only for advanced Wraith troupes.

# Shadowguiding

*Look, we two together must bear  
piecework and parts, as if they were  
the whole. But be careful. Above all,  
don't plant me inside your heart. I'd outgrow you.  
But I will guide my master's hand and will say:  
Here. This is Esau beneath his pelt.*

— Rainer Maria Rilke, *The Sonnets To Orpheus* (XVI)



The existence of the Shadow personalizes the lure of Oblivion for every wraith. This constant temptation to surrender to the inner darkness is made immediate through the use of a Shadowguide, who controls a wraith's Shadow independently of the player of the wraith's Psyche. It is this conflict between Psyche and Shadow that forms the heart of a **Wraith** game, and which sets up innumerable opportunities for uniquely intense storytelling experiences.

Usually, during a **Wraith** game, a player will play not only her character's Psyche but will also "guide" the Shadow of another player. Acting as a Shadowguide places a great responsibility on a player, since she will, in effect, share in the Storyteller's ability to direct the course of a **Wraith** story.

## Playing a Shadowguide

*And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.*  
— Genesis 3: 13

Just as a wraith's Psyche strives toward a personal goal, her Shadow also seeks to achieve its own ends. For most Shadows, this involves the destruction of the Psyche and the ultimate union with Oblivion. The Shadow has a number of means at its disposal to accomplish its tasks, but some of these are accessible only when it is in control of the wraith. To gain control, the Shadow must strive to weaken the Psyche. A favorite way of doing this is by tempting the Psyche, undermining it with suggestions that will lead it into situations favorable to the Shadow. Providing this undercurrent of seduction is one of the most important functions of the Shadowguide.

## Responsibilities

In order to play a Shadowguide successfully, a player must be familiar with the Shadow she controls and, to a lesser extent, with the general motivations of the Shadow's Psyche. Although a Shadowguide need not know every detail of her Psyche's character, she should at least have some working knowledge of that wraith's primary motivations, Abilities, Arcanoi, Passions and Fetters. The Shadow's character sheet will pro-

vide the necessary information on the powers and abilities of the Shadow as well as its current Angst rating. During the course of play, as a Shadow's Angst rating increases or decreases, the Shadowguide must keep track of these changes.

Besides recording the fluctuations of a Shadow's Angst, a Shadowguide also needs to play the role of tempter, embodying the dark desires and self-destructive impulses buried beneath the Psyche of the wraith.

At appropriate times during the game, the Shadowguide may announce that she is attempting to take control of the Psyche by means of a Catharsis roll. If the Catharsis roll succeeds and the Shadow dominates the wraith character, the control of the character remains in the hands of her original player (not the Shadowguide). The player, however, must see that her character behaves in accordance with the nature of her Shadow, even if this means that the character takes actions its Psyche would not normally permit. Although the Shadowguide does not control the Psyche during periods of Catharsis, she should be allowed to advise the Psyche's player on how best to play the Shadow. The Shadowguide is, after all, intimately familiar with the Shadow's motivations. The Storyteller may want to act as a mediator to make certain that the Shadowguide does not use her advisory capacity to undermine the ability of the Psyche's player to control her character's actions.

## A Matter of Trust

It is recommended that at the beginning of each session, player and Shadowguide sit down for a few minutes to discuss the character the Shadowguide will be tempting. Some players may balk at this, fearing that by sharing the secrets of their character with their Shadowguide, they are also giving the Shadowguide's character an unfair advantage in the form of knowledge of their Passions and Fetters.

While unscrupulous players may take information they learn out of character (i.e., as Shadowguide) and let their regular characters use it, **Wraith** players should be mature enough to separate what they know from what their characters know, and to trust their fellow players not to "metagame" or cheat. If you can trust your fellow players to report their dice rolls honestly and create their character honestly, you should be able to trust them to keep your character's secrets.

## Techniques

A Shadowguide interacts with the wraith whose Shadow she controls by making suggestions during play, offering advice or courses of action that will further the Shadow's own ends while seeming to assist the Psyche in accomplishing its goals.

Since the Shadowguide will also, in most cases, also be playing a wraith (whose Shadow is, in turn, controlled by another player), she must be careful to use different voices or tones of voice for each persona. Using a whisper to signify the voice of the Shadow will make it clear that it is the Shadow and not the player's own character who is speaking. It is also possible to make or buy a mask representing the Shadow, so that when a Shadowguide wishes to speak, she can hold the mask in front of her face as a visible sign that she is acting as such.

Although the Shadow is a constant presence within each wraith, it is not always active. Sometimes a Shadow simply watches the actions of her Psyche, waiting for the opportune moment in which to act. A Shadowguide need not constantly interact with her Shadow's Psyche. In fact, a constant barrage of suggestions and temptations can weaken the effectiveness of the Shadow's discourse, inuring the Psyche to its lures. The most effective Shadow is one that strikes without warning, biding its time until the perfect moment to make an offer its Psyche can't refuse.

## Temptations

Unfortunately, it is all too easy for a Shadowguide to overplay her role. When a Shadowguide's "inner voice" becomes so frequent that it prevents the Psyche's player from participating in the events around her, the story inevitably suffers. In addition, the player who finds herself constantly stepped on by her Shadowguide will lose enjoyment in the game.

**Wraith** is a multi-faceted game that necessitates a high degree of cooperation from everyone involved. Not only must the Storyteller be prepared to deal with players who have taken on dual roles (those of their own wraiths and of other players' Shadows), the players must be sensitive as well to the potentials for abuse that arise from their limited power over other players' characters.

Ideally, each player should possess the maturity to allow other players an equal degree of participation in the game. Knowing when another player (as opposed to the player's character) is feeling overwhelmed by her Shadowguide is a skill that must be encouraged in order for a **Wraith** game to succeed on all levels. Sometimes, during play, it becomes difficult to differentiate between the player and her character, but this difference is critical to maintain in a **Wraith** chronicle.

Shadowguides must take care to direct their comments as the Shadow to the *character* whose Psyche they control — *not* the player of that character. Otherwise, personal problems can arise between players, leading not only to the ero-

sion of the game but to bad feelings between players as well. Because **Wraith** emphasizes horror, it often touches upon fears that lie very close to individual players, as opposed to their characters. Many players design their characters using certain aspects of their own personalities. It is common for a player who has a fear of falling to transfer that fear to her character's personality as well. When a wraith confronts her Shadow, she confronts her deepest fears. If these fears reflect those of the player, the Shadowguide may inadvertently arouse feelings of anxiety (or Angst) in the player when she actually intends only to affect the character.

Roleplaying games are intended to be enjoyable pastimes. They may involve personal growth as players deal with unusual situations or conflicts in a "safe" environment, but they are not meant to provide therapy. Anytime a player (*not* a character) feels threatened by her Shadowguide, she should indicate to her Shadowguide that she is having a problem. If this is not enough to make the Shadowguide tone down his assault on her character's Psyche or change the direction of his suggestions to one that is easier for the player of the Psyche to handle, it is time for the Storyteller to intervene.

## Who's In Charge

*The faceless watcher, he makes me uneasy  
I can feel him through the floorboards and his presence is creepy  
He informs me that I shall be expelled*  
— Peter Hammill, "A Louse is Not a Home"

Even though **Wraith** players have a greater ability to influence the story than players in many other roleplaying games, the final responsibility for maintaining control of the game rests with the Storyteller. This is particularly important when dealing with excessive behavior on the part of a Shadowguide.

Storytellers have many techniques at their disposal for regaining control of a game that has gotten out of hand. In a **Wraith** game, where each player counts as two characters, insisting on some standards of common courtesy will help to keep players from stepping on each others' toes. Allowing only one person to speak at a time (including the Storyteller) will go a long way toward preventing a multi-player game from descending into total confusion.

It is also helpful if everyone involved in a **Wraith** game understands that they (through their characters) are participating in the creation of a story, and that it is the story itself that provides the framework within which their characters will interact with each other, with their Shadows, and with any Storyteller-controlled characters they may encounter. In the best of all possible worlds, the Storyteller and her players are able to appreciate the external structure of a story and to recognize each character's place in that story while at the same time getting involved in the drama and emotional intensity of the story's events. The most enjoyable games provide the unique opportunity to be both actor and spectator.

## Shadowing the Shadow

When a Shadowguide exceeds the boundaries of her responsibilities or becomes a nuisance to the player of her Shadow's wraith character, to another player or to the Storyteller, the Storyteller needs to take steps to bring the erring player into line.

The first step is to point out to the player that she is causing a problem. This should be done privately, if possible, so as not to cause embarrassment to anyone. If this does not solve the problem, a public (but polite) suggestion to the hyperactive Shadowguide to "back off" may be in order. Reminding the troupe as a whole that the story is supposed to focus primarily on their wraith characters and *not* on their Shadows may also be effective at catching current as well as potential Shadow-offenders. Limiting the number of times during a given storytelling session in which a Shadowguide may attempt to communicate with her Psyche may force a chatty Shadow to be more selective.

If all else fails, and the Shadowguide is either unwilling or unable to amend her behavior, the Storyteller should inform the problem Shadowguide that she will take over control of the Shadow until further notice. This will add an additional burden to the job of Storytelling, but may prove, in the long run, to be less troublesome than contending with a chronic irritant to one of the players.

Alternatively, the Storyteller can attempt to correct the player's behavior within the context of the game, preserving the flow of the story and dealing with the problem at the same time. Comments such as "Your Shadow's constant drone has caused you so much annoyance that your difficulty to resist its attempt to take over your Psyche is lowered to 3!" may offer a strong enough hint to the Shadowguide that her overzealousness is counterproductive. Distracting the problem Shadowguide by engaging her own wraith character in a Psyche-threatening situation may also interrupt intrusive back-seat driving. If the Storyteller chooses this course of action, however, she should be careful that she is not rewarding the Shadowguide's bad behavior by according extra attention to the player. Using a Storyteller-controlled character to Castigate the troublesome Shadow can sometimes weaken it enough to bring the Shadow (and the Shadowguide) under control.

If none of the above suggestions seems to work and Shadowguiding continues to be a problem, the Storyteller may choose to declare a moratorium on all Shadowguiding. Although this may detract from much of the inner conflict vital to portraying wraithly existence, it may be the only way to save a game suffering from runaway Shadows.

Storytellers may find it helpful to have a troupe discussion outside of the game session that focuses on how to play Shadowguides. During this time, any problems between players may be discussed openly. Sometimes other players, especially if they have had Storytelling experience, have valuable suggestions to offer frazzled Storytellers.



## Shadowguiding Do's and Don'ts

- Avoid annoying the player whose Shadow you control. Shadow the character, not the player.
- Choose your opportunities for temptation carefully. Rather than broadsiding your Psyche with general enticements, find out what makes your Shadow's Psyche tick and exploit those weaknesses at appropriate times.
- Don't play your Shadow character at the expense of your own wraith character. If you find yourself Shadowguiding more than a quarter of the time, you're short-changing your own character.
- Embarrassing another player is not fun for anyone. Try to avoid abusing your power as Shadowguide to cause discomfort to the player of your Shadow's Psyche.
- Find out if the player whose Shadow you control has a problem dealing with certain topics or phobias, and avoid those when you are acting as Shadowguide. Do not spoil the game for another player.
- Keep in mind that the Shadow you are playing is a small part of a larger game, and try to keep your actions directed to increasing the drama and enjoyment of the game for yourself and for the other players.
- Make sure you differentiate between your character's voice and that of the Shadow you are playing.
- Remember that the player of a wraith's Psyche controls her character regardless of whether or not the Psyche or the Shadow is dominant. Do not attempt to play someone else's character just because you are playing her Shadow.
- Try to make your Shadow's words and actions entertaining as well as effective. Others are watching what you do.

## The Eidolon and the Shadow

Wraiths who possess dice in Eidolon enjoy an advantage in resisting attempts by their Shadows to take control. The Eidolon represents the Psyche in its purest form, a collection of all of its virtues and higher purposes. As such, it does not have a separate persona or character sheet, nor does it normally communicate directly with a wraith's Psyche. It does, however, provide a bulwark against the lures of the Shadow, serving as a spiritual guide for the Psyche and the antithesis of the Shadow.

Because wraiths are creatures whose imperfections condemn them to life in the Shadowlands, the Eidolon's presence is only dimly perceived. Drawing upon the Eidolon's power has its limitations; in game, a wraith who possesses Eidolon may only use each dot in that Background Trait to add additional dice to her resistance rolls against takeover by the Shadow once per session.

In certain circumstances, a Storyteller may elect to personify the Eidolon, allowing that elusive aspect of a wraith's character to "appear" briefly to the Psyche. In circumstances where a wraith has been particularly effective in resisting the temptations of her Shadow, this glimpse of her higher self may act as a reward for good roleplaying and may contribute to the dramatic impact of the story.

Significant achievements in a wraith's struggle to achieve Transcendence may also be marked by a visitation from the Eidolon. Such an occurrence, however, will not go unnoticed by a wraith's Shadow, and it may redouble its efforts to recover lost territory by stepping up its assault on the Psyche.

## Playing the Shadow

*I will not be driven out of my body...I will not change souls with that bullet-ridden lich in the madhouse!*

— H.P. Lovecraft, "The Thing on the Doorstep"

The ultimate purpose of the Shadowguide is to tempt her Psyche into surrendering control to the Shadow, thus setting up a situation in which the player of the Psyche must play her own worst enemy — her Shadow-ridden character. This happens when a Psyche loses the Catharsis roll. Although this is a situation which most players try to avoid, they need to be aware of the actions their Shadows are likely to take when the opportunity arises.

## The Shadow's Arsenal

- **Dark Passions:** During the period in which the Shadow dominates the character, it may take advantage of its position in the driver's seat of the soul to improve its situation and further its own ends. Just as fulfilling Passions enables a wraith to increase her Pathos, the Shadow may increase its Angst rating through pursuing its Dark Passions.

## Variations on Shadowguiding

Instead of using the guidelines for Shadowguides, a Storyteller and her troupe may wish to experiment with alternate methods of incorporating the Shadow-Psyche conflict into a **Wraith** game.

- Instead of using other players as Shadowguides, a Storyteller may elect to roleplay her players' Shadows herself. Although this places an additional burden on the Storyteller, who must not only orchestrate the events of her story but must interact with her players in the guise of their Shadows, this can be useful in situations involving players who are new to roleplaying or to the Storyteller system. This works best with small troupes (two or three players).

- Storytellers for large troupes of players may wish to consider the use of a "First Mate" as a designated Shadowguide. In this situation, the First Mate acts as record keeper for the Shadow character sheets and takes on the personas of the wraith players' Shadows. This option can also be used to remedy situations in which the presence of too many Shadowguides results in confusion.

- Another possibility for large troupes allows players to choose to run either a wraith character or a Shadow but not both. In this situation, the Shadow takes full control of a wraith's actions when dominant. This is recommended only for advanced troupes, since it requires a great deal of discipline on the part of the players who are running Shadows. Most games focus on the Psyche aspect of a wraith, so Shadow players may find themselves sitting out large portions of any given session. Acting as spectators, however, allows Shadow players the opportunity to observe their Psyches carefully. When they are in control (as the result

of a Catharsis roll), they are thus able to take better advantage of their Psyches' abilities. This is a particularly effective way of emphasizing the helplessness of a wraith's Psyche in the grip of its Shadow as the players of the Psyche must take their turns on the bench while their Shadows run rampant. In order for this option to work, establishing ground rules for Shadow players is essential, and players and Storyteller must trust one another implicitly.

- Allowing a Shadowguide to remain in control during periods of Catharsis presents another variant on dealing with Shadow-Psyche interactions. Normally, Shadowguides act indirectly to influence their Psyches. In this situation, however, the Shadowguide takes over the wraith character for the duration of the Catharsis scene. Care must be taken and an understanding established between paired Shadow-Psyche players to make certain that this sort of shared roleplaying does not result in out-of-game tensions between players. *This option should only be used in advanced troupes, however, and all players involved in the story should be comfortable with this style of play.*

- Shadowguiding by consensus allows all the players to "gang up" on a wraith. In small troupes, it may be possible for everyone to have some familiarity with the Shadows of all the wraith characters, thus enabling them to take turns playing different Shadows. This can sometimes reflect the many faces of the Shadow, since each player will have a different style. Because this can lead to confusion if done improperly, it is not recommended for large troupes or for inexperienced players. Storytellers must also be careful to make certain that an individual player does not feel harassed by having multiple voices represent her character's Shadow.



The emotions that fuel a Shadow are often perversions of the higher emotions. Instead of love, pity, hope or loyalty, Shadows indulge themselves in hate, contempt, despair and treachery. Sometimes, however, Dark Passions represent emotions that are not necessarily dark but are, nevertheless, frequently repressed by the Psyche. Fear, guilt and anxiety (as distinguished from Angst) are examples of repressed Passions that are grist for the Shadow's mill.

Each Dark Passion has its own purpose, one which is often linked and antithetical to the Psyche's Passions. For example, a wraith who seeks to protect her surviving family may have a Shadow who seeks to harm them. Some Dark Passions, however, have no correspondence in the Psyche's repertoire of driving goals. A Shadow may seek to harm people even when the Psyche has no particular conscious interest in protecting them.

- **Thorns:** Certain Thorns provide the Shadow with numerous ways to affect the world around it. A Shadow who possesses Shadowed Face, Infamy, Shadow Call, Tainted Relic or other Thorns which gives it additional capabilities or powers can freely utilize these tools while it is in control of its wraith. Some Thorns can be used at any time, while others are restricted to times when the Shadow is in control.

## The Shadow's Style

A Shadow possesses its own unique Archetype, and it is this persona which colors its interaction with the world outside itself. Both player and Shadowguide should be familiar with the Shadow's Archetype. A Shadowguide should make use of her Shadow's Archetype when tempting her Shadow character's Psyche. Since this Nature emerges when a Shadow is in control, a wraith player should be prepared to adjust the actions of her character to reflect her Shadow Archetype.

The Abuser, for example, will badger the Psyche into taking its advice or threaten to punish the Psyche for not doing so. When in control of a wraith, it will spread its abuse far and wide, attempting to increase the suffering of others around it. The Pusher, on the other hand, will cajole the Psyche with promises of greater power (for a price). When it dominates a wraith, it will actively seek out situations in which the wraith must rely on its abilities for survival, placing the hapless character deeper in its debt.

## Running With the Shadows

*But poets should  
Exert a double vision; should have eyes  
To see near things as comprehensively  
As if afar they took their point of sight,  
And distant things as intimately deep  
As if they touched them. Let us strive for this.*  
— Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Aurora Leigh"

The dual nature of a wraith character presents a challenge for Storytellers and players alike. In most roleplaying games, the Storyteller seeks to weave a story that will involve her troupe in the pursuit of some goal desired by all the players. **Wraith** stories, however, feature characters locked in an inner battle for control. It is possible for characters in a **Wraith** game to end up acting against their own best interests. This adds an additional level of difficulty to the Storyteller's task, as she must contend with frequent upheavals as Shadows seize control of their wraiths' Psyches and take off in pursuit of their own ends. Sometimes the gist of a story can get lost in the complications caused by unexpected turns of the plot due to the Shadows' devious actions.

Storytellers must walk a fine line between preserving the dynamic integrity of the story and allowing the interplay between Shadow and Psyche to exert its unique form of dramatic conflict. Being able to keep the big picture (the progress of the story) in mind while dealing with the vagaries of frazzled Psyches and frenetic Shadowguides requires for a Storyteller to be on top of the game at all times. Players as well need to remember that their characters exist within a larger context, and that sometimes restraint and discipline must take precedence over self-indulgence. Standing back from the action of a game and trying to see the overall direction of its momentum can sometimes help players and Storytellers decide how best they can contribute to the overall enjoyment of a game.

When everyone involved in a **Wraith** game cooperates to create a story that makes room for the struggles of individual wraiths while retaining an overall focus on the big picture, the difficulties posed by the Shadow-Psyche conflict form a challenge worth meeting, making the successful completion of a **Wraith** story all the more meaningful.

## Harrowings

*'Hell is a lot like a theme park...The management is always trying to improve the attractions, add a more effective touch to the entertainment.'*

— Dan Simmons, "Vanni Fucci is Alive and Well and Living in Hell"



Harrowing is a nightmare ride through the Tempest, a passion play or psychodrama starring the wraith and directed by the wraith's Shadow with a supporting cast of Spectres. Harrowings are designed to torture a wraith, empower her Shadow and force her into making mistakes which may rip away her Passions, Fetters or her very essence and send her screaming to Oblivion. To some extent, the Harrowing is like a game, a challenge to the wraith to choose the right course of action which will allow her to escape from the nightmare. Naturally, the Shadow tries either to stack the cards so that the wraith chooses incorrectly, or to make all choices seem so ill that the wraith cannot

decide among them and consequently does nothing. In either case, the Shadow "wins" and takes as its prize some part of the wraith's Passions or Fetters. This weakens them and brings the wraith closer to the nothingness of Oblivion — or drags the wraith down into the Void. If the wraith triumphs, she breaks free of the Harrowing and retains her Fetters and Passions. Though she may be unscathed, she is usually not unchanged.

When a wraith experiences something that threatens to estrange her even further from the world of the living (such as losing Fetters, Passions or all of her Corpus or Willpower), her mind fights back against the loss. At the same time, another portion of her, her Shadow, attempts to encourage the break. There is both a strong life urge and an equally strong death wish within each person, and wraiths are no different. They need their ties to the living (Passions and Fetters) to remain wraiths. Otherwise, they simply slip into Oblivion. On the other hand, wraiths are unable to Transcend until they have resolved all their Fetters and given up their Passions in favor of peaceful repose. Until then, they are the Restless Dead, given meaning by their Passions and tied to the living through their Fetters. They need their Corpus as a shell to house their minds and souls, and their Willpower to withstand Oblivion's pull toward dissolution.

The Shadow seeks to overthrow the wraith's higher consciousness and assume control in order to send her to Oblivion. It also serves as a goad to drive the wraith to come to terms with her inner demons and throw off the need for clinging to her former mortality. At one time, this was the purpose of Harrowings; they were challenges designed to teach a wraith how to contend with her darker aspects and win out over them. Some wraiths were afraid of Transcendence, being unwilling to accept the proposed surrender of their own self-awareness. Others feared a terrible afterlife of eternal agony. Because of this, wraiths often refused to face their Shadows, hiding themselves from themselves and pretending they could continue on unchanged. Harrowings served as a cathartic experience, forcing such wraiths to face themselves, their Shadows and the possibility of their dissolution or Transcendence whenever they were in danger of losing their Passions, Fetters, Corpus and Willpower. By making a wraith confront and deal with her darkest fears and desires, Harrowings cleansed the wraith, opening her to the new possibilities inherent in Transcendence: the purification of the soul and its passage to a higher realm.

Harrowings are still confrontations between the different sides of the self, but they are no longer necessarily a cleansing process. Somewhere along the line Harrowings changed. They became darker, more sinister and more deadly. No longer are they lessons in achieving acceptance and Transcendence, but pitched battles with the wraith's soul as the ultimate trophy. Now Harrowings are things of horror and loss, though the wraith may still receive some insight into herself if she manages to vanquish her Shadow.

## Roleplaying the Harrowing

Whenever a wraith undergoes a Harrowing, a group of Spectres interacts with the wraith, bedeviling her into making the wrong choices. No Storyteller can adequately portray the many Spectres needed to people the Harrowing; that falls to the troupe. Rather than taking the part of their own characters or someone else's Shadow, each player assumes the role of a Spectre who has the intention of tricking or tormenting the wraith who is the target. Spectres are sadistic, and the other players should feel free to portray this in their temporary roles as Storyteller's assistants.

There is a great temptation, however, to overdo it when playing a Spectre. Some players may indulge in "payback" for imagined (or real) wrongs; others may simply become caught up and revel in being "evil." The Storyteller must make certain that the sadism inherent in any Harrowing is that of the Spectres, not the players. Should anyone cross that line, she should be taken out of that portion of play and left on the sidelines until normal play resumes. The Storyteller has final say on what is allowable; if she feels something a player-Spectre does is unfair, she can declare it never to have happened. This will not usually be a problem if the Storyteller takes the rest of the troupe aside and explains what she intends for the Harrowing, or if she brings the other players in on planning the Harrowing and setting the terms under which the victim can triumph. Excessive sadism will happen even less frequently in troupes in which the players realize that they can expect the same cruelty or courtesy when it is their turn.

## What Actually Happens

When a character is pulled down into a Harrowing, she becomes the star in a perverse psychodrama scripted by her own subconscious. In essence, the wraith lands in a nightmare landscape where the known rules may or may not apply any longer. During the Harrowing, the wraith may use Arcanoi, Willpower (except for her last point) and any of her Abilities, but she cannot use them to escape the Harrowing itself. There's no way out except by seeing the Harrowing through to the end.

A Harrowing occurs when a wraith is dragged down by Oblivion for various reasons (see below) into the Labyrinth, there to become the temporary plaything of some Spectres working with her Shadow. As soon as one of the Harrowing conditions is met (endangerment of a Fetter or a Passion, etc.), a small Nihil opens directly underneath the character, and she descends at great speed through the Tempest. Even Argos can't help her escape Oblivion's grip at this point, and the ride doesn't end until the wraith stands on the stage the Spectres have prepared for her, usually in the Labyrinth.

As the character descends, her Shadow is in constant contact with the local Spectre population, informing them of the wraith's weaknesses, phobias and regrets. The Spectres take this information and run with it, creating the setting and pulling the props for the Harrowing from the Tempest itself so that when the wraith finally arrives, the stage is set for a nightmare.

Inside the Harrowing, nightmare logic rules. Items can be plucked from thin air; the scene can change in the blink of an eye; new Spectres can simply materialize, and so on. Trying to understand what's going on will only make matters worse, and everything that happens is in accordance with the whim of the directing Spectre — and its advisor, the Harrowed wraith's Shadow.

Wraiths leave Harrowings the same way they arrive: rapidly. A Nihil will spew them back into the Shadowlands, or they will find themselves hurled into the Tempest, or Oblivion will claim them quickly. There's no time for a parting shot at the tormenting Spectres as one leaves a Harrowing. On the other hand, there's also no time for them to get a shot at the departing wraith.

## Getting Out

At the end of the Harrowing, assuming the victim has not successfully roleplayed her way out of it, comes a dice roll that determines whether the Harrowed character succeeds, fails or botches. It is important to remember that the roll determining success or failure is not just a random tossing of dice, but rather is a roll made *after* the character undergoes the Harrowing itself and has a chance to react to it. All Harrowings have some sort of dilemma or test for the wraith at their heart. If the Harrowed wraith roleplays well and makes intelligent choices during the Harrowing, thus finding and solving the core dilemma of the Harrowing, she should be considered to have succeeded *without the need for a dice roll*.

On the other hand, not every wraith will be able to solve her Harrowing through roleplaying alone. After a preset time limit (10 minutes works well), if a wraith has failed to find the key to escaping her Harrowing, the Storyteller should resolve the psychodrama and allow the character to roll to determine her fate. The roll is permanent Willpower (difficulty 9), and a single success is considered to be enough to allow the wraith to escape the Harrowing successfully.

## A Word of Caution

Just as players can earn automatic successes in a Harrowing through roleplaying, Storytellers may be tempted to assign automatic failures or even automatic botches as penalties for bad decisions, poor roleplaying or consistent botches rolled during the playing out of the Harrowing itself. However, Storytellers are cautioned to avoid making this sort of unilateral judgment, as it can lead to hard feelings on the part of the player whose character has just been unfairly (to his way of thinking) picked on. Instead, if the situation truly warrants it, Storytellers should either raise the difficulty of the Harrowing roll to 10 or increase the number of successes required to escape the Harrowing. Always leave a window of escape for the character, no matter how small, as this will keep the player behind the character from feeling helpless. It's no fun to feel helpless, and after all, fun is the point of the game.

The character does not need to roll *anything* unless she fails to solve the dilemma. Even then, good roleplaying can significantly reduce the difficulty number which the wraith must roll to escape the Harrowing. Though difficulty numbers for escaping Harrowings begin at 9, the Storyteller may reduce the difficulty to 8 or even 7 as a reward for good roleplaying.

Furthermore, if she has Eidolon, the wraith may roll on her Eidolon rating (difficulty 9) to change aspects of the nightmare to help her defend herself or escape from the Harrowing. Each success allows her to change one aspect to make it more favorable to herself, thus increasing her chances of successfully solving the dilemma (though the change must make sense in the context of the nightmare). If the wraith still has any points of Willpower, she may use them as she would for any other roll to gain one automatic success. It should be noted that when a wraith is being Harrowed because she is on the verge of losing her last point of Willpower, she may not *use* that last point to gain a success; that would mean she voluntarily gave it up, resulting in her dissolution.

## Harrowing Systems and Targets

There are two different kinds of Harrowings. They are distinguished by the target and possible outcome of the nightmare ride.



## Target Harrowings

The first type of Harrowing is one in which one of a wraith's Passions or Fetters is targeted by her Shadow in an attempt to destroy it; this may weaken the wraith's ties to the world of the living or make her a colder, less emotional person — and *that* brings her closer to Oblivion. The target of a Harrowing is called the Quarry, just as if the Trait were being hunted. Target Harrowings may be activated by the following events:

- The wraith loses (or uses up) all of her Willpower. As she is on the verge of losing that final point, which would bring her to zero Willpower, she immediately undergoes a Harrowing that targets either a Passion or a Fetter (Shadowguide's choice). Usually this is a low-level Trait or one she has neglected recently.

If the wraith succeeds at the Harrowing's test, she is snapped back to one of her Fetters, does not lose any points off her targeted Passion or Fetter, and keeps her one point of Willpower. Failure means the wraith must roll dice equivalent to the rating of the Quarry Trait (difficulty 8). She loses a number of points from the rating equal to the number of dice on this roll that do not come up with a success. If this brings the Trait to zero or less, the Passion or Fetter is gone forever. She then escapes the Harrowing, snapping back to a Fetter (assuming she still has any) and regaining Willpower

equal to her Intelligence rating. A botch results in the wraith's losing the targeted Trait outright. Additionally, she must now roll her permanent Willpower versus the Shadow's Angst (difficulty 6). If the Shadow wins, the wraith loses a point of permanent Corpus.

If the Storyteller feels that the wraith has wasted her Willpower in a particularly wanton fashion, she may instead opt for a Destruction Harrowing upon loss of the last point of Willpower (see below). The loss of a point of permanent Corpus is a fairly serious penalty in itself, since it limits the wraith's temporary Corpus score, making it easier for the wraith to fall into another Harrowing and thus lose more Corpus....

- The wraith is on the verge of losing (*not* Resolving) her last point in an individual Passion. So long as she has one point in the Passion, she is fine, but when that last point is threatened, she undergoes a Harrowing. This can occur either because the wraith has neglected the Passion or due to a Spectre's ability to numb even the fiercest emotions. Wraiths can also lose Passions due to failing a Harrowing, but only a truly cruel Storyteller would invoke a second Harrowing as a result of failing the first one — particularly over the same Passion, which may be gone anyway.

The Harrowing should focus on a theme that involves the Passion, and that Passion should always be the Quarry of the Harrowing. For example, if the Passion that is being threatened is **Protect my sister (Love)**, the Harrowing might seem



to take place in a mirrored funhouse, with each pane of glass reflecting the character's sister in some sort of life-threatening peril. Success has the same result as a success in a Willpower Harrowing. However, if the victim fails or botches, not only does he lose the Quarry Passion, but he also must roll against the rating of a different Passion (Storyteller discretion as to which Passion, difficulty 5) as well. Any failures acquired during this roll are subtracted from the rating of this second Quarry. In addition, a wraith who botches a Passion Harrowing must roll permanent Willpower versus permanent Angst (difficulty 6) or lose a permanent Corpus point.

- The wraith is on the verge of losing (*not* Resolving) her last point in a Fetter. When a living Fetter dies or a non-living Fetter is destroyed, the character whose Fetter has been lost is immediately thrown into this sort of Harrowing.

This Harrowing proceeds just as one for a Passion does, but the Fetter is the Quarry, and it becomes part of the scenery or a player in the psychodrama. If a character has his comic book collection as a Fetter, for example, his Harrowing could be peopled with Spectres portraying twisted versions of his favorite superheroes, all out for his blood. Successes, failures and botches are handled in the same way as for Passions, except that if the wraith loses his last Fetter in this way (through a failure), he cannot be snapped back to it, but instead is dumped into a random part of the Tempest. He is also unable to travel to the Shadowlands anymore. Failures and botches are handled in a similar fashion to those in Passion Harrowings.

If the wraith has been pulled into this sort of Harrowing because of the destruction or death of one of her Fetters, succeeding in the Harrowing will still not allow the wraith to retain that Fetter. Instead, a success will allow her to consider the Fetter Resolved instead of destroyed.

- The wraith has lost all of her temporary Corpus. In this case, the wraith herself is the Quarry of the Harrowing. Again, success allows the wraith to escape back to a Fetter and recover as many points of temporary Corpus as she has levels of Stamina. Failure results in the loss of one point of permanent Corpus, and a botch results in another immediate Harrowing, again with the wraith as the Quarry.

If a wraith loses her last point of permanent Corpus as a result of a temporary Corpus Harrowing, she is immediately thrown into a Destruction Harrowing (*see below*).

## Destruction Harrowings

These Harrowings occur only in extreme circumstances, and they directly threaten the wraith. In these rare instances, she becomes the Quarry rather than a Passion or a Fetter. Circumstances that bring about a Destruction Harrowing are as follows:

- The wraith loses all her Willpower (i.e., is on the verge of falling from one point of Willpower to zero points), and has spent that Willpower in what the Storyteller deems to be

## For Example...

*While Erik is still climbing over the edge of the building, the shot fired by the first Heretic attracts the attention of a couple of his friends. They all open fire on the unfortunate wraith, and their relic bullets connect. Erik loses his grip on the ledge and falls to the unforgiving ground.*

The Storyteller rules that between the bullets and the impact with the ground, Erik has taken enough damage to land in a Harrowing. She asks Erik's player to leave the room, and once that occurs, asks Erik's Shadowguide what would make a good target for the Harrowing.

The Shadowguide points to Erik's biggest Passion, tied up with his quest for the wraith he's fallen in love with but who was enthralled soon after. He also mentions that Erik's Nature is Martyr, and that it might be a good idea to make the escape condition that Erik has to refuse, consciously, a pointless self-sacrifice. The Storyteller agrees that this would make for good Harrowing material, and in conjunction with the other players, she decides to present Erik with multiple Spectral images of his lost love in soul-threatening peril. He can save one, possibly two, but he can't save them all, and trying will only get him destroyed to no end. Satisfied that all of the other players are comfortable with their roles as Spectres in the Harrowing, the Storyteller calls Erik back into the room....

particularly wasteful or frivolous ways. She herself is the Quarry of the Harrowing, as by losing all her Willpower she no longer has the strength to resist Oblivion's pull. In this sort of Harrowing, no rolls on Passions or Fetters are made. Instead, at the end of the Harrowing, the wraith makes a straight opposed roll pitting her permanent Willpower versus the Shadow's permanent Angst (difficulty 6). Success releases her back to a Fetter and allows her to retain her last point of Willpower. Failure means that the wraith is utterly consumed by Oblivion, while a botch can (at Storyteller discretion) allow the character to be reborn as a Spectre.

Destruction Harrowings based around Willpower are exceedingly rare, and should be undertaken by Storytellers only if the situation truly demands it.



- The wraith is on the verge of losing her last point in her last remaining Passion. Her emotions have become so numbed that she is a step away from feeling nothing and thus becoming nothing. Again, permanent Willpower should be rolled against permanent Angst (difficulty 6). Should the wraith win, she is transported to one of her Fetters (assuming she still has any), or to a random area of the Tempest (if she does not), and retains that last point of Passion. Failure strips her of her last strong emotion, opening her to the cold void of Oblivion and destroying her. Again, a botch can transform the Harrowed wraith into a Spectre.

- The wraith is reduced to zero permanent Corpus. With even her tenuous hold on the reality of the Shadowlands being eroded, she stands on the verge of total dissolution. The system is the same as above, with the wraith rolling her permanent Willpower versus the Shadow's permanent Angst (difficulty 6). Success snaps her back to a Fetter (if she has any) or to a random part of the Tempest where she immediately recovers a single point each of temporary and permanent Corpus. Failure results in the wraith's immediate destruction. The character is dragged screaming into Oblivion, and the player should consider what sort of character she'd like to play next. A botch on this roll will turn the character into a Spectre, probably of the Nephwrack caste.

## Rewards

Should the wraith successfully overcome the Harrowing, she should receive some sort of reward. For a target Harrowing, if the wraith has successfully "defended" a Passion or Fetter (especially one she may have recently neglected) with good roleplaying or clever thinking, it should be increased by one point. Thus a Fetter that was a three-point now becomes a four-point. For Destruction Harrowings, the wraith is awarded a decrease of one to three points (depending on the difficulty of the Harrowing and the roleplaying of the player) of temporary Angst. This represents a boost to the wraith's confidence due to her success and the relief at having escaped the Harrowing.

## Extended Harrowings

In this rules variation, when a wraith botches her roll during a Targeted Harrowing, she loses the Quarry of the Harrowing but does not lose permanent Corpus. Instead, the trauma of the loss throws her into a second Harrowing which targets another Passion or Fetter. In effect, this gives the wraith a second chance to reprieve herself. The Harrowing proceeds just as if it were the primary one, with the same results for success and failure as a normal Harrowing would cause. If the wraith must roll again and if she botches again, the Storyteller could then (with a clear conscience) declare that the wraith has lost a point of permanent Corpus, or might allow yet a third Harrowing.

Technically, this could continue until the wraith has no more Fetters and Passions to be targeted, but realistically, after the third Harrowing, the wraith will probably not be able to stand any more (and the other players will want to get back to their characters). Granted, the wraith should be able to overcome a botch by spending a Willpower point (and thus gaining a success), but there will be times when she cannot spend Willpower (such as when she only has one point left and doesn't want to spend it lest she set herself up for a Destruction Harrowing). Any wraith who undergoes three successive Harrowings gains a permanent psychosis to be determined by the Storyteller (assuming she makes it out intact). In addition to any other psychosis the wraith may acquire, she will never be entirely certain that she has escaped the Harrowing. She may believe that subsequent events are merely her Shadow trying to trick her into complacency. Whenever she is placed under stress again, she will assume it is the Harrowing resuming (and she might be right).

## Group Harrowings

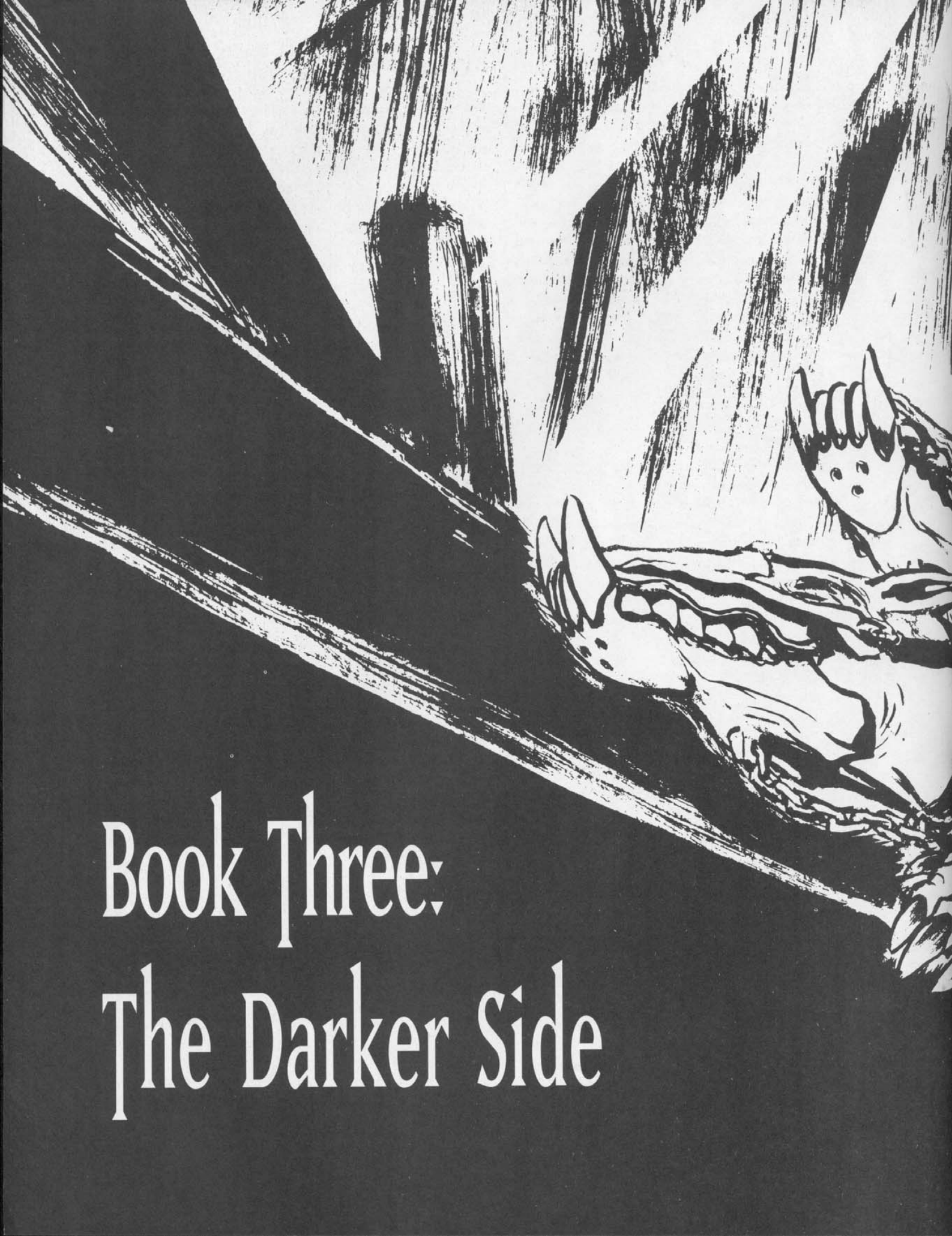
There are rare occasions when an entire group of wraiths undergoes a simultaneous Harrowing. This may come about through all of them losing a Fetter held in common, or all of them may be stripped of their Corpus at the same time (say, in a firefight or Maelstrom). Whatever the cause, in instances like this the wraiths undergo a Harrowing all together, rather than as individuals. In general, the mechanics for a group Harrowing are the same as for the individual version, and all of the wraiths involved are tested in some fashion (the tests may be individual or group in nature). Obviously, in a group Harrowing the players are too busy with their characters to play the parts of Spectres; this additional task then falls to the Storyteller.

At the conclusion of the group Harrowing, either all of the wraiths succeed or all must roll to determine the outcome. It is possible for individuals within the group to fail their individual tests at this point, even though the rest of the group succeeds. At this point, the group must decide whether they're all in this together, or whether they want to handle things individually. **Note:** The "all in this together" approach is only feasible if the wraiths are being Harrowed for the loss of a shared Fetter. If the Harrowing is over lost Corpus, it descends into "every wraith for himself" at this juncture.

If they're all together, the failure of even one wraith in the Harrowing means that the whole group is placed in jeopardy. The good news is that the person with the highest rating in the shared Fetter being targeted gets to make the roll for the whole group. If he succeeds, everyone escapes. Should he fail, everyone loses the Fetter; should he botch, he loses the Fetter, and the roll defaults to the person with the highest Willpower rating in the group. If that roll succeeds, the Fetter is still lost, but the wraiths all escape unharmed. A failure on this second roll results in the loss of a point of permanent Corpus from each wraith in the group, while a botch has consequences best left to Storyteller discretion.

The other way to handle this is take the select individuals from within the group who have failed their test and have only those people make the rolls. Whatever happens affects only those particular wraiths. If they lose the Fetter, it is lost only to them; the others in the group retain it. Should any of them botch and fail their Willpower rolls, only those wraiths lose permanent Corpus. Note that Extended Harrowings can apply in group situations as well.





# Book Three: The Darker Side



I'm sitting in the club car of a phantom train, playing poker with two ghosts and a Spectre who claims to have been a general for Alexander the Great. He certainly looks the part, with half-rotted bronze armor and helm. There's a red glow coming from his helmet where there ought to be eyes, though, and underneath his black beard I can see bone. Spectres are supposedly what us wraiths turn into when our Shadow takes us over for good. I've also heard that we can be swallowed by Oblivion — nothingness, entropy, whatever you want to call it. I look into those burning red eyes and I'm not sure what I'd prefer.

There's one problem with playing poker with a man who doesn't have eyes any more. It's hard to tell when he's bluffing. The other two wraiths — a skeletal gunslinger and someone charred like Cajun chicken who's wearing a hammer at his belt — don't matter. They've got objects and coins to bet, and lose, and even in a place like this, objects can be replaced. There are always more ghosts of objects. But me, I've run out of things to bet. All I've got left is myself, and ghost bodies are a very valuable commodity.

The other two are out. The Spectre is dealing. The ghosts of cards slide to a stop in front of me, here on the ghost of a table in the ghost of a train.

Suddenly, I'm afraid. I wish I could hear her singing one more time. I turn over the cards....

## Renegade

The night fairly vibrates with danger as I walk along strangely deserted streets, heading back to Pine Knoll Elementary. Time and distance are still playing tricks on me, and it seems to be taking much longer than necessary to walk the few miles back to the schoolhouse. Along the way, I pass decaying store fronts and vacant apartment buildings, but the strangeness of it all doesn't hit me the way it once did. *I must be getting used to this place, I reflect ruefully.*

A sudden flurry of activity off to my left in the shadows beside one of the buildings draws my attention. I wheel around with both fists clenched and raised, and stare into the shadows inside the ruined building.

At first, I see nothing. Then something much darker than the night resolves from the shadows and charges at me so fast I have no time to react. A peal of laughter fills the night as something slams into me. I experience the impact only as a distant shock, but it knocks me clean off my feet. I hit the ground, feeling oddly detached from reality, and tumble over backwards as the person or creature or whatever it is leaps into the air and then lands on my chest.

The world is spinning crazily out of control.

Fear grips me when I realize that I'm flat on my back, and that a creature with shreds of rotting flesh dangling from its face, and hollow, wide-set eyes that blaze with a savage red glow has me pinned to the ground. Bony knees grind painfully into my upper arms.

"You're mine now!" the creature snarls, leaning close to my face, its voice crackling like a hot wire.

Nearly insane with fear, I struggle to free myself, but it's useless. Whatever this thing is, it's too strong.

The creature straddles my chest, holding me down. Bony fingers dig into the sides of my head as the creature grips me and brings its face so close to mine we almost touch. Looping strings of plasm run from the creature's mouth and fall onto my face.

When I try to resist, the creature shifts its weight, countering every move I make. Soon, I'm completely pinned, one of his hands holding down both of mine with a grip so fierce that it would break bones if I still had any. I'm trapped, and my captor knows it.

It's not wasting any time, though, and I see it pull out from a

pouch at its belt a coiled length of chain with metal clamps on the ends. The rings of the chain flicker with a curious internal light that makes them glow a dull yellow, and they're moaning. Softly.

With a quick flick of its wrists, the creature snaps open one of the cuffs and forces my left wrist into it. The pain I feel the instant the metal touches my Corpus is indescribable. Scaring hot flames and powerful surges of numbing cold rip simultaneously through my Corpus and my mind. Even that other voice inside my head is screaming with me, and a shrill chorus of agonized shrieks seems to be coming from inside the chain links.

"Mine! Mine! All mine!" the creature howls, its voice warbling so high it finally cracks. This is followed by another burst of maniacal laughter as the creature snaps open a second cuff and shackles my other wrist.

I'm terrified, but from a place way far gone in the back of my head. These chains have done something to me so I can't resist any more, no matter how much I want to. The mere touch of this strange metal — so cold that it burns white hot against me — drains me of all strength and resolve. The weight of

the chains presses me to the ground with a crushing heaviness. Every fiber of my being screams in anguish.

"Wha-what do you—?"

"Be quiet, slave!" the creature bellows.

Sitting back on its haunches, it hauls back and punches me in the mouth. The impact is dull and nowhere close to the intense agony of the chains, but it knocks my head back against the ground hard enough to daze me. My view of the night sky shatters into a thousand mirrored fragments.

As the creature swings off my chest and reaches down to snap the two remaining cuffs onto my legs, I see a sudden rush of motion behind it. My captor seems oblivious of its presence, and I'm positive this is one of the creature's accomplices. Then the second figure gets a little closer, and a hopeless, sinking sensation fills me when I see it has a dark hood masking its face. I'm done for, I know it.

"Oh, I'll get a good price for this one, I will," the creature on top of me babbles to itself between bursts of laughter. "This one here's a good, strong Corpus, it is. And he's all mine!"

"Release him, Renegade."

The hooded figure's voice booms in the night and echoes from the empty buildings nearby.

The creature instantly freezes, its expression fixed in a startled grimace. The glow in its eyes dies, and it cringes like a whipped animal as it turns slowly and looks at whoever—or whatever—is standing behind him.

"Now!" the hooded figure commands, slowly raising one hand and pointing at the creature.

"But I...I caught him, Ferryman," the creature whines without much strength or conviction in its voice. "He's mine!"

"Incorrect. My mark is upon him, and has been since his Reaping," the hooded figure replies. It has a sonorous voice that seems to come from several directions at once.

"But I have him," the creature says. "I deserve him! I tracked him here. I found out where he stays, and I caught him. I earned him, Ferryman, he's mine!"

The hooded figure stares in silence at the cringing creature, who glances furtively from side to side. After a tense moment, it slumps forward and produces a key from the folds of its shabby clothes. Its hands

tremble as it leans forward and unlocks the manacles that bind me.

