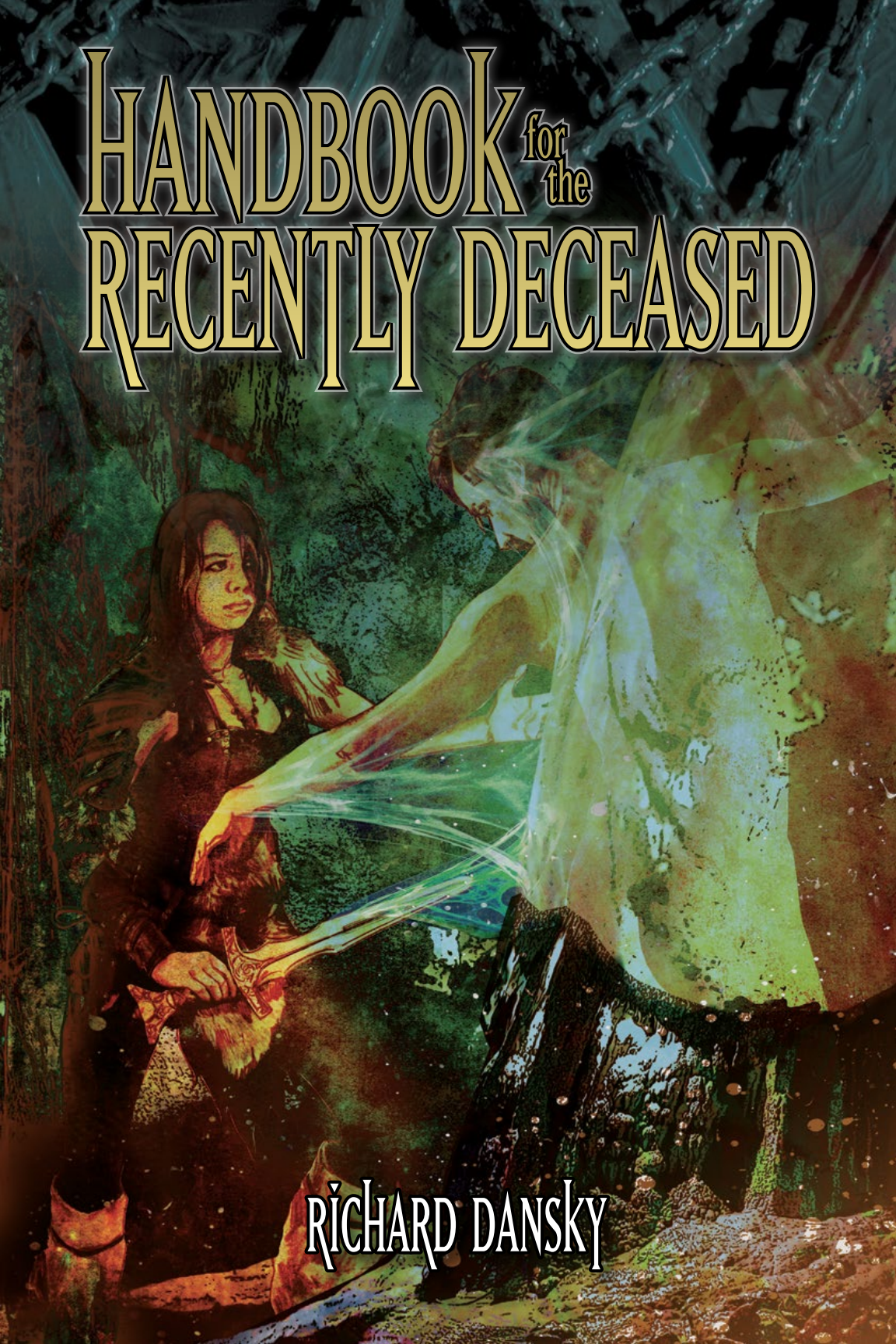


HANDBOOK^{for the} RECENTLY DECEASED



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Dedication

For all the players who ever wondered “What happens now...”



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You're Dead!

The **Handbook for the Recently Deceased** serves two purposes. On one hand, it's a guide to playing and storytelling characters who are new to the Underworld, with an eye to chronicles focused on the newly dead. On the other, it lends a helping hand to new **Wraith** players and Storytellers who may be having a little difficulty getting going. The book is broken into three sections, one each for players, Shadowguides, and Storytellers.

Part One is for players. It talks about how to address the challenges of playing **Wraith** for the first time, focusing on specific challenges like getting used to **Wraith's** metaphysics and learning how to address Passions and Fetters. It also touches on role-playing tidbits for players of newly created wraiths, on the experience of being Reaped into the Shadowlands, and how that affects play.