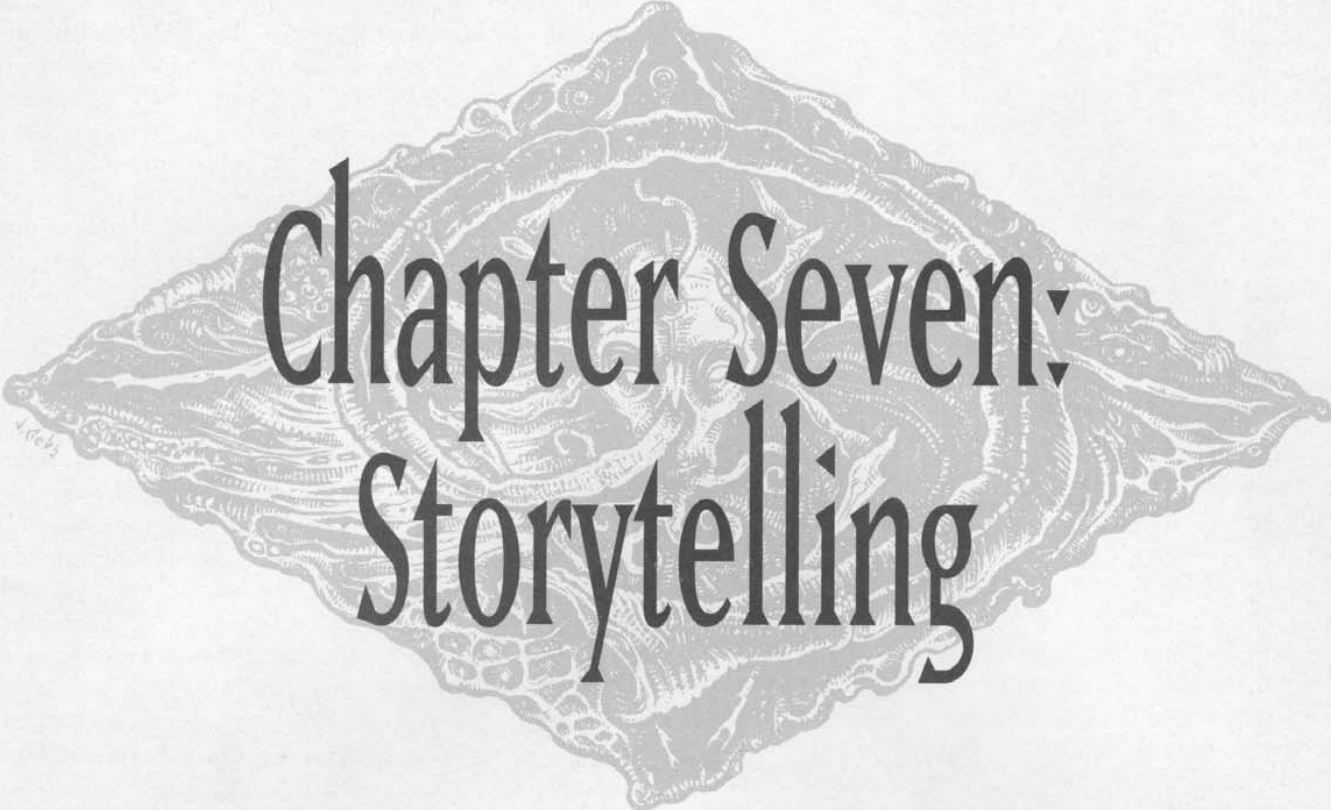
I can't describe the sudden, intense relief I feel as the chains release. The searing pain immediately dissolves, and the faint chorus of screams slowly fades away. The links clank heavily together, and the light bleeds out of them as the creature hastily gathers them up. With a bowed head, it scurries off into the night.

I'm too stunned to move, so I just lay there for a minute. My Corpus feels entirely drained of strength, and besides, what would be the use of running? If the Ferryman could scare off the "Renegade" who'd tackled me so easily, what chance did I have against him?

The hooded figure regards me with a long, steady stare. The cold intensity of its unseen gaze bores into me. I want to say something—to thank my deliverer, if nothing else—but I'm not convinced that my situation has improved. When I try to speak, the only sound I can manage is a feeble, "Thank you."

Without a word, the hooded figure turns and walks away, leaving me alone in the dark night.





# Chapter Seven: Storytelling

*...but to my great satisfaction, they are willing story-tellers,  
which they call "life-speaking."*

— Robert Holdstock, "Mythago Wood"



Ghost stories are an intrinsic part of the human condition, combining as they do two of our strongest drives: fear of death and the need to share our experiences. Part of a time-honored tradition, ghost stories have been handed down from the cave-men to us, by way of hands as diverse as Dickens and Homer, Tim Burton and the author of *Beowulf*.

**Wraith** is a natural extension of the grand and glorious ghost story tradition, but that means that in **Wraith** stories still have to be told, and that someone has to be the teller of tales. To a certain extent, all of the players in a game of **Wraith** are tale-tellers, determining the actions and dialogue of the characters. However, that covers only the heroes of your wraithly ghost tales; somebody has to play the informants, the soldiers, the victims and the villains. Someone has to map out the world that the heroes move in, and plot behind the scenes for the

villains. That's where the role of Storyteller comes in, for all these things and more are the Storyteller's responsibility.

If you've never tried a storytelling game before, it can seem awkward at first. Much of a game like **Wraith** springs from improvisation, character and mood, as opposed to being wrapped up in dice and neat little charts that tell you exactly what you do. In **Wraith**, the emphasis is upon you deciding your actions, not referring to a table or box to determine what they should be. This sort of storytelling freedom can be either exhilarating or daunting. With that in mind, this chapter is a guide to Storytelling techniques, along with hints, tips and suggestions for making your **Wraith** game run more smoothly. There isn't any "top-secret-for-Storyteller-eyes-only" information in this chapter, just ideas on what makes a good **Wraith** story and what sort of pitfalls you might want to avoid. If you are a Storyteller, you might even want to have your players read this as well. After all, they are telling part of the story, too.



# The Storyteller

*I pray God will curse the writer, as the writer has cursed the world with this stupendous, beautiful creation, terrible in its simplicity, irresistible in its truth...*

— Robert Chambers, “The Repairer of Reputations”

The Storyteller's role is varied and complex, requiring a sizable investment of both time and effort. After all, it is the Storyteller who creates the world anew every game session, who populates it with the living and the dead, and who determines what treasures, perils and plots the players come across. More importantly, as Storyteller you must learn to share your world with the players, allowing them to weave their own plot threads even if those threads don't quite match the pattern you'd envisioned. Unlike writing a novel or a screenplay, Storytelling a game like **Wraith** is an interactive experience; the best Storytellers realize that the best stories come from allowing the tales to develop naturally, not forcing them where the characters have no wish to go.

Establishing the setting for the story is one of the Storyteller's largest responsibilities. Every personality the players meet, every place they go and every thing they see springs from your imagination, and it is important to keep that imagination flexible. You must define everything for the players, serving as their eyes, ears, nose, touch, and taste. After all, as Storyteller you know what the old wraith huddled in the corner looks like; the trick is to get your players to see him as you do.

The more complex and detailed the setting that you present to your players, the more potential stories that can be told within that setting, and the better the stories that are told will be. Creating a world like a Hollywood set, all flats and façades, will lead to disappointment on both your part and the players'. When the characters turn the corner and there's nothing there for them to do because you didn't anticipate them going around the block, the players will grow restive from having their options limited by the single plot or setting you mapped out. At the same time, you'll get frustrated because your story will bog down in a morass of non-encounters and hastily thrown together scenes with no real depth or bearing.

Your world and the characters who populate it must be detailed, so that you can have them respond believably to any action the players take. Regardless of how thorough you wish to be, your players will find a way to come up with an action that you couldn't possibly have anticipated. If your world has depth and flexibility, you'll be able to integrate these situations into your story without any seams showing. If, however, you only detail the narrow path that you wish your players to follow, once they stray from that path (and they will stray, rest assured), both you and they will be lost.

One of the things that can make your job as world-creator easier is the fact that **Wraith** mirrors a side of the “real” world. Since the World of Darkness is so close to our world, much of the setting of a **Wraith** game can be drawn from the daily headlines. You don't have to create history and geography from scratch (at least not in the Shadowlands), because that part of the world has already been created for you by history and society. However, it is not our world, and you must draw in the shadows and darkened places that our world does not have.

The next step, once you're created your world, is to people it. Just as every person in our world has their own quirks and habits, so too must the characters that the players interact with each possess their own unique personality traits. This is true for the lowliest chained Thrall and the most diabolical Spectre; everyone in the Underworld (save Drones) must have a strong personality or else be dragged summarily down to Oblivion. If the players' characters are the stars of your story, the characters you play are the supporting cast. Remember, the voices and faces you take on are the only real way the players have of interacting with your world. If the characters you play are simple and generic, your story will turn generic rapidly. If, however, each of the masks you don as Storyteller has something unique about him — a Legionnaire with an eternal hangover, a Renegade with the nervous habit of flipping a coin in the air while speaking, an informant who rambles about his living days — then they will each stand out as a personality instead of a plot device, no matter how hackneyed the function each serves in your story.

Giving your characters strong personalities also helps when the players decide to do something unexpected. After all, if you have a good sense of who the character you're playing is, you'll have a good sense for how she'll react in the face of the unexpected.

## Using Rules

Another part of the Storyteller's job description is adjudication, deciding what the inhabitants of your story can and can't do based upon the rules. A good portion of this book describes the various rules needed for just this purpose. These rules exist as a tool for you to use, but should be regarded as a starting point, not a straight jacket. Ultimately, you judge the validity and interpretation of the rules and their effect on your story. If circumstances arise that the rules don't cover, or if you just don't like certain rules, you have every right to ignore or improvise your own rules, so long as you are consistent within the framework of your story. Interpreting a rule one way one session and another the next can be disastrous.

In the end, though, while statistics and dice provide a basis for comparison, you must interpret the meaning behind all the dots and botches. The most important rule to remember is that the rules are guides and tools, nothing more.

## Entertainment

The most important part of your role as Storyteller, though, is to make certain that everyone, yourself included, has a good time. **Wraith** is a game, and as such it is supposed to be fun. Don't confuse putting a character in an unpleasant situation with putting that character's player in an uncomfortable situation.

The best way to make sure all of your players have a good time is to keep them involved and active. If one wraith goes off for three hours' worth of solo adventuring, odds are that the rest of his Circle is going to get extremely bored. If they get bored enough, they'll quit the game. Keeping the Circle together (or at least in reasonably sized chunks) is a good way to keep as many players as possible involved at all times. Encouraging active Shadowplaying is another way to make certain that players are still a part of the action, even if their characters aren't on stage at the moment.

The other important thing to remember is that nobody likes to feel helpless, so make sure that your players' actions actually do affect the story. If you have too strict a notion of the plotline that your players have to follow, you'll find yourself resorting to heavy-handed tactics to keep them "on track," as it were. This makes your story less believable, not to mention less interesting. When the players realize that nothing they do makes a difference, they'll stop doing anything and you'll lose the interactive element of storytelling that makes **Wraith** enjoyable.

So, with all of these restrictions and warnings and responsibilities, why would anyone want to take the role of Storyteller? The answer is that Storytelling can be the most enjoyable part of the game. Crafting something unique and sharing it with your players, seeing the look of discovery in their eyes when they come across a plot hook of which you're particularly proud, and hearing them tell stories from your chronicle days, weeks or even months later ("So this Legionnaire sticks his head through the wall along with his sword arm, and Asok just grabbed his face and made this beautiful Moliate roll...."), all of these are the rewards of Storytelling. Most important, though, is the act of Storytelling itself, the creation of the story which your players eagerly become a part of. That's the true reward of Storytelling, and one which is well worth all of the time and energy of preparation.

## Casting Call

While you spend your time crafting a world and the personalities in it, the players are busy creating their characters. The character each player creates is her only access to your world, and as her creation the character has a lot of significance to her. To make sure that the investment the player makes in her character is fruitful, then, you and she need to interact during the character design process. If a player creates a hard-bitten Centurion ready to kick some serious Corpus, but you want to run a story about tragic ro-





mance, odds are neither of you will be happy with the results. Let your players know what kind of game you want to play, and listen to their desires concerning what kind of game they want. The story you and your group will create will be a cooperative effort, after all, and it makes sense to ensure that the characters are appropriate for that story. The characters' actions will mold and influence your world, while your plot and supporting cast will affect the choices the players make. Working together and communicating with your players increases your chances for having stories that everyone, players and Storyteller alike, can be happy with.

Communicating with your players during the character creation process will also help keep your group together. By helping at an early stage, you can prevent your players from creating mutually exclusive characters. If some of your players decide to play minions of the Hierarchy and the others die-hard Heretics, you could have a disaster, with half the Circle spending its time trying to arrest and soulforge the other half. That is, unless you can create a reason for Hierarchs and Heretics to be working together — say, to guard a particularly dangerous Nihil or as part of a jointly sponsored expedition to another Dark Kingdom. Depend on your players to be creative with their personalities, but keep the story in mind when approving character concepts. Keeping tabs on the roles your players chose to take can head off trouble before it begins.

During character creation, players also come up with backgrounds for the personae they are adopting. You can take the opportunity these backgrounds present to find plenty of plot hooks with which to bring the characters into your storylines. Old enemies or allies, traumatic remembrances played upon by the Shadow, favorite spots, links that can be forged between character backgrounds — all of these can serve to tighten the characters' fit into your world.

Becoming involved in a player's character generation can really make for a good story, but a good Storyteller knows her boundaries. Not every character will fit perfectly into every story. On the other hand, you can use this to your advantage by incorporating this apparent mismatch into your plot. For instance, a player wants her character to run a nightclub in the Shadowlands, but since your plot didn't call for a nightclub, you didn't design one. This doesn't mean that one can't be added, though. Instead of scratching the idea, you can give the player the go-ahead to build the club from the ground up. This can lead to plenty of plot ideas (dealing with the local Hierarchs to gain permission to run the club, competition from other clubs, possibly stepping on the toes of Renegades, Hierarchy busts of Renegade clients, etc.), which can make your story richer. Furthermore, the player has made another investment of time and energy in the world, making that world a little deeper. Situations such as these arise often, and by taking advantage of them, both you and your players can add depth and, ironically, life to your world.

# Elements of Wraith

*But he gave no reply, and turned away,  
following other ghosts toward Erebos.  
Who knows if in that darkness he might still  
have spoken, and I answered?*

— Homer, *The Odyssey*, Book 11



ost ghost stories have as their heroes the intrepid ghost hunters who banish malefic spirits and calm haunted houses. Rarer are the tales in which the object is to bring the ghost peace. **Wraith's** ghost stories are of a different sort entirely, for they cast as heroes the ghosts themselves. This is an

important aspect of making **Wraith** work at all: the characters are the protagonists and heroes of the tales you spin. They *do* and they *act*; if the characters want to be acted upon, they may as well be Thralls, Drones or oboli.

However, this inversion of the classic ghost story helps to make **Wraith** complex on occasion. There are many elements that must all be involved in a story in order to maintain the unique flavor of **Wraith**; horror, terror, romance, passion and regret are all vital elements of the Underworld which cannot be given short shrift. Willing suspension of disbelief and a good storytelling atmosphere are also important. When all of these elements are working, your Storytelling experience can be something fantastic.

## Themes

All stories have themes. It's a part of the narrative condition, and **Wraith** stories are no different. A theme is a single idea or concept underlying a story, and which shapes the story by its very presence. **Wraith** itself has a multitude of themes woven into it: transcendence, rebellion, reconciliation, defiance, passion, horror and more. It's not necessary to work all of these into your story actively; most will find their way into the subtext of what you're doing by themselves. However, you may wish to highlight a specific theme or two, giving them special emphasis in the tale you're spinning.

Playing up a specific theme can be done in a variety of ways. One of the easiest is to work your theme into the descriptions you give of a setting. If your theme is horror, strange scuttling noises from the shadows and horrific deathmarks on passing wraiths can accentuate what you're doing nicely. Even if the noises in the darkness turn out to be Skinlands mice, and the passing wraiths never speak a word to the characters, by their very existence they emphasize the horrific nature of what's going on. Another method is to include props — items in the hands of the characters you play, or simply left around — that have connections to

your theme. A soulforged rose in the hands of a lonely wraith can emphasize the theme of romance or tragedy much more effectively than simply saying, "We're going to be focusing on romance tonight."


Over the course of an extended chronicle, you may find yourself dealing with multiple themes. Each chapter may have its own theme, subordinate to the overarching idea of the chronicle, or the story's main theme may inform every minute of play. It's up to you. Some of the most important sample themes in **Wraith** can be:

**Adventure:** Many of the Restless Dead still seek out the thrills of life. In an effort to forget their torment or just in the process of living up their unlives, some ghosts love to cause trouble for the living world. This includes poltergeist antics, inspiring tabloid article frenzies and getting cheap thrills from Skinriding. On the other hand, there's plenty of excitement to be found in the Underworld. Doomslaying, Renegade (or Legionnaire!) hunting and exploring the Tempest are all possibilities. Characters with Passions related to excitement or fear will take a fancy to this theme.

**Defiance:** Some strong-willed wraiths see the Hierarchy as an oppressive government that crushes individuality and promotes slavery. Driven by their desire for order (or power), the characters could be agents of this oppression, fighting to suppress the unruly Renegade and Heretic mobs. On the other hand, the characters could be revolting against the dehumanizing machine of the Hierarchy as a band of Renegades or even Heretics, thriving off the energies from their quest for freedom.

**Fear:** The masses quake in their boots, and children cry in the night. The living fear the darkness and what lies across the Shroud; the dead fear Oblivion, eternal torment and the loss of hope. Fear is an essential theme for **Wraith**, as it flavors the actions of the living and the dead. It can provide the impetus for characters to fight all the harder against Oblivion, or to go Spectre-hunting in an effort to confront and defeat their terrors. Fears for those the wraiths love can force them into interactions with the living, and fear, well-founded, of other wraiths can lead characters into alliances, Guild affiliations and conflicts that they might have wished to avoid.

**Immortality:** Now that you have died, why fear death? There is no reason for fear, so live your unlives to the fullest. Emphasis on the timelessness of the Shadowlands versus the quick pace of the living world should be a central idea. The characters may be ghosts from a bygone era struggling to adjust to the modern world, or they may be more recent Shadowlands arrivals who have to deal with older wraiths stuck in their archaic ways. Plus, there is always the corrupting hand of stagnation casting its pall over the centuries. The struggle for sanity and new experiences in the face of the slow centuries can keep more than one wraith fully occupied.



Conversely, the characters may thrive once they have become immortal. If they achieve comfortable status, tend their Fetters and follow their Passions, the afterlife can be a pretty good place to be. But once a wraith gets a taste of forever, she won't want to give it up. How will the player react when that immortality is threatened?

**Inner Conflict:** The worst enemy a wraith has is her own Shadow. The inner conflict between self and self-destruction heats up immeasurably when death strips away the containing shell of the body. Will the wraith be able to withstand the constant onslaught of this subconscious demon, or will she be sucked down into Oblivion? How will her inner struggle affect her dealings with others, all of whom, after all, are fighting the same battle that she is.

Inner conflict could also play a role on a broader scale; the Shadow does not have to rule this theme. By giving the characters two mutually exclusive, but important goals, you can divide your main characters in two. Do they save a living loved one from death, or rescue a new-found Restless friend from the forges? By presenting tough questions or no-win situations, you force the players to examine their character's personalities and make hard emotional decisions. A wraith's Fetters will often cause her to make extraordinary sacrifices, especially with Oblivion ever-present in the background.

**Intrigue:** From the politics of Stygia to the maneuverings of the assorted Heretic cults, **Wraith** stories are ripe for suspense and intrigue. The Circle could be pawns in a Hierarchy plot or spies for a Renegade camp. One Deathlord could be using the characters in his plotting against another, or perhaps the undeclared war of the Guilds sweeps the characters up in its tendrils. In a world where Masquers can change faces and Harbingers can quite literally pop out of nowhere, paranoia rules and few are trusted. Fetters and loved ones are often targets in subversive wars between Restless factions, so stories can center around fending off assaults on these targets. On the other hand, it could be that the players are the plotters, attempting to subvert the local Citadel or perhaps Stygia itself.

**Mystery:** Let's face it, the Underworld isn't anything like any heaven or hell imagined. Just finding out what's what, who's who and how anything works for the dead can be an intriguing story in and of itself. After all, there are no manuals waiting for new ghosts on the other side, and many wraiths are forced to flee their Reapers. This propels them into a voyage of discovery as to what they are and what they can become, for good or ill.

**Triumph:** There are those ghosts who are undaunted by death, who have literally stared into the abyss and have walked away, stronger for what they have learned. Death does not mean an end to victory; battles, contests and struggles can be won across the Shroud. The triumph can be as small as rescuing a stray cat or as great as leading the forces that sweep a Byway clear of Spectres, but what is important is the sense of accomplishment, even in the face of Oblivion.

## Suspension of Disbelief

Lifting your players away from the mundane and everyday is a necessity for good Storytelling. While the world of **Wraith** is complex and fascinating, it is ultimately an artificial one that has been crafted for your use. It takes belief on the part of your players to imagine themselves as part of that world. By taking the part of wraiths seriously, they have to accept the reality of those wraiths' world and try to step away from their own.

With that in mind, it is important to keep from shattering the distance that **Wraith** creates from the real world. Every ring of a telephone in the background, every time a rules squabble forces books to be opened and referenced, every time someone quotes a favorite movie out of character once the story starts — all of these destroy the necessary separation from static reality that good storytelling demands. For as long as the game lasts (and not a minute longer), your players and you have to believe and immerse yourselves in what you're doing. Otherwise instead of an interactive experience, your story becomes exactly that: a story, to be listened to, critiqued and judged, instead of something to be participated in and co-created.

## Tragedy

In classical times, tragedy was defined as the rise of a hero with but a single flaw, and the hero's inevitable fall as the flaw was exploited by circumstance, foes or Fate. That definition has broadened over the years, but at the core is still the notion of something good inevitably being destroyed by its own weaknesses.

Tragedy of this sort is an important component of **Wraith**. Each wraith's tragic flaw is personified by her Shadow, and much of the conflict in a **Wraith** story consists of the character's struggle against the supposedly inevitable victory of Oblivion. It is not so important in the end as to whether each individual wraith wins or loses, but rather how she faces the encroaching darkness.

Tragedy is not synonymous with failure, and a good tragic **Wraith** story can be as enjoyable and rewarding as a solid Spectre-stomping. The regret, missed chances and emotional loss that are such an integral part of tragedy are also central to **Wraith**. Just as the game as a whole is about trying to make good on those errors, so can a specific story focus on a wraith's attempts to rectify his mistakes, even if the world tells him that it's too late.

## Horror, Terror and Fear

*For the horror eats light and digests it into darkness.*

— Thomas Ligotti, "Professor Nobody's Little Lectures on Supernatural Horror"

Many people use these three terms interchangeably, which is inaccurate. All three are important, distinct aspects of **Wraith**, and each has a meaningful place within a chronicle. By emphasizing one or another, you can give your story a wide range of moods.



• **Fear** — Probably the broadest category of the three, fear has no implications other than the obvious. While specific fears and their sources can be subtle, fear itself is broadly defined as the negative anxiety brought on by anticipation of unpleasant events. Fears are often directed at singular objects, people or places, and can manifest in a variety of ways, from psychotic rage to flight.

Most people actually enjoy fear on some level. That's why we read scary stories, ride roller coasters and go to haunted houses. The adrenaline rush of a fear-inducing stimulus, no matter what it is, can be quite pleasant, provided it is in a controlled environment where the thing inducing fear isn't a real threat. In *Wraith*, this means presenting threats that are real to the characters and real enough to thrill your players while still making the scene "safe" enough for them to enjoy the rush.

• **Terror** — Terror differs from horror in that it permits some hope. It is more of a visceral reaction than an intellectual one, a primal fear in direct response to a threat that is manifest. Everything from the misshapen shadow on the wall, to lumbering footsteps in the hallway, to a monstrous creature charging hungrily down a corridor can inspire terror. In simple terms, terror can be equated with the fight-or-flight reaction, with one caveat: the possibilities of escape or victory are still held out as real. Terror may inspire you to flee, but by doing so you think you have a chance to escape. Terror may encourage you to fight the monster by allowing you to think that there's even a slim chance that you can kill it. So

long as it hasn't been conclusively proved that the situation is hopeless, the emotion that gets inspired is terror.

• **Horror** — Horror is based on violation and hopelessness. It is a gut reaction to an intellectual understanding of a situation, a physical response to the moment when the boundary of what is safe and acceptable gets crossed emphatically. Anything from the sight of blood to something much, much worse can inspire horror. It all depends upon what the observer considers to be safe, and how much it takes to destroy that conception of safety.

Violation is at the core of horror. If one looks at violation as the moment when a boundary is crossed, then the door is opened for all sorts of violations — physical (assault, murder, mutilation, rape, Moliation, etc.), mental (things that cannot and should not be, the direct contradiction of a character's view of reality) and emotional (betrayal, abandonment, torture, etc.) — to inspire horror.

The other aspect of horror is its sense of finality and the inability of a character to change it. If terror is the moment when the monster charges down the hall, horror is the instant you discover your feet are rooted to the spot. While you obviously don't want your players to feel helpless, horror can still be an important part of your chronicle. The nightmare architecture of Stygia, the half-glimpsed titanic shadow in the waters of the Byway, forced viewership at a soulforging or Moliation, the impression of vast power available but not used — all of these are effective uses of horror within a chronicle.

## When to Stop

There is a world of difference between playing on a character's fears and doing the same to a player. While inevitably everyone puts a little of themselves into their character, that doesn't make them fair game for your in-story events and terrors. **Wraith**, with Harrowings directed at probing a character's psychological weak spots, can occasionally provide instances when the line between character and player gets blurred. Something which is intended to be a test of the character can rapidly become a test of the player as well, particularly in cases where the player strongly identifies with his character and puts a lot of his own fears and Passions into his character concept. This situation can be decidedly unpleasant for all involved. At its core, **Wraith** is a game, designed to be fun, and having your psychological soft spots poked can be no fun at all.

The most important way to make sure things don't go too far is to keep communication open. Keep an eye on your players, and if they seem uncomfortable with the action, ask them if they'd prefer that you stopped. Players who have a problem with what's going on should tell you immediately, and you should heed their concerns. Pre-agreed safewords are also a good way to go, allowing you to scale back the action without breaking out of character.

In the end, there has to be an element of trust between you and your players. They have to trust that you won't abuse

the knowledge they give you about their phobias or fears, and you have to trust them to be honest with you about what is and isn't okay. Bringing real-life fears into a game for story or effect purposes is acceptable so long as everyone agrees that it's acceptable. The moment the consent stops, the use of the fear-inspired story element should stop as well.

## Romance

Romance is always a tricky subject for roleplaying. Making certain that in-character interaction is kept separate from the real world, trying to avoid sounding mawkish, the delicate question of when to fade to black — these are the difficulties in bringing romance into a game. They are all serious issues, and all must be dealt with if you intend to have a romantic thread to your game, but for that very reason they are well worth resolving.

Wraiths are creatures of Passion, and among the strongest passions we as human beings possess are those related to love. Why should Passions of love not affect wraiths? It is foolish to expect that death would eliminate so basic a human need as romantic love; down the long centuries of ghostly existence, a companion and helpmate could quite literally save your soul.

With that in mind, romance can and should be an important part of your wraiths' existence. The trick is to let them



discover it for themselves. Forced romance will have precisely that feel to it: forced. Hurrying love is always a bad idea, and doing so in-game is no exception. Patience is a virtue, as is having empathy for what your characters want and will enjoy. The best romantic plotlines are often not planned, simply developing from well-crafted characters who find themselves together.

Working romance into a chronicle can be done in a variety of ways. A great many wraiths have Passions and Fetters related to those they loved in life. The love that they felt and still feel for those people is a central aspect of their existences. Romance across the Shroud can be by turns comic and tragic, as a wraith whose love is undying may have to watch her lover heal, pick up the pieces and move on to a new relationship. On the other hand, some lovers are not separated even by death, and while continuing a romance with a wraith can be difficult, it can also be rewarding. Embody, Phantasm and other of the Arcanoi can give the lovers a chance to be reunited, albeit briefly, but are those fleeting moments enough to overcome the distance between living and dead?

There are also those wraiths who find each other in the Underworld, where eternal love is a real possibility. If a wraith still has feelings for someone yet alive and finds himself falling in love with another wraith, the confusion he feels can fuel many stories and give his Shadow an opening with which to work. Wraiths without Skinlands emotional attachments who become involved may have things easier, as they deny Oblivion through the sheer power of their love. Still, even in the Underworld not every romance lasts, and with the temptations of the Shadow omnipresent, it is only a pure and strong love that survives long among wraiths.

## Mood

If the theme of a story is its underlying concept, then the mood is its underlying feel. The mood of the story should fit the emotions you wish your players to experience, bringing them into the story, rather than simply rolling dice and taking notes. Once you have established the mood, they will help sustain it through roleplaying.

It is best to create the proper mind-set when you begin telling your story, sometimes earlier. The players need to feel the change from a social gathering of friends to the moment when their characters come to life and their imaginations take over. Of course, you can't snap your players into line like a taskmaster. They are playing, after all, to interact with their friends, as well as participate in your story. Still, nothing can ruin your somber introduction more than an interruption to find out who wants what on their pizza. Time the beginning of your story to the moment when your players have settled down and are ready to go.

From the very beginning of your game session you need to evoke your mood. Different moods and strengths will call for different introductions. Violent themes may call for loud heavy metal music or just the crash of a book (not this one!). Sad, somber stories may require soft classical music or speaking to the players in a hushed whisper. However, you have to start establishing your

## Props and Music

While the primary instrument you have for setting mood is your voice, other tools can be helpful as well. Candles and soft lighting, old books, gargoyle statuettes and other props can be helpful in creating a visual setting that echoes the dim world of **Wraith**. Still, getting the scene too cluttered can be dangerous. The props should be there to accentuate the mood, not to draw your players' attention away from your story.

Sound is just as important in setting mood, and many Storytellers enjoy playing with music in the background. It is important not to let the music get too loud, and not to use songs with which your players are too familiar. If the music distracts or your wraiths start singing along with the Cure, then it's being counter-productive and pulling players' attention away from the story you're telling.

mood early and let it grow. Sudden shifts in mood don't always work, and they can break the spell for a great many players.

You'll want to decide on a mood for each story before you start, though your players' actions might take you in some unexpected directions. Among the types of mood that are best for **Wraith** are:

**Brooding:** Even the air thickens with the coming danger, while offering no tangible threat for the wraiths to combat. Events transpire too slowly for the characters, and their enemies move inexorably against them. Perhaps they have heard news of an impending Spectre assault, but no one at the Citadel will heed their warnings, or it could be that they are bound and enthralled, awaiting their turns at the forge. Trapped between the pressure to act and the restrictions laid on doing so, the characters will be caught up in the ever-growing tension.

**Romance:** Hope and beauty conquer all, even death. Despite the worst Oblivion has to offer, even ghosts can find love in their new existences. The players should feel hopeful, and even happy, yet uncertainty should always play a role in any romantic story.

**Tragic Romance:** Unlike its hopeful counterpart, this mood concentrates on sadness and longing. Love has been lost and can never be recovered, or a new love has been discovered to be a sham. Regret, misery, fear and longing can all be evoked in your players in a tragic tale of love gone wrong. As old flames are corrupted by Oblivion (perhaps to resurface as Doppelgangers) and new loves are revealed as Hierarchy spies or amoral Reapers, love misused can become the basis for many **Wraith** tales.

**Mysterious:** Secret whispers, foggy Shadowland streets and labyrinthine tunnels under Stygia's great towers can help make mystery one of the best options for a ghost story. After all, there is much that the wraiths do not know about their unliving existences, and by emphasizing how much they don't understand, you can spur them to voyages of discovery.

Mystery in the classic *film noir* sense also works well with **Wraith**. Street-level intrigues, beautiful tormented souls, seedy afterlife hangouts and shadowy political organizations lurking in the background can emphasize the characters' heroic nature by pitting them in stark contrast to the Underworld around them.

**Excitement:** Nonstop action and melodrama can become part of any **Wraith** story. The quick pace and imminent danger create suspense and thrills, as immediate successes lead to immediate gratification, but the price of failure can be terrible. Spectre raids, races against time to save Fetters or rescue comrades from the forges, and other stories can all be run without allowing the characters a moment to catch their figurative breaths.

**Lighthearted:** Even the Restless sometimes know peace. The characters seek out friendly encounters or play practical jokes on the living. The characters can rest and recover; the players can relax and have a little fun with their Arcanoi. With the intense emotional pressure of many **Wraith** chronicles, sometimes it can be helpful to lighten the mood to provide contrast and recuperation.

## Chronicle

*There is no final curtain; this is not a stage*

*Can you read what's written on this blackened page?*

— Steven Brust & Adam Stemple, "Blackened Page"



Just as individual chapters are bound up into a book, individual stories get strung together to make a chronicle. By placing the separate tales you tell within the framework of something larger, you gain the opportunity to create larger plots, connect disparate events and characters, and increase the scale and scope of your **Wraith** game.

Among the most important things a chronicle provides is continuity. A sinister Solicitor who appears in one story can be an adequate villain, but over the course of a chronicle you can also bring in his employer, the reasons he was hired, his Guildmates, Hierarchy soldiers looking for information on this ghostly criminal and more. While there wouldn't be space to develop all of this in a single game session, the wider canvas of the chronicle gives you more sessions with which to expand your ideas.

## Getting Started

The first thing you need in creating a chronicle is a basic idea, which you should have well in hand before the first player starts creating her character. Since the World of Darkness is an extension, albeit a bleak one, of our own world, ideas for

stories can come from anywhere around you. This morning's paper might have an intriguing article on a historical figure who could make a good wraith, or the latest New Age magazines might have some interesting theories on life after death that might inspire a Heretic cult. Plus, as the Underworld reflects the Skinlands, a traumatic event that makes the morning's headlines could well have devastating echoes in the Shadowlands. On the other hand, coming up with a wraithly explanation for a news story could also kick-start a story idea.

The basics needed for a story are the answers to the following questions: who is involved, where does it take place, and where will it lead the characters? The first question should get you thinking about what sort of characters you will be playing as Storyteller, and how they'll react to the players. Other wraiths? Spectres? The Quick? Knowing and preparing the characters your wraiths will meet goes a long way.

Figuring out where the story takes place is also important. Is your tale Shadowlands based, or does it occur in Stygia itself? Is there a particular haunt or Necropolis at the heart of it? Will the wraiths be required to breach the Shroud? The answer to this question helps you prepare your chronicle's setting.

Finally, there is the question of where will your story lead the characters. Every action has consequences, every villain has allies or friends, and no good deed goes unpunished. Even if you're only planning to play **Wraith** with these characters once, laying groundwork for potential future sessions can help you focus on what you want to have happen during the first one.

## Long-Term Commitment or One-Night Stand?

Stories can exist as part of a long-term chronicle or stand alone as "one-shots." A chronicle story has the advantage of long-term continuity, as well as access to a larger base of background material which has developed previously over the length of your chronicle. This wealth of material fleshes out your world and helps you to find firm footing should the players stray from the path you've blazed for them. On the other hand, extended chronicles do have drawbacks as well. In order to enforce continuity, each individual story needs to fit into the course of the chronicle's pre-existing plotline. This limits your ability to affect events and characters drastically without trashing your back history and plot. Plus, there is always the spectre of continuity errors, because if your world becomes inconsistent ("Last week you said he *wasn't* a Monitor!"), your players will cease to trust you. Still, the intricacies and opportunities of running long-term chronicles make them well worth the effort.

The alternative to a chronicle is the so-called one-shot story. With a one-shot, the players create characters whose game-play lifespan lasts as long as the game session. This allows you to avoid the long-term commitment to a long, drawn-out chronicle and instead focus on one particular idea. This also saves preparation time; you only need to create a few hours' worth of setting, characters and plot for a single evening's game. The main trade-off resides in the loss of background material and development time; everything needs to be introduced, developed and resolved over the course of one game session.

## Here or There

**Wraith** exists as part of the Gothic-Punk World of Darkness. Its setting finds its origins in the darkest corners of our actual world, but that doesn't mean that the game can't remove itself completely from our world and take you into the murky shadows of the Underworld. When designing your story, one of the first things you need to decide is where to set the stage. While you can always change this decision later on, your initial setting will greatly influence the type of story you tell. There are two major choices: the Shadowlands and its associated Skinlands, or within the Tempest, which includes Stygia, the Far Shores, the Labyrinth and the other Dark Kingdoms. Of course, stories will move from place to place, as most involve some sort of journeying, but the focus of most tales will usually be one of these two.

The Shadowlands exist just beyond the Shroud between life and death. Here the characters can interact with the Quick to the best of their ability, and have the advantage of being able to see and guard their remaining connections to life. Stories set in the Shadowlands will usually involve the members of the Circle with Passions, Fetters and the dilemmas of the living. Interaction with other supernatural entities, such as mages or werewolves, also becomes possible in the Shadowlands, allowing you to tie **Wraith** more firmly to the rest of the World of Darkness.

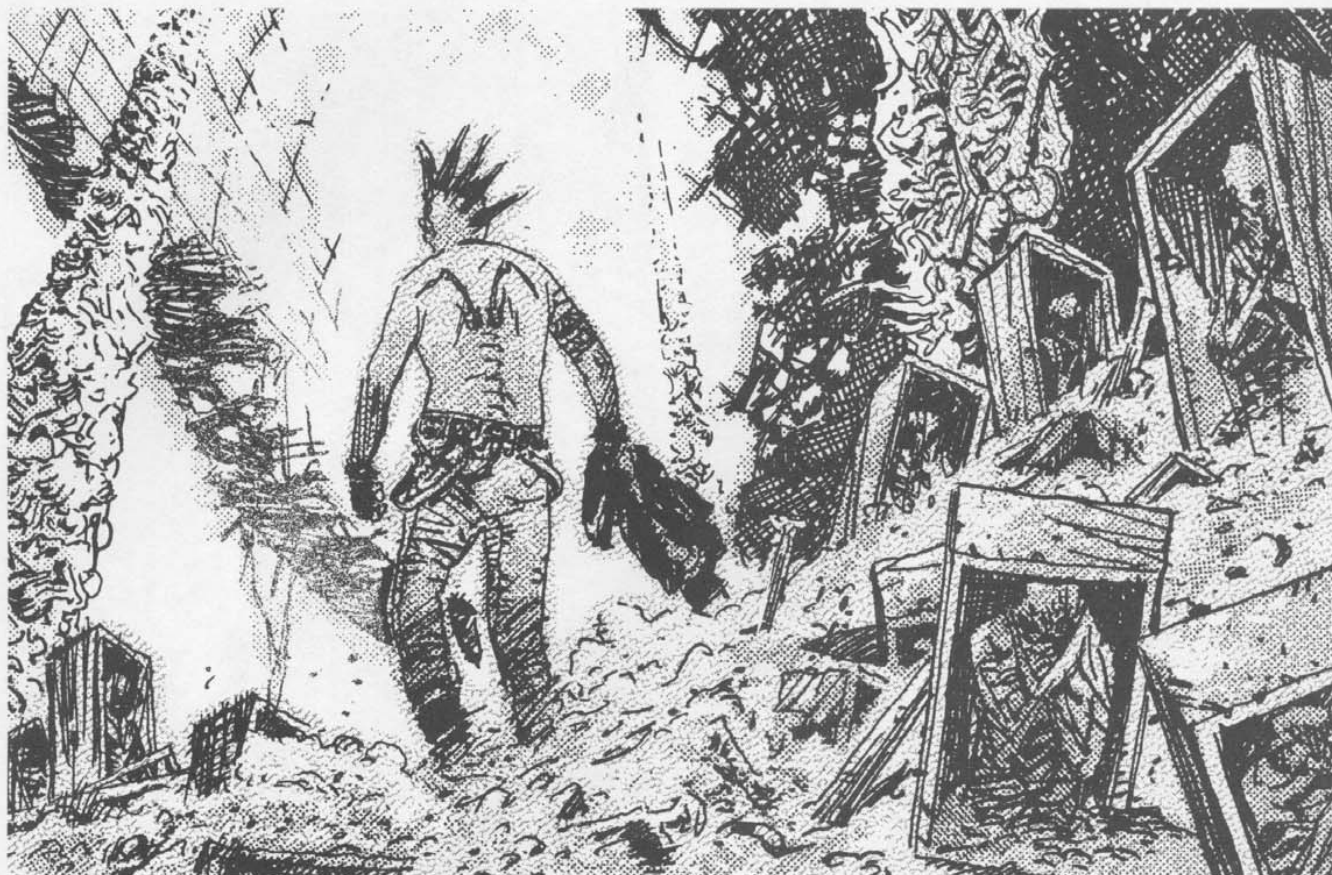
Within the Tempest, **Wraith** stories take on a very different aspect. The Tempest and its environs, even such supposedly friendly places as Stygia, are alien and incomprehensible to many souls. Just acclimating to this other world can take some wraiths several stories. Plus, there are the inhabitants of this new world — Spectres, Tempest-dwellers, aged wraiths who have long since seen their Fetters turn to dust — who will expect very different things of the characters than the local beat Legionnaire might. There also exist other Deadlands that the characters might journey to or receive visitors from. The clash of cultures, beliefs and metaphysics that this setting presents may not have the grittiness of a Skinlands chronicle, but offers a grandeur and scope that more localized chronicles might not have.

Stories will often cross back and forth through all of these settings, though when you begin it is a good idea to stick to one location for a while so the players have a chance to get acclimated. Their characters will need a place to call home. Familiar faces and places will help your players visualize your world, and give them the confidence to explore wider horizons.

## The Bad Guys

All stories need antagonists, someone against whom the protagonists must act and move. Not all antagonists have to be villains *per se*, but by adding characters who oppose the players' every move, you create tension and excitement within your chronicle. An unopposed victory is merely a task completed; an opposed victory is a triumph.





Of course, there's nothing that adds flavor to an extended chronicle like a good primary antagonist, someone whom players and characters alike love to hate. The enemies in your stories can be numerous or powerful, but they should be challenging and complex. The best antagonists make us question our own moral code by seeming to be the most hideous of monsters but turning out to be just like us in the end, or vice versa.

Generally, you will have one arch-villain, a main antagonist for your chronicle. In order to make him memorable, you should completely detail his every aspect. After all, he's your number one agent and voice. He drives the story, either from behind the scenes or right in front of the characters' faces, and should have as many goals, quirks and complexities as the main characters. In order for the players to truly hate their adversary, he should be as close to human as possible, or at least as realistic as possible. If they hate your antagonist, they care about him enough to expend real emotion on him, and that means that you've succeeded.

The villain of your story should have more depth than any other character you create. friend or foe, and part and parcel of this is his appearance. A detailed description of every aspect brings your villain to life in your players' minds. Your players should know exactly what to imagine when facing their nemesis, from what shoes the monster wears to how he parts his hair.

Your ability to roleplay the antagonist will inspire the greatest emotional impact on your players. Don't depend on amazing statistics or a hugely complex background to do the job. In a play or movie, the look and style of a villain can inspire fear

by themselves. In a story, you must create verbally the visual aspect of the villain, but his true emotional effect develops with the personality of your character. Give your villain some style and quirks, so that after a few encounters a tag line or a calling card (such as the miniature Catherine wheels members of the Solicitors' Guild roll past their victims) will announce your villain's presence as effectively as a formal introduction.

Your antagonist will have as many, if not more, goals than the players themselves. Tension between characters and antagonist arises when the villain and the characters end up on opposite sides of a conflict, as the classic antagonist diametrically opposes everything the characters represent. On a simplistic level, he is in the wrong simply because the characters disagree with him. However, a villain of true depth has his own motives which may not be evil, or at least not evil in his own mind. In essence, the antagonist is as important as any of the players' characters, and should be created with the same care and complexity as the protagonists themselves.

## Title

Most stories, poems, plays, movies and other narratives have titles. Why should your chronicle be any different? In addition to serving as an easy way to organize what you're doing, a title crystallizes and sums up a chronicle. A well-chosen title can evoke the mood of the story you're running even before your players sit down at the table, while a poorly chosen one can spark derisive laughter and serve to break any mood you're trying to create. Generally, simple titles work the best.

## Who's Driving?

Chronicle plots fall into two categories: story-driven and character-driven. Both types have inherent advantages and disadvantages, and both are equally good ways to get a **Wraith** chronicle going.

Story-driven plots tend to be more linear, and require you to plan out what's going to happen well in advance. In a story-driven chronicle, the events are what determine the action. The plans and actions of the antagonists are the focus of the chronicle; the resolution is based on whether the characters succeed or fail at foiling their enemies' plots. Story-driven plotlines are relatively simple to run, as you don't have to depend on the players to advance the plot. If they wait for the action to come to them, their enemies just get stronger. The disadvantage of story-driven plots, though, is their structure. If the players do something to upset the preplanned events, a story-driven chronicle can derail very quickly.

One of the most important parts of a story-driven chronicle is the villain. He can't be too strong, or the players will either give up or get their characters massacred. On the other hand, if he's too weak, the characters win a victory that's too easy. It's often best to start a chronicle with an idea of what you want your antagonist to be able to do, then adjust his abilities up or down after he meets the characters for the first time. This way, you have an accurate gauge of his power relative to the characters'.

Character-driven plots are more difficult, as they lack the simple structure of story-driven plotlines. While there is an ultimate goal to be reached in this sort of story, the path to that goal is much more nebulous, and is delineated only by what makes sense for the characters to do. Passions and Fetters are good ways of determining what will motivate players to go after the goal you've set. Good roleplayers tend to follow up on hints in this direction; beginners may require the impetus of a potential reward or a threat to property or loved ones. Characters you control who are allied to the players are good tools for propelling this sort of plot forward; if the players are stuck, you have a built-in way to give them a gentle nudge forward again. After all, it's in the best interest of the characters you're playing if they succeed....

Use of the carrot and stick method of motivating characters has to be balanced. If you offer too many rewards without fear of punishment, the characters' power level will rise rapidly and they'll get used to being rewarded for being balky. On the other hand, mete out enough punishments without respite, and either you'll run out of things to threaten or the players will get rebellious.

Once the characters are actually moving in the right direction, you need to throw a few obstacles in their way. Encounters, rough terrain or Maelstroms, Spectre attacks or the lack of a crucial piece of knowledge all serve as obstacles for the Circle to overcome.

The main drawback to character-driven plots is that they can meander. Furthermore, there is often temptation for the various members of the Circle to go their own separate ways to fol-

low their own agendas. This can make for frustrating game sessions as just two or three players at a time take turns playing, leaving the others out of what's going on until the scene switches to the characters (or Shadows) that they play. When character-driven plots work well, though, they have all of the excitement of story-driven plots with the added sense of accomplishment on the part of the players for driving the story instead of being driven.

## Chronicle Concepts

Every chronicle starts with a general idea of who the characters are and what they're up to. Some of the basic ones are:

- **Secret Agent Dead Man** — The Underworld is a cauldron of intrigue and plotting, often for its own sake. Older wraiths are always looking for new pawns; Lemures are constantly seeking ways to garner favor and attention from wraiths in power. The characters could very easily get drawn into the complex workings of wraithly politicking and intrigue. Between the Guilds, the Deathlords, the Renegades and the Heretics, there are always employers willing to hire wraiths for special assignments. Successfully completed, these could lead to bigger and better things, or they could attract the ire of some very powerful enemies.


- **The Gang** — Now members of the Restless Dead, the Circle sticks together for protection. Alternately, the wraiths may not have known each other in life, but have come together because of a mutual interest like a shared Haunt or political ideology.

To the majority of the dead, the Circle is a bunch of no-account hoodlums starting unnecessary trouble in the afterlife. As for the wraiths, they just want to have a good time with their immortality and maybe carve out a small section of

## Staying Together

Passions, Fetters and Harrowings can make it very easy for a Circle of wraiths to get separated. It is generally best when the entire Circle is acting together. It allows for more intercharacter roleplaying, keeps everyone involved in the action and saves wear and tear on your creative faculties as you don't have to keep switching scenes between four or five wandering wraiths.

The easiest way to keep a Circle together is to present a threat that has targeted the entire Circle. It only makes sense that there's safety in numbers, and if the wraiths stick together there's less chance that their enemy will pick them off one by one. More advanced methods for keeping Circles together go back to character creation. Creating interlocking histories or even shared Passions and Fetters works well to tie characters together.



town for themselves. The politics of the Hierarchy do not interest them, and Transcendence is above their heads.

Renegade gangs might find such spirited wraiths to be the perfect new recruits, or could see them as potential rivals. Heretics could see potential converts or blasphemers to be exterminated. The Hierarchy probably wants to wipe the Circle out, and won't hesitate to use excessive force to do so. The territory the gang occupies could have interest for a rival gang or a Gaunt, putting the characters, friendless, on the spot.

- **Take Me Higher** — The Circle could be seeking Transcendence. Such spiritual peace is not easily found, and the Shadow is sure to fight the process kicking and screaming every step of the way. Resolved Passions no longer feed a wraith Pathos; how do the Circle members ensure their survival while finishing up their business on earth, and what do their fellow wraiths think of what they're doing?

- **Refugees** — The Circle got kicked out of the last Necropolis, and now seeks a new home. The Restless are even more protective of their homes than they were in life, and have no sympathy for strangers. Perhaps the Hierarchy hunts them, or a particularly persistent Spectre has reserved for them a special place in its heart.

The characters must depend on each other for survival. Existing on the underside of the Underworld, every character's skills will be tested. Travel between Necropoli or through the Tempest can be fraught with peril, and the pressures of wraithly survival may be the only thing keeping the Circle together. The focus of the story centers on the hardships of not having a home and on the dangers and difficulties of being hunted.

Fear and paranoia will drive the wraiths from place to place in search of a home. Of course, wraiths on the run don't have much time to tend their Fetters, and their enemies may well take advantage of this fact. Conversely, the characters may decide to cut and run entirely, taking their chances in one of the other Dark Kingdoms.

- **Slave Rebellion** — The same Reaper harvests all of the characters, and they must cooperate in order to escape. First they must find a way to slip free from their Stygian chains while avoiding being forged — or worse. Once they have gotten away, where do they go? What resources do they find, and is anyone willing to help a bunch of runaway Lemures?

If your chronicle begins this way, the characters will need to explore their fascinating and terrifying new world. Since they have no allies, they will need to learn the Shadowlands and its surrounding geography for themselves. When they finally understand what and where they are, they will probably wonder what keeps them there. When they discover their anchors will they be thankful, or try to free themselves from the earthly bond? This chronicle focuses on exploration of the world and the nature of being Restless.