Part Two is for Shadowguides stepping into the role for the first time. It discusses everything from how to create a Shadow's voice to how to run your first (though hopefully not your last) Harrowing. On the roleplaying side, it also goes into the development of the Shadow from the first moments; how it starts communicating with the Psyche, how it discovers its Thorns and Dark Passions, and more.

Part Three is for Storytellers. Like the other two sections, it contains information for beginning Storytellers and for Storytellers running a chronicle for freshly reaped wraiths. It pays special attention to working with Passions and Fetters, the backbone of any story featuring the recently (and not so recently) dead.

Even the most experienced among the Quick and the Dead will find something new in this book.

Part One: Playing the Recently Deceased

You're Dead, and That's OK

The first thing to remember is that your **Wraith** character is dead, and that's just fine. It doesn't mean your character has failed somehow; rather, it means they're one of the few with the tenacity and drive to hang on after the Grim Reaper paid them a visit. Just by existing as a wraith, they're already remarkable.

What your character is getting is something rare and precious: a second chance. It's a second chance to set right what they did wrong in the world, or maybe just a second chance to do something meaningful, but it's a chance to *do* something. Being a wraith isn't just waiting around hopelessly for Oblivion to come calling, it's all the things you do in the face of Oblivion's presence to show that existence — specifically, *your* existence — matters. That's the essential truth of **Wraith**.

Bearing that in mind, the world of **Wraith** can be overwhelming for a new player. What follows here is some advice for dipping your toe in the waters in a way that makes sliding into the game easier and less intimidating.

Bad News from the Afterlife

The odds are slim that your character is going to know what to expect on the other side. Maybe if they were a medium or an afterlife researcher they might have some inklings, but beyond that, chances are that what they encounter is completely new to their experience. As such, it's generally going to take some time for a new wraith to acclimate. In other words, they're going to have a lot of questions. How those get answered can go a long way toward making onboarding with **Wraith** a lot easier.

Part of the fun of the game is discovery and exploration, learning what this new world you've been shoved unceremoniously into is like, and figuring out how to survive in it. That being said, there's always the risk of getting force-fed from the firehose, an endless string of terms and rules that can drown the fun intrinsic to playing. That's what you — and your Storyteller — should strive to avoid.

With that in mind, feel free to ask questions, both in character and out. Your Storyteller can decide what you should know versus what your character should, but questions of mechanics should always be on the table. You may need to discover the answers to your questions in-game, but asking is still the right idea!



THE EXISTING PARADIGM

Pretty much everyone has some idea as to what happens after they die. It might be a religiously inspired belief, a spiritual conception, or even nothingness, but most humans have given at least some thought as to what comes next. The fact that the afterlife as presented in **Wraith** doesn't match any of those preconceptions can come as a tremendous surprise. Reconciling what one was expecting with the harsh reality of Reapers, Shadows, and Stygia can be a shock to any wraith, let alone one who had strong beliefs about what was coming next.

How Did I Get Here?

The process of becoming a wraith is deceptively simple: Die with unfinished business so pressing that you're anchored to the lands of the living, and you become a wraith. These can be regrets, unfulfilled calls for vengeance, or overwhelming love — the details matter less than the fact that the emotion — the Passion — behind it is stronger than death.

If that's the case, your soul materializes in the Shadowlands, wrapped inside a protective Caul. The Caul cushions the shock of arrival on a new plane of existence; however, it's almost impossible to break out of on your own. Generally, new wraiths require the assistance of others, be they friendly or otherwise, to help you out. Once released from your Caul, you are known as an *Enfant* (among other things), and you start the process of becoming a fully-fledged denizen of the Underworld.

Where you pop up in the afterlife is an interesting question. Some wraiths cross over right at the location where they died. Others find themselves at their strongest Fetter. And a few are just scattered in places that seem random, but these inevitably turn out to be significant, as if the hand of Fate (or the Ladies thereof) had reached out and plucked them into existence at just the right spot for great — or terrible — things to happen there.

Getting Reaped

As noted above, very few wraiths escape their own Cauls without help. The vast majority are Reaped, which is to say someone cuts the Caul open and helps them out.

The process of getting Reaped can be overwhelming. The new *Enfant* goes from the semi-sensory deprivation of the Caul into their new existence without warning or



preparation. The first thing the new wraith sees (besides their Reaper) is the Shadowlands, the sad, decayed mirror of the living world. Throw in the effects of Lifesight and Deathsight, and the world is barely recognizable, a shockingly different landscape than the one the wraith is used to. As such, it makes sense for a new wraith to be stunned for a minute or two as they try to process all the new information their senses are feeding them.