- **Perfect Faith** — Dedicated to one of the three major sects, the characters follow strict orders, at least at first. Each group will have more than enough for a Circle of dedicated

wraiths to do, but prolonged contact with the "enemy" might lead the wraiths to question some of what they're doing. Deceptively simple, this sort of chronicle is good for new players to help them get their feet wet, as it were, while still allowing them to explore and make their own choices as to what they want out of their afterlives.

- **Platoon** — In life, the wraiths were members of the military, possibly the same unit. In death, they continue to ply their trade of choice. Then again, many wraiths are drafted into the Legions' armored ranks or Heretic military gangs *post mortem*, and military existence is a brutal fact for huge numbers of wraiths. They might work for the Hierarchy or against it. They could be well-trained Legionnaires, protecting their Necropolis from Spectre assaults and generally keeping the peace. Or they could be a Renegade troupe running a guerrilla war against a particularly oppressive batch of Anacreons. These wraiths thrive on danger and excitement, finding death only bearable if existence is on the line. They are driven by loyalty, devotion and duty, and find companionship only from each other. Cogs in the great military machine, they know their place and are comfortable with its risks.

- **Unfinished Business** — An entire chronicle can revolve around the characters' relationship with the living world. Their Fetters draw them back time and time again. Unable to resist, the wraiths continue to watch over and protect their loved ones or their most prized possessions. They continually force themselves through the pain of seeing their old lives without being able to contact them. The characters watch as their old lovers start new relationships or their children grow up without them.

The chronicle should be about more than just idle regret or longing. Something might threaten their Fetters, forcing the characters into action. Perhaps the conspiracies that slew a character in the first place now move against her family and friends, or a character's killer might still lurk in the shadows stalking more victims. The wraiths may still be addicted to earthly pleasures. Drugs, alcohol or sex can all be experienced vicariously by wraiths who have passions for such things, particularly with the help of Puppetry. Plus, there are other powers in the Skinlands: vampires, Garou, mages and other beings, all of whom might have plans for the Circle.

On the other hand, the Circle may have decided to seek Transcendence; and the wraiths are attempting to Resolve their Passions and Fetters. The process of saying good-bye is never easy, and the living might not want to let go, either.

- **Rise to Power** — The desire for power and glory still drives many wraiths even centuries after their deaths. The characters are at the bottom of the societal totem pole, and want to climb. After all, the higher you are, the less likely you are to end up in the forges. On the other hand, perhaps they just enjoy the game. The characters go to great lengths to move up in the ranks of their sect, using their greed and passion for power to push weaker wraiths aside. Political maneuvering and intrigue gives



meaning to their eternal existence. Complications will arise when they make too many enemies or step on too many toes. The characters' desire for power must be balanced with their fear of their enemies. Great rewards require great sacrifice. How much are the wraiths willing to give up? What will they do once they reach their desired position, and will it all have been worth it? As the characters defeat their enemies and rise in power, so too will their Shadows grow, feeding off the greed and desire that fuel their ascent.

- **Vision Quest** — One of the characters' allies or one of the characters themselves possesses strong powers of Fatalism. Using her ability, she has seen an impending calamity that will soon lay waste the Shadowlands or the Skinlands, and only the Circle can avert the disaster. Loved ones or Fetters hang in the balance, and the characters must succeed. The quest to find a solution to this dilemma can take them to the Shadowlands, Tempest or even the Far Shores, while at every turn other wraiths scoff and the agents of catastrophe seek to waylay them. Can the characters find the answer in time, and if they do, can they do what is needed to stop the threat?

- **That's Entertainment** — In life the characters were on the fast-track to fame and fortune, but somehow their lives were cut short just at the brink of success. Perhaps the Circle was a band or a tight-knit group of young actors who were just about to be discovered, or maybe they sublimated their love for the arts in life but can't deny it in death. They

could also come from different walks of life, drawn together by their common misfortune. In any case, the characters have decided to call on their talents and use them in the Underworld. They might start a traveling troupe of performers or open a theater of some kind. Their passion for art and creativity binds them, while their talent wins them a place among the Restless. Can they regain their fame in the world of the dead? Will their success feel the same in the Underworld, and what of the voices of censorship, just as loud across the Shroud? There are toes to step on and powers that be to offend among the dead as well. And that's not even counting the potential competition from Sandmen, Chanteurs, Masquers and Doppelgangers....

- **Ancient History** — Not everyone in the Underworld died recently. The juxtaposition of wraiths from 20, 50 or hundreds of years ago with the modern Underworld can have some interesting effects. As the wraiths struggle to fit in with what their afterlives have become, there is inevitable conflict. Other, more powerful wraiths may wish to turn back the clock, and it's up to the characters to decide which side they're on in that struggle.

Then again, you might want to switch the setting to a historical period. World War I, the French Revolution, the Roman Empire — the choice is yours. Just make sure you've created enough of a background and done enough research to make your historical setting seem real.

# Story

*You want to hear a story? True story? Stories always used to be good payment.*

— Neil Gaiman, "Murder Mysteries"



hile grand chronicle ideas are all well and good, there still remains the problem of individual chapters, or stories. Every evening's play needs to have a sense of closure to it, as each story needs to be self-contained with a plot and a resolution.

Ideally, your story will advance the grand plot of your chronicle while still allowing players freedom of choice. If they sense they are being tugged along against their will, the chronicle will cease to be enjoyable. Each story, then, has to take the players where you want them to go, but also has to make them want to go there. It need not directly advance the metaplot of your chronicle, but in some way it should help the characters develop toward your ultimate goal.

A few sample story ideas are provided below. Use them as jumping-off points.

• **Getting There From Here** — The characters have a pressing reason for being someplace else. Maybe they need to

get across town for a big meeting of Renegade gangs, or their Deathlord has summoned them to Stygia. Regardless, travel in the Underworld is always difficult. Other wraiths, Spectres and the living can prove tremendous obstacles to simple travel, and there's always the chance that someone doesn't want the characters to make the trip in one piece.

• **Sightseeing** — There's much to see and do among the Restless. Stygia is a tourist attraction as well as a working city, but it's not always easy to get — or survive — there. Doppelgangers and slavers haunt the streets of the Undercity, and innocent bystanders can get caught in the crossfire when political struggles get nasty.

On the other hand, maybe the wraiths want to see sights even more exotic. The Far Shores, the Tempest, other Deadlands, even the Labyrinth beckon to particularly adventurous (or suicidal) wraiths. You never know what you'll run into in the Underworld, but odds are it will be interesting.

• **Serve and Protect** — One of the character's Fetters has come under immediate threat. Perhaps his parents have decided to sell off his beloved baseball card collection, scattering the cards to the four winds, or a living Fetter has been targeted and must be protected from inimical forces. The wraith (and his Circlemates) must spring into action to save what he loves, even if it means violating the *Dictum Mortuum*. The consequences for getting caught are bad, the price of failure is far worse....



• **It's a Twister!** — There are Maelstroms and there are Great Maelstroms, but even the small ones are terrifying. When the storm gongs start to sound and the Tempest winds whip up, it's often every wraith for himself. Can the Circle find shelter, and will it be able to repel the Spectral assault that rides the storm's winds? What if one member of the Circle doesn't make it inside, and what effect will the storm have on the local Shadowlands?

• **Save My Soul** — A friend, ally or even a Circlemate has been caught by slavers and is destined for the forges. The Circle has a limited amount of time before their friend becomes a nightstand or something equally useful, and the opposition from the Artificers and the Hierarchy is certain to be fierce.

• **War of the Guilds** — The Guilds are still a real and powerful force in the Deadlands, no matter how loudly the Hierarchy denies it. Caught up in struggles centuries old, the Guilds are always looking for new recruits to throw at their enemies. Advanced Arcanoi and lost arts can be a tempting bribe to get wraiths moving in the right direction, but more than one Guild may be trying to entice members of the Circle.

• **Firebase Necropolis** — The Spectres are coming! The Spectres are coming! This story is pure combat, with wave after wave of Shadow-Eaten attacking the Circle's home. What are the Spectres after, and how did the characters get so unlucky? Or is there more to this than just mindless rapacity, and do the Spectres have some diabolical purpose in mind?

• **Pest Control** — Those pesky living can be a real pain, particularly when they take over a place that has real meaning to a wraith. Getting rid of the Quick can be a lot of fun, assuming you don't get caught while you're at it. This sort of story can be more lighthearted than many **Wraith** tales, allowing players to stretch their imaginations and have a little sadistic fun while they're at it.

## Conflict



If plot is the engine that drives a story, conflict is the fire in the engine. Internal and external struggles allow characters to progress, create narrative tension and generate excitement within your players' Circle. While eternal combat can get pointless quickly, chronicles based on nothing but peaceful coexistence and quiet mediation can be stultifyingly dull. Conflict livens up your chronicle and provides exclamation point-style emphasis to events.

Both internal and external conflict are vital to **Wraith**. There's no shortage of external enemies in the Underworld: Spectres, slavers, Hierarchs, Renegades, Heretics, angered Ferrymen, exorcists, vampires and more. If a wraith wants to pick a fight, or even if he wants to avoid one, there's usually

someone around willing to get violent in a hurry. By contrast, there is the relentless conflict each wraith has with her Shadow, a struggle which can be as violent as a barroom brawl and just as spectacular.

Building a conflict can form the basis for your plotlines in either your stories or your chronicles. The characters can start by facing down small threats and obstacles, move on to dangerous or even deadly dilemmas and eventually face the greatest threat in the climax. Obstacles in your chronicle can come from many directions, but ultimately they should also relate to your underlying theme. Unattached, unrelated conflicts will seem chaotic and poorly planned, unless your central theme is chaotic in nature.

Conflict can manifest in many different forms in a given story, even multiple forms at one time. The easiest, most obvious, type of conflict pits the characters against an enemy in a physical confrontation: trashing a guard, outracing a Renegade band, bushwhacking a Spectre. Those types of conflicts entertain and are necessary for story development, as well as giving your players confidence in their characters' capabilities.

Major conflicts inspire the deepest, strongest emotions: fear, loathing, hate, love, horror. While physical conflict satisfies the need to compete and overcome, deeper conflicts satisfy a basic need to express and experience our emotions. Involving ourselves with characters we sympathize with, we experience these emotions vicariously. **Wraith** stories bring out these emotions by pitting the characters against powerful foes, inexhaustible Spectres and the most potent opponent of all, the Shadow. Memorable villains that cannot simply be defeated in combat will stir hatred and fear. Unknowable Tempest spirits and Spectres horrify. The characters may find love or lose it, and must triumph on battlefields of the mind and the heart.

The following lists basic conflicts that can be used in any **Wraith** story. Many of them may be at work simultaneously as you weave your tale, as each character always has unique motivations and goals. Any of these conflicts can be the central focus for a plotline in either a story or a chronicle.

• **Wraith vs. Hierarchy** — A wraith, with or without her allies, defies the colossal bureaucracy of the Hierarchy. The corrupt Restless officials rake in their oboli and soulcrafted treasures. The lower class gets stepped upon or soulforged for the pleasure of the powerful. The sheer inhumanity of the situation calls out for response. *Viva la muerte revolution!*

• **Wraith vs. Heretics** — Some wraiths become religious zealots who will stop at nothing to make converts, or to eradicate opposing faiths. The characters may be targets for indoctrination, or may have some differing opinions within their own Circle. Multiple groups of Heretics may seek out the characters, leading to some violent consequences as the bidding for souls gets nasty.

• **Wraith vs. Renegades** — Whether dedicated revolutionaries or a bunch of hellbound undead bikers, Renegades are always dangerous to be around. The characters could be Renegades swept up in a gang war, or Hierarchs sent out to sweep the Necropolis clean of Renegade taint. No matter what, it isn't going to be pretty.

• **Circle vs. Circle** — Circles often involve themselves in turf wars; Haunts are hard to come by, and resources in the Shadowlands are scarce. Wraiths might share Fetters with opposing Circles, or a Fetter may be in danger because of a rival. These conflicts can quickly escalate into major affairs as each group pulls in allies, calls in favors and attracts the attention of the local powers that be. On the other hand, the lords of the Underworld often set groups of ghosts against each other, fighting over meager treasures for even smaller rewards.

The competition can also be a healthy exercise in artistic or physical abilities. Team competitions take up time in a never-ending existence. Anything from a Shadowland game of baseball, to endurance races in the Tempest, to scavenger hunts in the local Citadel ("Five oboli says you chickenshit Renegades can't nab the Anacreon's nameplate from his desk!") is a possibility, all in the interest of good, clean, dead fun.

• **Wraith vs. Wraith** — Ghosts were once human and so have human drives, goals and flaws. The number of reasons for conflict between wraiths equals the number of reasons for regular people to disagree, and your players will undoubtedly incorporate this type of conflict into the story without any help from you at all.

Conflict from life may also come back to haunt a wraith. Unfinished romances may rekindle in the Shadowlands, or a wraith's murderer may be sucked into the Shadowlands along with her victims. Childhood rivalries could resurface, or age-old vendettas may be played out over and over again.

• **Wraith vs. Vampire** — Vampires have died, but remain in the land of the living experiencing all that wraiths have lost. Vampires are responsible for much of the violence and gloom in the World of Darkness and, in many wraiths' eyes, this feeds Oblivion. On a more personal level, a wraith may have been the victim of a vampire feeding or just an innocent bystander cut down by rival factions in the bloodsuckers' eternal Jyhad.

Wraiths also hold secrets and powers to which vampires demand access. The Tremere, masters of blood magic; the Samedi, hideous zombielike vampires; and especially the Giovanni, masters of necromancy, all have reason and power to affect the Restless majority. The characters may be forced to do the bidding of a vampire and become involved in her petty schemes. Then again, the wraiths might seek vampiric help in preserving their living Fetters for eternity, or could hire themselves out to one side in a vampiric conflict.

• **Wraith vs. Werewolf** — While not as callous to the plights of the Restless as the Kindred, werewolves are no less responsible for many of the current residents in the Shadowlands. Their battles against vampires and their uncontrollable tempers tend to rack up high body counts of innocent bystanders, many of whom will never understand that they were "Wyrmtainted" and had to be destroyed for the good of Gaia. A wraith may wish to exact personal vengeance against a werewolf, either physically or mentally, and the lack of access most Garou have to the Shadowlands can make this sort of conflict one-sided at first.

• **Wraith vs. Mage** — The many mage factions and their ability to warp reality can trap unwary wraiths in incomprehensible situations of danger. Most mages, if they try hard enough, can see and hear ghosts, and some are even aware of the status of the Shadowlands. Occasionally, mages will trade information or favors for the same from a ghost. The mages of the Euthanatos Tradition often take advantage of their connections to the Restless Dead, and most even sojourn into the Shadowlands at some point. On the other hand, the soulless Technocracy is trying to eradicate wraiths from the entire paradigm of reality, and the foul Nephandi's monstrous masters seem to take Oblivion as an inspiration.

• **Wraith vs. Changeling** — Just as small children have never been taught to disbelieve the images they see of the Shadowlands, many fae have never learned to not see the undead. While they cannot freely interact with the Restless, the fae are more aware than most of the ghostly presence in their world. Unlike small children, however, changelings often have secret motives for dealing with ghosts. Petty courtly disputes, practical jokes or more dastardly intentions can drive a changeling to deal with the Restless. Many wraiths learn to regret becoming involved in the complex plots — or japes — of the changelings.

Sandmen, more than any other wraiths, come into contact with the fae. Changelings, creatures of reality and dream combined, draw Sandmen like the clichéd moth to the flame. There is peril here, though, for while fae are rich sources of inspiration, they also have potent defenses, and will go far to avenge a real or imagined slight.

• **Wraith vs. the Quick** — Wraiths often try to interact with the world of the living. Most people won't even realize a ghost is even there, which can be convenient but also frustrating when a wraith wants to make contact with the living. Construction on the site of a potent Fetter; a killer stalking a loved one; a rival succeeding where the ghost would have once been superior — all of these can push a wraith into conflict with the living.

There are many organizations, such as the Inquisition or the Arcanum, and individuals who make a concerted effort to contact, analyze and categorize the Restless. Some of these people simply wish to prove the existence of ghosts, while others seek to enslave or destroy the "minions of evil" that the Restless Dead obviously must be, to their way of thinking.

• **Wraith vs. the Shadow** — This most personal of all the conflicts, the war between Psyche and Shadow is eternal as long as the wraith exists. The Psyche's dark twin continually tries to destroy the self and drive the wraith into Oblivion, but its blandishments cannot be easily shrugged off. Succumbing to the Shadow means certain doom, but ignoring it is not an option and sometimes a deal with the Devil is essential to survival. Encourage your Shadowguides to participate actively in the story. A triumph over an external foe is sweeter when an internal one is defeated as well.

• **Wraith vs. the Self** — Not every internal conflict needs to involve the Shadow; every character probably has many more flaws that don't personify themselves. Indecision, emotional crises, fear and

doubts can drive a character to madness or the Shadow's clutches. Regret, jealousy, grief and guilt can bring out the worst in a personality. Fighting against one's own flaws can be the central theme in a personal, thought-provoking story. One of each wraith's greatest enemies lies in her own faults, and overcoming them can be its own reward.

• **Wraith vs. the Unknown** — The character doesn't know what, let alone who, seeks his destruction. The mystery heightens the fear, and the eventual confrontation can be as horrifying as necessary.

A more literal unknown can be found in the Tempest, which houses creatures few have seen and returned to speak about. Such beings as Tindelhounds, Kraken and the legendary Angelics can be as perilous to a wraith as any Spectre.

• **Wraith vs. Spectre** — The Spectres exist as the antithesis to everything the characters are and once were. Spectres have lost the battle with Oblivion, becoming completely consumed by their Shadows. They represent the easiest of antagonists to pit the characters against, but one of the hardest to execute properly. The Spectre embodies every worst nightmare the wraith has, serving as the ultimate evil of the Shadowlands. You cannot overstate the depravity or wickedness of these creatures. They serve Oblivion and seek only destruction and new converts to their unholy cause — that is, when they don't feel like having some fun with their prey first.

## Advanced Techniques

*Is all that we see or seem*

*But a dream within a dream?*

— Edgar Allen Poe, "A Dream within a Dream"



here are more ways to tell a story than just straightforward narrative. The techniques listed below can be difficult, but the effects that they can achieve are capable of adding tremendous depth and scope to your chronicle. Trying things like flashbacks or parallel stories requires planning and some fancy footwork,

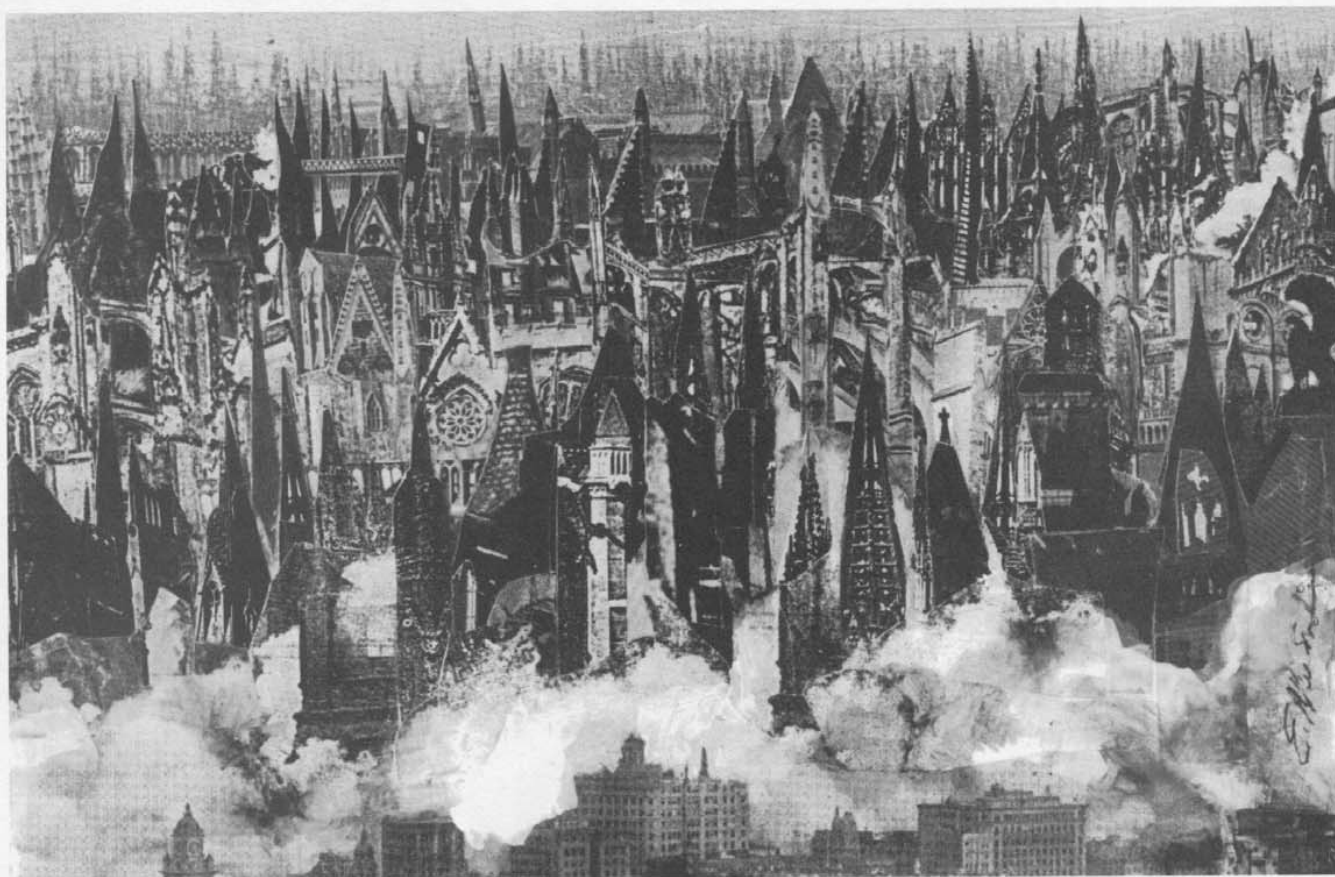
but if it works out, your story will rise to a whole new level.

### Flashbacks

By playing through the events in her character's history, a player adds depth to her understanding of her alternate personality. The character suffers, triumphs, fails, loves, loses and experiences all the myriad of human events, including, ultimately, death. A flashback opens a window to all these character experiences, which normally would only be part of the character's history, not her reality. A **Wraith** story that flashes back to the character's living days could move even the most jaded player. The flashback could provide information that the character forgot when crossing the Shroud, or could focus on the character's death itself and what significance that has for her now.

You have the option to play out a flashback cooperatively with your players. If the story centers on one character, and the other





characters weren't present at the time of the flashback's events, the other players can easily take the roles of characters involved in the flashback scene. This keeps everyone involved, takes some of the workload off you, and adds spontaneity to the sequence. Of course, you must control the ending, since these events of the flashback have already transpired. The player may introduce unique aspects of the story, but ultimately the outcome has already been decided.

## Foreshadowing

The simplest and most subtle advanced technique, foreshadowing provides the players with a hint as to what is to come. You can introduce elements into the story that seem out of place or different, but which really look forward to events that you have planned for later. By their very incongruity, these elements will catch the players' attention and get them thinking about what's coming as well as what's already here. For example, if you wish the characters to contact werewolves before the climax, ghostly wolf howls might follow them through the countryside. The destruction of an ally might herald the peril for a character, if the two look alike or share a common Fetter. Care should be taken to avoid making your foreshadows too obvious. Abstract or ambiguous images make the best foreshadows, otherwise your players might figure out what's going on before you want them to.

## Dreams

In the eternal rest that comes after death, what do the Restless dream? When a wraith dreams, she delves deeper into her subconscious mind than when she lived. Unfortunately, the Shadow resides there as well. **Wraith** dreams, akin in many ways to Harrowings, can take a wraith on nightmare journeys into his most self-destructive inner thoughts.

The classic use of a dream sequence provides the players with foggy clues concerning the current dilemma or premonitions of an uncertain future, but these clues and hints can be gotten across in two ways. First of all, you can turn the dream into a narrative you read to the player in question, allowing her (and those dreaming with her — quite possible when the Sandmen are involved) to draw her own conclusions about what the dream means. The second technique is to allow the player or players to take part in the sequence by playing it.

Describing the dream to the players puts the Storyteller in complete control and allows her to add to the story without interference. This sort of sequence can leave the players with more questions than answers, but often provides some important clues. The dream points the players in the right direction without solving any of their problems for them, and can be thought of as a sort of small-scale *deus ex machina*, moving the characters along when they get stuck on their own.

Allowing the players to participate in the dream story adds numerous complications but also opens new avenues. The players will want to explore regions of your dream world that you deem unimportant. They will see subtext in things that you never

intended to have meaning. Most importantly, allowing the players to participate keeps the action going. The entire game shouldn't stop while you read off two paragraphs of prepared text. Instead, the players get to uncover things on their own, making those discoveries more valuable and keeping the players actively involved in gameplay.

## Symbolism

In stories, things often represent more than what they suggest at first glance. These symbols add meaning to your story and help you express your theme. It is important to keep in mind that symbols need to remain subtle. Overplaying your hand with a symbol looks heavy-handed and ruins the effect.

Introduce your symbols in small ways. For instance, if a certain supporting character is a wise advisor to the Circle, continually associate her with computers, owls or other icons of intellect. Linking her to a key, a more subtle symbol, might not be noticed, and there's nothing worse than having to point out your carefully planned symbolism to your players because they weren't looking for the reference.

The best symbols are not easily recognizable, and there's nothing that says that one item can't symbolize different things at different times. Broken weapons could symbolize death or the futility of war. Rain might represent impending doom or a cleansing and nourishment. Your symbols should support the story, and be as subtle as the theme. The rain might soak the characters, but it should not drown them.

## Parallel Stories

The characters have a limited perspective through which they see your world. The players, on the other hand, have the ability to see more, if you give them the opportunity. A simple technique, similar to the dream sequence, is simply to let them in on what else is happening. You can provide the players with a story in which their characters have no direct involvement, but which has obvious applications to their current situation. The tale might come from a mentor or a newly discovered Artifact book. It might just be a story overheard in a bar, or eavesdropped from the Quick. You can even tell the players the story directly.

Or, if you're feeling adventurous, you can create new characters for the players and let them play through the parallel story as those characters. This gives them more perspective about what else happens in your world, which should enable them to root their main characters more firmly in their corner of it.

## Troupe Style

Although unusual, it is not unheard of to have players create multiple characters. This works especially well with **Wraith**. While the characters have lost contact with the real world, the players have not. You can have your players make up human characters as well as wraiths. The wraiths will be the primary characters, but you can tell stories about the human personalities as well, and use the two to link the Shadowlands and Skinlands more concretely.

The best way to accomplish a story like this is to include a common villain for both sets of characters, giving the two stories

an impetus to intertwine. The human characters might even be hunting, or hunted by, their ghostly counterparts. The alternate characters do not have to be human; vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings or even other wraiths work just as well.

## Crossover Games

**Wraith** makes up only one portion of the World of Darkness. Vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings, mummies and all sorts of other beings reside in and around the same cosmology. You or your players may want to incorporate the other entities of the World of Darkness into your stories. This is as easy or difficult as you make it. **Wraith** characters may seem to be one step away from the real world, but this does not have to be the case. There are powers that some wraiths possess that allow them to cross the Shroud and interact with the living, while many supernatural creatures have abilities that put them in touch with the Restless Dead. Vampires have rituals and enhanced senses; werewolves have special gifts and access to a spirit world of their own; mages sometimes even walk the Shadowlands; and changelings have the innocence, or ignorance, of a child, which sometimes allows them to ignore the Shroud.

The players themselves will probably be your toughest opponents when combining the different creatures of the World of Darkness. You must have cooperation with and between your players, starting at character creation. A wraith character for a crossover game should possess the proper powers to interact with the real world. At the same time, the "real world" characters should be written up with the fact that they're going to have to talk to ghosts in mind. Otherwise, no matter what, some of your players are going to be left out of the action at all times, and no one will be happy with that.

Getting different Awakened creatures to work together can be just as tricky as creating the characters. A common foe is your best option. For example, a wraith receives a portend of an approaching Maelstrom. She warns her mage and slough contacts, who uncover further information about what Skinlands event might cause the soulstorm. With some information in hand, the two approach the local werewolves, who, when convinced of the seriousness of the situation, assign a pack member to help the pair. With the wraith back in tow, the four characters discover that the twisted vampires of the Sabbat are planning a ceremony that will generate the Maelstrom as well as cause a lot of innocent deaths. Not knowing much about the Sabbat, the quartet of characters call on a vampire they know. The story proceeds from there, with all the characters benefiting from the interaction and participating in the defeat of the Sabbat's plans. Of course, if any of the Sabbat vampires survive, they'll probably swear vengeance and go hunt up allies to make the characters pay....

The most important factor in creating a successful crossover story is cooperation. If the characters fight beyond the usual bickering, or they simply don't interact, the story will fall apart. Crossover runs are not designed to see whether a wraith can beat up a mage; they are intended to expand the horizons of storytelling by allowing the players access to the whole of the World of Darkness.

# Passions and Fetters



Passions and Fetters are not merely the Traits that set wraiths apart from the other protagonists in the Storyteller games and from the other denizens of the World of Darkness. They are also integral aspects of **Wraith: The Oblivion** as a game, which make its stories and focus unique. Just as

players can use these Traits to further characterize their wraiths, you can use Passions and Fetters to create a resonant, poignant and unique environment in which to tell stories.

You should take special care to guide players in the choosing of Passions and Fetters. Players should be encouraged to choose innovative and creative Passions. While **Kill the people who killed my lover (Hate)** can provide some good basic stories, players should be encouraged to go beyond the obvious and invent some truly unique motivations. Also, the most obvious emotion to describe a Passion is not always the best choice. The rather pedestrian **Protect my lover (Love)** can be spiced up if it becomes **Protect my lover (Greed)**, wherein the wraith desires that no other should have her if he cannot; **Protect my lover (Hope)**, wherein the wraith wants and helps the lover to succeed; or **Protect my lover (Spite)**; where bitterness at his own death causes the wraith to do everything he can to make his lover feel loss and grief while protecting her all along. Love itself could be love for people, love of an ideal, love for money, love of life (a bitter Passion for a wraith) or love of oneself. Other Passions can be similarly revisited and their full potential explored. You should encourage your players to challenge their assignment of Passions to descriptions and find the emotions which most interestingly and accurately reflect their vision.

Furthermore, the relative levels of the Passions are important. Each wraith is a being torn by different, often conflicting emotions, and you should try to acquire a sense for the conflicts raging inside the characters in your chronicle. Such contradictions and opposites can be exploited to force a character to make choices and to confront his Passions, deciding what is most important to him and further deepening the player's understanding of his character.

Both you and your players should make the characters' Fetters as detailed as possible. Instead of relying on a one-line description for the Fetter in question, players should write up to a page about each one for their own reference and yours. The distinction between Passions (which are ideas, emotions and aspirations) and Fetters (which are solid material objects) can be capitalized on and emphasized. People who are Fetters can be described or represented by photographs cut from magazines; places that are Fetters can be mapped, described in detail and similarly represented by photographs; material objects (by far the most common Fetters) can be sketched, written about and in some cases actual examples of the objects can be found and brought to each gaming session. This kind of effort on the part of the players can enhance and complete an idea that would

otherwise be merely a few words in the Fetters section of the character sheet. Having a player create a Fetter like **My old church (3)** is far less descriptive and helpful than that same description, as well as some notes on the church's history (Did anyone famous ever speak there? Any supposed hauntings? Was it ever burned down? What was the character's connection to it?), appearance (What does the interior look like? Is it the sort of place that would tempt thieves? Any unusual works of art or stained glass windows?) and location (What sort of neighborhood is it in? Who frequents it?). The latter will provide you with more ways to work the Fetter into the chronicle, instead of simply having it hang in the background as a place the character retreats to for Slumber's sake.

As Storyteller, your job is made both easier and more difficult by Passions and Fetters. Passions make the game easier to run in that you should never be at a loss for an event, description or encounter to keep the narrative flowing and the world rich and detailed. Passions provide the Storyteller with kernels from which encounters, images and events which players will respond to automatically can be drawn, because they are relevant to the characters. Threats to or changes in Fetters will also provoke immediate responses from characters, as they seek to protect what holds them to the Shadowlands. On the other hand, you must constantly bear all of a character's Passions and Fetters in mind (it's a good idea to write these down) so that the narrative of the game can reflect the mix of Passions present in each wraith and in the Circle as a whole. It is also worth noting that a Shadowguide should also have detailed knowledge of the Passions and Fetters of the wraith whose other half she portrays.

Having noted the various Passions and Fetters of the wraiths in the group, you are now armed with a set of ideas and emotions to flesh out your vision of the Shadowlands and the World of Darkness. Because wraiths are creatures of pure emotion, their reality is defined by their Passions. While our vision might be clouded by some strong emotion we feel, a wraith sees everything in terms of his Passions, of his very being. Therefore, the emotions represented by the Passions of the wraiths are those that will be reflected by the actions, events, characters and stories which are told in that chronicle. While in most games it is good practice for a Storyteller who intends to design her own chronicle to take into account the characters and their predilections, in **Wraith** it is critical.

When the character rolls a Passion to regain Pathos, you shouldn't just let this go past as a rule of the game. Wraiths only regain Pathos by accessing their purest emotions and experiencing them; therefore they should give demonstrable evidence of following their Passions. If a wraith is rolling against a Guilt Passion, for example, that character should experience strong guilt, and that character's player should not be able just to sit back and say, "I'm rolling against my Guilt Passion."

Wraiths are constantly buffeted by their Passions. With no flesh to buffer them against feeling, it hits them raw and sharp, and they are inevitably changed by the impact. You should feel free to utilize the surreal nature of the Underworld to evoke the

Passions which the wraiths access, to make them feel that they are creatures of emotion, and help them understand that Pathos is more than just a number on a page which allows them to use their Arcanoi. Similarly, when wraiths do spend the Pathos to heal or employ Arcanoi, they are bleeding pure emotion, and they and those around them should sense and be affected by this.

As well as providing you with events and encounters to detail and enrich your vision of the Shadowlands, Passions and Fetters can be easily and effectively used to create entire stories. **Wraith** is a game well-suited to character-driven narrative, and while more traditional stories can be run with wraiths successfully, even these can and should be personalized to reflect the characters that play them.

Passions and Fetters can be used to generate stories on two levels. The first and more straightforward of these is the use of a Passion or Fetter as the focus for a narrative, placing one character at the center of the narrative and forcing the Circle to react to events which involve a Fetter or the object of a Passion.

**Wraith** is shown to best advantage when focused on character-driven narrative. The wraiths are the center of their own world, which for them is defined by their personal emotions and memories. The intrusion of outside realities and concerns, while still vital and pressing, is somehow less important and relevant for wraiths. They can survive with no external stimulus, but without their emotions they are nothing. Perhaps this is another way in which wraiths give us a naked view of a particular aspect of the human condition.

Fetters are particularly suited to this kind of narrative. They are objects which are vitally important to a wraith, which represent links to her breathing days and which allow her continued existence in the Shadowlands. Playing on this acute vulnerability of wraiths, a Storyteller can create situations which force a wraith to act to protect a valued Fetter. These threats need not be so simple as the destruction of the object or area, but might be more subtle, involving the sale, corruption, rezoning, damaging, forgetting, abusing, belittling or misusing of a particular Fetter. An effective story, for example, might involve the use by the Quick of a proud wraith's Fetter for some questionable purpose other than that for which it was designed. You can play such concerns against the wraith's Passions, and creating in conjunction with the Shadowguide the internal conflict which drives some of the best **Wraith** stories. Plots like this can either be meticulously prepared beforehand or run off-the-cuff, initiated by your picking up a character sheet and choosing the most interesting Fetter described there.

Stories can just as easily and evocatively be built around Passions, and there are two basic approaches (which are not mutually exclusive). You simply can choose an interesting Passion, or one of a generally neglected character, and make it the focus of a story. While this is a perfectly satisfactory way to initiate character-centered and character-driven narrative, Passions can be much more sophisticated storytelling tools. Rather than look at the specifics of a character Passion, the Storyteller can build a story with that Passion (love, hate, greed etc.) as its theme. This kind of approach is well-served

by preparation, as it takes time and creativity to explore a Passion properly, but you can also run a rewarding improvised story in this way. While it is a bonus if more than one of the wraiths possesses the Passion you choose as your starting point, it is by no means mandatory. Wraiths are creatures of Passion, and all emotion is experience and sustenance for them.

Taking the Passion which you've chosen, you can create either a tight narrative that centers on events in which the Passion is prominent in the motivations of the Storyteller characters, the players or the metaplot behind the events; or you can devise a series of encounters and events, each of which evokes a different shade or aspect of the Passion. These encounters can be connected or independent, but should demonstrate the flexible and variable nature of the emotion which is at the center of things. Perhaps ideally, a story that takes a particular Passion as its theme should consist of both a central plot and satellite encounters that explore and expose the Passion, and pose various questions to the wraiths, especially those with that sort of Passion, concerning that emotion.

As an example, the emotion Hope could spark many encounters and different experiences. The wraiths might become involved in a story in which hope (in a typical sense) constitutes the central thread of the narrative. Perhaps a wraith whom the characters know is following a clue which he hopes will lead him to his wife, recently deceased and hopefully a new Lemure. The characters help their friend, and in the course of the story (during which there are obstacles and adversaries and all the elements of a good story), they encounter other characters and scenes which suggest other aspects of hope: hope as desire, hope as greed, hope as belief, hope as pain (false hope, fool's hope), as well as the more straightforward path their friend is following. For any wraith who has a Passion focused around hope, this might be a special session, but that doesn't mean that the other wraiths will be left out. A wraith with a Passion centered on desire might well learn something about how desire and hope are intertwined.

A series of scenarios, each of which takes a particular character's Passion as its theme, makes a satisfying chronicle and one which probes the characters' psyches, resulting in well rounded and highly resonant wraiths. This cycle of Passion plays brings each character face-to-face with her most important aspects. It gives the players insight into their characters and, more generally, into the nature of wraiths and even the nature of emotion. These stories can be used as a mini-chronicle from which the Storyteller can launch into a more linear narrative, secure in the knowledge that the characters taking part have come to terms with their identities and understand what it is to be a wraith. Or, they can stand alone as a chronicle story cycle. This kind of an approach fosters long-term character development, and keeps the characters engrossed as they come to grips with themselves.

Passions and Fetters define wraiths. Passions ennoble them, Fetters anchor them. Both are rich tools you can use to make the experience of playing **Wraith** more beautiful, horrific, sad, funny and rewarding. Wraiths are our reflections, creatures ruled by their emotions, and just as no wraith can escape a story without using and facing her emotions, no player should escape a **Wraith** session unmoved.

# Storytelling Harrowings

*If only you could remember how once we lived, what Halloween was to us and what Poe was, and how we gloried in the dark morbidities.*

— Ray Bradbury, "Pillar of Fire"



inevitably, there comes a reckoning. Harrowings are not just nightmarish encounters, they are confrontations in which a wraith must face and overcome the darkest parts of herself. Ideally, if the players trust you and each other, Harrowings also provides the opportunity for the players to work out

some of their own fears, prejudices and hatreds, cleansing their own psyches in the process of clearing out their characters'.

The actual Harrowing is the part that may be easiest for you, especially if you've kept a book on the feelings the wraiths (and the players) have exhibited throughout the chronicle. Then again, you might find it the single most difficult aspect of running a **Wraith** chronicle, even with copious notes. Whether easy or hard, the actual Harrowing should never be a throwaway. Even if you start your players in the middle of the story, without preamble, you should never allow events to force the wraiths into a Harrowing before they've had time to learn something about the Underworld and become somewhat comfortable being there. The worst thing you can possibly do is bring in a Harrowing prematurely. There are plenty of other terrors to torment the characters with. Harrowings should be saved and savored.

By the time a wraith undergoes her first Harrowing, she should be fervently involved with at least some of her Passions and Fetters (obviously she can't keep all of them at a fever pitch all the time). If those are challenged or endangered, she will be intensely involved with the Harrowing, provided it is at least marginally scary. Though it takes some work, there are a number of ways to make the nightmare ride just as frightening and tense as the Storyteller could wish.

## Techniques of Horror Storytelling

The best sorts of Harrowings seem to arise naturally from the situations that provoke them, and one may not seem like a Harrowing at all to the character(s) involved until it is quite advanced or even its conclusion. This requires a deft touch and a great deal of adaptability on your part, not to mention a skill for improvisation. Whenever a wraith loses all her Corpus, for example, you don't necessarily have to inform the player of that, instead telling her that her character has suffered some lesser amount of damage than would automatically induce a Harrowing and is feeling weak or tired or is just plain hurting.

At this point, you should ask the injured character's player to leave the room for a few minutes, or should call the other players aside, and work out the details of the coming Harrowing. The player is then asked to rejoin the troupe, and play

proceeds as if nothing extraordinary has happened (see the section on **Recommended Storytelling Techniques** for tips on making this ploy successful, pp. 220). The player should be allowed to determine her character's next few actions (fight, run away, slip into the Tempest and head for a Fetter, or whatever else she chooses to do). Still, nothing seems out of the ordinary. After a few actions, however, you can gradually begin working in strange, frightening elements (the wraith's Fetter is gone, or her Argos ability seems to be malfunctioning).

## Going Down

Perfectly straightforward Harrowings, wherein the player knows full well that he's being Harrowed, are just fine as well. You can get a lot of mileage out of your other players with a description of the Harrowed wraith being sucked down into the roiling Tempest, the screams of the waiting Spectres and the despairing wail of their vanished comrade. Just because a wraith knows that trouble is coming doesn't mean he knows which direction it's coming from, or how best to avoid it.

Simpler introductions to Harrowings are recommended, at least until after you've gotten a few Harrowings under your belt and are comfortable with what happens in one. Besides, if the players get used to knowing when they're in a Harrowing, it's all the more potent a surprise when they're dropped into a Harrowing unawares.

## Scaring the Players

Players will often scare themselves far more efficiently than you ever could. There seems to be a rule (or perhaps it's only a truism) that whenever players are presented with a situation that is potentially dangerous to their characters, they will always see it as more threatening and hopeless than you ever intended. If the player is spooked, the character will almost assuredly be spooked too. You should feel no remorse in playing on this, nor should you lessen the impact of the encounter just because the players whine or become overprotective of their characters. It should be made clear to the players at some point that only bold action on their part will serve to release their character(s) from the Harrowing. Of course, the inappropriate bold action could have disastrous results as well....

## Designing Appropriate Harrowings

If a wraith's Fetter or Passion has been selected as the Quarry of the Harrowing, the ensuing psychodrama should have something to do with the chosen Trait. This is where keeping a book on various encounters is so valuable. You only need to look back over what has gone before (even if it occurred some time ago) to design an appropriate Harrowing. If a wraith had initially been very conscientious about watching over her father (who had been in poor health), for example, but had lately fallen off from that duty because his health had improved and she was busy with other things, this might serve as the basis for a Harrowing meant to tweak that Passion. The wraith's Shadow would try to recreate some scene

from the wraith's past which involved her father and his failing health. The Shadow would attempt to corrupt the love engendered by the Passion, either making the wraith feel guilty for having abandoned her dying father to concentrate on the cruelties of life as a new wraith or perhaps by twisting love to revulsion by having the wraith's father's body corrupted into putrescence.

Other possibilities for creating Harrowings involve focusing on the wraith's (or Shadow's) Archetype. For example, if a wraith has a Martyr Nature, the Harrowing might focus on opportunities for the character to be truly self-sacrificing, while making it clear that doing so will harm the character (stripping her of Corpus or a Passion). Actually, the correct move for the character would be to go ahead and act the martyr, and the purported penalty would not be levied. Acting selfishly would, in this case, be the wrong choice. Similarly, the Shadow's personality might provide the basis for the Harrowing, with an authoritarian type setting up some sort of repressive scenario for its wraith to respond to.

## Choices

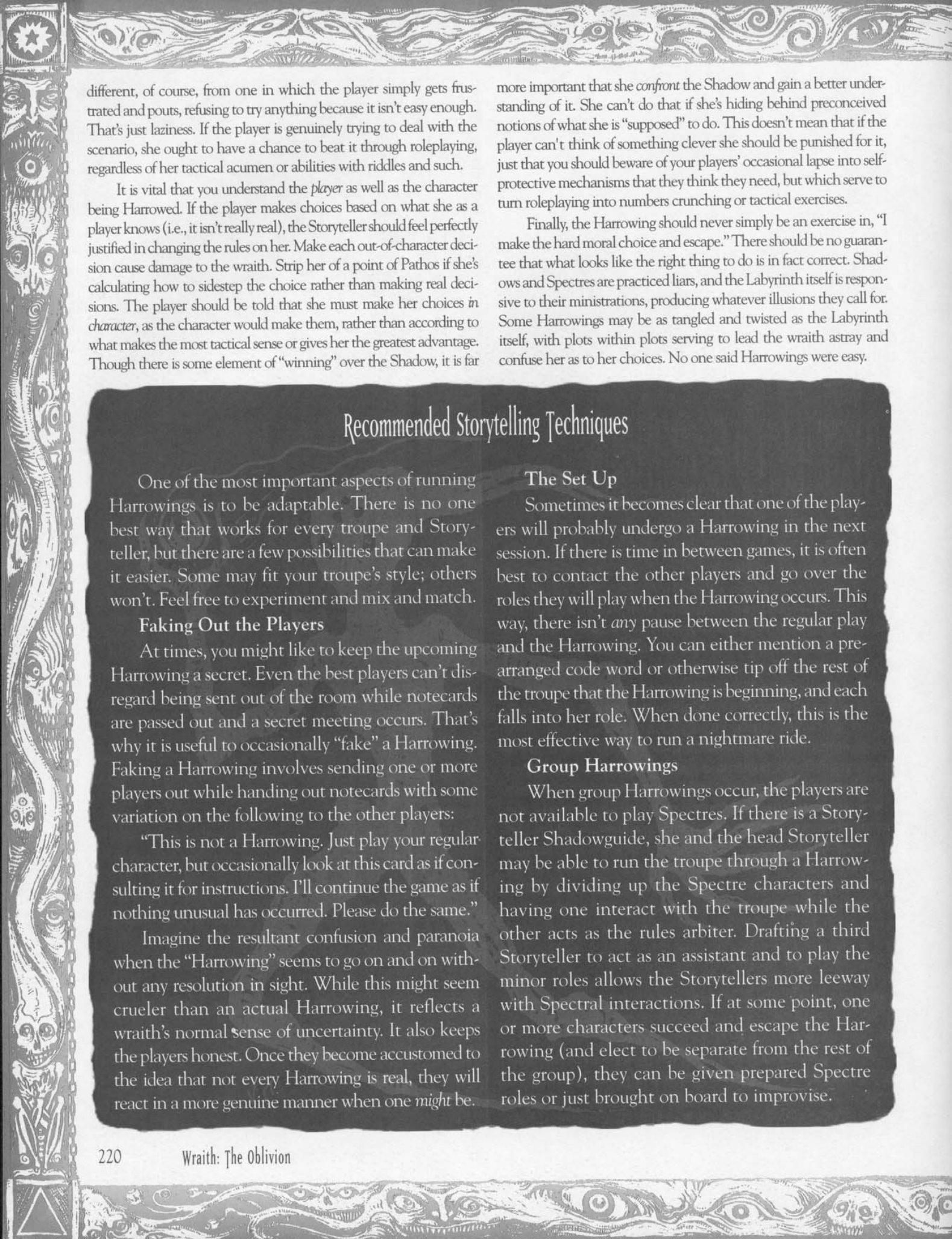
There is one final piece to the Harrowing that must be an integral part of its design and execution, and that is the character's choice. Each Harrowing is a challenge that the wraith may win or lose. Each is also a confrontation, a struggle in which the wraith faces her own dark reflection and battles herself. It has been said that we are our own worst enemies. Nothing could be more true in the war between the Shadow and the self.

A wraith's choices during the Harrowing are the key to her success or failure. The Storyteller must make the choices within the nightmare ride as vivid as possible so that the player (as well as the character) *feels* the consequences of her decisions. Each portion of the Harrowing should be constructed with turning points, lesser choices that the character must make as she moves toward the conclusion. Each turning point should present an opportunity for the wraith to better her overall position within the Harrowing — by harming or allowing harm to come to someone else or at the expense of her principles.

While it is perfectly fine to construct elaborate games within games that the wraith must maneuver through and figure out in order to succeed, not all Harrowings should be escapable only if the wraith is a good puzzle-solver or tactical genius. Though it might be interesting to require the wraith to open a combination lock that causes aggravated damage to her best friend every time she fails to get the combination right, there should be other ways to defeat the scenario than getting the combination right. Using her teeth to bite through the wiring so no shocks can be delivered might be a solution some people would think of, but many would never bother to ponder ways around the trap.

You must be willing to give the players some leeway, for example allowing the character to succeed when the player can't think of any other way out and simply declares she's not going to work on the lock at all, that she'll just stay with her friend. Though this doesn't "solve" the dilemma, it does indicate the wraith's unwillingness to hurt someone else just to escape her nightmare. This sort of decision is very





different, of course, from one in which the player simply gets frustrated and pouts, refusing to try anything because it isn't easy enough. That's just laziness. If the player is genuinely trying to deal with the scenario, she ought to have a chance to beat it through roleplaying, regardless of her tactical acumen or abilities with riddles and such.

It is vital that you understand the *player* as well as the character being Harrowed. If the player makes choices based on what she as a player knows (i.e., it isn't really real), the Storyteller should feel perfectly justified in changing the rules on her. Make each out-of-character decision cause damage to the wraith. Strip her of a point of Pathos if she's calculating how to sidestep the choice rather than making real decisions. The player should be told that she must make her choices *in character*, as the character would make them, rather than according to what makes the most tactical sense or gives her the greatest advantage. Though there is some element of "winning" over the Shadow, it is far

more important that she *confront* the Shadow and gain a better understanding of it. She can't do that if she's hiding behind preconceived notions of what she is "supposed" to do. This doesn't mean that if the player can't think of something clever she should be punished for it, just that you should beware of your players' occasional lapse into self-protective mechanisms that they think they need, but which serve to turn roleplaying into numbers crunching or tactical exercises.