And then there's the Reaper. Some are kind, but some are not. It all depends on what sort of chronicle your Storyteller wants to run. A helpful Reaper can fill you in on the basics of the Underworld while you acclimate and help you adjust. A neutral one may just turn you loose to find your own answers. And an unfriendly one can clap you in irons and try to haul you off to the forges.

What Do I Do Now?

The Underworld's a big place, and there's a lot to do in it. It's easy to be overwhelmed by the possibilities. Fortunately, new wraiths are confined to the Shadowlands in their initial time in the Underworld, keeping their choices limited but clear. Some options include:

Tend to your Fetters — This is an easy one. Your Fetters are what tie you to the Skinlands; they're the things your character cares about so much that they held them back after they died. Just defending them from peril can be a full-time job, depending on the circumstances you left them in. It's perfectly acceptable to ignore

REAPED INTO CHAINS

There's a very good chance a new wraith is going to get shackled and hauled off as fodder for the forges. There is a similarly high chance that this not the intended arc of the chronicle. New players should look for a chance to escape or some other intervention that will shortcut the trip to the forges and free your character. Be alert for the possibility and get ready to act when the Storyteller gives you the opportunity. You may not get more than one...

Stygia, the politics of the Underworld, and everything else in order to take care of your own business. Ideally, you're with a group that can work with that decision, maybe one with shared Fetters.

Focusing on Fetters means staying in the Shadowlands and staying close to the lands of the living. In gameplay terms, that means potentially interacting with mortals (and being careful about Dictum Mortuum violations) and affecting the living world as your Fetters demand. It also means interacting with other wraiths who have the same idea you do, and quite possibly the representatives of the local Necropolis. Encounters with Spectres are likely to be rare, but your character's relative limitations may mean trying to keep Fetters safe stretches your character's limits and ingenuity.

Get Involved Locally — Odds are there's a wraith community where you crossed over, and there's always a place for a hardworking soul (assuming you avoid the forges). Signing on with a legion at the local Necropolis can serve as an introduction to local intrigue while you get your feet wet with the Hierarchy. Odds are you'll have fewer chances to interact with the Skinlands — your coworkers will be watching for those pesky Dictum Mortuum violations — but you'll still have access to your Fetters so you can keep an eye on them.

Plus, there's always the possibility of a Maelstrom, in which case having the swords of the local Legionnaires at your back is probably a good thing.

Join the Welcoming Committee — Odds are, someone helped you escape your Caul. Now it's your turn to return the favor, searching the landscape for new wraiths and helping them out — preferably before other, less friendly Reapers find them. (Or you could go the unfriendly route yourself...) If you're feeling less sociable, you can go out looking for relics, some of which are no doubt useful or valuable. Of course, you won't be the only one on the search, and the competition can bring you into conflict with other scavengers. It can also introduce you to local

wraiths dwelling outside of the Necropolis, such as a Renegade cell or a Heretic cult. They might be friendly. They might not. Either way, it's likely to be an interesting encounter, and a jumping-off point for further adventures.

Burn It All Down — You might get a taste of the Hierarchy, dislike it, and dedicate your afterlife to tearing it down. You wouldn't be the first wraith to get this idea, nor will you be the last. Maybe you can search for allies in the Necropolis, wraiths who are just looking for the right leader (or leaders) to rise up. Or maybe hardened Renegades come calling for you to recruit you into their fight.

You're Not Alone

Odds are you're playing as part of a group of wraiths, called a Circle. Ideally, your Circle gives you companionship, assistance, and someone to watch your back in the Underworld. But being part of a Circle means that you don't have to make decisions or face the future alone. Instead, you can make group decisions about what to do and whom to do it with.

There are lots of ways to build a Circle. One of the easiest is to have all of the characters cross over at the same time, potentially from the same incident, and then get Reaped together. Alternatively, shared Fetters or Passions are a good way to weave a group of disparate wraiths together. And sometimes it's just fate (and the Storyteller) that brings everyone together with a shared crisis or foe.

Playing as part of a Circle comes with its own benefits and restrictions. On the bright side, you've got companions in the Underworld, wraiths who hopefully complement your skills and powers and who are at least as interested in helping you survive as you are in helping them. On the other hand, sometimes you've got to rein in your goals and desires, subjugating them to what the group decides to do. This can be particularly maddening where a Passion or a Fetter is involved. Healthy Circles make room for wraiths to take care of their own business as well as the group's.

Playing Your Passions

Your Passions are at the heart of your character, literally the drives that have enabled you to exist as one of the restless dead, the motives stronger than death that define your existence. Roleplaying your Passions is not only great storytelling; it's also a way to regain Pathos and strengthen your character.

That doesn't mean you have to religiously follow the text of your Passions to the exclusion of all else. Each Passion is written with three parts: the Passion itself, the emotion at the core of the Passion, and the relative strength of the Passion. The last part is the easiest to deal with. The higher the number, the more important the Passion is to you and the better your chance of regaining Pathos by following it.