Finally, the Harrowing should never simply be an exercise in, "I make the hard moral choice and escape." There should be no guarantee that what looks like the right thing to do is in fact correct. Shadows and Spectres are practiced liars, and the Labyrinth itself is responsive to their ministrations, producing whatever illusions they call for. Some Harrowings may be as tangled and twisted as the Labyrinth itself, with plots within plots serving to lead the wraith astray and confuse her as to her choices. No one said Harrowings were easy.

## Recommended Storytelling Techniques

One of the most important aspects of running Harrowings is to be adaptable. There is no one best way that works for every troupe and Storyteller, but there are a few possibilities that can make it easier. Some may fit your troupe's style; others won't. Feel free to experiment and mix and match.

### Faking Out the Players

At times, you might like to keep the upcoming Harrowing a secret. Even the best players can't disregard being sent out of the room while notecards are passed out and a secret meeting occurs. That's why it is useful to occasionally "fake" a Harrowing. Faking a Harrowing involves sending one or more players out while handing out notecards with some variation on the following to the other players:

"This is not a Harrowing. Just play your regular character, but occasionally look at this card as if consulting it for instructions. I'll continue the game as if nothing unusual has occurred. Please do the same."

Imagine the resultant confusion and paranoia when the "Harrowing" seems to go on and on without any resolution in sight. While this might seem crueler than an actual Harrowing, it reflects a wraith's normal sense of uncertainty. It also keeps the players honest. Once they become accustomed to the idea that not every Harrowing is real, they will react in a more genuine manner when one *might* be.

### The Set Up

Sometimes it becomes clear that one of the players will probably undergo a Harrowing in the next session. If there is time in between games, it is often best to contact the other players and go over the roles they will play when the Harrowing occurs. This way, there isn't *any* pause between the regular play and the Harrowing. You can either mention a pre-arranged code word or otherwise tip off the rest of the troupe that the Harrowing is beginning, and each falls into her role. When done correctly, this is the most effective way to run a nightmare ride.

### Group Harrowings

When group Harrowings occur, the players are not available to play Spectres. If there is a Storyteller Shadowguide, she and the head Storyteller may be able to run the troupe through a Harrowing by dividing up the Spectre characters and having one interact with the troupe while the other acts as the rules arbiter. Drafting a third Storyteller to act as an assistant and to play the minor roles allows the Storytellers more leeway with Spectral interactions. If at some point, one or more characters succeed and escape the Harrowing (and elect to be separate from the rest of the group), they can be given prepared Spectre roles or just brought on board to improvise.

## Peopling the Harrowing

The wraith needs to interact with other beings if the Harrowing is to be a real confrontation. Aside from the Shadow and wraith, the other players in the troupe usually portray Spectres, Doppelgangers who take the roles of the wraith's friends, loved ones, foes and personal enemies, as well as various others such as authority figures and crowds. They excel at drawing out a wraith's most deeply hidden secrets and fears. They may appear in helpful or harmful roles, acting to obstruct the wraith or facilitating her passage through the Harrowing, but ultimately they are there to confuse, delay, surprise and torture the wraith.

There's just one problem with all of this. Good roleplayers may act as if their characters truly believe that their choices within the Harrowing may adversely affect themselves or their loved ones or friends, but the players are wise to what's really going on. They know those are just Spectres messing with their characters' heads, and this is bound to affect their play. So once again, you can change the rules. When the scenario calls for a wraith to rescue a victim (for example), the following variations can be used to increase the tension level and provide other members of the troupe with some really meaty roleplaying opportunities.

- **Variation One:** Spectres are tough. There's no reason why one of them couldn't go to the Skinlands, Skinride one of the wraith's loved ones, force her into committing suicide or a fatal accident, then claim the newborn wraith and hold her in reserve for the wraith's next Harrowing. How will the wraith react when she realizes it really is her lover the Spectres are about to set on fire? What if they drop Dad into the Void if the wraith messes up? Suddenly the stakes are a lot higher.

- **Variation Two:** Nothing prevents Spectres from capturing members of the wraith's Circle and using them in a similar fashion. These can be either well-liked Storyteller-controlled characters or players' characters. If they were captured fairly, and had some chance to win against those who captured them, the captive characters have no real room to complain. After all, the wraiths could be obliterated; with a friend trying to save them, they might escape the situation. Things generally become a little more tense when one player is working to save another's and the second player makes it plain that it really is her character's afterlife on the line.

- **Variation Three:** It is also effective to go through a capture scenario with the player who is to play the victim, then let the captured character's player react to the other wraith's Harrowing in character, then announce to the first player (especially if the second one botched things) that his character was not really captured at all and that he was actually acting (in this particular circumstance) as a first mate to the Storyteller, helping her run a Spectre as realistically as possible. This technique can be difficult and confusing, particularly since one of the Spectres doesn't realize he's playing the part. The Storyteller will have to keep track of expenditures of Willpower and such made by the "captured character" so that the points can be returned when the Harrowing is over. Though this isn't recommended as a recurring technique, it can be used at least once to scare both the players (and again some time after they've forgotten about it and gotten cocky).

These switches shouldn't happen all the time, but they should happen often enough that it is impossible for a player to ignore the idea that the victim she has to save might not just be a Spectre in disguise.

## At the End of Things



At the end of each story, you should take time to consider the effects the evening's play has had on your players, their characters and the chronicle as a whole. It's highly unlikely that you'll ever see a single session go precisely as planned, so it's best to think about what in your world has changed as a result of each story. Player actions, characters who are destroyed or chased off, vital relics dropped into Nihils, allies turned into enemies — all of these and more are likely to happen, and it's best to be prepared when they do. It is impossible to come up with something that your players won't try, and even more impossible to come up with everything that they will. Just be flexible and take the time to adjust your chronicle's plot as player actions demand it.

Everything that one of the characters that you play does or says becomes part of your world and your continuity, and it can become impossible to keep track of all of that in your head. The end of the story is a perfect time to sit down and keep track (say, on index cards or in a chronicle notebook) of who said what to whom, who did what, and what it all means. Otherwise, eight weeks later you'll be caught flat-footed when one of your players dredges up an offhand comment that a minor character made in a bar and bases a plot-shattering decision on it.

### Chronicle's End

All good things come to an end, and even the best chronicle is no exception. It is important, though, that when you do end your chronicle, you do so properly. A climax wrapping up all of your loose plot threads is a necessity, otherwise the players will move on with a sense of unfinished business. Your final story should be something to remember, a summation and a conclusion to everything that your chronicle is and was.

It often makes sense to have some post-climactic confrontation gameplay, so that characters can say their good-byes, explanations can be made and everyone can come to grips with what's just happened. It eases the players down from the emotional high of the conclusion, and gets them ready for the next step.

The next step, of course, is the next chronicle. You can take the same characters and continue with them; many players grow attached to their characters and want to watch them grow, change and triumph. Perhaps one of your players wants to try his hand at Storytelling, letting you have a chance to play for a while. The one thing to remember is that the end of one chronicle is the chance to do something new, to experiment and start all over again. If you want to add werewolves and mummies, or switch your chronicle's setting to the Dark Kingdom of Jade, go for it. Just as in *Wraith*, death is a beginning, not an ending, and the end of one chronicle is also the moment that gives you the chance to start another.

## The Shadow

I am alone in Pine Knoll Elementary — at least as far as I can tell. Soft scraping sounds, faint voices, high laughter and the muffled sound of doors opening and closing echo through the dark school building, and from down in the basement, I can hear deep, reverberating groans and what sound like heavy, clanking chains. I feel only a slight measure of relief that I haven't encountered any other wraiths here. For now, it seems to be about as safe a place as I'm likely to find.

Outside, the night is dense and pressing. A heavy sheet of cloud hides the sky and dulls the blue glare of the streetlights. The air seems charged with electricity. Low clouds pulsate with rippling purple light, like heat lightning that edges everything with an eerie glow.

Through the opened doorway, I catch glimpses every now and then of faint lights, shining like candles seen through dense fog, moving from one window to another in the buildings across the street. Closer, I can hear the faint rustling of wings, unseen in the dark.

I'm sitting on the floor in the darkness, wondering how and if I'll ever be able to find my daughter. I can't imagine what she might have

experienced if she's been here in the Shadowlands for the last five years. A deep, twisting sense of guilt and frustration stirs within me. Regret fills the center of my chest like a cold, iron ball.

Isn't there such a thing as "Heaven" or "Nirvana" or "Paradise" where the dead can dwell in eternal peace and bliss? This *can't* be all there is to the afterlife. At least, I hope it isn't.

I realize ruefully that at least I'm beginning to accept the fact that I am dead. The best I can figure, it's only been a day in "real" time — whatever the hell that means — since I died, but I'm still wrapped in an overwhelming sense of sadness and despair.

I'm finding existence in the Shadowlands extremely disorienting. I experience emotions and physical sensations very differently now. I have to keep telling myself that this is simply because I no longer have a physical body that has biological reactions to what I feel and think. My emotions are no longer complicated or enhanced by the physical reactions, so I experience them in what seems to be a purer, more essential way. It is just incredibly disorienting the way my senses are distorted in this new state of being.

I can't figure out what my Corpus is made of. Maybe it's an illusion, an echo of the form I'd once had that has no reality other than as a memory. The impression I have from my encounter with the Renegade is that the substance of my Corpus is valuable in and of itself here in the afterlife. The sudden fear grips me that maybe I won't find my daughter because she has already fallen prey to that or some other Renegade.

An urgent sense of impending doom fills me. I know that I have to act swiftly and decisively, but I have no idea where to begin.

Maybe I should just give up.

Where is the sense of inner peace and tranquillity you're supposed to obtain when you die?

A sudden bolt of anger and fear rips through me. I leap to my feet and begin pacing back and forth in the darkness. My footsteps drag across the ancient floorboards, echoing weirdly in the dense darkness. Everything I did, everything I tried to do, where did it get me? Dead and right back where I started.

*You're right.... It's all for nothing,* a voice whispers inside my head.

I look around to see who spoke, but there's no one else here.

There's just me, and I think that's more terrifying than anything else.

All of it, it's all absolutely worthless! All you're doing is a useless waste of time and energy, so why not just give up now? Karen's dead. You're dead. You'll never find her, and even if you do, what could you possibly do to help her? All you've managed to do since you died is hide, just like you did your whole life. No, you'll fail Karen, and then, a failure, you'll go back and fail Sarah. You'll try to watch over her, but it won't do any good. All you're going to do is watch her getting old and ugly. You'll start to hate her, and you'll hate yourself for it. Then, when she dies and crosses over, she'll come looking for you, and you won't even be able to look her in the eye. Everyone dies, everything dies, and nothing you do will make any difference. Let it all go. It's all headed for Oblivion anyway, so why not get a head start? Why prolong our agony?

Against my will, I listen to this voice, whispering harshly inside my head. It terrifies me, and I have the unshakable impression that someone is standing beside me in the

dark, pouring these terrible things into my ear like hemlock. But when I turn, there's no one there. It's just me. Me and that voice.

"No," I say as I clap my hands over my ears and shake my head in adamant denial. "It won't be like that! It can't be!"

Oh, but it will, the voice inside my mind continues. You've always known it. Oh, yes, deep down in your heart of hearts, you've always understood the utter futility of it all. So why pretend anymore? Why not just give in? Why not embrace Oblivion? Let yourself go; that's the only way you'll find any kind of peace. All of your suffering will end, all the pain and hurt will go away in the cold, eternal embrace of Oblivion. Just let go....

"Stop it. Damn you, stop it!" I find I'm slamming my fists into the sides of my head, trying to pound that voice into silence.

No, I won't stop it, the voice hisses petulantly, and for a terrifying instant I am convinced that I have said this out loud. Give in. There's no point to your pathetic little mission. Eventually everything — even the Shadowlands — is going to fade away, so you'd just be buying Karen a short reprieve before los-

ing her again. You've known all along that I'm right — you said it yourself in your last book. "Existence is nothing but a terminal blip in a meaningless, endless Void...."

"No." My throat feels like it's burning, and again I become acutely aware of the fact that I can't breathe. "That can't be all there is! There has to be some kind of meaning or hope, otherwise—"

Otherwise... what?

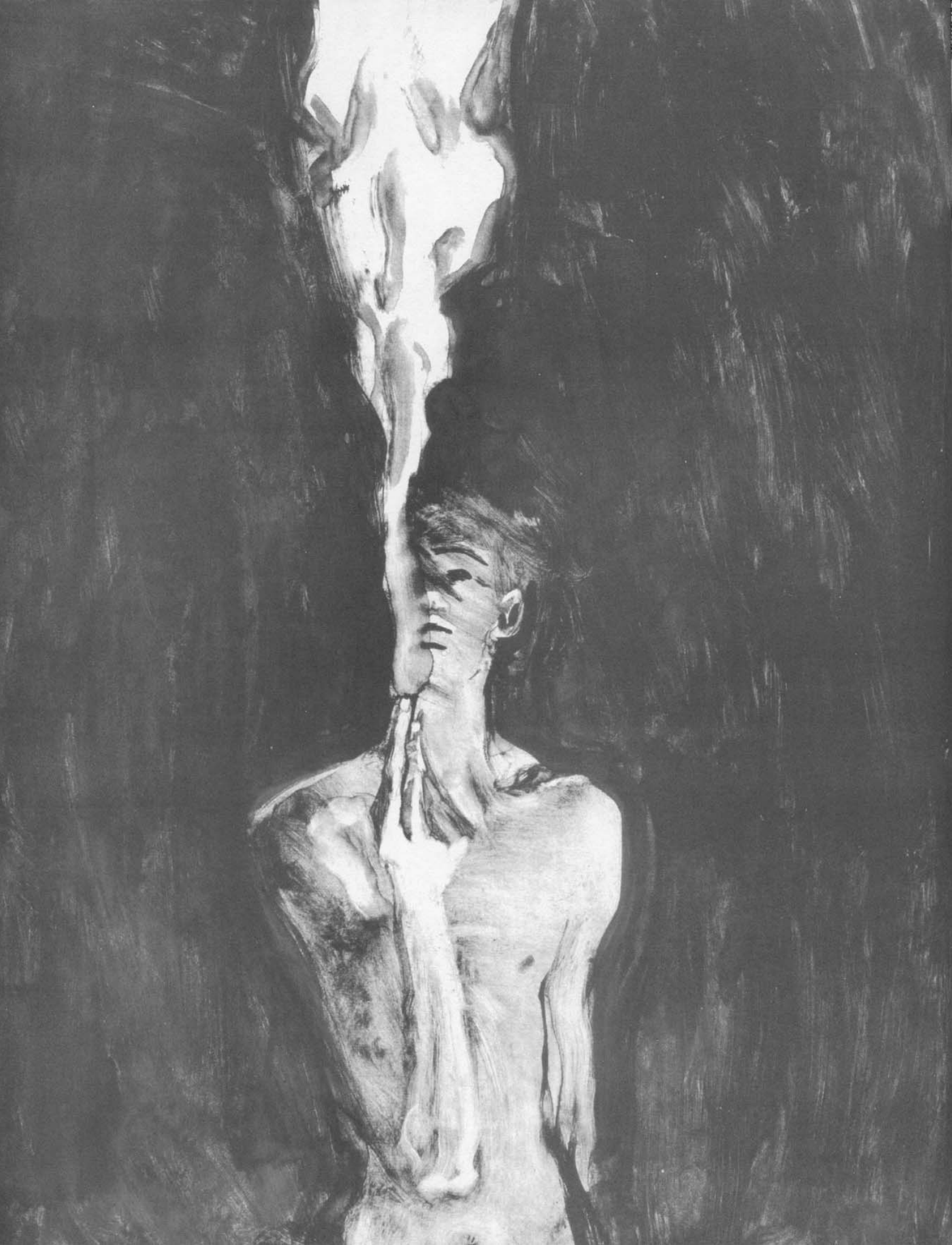
A terrible ache fills my chest and chokes off my reply.

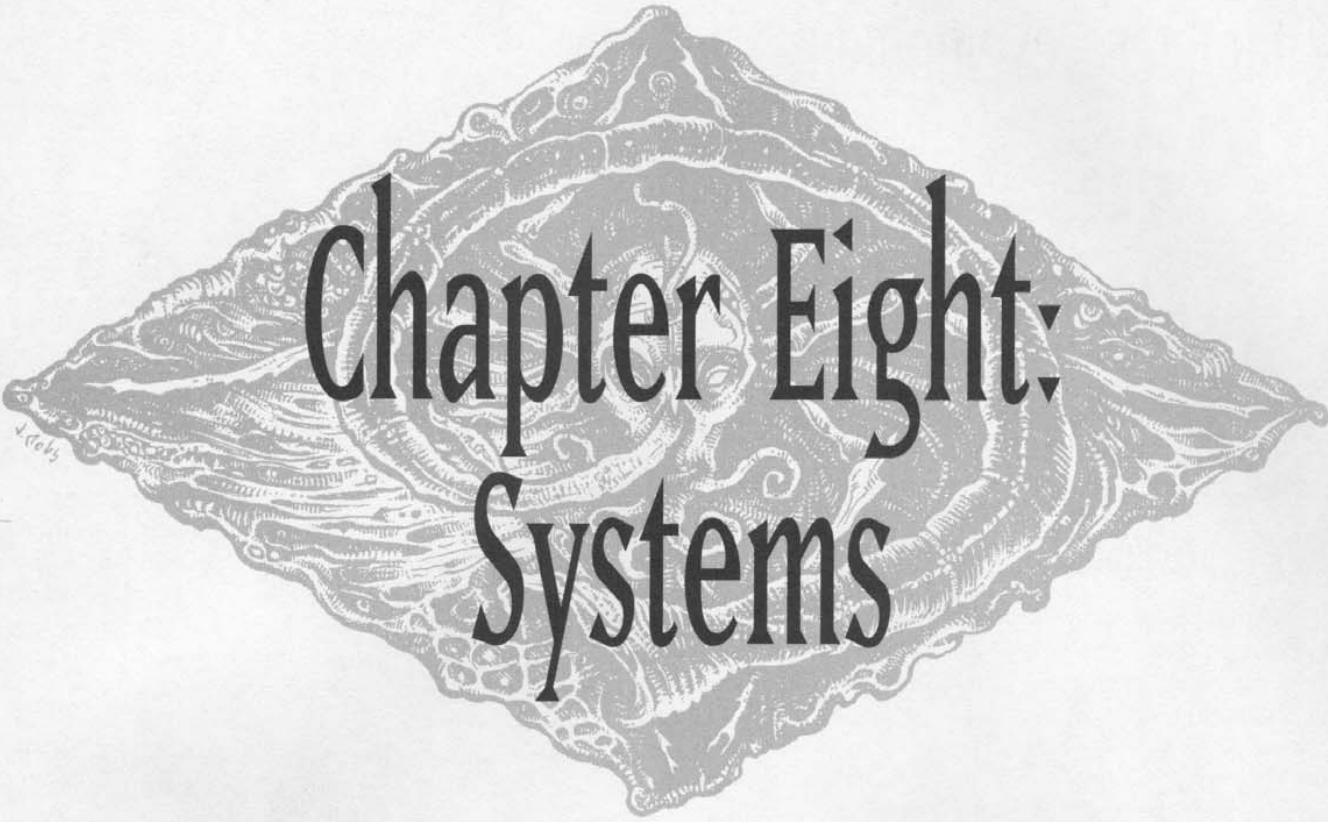
"I have to try to find her... help her if I can," I mutter in a broken voice. I'm not sure if I'm trying to convince this other voice, or myself. Maybe both.

Why even try? the voice inside my head whispers. No matter what you do, it won't do a damned bit of good. Why torment yourself? It'll be just wasted effort, anyway. Wasted agony. Give yourself over to Oblivion now, if only so it will be over all the quicker. Why prolong our suffering?

"You may be right. It may be that way," I whisper hoarsely, "but... at least I have to try."

The last thing I hear is his — my — laughter.





# Chapter Eight: Systems

*Here's the Armada of Souls  
here's the flotilla from God knows where:  
from gopher-wood to the last of the ironclads  
in common concert they send up the flares  
— Peter Hammill, "Fireships"*



**T**his chapter is about the systems that make **Wraith** unique. It details how wraiths grow more powerful with more experience, as well as what restricts their movement through the Underworld, what can do them injury, how they can heal, how to achieve the mysterious Transcendence, and what prevents the living from seeing the Restless Dead.

The chapter is divided roughly in three segments. The first part is about character development; how

wraiths and their Shadows grow and change over time. The second segment is about injury and healing among the Restless. After all, it takes something special to hurt a ghost, and afterward it's not as if a wraith can apply a ghostly bandage. The last part of the chapter is about the mental states, internal and external, that are unique to wraithly existence.

Very little in this chapter is essential. A great deal of it, however, is important for fleshing out the world of **Wraith** and making it function smoothly.

# Character Development

*There are unsmiling faces in fetters and chains  
And a wheel in perpetual motion  
And they follow all races and answer all names  
With no show of an outward emotion*

— Alan Parsons Project, "Turn of a Friendly Card, Part 2"



Everyone learns as they go along, even the dead. The awarding and spending of experience points is an in-game way to reflect that a character can acquire new Traits through her experiences and adventures.

## Experience Points

Experience points are a way of demonstrating how much valuable experience a character acquired over the course of a story. At the end of each session, a Storyteller assigns a certain number of experience points to each character depending upon certain factors (how much the character did in-game, how well the player roleplayed, etc.), which the character's player records. A player can then spend these points on improving his character's Traits. This serves to represent how characters grow more powerful by learning new things through experiencing them. Of course, it's not just the character who becomes more powerful as time passes; her Shadow learns from its experiences as well.

The point cost for "learning" new things varies, depending upon what the player wishes to purchase for his character. It's easier — and thus less expensive — to learn a new Ability than it is to learn a new Arcanos. Many costs for raising Traits depend upon what a character already knows about the Trait he's trying to improve. For example, raising an Ability costs two times the character's current rating in that Ability. On the other hand, a Trait that a character does not have but which he wishes to acquire is considered to be a "new" Trait, and these have fixed point costs. If Erik has a Dodge of 3 and wants to raise it to 4, he needs six points to do so. On the other hand, if he wants to acquire Subterfuge, which he has no dots in, Erik would only pay the fixed cost for a new Ability: three experience points.

A Trait can only be raised one dot per session, never more.

## Roleplaying Experience

*Your Circle has just come to the end of an intricate, long-running chronicle, during the course of which you not only accomplished a number of your goals, but also got to know your character considerably better than you did when you started out. The Storyteller, pleased by your ever-increasing roleplaying skill, offers you a double handful of experience points. Is it time to buy all those Firearms dots you didn't think to take when you created your character?*

Unexpectedly showing up at the beginning of your next session as a brilliant marksman is going to be a little difficult to explain, to say the least. It wouldn't be surprising if your Circle started wondering when you'd been practicing, not to mention on whom. And then on top of that, you'll have to explain your mastery of those two new Arcanoi you decided to pick up as well....

While characters can and should change over time, they develop the same way that real live people do: they learn as they go. Players should learn to be aware of how events affect them over the long run. Every story played through offers the characters a chance to learn something, whether that something is as straightforward as the notion that being a slave would be bad, or as complex as the discovery that a lifetime of labor was misspent.

Translating this kind of gaming experience into hard data on a character sheet can be difficult. Emotional revelations, newfound senses of purpose and sworn oaths of vengeance can sometimes be reduced to so many dots in a Passion, but that shouldn't be a player's first concern. The important thing is using experience to demonstrate what's going on with a character, both to the other players and to the Storyteller, through roleplaying. It's much more satisfying to watch a character slowly becoming obsessed with a once-glimpsed mortal than it is to have a player show up and announce that he wants to purchase a new Fetter. Not only will the former be a more intense personal experience for the player, but it will help get the other characters involved as they start wondering why their Circlemate is suddenly practicing his Embody (and endangering them by violating the *Dictum Mortuum*) any chance he gets.

As far as dramatic personal changes go, altering a character's Demeanor, while not a piece of cake, obviously involves less of an effort than altering her Nature. It's much easier to establish a new behavior pattern than it is to rebuild the fundamental structure of a personality, and Storytellers should encourage players to keep this in mind. Changing a character's Nature is a major, existence-altering decision, and should consist of considerably more than just writing down a new Archetype on a character sheet. Such a choice can only be communicated effectively through roleplaying over time.

While acquiring Traits, especially Abilities, poses slightly less of a roleplaying challenge, the process does have its own logistics. It's important to remember that new Traits should reflect the particulars of how characters have changed and what they've had an opportunity to learn. They should be consistent not only with what characters have picked up, but also with characters' backgrounds and personalities. A wraith who's been a pacifist for centuries is unlikely to pick up Firearms; a straight-arrow Legionnaire probably won't learn Puppetry because it interferes with the living. Avoiding abrupt changes is a good idea; if a player wants to purchase a certain Ability as soon as he gets a few experience points, foreshadowing his character's interest in that subject (having him hint at it in conversation,

talking about wanting to learn, asking questions on that topic, etc.) will work more smoothly than suddenly having a character show up at a Haunt announcing, "Hey, guys, I can speak Swahili now!" A good way to subtly work in new Abilities is to have characters purchase those things that could have been taught them by Mentors, Contacts, Circlemates or Allies, or even by characters met during the course of a story.

While players will sometimes want to spend their experience as soon as a session ends to respond to the situations their characters have just faced — a different Passion that would have provided needed Pathos, a new Ability — Storytellers should encourage them to stay focused on their character concepts and on logical, reasonable character development. There are dramatic events that can cause immediate, serious changes in characters, but these should be few and far between if the Storyteller and players want to maintain any kind of consistency.

When spending Shadow experience, there is always the temptation to allocate it in ways that produce as weak a Shadow as possible. Although this leads to "stronger" wraiths, in the end it makes for a less enjoyable chronicle. The conflict between Psyche and Shadow is one of the central elements of **Wraith**, and it can be devalued rapidly by having the Psyche grow stronger while the Shadow remains static.

## Awarding Experience

There is a fine balance to be struck when it comes time for Storytellers to hand out experience points. On one hand, giving out too few will lead to character frustration, as it takes a month or more to learn that new Arcanos each wraith has been pining for. On the other, handing out too much experience can result in characters running roughshod over the rest of the Underworld. Generally characters should receive between one and five experience points per session, though occasions when Storytellers bestow four or five points should be rare indeed. A character should not receive zero points; regardless of whether he "succeeded" or "failed" during the session, there is something to be said for learning through simple participation.

## Reasons for Experience

- **One point — Automatic:** Each player earns one point per session, no matter what, unless he truly and spectacularly proves he doesn't deserve it (by making the gaming situation unpleasant for other players, suddenly deciding that his wraith would speak only with a silly accent, etc.).

- **One Point — Learning Curve:** The character acquired some important bit of information or wisdom during the session. However, it should be left to the player to tell the Storyteller what her character learned that was so vital.

- **One Point — Acting:** Truly superior roleplaying should be rewarded with an experience point. This is highly

subjective, and standards for awarding this point should be raised as the players improve.

- **One Point — Concept:** A player who does a superb job of embodying what her character is all about should earn an extra point.

- **One Point — Heroism:** Not stupidity. Not suicidal mania. Heroism, the act of going above and beyond the call of duty to achieve some higher purpose. Pointless machismo should not be rewarded.

## Helpful Hints

- **Don't** purchase Abilities if you can't come up with a plausible explanation for how you acquired them.

- **Don't** lose track of your character concept by racking up every Ability in sight. A character who has consistently evinced a mistrust of technology is not suddenly going to become a computer whiz — at least, not believably — no matter how useful that Ability might be to his Circle.

- **Don't**, if you're playing a cerebral sort, turn into a major engine of destruction overnight just because you're tired of getting beaten up. Remember, it took even Hercules years of hard work and some serious motivation to build those biceps.

- **Don't** try to beat the system by exploiting rules loopholes. Creating the most unbeatable **Wraith** character ever guarantees the other players' frustration and your eventual boredom when you run out of people to play with and Malfeans to pulp.

- **Don't** hoard experience points for months on end because you're hoping to leap way ahead in an Ability or Arcanos. Again, change should be gradual, not abrupt, or it gets unbelievable.

- **Don't**, as the Storyteller, assign large quantities of experience points unless players actually deserve them.

- **Don't**, if you're the Storyteller, allow players to get away with dramatic character changes unless they have very good reasons (having explained those reasons to you!), and are willing to roleplay those changes extensively.

## End of Story

When a story reaches its climax, there should be some sort of reward given to the characters for achieving a resolution. Accordingly, every time a story ends, characters should receive between one to three additional experience points as a bonus. (Additionally, many Storytellers like to restore temporary Willpower, grant Pathos, etc., at a story's end).

Among the reasons to give a character extra experience at the end of a story are:

- **One point — Success:** The Circle succeeded in its immediate task, at least to some extent. The victory might not have been total, but the Circle can claim at least partial triumph.
- **One point — Danger:** The character survived perils above and beyond those normally faced by wraiths and came out unscathed. Conversely, maybe the character acquitted himself well during a Harrowing.
- **One point — Wisdom:** If the character exhibits great wits or resourcefulness, an extra point can be his reward.

Of course, Storytellers don't need to restrict their reasons for giving out experience to the ones above. If they want to accelerate their players' character development, Storytellers should feel free to give out experience more rapidly.

## Spending Experience

The costs for raising existing Traits or adding new ones are listed below.

### Trait Cost Chart

Trait	Cost
Attribute	Current rating x 4
New Ability	3
Ability	Current rating x 2
New Arcanos	7
New Arcanos Basic Ability	4
Arcanos	Current rating x 3
Willpower	Current rating

**Note:** Raising an Arcanos from Basic Ability to level 1 costs 3 experience points.

## Raising Backgrounds

Higher levels of Background Traits cannot be bought with experience points. They can only be acquired through roleplaying; a new Ally must be cultivated in-game, for example.

If a player and Storyteller agree that the character has acquired a new Background Trait (or increased an old one), the recommended cost is 4 points to open the new Background and 3 x current level to increase it. However, Backgrounds should be gained through roleplaying, not point expenditure — the experience point cost is a recommendation, not a price listing.



## Raising Arcanoi

It is possible to learn just the basic level of an Arcanos (as opposed to the level 1 art) at a cost of 4 experience points. For an additional 3 points, the character can later step up to learning the level 1 art. This allows characters to simulate slowly learning Arcanoi, as well as allowing them to learn useful applications of Arcanoi without spending excessive amounts of experience.

Wraiths are capable of learning Arcanoi on their own, but it often helps to have a Mentor. A wraith with points in the Mentor Background can roll against her Mentor rating when trying to learn a new Arcanos (difficulty 6). Each success reduces the point cost of the Arcanos by one. This roll can only be made if the wraith is attempting to learn the full Arcanos; wraiths picking up just the Arcanos' Basic Abilities must pay full price. They can, however, make the roll when attempting to upgrade their skills from the Basic Ability to the full Arcanos itself.

## Willpower

A character can raise her Permanent Willpower rating through experience. This reflects the hardening of purpose wraiths undergo as they adventure throughout the Underworld. Then again, many wraiths lose Willpower as they go along, finding it harder and harder to resist Oblivion.

Should a character ever use his last point of temporary Willpower, he is immediately drawn into a Harrowing. A character who loses all of his permanent Willpower is either drawn at once into the Void (if he has no Fetters) or becomes a Drone (if at least one Fetter remains). Drones can never be player characters, and it is impossible to grant Willpower to a Drone in order to elevate his status.

## Passions

A wraith's Passions can change over time. Often their focus shifts from the Skinlands to the Underworld. Old Passions are lost, new ones gained, and the transitional period can be difficult.

A player wishing to add a new Passion should discuss the matter with her Storyteller. Ideally, the addition of the new Passion as a Trait will be the culmination of a continuing aspect of the chronicle's narrative. New Passions should cost three experience points for each dot in the Passion's rating. A similar cost holds for a player wishing to increase an existing Passion's rating, but the Storyteller has the final say as to whether or not the increase is allowed.

## Losing Passions

*Take away the love and the anger  
And the little piece of hope holding us together...*  
— Kate Bush, "Love and Anger"

Wraiths can also lose Passions. Whether through time, neglect or the action of others, a wraith's Passions can slip away from him. The Storyteller has total control over if, how and when a wraith's Passions diminish. There are four principal ways in which a Passion can be weakened or even destroyed.

- **Neglect:** If a wraith has not paid attention to his Passion, eventually it will diminish. If a Storyteller feels that a character has neglected his Passion thoroughly enough to weaken it, she rolls the Passion's rating (difficulty 9). A failure indicates that the wraith should reduce his Passion's rating by one; a botch lowers the rating by two. This may well excise the Passion and drop the wraith into a Harrowing.

- **Harrowings:** Some Targeted Harrowings can weaken or even destroy Passions. **For more information, see "Harrowings," page 183.**

- **Numbing:** Some Spectres have the ability to "numb" a wraith's feelings, even those so strong as to be labeled Passions. If an attack of this sort is successful, it reduces one of a wraith's Passions (selected at random by the Storyteller) by one. This may also force the victim into a Harrowing. **For more information on Numbing, see "Spectres," page 273.**

- **Resolution:** See below.

## Resolving a Passion

Given time, wraiths can come to grips with and master their Passions. While it might not make sense to some wraiths to try to let go of their sources of Pathos, other wraiths feel that calming their Passions is vital to achieving Transcendence. With that in mind, they will attempt to calm their Passions, changing what were once overwhelming emotions into more moderate desires and approaches.

The Resolution of a Passion is a delicate thing, and should be roleplayed thoroughly before any modification is made to a wraith's character sheet. A player wishing to Resolve a Passion should bring the matter to his Storyteller and discuss the situation at length, including ways in which to bring the resolution plot into the chronicle. It is suggested that a character attempting to Resolve a Passion not roll against it for Pathos.

Once the attempt to Resolve the Passion is well under way, the Storyteller may at his discretion offer the player a roll to weaken the Passion. The wraith rolls the rating of the Passion (difficulty 9); each success lowers the rating of the Passion by one, though the Passion can never be reduced below one in this fashion.

Eventually, when the Storyteller feels that the character has the Passion firmly under control, a Resolution roll can be made. When attempting Resolution, the wraith rolls Willpower (difficulty 5 + the Passion's original rating). If the wraith achieves successes equal to the Passion's original rating, she succeeds in Resolving her Passion. If she fails, the Passion is considered to be unResolved, and gains a point in its rating. If she botches, the Passion is destroyed, and she immediately falls into a Destruction Harrowing.

## Fetters

Wraiths can, on very rare occasions, gain new Fetters. Occasionally their interactions with the Skinlands will lead them to care for a person, place or thing (most often a person) so intensely that it becomes a new Fetter. If a player wishes to add a new Fetter, he must discuss the matter at length with his Storyteller and work the new Fetter into the chronicle through intense roleplaying. New Fetters, if the Storyteller permits them, cost 3 times the desired rating for the Fetter.

## Losing Fetters

During the course of gameplay, wraiths can see their Fetters weaken or even vanish. Many wraiths have living beings or animals as their Fetters; when these die the Fetters they

represent are destroyed. Fetters can also meet with accidents or be destroyed, and there are even times when a wraith's neglect weakens the pull a Fetter has on him.

There are five main ways in which Fetters are weakened.

- **Destruction:** If a wraith's Fetter dies or is destroyed, its status as a Fetter ends and the wraith is immediately dropped into a Harrowing. For this reason, wraiths do their utmost to protect their Fetters.

- **Neglect:** If a wraith does his best, intentionally or otherwise, to distance himself from a Fetter, the pull of that Fetter may well weaken. The Storyteller has complete control over whether a Fetter's attachment (i.e., its rating) to a wraith has diminished with neglect. If a Storyteller decides that a wraith has neglected his Fetter, she rolls the Fetter's rating against difficulty 9. A failure indicates that the Fetter's rating lessens by one; a botch indicates that it drops by two. This could well remove the Fetter from the wraith and drop him into a Harrowing.

- **Harrowings:** Some Target Harrowings can reduce or even destroy a Fetter's attachment to a wraith.

- **Rending:** Some Spectres have the ability to Rend Fetters. Each successful attack of this sort weakens the Fetter's rating by one, and may well force the wraith into a Harrowing.

- **Resolution:** See below.



## Resolving Fetters

Eventually wraiths can come to grips with their Fetters, saying farewell to the things and people they loved on their own terms. This is known as Resolving a Fetter, and it weakens the attachment that a wraith has to the Shadowlands. However, it is a healing process as opposed to a violent one (like Fetter destruction), and most wraithly authorities agree that it is a vital step in achieving Transcendence.

The Resolution of a Fetter should be roleplayed out, if at all possible. If a wraith has as a Fetter his father, with whom he never settled his differences when alive, and he manages to achieve a *post-mortem* reconciliation, then that Fetter should be considered to be Resolved. When there are no regrets and no words left unsaid, when the beloved stuffed animal can be placed on the shelf for the last time, when the last look at the family homestead can be taken with wistfulness instead of regret — these are moments when Fetters are Resolved.

A character wishing to Resolve a Fetter should discuss the matter extensively with her Storyteller, who should be prepared to work the attempted Resolution into her chronicle as a major plot element. At junctures that the Storyteller deems appropriate, the character can roll the current rating of the Fetter (difficulty 9). Every two successes weakens the Fetter by one.

If the wraith demonstrates conclusively through roleplaying that her attachment to her Fetter has been Resolved, then and only then should she be allowed to make a Resolution roll. When attempting Resolution, the wraith rolls Willpower (difficulty 5 + the Fetter's original rating). If the wraith achieves successes equal to the Fetter's original rating, she succeeds in Resolving her Fetter. If she fails, the Fetter is considered to be unResolved, and gains a point in its rating. If she botches, the Fetter is destroyed, and she immediately falls into a Destruction Harrowing.

## Underworld Travel

Where a wraith can go in the Underworld is determined by his Fetters. Without Fetters, he can't enter the Shadowlands for long; with unResolved Fetters he can't achieve Transcendence.

Wraiths with no Fetters can appear in the Shadowlands for only Stamina x 2 turns, as there is nothing in the Shadowlands to anchor them against Oblivion's pull. Wraiths who Resolved some of their Fetters can stay in the Shadowlands for Stamina x 2 scenes, but even they must soon return to the Tempest and the places of safety within. Wraiths without Fetters must find a safe haven in the Tempest in which to dwell. Whether they choose Stygia or one of the other islands of safety within that eternal storm is unimportant; what matters is that the Shadowlands are no longer an option.

Wraiths with unResolved Fetters can travel to Stygia or within the Tempest, but the further they go from the Shadowlands the more difficult it is for them to resist the tug of their Fetters. When in Stygia itself, the difficulty on all rolls increases by one for wraiths with Fetters; past Stygia in the direction of the Far Shores or in the Labyrinth the difficulty increases by + 2.

There are those rare wraiths who Resolved all of their Fetters, to whom rumor grants the ability to travel anywhere in the Underworld at will. The most powerful Gaunts of Stygia are supposed to be of this type of wraith, as are many elder Heretics.

## Shadow Experience

*No-one is near, no-one will hear  
your changeling song take shape  
in Shadowtime*

— Siouxsie & the Banshees, "Shadowtime"

If a wraith's personality gains experience and talents, it doesn't make sense for his dark side to be left behind on the learning curve. Shadows get experience as well, and can use their experience points to buy new Thorns or temporary Angst. On rare occasions Shadows can also purchase new Dark Passions, following the guidelines established for gaining Passions.

Shadows acquire one experience point for every three experience points their Psyches receive. In addition, for truly exceptional Shadowplay, extra Shadow experience can be awarded. While this doesn't directly benefit the Shadowguide responsible for the extra experience, it still serves as recognition of her work.

Shadows can spend experience at the following rates:

Trait	Cost
Thorns	Original Thorn cost
Personal Angst	Current rating
Dark Passions	2 x Dark Passion Rating

## Injury

*Ooooh, that's gotta hurt.*

— Ash, *Army of Darkness*



Paradoxically, wraiths are both fragile and incredibly resilient. Though the swat of a cat's paw can disperse them, they can be riddled with Skinlands bullets and barely feel it. Only one Trait deals with injury inflicted upon a wraith: Corpus. A wraith's Corpus is the shell of plasm that houses his Psyche — and Shadow. A player records injuries by marking off levels of Corpus, signifying damage to her character's "body."

Unlike humans, who lose vital organs or blood when they are wounded, wraiths lose substantiality — physical coherence. The less Corpus a wraith has remaining, the thinner and more fragile his form becomes, and thus the more susceptible he becomes to Oblivion's deadly pull. A wraith who loses all of his Corpus falls into a Harrowing, as there is no longer anything left to him that can physically resist Oblivion's pull.

## Permanent Corpus

A wraith has two Traits to measure how solid her Corpus is. A wraith's permanent Corpus indicates the maximum number of temporary Corpus Levels a wraith can have. A wraith with a permanent Corpus rating of eight could never have more than eight temporary Corpus Levels, even if she had enough Pathos to try to heal more. In other words, temporary Corpus can never exceed permanent.

All wraiths start with a permanent Corpus rating of 10, but this can be reduced by Harrowings.

## Corpus States

*Something surely was pressing steadily against the sides of the tent and weighting down upon it from above. Was it the body of the wind?*

— Algernon Blackwood, "The Willows"

Wraiths can exist in four Corpus states: Material, Corporeal, Incorporeal and Harrowed.

- **Material:** This state is made possible only through use of the Embody Arcanos. A Material wraith is made of solidified spiritual energy, and can be said to be physically present in the Skinlands. When in this state, the wraith takes normal damage from attacks by physical objects. However, he does not suffer penalties to his Dice Pools because of damage (page 235). Material wraiths may make soak rolls and engage in physical (hand-to-hand) combat (see Chapter 9).

- **Corporeal:** This is the normal state of a wraith as he exists in the Shadowlands. When in this state, the wraith can suffer damage "through the Shroud." Any object — a bullet, a speeding car, a forcefully thrown baseball — that collides with the wraith *that would normally cause damage to a human being* inflicts one level of Corpus damage and turns the wraith Incorporeal for a number of rounds equal to his Stamina rating. Thus a rock hurled through the space a wraith is standing in would inflict one level of Corpus and

### The Rule of Ouch

When trying to decide if an impact is enough to cause a level of Corpus damage, we recommend that Storytellers use the Rule of Ouch. Simply put, if the impact in question would be enough to make the Storyteller go, "ouch," it's enough to inflict a level of Corpus. However, we don't recommend actually testing the impacts in question. Remember, there's no touching in **Wraith**, and besides, common sense should be enough of a guide.

turn him Incorporeal. A soda can, however, absently tossed at the wraith would not inflict Corpus damage, nor would it send him Incorporeal. Wraiths can also voluntarily inflict Corpus damage on themselves and become Incorporeal by walking through a wall or other solid object. This is how wraiths can walk through locked doors, barred gates, walls, etc.

A wraith only loses Corporeality if damaged by something in the Skinlands. Shadowlands damage does not cause a wraith to become Incorporeal.

**Incorporeal:** When a wraith is Corporeal and suffers damage from an object in the living world, he becomes Incorporeal with respect to the Skinlands. This always causes the wraith to lose a level of Corpus. His form immediately becomes misty and indistinct. During this time, no further damage can be inflicted from the Skinlands. This state lasts for a number of turns equal to the wraith's Stamina. Incorporeal wraiths are still solid with respect to the Shadowlands; a wraith can be run over by a truck and rendered Incorporeal one turn, then impaled on a Legionnaire's sword for three levels of Corpus the next.

**Harrowed:** When a wraith loses all her Corpus, she is immediately sucked into the Tempest (possibly even the Labyrinth) and put through the nightmarish experience called a Harrowing. If a wraith survives her Harrowing, she is drawn back to one of her Fetters, where her Corpus re-forms. If she has no more Fetters, she will find herself instead floating in the Tempest near a Byway.

A wraith who survives a Harrowing caused by loss of Corpus will re-form with a number of Corpus Levels equal to her Stamina rating or her permanent Corpus, whichever is lower.

## Healing

Luckily for wraiths, their ghostly shells require little maintenance, and they may convert their own Pathos energy into Corpus. By spending a point of Pathos, a wraith can regain one of his lost Corpus Levels (only one point per turn may be spent this way). The Usury Arcanos can also restore a wraith's Corpus. A wraith may also heal Corpus Levels by Slumbering. A Slumbering character fades into one of his Fetters for eight hours. At the end of this time, assuming the Slumber was uninterrupted, the player rolls the character's Stamina (difficulty 6). Each success heals one level of non-aggravated damage.

## Types of Damage

There are two types of damage that wraiths can suffer: normal and aggravated.

**Normal damage** is the standard type of damage caused by any attack, from a club to a rocket launcher to a fist. A wraith can heal normal damage with one point of Pathos per Corpus Level.

**Aggravated damage** is an especially severe form of damage. Certain creatures and items can injure a wraith so horribly that the damage cannot easily be repaired. These injuries, called



aggravated wounds, can be inflicted by any of the following: weapons made of Stygian steel; barrow-flame (the flame of the Shadowlands); soulfire (crystallized Pathos); the claws and teeth of some Spectres (see “Shade Powers,” page 272); the claws and teeth of vampires, werewolves and other supernatural creatures (assuming they could somehow get into the Shadowlands); and certain Arcanos powers (such as Outrage and Usury). Furthermore, the Storyteller may declare that any particularly severe injury is an aggravated injury.

When an aggravated wound is inflicted, the player must cross off one Corpus Level per level of aggravated damage. Aggravated injuries may be healed only if the wraith Slumbers and spends three Pathos points. Every eight hours of Slumbering or Meditation plus the expenditure of three points of Pathos heals one Corpus Level taken as an aggravated injury (see the Meditation Ability on page 123).

If a wraith loses all of his remaining Corpus Levels due to aggravated damage, he immediately tumbles into the Labyrinth and undergoes a Destruction Harrowing.

## Sources of Injury

Despite wraiths’ resilience, there are many ways to harm them. Some are shared with and readily understandable by mortals; others are specific to wraiths. These sources of injury are described below.

Characters, whether human or wraith, can make Stamina rolls (difficulty 6) to “soak” (resist) damage. Each success indicates that the wraith suffers one less Corpus Level of damage.

Physical objects in the world of the living can harm wraiths, provided that the wraith is Material or Corporeal, and that the object could harm a living person. Thus, rain, snow or paper footballs, which cannot injure mortals, are not harmful to wraiths. On the other hand, unfriendly contact with an oncoming truck, a bullet or a sword — anything harmful to mortals — results in the loss of one Corpus Level and the temporary Incorporeality of the wraith.

## Combat

Combat and the injuries it can cause are dealt with at length in **Chapter 9: Drama**. Each success on an opponent’s damage roll causes the character to lose one Corpus Level; typically, this damage may be soaked. Of course, damage from across the Shroud (from the living world) only causes the loss of one Corpus Level and forces the wraith into the Incorporeal state.

In the Shadowlands, firearms work “normally,” but fires and other chemical reactions produce no heat. The exceptions are the hideous substances known as soulfire and barrow-flame, though soulfire burns hot and barrow-flame is cold.

## Stygian Steel

Many Stygian weapons are forged from the peculiar alloy called Stygian steel. Developed by Nhudri, the Grand High Artificer, it is an alloy of scrapings from the walls of the Veinous Stair and wraith plasm that is said to be tempered in the stuff of Oblivion. Tougher than anything else in the Underworld, it causes aggravated damage to any wraiths (or Spectres) whom a blade forged from it strikes. High-ranking Legionnaires often carry Stygian steel weapons; lower ranks often carry soulsteel blades (made from smelted Corpus) instead.

## Falling

There always remains the chance that a wraith will accidentally step out a window or off the edge of a rooftop and plummet to the ground below. Gravity cannot be ignored, even by the Restless. Use the chart below to calculate the damage a wraith takes from falling. Damage from falling is considered to be Shadowlands damage and does not force a wraith to become Incorporeal.

Falling in the Tempest is a different matter altogether, since entropy replaces gravity in the eternal storm. Wraiths who fall through the Tempest are assumed to reach a velocity equivalent to that reached after falling 60 feet and impact damage should be calculated accordingly. Wraiths who fall through the Tempest into a Harrowing take no additional damage from their plummeting descent, and wraiths falling through the Tempest can be caught by sufficiently daring Harbingers.

Distance (in feet)	Injury
5-9	One Corpus Level
10-19	Two Corpus Levels
20-29	Three Corpus Levels
30-39	Four Corpus Levels
40-49	Five Corpus Levels
50-59	Six Corpus Levels
60-69	Seven Corpus Levels

...and so on, to a maximum of 10 Corpus Levels.

## Fire

Fire is hazardous to mortals, and it can injure wraiths when ignited in the Shadowlands. Fire in the living world can hurt wraiths "through the Shroud," but, like any other sort of physical damage from the living world, it simply causes them to lose one Corpus Level and become Incorporeal. On the other hand, fire in the Shadowlands, also called barrow-flame, always causes aggravated damage to wraiths, and thus is capable of destroying them. Barrow-flame exists solely in the Underworld, and as such cannot harm the living. It functions just as fire does in the world of the Quick, save for the fact that it is cold rather than hot. This unholy fire lingers in places of great destruction in the Skinlands, and

its appearance often presages new disasters. The Necropoli of London, Atlanta, Philadelphia and Los Angeles, among others, are speckled with barrow-flame.

A flame of any size has the potential to harm a character. Each turn a wraith is exposed to flame, he may roll his Stamina rating against the difficulty listed on the chart below to resist the damage. The player must roll each turn the character is in the flames. If a roll is failed, the character takes from one to three Corpus Levels of damage (refer to the second chart below). If a roll succeeds, the character takes one fewer Corpus Levels of damage per success (*a la* a soak roll). If wraith botches the roll, he is harmed in some special way — perhaps he loses his eyesight, or his limbs are maimed.