PASSION VERSUS PASSION

If two wraiths in a Circle have opposing Passions, things can get tricky. However, just because their Passions are at odds doesn't mean they have to be. There could be a truce called on the matter of these Passions, whereby neither wraith actively tries to fulfill them. Ultimately, though, it's up to roleplaying (perhaps with assistance from the Storyteller) to make sure that Passions don't set the Circle members at each other's throats from the start of the chronicle.

The core emotion is a little trickier. Choosing the right emotion for you is the first step. If Love drives your character's Passion, they will behave differently to if it were Guilt or Jealousy, for instance. You may wish to consider the nuances between these core emotions, the reasons behind why your Passion so strongly connects to that emotion and not another, and the kinds of activities the character will undertake driven by this emotion.

If your character acts in a way consistent with the core emotion at the heart of a Passion, even if they're not doing exactly what the Passion says, you can try to regain some Pathos. For example, if your Passion reads "Protect My Family (Love) 5" and you do something that isn't directly related to your family but is, in your opinion, done out of Love, you can petition the Storyteller for the opportunity to roll for Pathos. It's a judgement call for the Storyteller as to whether they'll allow you to do so, but as long as you don't abuse the system, it's generally pretty straightforward.

Finally, there's the letter of the Passion. As in the example above, this means literally doing something to protect your family. Doing exactly what the Passion describes is the easiest way to regain Pathos. It's also in line with your character, so you get power and roleplaying bundled up into one convenient package.

However, you need to balance your desire to take care of your Passions with the needs of your Circle. Charging off alone to take care of your business is a great way to get yourself into trouble. It's better for the group to sort out what they want to do together, especially if they have overlapping Passions (or Fetters). Of course, that means revealing your Passions and Fetters to other wraiths, which is something you may not want to do...

Playing Your Fetters

A Fetter is a person, place, or thing that anchors a wraith to the Shadowlands. Every new wraith has Fetters, while older wraiths tend to lose or resolve theirs as the long, slow years fade into the past. A Fetter can be a group of people ("My

Family” is a common one) but it must remain a small group. Likewise, it can be a specific place, but something larger than a few buildings stretches the definition. The best Fetters are singular and easily identifiable — an individual, a home, or a beloved car. Abstract nouns are right out. One cannot have the notion of “Justice” as a Fetter. A good way to gut check is this: If you can build a Passion around it as the core emotion, it probably shouldn’t be a Fetter.

Playing Fetters is mainly a case of keeping them safe, and that means getting up in their business. As every wraith quickly learns, the Dictum Mortuum proscribes interference in the Skinlands, but for many wraiths, the temptation to protect — or benefit — their Fetters proves irresistible. But there’s more that you can do besides directly interfere. You can simply keep an eye on them, which, depending on how things go, may become a full-time job. Alternatively, you can protect them in the Underworld from wraiths (and Spectres) who wish to do them harm.

The one thing you should not do is reveal what your Fetters are to another wraith, even one in your Circle, without a very good reason to do so. Your Fetters are some of the most important elements in your afterlife, and some of your greatest sources of vulnerability. They can be used against you, held hostage, damaged, or even destroyed to plunge you into a Harrowing. Letting another wraith know what even one of your Fetters is opens you up to great danger. To share knowledge of a Fetter is an expression of supreme trust.

How the Underworld Works

Being a wraith involves operating on a different level of reality from the one inhabited by the Quick: living, breathing humans. While they’re restricted to the Shadowlands for the first few days of their experience as restless dead, wraiths ultimately can travel between the different layers of the Underworld. Each layer has its own unique characteristics, and in some case, special rules.

The Skinlands — These are the lands of the living. A wraith sees them as faded, grim, and tattered due to the results of Death sight, though living mortals stand out brightly due to Life sight. The Skinlands are full of solid objects that a wraith can pass through with minimal damage (see “The Rule of Ouch,” **Wraith: The Oblivion 20th Anniversary Edition** p. 293) and mortals going about their business completely unaware of what lurks on the other side.

The Shroud — The Shroud is the metaphysical membrane that separates the Skinlands from the Shadowlands, and the lands of the living from those of the dead. It does not have a physical existence — you can’t bump your nose on the Shroud — but it resists attempts to reach through it from either direction. Wraiths are forbidden from trying to reach across the Shroud by the Dictum Mortuum, though in practice, wraiths often merely pay lip service to this law. Certain Guilds,

such as the Puppeteers, specialize in cross-Shroud intervention, and as such must be very careful in exercising their powers.

The Shadowlands — The Shadowlands are the lands of the dead. They are separated from the Skinlands by the Shroud. They overlap the Skinlands like a blanket, allowing wraiths to see (and if necessary, reach) through the Shroud. The Shadowlands are a haunted landscape, cold and decaying. The ghosts of destroyed buildings are present here, as are the ghosts of objects; all these are solid to wraiths, who cannot materialize through them. Wraiths who have lost all of their Fetters can no longer stay in the Shadowlands and find themselves returned to Stygia — or the Tempest — after only a short visit.

The Tempest — The Tempest is the eternal, ferocious storm of memory that rages between the Skinlands and the deeper Underworld. Brave, foolish, or desperate souls can attempt to cross it directly; others use safe paths through the storm called Byways. The Tempest is full of the flotsam of the Underworld. It's haunted by entities called Plasmics. Spectres can also be found in the Tempest, as they like to waylay travelers on Byways. The largest of the Byways is the Great River of the Dead, which leads to Stygia, the capital city of the Empire of the western dead. Wraiths can access the Tempest through nihilis, small tears in the fabric of reality. However, there is no guarantee where the nihil will lead to, or what's waiting on the other side.



Stygia — Stygia is the capital city of the Dark Kingdom of Iron, a massive metropolis built onto a series of stable islands in a calm area of the Tempest. This is where wraiths who have lost their Fetters reside. It's also where the first Ferryman and only Emperor of Stygia Charon dwelt, where the great smith Nhudri labors, and where the present masters of Stygia, the Deathlords, hold their councils. Stygia is walled and fortified against Maelstroms, the storms that come boiling up from the Tempest bringing hosts of Spectres riding their winds. The ocean that laps against Stygia's coast is called the Sea of Shadows.

Dark Kingdoms — Stygia is just one of many so-called Dark Kingdoms of the dead. The others can be found on their own islands in the Tempest. Some have made contact with Stygia; others remain cloaked in the eternal storm. Travel between Dark Kingdoms through the Tempest is lengthy and dangerous, and few even attempt it.

The Far Shores — Distant islands in the Tempest across the Sea of Shadows. Many souls thought they were Paradise — or Hell. Charon declared them a sham, ruled by wraiths claiming divine status, but still, some wraiths set out across the waters to try to reach them.

The Labyrinth — Deep in the heart of the Tempest is an endless maze gnawed out of the stuff of raw creation. This is the Labyrinth, and it is where Spectres dwell. Any nightmare you can imagine — and plenty you can't — can be found within its ever-shifting walls. At its center is the Void, the mouth of Oblivion, though which all things must eventually pass.

Whose Side Am I On?

In **Wraith**, you don't have to particularly be on anyone's side. The core of the game is about personal passions and conflict, after all. But the Underworld is a dangerous place, so it's good to have someone to watch your back (besides your Shadow). There are three main factions in Stygia — the Hierarchy, the Renegades, and the Heretics — and there are pros and cons to aligning with each. Remember that even if you don't see yourself as a Hierarchy wraith or a Renegade doesn't mean that someone else won't see you that way...

The Hierarchy — The Hierarchy isn't all there is to Stygia, it just seems that way. Technically, the Hierarchy is the term for the bureaucracy and military that keep the empire running. The Hierarchy is also the strongest bulwark against Oblivion, made up of the soldiers of the legions who keep Spectres at bay. Aligning with the Hierarchy means aligning with the status quo, with all that implies — the good and the bad. There are many reasons to join up with the Hierarchy. They range from security to fear to honest belief that it is the best way to fight Oblivion.

Renegades — There is no single definition of a Renegade, and there is no unified Renegade movement. Instead, it's a heterogeneous amalgam of groups of varying strengths in varying locations with varying agendas. One Renegade gang may not be to your liking, but the next might align perfectly with your priorities and goals. Bear in mind that Hierarchy versus Renegades is not a fair fight; it's more like a giant swatting at a swarm of mosquitoes. But for every Renegade gang the Hierarchy crushes or subverts, there's always another to take its place. And not every Renegade gang is dedicated to smashing the Hierarchy. Some are self-help organizations, or simply want to exist on their own terms — something the Hierarchy seems disinclined to let them do. Joining up with a Renegade gang can be an expression of choice, a rejection of the Hierarchy and all its works, or it can be an accident of fate, if you find yourself Reaped by a group of Renegades who induct you into their gang.

Heretics — Like Renegade gangs, Heretic cults are numerous and disorganized. Built around a central spiritual belief (as opposed to a political one, like a Renegade gang), they can burn out in a short period of time or continue on for centuries. Some cults are violently opposed to the Hierarchy, while others worship Charon and preach total obedience. Joining up with a cult is generally a decision made by a driven wraith looking for spiritual fulfillment that the Underworld is sadly lacking in. Many cults operate innocuously within the bounds of the Hierarchy, while others have their own citadels in the wastelands of the Shadowlands.