Difficulty	Heat of Fire
Three	Heat of a candle (first-degree burns)
Five	Heat of a torch (second-degree burns)
Seven	Heat of a Bunsen burner (third-degree burns)
Nine	Heat of a chemical fire
Ten	Heat of molten steel

Wounds	Size of Fire
One	Torch; a part of the body is burned
Two	Bonfire; half of the body is burned
Three	Raging inferno; entire body burned

Soulfire crystals, if grasped, can cause aggravated damage just as barrow-fire can. Wraiths who are Moliated into torch shape have a soulfire crystal attached to their reformed Corpora, and as such can actually be used as weapons. On the other hand, soulfire is also hot enough literally to cause a wraith's Corpus to melt, and this deformation can also inflict aggravated damage.

## Maelstroms

From time to time, Maelstroms sweep across the Shadowlands and through the Byways. Aside from the fact that Maelstroms carry Spectres with them, they also can do great damage to a wraith with their howling winds, slashing rain and terrifying lightning. While Storytellers might wish to roleplay out the effects of having characters caught in a Maelstrom, for basic Maelstrom damage they should refer to the chart below.

Maelstrom Level	Damage per turn of contact
One	Four dice
Two	Six dice
Three	Eight dice
Four	12 dice
Five	14 dice

A wraith may resist Maelstrom damage by using Castigate or by seeking shelter within a Haunt. Damage is per turn of contact with the Maelstrom.

# The Quick

'Sot!' cried Manfred, in a rage, 'is it only a ghost, then, that thou hast seen?'

— Horace Walpole, *The Castle of Otranto*



Because wraiths frequently deal with mortal humans, it is important to understand what injures the living. Instead of having a Corpus rating, humans have Health Levels. Humans have seven Health Levels, instead of wraiths' 10 levels of Corpus. A mortal's Health rating can be thought of as a spectrum with "Bruised" at one end and "Incapacitated" at the other. Each wound level beyond "Bruised" carries with it a penalty to a human's Dice Pool, due to the fact that someone who is wounded tends not to operate at peak efficiency. Storytellers should mark off one Health Level for every wound that a human character takes.

## Mortal Death

When a mortal or animal reaches Incapacitated, she is one Health Level away from death. If she is injured one more time, or if it is impossible to stem the flow of blood from her body, she will die in short order.

Of course, mortals heal differently than wraiths do. With proper medical attention, mortals recover based on the following chart. Note that the time given is how long it takes to recover that particular Health Level — other Health Levels must be healed as well. Thus, if the mortal takes three months to recover from being Mauled, he must still take the time to heal Wounded, Injured and so one.

Health Level	Time
Bruised	One day
Hurt	Three days
Injured	One week
Wounded	One month
Mauled	Three months
Crippled	Three Months *
Incapacitated	Perhaps never

\*Not only do mortals have to heal this Health Level, but they lose one point from one of their Physical Attributes as well (Storyteller discretion). Mortals who reach Incapacitated heal at the Storyteller's discretion; some enter comas for the rest of their lives; others make miraculous recoveries.

If a mortal dies while possessed with Puppetry, the wraith possessing her takes Corpus damage equivalent to the Health damage that destroyed his mortal host.

**Note:** Wraiths can heal mortals with the Usury Arcanos (see page 160).



## Mortal Health Levels

Bruised	No effect
Hurt	-1
Injured	-1
Wounded	-2
Mauled	-2
Crippled	• -5
Incapacitated	Incapable of Action

## Perceptions

*I believe that all these varied experiences have been sent to us not to amuse us by tales to be told and then forgotten but as the essential warp and woof of a new spiritual garment which is to be woven for the modern world.*

— Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Law of the Ghost”



hosts have always been associated with altered perceptions on the parts of the living. This doesn't change in the World of Darkness; there are several altered states associated with the presence of wraiths. Transcendence is one that can be achieved (theoretically) by wraiths themselves, while the Shroud separates the living from the Restless and the Fog protects mortals' fragile minds from the implications of ghostly existence.

## Transcendence

*Trasumanar significar per verba non si poria.*

*(The passing beyond humanity cannot be set forth in words.)*

— Dante, *Paradiso*

There, in the shifting darkness between the tenement houses, your friend struggles with two protean forms: one dark like a shadow, the other limned in pearly light. You wait; he doesn't like interference. Raising his head in a silent howl, he clutches at the beings of shadow and light, and a silver flash arcs between the three. You shiver, sensing something potent coalescing around you.

Your friend's eyes widen, as his body drains of substance and texture. Centered within his transparent form, a silver light begins to blaze with the ineffable brilliance of the Sunlit Lands. The Necropolis' gray walls grow somehow darker, while, from somewhere above you, you hear beautiful voices whispering and laughing — not the cruel sniggering and sardonic remarks of the damned, but eloquent, musical sounds of joy. For a brief moment, the greasy clouds above the Necropolis part. Light and warmth flood the city of the dead, as its inhabitants shield their eyes and cower, wondering what new form of attack the Spectres are attempting.

As you stare slack-jawed, your friend's form ripples and dissipates. Where he stood, a silver beam of light shoots straight up into the roiling cleft in the clouds. You stand rooted in place, longing to follow, but the beam disappears. The clouds clap shut like dungeon doors, and the ground trembles with the bass rumble of thunder. In one brief moment of beauty, your friend is gone... forever.

## The Elusive Truth

Accounts of Transcendence vary: a tunnel of light, a parting of clouds, a golden chariot conveying the Transcended to Heaven, the transformation of the enlightened Corpus into a shining white lotus flower, even the simple dissipation of the illusion of self and plasmic “reality.” Yet these accounts all agree on one thing: the Transcended never return to tell their stories.

Piecing together elements of such legends, the Restless have constructed a representative understanding of Transcendence. Various put, Transcendence is the attainment of a higher or more balanced order of being, a state of ultimate self-awareness and inner peace, the release or acceptance (depending upon one's point of view) of the negative aspects of being, a cosmic harmony of opposites writ small, or final release from the suffering and passions of the Underworld. When a wraith Transcends, she has completed a purification process. Just what constitutes this process depends upon one's outlook. Wraiths who view Transcendence as a spiritual achievement also see it as the reward for undertaking the arduous process of transformation into a virtuous being. Some view it as the result of shedding one's illusions and developing wisdom by simply accepting what is. Wraiths with no religious or philosophical bent often believe Transcendence to be the evolution of mental essence into a more advanced form. On the other hand, many believe that Transcendence is simply a cruel hoax designed to nourish false hope.

Nonetheless, while no definitive proof of its reality has been established, many legends point to Transcendence as a very real state. Some wraiths claim that if you look deep into the eyes of a Ferryman, you can see the blessed faces of all those who have Transcended. Others posit that Ferrymen, akin to Bodhisattvas, are compassionate Transcended beings who remain behind in the Underworld to shepherd the dead to Transcendence.

Historically, Ferrymen have been known to usher wraiths to their just destinations. Early in the century, half a dozen wraiths (all long since vanished, of course) witnessed the Transcendence of the famed Stygian Sandman and artist Elector Merian when, for the price of the Phantasmal masterpiece dubbed “Charity,” the dread Ferryman Antaeon ferried the painter to the pool of Bittersweet Remembrance in the Sunless Sea. As the artist stepped onto the Pool's silvery circle, the Ferryman offered these mysterious words: “Elector Merian, you have become Charity. Forever, in joy, will we see through these eyes.”

Others claim that Charon Transcended as he disappeared into the whirlpool with Gorool, for they felt a glowing warmth



in their dead Corpora thereafter. Many of these wraiths took up the path of Transcendence, and, a few decades later, disappeared into the mists on the boats of the Ferryman Zaphnath-paaneah and Timotheus. And there have even been accounts of wraiths who, having perfected the art of Fatalism, claim to have seen their own Transcendent destinies. Lionel Vastupi, a 19th-century Monitor of Necropolis New York, was one of these; claiming that his Transcended self spoke to him during Slumber, he was said to have awakened spiritually under its strange, periodic tutelage. In 1944, he dissipated before a crowd of wraiths in Central Park. Even more peculiar, each witness claims to have seen Vastupi's Corpus transform into something different as it dissipated: an angelic being, a beam of light, the wafting smoke of fragrant incense, a fragile white rose withering before their eyes. These witnesses have all been discredited or have publicly recanted their statements, but hope springs eternal, especially among those who have all eternity.

## The Aspirants

Like the living, wraiths have no definitive proof of existence after death (i.e., Transcendence) — testimonials, yes, but no hard evidence. Many wraiths would like to keep it that way. To them, the possibility of Transcendence is simply undesirable. An unknown, mysterious state, it is terrifying, particularly to those who believe or fear that the universe works on a principle of justice. Wraiths who are attracted to

the concept generally consist of those who have nothing left to lose, want a purpose or a goal to work toward, or desire inner peace and believe that none of the institutions, relationships or potential gains of the Underworld will provide it. Still others desire good, see the loss of souls to Oblivion as evil, and view Transcendence as the only escape from such loss. Some simply hate the Underworld and seek to move on.

Often, those who in life sought their versions of Transcendence also seek it in death. Many such aspirants consist of worshippers and members of religious orders such as priests or nuns, but, of course, are not limited only to these. The vast majority of active aspirants eventually find themselves journeying toward the Far Shores. Still, despite the numbers of the devoted and the diligence with which they work toward their goal, most of these wraiths never attain Transcendence.

## The Successful

The quantity of Underworld speculation on what characterizes the Transcended could fill at least half a dozen Alexandrian Libraries. Stygian scholars, if they admit that Transcendence is real at all, generally concede that only a rare few attain it — less than one-half of one percent of the Underworld's population of wraiths (and even fewer former Spectres). Leaders of the various Far Shores realms heartily disagree with this perception, deluging nonbelievers with litanies of Transcendence tales for every ounce of skepticism expressed.

Whoever is right, almost all students of Transcendence have come to agree that certain “proven” axioms, known as the Eight Truths in some circles, pertain to these enlightened aspirants (many of whose legends have been recorded in a set of heavy volumes known throughout the Shadowlands as *The Tomes of Golden Light*). First among the Truths is that it takes decades, usually centuries, to Transcend. This process of perfection varies according to beliefs. Many wraiths trust that the aspirant only requires a simple heart and a fervent wish to Transcend; a higher power will send trials over the course of centuries to purify and perfect what remains. Others believe that the aspirant must completely master her mind in order to Transcend, but that the power of perfection is to be found entirely within herself. There is also a small following of those who discount the stories of the long-suffering aspirants in *The Tomes of Golden Light*, all of whom required a century or more to attain some semblance of perfection. These wraiths believe in a kind of epiphanic Transcendence, in which a sentence, a picture, a snatch of music or a fragrant scent can send the diligent aspirant directly into a state of Transcendence. Many Heretic groups champion this notion of instant Transcendence; if nothing else it makes for attractive tales for recruiting.

Second among the Truths is that aspirants must possess a higher drive, something internal compelling them to think and behave more spiritually than they ordinarily might. This

spiritual fervor has many names: the Eidolon, the Spirit, the Inner Light, the Eternal Flame, the Buddha Within, even simple “resolve” — but whatever its name, it provides the necessary inner push toward perfection.

The complete list of Eight Truths is as follows. The devoted aspirant must:

- Practice patience in attaining Transcendence, for it comes at great length and at great cost;
- Cultivate the higher drive (Eidolon, Spirit, Inner Light, etc.);
- Conquer the Shadow;
- Make peace with himself;
- Make peace with the world of the living;
- Value the mind over the plasmic body;
- Value the goal of Transcendence over identity or mind;
- Perfect the positive virtues, among which are numbered: compassion, courage, creativity, honesty, hope, humility, humor, love, perseverance, self-acceptance and wisdom.

## Official Positions

Whether or not the “Truths” listed above are self-evident is up to the individual wraith (or player) to decide. However, because of the potentially disruptive nature of the topic, positions on Transcendence have evolved within each of the Underworld’s three political factions over the past millennium.



The Hierarchy does not officially discount Transcendence as a myth, but neither does it encourage its pursuit. The party line is that Transcendence is an impracticality; it distracts wraiths from the more important duties of maintaining the Necropoli and fighting the forces of Oblivion. In reality, Hierarchy wraiths fear the fanaticism of aspirants and thus try to downplay the stories of Transcendence that persistently crop up throughout the Shadowlands.

Because of their diversity, Renegades have no official position on Transcendence, although many are likely to scoff at the idea. Those who believe it can be attained often spurn the accepted paths (the Eight Truths, for instance) in favor of ones of their own design, such as epiphanies and ecstatic revelations.

Heretics, of course, are the natural choice for aspirants. After all, what better moral compass is there for misguided souls than someone who pursues and achieves perfection? At odds with the Hierarchy, many Heretics seek to publicize reports of Transcendence in order to convert others to their ways of thinking.

## Storytelling the Path Beyond

Despite its canonical treatment throughout the Underworld, Transcendence remains a mystery. A wraith may perfect the Eight Truths listed above and still not ascend into the clouds on a flaming chariot of gold. Perhaps the Eight Truths are bunk preached by the unTranscended and propagated by the realms of the Far Shores to increase membership (after all, just because students of Transcendence all agree on something doesn't mean it's correct). Perhaps following the Eight Truths does not result in the balance necessary to achieve Transcendence. Or perhaps Transcendence can be attained by alternate means: self-sacrifice, travel, deep study of a belief system, creation of one's own belief system, or a complete acceptance of the way things are. The real essence of Transcendence must be a matter for the Storyteller and players to resolve.

Characters who Transcend usually leave the game; on the other hand, Storytellers who want to devise a detailed explanation of what happens on the other side of Transcendence may want to keep a Transcended character around as a plot hook. Generally speaking, Transcendence should be treated as the theme for an entire chronicle: it is neither easy nor fast. Other than the fact of Transcendence, the path beyond holds no sure reward; the promise is there, but the evidence is not.

Characters following the path undertake great hardship. The trials they face make less courageous wraiths turn tail, but true aspirants find it within themselves to confront these conflicts. And the farther along the path aspirants travel, the harder the choices they face: the path to Transcendence offers many opportunities for great roleplaying, and should not be reduced to a series of dice rolls.

The Storyteller may wish to use the following progression as a guideline for organizing a Transcendence chronicle.

## Resolving Fetters

A necessary step in Transcending is letting go of the ties that bind the wraith to the world of the living. This is not the same as having them severed. Letting go means that the wraith must willingly set straight his unfinished business with the world by Resolving all his Fetters. Because the Resolution of each Fetter represents a story, this step alone takes quite a while to accomplish.

## Increasing Eidolon

Before a wraith can tackle the psychological complexities of confronting her own Shadow, she must develop her higher self, strengthen her resolve, and perfect her positive traits (courage, self-acceptance, love, honesty, hope, compassion, creativity, humor, wisdom) — all of which are represented in the character's Eidolon rating. The Storyteller may require that the player increase her character's Eidolon to five or more, depending upon how long he wants the chronicle to take and how difficult he wants to make the attainment of Transcendence. As Backgrounds such as Eidolon cannot be purchased with experience points, this aspect of the search for Transcendence must be roleplayed out.

## Merging the Shadow and Psyche

Before progressing further, the character must combine these two forces in a gesture of full self-acceptance. While they are apart, they oppose and feed off one another. When they are one, they become a powerful tool for Transcendence.

**The Shadow:** Once the character has strengthened her resolve against her Shadow by increasing her Eidolon, she can confront it and the doubt, resistance, antipathy and subconscious impulses it represents. This part of the path to Transcendence reflects the character's spiritual journey through a psychological Underworld and out again, just as Dante traversed the Inferno and Persephone visited Hades. Each story in this cycle should result in a small reduction of Angst (or the wraith's pain, fear, alienation, self-doubt and frustration) and of the Shadow's Dark Passions. Such reduction should not come as a result of denying these sources of Angst; rather, it should result from an acceptance of them.

**The Psyche:** Transcendence requires not only that the aspirant defeat her Shadow, but that she also defeat the part of her Psyche which values static identity over Eidolon. In order to prepare for the last step toward Transcendence, a wraith must be willing to risk both her body and her mind to destruction. If she cannot accept the possibility that Transcendence requires permanent dissolution of both Corpus and of identity, she is ill-prepared to face the Final Harrowing that determines her destiny, whether that be Transcendence or Oblivion. Stories in this cycle should place the mind and body at risk with the intention of increasing the character's acceptance of her own dissolution.

## Eliminating Passions

Ordinarily, this step occurs last because it destroys a wraith's final ties to both the Sunlit Lands and the Underworld. At this point, the wraith has no Fetters and has come to terms with the potential loss of body and mind as the result of her path. This step tests that belief to the limit. Immediately upon Resolving her final Passion, a wraith undergoes a climactic Destruction Harrowing which determines whether or not she achieves Transcendence. Success takes her to Transcendence; failure carries terrible consequences. Optionally, a wraith who succeeds in Resolving her Passions can replace her former Passions with a new one: **Achieve Transcendence (Desire for Unity) 5**. If ordinary Passions provide reasons for the character to exist after life, her new Passion provides a consuming reason for her to exist after death. Thus, instead of slipping into Oblivion, the character becomes completely self-accepting, follows her Passion and, in fact, Transcends.

Alternately, the Storyteller may wish to present the player with scenarios that work toward more than one of these goals at a time instead of following a strict progression. This option makes it more difficult to keep track of a character's progress, but it may feel more natural than the step-by-step method.

In the end, there is no hard and fast method for achieving Transcendence; much depends on the individual character's beliefs, mindset and desires. On the other hand, this should serve as a rough outline for leading a character to Transcendence, should any wraith wish to journey so far.

## The Shroud

*I have said that Danforth refused to tell me what final horror had made him scream out so insanely...*

— H.P. Lovecraft, *At the Mountains of Madness*

The Shroud is the veil of fear and misunderstanding that separates the Skinlands from the Shadowlands. It is invisible and intangible, yet it serves to keep the two worlds firmly apart. It is because of the Shroud that wraiths cannot be seen or heard by the living, save when the Restless exercise their wills and Arcanoi pierce the Shroud.

The thickness of the Shroud is hardly a constant. It varies from place to place, from time to time, and according to the sort of people in a given area at a given moment. A cemetery at midnight, populated by devotees of Edgar Allen Poe, would have a much thinner Shroud than the heart of Wall Street during lunch hour on a sunny day. The thinner the Shroud, the easier it is for wraiths to affect the Skinlands there; were there ever a place where the Shroud rating was zero, wraiths in that spot would be plainly

visible to any mortals standing nearby. However, the Shroud rating of a place can never dip below 4, no matter what.

Other Awakened beings (vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings, etc.) can thin the Shroud by their mere presence. The Shroud thickness is reduced by 2 in the presence of any other supernatural being, regardless of type, but it can never go below 4. So the Shroud around a vampire standing in a graveyard, or a sluagh in a dismal part of the sewers, regardless, will still be 4.

The chart below details sample Shroud thicknesses:

### Shroud Rating

A shopping mall on a sunny spring day	10
A clean subway station in the afternoon	9
A well-cared for home with no violent history	8
A crowded, dim club playing Top 40	7
A country crossroads on a moonless night	6
Old mansion where brutal murders were committed	5
Deserted cemetery at midnight on a full moon	4

## The Fog

The living simultaneously want and fear proof of life after death. While they want to know that there's something beyond the last breath, ghosts provide tangible proof of death itself, and give the lie to the notion that everyone goes to Heaven. With that in mind, the human psyche protects itself by weaving a Fog between itself and even the most blatant manifestation of ghostly activity. By virtue of the Fog, most of the Quick will find themselves rationalizing or simply forgetting any encounters they have with the Restless

Some are not affected by the Fog: innocent children, animals, the insane and certain of the other supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness. Any of these can roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 8) and see and hear the wraiths in their vicinity. Of course, this extra-perception doesn't extend to others in the vicinity of the person who sees the ghost; to them their child will be talking to an imaginary friend, and their cat will be hissing at nothing at all.

**Note:** Not all supernatural beings can see past the Shroud in this manner. Giovanni and Samedi vampires, Euthanatos and Dreamspeaker mages, sluagh fae, and Silent Strider and Stargazer werewolves are among those most likely to be able to detect hovering wraiths. On the other hand, even most vampires are likely to be unaware of ghosts. **For more information on the other dwellers in the World of Darkness, see page 281.**

## Fog Ratings

### Willpower % of Population Reaction

1 10% **Catatonic Fear:** Terrified into paralysis, mortals in this category will, at best, be able to grope about for a hiding place. Rational thoughts and complex actions are completely out of the question.

2 20% **Panic:** Blind flight is the immediate response of this segment of the population to the presence of a wraith.

3 18% **Disbelief:** This response is the classic over-rationalization; someone in this category who sees a ghost will put it down to anything *but* the presence of the supernatural.

4 15% **Berserk:** A purely animalistic reaction, the berserk response causes mortals to throw whatever's handy at the intruding wraith, smash things and otherwise take out their fear by causing blind destruction.

5 13% **Terror:** The mortal is afraid, but retains some self-control. She will quickly try to put as much distance as possible between herself and the wraith, but she won't run out the front door screaming, "Ghosts!"

6 10% **Conciliatory:** The mortal is afraid, but is collected enough to attempt to bargain.

7 7% **Controlled Fear:** While still afraid, a mortal in this category will still act rationally: refusing to go down to the basement by herself, putting her haunted house up for sale immediately, etc.

8 5% **Curiosity:** Members of this category are more fascinated than afraid, though they may run immediately for their camcorders or the psychic hotline. Wraiths are likely to find their attentions overwhelming.

9 1.5% **Righteous Anger:** More stubborn than death, this type of mortal will stand her ground against even the most sadistic Haunter. These mortals refuse to fear wraiths, seeing them as opponents instead of supernatural agents.

10 0.5% **No Reaction/Blasé:** This sort of mortal has no particular reaction to the presence of the Restless at all. Perhaps he's had a near-death experience, he might think the wraiths are messengers from his departed Uncle Harry or maybe he's just not too bright. Either way, he doesn't regard ghosts as anything special.



# The Harrowing

Late that night, I'm pacing the floor in the schoolhouse when the room suddenly shifts sideways and then slips away altogether. There's a roaring concussion that cracks the darkness like a cannon shot, and the floor opens up beneath my feet. I let fly a warbling scream as I pitch backward, spinning head over heels into a cold, dark void. Panic grips my throat and squeezes, hard.

Once I realize that I've somehow fallen *through* the floor, the disorienting sensation of disintegration subsides. I feel as though I'm floating through a dense fog, still moving downward, but with direction, it now seems. Something is pulling me down, relentlessly. Wind whistles shrilly in my ears and tugs at me as powerful gusts buffet me from every direction, and the force of it tosses me about like I'm a dust mote. Still, I keep on heading down.

*This is it!* I hear that other voice in my head say. *It's all over, so just let go and enjoy the ride....*

Rushes of vertigo and stomach-tightening nausea sweep through me as I twist about in the dark emptiness. I think I've stopped screaming, but it's impossible to tell. The wind shrieks around me with a thousand voices that drown out my thoughts, let alone my words.

All I can see is a swelling darkness that churns around me like fat storm clouds. I am not even sure if my eyes are open or closed, but I soon decide that it doesn't matter. Such distinctions seem almost silly. The void is exactly the same, whether it's inside me and outside me.

"No," I whisper, the sound faint and lost on the wind.

A powerful surge of terror seizes me. I stretch out my arms in a vain attempt to touch something to orient myself, but feel nothing and continue to tumble in free-fall. I have an internal sense of moving at great speed as strong, irresistible forces tear at me. The darkness before my eyes surges with dangerous, hungry energies.

No! says another, louder voice in my head. You can't let go!... You can't give up!

I struggle to clear my mind and force the chattering voices inside my head to stop by mentally repeating — I'm still me! I'm still me! — but that single, simple thought seems so small and insignificant.

I'm still me, and I can't give up! Not when Sarah and Karen might still need me!

I let loose another scream that's so intense it's painful. It tears the night

like a blade slashing through a sheer, dark curtain. Gripped by terror, I watch as huge, distorted faces, horribly backlit by flashes of red and purple lightning, materialize from the darkness and loom close to me. Hands — some of which don't even look human — reach out for me, raking the air with hooked fingers as huge and terrifying as scythes.

The roaring sound of hurricane winds fills my ears, but all the while, beneath it, I hear something else...indistinct voices that scream at me and call out my name.

I can't make out anything they are saying because the voices and the screaming thoughts that fill my mind blend into a single, howling cacophony that rises louder with soul-shaking fury.

*...please...make this stop...*  
the voice inside my head whimpers like a lost, frightened child. *...just let me disappear...forever...*

An unimaginable cold grips me, paralyzing my mind, my Corpus, my very soul. I suddenly realize that I recognize the faces that are materializing out of the darkness around me. I scream and try to turn away, but no matter where I look, I see them. I can't even close my eyes.

They come closer, now. Mr. Moore, the terrifying Sunday school

teacher who kept on telling a frightened little boy that he was going to Hell. Karen, just as she looked after her... accident. Sarah, but her features horribly distorted by a combination of lust and contempt. My father's face — pale and bloated, exactly the way I remember it from that day so long ago when I found him hanging from a rope tied to the rafters in the garage. His lips move, but the words he says, the blame and accusations, echo only in my memory.

*It's all your fault, the parody of my father whispers. Now it's time to pay.*

"No," I whimper. "Dad, stop this."

*You're everything about me that was weak, David, the voice continues. Is it inside my head or out? I can't tell. You even tried to die the same way, but you didn't have the courage. You're a failure even as a suicide.*

There's a horrible sense of rightness to what my father says. All around me, it's getting colder. "I tried to be strong, Dad, but it was so hard after Karen died. So hard..."

*It was your fault she died. You killed her, just like you killed me.*

"No!" I cry out, feeling terribly, utterly alone. "You've been dead for decades, Dad, and you did this to yourself — for God's sake let me be!"

My father's face fades away with a howl, and the darkness coalesces into something else — a dark oval that is framed by the swirling glow of night sky. With a jolt of surprise, I realize that I'm lying on my back, looking up at a thin, skeletal face. Bright eyes stare back at me from underneath the dark folds of the Ferryman's hood. Harsh, angular lines of bone cast deep shadows beneath his eyes and chin. The lipless mouth appears to be grinning at me. The only spark of life or intelligence is in those glowing eyes. They bore into me like spikes.

"You're strong," the Ferryman says, his teeth clacking like stone against stone. "I knew you wouldn't give in so easily to the temptations of your Shadow. You have a good sense of yourself. Ultimately, that can only help."

I'm too drained to reply as the Ferryman leans over me with one hand extended. I feel his fingertips brush across my forehead.

"I — I have to find her, my daughter," I say, not even sure if I'm speaking out loud or not. It takes an immense effort merely to think clearly, much less speak. "Can you help me?"

A low, chuffing sound like laughter fills my ears.

"There are things you can do," the Ferryman says, his voice deep

and sonorous. "Talents and abilities you don't even realize you have. Learn to use them, and you'll go far."

I don't reply. I'm still finding it difficult to focus my thoughts.

"Your daughter is not here," the Ferryman says simply. "She was, a long while ago, but she wasn't in the Shadowlands for very long. She disappeared shortly after she arrived. The Reaper who attacked you caught her and took her away. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he's taken her to his Haunt. His little cabal maintains a stronghold in the Tempest, and they're always looking for recruits."

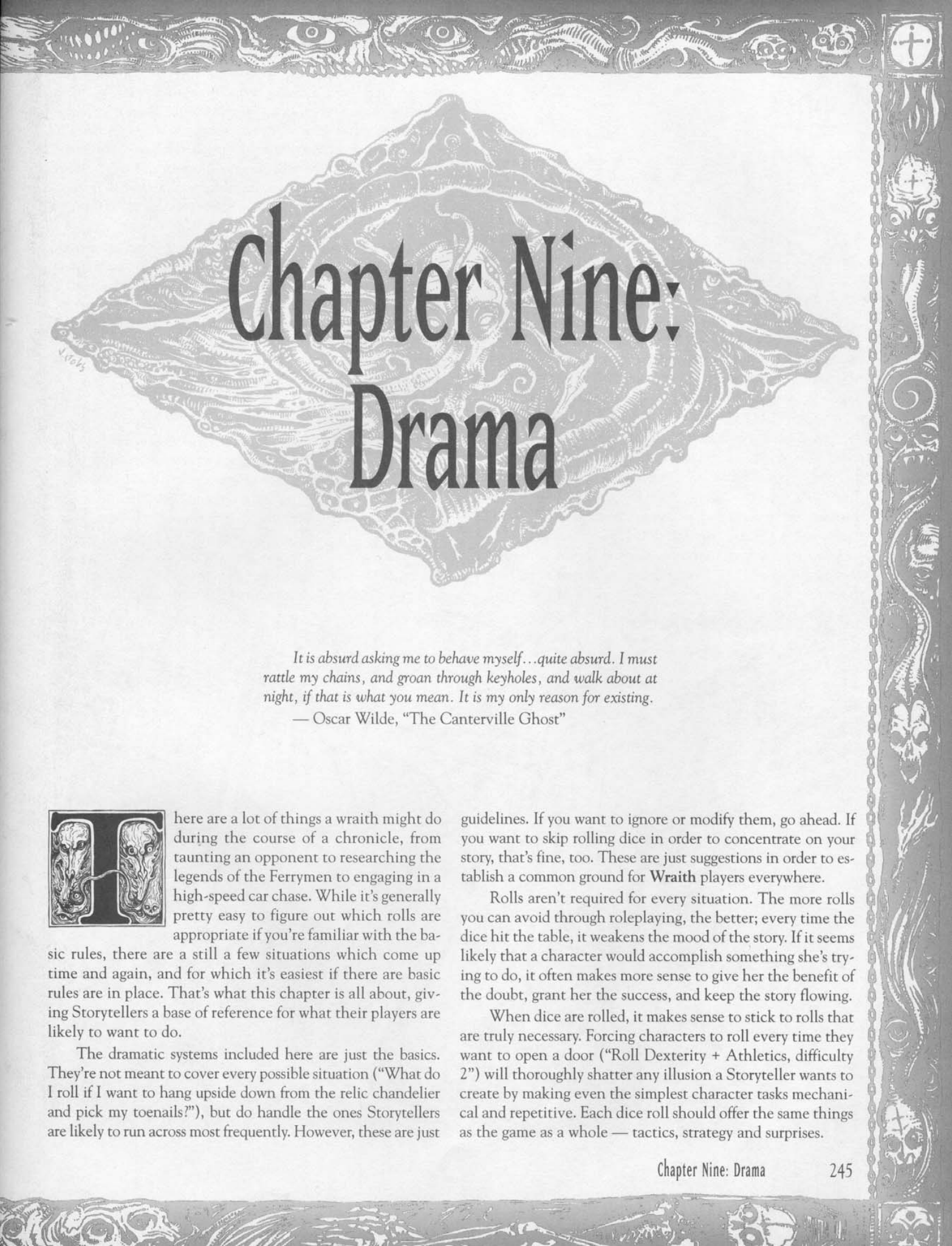
"The Tempest?" I echo, hearing the tremor in my voice. "Where is that? How can I get there? I have to find her!"

The Ferryman shakes his head. The cloth of his hood rustles with a harsh, scraping sound. "It's right underneath your feet," he says. "You'll find it soon enough, I suspect."

"Can you take me there?" I ask, but as I stare up at him, his face slowly wavers and then dissolves into the darkness. Once again, I am alone in the eerie silence of the empty schoolhouse. I realize that death isn't the end. Far from it.

It's just the beginning....





# Chapter Nine: Drama

*It is absurd asking me to behave myself...quite absurd. I must rattle my chains, and groan through keyholes, and walk about at night, if that is what you mean. It is my only reason for existing.*

— Oscar Wilde, “The Canterville Ghost”



There are a lot of things a wraith might do during the course of a chronicle, from taunting an opponent to researching the legends of the Ferrymen to engaging in a high-speed car chase. While it's generally pretty easy to figure out which rolls are appropriate if you're familiar with the basic rules, there are still a few situations which come up time and again, and for which it's easiest if there are basic rules in place. That's what this chapter is all about, giving Storytellers a base of reference for what their players are likely to want to do.

The dramatic systems included here are just the basics. They're not meant to cover every possible situation (“What do I roll if I want to hang upside down from the relic chandelier and pick my toenails?”), but do handle the ones Storytellers are likely to run across most frequently. However, these are just

guidelines. If you want to ignore or modify them, go ahead. If you want to skip rolling dice in order to concentrate on your story, that's fine, too. These are just suggestions in order to establish a common ground for **Wraith** players everywhere.

Rolls aren't required for every situation. The more rolls you can avoid through roleplaying, the better; every time the dice hit the table, it weakens the mood of the story. If it seems likely that a character would accomplish something she's trying to do, it often makes more sense to give her the benefit of the doubt, grant her the success, and keep the story flowing.

When dice are rolled, it makes sense to stick to rolls that are truly necessary. Forcing characters to roll every time they want to open a door (“Roll Dexterity + Athletics, difficulty 2”) will thoroughly shatter any illusion a Storyteller wants to create by making even the simplest character tasks mechanical and repetitive. Each dice roll should offer the same things as the game as a whole — tactics, strategy and surprises.

# Scenes



A scene in a story is similar to a scene in a film. It's an easily definable moment when *something is happening*, and the events of the scene are roleplayed through as if they were actually occurring. A scene could be resolved through roleplaying alone, or dice might be called for, multiple actions could be performed, or combat might even break out.

Scenes should be as exciting, vivid and dramatic as possible. They are the heart of any story, the moments when characters actually get to act and see the results of their actions immediately, and as such they are the parts of the story that generate the most player interest and attention. If a Storyteller can't capitalize on that increased interest, the story itself could be in trouble.

Scenes are never static pictures. There are always things happening in them, little bits of incidental action that flesh the scene out and breathe life into it. A staredown with a Spectre could be highlighted by a description of the incessant buzzing of flies that can be heard behind each of the monster's words. A Deathlord giving an audience doesn't just sit behind his desk; he will stroll around the room and attempt to physically dominate the conversation. The more that's going on in a scene to start with, the more there is for players to pick up on and get involved in.

The opposite of the scene is downtime, those moments when players aren't actively taking the roles of their characters. Jackie the Renegade Netrunner may want to spend six hours digging up a file that she wants, but that doesn't mean that Jackie's player and Storyteller want to spend six hours sitting there detailing every step of the process. Downtime is useful in the same way that fadeouts are useful in films; it permits the action to move along to the next important scene gracefully.

Making the transition from downtime to scene can be relatively seamless. The characters could announce that they are traveling from Boston's Necropolis to Atlanta's, but halfway through the journey, they could be involved in an attempted Byway robbery. Suddenly, the long blur of the trip becomes a very real moment that the players are actively involved in, and downtime has shifted to an active scene.

## Turns



Turns are the individual units making up each scene. They allow a Storyteller to break down the action of the scene into manageable slices, permitting greater control over the action. Technically, a turn is a period of time of variable length during which a wraith can perform an action. By turning a scene into a series of turns, the Storyteller makes sure that everyone gets to act, and that each player gets the same amount of time to decide on her action.



Turn structure should be reasonably loose, allowing characters to do things more or less simultaneously that might take varying amounts of time in the real world. For example, one character might choose to climb a tree while another ducks behind a desk; in real life climbing the tree might take much longer, but full advantage should be taken of a Storyteller's dramatic license.

## Multiple Actions

A character can perform multiple actions in a turn, but it makes sense that with his attention diverted he won't be able to perform any action at peak efficiency. Instead, when he declares his multiple actions, the Storyteller determines his Dice Pool for all of the actions (usually two is the maximum) and then gives him the total of dice in his *smallest* Pool to split between the actions.

The character should also decide which action he's performing first; second actions are only performed after all of the other characters have performed their first ones. If more than one character has a second action, then those characters perform their second actions in order of initiative. The same procedure follows for third actions and beyond.

Characters can delay multiple actions, but they must perform the delayed action before their next action comes around or the first one is lost. A character can always dodge at any point during a round if he has unrolled dice remaining, even if those dice are ticketed for a second action.

## Action Scenes



Many scenes are loaded with complicated actions and the dice rolls that allow them to happen. Fights, car chases and other perilous moments are some of the scenes that players most enjoy, however, they can also be the most complicated for Storytellers.

There are a lot of possibilities for action scenes, from swinging out of trees to running over a bunch of Spectres, and there are a few things that help them move more smoothly. Vivid description of the setting is vital, letting the characters know what their options are and what they have to work with. Otherwise the Storyteller will be inundated with complaints like, "You didn't tell us there were six other Spectres standing behind us!" and the game will bog down. On the other hand, not every detail is important — too many and the momentum of the scene gets lost.

It's a good idea to let characters try just about anything they want to do, no matter how ridiculous or odd it might seem. Even with a difficulty of 10 and multiple successes required, they just *might* pull it off....

## Organizing Action Turns

Just as Storytellers need to break scenes into turns, they sometimes need to break down turns into smaller divisions. Action turns generally call for this sort of approach, otherwise they can degenerate into chaos with everyone calling out their actions and squabbling over who did what to whom first.

Action turns should be organized so that they start with an initiative roll (Wits + Alertness, difficulty 4). The characters (including non-player characters) get to announce their actions in descending order from most successes to least, and then the action of the scene gets played out.

This is just a suggested approach to organizing action turns. Storytellers should feel free to modify it as they wish — changing the initiative system or discarding this structure altogether — to fit the mood and needs of their chronicles.

### • Describing the Scene

In many ways, this is the most important part of a turn. By detailing the setting of a scene (including exits, props, the location of allies and enemies, etc.) the Storyteller determines what options and actions the characters have open to them. Springing surprises on the characters ("Didn't I mention there was a relic blunderbuss on the wall?") or not giving them all of the basic information about a scene is a sure way to achieve chaos. Making sure the characters know where they are in relation to each other and anything else of importance (like escape routes) is vital.

On the other hand, description is not just about what is there and what can be done with it. The description of a scene can add tremendous depth to the storytelling aspect of the game. Just describing a room by saying, "You're in a room with two doors and a desk," loses the flavor of the game. Instead, a Storyteller might describe the scene as "...a large study, with the relic of a mahogany desk resting on what looks to be a Moliated rug in a Persian pattern. On the wall behind the predatory-looking wraith at the desk are numerous archaic weapons, obviously Artifacts, and on the desk itself is a soulforged ashtray, which is emitting a high-pitched moan." The latter gives a better sense of the scene, and also by injecting some menace into the room description, gives the characters some idea as to what they're dealing with.

This is also the part of the scene when initiative is determined, setting the stage for the systems aspect of the rest of the round. Even if a Storyteller chooses to discard the standard initiative system, it still makes sense at this point to establish some sort of order to the action about to take place.

### • Decision Stage

This is when all of the characters, including those played by the Storyteller, go around the table in reverse order of initiative and announce what they're doing. By working things this way, it provides characters with higher initiatives — those who are thinking faster this round — with the advantage of seeing and acting on what their opponents are doing. After all, it doesn't make sense that the character who gets the lowest initiative (and who therefore is supposedly thinking the slowest) manages to grasp what everyone else is doing in a round before deciding on his action.

The Storyteller then decides how all of the announced actions are going to be resolved — which rolls are to be made, difficulties, numbers of successes needed — and the action moves on to the resolution stage. The rolls that are set up can be as simple or as complicated as necessary.

#### • Resolution Stage

The resolution stage of a turn is the part of the turn when the dice get rolled and everyone's conflicting intents ("I shoot him!" "I dodge!") get resolved. The players roll dice in accordance with the systems below, or whatever other ones their Storyteller has come up with, and the Storyteller adjudicates the results of the rolls. In other words, she tells them what happens.

All dice rolls, by the end of the resolution stage, need to be translated into description, story and plot. Players roll dice; characters engage in life-or-death struggles, and if a chronicle never gets past dice rolling, the whole roleplaying element of **Wraith** is lost. Storytellers shouldn't just announce levels of Corpus damage; they should describe wounds inflicted, daring escapes and combat maneuvers. The more in-depth the description of what the *characters* are doing, the better.

## Initiative

Someone always has to go first. Initiative is the best way of figuring out who does, not to mention who goes second or third, or when the villains get to act. By rolling initiative, a Storyteller sets up the order of the action and eliminates any confusion about who gets to do what when. Sometimes who gets to go first is obvious — ambushes and the like — but the rest of the time, initiative should be determined so that there's a fair, equitable way of organizing the action.

Under normal circumstances, each character involved in an action sequence rolls Wits + Alertness (difficulty 4), with the characters gaining the most successes acting first. Characters who fail their initiative rolls get to act last, after everyone else. Characters who botch do not act that turn, and will spend the turn being generally unavailable. Perhaps their guns jammed, or they were dazed by the damage they took the last round.

When planning a situation in which the characters' opponents will get a free shot at them (such as an ambush), it's generally a good idea to permit the characters a Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 8, or above) to see if they notice the impending danger. This heightens the suspense, and also keeps players from getting unhappy over cavalier treatment of their favorite wraith characters.

## Taking Actions

Once an action turn has begun, there are only three basic actions that characters can perform without a dice roll. They are:

- **Yielding** — This allows a character to reserve her action, and lets initiative pass to the next player. A character who has yielded her action can choose to take it at any point before the end of the round. If everyone yields their actions for a round, no one does anything during that round.

- **Healing** — A wraith can use Pathos to heal one Corpus Level per turn of non-aggravated damage. If the character wishes to do anything else besides heal in a turn, she must roll Stamina (difficulty 8). If this roll is failed, then the attempted healing failed as well.

- **Moving** — A character can move by walking, jogging or running (crawling, staggering, etc., are left to Storyteller and player imagination). If a character simply walks for a scene, she moves seven yards. If she jogs, she moves 12 + her Stamina rating in yards. If she runs, she moves 20 + 3 x her Stamina rating in yards.

There is no roll required to move, but that is all that the character can do for that round. If conditions are hazardous (slick footing, harsh weather, enemy fire), a Storyteller may call for some sort of roll to make sure that the character maintains her footing and direction. If a character is seeking to flee an encounter or combat, she must dodge until she is clear of the combat area.

Characters floating in the Tempest without benefit of Argos move at one-half normal walking rate, and can only change their direction through the expenditure of a Pathos point.

# Dramatic Systems

*'A game?' said Jive. 'No, no boy. It's more than that. It's an education.'*

— Clive Barker, *The Thief of Always*



Below is a list of suggested ways to handle actions that characters are likely to take frequently. If you want, you always have the option of roleplaying things to a resolution and just using what's below as suggestions. However, you may wish to use dice rolls for resolution instead; here's a list of common rolls and effects. Generally, Physical dramatic systems demand dice rolls more frequently than do Mental or Social ones, as the latter two are easier to roleplay through without dice.

## Physical Systems

These are systems that describe physical actions and effects — dramatic situations in which characters need to use their Physical Attributes.

### Climbing

Regardless of whether a character is trying to climb a tree, a cliff or a building, the player must roll Dexterity + Athletics. The difficulty of the roll depends on the surface being climbed, how steep or sheer the climbing surface is, and to a lesser extent, the weather conditions. Rain or strong wind increases the difficulty of the climb from +1 to +3.

Each success rolled indicates that the character has climbed five feet. Once enough successes are accumulated to reach the

desired height, no further rolls are required. A failure indicates the character has climbed no further that round. A botch means the character falls, and cannot attempt to climb the same cliff, tree, etc., again without expending a Willpower point.

- 2 Easy climb; a tree with many stout branches
- 4 Simple climb; a cliff with many handholds
- 6 Straightforward; a tree with many thin branches
- 8 Treacherous; very few handholds
- 10 Extremely difficult; an almost sheer surface

## Feats of Strength

A character's Strength is often used alone, without an Ability, for actions needing only brute force to achieve the desired result. The system used corresponds to the rule of automatic success. If the character's Strength equals or exceeds the difficulty of the task she is attempting, she succeeds automatically.

If the difficulty of the task is higher than the character's Strength, a roll is needed. Willpower is rolled, not Strength. This is a simple roll, and the character generally gets only one chance to attempt it. Each success on the Willpower roll against difficulty 9 increases the character's effective Strength by one step on the chart below (to a maximum of five steps). Thus, if a character has Strength 4 and wishes to flip over a car, she needs three successes on the Willpower roll to succeed.

**Note:** Relics generally have a durability equivalent to their Skinlands counterparts.

Dice Pool	Feat	Lift
1	Crush a beer can	40 lbs.
2	Break a chair	100 lbs.
3	Break down a wooden door	250 lbs.
4	Break a 2" x 4"	400 lbs.
5	Break open a metal fire door	650 lbs.
6	Throw a motorcycle	800 lbs.
7	Flip over a small car	900 lbs.
8	Break a 3" lead pipe	1000 lbs.
9	Punch through a cement wall	1200 lbs.
10	Rip open a steel drum	1500 lbs.
11	Punch through 1" sheet metal	2000 lbs.
12	Break a metal lamp post	3000 lbs.
13	Throw a car	4000 lbs.
14	Throw a van	5000 lbs.
15	Throw a truck	6000 lbs.

## Hotwiring (Without Inhabit)

If a character is stealing a car and does not have a key, or cannot find the key to her own car and wishes to start it in a hurry, she must hotwire it. This requires a roll of Strength + Repair to force off the steering wheel cover and expose the appropriate wires (difficulty 6). A botch means that the cover breaks, and cannot be replaced. Next the character must roll





Dexterity + Streetwise to start the engine (difficulty 8). Failure means the car does not start. A botch on this second roll means the character has ripped out the appropriate wires in her haste, and cannot start the car at all.

## Jumping

Jumping requires a Strength roll for a vertical jump, or Strength + Athletics for a horizontal jump with a running start. The difficulty of the jump is invariably 5 (unless there are difficult weather conditions or a narrow landing space). The Storyteller calculates how many successes are required to make the jump. There are no partial successes in jumping; the character either succeeds in one roll, or he falls. So a character attempting to leap up six feet would need to roll Strength and score three successes against difficulty 5; if he were jumping from one rooftop to another, 20 feet away, he'd need 5 successes on Strength + Athletics.

Type of Jump	Feet per Success
Vertical (up)	2
Horizontal (across)	4

## Pursuit

This simple system is used when one character attempts to catch another. The pursued starts with a certain number of successes, either randomly determined by the Storyteller, or the number of successes obtained on a roll of Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6) for each turn of head start he has. His pursuer must achieve the same number of successes on Dexterity + Athletics (difficulty 6) before she can catch up. Once she does, she can try to grapple the pursued character (see "Combat" on page 256). The pursuer might only need to lessen the distance between herself and the pursued if attempting to shoot him, in order to bring the target into range. If this is the case, she does not need to match the total number of successes. Instead, the same roll is required, but the required number of successes is halved.

## Repair

The Restless can rarely turn to a mechanic in order to have something fixed; they must usually do the job themselves. When a character wishes to fix any damaged mechanical implement, he must roll Dexterity + Repair. The difficulty is determined by the complexity of the task (see the table below). Before the task can be considered complete, a certain number of successes must be collected, usually between two and 20. Each roll means that a certain period of time has passed, as appropriate to the demands of the story. A botch indicates that the device is further damaged in the attempt to repair it, and that the repair attempt as a whole has failed.

Job	Difficulty	# of Successes
Gluing a broken vase together	4	3
Soldering job	5	2
Electronic malfunction	5	5
Fitting new part	6	10
Changing a flat tire	6	5
Tough auto repair	7	10
System overhaul	8	20
Technical glitch	9	2

## Shadowing

Shadowing is the art of following someone covertly, hoping to learn where he is going or whom he is meeting without being noticed.

Shadowing someone successfully entails keeping track of the subject while simultaneously making sure certain not to be seen. Shadowing can be done on foot or in a vehicle. Vehicle shadowing rolls can be made even if someone else is doing the driving, so it is still possible to follow in a limousine or a taxi ("I'm afraid I can't remember the address; you'll have to follow my directions. Take a right at the corner. No, wait, a left!").

The character attempting to shadow must make a Perception + Investigation roll. The difficulty is usually 6, although it can vary from 5 to 9 depending on variables such as crowds, traffic, weather conditions and interference from the Skinlands. Each success indicates that the target has been followed for one turn. A preset number of successes (determined by the Storyteller) are required to follow the target all the way to his destination. A failure indicates that the character has temporarily lost her subject, but can try to pick up the trail again next turn. A second failure indicates that the trail has gone completely cold. A botch on a shadowing roll means that the character has not only lost the target, but has also met with some kind of trouble — perhaps she was so intent on following the target that she had an auto accident or fell into an open Nihil.

Although the Perception roll is an important part of shadowing, each turn the character must make an additional roll of Dexterity + Subterfuge (Dexterity + Drive if the character is in a vehicle) to determine whether she has remained undetected by her target. The base difficulty is the subject's Perception + Alertness. This can be modified + 3 or - 3 depending on the circumstances (e.g., a brewing Maelstrom or empty streets). One success means the shadower has not been detected; each additional success makes it increasingly difficult for the target to spot his pursuer, even if actively looking. A failure indicates that the target has become suspicious, and begins glancing over his shoulder (the target may also begin making Perception rolls of his own; see below). A botch indicates that the target has completely revealed herself, and the subject knows he is being followed.

If the subject is somehow alerted to the pursuit (i.e., by the shadower failing her Dexterity + Stealth roll), or simply looks to see if he is being followed out of habit, he rolls Perception + Streetwise. The difficulty is the Stealth of the shadower + 5. Each success on this roll indicates a higher degree of suspicion on the part of the wraith being tailed. Successes can be accumulated from turn to turn; see the chart below to determine how alert the subject is to the fact that he is being followed. Failure means that nothing out of the ordinary is seen and the "suspicion value" of the subject decreases to zero. A botch means the subject is convinced he is not being followed, and will not look again.

Successes	Paranoia Level
1	Hunch
2	Suspicion
3	Near certainty
4	Positive knowledge
5	The shadower has been spotted and IDed

**Buddy System:** Two or more characters can share shadowing responsibilities by trading off. However, they must have previously worked/trained together in this technique; otherwise, the difficulties of all rolls for the pair are increased by + 1. When using this system, one character will tail the subject for a turn or more, trading off whenever her partner gives the signal. If the shadowing team continually switches off, the subject can't accumulate successes for very long, which makes it much harder for the subject to spot those who are following him.