But What About the Guilds?

Technically, the Guilds of Stygia are Renegade organizations, but they're kind of a special case. Everyone knows who they are and what they do, and if they're useful and helpful, odds are nobody's going to run screaming to the legions demanding they be arrested. Joining a Guild has obvious benefits (like being able to learn more Arts for your Arcanoi) but there's still that whiff of danger about them, not to mention the fact that internal Guild politics can be as byzantine and lethal as anything the Isle has to offer.

In any case, joining a Guild is not something you decide to do without some thought and preparation. Generally, you need a sponsor within the Guild, an older wraith who will vouch for you. Also bear in mind that sometimes the Guild picks you. You can catch the eye of a Guildwraith looking for talent who actively recruits you. In either case, it's your choice whether or not to discuss Guild matters with your Circle. It could be that all of you get inducted en masse, or that you're told to keep your Guild membership a secret. Either way, joining a Guild adds new allegiances your character must uphold, and new complexities to their story.

Part Two: The New Shadow



One of the toughest aspects of **Wraith** for new players to grasp is the Shadow. The idea of playing a second character, one diametrically opposed to another player's character, can seem confusing or overwhelming. Then there's the basic mechanics of roleplaying someone else's dark side: how much is too much, what works and what doesn't, and so on.

The first thing to understand is what the Shadow is. As noted in Chapter 6 of **Wraith: The Oblivion 20th Anniversary Edition**, the Shadow is the negative portion of a wraith's personality, given voice and sentience by the transition to the Underworld. Ultimately, it seeks to drag the wraith down to Oblivion, doing as much damage as it can along the way.

What this does *not* mean is that there should be a competition, immediate and fierce, between the Shadowguide and the player. The Shadow and the Psyche are two halves of the same whole, and if all the Shadow was after was immediate destruction, it would be dull and relentless play indeed. Instead, it's a question of what the Shadow *actually* wants. Does it want the Psyche to admit it was right before they take the final plunge into Oblivion? Does it want to destroy everything the Psyche loves so that the wraith embraces Oblivion willingly? Does it want to drive away everyone else in the wraith's circle until the wraith is alone and has nowhere to turn but to the Shadow? The end goal of Oblivion is the same, but the route is important.

Understanding that the Shadow is not just about jumping into the jaws of the nearest Spectre goes a long way towards making Shadowguiding fun and interesting for both Shadowguide and player. Understanding that the Shadow has a goal and possibly a plan, and working from that supposition, gives the Shadow a personality and a direction, and offers numerous opportunities for the Shadowguide to get some juicy roleplaying in. So, a new Shadowguide should start by trying to answer the following questions:

Who Is It? — Who is the Shadow? Get a sense of the Psyche the Shadow will be tormenting and then figure out what sort of personality meshes best with that in opposition. You can't play the Shadow without knowing the Psyche, its wants and weak spots. That means, in practical terms, looking over the Psyche's character sheet and paying extra attention to things like Passions and Fetters that the character might be extra protective of. These make the best targets for later scheming.

What Does It Want? — It wants Oblivion, yes, but how does the Shadow want to get there? What's the grand plan, or does this Shadow want to play it by



ear? Knowing what the Shadow wants to do to the Psyche goes a long way towards simplifying courses of action during gameplay.

What Is Its Voice? — While the Shadow's Archetype will help determine this, figuring out how the Shadow speaks to the Psyche is important. Is it all snide comments and one liners? Does it talk more or less? Does it keep bringing up past failures, or does it focus on trying to set up new ones? Does it have an accent that's significant to the Psyche, or that just differentiates the Shadow's voice? Does it prefer to mimic the Psyche as closely as possible?

What Does the Shadow Like To Do? — Does the Shadow have a favorite tactic? Is there a particular Thorn that's its go-to in opportune moments? Like the Psyche, the Shadow has likes and dislikes and preferences, and laying out what tactics and tools it prefers can make the role a more reflexive one when push comes to shove.

What Won't It Do? — Even Shadows have lines they won't cross. Maybe it's a question of aesthetics, or maybe there's some residual affection for the Psyche that will prevent the Shadow from unleashing the deadliest weapons in its arsenal. Finding out where the Shadow draws the line goes a long way toward understanding the character.

It's all right not to have perfect answers for all of these questions, but just thinking about them can help give the Shadow shape and definition. Odds are the definitive answers will reveal themselves through play, rising organically from interactions between Shadowguide and player. And there's nothing wrong with

changing the answers you laid out at the beginning if it becomes clear that gameplay dictates a need for a different approach.