## Sneaking

When a character attempts to hide in shadows or sneak up on another wraith, she should roll Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty equals the Perception + Alertness of the person she's attempting to elude).

The sneaking character needs to collect a certain number of successes in order to reach her destination. Usually it's only necessary to sneak for a single turn; should additional skulking be required, the Storyteller determines how many successes the wraith needs to avoid detection altogether.

Failure of any sort on a Stealth roll indicates detection.

## Stunt Driving

Use this system to determine the outcome of relic car chases and other tricky vehicular maneuvers. Dice rolls in chases are made to determine how fast the driver goes, and whether or not she is able to avoid driving through Skinlands objects. Each vehicle is rated for its maximum driving speed, as well as its maneuverability. Because different vehicles have different speeds and response times, the details of the chase can often depend on the make of the vehicles involved (see the table below).

A character who is driving can perform a special maneuver in order to catch up with or throw off another ve-

hicle, such as making a sudden turn, doing a 180° turn or blocking off a Byway. If one character makes a special maneuver, the other character must copy it by making the same or a similar roll.

The player making the initial stunt driving maneuver must roll Dexterity + Drive, with the complexity of the maneuver dictating the difficulty at what is called the safe speed. If the vehicle is moving faster than its listed safe speed, the difficulty increases by + 1 for every 10 mph the vehicle is going above the safe speed. The driver decides how fast her vehicle performs the maneuver, although she will not always be able to decelerate enough to avoid a crash or collision.

In addition, the vehicle's maneuverability rating dictates the maximum number of dice that can be rolled. Even if the driver has a Dice Pool that exceeds the maneuverability rating of the car, he can still only roll a number of dice equal to the car's rating.

Solid objects present less of a hazard during high speed chases to wraiths than they do to the living. A wraith can drive a relic sports car right through an oncoming Skinlands 18-wheeler, causing only minimal Corpus damage to himself, his passenger and his vehicle. In cases where a wraith drives through a solid object, he instantly takes one level of temporary Corpus damage and goes Incorporeal for a number of rounds equivalent to his Stamina rating. If his vehicle is still within a solid Skinlands object at the time when he drops out of Incorporeality, he will immediately take another Corpus Level and repeat the process. The same holds true for any passengers in the relic vehicle.

A relic car also suffers Corpus damage (which can be healed with an investment of Pathos) when passing through a solid object. It will also go Incorporeal, and will remain in that state for as many rounds as its owner has points in Stamina.

Relic vehicles affect each other normally; a relic car could drive through a Skinlands tank and take only one Corpus Level, but a head-on collision with a relic sub-compact (even if both were Incorporeal at the time) could very well destroy both vehicles.

Vehicle	Safe Speed	Max Speed	Maneuverability	Corpus
Six-wheel truck	60	90	3	70
Bus	60	100	3	90
18-wheeler	70	110	4	100
Sedan	70	120	5	35
Mini-van	70	120	6	50
Compact car	70	130	6	30
Sporty compact	100	140	7	25
Sports coupe	110	150	8	25
Sports car	130	170	9	25
Formula One race car	140	240	10	30

## Social

*'The action's always there. It just moves.'*

— Neil Gaiman, "Six to Six"

These systems apply to scenes that could be better resolved through roleplaying than dice rolling. They involve interaction and intimation, intuition and intrigue. It is recommended that roleplaying supersede these systems whenever possible, but there are times when a player's abilities can't match her character's. For those situations, use the systems suggested below.

## Credibility

When a character is attempting to convince someone (such as a Hierarchy magistrate) that she is telling the truth, or similarly attempting to establish her identity as trustworthy, the player rolls Manipulation + Leadership (difficulty is the subject's Intelligence + Subterfuge). Each success indicates a higher degree of believability. With five successes, the subject is completely convinced. A failure indicates disbelief, and a botch indicates the character is caught in a lie (or the subject thinks he has caught her in a lie).

## Fast-Talk

Fast-talking is a means of verbally confusing a target into allowing you to do something irregular. Fast-talked guards will allow you to slip past them with a shrug, suspicious widows will sign over treasured relics, and Renegade guerrillas will believe you have simply forgotten the password. The player attempting to fast-talk an opponent rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge; the difficulty is the target's Wits + Streetwise.

Success indicates that the target is disoriented by the character's words, and is likely to agree with him, at least momentarily. Failure indicates that the attempt has faltered, allowing the target to think about what is being said, and perhaps come to her senses. A botch indicates that the target is angry, aware of the attempted chicanery, and suspicious of the character so as to be immune to any further attempts at fast-talk. Repeated rolls might be necessary to establish an extended bamboozling.

Willpower rolls can be made to resist fast-talk (difficulty 5). Each success on the Willpower roll subtracts one success from the fast-talk roll; if the Willpower successes cancel out the fast-talk successes, then the would-be con artist can be considered to have failed.

## Interrogation

Interrogation is the close and careful questioning of a person by one or more characters. It differs from torture in that no violence is used, though it can be threatened. In order to extract a secret in this manner, the interrogator makes a Manipulation + Intimidation roll (difficulty is the prisoner's



Willpower). The number of successes indicates the amount and degree of detail of information obtained. A failure means that the questioner learns nothing of value. A botch indicates that the target will tell him nothing, and will never tell him anything — or worse, the subject lies believably, and the interrogator believes her. For this reason, the Storyteller should often make the roll for characters attempting interrogations.

Successes	Interrogation
1	Only a few mumbled facts
2	Some relevant details
3	Much interesting information
4	The subject talks on and on
5	Everything important is discovered

## Oration

If a player wants her character to give a speech, but does not want to recite the entire proclamation verbatim, this system makes an acceptable substitute. The player should at least describe what her character says, coming up with the opening lines, or a memorable phrase or slogan; with prompting, such a monologue may encourage the player to make up its entirety.

However, if the player decides not to perform the wraithly equivalent of the Gettysburg Address, she rolls Charisma + Leadership. Base difficulty is 7, but can depend on the mood of the crowd and its willingness to hear what the character has to say

(not to mention the aim of participants armed with relic bricks, or particularly savage hecklers). The orator's Status (if any) can decrease the difficulty. The number of successes indicates how impressed the crowd is (see the following chart). This is a simple roll, and the player has only one chance to succeed. A failure indicates the crowd ignores the character. A botch indicates that the crowd is antagonistic, and may surge into mob violence.

Successes	Crowd Reaction
1	They listened, but aren't excited
2	They are somewhat convinced
3	The crowd is won over
4	The crowd is completely enthralled
5	The crowd is in the palm of the character's hand

If the speech is vital to the story, the player may make several rolls. You can make the speech an extended action, interspersing each roll with roleplaying. The character can spend as many turns as she likes orating; however, after the third turn, as the audience grows restless, the difficulty increases by + 1 each turn. More successes than five might be needed to win over the crowd completely.

Stirring oratory may well feed the Passions of wraiths in the audience. If this is the case (for example, if members of the audience have Passions based on Patriotism or Pride), the difficulty for the oration roll is reduced by - 2, and members of the audience may roll for Pathos gain.

## Performances

Regardless of whether a character's performance is sung, spoken or acted, whether it is on stage or in a nightclub, formal or informal, rehearsed or spontaneous, this simple system is used to resolve it.

The player rolls the appropriate Attribute (for example, Charisma would be appropriate for acting, while a stand-up comic might prefer Manipulation) + Performance (or Expression, depending on the circumstances). The difficulty depends on how receptive the audience is. A failure represents a performance best forgotten. A botch indicates that the performance is so bad that the audience interrupts it with boos and catcalls before it can be finished; perhaps an unfriendly Artificer Gremlinized the sound system, or some similar disaster occurred.

The number of successes indicates how moved the audience is, and the artistic merit of the performance.

Successes	Your Performance	Reaction
1	Mediocre	Polite applause
2	Average	Approval
3	Good	Genuine appreciation
4	Superior	Vigorous applause
5	Exceptional	Ecstatic reaction
6	Superb	Immediate sensation
7	Brilliant	Miraculous

Performances that stir Passions have a reduced difficulty (-2). On the other hand, botching a performance that feeds an audience member's Passion may well fuel a Dark Passion, with potentially dire consequences.

## Seduction

A seduction is a planned and contrived means of becoming intimate with another person; every step is planned and real emotions are not shared. A seduction takes place in several stages; each consecutive stage must be a success, otherwise the seduction as a whole will fail.

Ideally, a seduction, like any emotional exchange, should be roleplayed out. This system can be used if one or both parties are uncomfortable with acting out such intimacies.

While seduction among the dead might seem an odd thing, it's a more common occurrence than one might think. After all, many wraiths have Passions linked to Love or Lust, and while physical intimacy isn't quite the same thing for the dead as it is for the living, it still has its appeal. In addition, many wraiths skilled at Puppetry enjoy nothing more than dabbling in the romantic and carnal affairs of their hosts.

**Opening Line:** The player rolls Appearance + Subterfuge. The difficulty is the subject's Wits + 3 (The player gains a bonus of one to three dice for a good pickup line. "Do you come here often?" or something similarly clichéd

will increase the difficulty by +1). One success means that the target is listening. Each additional success allows the character to add an extra die per success to the roll in the next stage. Failure means the target turns away, while a botch indicates that the target is somehow insulted or embarrassed.

**Witty Exchange:** The player rolls Wits + Subterfuge (difficulty of the target's Wits + 3). Again, give bonuses and penalties for roleplaying. Each success over and above the base adds an extra die to the roll in the next stage, indicating that the target of the seduction is impressed or otherwise favorably inclined.

**Conversation:** The player rolls Charisma + Empathy. The difficulty is the target's Perception + 3. Again, roleplaying bonuses come into play here.

**Intimacies:** Now the couple may move to a private area and become physically intimate. No dice rolls should be necessary for this stage of the seduction, though the Arcanos Moliare does offer some fascinating possibilities.

## Mental

These dramatic systems deal with the application of the mind and Mental Attributes. Use them in scenes where the drama stems from thoughts, revelations, discoveries and mysteries.

## Dream Interpretation

Wraiths' dreams often contain important information, although this divinatory and mystical knowledge is usually shrouded in symbolism and obscure references. A wraith who wishes to learn the meaning of his dreams should roll Perception + Enigmas. The Storyteller decides the difficulty of this roll, based on the obscurity of the dream and its importance to the character. The more important the information contained in the dream, the more thoroughly it will be hidden, and thus the more difficult the roll will be. Not all dreams will have information hidden within them, but go ahead and let the players roll anyway, to keep them guessing.

Dreams should be mysterious things, rich in strange symbols and personal myths. Echoes and reflections of the wraith's mortal life and death and bizarre glimpses and pseudo-memories of her existence in the Shadowlands should punctuate a wraith's dreams, together with surreal imagery contrasted with banal happenings. Storytellers should spare no effort in making important dreams rich and unique.

Sometimes a Storyteller may decide to have a recurring dream haunt a certain character. If this is desired, dream interpretation can become an extended action. The Storyteller decides the difficulty of the task and the number of successes needed to unravel the hidden meaning within a recurring dream.

(See Chapter Seven: Storytelling, for additional guides to employing dreams in your Wraith chronicle.)

## Research

Research is often the only way for a character to proceed to the next scene of a story. A character may have to investigate matters in a library, a newspaper office or in computer files to discover vital information. Research is a great way to allow a character with high Intelligence to use her Attributes to good advantage, and shifts the focus of the game from action and combat to more intellectual pursuits.

In order to perform research, the player rolls Intelligence + Investigation (or sometimes a more specialized Knowledge Ability after a location to conduct research has been found). The difficulty is based on the obscurity of the information.

Difficulty	Accessibility of Information
2	Generally available
4	Widely documented
6	Accessible
8	Difficult to find
10	Encrypted and written in Etruscan

The number of successes determines how much information the character learns. One success might mean that only the most obvious facts are found, while five successes could indicate that the full (and perhaps truthful) story is discovered. Depending on the precise information sought, 10 or even 20 successes might be required to find all of the available data.

A wraith might want to continue research after gaining a partial success. However, continued research generally takes longer than the initial search, as there are many potential alleys of investigation opened up by each fact uncovered. Basic research usually only takes an hour or two. More in-depth research (and a second roll) can take up to one complete day.

## Search

This system allows a character to find something that is hidden or concealed in a confined area, such as a room, vehicle or clearing. Each wraith who is searching should roll Perception + Investigation, with the difficulty depending on how well the object is concealed. An envelope lying in plain sight would be difficulty 4; the same envelope folded inside a hollow chair leg would be difficulty 9.

Sometimes a certain number of successes are needed to find a carefully concealed object; in the case of a concealed trap door, for example, a total of five successes may be needed to find the latch. One or two successes indicates that the searcher has found the door, but does not know how to open it.

## Track

This system is used to track people, animals or objects by following the physical trails they leave, such as footprints, tire tracks or bloodstains. The player rolls Perception + Streetwise (or Investigation if the tracking attempt is taking place in a rural





environment). The difficulty is based on the weather conditions, the terrain and the relative freshness of the trail, but averages 7. Each success lowers the difficulty of the next tracking roll by - 1.

The character needs to succeed for a certain number of turns with the exact number depending on the length of the trail. For purposes of tracking, each turn can be considered to be about five minutes in duration. If the character misses a roll, she can try again; however, the difficulty for this re-roll increases by + 1. Once the difficulty rises above 10, or the player rolls a botch, she has lost the trail and cannot attempt to follow it again unless she returns to where she first found the tracks and begins again. When a wraith attempts to start tracking all over again, the difficulty of this new attempt begins at 8.

**Note:** The above system is for tracking things in the Skinlands; as wraiths don't often leave footprints, attempts to track the Restless or Spectres without benefit of Argos generally start at a difficulty of 8.

## Combat

*I'll never forget that day. I walked into the training hall and told the instructor I wanted to learn how to hurt people.*

— Dennis O'Neil & Joe Quesada, *The Question Quarterly* #5



Combat in Wraith attempts to capture the drama of violent conflict without downplaying the grim reality of what is going on. Every effort has been made to create a system true to the dynamics, limitations and viciousness of real combat while still leaving room for the unique (and sometimes spectacular) elements wraiths bring to it.

## Types Of Combat

There are three types of combat, all of which involve the same basic system yet have some minor differences. The three types are firefight, melee and brawl.

- A firefight is any type of armed combat using projectile weapons — things like crossbows, Uzi submachine guns and sawed-off shotguns. Opponents normally need to be within sight of each other to engage in a firefight.

- Melee combat refers to any type of armed combat using non-ranged weapons — anything from a broken bottle to a sword to a soulsteel axe. Opponents need to be within one or two yards of each other to engage in melee.

- A brawl refers to any type of unarmed combat, whether it's two street punks using down-and-dirty infighting or the most skilled martial arts combat. Opponents must be within touching distance to engage in a brawl.

The rolls made in combat determine whether an attack succeeds, whether the target dodges, and how much damage the target suffers. Almost all combat turns take three seconds of game time (though, of course, they will take longer than that to resolve in real time).

Because combat can sometimes get a little sticky, a combat turn is divided into three stages — Initiative, Attack and Resolution — to make it easier to keep track of things.

## Stage One: Initiative

This stage organizes the turn, and is when characters declare their actions. Characters can take a number of different actions — anything from leaping behind a wall to shouting a warning. Each player must declare what his character is doing in as much detail as the Storyteller requires. At this point, everyone needs to decide what weapon they are using, if any.

Characters make initiative rolls using Wits + Alertness (difficulty 4, though Storytellers can vary this roll if they so desire). The character with the most successes acts first, while characters who rolled fewer successes take their actions in descending order of successes. Some characters will act simultaneously because they rolled the same number of successes (or, if the Storyteller chooses, the one with the highest Dexterity goes first). Those who gain no successes at all on this roll go last, and those who botch are considered to be confused and incapable of action.

Players should declare what actions they want their characters to take during the combat turn before going to the Attack Stage. A player splitting his character's Dice Pool must declare how many dice he is allocating to each action. He must also declare if he is spending any Willpower points.

All of a character's actions happen when it is her turn to act. The only exception to this is a dodge, which a character can perform at any time so long as she has dice left in her Pool.

## Stage Two: Attack

The attack is the meat of the combat turn. This stage is when the success or failure of an action is determined, as well as something of its potential impact on the target.

The Roll: There are three different types of attack rolls; the type of combat determines which one to use.

- For firearms combat, roll Dexterity + Firearms.
- For melee (with weapons) combat, roll Dexterity + Melee.
- For hand-to-hand (without weapons) combat, roll Dexterity + Brawl.

The weapon or attack used by the attacker determines the base difficulty of the roll. The number of dice rolled might be modified by the gun's rate of fire or the use of a scope, but the difficulty is usually modified only by the circumstances of the attack. If no successes are obtained, the character fails his attack and inflicts no damage. If the character botches, then not only does the attack fail, but something truly nasty happens; weapons jam or explode, swords break, allies are accidentally wounded, and the like.

## Dodging

Any time someone attacks a character, she has the option of dodging. In fact, a player may announce at any time that her character is using an action (or part of one, by dividing her Dice Pool) to dodge, simply by declaring, "Dodge!" before the opponent makes an attack roll. Some situations may prohibit a dodge, such as confined quarters or surprise. After all, you can't dodge when there's no room to maneuver, or when you don't know an attack is coming. The required roll for a dodge is Dexterity + Dodge; each success subtracts one success from the attacker's roll. A character can even subtract successes from different opponents, though this means dividing successes between (or among) them.

The difficulty for dodging melee or brawl attacks is 6, increased by + 1 for each opponent after the first. This reflects the fact that it's a lot easier to get out of the way of one punch than it is to avoid three hunting knives coming from different angles.

In firefights, the difficulty of a dodge depends on the availability of nearby cover behind which a character can dive to avoid getting hit. Each success removes one of the opponent's successes. After such a dodge attempt, the character usually ends up behind some sort of cover or, at the very least, lying on the ground (if there is no cover to be found).

The difficulty to dodge during firefights is determined by the proximity of cover.

Difficulty	Terrain
2	By moving back half a step, the character is back under full cover.
4	Full cover within diving distance (one yard)
6	Full cover within running distance (three yards)
7	Partial cover within running distance (three yards)
8	Flat and featureless, no cover (the character dives to the ground and imitates a small rock)

## Stage Three: Resolution

During this stage, characters determine the damage inflicted by their attacks, and the Storyteller describes what occurs in the turn. The resolution stage is a mixture of game and story; it's a lot more interesting for players to hear: "Your Stygian steel blade bites through his breastplate and opens a deep gash across his chest, leaving silvery-white plasm spilling out as he screams," than to be told: "Umm, you do three levels." Corpus damage and successful attacks are merely ways of describing what actually goes on in the story, and it's very important that the narrative of the combat is maintained even as the dice are rolling.

**Damage:** Each weapon or attack allows the wielder to roll a certain number of dice in order to inflict damage (difficulty 6). Each success causes the target to lose one Corpus Level. Additionally, each success scored with a firearm on an attack roll (after any dodges) adds one die to this damage roll. Melee and brawling attack successes do not add to the damage.

**Soak:** A target may make a roll to see how much damage she "soaks" because of her natural hardiness. The target rolls Stamina (difficulty 6); each success reduces inflicted damage by one.

**Note:** Damage and soak rolls are two rolls in **Wraith** that cannot be botched. A botched soak roll does not cause additional or aggravated damage, while a botched damage roll simply means that the attack failed.

## Complications

A number of factors determine whether or not an attack hits. Smart combatants head for cover as soon as bullets start flying. Others find that ganging up on one foe in a brawl never hurts. The following modifiers delineate many of the variables that affect combat.

## General Complications

- **Changing Actions:** If a character changes her declared action after the turn has started, the difficulty for the new action increases by + 1. Generally, the Storyteller should only allow the character to change her declared action if events have made it impossible. "Yes, I know I said my character would jump into the car, but that Renegade just blew it up!"

- **Immobilization:** If a target is immobilized (e.g., held down by someone), but still struggles, the difficulty for the attack roll is decreased by - 2. However, if the target is completely immobilized (tied up, chained down or otherwise paralyzed), then no roll is required and the attack succeeds automatically.

- **Stunning:** If, in one turn, a character loses a greater number of Corpus Levels than his Stamina rating, he must spend the entire next turn shaking off the effects of the debilitating attack. He may not attack, and his Dice Pool for defensive actions (i.e., dodging) is halved (round down).

## Firefight Complications

- **Range:** Getting close to one's foe is a good idea if a character doesn't mind risking getting shot a few times in return. The range given on the Firearms Chart is the weapon's medium range; the character receives no modifier for shooting at this range. Twice that range is the farthest the weapon can shoot. Shots from less than this distance have their difficulty reduced by - 1 (within reason; if a weapon has a range of 12 yards, and a character is shooting from 11.5, the difficulty of the shot probably should not decrease). On the other hand, shots made at targets within a yard of the attacker are considered to be "point-blank." The difficulty of a point-blank shot is 4, regardless of the base difficulty for use of the weapon.

- **Cover:** Intelligent characters use cover to protect themselves from enemy fire. Cover increases the difficulty of an attack by a variable amount, depending on how much of the character's Corpus is still exposed. However, though cover protects, it can also hamper return fire. In some rare instances, it can even prevent any return fire. For instance, ducking out from around a corner to shoot may increase the difficulty of returning fire by + 1, while watching a shoot-out through the cracks in a battered wall will prevent a character from firing back at all.

**Note:** Relic bullets can be considered to have only the equivalent of one Corpus Level. Therefore, relic ammunition fired through solid Skinlands objects disincorporates as soon as it hits the "solid" object, and does no damage to any wraith hiding behind Skinlands cover.

Cover	Difficulty
Lying flat	+ 1
Behind pole	+ 2
Behind wall	+ 3
Only head exposed	+ 4

- **Movement:** Shooting at a moving target increases the difficulty by + 1 (or even more), as does shooting while moving at any speed faster than a walk (such as firing out the window of a speeding car).

- **Aiming:** A character may add her Perception rating to her Dexterity + Firearms Dice Pool if she spends time aiming. However, aiming takes one turn per die added, and during this time the character can do nothing but aim — it takes time and patience to line up a target precisely. Additionally, it is impossible to aim at a target moving faster than a walk. Shotguns and SMGs cannot be aimed.

If the gun has a scope, the character may add two dice to her Pool in addition to the dice added for Perception. The scope bonus can be added only once — after the initial three dice added in the first round (two for the scope and one for Perception), the character continues aiming as outlined above.

- **Targeting:** Aiming for a specific location (gun hand, the head) increases the difficulty by + 2. Aiming for a particularly difficult target (left eye, big toe of the right foot) increases the shot difficulty by + 4. The difficulty cannot be increased above 10, but Storytellers may demand multiple successes.

- **Multiple Shots:** If a character wants to take more than one shot in a turn, he must divide his Dice Pool into two or more actions. Also, for each additional shot after the first, the difficulty increases by one because of recoil (which functions even in the Underworld). 10 is, of course, the maximum number to which the difficulty can be raised. A character can fire a maximum number of shots equal to the rate of his firearm.

The recoil penalty is cumulative. Thus, a character adds +1 to her difficulty on the second shot, + 2 to the difficulty on her third shot and + 3 on her fourth. It is usually unwise to snap off shots blindly; recoil always catches up with the gunman and makes botches much more common. Using these rules, it is permissible to fire two or more three-round bursts in a single turn, though a character can only fire on full-auto once per turn (and must reload to do it again).



- **Three-Round Burst:** The semi-auto option is the middle ground between the full-auto and single-shot options, and has some of the strengths and weaknesses of both. A burst gives the attacker three additional dice on the attack roll. However, the recoil increases the difficulty by + 1 for the entire attack. As implied by the option's name, three bullets are expended per use.

- **Full-Auto:** The full-auto option is the most damaging attack a firearm can make; the attacker unloads the full contents of a gun's ammunition clip within a very short time span (and on a single attack roll). However, the gun becomes difficult to control and even harder to aim.

A character gets 10 additional dice to roll on the attack, thus increasing the chance to hit and cause damage. However, the difficulty of the attack is raised by + 3 because of the recoil.

Full-auto fire is permissible only when a weapon has more than half its clip remaining. Whenever a character uses the full-auto option, he empties his entire clip and must reload before he can use the weapon again. Reloading a clip (even on a relic) takes one full action and requires the character's full concentration (and Dice Pool).

- **Spray:** When on full-auto, a character can decide to spray across an area instead of focusing on one foe. A spray uses the extra 10 dice given by full-auto fire, but the attack has a base difficulty of 5, increased by one per yard covered by the spray (in addition to other modifiers).

The player divides any successes gained on the attack roll evenly among all targets in the covered area. If only one target is in the sprayed area, only half the successes affect him. The player then assigns any leftover successes as she desires. If the attacker rolls fewer successes than there are targets, the player may only assign one per target until they are used up. This attack also empties the clip.

The difficulty of a dodge roll against a spray is increased by + 2.

## Melee and Brawl Complications

- **Multiple Opponents:** If a character is battling multiple opponents in close combat, that character's attack and dodge difficulties are increased by + 1 per opponent after the first (to a maximum of 10).

- **Flank and Rear Attacks:** The difficulty of attacking an opponent's flank is lowered by 1, while assaulting an enemy's rear lowers the difficulty by 2.

## Melee Complications

- **Parry:** A character using a melee weapon may elect to parry an attack, using her weapon to block the blow. Like a dodge, a parry can be performed at any time, so long as the character still has dice in her Dice Pool. A character cannot

## Firefight Complications

Complication	Difficulty	Dice
Changing action	+ 1	—
Immobilization	- 2	—
Long range	+ 1	—
Point-blank	4	—
Lying flat	+ 1	—
Behind pole	+ 2	—
Behind wall	+ 3	—
Only head exposed	+ 4	—
Movement	+ 1	—
Aiming	— + Perception (1/turn)	—
Scope	—	+ 2
Specific area of target	+ 2	—
Multiple shots	+ 1/extra shot	—
Full-auto	+ 3	+ 10
Three-round burst	+ 1	+ 3
Spray	5 + 1/yard	+ 10

parry with a weapon as small as a knife, but she can use a sword or axe. She rolls Dexterity + Melee (difficulty 6). Each success subtracts one from an opponent's number of attack successes.

A botch on a parry roll usually means that the parrying weapon is knocked from the character's hand.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** 6  
**Damage:** None **Actions:** Special

• **Disarm:** This maneuver is an attempt to knock the weapon from an opponent's hand. The character rolls Dexterity + Melee, adding + 1 to the weapon's normal difficulty. If at least three successes are scored, she then rolls the weapon's damage; if she scores more successes than the opponent's Strength rating, the opponent is disarmed. A botch usually means the character drops her own weapon.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Melee **Difficulty:** + 1  
**Damage:** Special **Actions:** 1

## Brawling Complications

• **Block:** A character can elect to block instead of dodge. Like a dodge, a block can be performed at any time, so long as the character still has dice in his Dice Pool. Blocks may be made only against fists, kicks or blunt weapons. A blocking action cannot block a sword, arrow or bullet unless the defender has an Arcanos that provides special protection. Roll Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 6); each success subtracts one from an opponent's number of attack successes.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6  
**Damage:** none **Actions:** Special

• **Body Slam:** A character charges forward, hurling his weight into his opponent. It is possible to damage oneself with this attack; bodies were not meant to be used as battering rams. A character needs three successes to unbalance an opponent. He inflicts one Corpus Level of damage on himself for each success fewer than three.

If the attack succeeds, the opponent is thrown off balance; difficulties for the rest of her actions this turn are increased by + 2. Also, if the opponent does not succeed in a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty of the attacker's successes + 3), she falls to the ground. The base damage done equals the attacker's Strength; each success scored on the attack roll above the minimum adds one to this base. If the attacker does not score at least three successes, this maneuver fails; he falls to the ground, and is treated as though he has no dice left in his Pool.

The character can move his full running distance, but he must run in a straight line. Running around in circles does not build up sufficient momentum.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 7  
**Damage:** Special **Actions:** 1

• **Grapple:** An attacker can try to grab a foe, hoping to immobilize him and then subsequently crush him. If the attacker scores more successes than the opponent's Strength, the attacker can immobilize him. In the next round, she can begin to inflict harm. Any character struck by this attack loses his attacks for the current turn.

If the attacker misses altogether (by failing the Dexterity + Brawl roll), she is knocked down and must spend an action getting to her feet.

Continuing to grapple during each turn after the first requires the combatants to make opposed Strength + Brawl rolls. Whoever accumulates more successes may immobilize the other. If both score the same number of successes, neither gains the upper hand this turn.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl **Difficulty:** 6  
**Damage:** Strength **Actions:** 1

• **Kick:** A kick can range from a very simple front kick to aerial spins. Depending on the circumstances, the difficulty and damage modifier may be adjusted (Storyteller's discretion). The damage from a kick is never aggravated.

## Melee Weapons Table

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Conceal
Sap	4	Strength	P
Club	4	Strength + 1	T
Knife	4	Strength + 1	J
Foil	5	Strength + 3	T
Saber	6	Strength + 4	T
Broadsword	6	Strength + 5	N

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl  
**Damage:** Strength + 1

**Difficulty:** 7  
**Actions:** 1

• **Punch:** The attacker balls her hand into a tight fist and swings it with all her might. The Storyteller may adjust the difficulty and/or allow extra dice if the attacker decides the type of punch she wishes to deliver: hook, jab, haymaker, etc. The damage from a punch is never aggravated.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl  
**Damage:** Strength

**Difficulty:** 6  
**Actions:** 1

## Special Maneuvers

Not every character will be able to perform the following maneuvers; they must be learned through training. For each dot a character has in her Brawl Attribute, she may choose one of the following maneuvers:

Players may create special maneuvers not on this list, subject to the Storyteller's approval.

## Relic Firearms Chart

Type	Difficulty	Damage	Range	Rate	Clip	Concealment	Pathos Use
Revolver, Lt.	6	4	12	3	6	P	1
Revolver, Hvy.	7	6	35	2	6	J	1
Pistol, Lt.	7	4	20	4	17+1	P	1
Pistol, Hvy.	8	5	30	3	7+1	J	1
Rifle	8	8	200	1	5+1	N	2
SMG, Small*	7	4	25	3	30+1	J	2
SMG, Large*	6	4	50	3	32+1	T	3
Assault Rifle*	7	7	150	3	42+1	N	2
Shotgun	6	8	20	1	5+1	T	3
Shotgun, Semi-auto	7	8	20	3	8+1	T	3
<b>ARCHAIC FIREARMS</b>							
Crossbow**	7	5	20	1	1	T	0
Matchlock Pistol (1400s)	8	5	20	1	N/A	J	1
Matchlock Rifle (1400s)	8	5	40	1	N/A	N	2
Wheellock Pistol (1500s)	8	5	20	1	N/A	J	1
Wheellock Rifle (1500s)	8	5	40	1	N/A	N	2
Flintlock Pistol (1600s)	8	5	20	1	N/A	J	1
Flintlock Rifle (1600s)	8	5	40	1	N/A	N	2
Dueling Pistol (1770)	7	5	25	1	N/A	J	1
"Brown Bess" Rifle (1700s)	7	5	40	1	N/A	N	2
Percussion Pistol (1800s)	7	5	20	1	N/A	J	1
Percussion Rifle (1800s)	7	5	40	1	N/A	N	2

**Range:** This is the practical range of the gun in yards. A character may fire on a target at up to double the listed range; however, this is considered a long-range shot.

**Rate:** The maximum number of bullets or three-round bursts the gun can fire in a single turn. The rate does not apply to full-auto or spray fire.

**Clip:** The number of bullets that can be held in one clip or in the barrel. The + 1 indicates a bullet can be held in the chamber, making the gun ready to fire.

**Concealment:** P = can be hidden in a pocket; J = can be hidden inside a jacket; T = can be hidden inside a trenchcoat; N = cannot be hidden on one's person at all.

**Pathos:** The Pathos cost for a weapon of this sort to be usable. The investment of the Pathos cost in the weapon will activate it for the duration of the scene. Note that ammunition must be obtained above and beyond the Pathos cost for these weapons.

\* indicates the gun is capable of three-round bursts, full-auto fire and sprays.

\*\* The crossbow, unlike a firearm, does not add attack successes to the damage Dice Pool. Additionally, a crossbow takes five turns to reload.

\*\*\* These archaic weapons must be reloaded meticulously or they will misfire. Roll Dexterity + Firearms, difficulty 6, to reload. If you achieve more than 5 successes, you may get two shots off in one round. If you botch, the weapon misfires and may damage you.

• **Evasive Action:** This maneuver involves leaping, spinning, jumping and diving in an attempt to escape harm. This maneuver inflicts no damage, but each success rolled subtracts one from the opponent's number of attack successes. This maneuver acts like a dodge in every way, except that the roll is based on Wits rather than Dexterity; it involves outsmarting or fooling the opponent instead of merely avoiding him. The character cannot, however, abort an action to perform an evasive action; he must simply dodge instead.

**Roll:** Wits + Dodge

**Difficulty:** 6

**Damage:** None

**Actions:** 1

• **Leaping Rake:** A leaping rake is best described as a sort of fly-by clawing. It is an all-out attack, made by throwing oneself at one's opponent and attempting to slash him as one flies past. It is a difficult maneuver to perform, but often an effective one, as it can close range on a distanced opponent in a hurry. Many wraiths experienced in combat prefer to avoid making this sort of attack, for if it misses it leaves the attacker off-balance and vulnerable. However, in desperate situations or instances when an all-out attack is called for, the leaping rake is an old favorite of many Restless.

**Roll:** Dexterity + Brawl

**Difficulty:** 8

**Damage:** Strength + 2

**Actions:** 1

• **Taunt:** By verbally abusing her opponent, a wraith might actually alarm or distract him. Just as comic book characters like to utter witty banter while performing incredibly complex combat maneuvers, wraiths can also discourse at length during combat upon their opponent's ancestry, hygiene habits, feelings towards quadrupeds or whatever else strikes their fancy. For purposes of game mechanics, talk (within reason — no reciting the preamble to the US Constitution each round) is considered to be free during combat, and characters are encouraged to liven up their actions with verbal pyrotechnics.

On the other hand, taunting can be played as a combat action which precludes other actions. For every two successes obtained on a taunting roll, subtract one die from the opponent's next action, whatever it is. If more than one character uses the taunt maneuver on the same foe in one turn, the effects are cumulative. In this way it is possible for a group of characters to paralyze an opponent through confusion and fear. However, as soon as one member of a Circle fails a taunt roll, no further taunt rolls will affect that opponent that turn.

Victims paralyzed by taunting may only perform actions that do not require rolls (although they may dodge).

The Storyteller can elect to award the character extra attack dice for roleplaying this maneuver particularly well.

**Roll:** Manipulation + Expression **Difficulty:** Opponent's Wits + 4 **Damage:** None **Actions:** 1

## Armor

A character with body armor can add dice to her soak rolls. Different types of body armor have different armor ratings, which translate to the number of extra dice rolled on a soak roll. On the other hand, certain types of armor restrict body motion and thus penalize the character's Dexterity rolls (all rolls involving this Attribute have their difficulties raised by an amount equal to the penalty).

## Armor

Class	Armor Rating	Penalty
Class One (reinforced clothing)	1	0
Class Two (relic chain mail shirt)	2	0
Class Three (soulsteel breastplate)	3	1
Class Four (full suit of relic Kevlar)	4	2
Class Five (Stygian steel plate mail)	6	3

Below are some guidelines to use when creating special maneuvers. These rules are entirely optional; beginning Storytellers should feel free to ignore them or wait until they are familiar with the regular rules.

## Dice Rolls

There should only be two dice rolls involved in any combat maneuver: an attack roll and a damage (or effect) roll. All effects from the maneuver should be figured through these two rolls. An exception to this rule is a movement-based maneuver (see below).

A hand-to-hand attack is made with a Dexterity + Brawl roll, while a melee attack is made with a Dexterity + Melee roll. Whenever a character tries to outsmart or fool an opponent, such as with the taunt maneuver, the roll would instead use Manipulation plus an appropriate Ability (such as Brawl, Intimidation or Subterfuge).

## Difficulty

The difficulty for a maneuver is usually 6, but this can be raised or lowered depending on the maneuver's complexity or precision (for example, a hamstring has a higher difficulty because it aims for a certain area).

If the maneuver is designed to fool an opponent, the difficulty is usually the opponent's Wits (or Perception) with a + 4 constant modifier. Sometimes the difficulty is an opponent's Ability + 4, or, rarely, an opponent's Attribute plus an Ability (such as Wits + Brawl), in which case the constant modifier is not used.

## Resisted Rolls

Sometimes a character can resist an attack against him, whether by dodging, performing an evasive action or using another maneuver. The Storyteller should decide whether a combatant should receive a resistance roll. The resistance roll will often require the combatant to split his Dice Pool if he also wants to attack that turn.

The exception to this is resisting Arcanoi. Characters can resist Arcanoi attacks without splitting their Dice Pools. See the specific Arcanos write-ups in Chapter Five for details.

## Successes

Generally, an attack needs only one success to hit; damage is then rolled. In some instances, however, a set number of successes is required. For example, when a character tries to grapple an opponent, he must gain more successes than the opponent's Strength score.

## Brawling Chart

Maneuver	Roll	Difficulty	Damage	Actions
Block	Dex + Brawl	6	none	Special
Body Slam	Dex + Brawl	7	Special	1
Grapple	Dex + Brawl	6	Strength	1
Kick	Dex + Brawl	7	Strength + 1	1
Punch	Dex + Brawl	6	Strength	1
<b>Special Maneuvers</b>				
Evasive Act.	Wits + Dodge	6	none	1
Leaping Rake	Dex + Brawl	8	Strength + 2	2
Taunt	Manip + Expr	Opp.	Wits + 4	none 1

## Damage (Effect)

Use the Brawling Chart to determine damage and adjust from there for special conditions.

If the effect is to fool or confuse an opponent, the general rule is that each success on the attack roll subtracts one die from the opponent's Dice Pool. In this case, only the attack roll is made; there is no separate damage roll.

**Multiple Actions:** As always, a character will have to split his Dice Pool to perform multiple actions in one turn.

**Movement:** Normally, a character may not move and attack in the same action. However, some maneuvers, such as Body Slam, do permit this. The Storyteller can allow other movement-based maneuvers to be performed with the following guidelines.

If a character is performing some acrobatic feat, such as leaping, swinging from a chandelier, etc., then a Dexterity + Athletics roll may also be required. The difficulty depends on the complexity of the maneuver. A simple roll to determine leaping distance has a difficulty of only 3 (see "Jumping," page 250), while a leap from a hurtling train onto a galloping horse may have a difficulty as high as 9. He must split his Dice Pool between the acrobatics roll and the attack roll. However, the Storyteller should use the Automatic Success rule whenever possible.

## Combat Summary Chart

### Stage One: Initiative

- Roll Wits + Alertness (difficulty 4). The winner declares her action *last* (after she has heard everyone else's actions) and performs it *first*.
- Declare Dice Pool division if performing multiple actions.

### Stage Two: Attack

- For firearms combat, roll Dexterity + Firearms.
- For melee (with weapons) combat, roll Dexterity + Melee.
- For hand-to-hand (without weapons) combat, roll Dexterity + Brawl.
- Dodge: roll Dexterity + Dodge. A character can forfeit some or all of his Dice Pool to dodge at any time; each success subtracts one from the opponent's successes.

### Stage Three: Resolution

- Roll damage, determined by weapon or maneuver (difficulty 6).
- Soak damage: roll Stamina (difficulty 6).

#### General Complications

- **Changing Actions:** The difficulty increases by + 1.
- **Immobilization:** The difficulty to hit an immobilized target is decreased by - 2.
- **Stunning:** When Corpus damage exceeds Stamina rating, the target is stunned and cannot act next turn.

There are some exceptions to this rule, in the interest of dramatic license. If a character has seen many swashbuckler movies and practiced the flamboyant moves she has seen, the Storyteller might allow her to swing from a chandelier and attack without having to split her Dice Pool. Alternately, the Storyteller may require her to "purchase" this as a special maneuver (see "Special Maneuvers," page 261).





GLAD TO SEE YOU ROBIN. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU COULD DO ME A LITTLE FAVOR. A REAPER CALLED MACEDON HAS BEEN A LITTLE HARD TO FIND, AND I'D LIKE YOU TO DIG HIM UP. START WITH HIS HAUNT IN LITTLE 5, AND SEE WHERE THAT TAKES YOU.



IF CHARNEL HOUSES AND OUR GRAVES MUST SEND THOSE THAT WE BURY BACK, OUR MONUMENTS SHALL BE... HELLO, WHO HAVE WE HERE?



SO I THINK THE BLOCKING WITH THE STAIRCASE SCENE REALLY IS DERIVATIVE OF THE PAPP VERSION...



OH, YESSSS....

I'M NOT SURE I SUPPORT THAT READING OF THE ROLE.



WHERE ARE THE CHAINS TODAY, ROBIN? MILLER LET YOU OUT FOR A WALK?

HELLO, ALEXIA NICE TO SEE YOU, TOO. STILL WORKING FOR OBLIVION ALONG WITH THE REST OF THE OLD GANG?



SAVE THE PARTY LINE FOR SOMEONE WHO CARES. I DON'T KNOW WHO'S WORSE, YOU GUYS OR THE SPECTRES. YOU DON'T SEE DOPPELGANGERS BITCHING OVER THEIR PERCENTAGES...

IF YOU DON'T MIND I'M A LITTLE BUSY TO TALK POLITICS. BESIDES, IF IT WEREN'T FOR US GUYS, YOU'D GET TO SEE WHAT DOPPELGANGERS BITCH OVER UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL.

# Example of Play

Joshua is setting up a **Wraith** story with Annys and David. Robin, Annys' character, is a low-ranking member of the Hierarchy, while Alexia, a sworn Heretic, is played by David. Joshua is using this story to forge a bond between two radically different wraiths, hoping that the built-in Hierarchy/Heretic conflict will be ripe with story potential. To start things off, Joshua has William Miller, a high-ranking member of the Hierarchy of Atlanta (see *Necropolis Atlanta*), ask Robin to investigate the disappearance of a local Reaper. This sends Robin to the Little Five Points section of the city, where Alexia has her Haunt. Hopefully the two characters will meet, and the story will unfold from there. As Miller is an Anacreon, though not of Robin's Legion, his polite "request" carries enough weight to get Robin headed quickly toward Little Five Points.

After rushing Robin to Little Five Points (David is getting antsy at being left out of the action), Joshua describes the scene. As there's a thriving arts community in that part of town, Joshua mentions that the cast of a production of *Macbeth* is lounging around outside the local theater talking about their work.

Annys looks at Robin's character sheet, and notices the Passion **Protect my favorite book (Love) 2**. She asks Joshua if any of the actors sitting outside are obviously expressing love for their craft, and if so, if Robin could gain any Pathos from them. He started with 7 Pathos points, but Annys wants more — just in case.

Joshua thinks for a minute, and decides that a particularly attractive actress — just the sort to catch Robin's eye in the first place — fits the bill.

Normally, the target number for a Passion roll of this sort would be 9, but as both Robin's Passion and the actress' enthusiasm express Love for their work, Joshua decides to knock the difficulty of the roll down to 8. Annys rolls Robin's Passion of Love (2), and gets an 8 and a 6. The success grants him 1 point of Pathos. Annys starts looking hopefully at the other actors, but Joshua doesn't want to lose the momentum of the story, announcing that the actors finish their coffee and move inside. It's time to bring Alexia on stage.

Joshua uses this moment to introduce Alexia. He decides to stack the deck a little by informing Annys that Alexia and Robin had crossed paths before, creating an in-character reason for the two wraiths to interact.

To give the two wraiths a chance to converse, Joshua tells David that while sitting in her Haunt, an antique store across from the theatre, Alexia noticed Robin as he "mingled" with the actors. Seeing a chance to tweak a harmless Hierarchy representative, David decides that Alexia will sneak up on Robin and try to give him a bit of a fright. Joshua asks David to roll Dexterity + Stealth, at a difficulty of 5 because Robin is still distracted by the theatre troupe. Alexia has 3 dots in Dexterity and 2 in Stealth, which gives her 5 dice. This is enough for an automatic success, but David decides that he wants to see if he can succeed in spectacular fashion. He rolls, and gets 7, 4, 3, 1 and 1. There's only one success to go against two ones, so it's a botch. Since it's a non-critical situation, Joshua rules that Alexia simply couldn't contain herself from taunting Robin, and David takes it from there with enthusiasm.

The characters engage in a little dialogue, which is obviously the continuation of an old argument. This previous acquaintance wasn't in either of the characters' backgrounds, but as it seems natural, Joshua decides to run with it. Robin wins this round, and Alexia is prepared to let him go when Joshua lets David know that Alexia's Fatalism ability Kismet has pegged Robin as being important.

In reality, Joshua is worried that by behaving in character, Robin and Alexia will just wander off in opposite directions and never speak again. So, taking advantage of what he knows about Alexia's Arcanoi, he uses a game mechanic (her Kismet) to ensure that she'll have a reason to continue to interact with Robin.



As Robin walks off toward the deserted house that serves as Macedon's Haunt, Robin turns and offers a warning to Alexia about the night's increased patrols. Again, this isn't something that was explicitly stated earlier, but it's good roleplaying so Joshua lets it slide. Alexia, touched by Robin's warning and curious because of what Kismet told her, decides to follow him secretly.

Using the Shadowing rules, Joshua asks David to roll Perception + Streetwise (difficulty 6) to shadow Robin. David rolls 9, 8, 8, 7 and 4; four successes is more than enough to follow Robin to Macedon's haunt. David must also roll Alexia's Dexterity + Stealth to avoid alerting Robin. He rolls a 9, 8, 6 and 2 compared to Robin's Perception + Alertness of 7, netting two successes. Robin has no idea he's being followed.

Acting as Robin's Shadow, David offers three Shadow Dice when Annys announces that Robin's going to check to see if anyone's following him. Annys agrees, and rolls Perception + Investigation, plus the three Shadow dice. Annys rolls a 7, 5, 4 and 4 on her regular dice, but her Shadow dice come up 2, 1 and 1 — a botch that also gives Robin's Shadow 2 points of Angst. Robin has no idea Alexia is following him, but his Shadow is feeling energetic.

With Robin's Shadow on a roll, David decides to ride it for all it's worth. As Robin mounts the steps to the Reaper's Haunt, he starts whispering insinuations into Robin's ear, hoping to distract him from whatever dangers lie ahead. Robin, needing all his wits about him if he's going to find Macedon, instead tries to ignore his Shadow's whispers. Joshua rules that Annys must make a Willpower roll against Robin's Shadow's Permanent Angst of 5. As Robin has a Permanent Willpower rating of 6, she rolls 6 dice. They come up 10, 8, 4, 4, 3 and 1; one success, which will enable Robin to ignore his darker side — for the moment.

Without further incident, Robin searches the exterior of the Haunt for a means of entry. Joshua asks Annys to roll Perception + Alertness (difficulty 6) to find a way in. She does, and rolls no successes, so Joshua rules that the house is sealed up tight. If he wants to get in, Robin must pass through the door by becoming incorporeal. Annys decides that this would be less painful than reporting failure to Miller, so she marks off one Corpus Level and announces that Robin has just walked through the door. He reappears inside the house on the other side of the door, but as a penalty for having walked through a solid object, his Corpus will remain incorporeal for a number of rounds (in this case three) equal to his Stamina rating. Robin takes that time to look around the Haunt for Macedon, but doesn't find him. As he already knows that Macedon isn't at home, Joshua doesn't bother making Annys roll for the search.

Though Robin has managed to silence his Shadow temporarily, it's not done for the evening. Joshua rules (secretly, of course) that there is a Spectre in the kitchen who has successfully made Robin's Shadow aware of his presence. He passes a note with this to David, who in his role as Shadowguide thinks that it's about time that Robin got himself into a little trouble. He spends a temporary Angst point to activate the Thorn Trick of the Light, making the door at the end of the hall glow eerily. Robin, of course, goes to investigate the strange light, exactly what both his Shadow and the waiting Spectre wanted. Plus even with spending an Angst point to use the Thorn, Robin's Shadow still has more Angst than normal. Annys doesn't know quite how much power Robin's Shadow has at this point, but she's starting to get worried....

Being a reckless sort, Robin starts to step through the half-open door, but stops when he sees what must be a Spectre rising from a Nihil on the floor. Robin isn't stupid, so Annys decides that he immediately figures out: A) what happened to Macedon, and B) that he's in a great deal of trouble. Deciding to give Robin a small break, Joshua takes the opportunity for melodrama with the Spectre, and has the creature spout some witty banter before attacking.

Alexia follows Robin into the house. Joshua, knowing that Alexia has Danger Sense (Fatalism --), asks David to roll Alexia's Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 6). He rolls 10, 8, 5, 3 and 1, getting only one success. Still, with a Spectre lurking about, one success is enough. Joshua informs Alexia that as soon as Robin vanished into the house, she began to feel a palpable sense of menace. As her Shadow (permanent Angst rating of 2) is too weak to dissuade her, she plunges through the front door in the same way Robin did. As the Danger Sense has given Alexia plenty of warning, David announces that she's pulling out her trusty relic knife as well.

As the Spectre pulls itself into the room, Joshua asks Annys to roll Wits + Alertness for combat initiative. Annys does, and rolls 8, 5, 4 and 2 — one success. Meanwhile, Joshua has rolled three successes for the Spectre, who acts first. Screaming, it leaps upon its prey.

Joshua rolls Dexterity + Brawl for the Spectre against a difficulty of 6 for a claw attack, and ends up with a whopping six successes. He asks Annys if Robin is going to dodge, and David offers Shadow Dice once again. Annys takes the Shadow Dice, knowing she's going to need all the help she can get, and rolls Dexterity + Dodge + 3 Shadow Dice. However, the dice have something against Annys tonight: no successes and two more 1s on her Shadow Dice. Robin's Shadow gains 2 more temporary Angst, and Robin himself trips over the door-jamb as he tries to dodge the Spectre's attack. Joshua rules that the botch was so bad that Robin falls backward with the Spectre on top of him, and rolls the Spectre's damage. Rolling six dice (four for the Spectre's strength and two for the claws), Joshua comes up with five successes. Annys rolls Robin's Stamina (three dice) to see if he can soak any of the damage, and comes up with 10, 4 and 3. One success lets her subtract one level of Corpus damage, but Robin still takes four. Plus, the Spectre's now on top of Robin.



Alexia is standing down the hall from where Robin is being shredded. She shouts to attract the monster's attention, and Joshua decides that it turns its head. Robin takes this opportunity to scramble backward, away from the creature's grasp. Joshua asks Annys for a Dexterity + Athletics roll to see if Robin can escape. Since the Spectre's distracted, Joshua sets the difficulty at 4. Annys rolls three successes. Robin gets away easily.

Again, Joshua has everyone roll initiative. David gets five successes, the Spectre two, and Annys one, so Alexia gets to act first. David asks Joshua if he can delay his action, and Joshua agrees. He has the Spectre leap for Alexia, who's ready for it.

David announces at this point that he wants to split Alexia's Dice Pool. First, Alexia will dodge, dropping under the Spectre's attack. Then, she wants to gut it as it goes by. The first roll is Dexterity + Dodge, the second Dexterity + Melee. Alexia has seven dice in the first pool and six in the latter, so David has only six dice to use. He puts five into the dodge and one into the attack. Joshua rolls the Spectre's attack at the same time David does Alexia's dodge, and everything goes Alexia's way. The Spectre gets no successes, while Alexia gets four. The monster's claws don't even come close.

Now it's time for Alexia's attack. David doesn't want to take any chances, so he spends a Willpower point. It's an automatic success, and the Spectre can't dodge. David rolls damage on Alexia's attack: two dice for her Strength + 1 for the knife. She rolls three successes, and the Spectre doesn't soak. It's wounded, but Joshua lets David know that it doesn't look badly hurt.

Deciding that Alexia's outclassed, David tells Joshua and Annys that he's having the Heretic get herself and Robin out of there. She starts pelting down the hall toward Robin, who unfortunately is pre-occupied. Annys' most recent botches on the Shadow Dice have raised Robin's Shadow's temporary Angst to 8, greater than his Willpower. David, who enjoys making life difficult for himself, decides that the Shadow is going to use the opportunity to take control of Robin's Corpus, and initiates a Catharsis roll by spending a temporary Angst point. He rolls the Shadow's permanent Angst (five dice) while Annys rolls Robin's Willpower (seven dice), with both rolling against a target of 6. Annys rolls 10, 9, 8, 7, 5 and 2, while Joshua rolls 8, 6, 4, 3 and 3. Annys gets more successes, so Robin stays in control of his Corpus. Again, it's time for initiative rolls; this time Alexia and Robin tie with two successes, and the Spectre goes last with one.

At this point, Joshua rules that Alexia reaches Robin's corner. David has Alexia turn on her Argos power of Phantom Wings, rolling Stamina + Argos (difficulty 8). She gets three successes, meaning that she can fly for three turns. At the same time, Robin reaches out to take Alexia's hand. Joshua asks for Dexterity + Brawl (difficulty 4), and Robin makes it with ease. Down the hall, the Spectre turns for another attack.

THANKS FOR THE RESCUE

NO PROBLEM. WHERE TO, MIGHTY HUNTER OF SPECTRES.

BACK TO THE CITADEL. I NEED TO MAKE A REPORT ABOUT ALL THIS.

OH NO WE DON'T. I'M NOT GOING ANYWHERE NEAR THAT PLACE...

With joined hands Alexia and Robin burst through the walls of Macedon's Haunt and soar upward where the Spectre can't follow. The wraiths are temporarily safe, and Joshua has set the stage for the rest of the chronicle. It's up to Alexia and Robin to decide what they want to do now....

# Antagonists

## Spectres

*Be afraid. Be very afraid.*

— Veronica “Ronnie” Quaife, *The Fly* (1986)



pectres are souls who have been devoured by Oblivion, but not swallowed by the Void. Their numbers include both wraiths whose Shadows have conquered them and mortals who died such violent deaths that they crossed the Shroud with their Shadows in ascendance. The circumstances of

each soul's transformation determines which Spectral caste the individual Spectre will belong to once it emerges from its Tempest-tossed cocoon; wraiths who succumb to the lures offered by their Shadows become Doppelgangers, for example, while those souls lost in the Tempest become Shades.

A Spectre's caste determines its position in Spectral society, which is rigid and hierarchic in a cannibalistic sort of way. Within the confines of caste, a Spectre's individual influence is determined by its Dark Passions. The more a Spectre hates, or lusts, or is greedy, the more influence it has among its peers. Spectres are creatures of Dark Passion; they are Hate, Rage or some similar emotion made manifest. Proximity to a strong emotion such as the Spectre embodies (this emotion is called their Being, and serves them in place of Willpower) can trigger a frenzied state called Rapacity, during which the Spectre mindlessly attacks the wraith or mortal who provoked it. Whenever a Spectre encounters a mortal or wraith with a Passion equivalent to its Being, equal to or more than its Being rating, the Spectre must make a Being roll or become Rapacious.

Oblivion slowly consumes Spectres even as they serve its will. Some Shades claim that it is sentient and aware, while others assert that Oblivion is a mindless, implacable force. Only its voracious appetite is agreed upon by all. The erosive impact of Oblivion's presence on Spectres ensures that their existence is usually both brief and painful, and out of sheer sadism some Spectres will try to tempt wraiths into becoming their companions in torment. When Oblivion eventually claims a Spectre, a Nihil opens around his remains, plunging what remains of the decaying fragments into the Void. Wraiths or other Spectres in the Nihil's vicinity risk a similar fate, and if they are pulled down with the remnants of Spectral Corpus, at the very least they will find themselves deep within the Labyrinth.

Oblivion's slow destructive power means that Spectres are in pain every second of their existence in the Underworld. It is in hope of ending their pain that Spectres so fanatically serve Oblivion, throwing themselves into the fray in the hope of a quicker death. Not all Spectres are suicidal;

some instead plot the destruction of all existence in the hope that the end of all will mean an end to their pain. This ambition, annihilating not just the world but all worlds, is the closest thing the majority of Spectres have to a goal. All Spectres seek to inflict their own suffering upon others, be they mortal or supernatural.

If they can be said to have a purpose in the World of Darkness, then Spectres exist to harvest the seeds of Oblivion that grow in all souls. To this end they possess some mortals and haunt others in order to stimulate the growth of the Dark Passions upon which they feed. They spread the essence of Oblivion throughout the Skinlands and the Shadowlands, nurturing negative emotions and wreaking bloody havoc. Because Oblivion is so strong in Spectres, they find it difficult to notice the world of the Quick. Spectres are twice as far removed from the Skinlands as wraiths, and the Shroud is correspondingly difficult for them to pierce. Most mortals are invisible to Spectres, as is the mortal world.

When they are not attacking the Restless or haunting the Quick, Spectres plot and intrigue in their mephitic lairs in the Labyrinth. They also haunt the Tempest, the turbulent nature of which they can twist and alter with the Dark Arcanos Tempest-Weaving. Other Dark Arcanoi, which Spectres possess but wraiths cannot, are Shroud-Rending (which allows a Spectre to interact with the Skinlands); Contaminate (by means of which a Spectre can infect others with Oblivion); Larceny (which enables a Spectre to heal the damage inflicted upon it by Oblivion by stealing the energy of others); and Hive-Mind (through the use of which a Spectre may remember information it has never learned). **Details concerning Dark Arcanoi, and a wealth of other information concerning the Shadow-Eaten, can be found in Dark Reflections: Spectres.**

## Doppelgangers

As their name suggests, *Doppelgangers* are Spectres who are still able to pass for wraiths. Many are able to change their appearance in order to infiltrate Hierarchy Necropoli and Renegade outposts, where they gather information, spread lies, destroy key individuals and take their places, and generally wreak havoc. Doppelgangers are favored agents of the Malfeans, and are more often found in the Shadowlands than in the Tempest.

Doppelgangers retain all their intelligence upon becoming Spectres. Some say that the transforming nature of Oblivion sharpens their wits, making them all the deadlier. They are free-willed, malevolent and in possession of all their wraithly Fetters and Arcanoi.

Regardless of what appearance they take, all Doppelgangers can be detected by the death-light of Oblivion, which burns darkly in their eyes. Alert wraiths may recognize this light, and so detect a Doppelganger by succeeding on a Perception + Occult roll (difficulty 8).

### Sample Doppelganger Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3  
**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 2  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Awareness 2, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Subterfuge 3  
**Skills:** Etiquette 3, Firearms 2, Performance 2, Stealth 2  
**Knowledge:** Enigmas 3, Linguistics 2  
**Arcanoi:** Moliat 3  
**Dark Arcanoi:** Tempest Weaving 1, Shroud-Rending 2  
**Shade Powers:** None  
**Backgrounds:** Allies 3, Mentor 4  
**Dark Passions:** 10 points worth  
**Fetters:** 5 points worth  
**Being:** Envy 5  
**Permanent Corpus:** 10  
**Angst:** 10

## Shades

Those Spectres known as *Shades* are the most fearsome of their kind. They are the shock troops of Oblivion, existing only to destroy. Shades are all that remains of wraiths who were caught in a Maelstrom or lost in the Tempest. Their higher thoughts are stripped away by raw Oblivion, leaving only Dark Passions to motivate the emerging Shade in its new existence.

Shades are the epitome of destructive energy. They exist to tear down the bulwarks holding back Oblivion, from the soulforged walls of Imperial Stygia to the hopes and beliefs of individual wraiths and the Quick.

Lacking mortal drives and ambitions, Shades cannot have Fetters, and so cannot exist for long in the Shadowlands or Skinlands unless summoned there through necromancy or otherwise transported there by others. The Tempest is their home, and much of its nigh-infinite expanse is made inhospitable by the voracious hordes of Shades dwelling there.

### Sample Shade Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3  
**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 2  
**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 5, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2  
**Skills:** Leadership 3, Melee 3, Stealth 3  
**Knowledge:** Enigmas 3  
**Arcanoi:** None  
**Dark Arcanoi:** Contaminate 1, Hive-Mind 2, Larceny 2, Tempest-Weaving 3  
**Shade Powers:** 1 to 3 Shade Powers  
**Backgrounds:** Allies 2, Contacts 1, Notoriety 2  
**Dark Passions:** 12 points  
**Fetters:** None  
**Being:** Despair 5  
**Permanent Corpus:** 15  
**Angst:** 10



E. LACOMBE.

## Dark Arcanoi

The Dark Arcanoi of Spectres have the following powers:

**Shroud-Rending** allows a Spectre to: Extend its time manifesting in the Skinlands, and see and hear things in the Skinlands with varying degrees of clarity.

**Hive-Mind** allows a Spectre to: Send a telepathic distress signal; conduct two-way telepathic conversations with other nearby Spectres; recall information in full which she herself may not have fully learned; dredge up secrets known by Spectres long since swallowed by the Void; and eventually pull any information from the vast Spectral communal consciousness.

**Tempest-Weaving** allows a Spectre to: Navigate the Tempest; locate Nihils and eavesdrop through them; employ Nihils as shortcuts between the Tempest and the Shadowlands; ride Maelstroms; retrieve objects from the Tempest (the assortment is generally random); pull specific lost objects from the Tempest (such as Artifacts) and reshape the Tempest and the Labyrinth as it desires (particularly useful when staging a Harrowing).

**Contaminate** allows a Spectre to: See Oblivion's hold on living creatures; observe and speak with a wraith's Shadow; discover a wraith's Nature; feed a Shadow Angst; awaken new Thorns; and even help a Shadow assume control.

**Larceny** allows a Spectre to: Determine how strong Oblivion is in others; drain Corpus from others to replace her own; implant Dark Passions in chosen targets; draw Angst from the pain it inflicts on others; heal botch damage; and transfer the effects of Oblivion from itself to another.

## Shade Powers

All Shades, and certain other Spectres as well, have uniquely monstrous abilities called Shade Powers. All Shades have at least one, while some have as many as four or five.

• **Bind** — In order to use this Shade Power, the Shade must first successfully grapple her target (see “Brawl Complications” page 259). In the next turn, the Shade's form twists to envelop her victim completely, and unless the Shade is destroyed any wraith imprisoned thus cannot be freed. The encapsulated wraith is usually carried off into the Tempest to an uncertain doom. Use of this power costs three Angst points. Some Shades use this power to conceal other Shades within themselves, bursting open to release their fellows at an appropriate moment.

• **Chameleon Parasite** — This power allows a Shade to attach itself inconspicuously to a wraith by making a Dexterity + Stealth (difficulty of the wraith's Perception + Alertness) roll. A light-source held up to the wraith's Corpus might detect the presence of the Shade parasite (Perception + Awareness, difficulty 8), but otherwise the parasite will remain undetectable by most means. So long as it remains quiescent, the Shade can follow the wraith wherever it goes, even into the Shadowlands. The Shade may then detach itself, inflicting one Corpus Level of damage to its host in the process, and attack anyone nearby for one to five turns before vanishing into the Tempest. By journeying thus, the Shade can also act as “ears” for a Malfean. This Power costs five Angst points to use, plus one Angst per day spent out of the Tempest.

• **Ectoplasmic Tentacles** — Endowed with extra limbs of a sort, the Shade can attack twice a turn. Spectres with Ectoplasmic Tentacles rarely use weapons.

• **Hound the Harrowed** — The Shade can attach itself to a wraith's Psyche as it falls through the Tempest into the Labyrinth. While in the Labyrinth, the Shade can attempt to capture any Willpower or Pathos spent during the wraith's

## Being

Being is a Trait unique to Spectres. A Spectre's Being is determined by its strongest Dark Passion. For example, a Doppelganger whose highest Dark Passion is **Kill all servants of the Hierarchy (Hate) 5** will have Hate as its Being, at an initial rating equivalent to the Dark Passion. Being points may be spent in the same manner as Willpower, and a Spectre's Being rating may increase and decrease during game play. Similarly, Spectres use Angst (gleaned from their Dark Passions) instead of Pathos to power their Arcanoi.

Harrowing and convert it to Angst for its own use. To do so, the Spectre rolls Dexterity + Awareness (difficulty 9). Each success allows another point to be transmuted.

- **Miasmal Breath** — This Power allows the Shade to exhale a noxious vapor, akin in nature to the foul winds of Oblivion that whirl through the Labyrinth. Victims caught in the exhalation lose one point of Corpus per Angst point the Shade invests in the use of this Power. As the Spectre is essentially exhaling raw Oblivion, this damage cannot be soaked or resisted.

- **Numbing the Heart** — The Shade can attack a wraith's Passions directly, infecting them with the cold of Oblivion. After a successful attack, a Shade wishing to use this Power makes a contested roll of its Angst against the target's Willpower. If the Shade succeeds, one of its victim's Passions has its rating reduced by one. This Power costs the Shade three Angst points with each use, but is capable of driving a wraith into a Harrowing when employed in battle.

- **Pathos Drain** — On any successful attack roll, the Shade can drain one point of Pathos per success. These Pathos points are then converted directly to Angst points on a one-for-one basis. Shades with this Power often become greedy and bloat themselves on Angst, and there are legends of Shades who took so much from their victims that they literally exploded.

- **Rend the Lifeweb** — The Shade can attack a wraith's Fetters directly. After a successful attack, the Shade rolls its Angst against its victim's Willpower. If the Shade succeeds, one of the wraith's Fetters has its rating reduced by one. Use of this Power costs five Angst points, but like Numb the Heart it can tumble wraiths easily into Harrowings.

- **Shark's Teeth** — The Shade can do aggravated damage with a bite (damage = Strength + 2).

- **Siphon Emotion** — The Shade can directly attack the Passions of an opponent, and convert drained Passion points to Dark Passions. Each point so drained increases the Shade's dominant Dark Passion (and also its Being) by one. The Shade must successfully grapple its opponent in combat, and then attempt to overcome the target's Pathos with its Being in an opposed roll.

- **Spectral Scream** — The Shade can scream into the Tempest, thereby summoning one to five more Shades. Use of this Power costs five Angst points, regardless of the number of Shades summoned.

- **Stampede** — Shades generally run in packs. Through use of this Power, all the Shades of a single pack can combine their physical talents to inflict greater damage on their foes. At the cost of one Angst point and one point of Being, each Shade with this Power who takes part in a joint charge or attack can temporarily assume the value of the highest Strength, Dexterity and Stamina of any Shade in the group.

- **Talons** — The Shade can do aggravated damage with its razored claws (damage equals Strength + 1).





• **Tempest Wrack** — At the cost of two points of Angst and one point of Being, a Shade can infect the Tempest around her with her own inner turmoil. This results in the Tempest becoming wracked by storms, whirlpools bubbling up through Byways and other generally unpleasant effects.

## Striplings

Child wraiths who succumb to their Shadows become *Striplings*. Shades, Doppelgangers and Mortwights are all found among the ranks of the Striplings, who are unique in Spectral society in that they are a group whose membership crosses caste borders. The Striplings became an organized movement among Spectres during the Industrial Revolution, when the numbers of children who became wraiths and eventually (or sometimes swiftly) Spectres began to increase rapidly.

Striplings delight in leading other children, wraith or mortal, to share their doom. After all, misery loves company. All Striplings excel in the Dark Arcanos Shroud-Rending, allowing them much greater contact with the Skinlands than most Spectres.

### Sample Stripling Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1  
**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 3, Wits 3

**Talents:** Alertness 4, Brawl 1, Dodge 5, Streetwise 3

**Skills:** Stealth 5

**Knowledge:** Enigmas 4, Investigation 3

**Arcanoi:** Embody 2, Keening 1, Outrage 1

**Dark Arcanoi:** Larceny 2, Shroud-Rending 3, Tempest-Weaving 1

**Backgrounds:** Allies 2

**Dark Passions:** 10 points

**Fetters:** Variable, up to 10 points

**Being:** Jealousy 5

**Permanent Corpus:** 10

**Angst:** 10

## Mortwights

Mortwights are Spectres who never spent time as wraiths. Their mortal deaths were so violent or shocking that they were claimed instantly by Oblivion. Mortwights seem more at home in the Tempest than other Spectres, and are especially skilled at the Dark Arcanos Tempest-Weaving. Currently their numbers are few, which sets them firmly at the bottom of the ladder as far as Spectral castes go. As their ranks grow with every drive-by and serial murder, however, they gain strength and seethe against the contempt of the other castes.

### Sample Mortwright Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4  
**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 2, Appearance 1  
**Mental:** Perception 2, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Expression 3  
**Skills:** Leadership 4, Melee 3, Stealth 2  
**Knowledge:** Bureaucracy 2, Politics 3  
**Arcanoi:** None  
**Dark Arcanoi:** Hive-Mind 1, Tempest-Weaving 5  
**Backgrounds:** Artifact 1, Contacts 2  
**Dark Passions:** 8 points  
**Fetters:** None  
**Being:** Rage 5  
**Corpus:** 10  
**Angst:** 10

## Nephwracks

Spectres whose Corpus is so permanently stained by Oblivion that not even the most skilled application of Moliat can conceal it become *Nephwracks*, courtiers to Malfeans. They take perverse pride in transforming themselves into the most repulsive forms they can imagine. To a sane eye, Nephwracks are worse monstrosities than were ever imagined by Bosch and Blake — emaciated, deformed, charnel horrors.

Unable to infiltrate Restless society, instead they plan its destruction. Nephwracks interpret the dreams of Malfeans, and deliver commands and guidance to Shade war parties. When not attempting to destroy wraiths, they plot against one another and their masters' rivals, and they are not above destroying their own kind. Nephwracks make admirable villains for *Wraith* chronicles, as they are powerful enough to pose a true threat, but they can also be defeated by a skilled and insightful Circle.

### Sample Nephwrack Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2  
**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0  
**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Subterfuge 4  
**Skills:** Etiquette 2, Leadership 3  
**Knowledge:** Bureaucracy 3, Enigmas 3, Politics 3  
**Arcanoi:** Phantasm 1  
**Dark Arcanoi:** Hive-Mind 4, Larceny 2, Tempest-Weaving 1  
**Backgrounds:** Mentor 5  
**Dark Passions:** 10 points  
**Fetters:** Variable; none to 5 points  
**Being:** Selfishness 5  
**Permanent Corpus:** 10  
**Angst:** 10

## Malfeans

The monstrous Never-Born are the immortal god-kings of Spectral society. Massive, bloated horrors spawned of nightmare and the dark before death, *Malfeans* defy description. Much of their time is spent in slumber, and they rouse only fitfully every few centuries. Some Malfeans have colonies of Shades dwelling in tunnels gnawed through their rotten flesh. Others are surrounded by servile Nephwracks and fawning Doppelgangers who carry out their every mumbled whim. It is said that some Malfeans are Spectres who have devoured their fellows, growing great in size and power by their supernatural cannibalism, although given Oblivion's all-consuming hunger, it seems unlikely that any Spectre could survive long enough to prosper from such a practice.

Through their dreams Malfeans direct their servants and guide Spectral society, rarely stirring from the caverns they themselves gnawed out of the primal darkness eons ago. Malfeans rarely emerge from the Labyrinth, and when they do, their appearance signals some great impending catastrophe. It is rumored that somewhere in the darkest recesses of the Labyrinth dream Malfeans who have slept since time began, of whom Gorool itself was but a pale imitation. Should ever they awaken, then surely the Final Maelstrom shall break over the Shadowlands, and Oblivion will reign over all.

You are advised to keep Malfeans in the wings of your chronicle, rather than on center stage. A Malfean foe should remain an unseen presence whose diabolic manipulation and pervasive menace is a subdued but ominous presence, rather than a direct threat. Any encounter with a Malfean should come as the climax to a long and dangerous chronicle, if at all.

Even lesser Malfeans are so powerful as to make statistics irrelevant. Greater Malfeans are virtually gods in the darkness.

## Barghests



Fearfully obedient to their masters, terrifyingly vicious toward everyone else in the Underworld, barghests were once wraiths. However, they have since been lobotomized, Moliated into the semblance of hunting hounds, and trained to track or attack the enemies of the Hierarchy. Usually barghests run in pairs (called a brace), though hunting packs of up to a dozen have been spotted during sweeps to capture particularly dangerous Renegades.

Each barghest wears a muzzle, a low-grade Artifact which keeps it loyal to the holder of its leash. If the muzzle comes off, it's anyone's guess as to whom the hound will attack, though many barghests are capable of houndlike affection for their keepers.

Most barghests have only animal-level intelligence. Pack leaders tend to be a bit brighter.

### Sample Barghest Statistics

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5  
**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 3 (for Intimidation purposes only), Appearance 1  
**Mental:** Perception 5, Intelligence 0, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 4, Brawl 2, Dodge 2, Intimidation 3  
**Skills:** Tracking 5  
**Arcanoi:** Argos 1, Keening 4  
**Passions:** Serve (Loyalty) 5  
**Fetters:** 1 point remaining  
**Willpower:** 5  
**Pathos:** 5  
**Angst:** 7/5  
**Permanent Corpus:** 8  
**Equipment:** Muzzle, soulforged chewtoy

## Dwellers in the Storm

*Laughter lies on faces*

*Where the sun has never shown*

*The fear of life is strong*

— Big Country, "Porrohman"

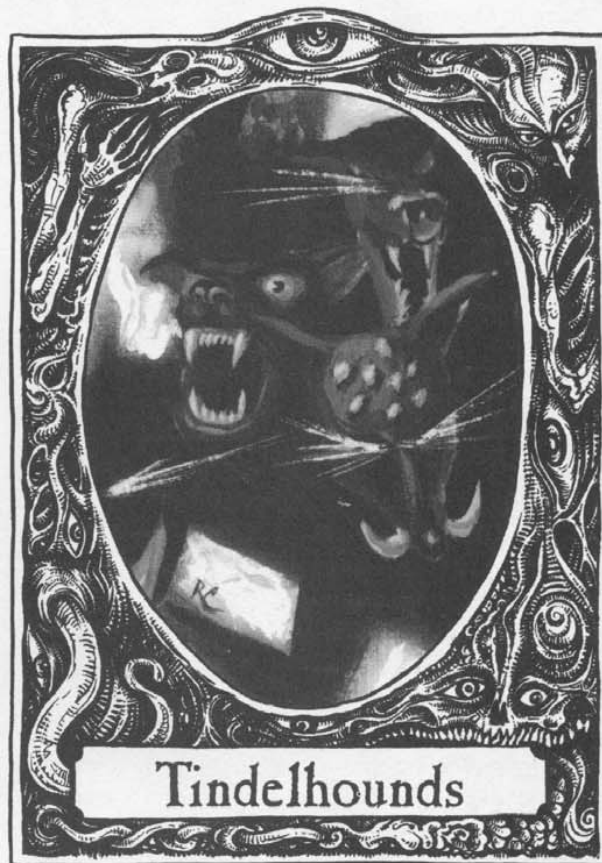


The Tempest hosts hordes of creatures neither wraith nor Spectre, but something entirely other. They are called by many names and come in an endless array of shapes and sizes. Many new wraiths call these creatures the Plasmic, and have even catalogued them according to type. There are the Phantasies, which bear a strong resemblance to the creatures found among the living in the Skinlands. There are the Deliriums, which are much like the Phantasies but malformed and sometimes dangerous. There are the Legendaries, which often appear as the creatures of ancient myth, the dragons and unicorns of days gone by. Finally, there are the Wyrd, which must surely be nightmares left behind by long dead gods or beings of similar power. Taken as a collective, these odd entities are referred to by the most ancient of wraiths as the Whistimmu. While many Harbingers and Doomslayers have tried to catalogue the strange apparitions, there seems to be no limit to the forms they can take. The following examples are merely some of the more common of the Whistimmu, but everything imaginable (and some things that might not be) can be found within the nightmarish reaches of the Tempest.

For more information on the Plasmic, see *Sea of Shadows*.

### Tindelhounds

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6  
**Social:** Charisma 4, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0  
**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 2, Wits 2



**Talents:** Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 4

**Skills:** Tracking 5

**Arcanoi:** Argos 5, Moliat 3

**Powers:** Hellfire (See below)

**Willpower:** 9

**Permanent Corpus:** 10

**Angst:** 8

**Image:** Tindelhounds are massive beasts resembling giant black dogs. There are differences, however. Dogs only have one mouth and two eyes, while Tindelhounds have been spotted with as many as 10 mouths and 15 eyes. Tindelhounds stand as high as 15 feet at the shoulder, and sport what appears at first glance to be thick black fur. On closer examination, the "fur" is actually revealed to be a heavy mat of short barbed hooks, useful for snaring whatever gets too close. These barbs are capable of limited movement, and normally pull whatever they have hooked closer to the numerous heads of the Tindelhounds.

The most appalling aspect of Tindelhounds is the variation each sports in the shape, size and number of its heads. Each head is unique, though still vaguely canine, and equipped with a massive fang-filled mouth and at least one burning green eye. The Tindelhounds belch great gouts of green fire from their snouts when howling, and leave a heavy trail of soot wherever they go.

**Background:** The first documented sighting of a Tindelhound came about when one of the beasts erupted from the chest of Henry Tindel, a wraith in London, England, in the latter part of the Victorian Era. Tindel's Corpus was completely shredded in the process of "birthing" the beast, and the few who lived through the experience claimed that Tindel's foul temper had manifested itself in the form of the monster. Other manifestations of Tindelhounds since then have disproved this hypothesis, but it is still exceedingly rare for one of the beasts to prowl the Shadowlands. They prefer the far reaches of the Tempest, and several of the more notable hells in the Far Shores have trained Tindelhounds as watchdogs.

**Roleplaying Tips:** Eat, growl, destroy!

**Storyteller Notes:** Tindelhounds are not stupid animals, and they tend to learn as they go. While the maddened beasts might be fooled once with a trick, they will never fall for the same stunt twice. Working in packs, Tindelhounds tend to stick with a target once they have decided to attack. Even leaping into the Tempest is no guarantee of safety from these beasts, as they can use their tracking instincts to follow the scent of their prey (Perception + Tracking, difficulty 7) through the eternal storm. The flames from a Tindelhound are extremely hot, and cause two levels of aggravated damage to any wraith who gets in their way. This damage can be soaked, but any wraith snared in the barbs of a Tindelhound is constantly exposed to the flames. All damage from Tindelhounds' fangs and claws is aggravated. In the opinion of most wraiths, the best thing to do when facing a Tindelhound is simply to flee, or, failing in that, to throw another wraith in the monster's path and hope the creature chooses the new victim instead.

## Ailerons

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

**Social:** Charisma 2, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 1

**Talents:** N/A

**Skills:** Brawl 3, Dodge 4

**Knowledges:** N/A

**Arcanoi:** Argos 3

**Powers:** Flight, Leeching (See below)

**Passions:** N/A

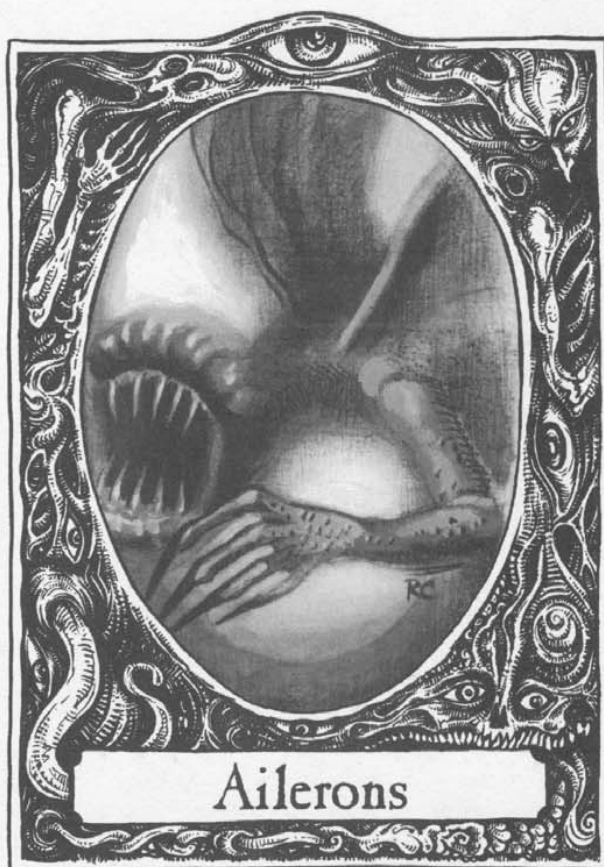
**Willpower:** 4

**Permanent Corpus:** 5

**Angst:** 4

**Image:** An aileron is little more than a suctioning mouth and a prehensile tail attached to a thin reptilian body with very large wings. These wings are actually more akin to sails, used for soaring on the winds of the Tempest and not for actual flight. Ailerons can change color to match the sky against which they glide.

**Background:** For as long as wraiths can remember, the Ailerons have always been around to swarm unwary travelers. Seldom leaving the sky for anything more than feeding, they learned to



haunt the Byways where prey was more plentiful. After attaching themselves to their prey with their long tails and their lamprey-like mouths, the creatures literally subsume the Corpora of their victims, who inevitably fall into devastating Harrowings as a result. When the Hierarchy was at its greatest, well-trained groups of Legionnaires with Artifact weapons and nets were appointed to keep the Byways cleared of these beasts, but in recent decades the Aileron population has rebounded emphatically.

**Roleplaying Hints:** It's a feeding frenzy! Eat, eat, eat!

**Storyteller Notes:** The Ailerons are mindless. They exist only to consume. They are easily confused by multiple targets, but will stick with the first one they land on until they are destroyed. The hook-filled mouths of the Ailerons are used to drain Pathos and Corpus from a wraith, but despite their voracious appetites, the beasts can only drain a point of energy (either statistic, Storyteller discretion) every two turns. This leeching effect can be soaked if the beast is attempting to drain Corpus.

The only other weapon available to these creatures is the barb at the end of their prehensile tails, which is powerful enough to slice through Corpus with little effort. They also use their tails to trap and entangle victims' limbs. However, far from the Byways, larger and more powerful Ailerons are rumored to exist, capable of devouring half a wraith's Corpus in a single turn.

While not invisible, the Ailerons are both small and well-camouflaged. Attempts to spot them are at a difficulty of 9 until they attack.

## Cerements

**Physical:** Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3  
**Social:** Charisma 3, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0  
**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 2, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Dodge 4  
**Skills:** Stealth 4  
**Arcanoi:** Argos 4, Inhabit 4, Outrage 5  
**Powers:** Entangle (See below)  
**Fetters:** See below  
**Willpower:** 7  
**Permanent Corpus:** 8  
**Angst:** 6

**Image:** The Cerements are large sheets of pale, mucuslike ectoplasm. This substance is laced with a fine layer of veins and arteries, which pulse with an arrhythmic motion.

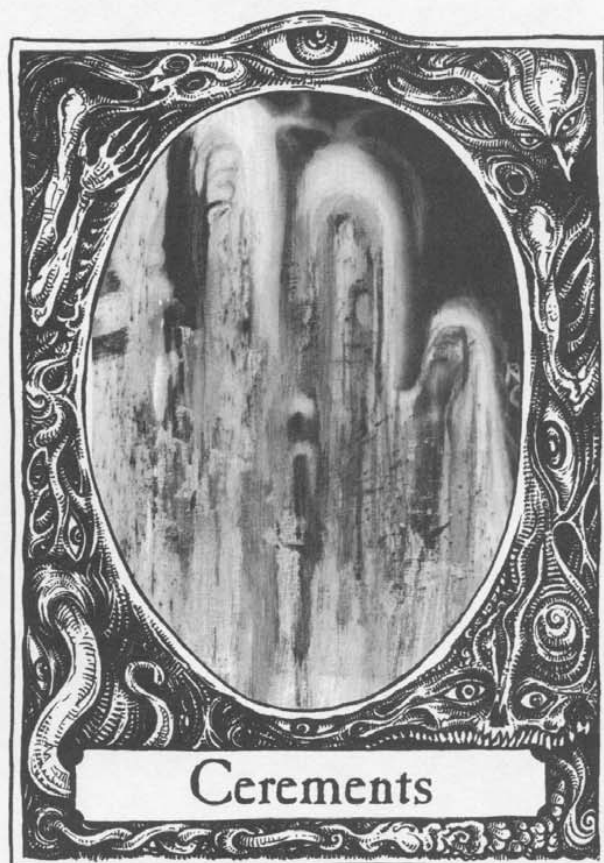
**Background:** The Cerements are believed to be wraiths who never escaped their Cauls and were then lost in the Tempest. However, no proof exists to confirm or deny this belief, as the creatures have never been seen in their early stages. What is known is that the “flying body bags” seem intent on enfold-ing targets within their forms and then imprisoning them.

As Cerements are not active predators like Ailerons, the creatures are considered harmless by many. Nevertheless, their effect on wraiths can be very serious indeed. The longer a wraith remains entangled within the depths of a Cerement, the more likely that the captured Restless will forget important aspects of his existence, including Passions, Fetters and Arcanoi. Another common belief about the Cerements is that they are actually able to use the memories they steal in order to become wraiths themselves. Again, no proof exists to confirm this allegation.

**Roleplaying Hints:** If it moves, snare it. The peace of the grave is your gift to others. It must not be denied.

**Storyteller Notes:** The Cerements exist solely to destroy memories. For every night trapped within the Cerement’s form, a conscious wraith will lose one year’s worth of memories. Over a length of time, the wraith can forget all Passions and even forget where her Fetters are located. While a certain pull to be near the areas where Fetters are located will still exist, a wraith whose memories have been drained will have no idea why she’s been drawn to that area. Often, the Cerements will steal these Fetters, pulling the attachment that a wraith feels for these precious connections to the Shadowlands away, and using them as a connection of their own.

The Cerements’ greatest power is that they can force captured prey into Slumber. On a contested Willpower roll, the Cerement can attempt to make an enfolded victim sleep, and for each success the creature rolls, the victim remains Slumbering for an entire day. Any wraith who remains too long in this forced Slumber (a number of days equal to his Willpower) loses all recollections of the past, and within a few weeks, becomes a Cerement himself. Cerements, particularly those who have stolen Fetters, may enter the Shadowlands for brief times.



## Shroudrippers

**Physical:** Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 2  
**Social:** Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0  
**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 3, Wits 3  
**Talents:** Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 5  
**Arcanoi:** Argos 3, Pandemonium 5  
**Powers:** Lightning Ride (See below)  
**Willpower:** 9  
**Permanent Corpus:** 9  
**Angst:** 10

**Image:** It is almost impossible to see one of the Shroudrippers long enough to truly comprehend its appearance. All that most wraiths ever see is a blurred streak tearing across the sky. The few Shroudrippers destroyed to date have not made good subjects for study, melting into ruined ectoplasm and then evaporating in a matter of minutes. However, a few illustrations exist that are allegedly accurate drawings of the creatures in flight. One such illustration shows a series of long, bony joints forming 10 near-fingers growing from a thick central disc. Thick webbing grows between the fingers, forming a sail of sorts. When fully extended, each of the “fingers” is tipped with a razor-sharp barb, and the webs are filled with small orifices and jets for spraying a powerful acidlike substance. When closed, the entire mass appears as a fetus held within skeletal hands.

**Background:** The Shroudrippers first made their appearance after the last great Maelstrom, destruction their only discernible purpose. They move at amazing speeds and shred whatever they come in contact with. Rumors persist that the Rippers can even slice their way through Stygian metal with little difficulty. Many wraiths count their blessings that the Shroudrippers only appear in the wake of Maelstroms, seemingly incapable of entering the Shadowlands without the storm winds to bear them there. Flocks of the beasts have been seen, but never encountered (at least by anyone who cares to recall the experience), near the Labyrinth.

**Roleplaying Hints:** If it moves, it's a target.

**Storyteller Notes:** Shroudrippers are extremely fast, moving at velocities well over 120 miles per hour. They can turn 180° with little effort, and produce a hideous shrieking noise when moving at maximum velocity.

The acid mist produced by the Shroudrippers glows as the beasts spray it on their attack runs. This glowing effect, in conjunction with the speed of their attacks, has been dubbed a "Lightning Ride." The exhaled mist covers an entire area, and reduces the effective soaking ability of whatever it touches by two dice until the affected wraith makes a successful Stamina roll (difficulty 8). Fortunately, the effects of this mist are not cumulative.

## Kraken

**Physical:** Strength 10, Dexterity 4, Stamina 10

**Social:** Charisma 5, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 0

**Arcanoi:** Argos 1

**Willpower:** 10

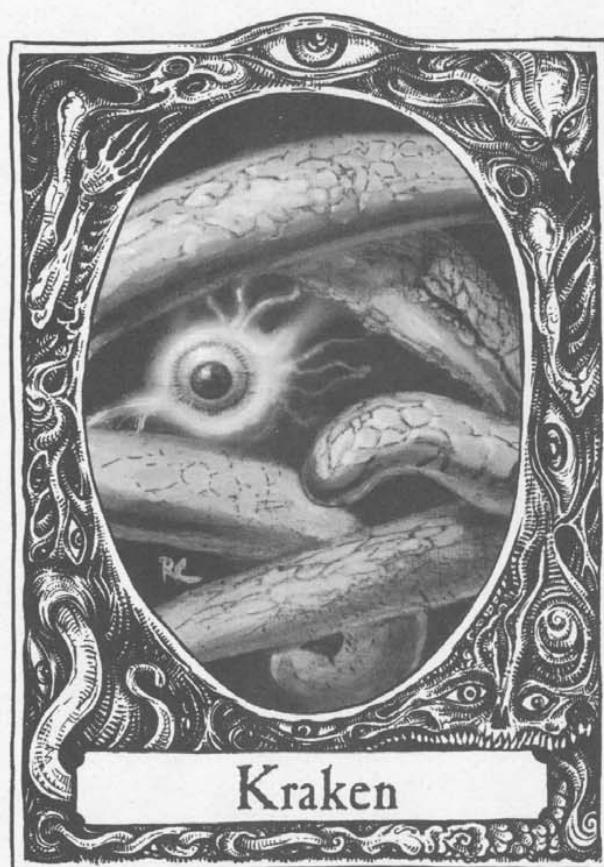
**Permanent Corpus** 100

**Angst:** 10

**Image:** No one has ever seen the entire Kraken. What survivors have reported is fragmentary: an enormous collection of tentacles, or a bloated, dead eye rolling in a rotting socket. The sheer size of the Kraken is too much for most wraiths to comprehend.

**Background:** The Great Library of Stygia mentions the Kraken spilling forth from the Sea of Shadows before Charon had even finished creating Stygia. The behemoth is allegedly trapped beyond the Tempest, but able to reach through the swirling mists from time to time and capture victims to feed its insatiable hunger. Some claim the Kraken is actually Oblivion itself, seeking to destroy everything. Others claim it is a god best forgotten attempting to break through the Tempest and consume all who would defy it. No one has ever seen the Kraken and continued to exist long enough to find out for certain.

**Roleplaying Hints:** Grab and crush. Whatever it is, moving or not, grab it and crush it.



**Storyteller Notes:** There is no Kraken, *per se*, and the stories about it are just that — stories. However, *something* is out there, beyond even the Tempest, and from time to time it reaches into the storm from whatever realm it calls home, destroying whatever it can grasp. A mass of tentacles and occasionally an enormous cold eye are all that the beast has ever been able to manifest in the Underworld, but even Malfeans are grateful that more has never been forced through. The Kraken may well be indestructible; even its tentacles are remarkably difficult to injure. Luckily, though, it has never been able to breach the Tempest for more than two turns before being drawn away again by whatever forces master it.

## Mourners

**Physical:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5

**Social:** Charisma 5, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

**Mental:** Perception 4, Intelligence 5, Wits 4

**Talents:** Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Brawl 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 5

**Knowledges:** Enigmas 5, Investigation 4

**Fetters:** 1 (Not a true Fetter, this takes the form of a single wraith or living human who calls out to the individual Mourner)

**Arcanoi:** Argos 3, Keening 4, Lifeweb 4



**Powers:** Chaining (See below)

**Willpower:** 10

**Permanent Corpus:** 13

**Angst:** 10

**Image:** Few things from beyond the Tempest strike fear into a wraith with the power of the Mourners. These shambling masses bear a superficial resemblance to Ferryman, but carry no weapons save the chains looped repeatedly around their torsos. The Mourners are cloaked entirely in black, but the fabric of their robes seems to slither around their bodies by its own power. From the depths of their hoods rises a rumbling moan of sorrow, pouring terror into the soul of any wraith who hears it. Adding to the aura of fear they generate, the gaunt figures take slow steps, but cover more ground than should be possible.

**Background:** From time to time the depths of the Tempest split, disgorging a gathering of Mourners into the Shadowlands. These figures, while humanoid, bear no features to mark that they were ever human. Heavily wrapped arms stretch out before the shambling shapes as they stumble down the streets of the Shadowlands, wailing and lamenting for all to hear. Much as the legendary Bean-Nighe warned of death with its scream, the Mourners call out and let everyone know that someone will be taken before the night is

over. Numbering between five and 20, the Mourners move relentlessly in search of the one soul they will take, and do not hesitate to crush any who would stand in their way. When the travelers finally find their victim, the chains about their waists move of their own volition to wrap around their target. Once the unfortunate is captured, the Mourners move to the closest Nihil and leave the Shadowlands once more.

Perhaps the most serious threat the Mourners offer is the knowledge that any whom they touch are marked. In every case in which a wraith has physically struck one of the Mourners, the screaming nightmares have come back later to claim that wraith as one of their own. Additionally, several wraiths claim that loved ones in the realms of the living were actually snatched away by the chain-draped monstrosities. Renegade Alan White of Teaneck, New Jersey, grew briefly famous for telling the story of the night he awoke to see the Mourners surrounding his sleeping wife. Though he could see the creatures clearly, he could not touch them, and he was helpless to prevent one of them from placing its hands on his wife's brow. Alan's wife died in her sleep. The coroner claimed she died of natural causes, but Alan knew better in life. He argued the point in death as well, at least until the Mourners came for him.

**Roleplaying Hints:** It's a tragedy, really. The endless quest for the one who will free you is almost always fruitless. Someday, perhaps the chains will let you go. Until then you must endure the pain of dying eternally, without the release of death. Find your victim, the one whose very being calls to you; and bind him to you. Then you may leave, journeying back into the great darkness and a brief moment of peace.

**Storyteller Notes:** The Mourners are forever in pursuit of the one soul who can free them. However, they have no idea who that one soul is. They have no leaders; they simply all know whom they must pursue, and where to go to pursue him. Mourners seek victims in order of what is in essence seniority; the other Mourners will seek with the oldest until she finds her savior. Then the oldest remaining will be afforded the same courtesy, and so on.

The Mourners may be used as the start of a long quest to save a friend, or they may simply remove from play any Storyteller characters who have overstayed their welcome. If the Mourners are used against a player character, you are encouraged to design ways to free him and perhaps to set this particular group of Mourners free from their endless imprisonment.

The chains and cloaks of the Mourners are somehow aware of their surroundings, making it impossible to sneak up on a Mourners. The chains are as strong as Stygian steel, and will move on their own to attack the one chosen by the Mourners. These manacles and chains attack with the same Dice Pool as the Mourners themselves, and are considered Strength 10 for purposes of pinning a victim.

# Creatures of the Night

*Goddam creatures of the night. They never learn.*

— Mr. Gideon, *The Crow*



he Restless Dead share the World of Darkness with many other supernatural beings. Most ignore or are ignorant of the ghostly doings under their noses. Others, more aware or open-minded, have at least scraps of knowledge about the Underworld and its denizens, and the inclination

to do something with that knowledge. Some are friendly, others inimical, but all are dangerous enough for wraiths to be wary of their attentions.

## Vampires

Sleek, stylish predators of the living, vampires share with wraiths the fact that they are dead souls who refuse to rest. Vampires, however, take a very active hand in the affairs of the living world, manipulating the course of history down through the centuries in response to their ancestors' eternal war for supremacy, called the Jyhad. Younger vampires are often unaware of this grand puppet show behind the scenes, and stalk the streets for blood and other thrills; older vampires view industries, cities and even nations as their prey.

A fair number of vampires can, in some form or other, detect the presence of wraiths by looking at their unliving auras. The vampire in question must be specifically looking for wraiths at the time, but once a Restless has been spotted, he generally can be tracked as well. Some of the vampiric "clans" and "bloodlines" have powers over and knowledge of the denizens of the Underworld which surpasses that of most vampires. The sorcerous Tremere, for example, know thaumaturgical rituals that hold sway over even the Restless Dead, while both the Venetian-born Giovanni and the repulsive Samedi are students of the art of necromancy.

The mythology of vampirism that has been woven over the years contains equal parts truth and falsehood. Vampires do and must fear the sun, open flame and a stake through the heart, but on the other hand only a bare minimum are affected by garlic or running water, and a well-placed stake immobilizes instead of kills. Holy symbols of any creed or religion have no power over the so-called Kindred, unless that icon's wielder possesses True Faith.

Depending upon how recently a vampire has feasted and what (or whom) she has dined upon, her ability to perform supernatural feats varies. When they have blood to invest in their powers, they can move faster than humans, call and control animals, manifest ESP and all of the other legendary powers of literary, mythological and cinematic vampirekind.

Each vampire has a statistic called a Blood Pool, which functions in the same way that Pathos does for wraiths. Vampires refill their Blood Pools by feeding on animals, humans and even other vampires, and can use the blood thus obtained to heal damage or increase their Physical Attributes.

**Arcanoi:** Vampires have certain powers called Disciplines, which are similar but not identical to Arcanoi. The Arcanoi listings for the sample vampires below match vampiric Disciplines to those Arcanoi that are most similar. For example, a vampire listed as having Puppetry cannot in fact Skinride others, but can control their minds. If you wish to be more precise in your accounting of vampiric Discipline powers, full write-ups of those abilities can be found in *Vampire: The Masquerade* and its related sourcebooks. **In particular, information on the Giovanni and Necromancy can be found in the Vampire Players' Guide and Giovanni Chronicles 2: Blood and Fire.**

**Neonates:** The recently deceased among the Kindred, neonates rarely have more than a century of unlife under their belts. Often rebellious, they are the vampires most likely to wander into Necropoli, and many have the sort of messy feeding habits that either create or bring them into conflict with the Restless.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 7/5/3, Abilities 13/9/5, Backgrounds 7, Willpower 7, Arcanoi 4, Blood Pool 10

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume minimum ratings of 2 for all Attributes

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 1, Drive 2, Etiquette 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 2, Melee 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

**Suggested Arcanoi:** Puppetry 2, Keening 2, Argos 1

**Equipment:** Black leather jacket, shades, .22 handgun, small basement apartment

**Elders:** More experienced and powerful than neonates, elders have been vampires for three centuries or more (vampires in the intermediate social stage are called ancillae), and some are as old as a millennium. Most are the vampiric rulers of their cities, or at least in positions of considerable power with regard to both their kind and the mortal world. The Traits below are for a typical American elder; European elders tend to have slightly higher statistics.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 10/7/5, Abilities 21/13/9, Backgrounds 12, Willpower 10, Arcanoi 10, Blood Pool 20

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume minimum ratings of 3 for all Attributes

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Dodge 3, Etiquette 4, Expression 2, Intimidation 5, Melee 3, Occult 2, Stealth 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

**Suggested Arcanoi:** Puppetry 4, Keening 4, Outrage 3, Pandemonium 3, Argos 1

**Equipment:** Expensive period clothing, sword cane, entourage of ghoulish retainers, chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce Silver Ghost

## Tremere

A confederation of wizards who achieved vampirism through dark magic, the Tremere are masters of the vampiric Discipline of Thaumaturgy. Most also possess the Discipline Auspex, which allows them to perceive wraiths. Most, if not all, members of this clan are quite aware of the existence of the Restless, and will take steps if necessary to ward and guard their homes against intruding ghosts. The elders of the clan know a ritual called Ward Versus Spirits, which is a powerful barrier against the Restless.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 10/5/3, Abilities 17/9/5, Backgrounds 11, Willpower 9, Arcanoi 7, Blood Pool 12

**Suggested Attributes:** Tremere have Mental Attributes of at least 4, with the other Attributes far less important

**Suggested Abilities:** Tremere should have high ratings in areas like Occult and Enigmas, and often they have specialized Knowledges relating to magic, wraiths and other supernatural beings. Otherwise, the above statistics should serve as a good base for creating a Tremere character.