Shadowguiding For Beginners

If there are two rules of thumb for beginning Shadowguides, they would be “don’t be afraid” and “don’t be a jerk.” “Don’t be afraid” means that you shouldn’t be afraid to interject as the Shadow. Waiting for the perfect moment or not wanting to interrupt can mean letting a Psyche get away with a mostly Shadow-free existence. The Shadow exists to interact with the Psyche, questioning, mocking, and threatening, and it’s never afraid to speak its mind. Being hesitant to speak up as the Shadow defeats the purpose of Shadowguiding.

Conversely, “Don’t Be A Jerk” means that you shouldn’t be omnipresent as the Shadow. The point of Shadowguiding is not to drown out the Psyche, nor is it to question every single move the Psyche makes. Doing so makes play intolerable for the other players and the Storyteller. It slurps up the limelight and doesn’t leave any room for anyone else to shine. Not being a jerk in this case means playing well with the rest of the group and not overwhelming another player.

Even if you’re not talking constantly, it’s wise to moderate one’s time as the Shadow. It can be tempting to interject as the Shadow with every cutting comeback and snarky commentary, but with volume comes a loss of effectiveness. Too much Shadow turns the Shadow’s voice into white noise, which becomes increasingly easy to ignore. This can also overwhelm a player or shake their confidence, even if the Shadowguide’s commentary is intended as in-character chatter only.

Between those two guidelines, Shadowguides can find plenty of room for exploration and play. The story of a Shadow finding its voice can be just as compelling as a wraith awakening to the full extent of the Underworld.

The First Words

A wraith isn’t born knowing what his Shadow is. The first time the voice in his head speaks to him should produce an appropriate reaction: fear, alarm, you name it. The Shadow, on the other hand, may very well know its purpose from the start. That’s a player and Storyteller choice. If the Shadow does know what it is and why it’s there, it can begin tormenting the wraith immediately, taking advantage of the Psyche’s ignorance about the state he finds himself in.

On the other hand, it’s also possible to play it with the Shadow just as new and confused as its other half. This can lead to some intense roleplaying as Psyche and Shadow slowly come to grips with their antagonistic but symbiotic relationship. Either one might be the first to figure out the true lay of the land. But in the



INTRODUCTIONS

The very first words a Shadow speaks are going to have a profound impact, so they should be chosen wisely. They can be tentative, ingratiating, witty, cutting, or vicious, but their purpose is always to let the Psyche know they're not alone and never will be.

meantime, there's a slow build as the Shadow comes to grips with being trapped as a passenger in the wraith's head.

The Shadow may be the one to explain to the Psyche what it is and what its existence means. If the wraith doesn't have a friend or mentor who clues him in as to who that sneaky voice in the back of his head is, the job may fall to the Shadow. There's nothing saying that the Shadow has to be honest if that's the case, and there's plenty of mileage to be gained from misleading the Psyche for even a little while. Then again, Psyche-Shadow is liable to be a long-term relationship, and the Shadow may not want to start things off in a way that may come back to bite it later.

Discovering Thorns

Shadows have unique powers called Thorns. However, that doesn't mean they come into existence with a complete knowledge of their metaphysical arsenal. It's up to the Storyteller to determine how the Shadow discovers its newfound powers, and if the entire kit is available from the get-go. Shadowguide and Storyteller should discuss how they want the Shadow's Thorns to manifest. It could be accidentally and at Storyteller discretion, which could make for some awkward moments for the wraith. It could also be gradual, with the Shadow only understanding its powers well enough to use them one at a time. Or the Storyteller could decide that the Shadowguide gets everything from the beginning and can immediately use the whole bag of tricks to bedevil the Psyche.

If the Thorns do manifest at Storyteller discretion, that opens up roleplaying opportunities for the Shadowguide. There's the obvious: "Did I do that?" or, more pragmatically, "How did I just do that and can I do it again?" but there's also the possibility of uncertainty, of bluffing the Psyche with as-yet unrevealed powers, and of even being shaken by what it has unleashed. Then there's the greed for more power that use of a Thorn can unleash in a Shadow's heart of hearts; if it can do this much already, how much more is out there, and how can it manipulate the Psyche into getting it someplace where it can learn?

Dark Passions

A Shadow doesn't know what a Dark Passion is any more than a wraith intrinsically understands a Passion. Instead, it knows what it wants to do, and it'll be surprised with a rush of energy when the Psyche actually acts in accordance with one of those goals. Sooner or later the Shadow's going to figure out that relationship, but it may take some time. And if, during that time, the Shadow runs out of Angst, that's all right. It's OK for the Shadow to take some time to get going efficiently, and moments when the Shadow is literally powerless (except for the always-available power of its voice) can make for some excellent roleplaying opportunities.