**Suggested Arcanoi:** Outrage 4, Puppetry 3, Pandemonium 3, Keening 2, Argos 1, Lifeweb 1

**Equipment:** Grimoire diskette, laptop computer, conservative business suit, Gold Card

## Giovanni

Tight-knit and not very numerous, the Giovanni are necromancers *par excellence*. Embracing strictly from within their own mortal family, the Giovanni are both proud and fanatically protective of their heritage. Those Giovanni who are not Embraced are still often privy to some or all of the family secrets, often serving as ghouls (see below).

International commerce and the Discipline of Necromancy are the two studies at which the Giovanni excel. Vampires and scholars of this clan have been handing down (or refining) knowledge of wraiths for centuries, and no other Kindred know as much about the Restless. With this in mind, a Giovanni vampire can make a potent ally for a wraith — or a powerful enemy.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 10/5/3, Abilities 17/9/5, Backgrounds 7, Willpower 7, Arcanoi 5, Blood Pool 12

**Suggested Attributes:** Giovanni vampires usually have Mental Attributes of at least 4, with secondary focus coming on Social Attributes. On the other hand, it is very rare for a Giovanni to have a rating of 1 in any Attribute; the clan values well-rounded individuals.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Bureaucracy 2, Dodge 1, Etiquette 3, Expression 1, Intimidation 3, Melee 1, Occult 4, Politics 1, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

**Suggested Arcanoi:** Puppetry 3, Keening 2, Argos 1, Lifeweb 1

**Equipment:** Tailored silk suit (Italian design), elegant handgun, Rolex, flip phone

## Samedi

Culled from the ranks of morticians, graverobbers and other dabblers with the dead, the Samedi are among the most physically revolting vampires on the face of the planet. Often employed as bodyguards by wealthy and paranoid Kindred, the Samedi deal with both Necromancy and their own, specialized Discipline of Thanatosis (which focuses on rot and other, Oblivion-friendly actions). Usually genial despite their monstrous appearance, Samedi tend to have much less formalized relations with wraiths than do the Giovanni. A Samedi is much more likely to converse with a wraith than bind one, though there have been notable exceptions to this détente of the dead.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 10/5/3, Abilities 21/9/5, Backgrounds 4, Willpower 9, Arcanoi 6, Blood Pool 10

**Suggested Attributes:** Samedi usually have Mental Attributes of 3 or above. On the other hand, a Samedi must have an Appearance rating of zero.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Dodge 1, Drive 1, Etiquette 1, Expression 1, Intimidation 4, Melee 2, Occult 4, Stealth 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 3

**Suggested Arcanoi:** Outrage 3, Puppetry 3, Argos 1, Lifeweb 1

**Equipment:** Silk top hat, rust-stained crowbar, can of disinfectant, gold pocketwatch, surprisingly large bankroll

## Necromancy

A Discipline shared by the grotesque Samedi and the refined Giovanni, Necromancy is the prime tool vampires have in dealing with the Restless. The effects of the Discipline are as follows:

Level	Effect
1	Allows recall of the last thing glimpsed by a corpse.
2	Allows a Necromancer to summon a wraith.
3	Compels a wraith to obey a Necromancer's commands.
4	Ties a wraith to a location in the Shadowlands.
5	Turns a mortal into a wraith temporarily, leaving his body as a Fetter.
6	Animates a corpse through the insertion of a Drone into the shell.
7	Allows a vampire to strike a wraith physically and do normal damage.
8	Permits the exchange of spirits between bodies.
9	Temporarily places a wraith in command of a freshly dead corpse.
10	Lets a mortal promise service beyond the grave in exchange for a favor from the Necromancer.

All Giovanni and most Samedi know at least one level of Necromancy.

## Ghouls

Halfway between life and vampirism, ghouls are mortal creatures — and not just humans — who have been fed vampiric blood without first being drained themselves. Regular feedings of Kindred blood can allow ghouls to live indefinitely and acquire some of the vampiric Disciplines. On the other hand, once her normal lifespan has passed, a ghoul must have vampiric blood in her system at all times or she will rapidly revert to her true age and, in all likelihood, crumble to dust.

**Suggested Statistics:** Ghouls are still mortal, so they should have statistics similar to those of normal human beings (or dogs, or cats, or centipedes or whatever). A few extra dots in Physical Attributes is common for ghouls, and some of the older ones might possess the equivalent of one or two dots in Arcanoi.

## Werewolves

*He wears rejection like a*

*Worn human skin suit*

*And he sees temptation like*

*Two hands that strangle love*

— Cliffs of Dooneen, “Animal Song (Mary My Mary)”

In the World of Darkness, the forests and wild places have protectors far deadlier than a cartoon bear in a ranger's hat. Forever bound up in a war against those who would despoil the wilderness, the Garou (as the werewolves call themselves) give no quarter to their enemies. With one eye on the spirit realms and the other on mankind's inexorable advance, the Garou stand between two worlds, trying desperately to serve as guardians of both.

Far from the only shapechangers on earth, but certainly the most numerous, the Garou have an oral tradition and history that dates back thousands of years before humanity's first written records. Casting themselves as the defenders of Gaia, the Earth Mother, the Garou punish those who transgress against Her. Infiltrating the cities as well as guarding the forests, werewolves see the hand of a being called the Wurm, a great spirit of destruction, behind every move made to desecrate Gaia. Garou claim to be able to sense the “taint” of this great enemy on others, and use Wurm-corruption as justification for committing acts of incredible violence against those who oppose them.

Modern Garou are divided into 13 tribes that stand against the Wurm. A 14th tribe, the Black Spiral Dancers, consists of Garou who have been corrupted and now serve the Wurm. As might be expected, each tribe has its own unique identity and agenda. The Red Talons tribe, for example, consists entirely of Garou born to wolves instead of humans, while the Fianna share a Celtic heritage. A pair of Native American tribes, the Uktena and Wendigo, (a third Native American tribe, the Croatan, was destroyed 400 years ago), are yet bitter over the theft of their lands. The technofetishist Glass Walkers stalk the hallways of corporate power, while the mangy Bone Gnawers rifle through their garbage for useful information.



**Powers:** All Garou have a variety of shapes they can assume, ranging from full human (Homid) to horror-movie wolfman (Crinos), and so on through intermediate forms to full wolf (Lupus). Always fearsome, Garou are at their most dangerous in Crinos form. This guise can reach nine feet in height, and offers incredible strength and stamina.

Garou are capable of healing almost instantly any damage inflicted upon them, unless the offending weapon is made from silver. While they can soak most aggravated damage (though such damage heals slowly), Garou cannot soak damage from silver weapons.

Granted powers called Gifts by natural spirits (some of whom serve as totems to the 13 tribes), Garou make effective use of these abilities. The effects of Gifts range from enabling a Garou to make edible stew from literally anything handy to arts of in-

credible battle prowess. Werewolf shamans can also bind spirits into objects, creating Artifact-like devices called fetishes.

With their close ties to the spirit realm, Garou can "step sideways" and enter the so-called Umbra, or spirit world. As wraiths dwell in what Garou define as the Dark or Low Umbra, which most werewolves have tremendous difficulty accessing, it is rare for a Garou to encounter a wraith on the Restless' home territory. Indeed, most werewolves have little or no truck with wraiths at all. The prime exception to this is the tribe known as the Silent Striders, Garou whose death-lore stretches back to the dim antiquity of Egypt and Meroe. Wanderers and spirit-speakers, the Striders know the secrets of reaching the Underworld and dealing with its denizens, though even the most powerful Garou rarely make the perilous journey. Additionally, many non-Strider shamans do know Rites and possess Gifts that allow them to affect wraiths or even to bind them. **More information on the Garou can be found in *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*.**

The sample statistics below are for a Silent Strider capable of journeying to the Shadowlands. It should be noted that any werewolf who reaches the Underworld is likely to be quite a specimen, even for her own remarkable breed.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 11/7/5, Abilities 21/13/9, Backgrounds 7, Willpower 7

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume ratings of 3

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 4, Athletics 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Dodge 2, Intimidation 2, Etiquette 2, Meditation 2, Melee 3, Stealth 3, Enigmas 4, Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Occult 3

**Special Rules:** Werewolves can shift back and forth between human and wolf forms. However, they can also assume the nine-foot wolfman form they call Crinos. In Crinos form, a werewolf adds three dots to all Physical Attributes, has claws and teeth that do aggravated damage, can regenerate one Health Level per turn (except for damage caused by silver, fire, magic or the teeth and claws of a supernatural entity), and is immune to Dice Pool penalties for being wounded. Humans who view one of these nine-foot monsters, or indeed any Garou in Crinos, usually fall into delirious fright. The effect is called the Delirium, and is quite similar to the Fog.

Silent Striders in Crinos form look much like depictions of the ancient Egyptian god Anubis; members of this tribe often possess supernatural gifts that allow them to travel quickly and safely to places most people can never reach.

## Mages

*There's only so much magic to go around, you know that. Why waste it on a miserable little punk like this?*

— Clive Barker, *The Thief of Always*

The reality of the World of Darkness is not static. Certain mortals, Awakened individuals collectively known as mages, can alter the fabric of reality itself in ways subtle or grandiose. How each of these wonderworkers views wraiths varies, depending upon the individual wraith and mage involved. However, there are enough mages capable of reach-

## Oblivion and the Wyrms

Occult scholars in the know often confuse the Wyrms and Oblivion. Admittedly, each is a tremendous force, and in some ways a personification of destruction, but that is the only similarity. The Wyrms are active destruction and corruption, seeking to tear down all that exists. It is not content to wait for things to fall apart; it wishes to drag all down to ruin by the force of its actions.

Oblivion, on the other hand, is patient, passive destruction. When things grow old and falter, as they all inevitably must, then and only then does Oblivion claim them. Even Spectres, in a very real sense, give themselves to Oblivion as opposed to being claimed by it.

At the end of all things, when the Wyrms have destroyed all else, it will seek to destroy the only thing that remains: itself. By doing so, it will gift itself to Oblivion.

Some theorists postulate that the Wyrms and Oblivion are bound in a tight balance, a sort of yin-yang of destruction, and that as the Wyrms grew in power Oblivion was forced to grow to match it and maintain their eternal equilibrium. However, there is little (if any) evidence to support this hypothesis, and hard proof is likely to be hard to come by.

ing across the Shroud with their powers that wraiths had best exercise some civility when dealing with them.

The society of the mages of the world is divided in four, with each faction battling or allying with the others both on Earth and in realms undreamed of. Their conflict, called the Ascension War, concerns nothing less than the spiritual Manifest Destiny of the entire human race. While the idea of Ascension itself has never been clearly defined, each of the four factions at war has very definite ideas about the sort of future it wishes to usher in.

With the exception of the mages called Marauders (all of whom seem to be certifiably insane), most workers of magick prefer to be as unspectacular as possible when performing magickal feats. Conversations wraiths have had with Euthanatos mages have yielded the notion of something called Paradox, which can best be described as the static reality of the universe snapping back to its original form. Most mages fear Paradox, and seek to avoid its reflexive attentions by making the effects of their magicks appear coincidental. Showy, or "vulgar," magicks run the risk of drawing Paradox down on the careless mage's head, to vastly detrimental effect.

**Powers:** The broad range of powers mages call upon can create practically any effect. Rather than attempting to shoe-horn such wild power into Arcanos descriptions, it is often easier to assume that any mage can accomplish any reasonable effect desired within her fields of expertise. Giving the effects difficulties from 5 to 8, the Storyteller could determine the power of the effect achieved from the number of successes rolled. Botches or even failures could incur Paradox.

Most magick does not inflict aggravated damage. The exceptions are magicks of fire, electricity and pure eldritch force (a.k.a. Prime), which inflict aggravated damage if they score three or more successes (two levels of damage per success for every level over the second). Mages should roll two to six dice when trying to determine the damage of their attacks, depending upon the power of the individual magician.

This system serves as a quick way to integrate mages into a Wraith chronicle. For more in-depth information on mages and a full explanation of the magick system that they use, see **Mage: The Ascension**. Full details of how each of the various Spheres of magick affects wraiths can be found in Chapter Nine of that book.

## Euthanatos

Numbered among the Traditions, the Euthanatos are death-mages and reincarnationists. The Tradition's stated aim is to hurry those who are suffering, or those whose existence is karmically detrimental, to their next station on the Great Wheel of Being. Euthanatos euphemistically refer to their work as the "Good Death"; others see it as murder. However, the Euthanatos generally don't take time to explain their actions to others.

Most Euthanatos take at least one trip into the Shadowlands around the time of their initiation. For the vast majority, the one trip is enough. Others, however, do return on occasion. Unfortunately, Euthanatos mages specialize in Entropy magicks, and any use

of that particular specialty (Sphere, in mage parlance) has interesting effects in a realm where Entropy itself manifests as Oblivion.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 9/6/4, Abilities 20/8/5, Backgrounds 10, Willpower 8, Magick Dice Pool 5

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume ratings of at least 3 in Physical Attributes, 2 in Social ones and 4 in Mental.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 1, Awareness 3, Brawl 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 2, Enigmas 2, Firearms 2, Intimidation 2, Meditation 1, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1

**Suggested Magicks:** Entropy (magicks of destruction and decay), Life (magicks of living things), Spirit (allowing contact with the Restless)

**Equipment:** Functional black clothing, portable tape recorder, ritual accessories, multiple concealable weapons

## Dreamspeakers

Also of the Traditions, the Dreamspeakers are more shamanistic in their approach to wraiths and other spirits. Drawn from all over the world, the Dreamspeakers regard the spirit world in a manner that bears similarities to the Garou perspective. As such, while a Dreamspeaker will occasionally deal with wraiths, she will rarely attempt to bind or destroy one. These masters of Spirit magick can occasionally visit the Underworld, but they dislike sojourning to a place where all of the spirits are those of the dead.

It is a mistake, however, to view the Dreamspeakers as merely a collection of kindly, harmless rustics. Most members of this Tradition come from societies that have been displaced and plowed under by the relentless expansion of European colonization, often sponsored by the other Traditions or the Technocracy. As such, there is more than enough rage to go around among the Dreamspeakers. It is merely a question of whom to direct it against.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 9/6/4, Abilities 20/8/5, Backgrounds 10, Willpower 8, Magick Dice Pool 5

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume ratings of at least 3 in Physical Attributes, 3 in Social and 3 in Mental.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Awareness 4, Brawl 1, Crafts 1, Dodge 1, Empathy 3, Enigmas 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Medicine 1, Meditation 3, Occult 3, Stealth 2, Streetwise 1

**Suggested Magicks:** Time (magicks of time and prophecy), Life (magicks of living things), Spirit (allowing contact with the Restless)

**Equipment:** Drum, comfortable clothing, small stash

## Void Engineers

Seeking out new things of all stripes, the Void Engineers are perhaps the wildest spirits remaining among the Technocracy. While most Technocratic mages seek to lead the Masses to Ascension by ordering reality (and ghosts have little place in such an ordered world), the Void Engineers prefer to organize, catalogue and explore. This can lead the Engineers into conflict with wraiths, as the Underworld isn't friendly to tourists or surveyors. Also, as the Engineers explore the frontiers of perception, they are constantly com-

ing up with new and exciting ways to perceive the ordinarily imperceptible. This, of course, lets them see wraiths and what they're up to, and the wraiths thus spotted aren't always thrilled that anyone among the living can keep track of them and their plots.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 9/6/4, Abilities 20/8/5, Backgrounds 10, Willpower 8, Magick Dice Pool 5

**Suggested Attributes:** Assume ratings of 3 in Physical Attributes, 2 in Social ones and 4 in Mental.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 2, Brawl 1, Computer 3, Drive 3, Enigmas 3, Firearms 3, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Repair 4, Science 4, Stealth 2

**Suggested Magicks:** Forces (magicks of elements), Prime (the core magick of creation), Spirit (allowing contact with the Restless)

**Equipment:** Portable Disruptor Cannon (Level 4 Device) — Fires Prime energy linked to Spirit magicks, allowing it to disrupt wraiths. Each success on a Dexterity + Firearms roll (provided the wielder of the cannon can actually see the wraith he's aiming for) inflicts one level of aggravated Corpus damage. Most of these devices have 10 charges.

Spirit Goggles (Level 1 Device) — These allow the hunter wearing them to see into the Shadowlands on a successful Perception + Awareness roll (difficulty 4)

Trenchcoat, camera, plastic bags for collecting specimens

## The Others

Nephandi and Marauders make up the other two factions in the Ascension War. The Nephandi in particular are of concern to wraiths, as they serve twisted, monstrous masters who seem to have many goals in common with Oblivion. Even the most hardened wraith will find it difficult to stomach working with a Nephandus once the mage's true goals are revealed. Then again, there are reliable witnesses to alliances between Nephandi and Spectres.

Marauders are madness personified, and those who are sane enough to have goals and linear thought patterns seek to bring that madness to the rest of creation. Wraiths occasionally get wrapped up in their bizarre schemes, usually to their detriment, but the Marauders generally deal more with the living. It's not that they're unaware of the presence of wraiths; indeed, they're more aware than most. It's just that the wraith population doesn't concern them.

## Changelings

*There came a woman from the fairy fort  
with a Black & Decker  
and cut down my quince-tree*

— Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, "As For the Quince"

Fae spirits wrapped in mortal flesh for protection against the cold winds of mundane existence, changelings are occasionally capable of seeing wraiths. Many changelings are chronologically young (even if their souls are old), and have not yet surrendered to a consensual reality which says that they can't possibly

have seen a ghost. This sort of innocence is particularly common among the childlings, the youngest changelings. Wilders and grumps, older examples of the kind, have generally been touched too heavily by Banality (a sort of Oblivion of the imagination) to accept the presence of ghosts, even if they once did.

Just as wraiths are driven by Pathos, changelings' unnatural existences are fueled by Glamour, a refined essence of expression or creativity. The two can often be garnered from the same source, and this can lead to either cooperation or conflict between changelings and wraiths. Practitioners of Phantasm in particular often run afoul of changelings when harvesting their precious "sand" — pure dreamstuff — which can be thought of as another manifestation of Glamour.

Changelings exist in two worlds, the mundane and the enchanted. The former is workaday existence, and changelings wear their mortal guises when moving in it. But with the application of Glamour, changelings reveal their true selves, at least to those who are also enchanted and can see them. Nor does this ensorcelled version of reality restrict itself to revealing changelings' true visages; dreams and fears given form, called chimera, remake the landscape into a riot of color and fantasy.

Divided into a pair of conflicting Courts (Seelie and Unseelie), a plethora of noble houses and social distinctions, and a riot of kith (types of fae), changeling society can prove to be almost terminally confusing to an outsider. In all likelihood a Seelie changeling is more likely to be friendly than an Unseelie one, and a noble troll is more likely to be friendly than a hungry (and omnivorous) redcap, but with changelings you never can tell....

**Powers:** While changeling magic is not necessarily as powerful as that of mages, it can pack a wallop in its own right. Often requiring a short ritual or an ingredient or three to set in motion, changeling cantrips are less about brute force than they are about trickery, misdirection and personality. That isn't to say that a cantrip couldn't conceivably have devastating effects, but rather that a changeling is more likely to convince an enemy to chase his own tail than to zorch him with a fireball.

If you don't intend to use the cantrip systems set forth in **Changeling: The Dreaming** and the **Changeling Players' Guide**, cantrips are most easily handled in a manner similar to the short version of mage magicks listed above. Changelings are immune to the effects of Paradox, but can be trapped in their own nightmares if their cantrips go wrong.

Cold iron and Banality are the things changelings fear most. The latter strips Glamour from them and drags them inexorably into the mundane world, where slowly the memory of fae existence fades. The former, though, presents a more immediate threat. Cold iron inflicts aggravated damage on changelings, and whereas death by chimerical weapons merely dumps a changeling back into the "real" world, death from a cold iron blade is permanent indeed.

## Sluagh

Unnerving dwellers in darkness, the sluagh are the gatherers of secrets and the speakers to the dead of the changeling world. Unable to raise their voices above a whisper, and fond of cobwebs and shadowy corners, the sluagh garner information from whatever source it may come. They will often trade secrets, but the kith as a whole places great value on formality and secrecy. Most sluagh have little quarrel with wraiths, but see them as superb spies and sources of information. Wraiths, in return, gain a pair of hands in the Skinlands when they make alliances with a sluagh. Unseelie members of the kith, however, can demonstrate a marked sadism, and have been known to torment a wraith's living Fetters simply for the pain it causes the wraith.

By making a Perception + Alertness roll (difficulty 7), sluagh can see into the Shadowlands (and rumor has it that they prefer the decor there to that of the Skinlands). With the expenditure of a point of Glamour, the sluagh can also converse freely with whatever wraiths are in her vicinity, and on rare occasions wraiths are even invited to the sluagh ritual of high tea.

**Character Creation:** Attributes 8/6/4, Abilities 17/13/9, Backgrounds 7, Willpower 7, Glamour 8

**Suggested Attributes:** Mental Attributes should be at least 3, as should Manipulation. Other Social Attributes should be 2 at most, and Dexterity is the most important Physical Attribute.

**Suggested Abilities:** Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Dodge 2, Empathy 2, Enigmas 3, Etiquette 2, Expression 1, Intimidation 1, Investigation 3, Stealth 3, Subterfuge 3

**Arts:** Legerdemain (Arts of illusion), Soothsay (Arts of prophecy and knowledge), Chicanery (Arts of misdirection and trickery)

## Mortals

### Force of Will

*Child, take what I say*

*With a pinch of salt*

*And protect yourself with fire*

— Kate Bush, "Lily"



Over the centuries, human willpower has enabled men and women to perform feats that have often literally defied death. Thus, it is no surprise that sheer human tenacity and stubbornness, not to mention the odd dose of concentrated will, can have powerful effects on the dead. Mortals can use their Willpower Trait to act directly against wraiths, and the effects of this tactic are often astonishing.



## Warding

Remember always to copy each of the formulae as I have put it down, and not to change it by one line or dot, not so much as a hair's breadth, lest it be rendered valueless, or worse: a broken line provides entrance for those Outside, for a broken star is the Gate of GANZIR, the Gate of Death, the Gate of the Shadows. }

— Abdul al-Hazred, *The Necronomicon*

From tar on the doorposts of Classical Athens to modern arrangements of crystals, humanity has long experimented with hundreds of different ways to keep unwanted ghosts out. In older times, pennies on the eyes of corpses or rusty nails over doorways did actually serve to ward off unwelcome wraiths, but as belief in these methods faded, so did their effectiveness. Still, the power of the old ways isn't entirely gone for those who have the Willpower to make them work.

Belief and knowledge are equally important components of any warding procedure. The mortal performing the ritual of warding must have sufficient knowledge of the subject matter at hand (Occult 3 or higher), and a firm belief that what she is doing will work. The most well-educated skeptic will not be able to ward a site, no matter how letter-perfect her ritual is. She simply won't be able to bring herself to invest Willpower in something that she knows, deep down, can't possibly work.

There are two types of defenses one can make against wraiths. Active ones are collectively known as *Forbiddances*, while passive ones are called *Wards*.

## Forbiddance

Along the lines of the classical exorcism, a Forbiddance actively drives a wraith from a haunted area. The mortal doing the Forbidding, while performing an appropriate ritual (the classic bell, book and candle works well), rolls Willpower (difficulty 7). Unless a wraith in the area spends one Willpower per success on the Forbiddance roll, he is immediately driven from the site. However, the wraith can resist the Forbiddance in progress through the use of appropriate Arcanoi. In that case, the roll is an opposed roll between the Forbiddance and the Arcanos.

A wraith who is the object of a Forbiddance must leave the affected area as soon as possible, but as soon as the exorcist's back is turned, he can return. Still, Forbiddance can buy haunted individuals some temporary relief, as well as time for more permanent measures to be taken.

## Wards

Forbiddance serves to exile wraiths already in residence; wards keep them from ever entering a place. Always centered around some sort of focus (incense, a chalk circle, etc.), wards are protective and preventative, rather than active, measures. By taking a focus and centering a ward on it, a mortal can erect a barrier blocking wraiths from entering a room, a building or, in a very few cases, even an entire city.

## Warding Chart

# of Successes	Duration
1	1 hour
2	1 day
3	1 week
4	1 month
5	3 months

When setting up a ward, the mortal creating the shield must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) and spend at least one point of temporary Willpower. The number of successes indicates how long the ward lasts, though the investment of a point of permanent Willpower can extend a ward's duration by months or even years.

The permanent Willpower score of the mortal raising the ward is the difficulty for any wraith attempting even to penetrate the perimeter of the warded area. To make the attempt, the wraith must roll her Willpower and achieve a number of successes equal to the number rolled by the mortal who raised the ward. A botch can permanently bar a wraith from entrance, and Arcanoi cannot be used from outside a warded area to affect someone inside a ward. Once a ward has been breached, the Shroud inside the warded area is considered to be 2 higher than normal, but wraiths can function normally there.

In the Shadowlands, warded areas appear to be cloaked in domes of grayish-white light. These domes appear solid, though close observation can often discern cracks or weak spots which an enterprising wraith can attempt to slip through. Otherwise, though, the ward is solid in the Shadowlands, and can be touched, leaned against and otherwise felt.

Wards do need to be renewed, though there are techniques for making these psychic barriers longer-lived or even permanent. An old ward must be taken down for a new one to be raised, and during these few moments of vulnerability, wraiths often attempt to disrupt wardings or attack the human responsible for the ritual. If a wraith successfully attacks the focus of a warding (breaking the circle, blowing out the candle, scattering the incense), the ward will immediately collapse. On the other hand, wise exorcists often leave psychic booby traps for wraiths who are too eager to wait for the ward to come down naturally.

## Seeing the Dead

Most mortals can't see wraiths at all. They only get vague impressions of ghostly presences when they're tired, drunk, injured or otherwise not quite themselves. This is both a blessing and a curse to wraiths, who are usually thankful that they pass through the mortal world unseen, but who occasionally wish that vision could pierce the Shroud. Even wraiths who actively wish to be seen (say, to deliver a warning) are often just not visible to those to whom they wish to speak.

## Innocence

Innocence is a rare thing in our world as well as the World of Darkness. Nearly extinct in anyone over the age of 12, it still can be found in children, even in a world haunted and ensorcelled. Innocence can last in children until experience and knowledge of unhappiness strip it away, but it can confer some benefits while it lasts.

On rare occasions, the truly innocent can see and even converse with wraiths moving in the Shadowlands. These moments always occur at night, usually when the innocent is alone, and generally when the mortal isn't actively concentrating on anything specific. To determine if an innocent sees a wraith, the Storyteller rolls the child's Perception (difficulty 6). Success indicates that the child sees the wraith; three or more successes allows the two to converse.

Most innocents will not react to the presence of a wraith with fear, save those wraiths or Spectres who are deliberately attempting to terrify. Part of the nature of innocence is a lack of understanding of death; the wraiths an innocent sees are just more people in her life who happen to look different, and whom no one else can talk to. Many wraiths, desperate for contact with the living, will spend long hours in conversation with children, sometimes even helping them or serving as "imaginary friends."

Innocents can also forbid wraiths to approach them without the trappings of a full Forbiddance or Warding. Just telling a wraith to "Go away!" or "Leave me alone!" is often enough, when the force of childish will is behind the command, to banish an unsuspecting wraith.

**Note:** Children are not the only innocents, even in the World of Darkness. Insanity or extremely sheltered upbringing can produce innocence in others. Malkavian vampires, however, even in the depths of their insanity, are far from innocent.

## The Benandanti

Children born with intact Cauls, the *Benandanti* are those few souls capable of seeing and even traveling to the Underworld while yet living. Based more on a mentor (*sapienza*)/disciple (*novizio*) system than any formal organization, the Benandanti meet at gatherings called *Raduni* to debate, discuss and dispute the nature of wraiths themselves.

While most of the superstitions concerning the Benandanti are not true, a member of the group does have certain supernatural abilities so long as part of his birth Caul is in his possession. Benandanti can see into the Shadowlands at all times, and are capable of occasional travel into the Underworld at night. Benandanti trapped away from their bodies at dawn fall into comas, which cannot be broken until the wandering spirits come home. Sometimes this takes years, sometimes it never happens at all.

In addition, the legendary fennel swords of the Benandanti are quite real, and can strike wraiths from the Skinlands. When Benandanti die and become wraiths (as many ironically do), they usually cross the Shroud with these weapons, as well as a host of other relics and even Artifacts. In the Underworld, fennel swords are extremely valuable Artifacts, capable of shattering most blades they cross.

The Benandanti are not unified in their perception of wraiths. The *Dannati*, who believe that wraiths are damned souls that cry out for destruction, and the *Redentori*, who seek to encourage wraiths to move beyond ghostly existence, are the two largest factions of the group, but there are literally dozens of others. Each is fanatical about its own take on the situation, and debates in *Raduni* can intensify to the point of violence.

Benandanti are rare enough that most wraiths have never seen one, but a member of the group can be sniffed out easily by a wraith with Castigate, as Benandanti diving into the Underworld have in essence no Shadow. Benandanti who make repeated trips to the Underworld, however, or who are stranded there, rapidly become indistinguishable from wraiths.

Supposedly, the Ladies of Fate are working in tandem with a small group of Benandanti, a maneuver which has upset the other Deathlords to no end. Most Benandanti wraiths align themselves neatly with Heretic or, more rarely, Renegade groups, and by working with the Benandanti, the Seven Deathlords say, the Ladies of Fate are simply arming the enemy. To date, no reply to this charge has been made.

## The Orphic Circle

A select group of 300 beings who study death and its various states, the Orphics number among their ranks mortals, mages, vampires and even wraiths. Mystically bound not to reveal the secrets of the Circle to any outsider, the Orphics study death in an attempt to understand its true nature. Every tool imaginable, from sojourns in the Underworld to drug-induced trances to sacrifices of the living and the dead, is put to use in the quest for this ultimate knowledge. Many of the members are aware of the natures of their fellows, as it is far more likely for a Circle member to know of another member's work than whether she might be mortal, mage or vampire.

Ruled by a collection of nine priests and priestesses called the Ebon Bench, the Circle looks to the legendary Orpheus as the source for its rites and ideals. The bard's journey to the Underworld to retrieve his beloved Eurydice has become transformed in the Circle's understanding to a vampire's sojourn in the Deadlands on a quest to understand the secrets of life and death. A board of 10, calling itself Kerberos, is in charge of the enlistment and vetting of new members, while two factions, the Orgiophontes (a male-dominated, rather conservative priesthood) and the Dikeia (female-dominated and in favor of returning to the Circle's Maenadic roots), struggle

for control of the Circle's direction. At the moment, the Dikeia control four seats on the Ebon Bench, and each side is marshaling allies both living and Restless.

Most of the Circle's interactions with non-member wraiths come in the spring, during the Great Festival in the Pindus Mountains of Greece. A week-long bacchanal of pure abandon, the Festival serves as a magnet for Skinriders. These sensation-seekers are often given the hosts they wish — if they agree to take part in certain of the Circle's experiments. Few wraiths hesitate to make the bargain, at least at first.

Of all of the organizations that deal with the dead, the Orphic Circle most assuredly has the best understanding of wraith society. No doubt the wraiths who are Circle members have been able to clear up a great many misconceptions that other groups hold about their kind. This accurate knowledge in the hands of a band of mortals and other, more powerful beings displeases the Hierarchy greatly, and that august body has begun to bend its efforts toward dismantling the Circle.

While the Circle's stated aim is hardly innocent, there are other, darker rumblings about what the Ebon Bench's real agenda might be. The most persistent is that the Circle is planning to drop the Shroud somehow to ring in the millennium, ushering a new age of coexistence of life and death. Part and parcel with these rumors are the Circle's dealings with the eternal being known as Diké (pronounced DEE-kay), whom Circle members see as a judge of the dead.

## The Arcanum

Less of a hunter organization and more of a sort of supernatural NSA, the Arcanum as a whole is interested only in knowledge of the supernatural. Individual members might well have their own plans for what to do with that data, but the Arcanum casts itself as a repository of knowledge and nothing more.

Founded in the late 1880s, the Arcanum has chapter houses all over the world, but bases its efforts at its Boston, London and Washington D.C. chapter houses. As firmly placed in the shadows as its subjects of study, the Arcanum focuses not only on wraiths, but also on vampires, werewolves, fae, mages, cattle mutilations, Loch Ness Monster sightings and any other incidents that so much as hint of the supernatural. However, this doesn't mean that the Arcanum's scholars and researchers are gullible or foolish. Instead, they simply refuse to discount any potential source of information, no matter how *outré* it might seem.

A century of this sort of open-minded information gathering has produced the largest collection of occult information on the planet, as well as a surprisingly accurate picture of Underworld cosmology, geography and politics. However, the Arcanum's researching strength is also its weakness, as the truths the group has gathered are caught up in a morass of half-truths, partial truths and flat-out lies about wraithly existence. The organization does have a sizeable number of imprisoned wraiths (mostly Drones) forced into manifestations; the collection is justifiably famous in occult circles.

Immortality is a pet project of many Arcanum scholars, several of whom have extended their lifespans for centuries through the use of various elixirs. Wraiths are, of course, a focus of this sort of research, and as time winds down for certain Arcanum elders, the urgency of such research increases dramatically. To date the most successful experiments have been conducted by one Jonathan Kelvin, youngest of the Arcanum's original founders. Kelvin's work involves extracting Pathos from trapped wraiths and psychically injecting it into living humans, mostly derelicts lured into the experiment by the promise of a hot meal and a warm bed. Should those experiments ever succeed (at the moment the procedure still has a 100% casualty rate), it is a certainty that the Arcanum, and perhaps other organizations, will start looking across the Shroud and seeing wraiths as nothing more than a resource to be exploited.



## Afterword

Afterword...after words...afterwards. I can't believe it's over, but my part in **Wraith: The Oblivion 2nd Edition** is just about done. Even the pesky page XXs are being hunted down and exterminated, and I think I've caught most of the errors that I accidentally inserted myself. Only posterity, and you, will be able to tell, and I suspect you'll be letting me know if I missed anything.

So now it's come time for me to write an afterword for the book that's been the centerpiece of my existence for the past six months or so. This is the moment when I'm supposed to summon up the last of my fading reserves of wit and self-possession, and write something pithy about the process by which **Wraith 2nd** came to be.

I'd rather not do that. **Wraith** has traveled a long and difficult road, steered by many and divers hands. It's had some triumphs and some, well, less than triumphant moments. It's weathered storms and crises and a lot of human pain, not to mention a malevolent, creative curse which I don't really believe in but which I could swear is peeking over my left shoulder as I write this. Now is not the time for kicking up my heels in celebration of the great work's end, but rather the moment when I can really appreciate how lucky I am to have gotten the chance to do this. 20 years from now I'll be able to take a dog-eared copy of this book off the shelf, show it to my

hypothetical children and say, "I did this." These days, very few people get a chance to create something that might last.

So what is there to say? Only that I'm proud of my work on this project, and I'm proud to have worked with everyone else who helped create this. That means everyone from the original creators of the game down through the freelancers whose first professional assignment was helping to re-create **Wraith**. There's a lot of passion that went into this book, quite literally from around the world, and I think that the dedication, talent and effort of those who created it are clearly evident.

In any case, here it is, cranky and newborn. The book you hold in your hands is the product of a lot of late nights and early mornings. It's been raised on far too much caffeine and junk food, not to mention a surfeit of Lovecraft and Blackwood and M.R. James. A lot of people have fussed over it and helped out with the delivery, and the general consensus is that even if the kid is a little weird looking, he's going to turn out all right.

In other words, it's time to shove the metaphors. What you've got in your hands is a good game. Play it. Enjoy it. Maybe even tell your friends about something your character did that you're so damned proud of that you want to share it. I can think of no higher praise for the many people who have combined their skills and efforts for this book than that.

Richard E. Dansky



# SHADOW

Psyche:  
Shadowguide Player:

Thorns

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Angst

○○○○○○○○○○  
□□□□□□□□

Psyche Willpower

○○○○○○○○○○

Archetype:

Dark Passions

\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○  
\_\_\_\_\_○○○○○

# Wrath

## THE OBLIVION

Name:  
Player:  
Chronicle:

Nature:  
Demeanor:  
Shadow:

Life:  
Death:  
Regret:

### Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●○○○○	Charisma	●○○○○	Perception	●○○○○
Dexterity	●○○○○	Manipulation	●○○○○	Intelligence	●○○○○
Stamina	●○○○○	Appearance	●○○○○	Wits	●○○○○

### Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledge	
Alertness	○○○○○	Crafts	○○○○○	Bureaucracy	○○○○○
Athletics	○○○○○	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	○○○○○	Etiquette	○○○○○	Enigmas	○○○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Investigation	○○○○○
Dodge	○○○○○	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Meditation	○○○○○	Linguistics	○○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Medicine	○○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	○○○○○	Occult	○○○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Repair	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Stealth	○○○○○	Science	○○○○○

### Advantages

Backgrounds

Passions

○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○

Arcanoi

Corpus

Fetters

○○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○○○○○
○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	○○○○○
○○○○○		○○○○○
○○○○○	Willpower	○○○○○
○○○○○	○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○	○○○○○
○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	○○○○○
○○○○○		○○○○○
○○○○○	Pathos	○○○○○
○○○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	
○○○○○		

Experience

# Index

## A

Abilities 99, 119  
  Knowledges 124  
    Bureaucracy 124  
    Computer 124  
    Enigmas 125  
    Investigation 125  
    Law 126  
    Linguistics 126  
    Medicine 126  
    Occult 127  
    Politics 127  
    Science 127  
Skills 121  
  Crafts 122  
  Drive 122  
  Etiquette 122  
  Firearms 123  
  Leadership 123  
  Meditation 123  
  Melee 123  
  Performance 123  
  Repair 124  
  Stealth 124  
Talents 119  
  Alertness 119  
  Athletics 119  
  Awareness 119  
  Brawl 120  
  Dodge 120  
  Empathy 120  
  Expression 120  
  Intimidation 120  
  Streetwise 121  
  Subterfuge 121  
Action Scenes 247  
Actions 82  
  Extended 84  
  Multiple 84, 247  
  Multiple Attempts 85  
  Resisted 84  
  Taking 248  
  Teamwork 85  
Advantages 99  
Afterword 291  
Angst 169, 174  
  Gaining/Losing 175  
Antagonists 205, 270  
Appearance 101  
Arcanoi 133  
  Alternate Arts 133  
  Botches 134  
Arcanos Markings 134  
Archetypes 97, 112  
Argos 136  
  Botches 136  
  Enshroud 137  
  Flicker 137  
  Jump 137

  Orienteering 136  
  Oubliette 137  
  Phantom Wings 137  
  Tempest Threshold 137  
  Tempestpeek 137  
Armor 262  
  Ratings Chart 262  
Artifacts 45  
Artificers 144  
Attack 257  
Attributes 98, 116  
  Mental 118  
    Intelligence 118  
    Perception 118  
    Wits 119  
  Physical 116  
    Dexterity 116  
    Stamina 116  
    Strength 116  
  Social 117  
    Appearance 118  
    Charisma 117  
    Manipulation 117  
Attunement 135

## B

Backgrounds 99, 127  
  Allies 128  
  Artifacts 128  
  Contacts 128  
  Eidolon 129  
  Haunt 129  
  Legacy 130  
  Memoriam 131  
  Mentor 131  
  Notoriety 131  
  Relic 132  
  Status 132  
Barghests 52, 275  
Being 272  
Brawling Chart 263  
Brawling Complications 260  
Byways 36

## C

Castigate 138  
  Botches 138  
  Bulwark 138  
  Coax 139  
  Dark Secrets 138  
  Defiance 139  
  Housecleaning 139  
  Purify 139  
  Soulsight 138  
Catharsis 176  
  Rules 176  
Chains 46  
Chanteurs 146  
Character Creation 93  
  Chart 100  
  Shadow 166  
Character Development 226  
Character Sheet 292  
  Sample 103

Charon 60  
Charon's Law 52  
Chronicle 204  
  Endings 221  
Chronicle Concepts 207  
Circles 47, 102  
Citadels 40  
Coldheart 71  
Combat 233, 256  
  Complications 258  
  Summary 263  
Conflict 211  
Corpus 132  
Corpus, Permanent 133, 232  
Corpus States 232  
Corpus, Temporary 133  
Creatures of the Night 281  
  Changelings 286  
  Ghouls 283  
  Mages 284  
    Dreamspeakers 285  
    Euthanatos 285  
    Void Engineers 285  
  Vampires 281  
    Giovanni 282  
    Samedi 282  
    Tremere 282  
  Werewolves 283  
Crossover 215

## D

Damage 232  
  Aggravated 232  
  Normal 232  
Dark Arcanoi 272  
Dark Kingdoms 39  
Dark Passions 170, 180  
  Creation 170  
Death 235  
Deathlords 43  
Deathmarks 46  
Decree of the Breaking, The 55  
Dice Pool 81  
  Splitting 84  
Dictum Mortuum, The 68  
Difficulty 83  
Dodging 257  
Domains 39  
Dramatic Systems 248  
  Mental 254  
    Dream Interpretation 254  
    Research 255  
    Search 255  
    Track 255  
  Physical 248  
    Climbing 248  
    Feats of Strength 249  
    Hotwiring 249  
    Jumping 250  
    Pursuit 250  
    Repair 250  
    Shadowing 251  
    Sneaking 251  
    Stunt Driving 251

Social 252  
 Credibility 252  
 Fast-Talk 252  
 Interrogation 252  
 Oration 253  
 Performances 254  
 Seduction 254

Drones 43

**E**

Embody 140  
 Botches 140  
 Ghostly Touch 140  
 Life-in-Death 141  
 Maintain the Material Form 141  
 Materialize 141  
 Phantom 141  
 Statue 141  
 Whispers 140

Example of Character Creation 102  
 Example of Play 265, 269  
 Example of Shadow Creation 173  
 Experience Points 226  
 Chart 228  
 Shadow Experience 231  
 Chart 231

**F**

Falling 234  
 Far Shores, The 38  
 Fatalism 142  
 Botches 142  
 Fatal Vision 143  
 Foreshadow 143  
 Guesswork 143  
 Interpretation 143  
 Kismet 142  
 Luck 143

Ferryman 57, 61  
 Oath of the, 62

Fetters 41, 101, 216, 230  
 Losing 230  
 Resolving 231

Fire 234  
 Firefight Complications 258  
 Fishers, The 67  
 Flaying, The 71  
 Fog, The 240  
 Chart 241

Forbiddance 288  
 Freebie Points 101  
 Chart 101  
 Shadow 170  
 Chart 170

**G**

Golden Rule, The 80  
 Gorool 75  
 Guilds, The 53, 68  
 Breaking, The 54  
 Lesser Guilds 57  
 Listing 58  
 War of the Guilds 53

**H**

Harbingers 136  
 Harrowings 183  
 and Angst 175  
 Cosmology 184  
 Destruction 188  
 Escape 185  
 Extended 189  
 Group 189  
 Storytelling 218  
 Recommended Techniques 220  
 Systems and Targets 186  
 Targeted 186

Haunters 154  
 Haunts 35  
 Healing 232  
 Heretics 47, 49, 69  
 Notable Cults 50

Hierarchy, The 48, 50, 68  
 Judiciary 52  
 Sentencing and Punishment 52

Historia Popularis Stygiae 59  
 Holocaust, The 74  
 Horror, Terror and Fear 200  
 Horses of the Dead 67

**I**

Inhabit 144  
 Botches 144  
 Claim 145  
 Empower 145  
 Gremlinize 145  
 Ride the Electron Highway 144  
 Sense Gremlin 144  
 Shellride 144  
 Surge 144

Initiative 248, 257  
 Injury 231  
 Sources 233

**K**

Keening 146  
 Ballad 146  
 Botches 146  
 Crescendo 147  
 Dirge 146  
 Muse 147  
 Perfect Pitch 146  
 Requiem 147  
 Sotto Voce 146

**L**

Labyrinth, The 36, 61  
 Lady of Fate 60  
 Legion Ranks 51  
 Anacreon 51  
 Centurion 51  
 Legionnaire 51  
 Marshal 51  
 Overlord 51  
 Regent 51

Legions, The 51

Listing 51  
 Lexicon 24, 86  
 Lifeweb 148  
 Botches 148  
 Locate Fetter 148  
 Sense Strand 148  
 Sever Strand 149  
 Soul Pact 149  
 Splice Strand 149  
 Web Presence 148

Live-Action 20  
 Rules 20

Lux Veritas 64

**M**

Maelstroms  
 37, 65, 68, 71, 74, 75, 234

Maneuver Creation 262  
 Masks 46  
 Masquers 150  
 Melee Complications 259  
 Metaphysics 41  
 Midnight Express, The 40  
 Moliat 150  
 Bodyspace 151  
 Botches 150  
 Glow 150  
 Imitate 150  
 Martialry 151  
 Rend 151  
 Return of Death's Visage 150  
 Sculpt 151

Monitors 148  
 Mood 203

**N**

Necropoli 39, 72  
 Nhudri 62  
 Nihilis 36

**O**

Oblivion 32  
 Oboli 46  
 Oracles 142  
 Outrage 152  
 Botches 152  
 Death's Touch 152  
 Leap of Rage 152  
 Obliviate 153  
 Ping 152  
 Stonehand Punch 152  
 Wraithgrasp 152

**P**

Pandemonium 154  
 Befuddlement 154  
 Botches 154  
 Dark Ether 154  
 Foul Humour 155  
 Sense Chaos 154  
 Tempus Fugit 155  
 Weirdness 154

- Pardoners 138
- Passions 41, 100, 216, 229
  - Losing 229
  - Resolution 229
- Pathos 101
- Perceptions 236
- Phantasm 156
  - Agon 157
  - Botches 156
  - Dreams of Sleep 157
  - Elysia 156
  - Lucidity 156
  - Phantasmagoria 157
  - Sleepsense 156
  - Sudden Movement 158
- Plasmics 276
  - Ailerons 277
  - Cerements 278
  - Kraken 279
  - Mourners 279
  - Shroudrippers 278
  - Tindelhounds 276
- Prelude 105
- Proclamation of Reason 70
- Proctors 140
- Props 203
- Puppeteers 158
- Puppetry 158
  - Botches 158
  - Detect Possession 158
  - Master's Voice 158
  - Obliterate the Soul 159
  - Rein in the Mind 159
  - Skinride 158
  - Sudden Movement 158

## Q

- Quick, The 235, 287
  - Arcanum, The 290
  - Benandanti 289
  - Orphic Circle, The 290

## R

- Reapers 43
- Relics 44
- Renegades 47, 48, 64
  - Notable Gangs 48
- Resolution 257
- Restless, The 40
  - Domems 43
  - Enfants 42
  - Gaunts 43
  - Lemures 43
  - Status and Society 42
    - Factions 47
- River of Death, The 37
- Rolling Dice 81
  - Example Rolls 86
- Romance 202
- Rule of Ouch, The 232

## S

- Sandmen 156
- Scenes 246
- Setting 32
- Shade Powers 272
- Shadow Sheet 291
  - Sample 174
- Shadow, The 23, 165
  - and Eidolon 180
  - Archetypes 166
- Shadowguiding 19, 166, 177, 180
  - Dos and Don'ts 180
  - Responsibilities 177
  - Techniques 178
  - Temptations 178
  - Variations 181
- Shadowlands, The 35
- Shroud 35, 240
  - Chart 240
- Soaking 258
- Soulforged Goods 44
- Soulforging 66
- Souls 33, 44
  - Trading In 33
- Special Maneuvers 261
- Specialties 112
- Specialty 98
- Spectres 58, 270
  - Doppelgangers 270
  - Malfeans 275
  - Mortwights 274
  - Nephwracks 275
  - Shades 271
  - Striplings 274
- Spooks 152
- Story 210
- Storyteller 196
- Storytelling
  - Advanced Techniques 213
- Stygia 36, 63
- Stygian Steel 234
- Successes 83
  - Automatic 84
- Sundering, The 60

## T

- Tempest, The 36
- Themes 199
- Thorns 170, 182
  - Aura of Corruption 171
  - Bad Luck 172
  - Dark Allies 170
  - Death's Sigil 171
  - Devil's Dare 173
  - Freudian Slip 173
  - Infamy 170
  - Pact of Doom 171
  - Shadow Call 171
  - Shadow Familiar 173
  - Shadow Life 173

- Shadow Traits 171
- Shadowed Face 172
- Shadowplay 172
- Spectre Prestige 170
- Tainted Relic 170
- Tainted Touch 172
- Trick of the Light 172
- Thralls 43, 72
- Time 81
- Tragedy 200
- Traits 111
  - Ratings 82
- Transcendence 236
- Turns 246

## U

- Underworld, The 21, 32
  - Construction 34
- Usurers 160
- Usury 160
  - Assessment 160
  - Botches 160
  - Charitable Trust 161
  - Early Withdrawal 161
  - Exchange Rate 161
  - Investment 161
  - Transfer 160

## V

- Veinous Stair, The 38

## W

- Warding 288
- Wards 288
- Weapons
  - Firearms 261
  - Melee 260
- Willpower 101
- Wraith Characteristics 22
  - Deathsight 22
  - Insubstantiality 23
  - Lifesight 22
  - Sharpened Senses 23
- Wraiths 21

# THE STORYTELLING GAME OF PASSION AND HORROR SECOND EDITION

THIS ISN'T HEAVEN.

THIS ISN'T HELL.

THIS ISN'T ANYTHING YOU COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

DEATH WASN'T THE END.

DEATH WASN'T THE ANSWER.

DEATH WAS JUST THE BEGINNING.

## SO WHAT DO YOU DO?

DO YOU LISTEN TO THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR  
HEAD TELLING YOU JUST TO LET GO?

OR DO YOU STILL FIGHT,  
STILL LOVE,

STILL FEEL THE PASSION  
THAT WON'T LET YOU REST?

OBLIVION'S THE EASY WAY OUT.  
LIFE AFTER DEATH IS HARD.

## C H O O S E .

YOU HAVE ETERNITY TO WEIGH THE CONSEQUENCES.

# WRAITH: THE OBLIVION™

IT'S NOT ABOUT DEATH.

IT'S ABOUT WHAT COMES AFTER.



USA

-5 WW 6600



Printed in Canada



780 Park North Blvd  
Suite 100, Clarkston,  
Georgia 30021, USA  
[www.white-wolf.com](http://www.white-wolf.com)