The Power of the Voice

The most important weapon a Shadow has is its voice. That's the one weapon it always has no matter what, and it can be its deadliest.

The instinctive tone to take with the Shadow's voice is adversarial, and for some Archetypes that makes perfect sense. For many, though, there's a wider range of options to consider. To quote *Hamlet*, one may smile and smile and yet be a villain.

Shadow Dice

Shadow Dice are the literal deal with the devil, extra dice in exchange for extra risk. An inexperienced Shadowguide may be unsure of when to offer extra dice, or how many. It's easy to default to offering them at every opportunity, but doing so normalizes them in a way that takes away their allure. Besides, for a basic roll, it's easy to refuse the extra dice. Saving the first offer for a moment of real peril or a roll that's a long shot has a way of making those dangerous dice more appealing.

Storytellers may want to limit the number of times a Shadowguide can offer dice, at least until the player gets the hang of when to offer and when not to. This can easily be explained in-game as the Shadow still coming into its power and learning how to "help," and thus it can't tap into all of its resources at will. If Storytellers choose this route, they should not let the Shadowguide know how many bullets they've got; knowing they're limited and that they could run out at any time will make for some hard thinking as to whether or not to offer. At the same time, if the Psyche's player knows they're only going to get the option of help a limited number of times, they might be more willing to take a chance rather than risk never getting any help at all.



NEGOTIATIONS AND HATE SONGS

While the offering of Shadow Dice by necessity breaks the fourth wall of the chronicle (you are dealing with dice, after all), there are some things that can be done to minimize the disruption.

Storytellers may want to consider allowing the Psyche and Shadow to haggle over the number of Shadow Dice offered. This puts the relationship between Psyche and Shadow at the forefront, even if they're arguing over the number of dice to be rolled. The negotiation also serves as intel for the Shadowguide; knowing what the Psyche is looking for this time can help make the next offer that much more irresistible.

Conversely, the Storyteller can take responsibility for the number of dice offered. This reframes the conversation as being about “help” and not about dice. The Shadowguide can offer *some* assistance, and it's up to the Psyche to determine the level of risk without knowing exactly what's coming down the pike. But without a specific number of dice being on the table, the two sides are dealing with something more basic and primal, more in line with the core dynamic of the Shadow-Psyche tussle.

Making the First Offer

Nothing deflates the sense of danger and temptation that comes with Shadow Dice more than a pedestrian “Want some dice?” The offer should always be enticing and dangerous, not banal and transactional. This is especially true for the first offer of Shadow Dice, when theoretically the Psyche has no idea what its Shadow is actually offering. This first chance can set the tone for every future offer of dice; it's especially important to get it right.

A Garden of Thorns

Using Thorns effectively can make Shadowguiding a much more rewarding experience. The trick is not to use them as often as possible; instead, the Shadowguide should try to find those right moments to use them. Uncorking a use of Freudian Slip when the Psyche is talking to another member of the Circle is one thing. Using it when the Psyche is talking to a Legionnaire who potentially holds the Circle's existence in their hands is quite another.

Most Thorns can't be used that often, so when you do use them, you have to make them count. Also, bear in mind that if you use Thorns often, the Psyche (and the rest of the Circle) can get used to their effects and start to shrug them off. It is the unexpected nature of a Thorn's use as much as what the Thorn actually does that provides its power.

Playing Dark Passions

A Shadow has Dark Passions just as the Psyche has Passions, and is just as invested in getting the wraith to indulge these. Getting a wraith to act in accord with its Dark Passions can fuel the Shadow with Angst, so the Shadow is always on the lookout for the opportunity to snaffle some up.

That doesn't mean the Shadow is constantly nagging at the Psyche to act in the Shadow's best interest. Doing so would quickly become counterproductive. Rather, the Shadow needs to strategize as to how acting in line with Dark Passions can seem to be in line with the Psyche's interest, and to talk the Psyche into agreeing with it.

It helps if a Dark Passion is effectively a shadowy version of a regular Passion. If the wraith's Passion is "Defend My Family (Love) 5" and the Shadow's Dark Passion is "Hurt Anyone Who Hurts My Family (Vengeance) 5," the Shadow can gently suggest that the best way for the Psyche to protect her family is by doing something about those who would cause them harm.

Where the Shadow excels is in maneuvering the Psyche into a position where their only logical choice is to act in accordance with a Dark Passion. The icing on the cake comes when the Shadow points this out to the Psyche, adding that final bit of gotcha.

First Catharsis

Catharsis is when the Shadow has acquired enough Temporary Angst to overwhelm the Psyche's Willpower and take control of their shared Corpus. This can be a delicate situation, and a certain nod to the metagame is required to ensure that all parties are treated fairly. In other words, even while in command of the Corpus, the Shadow cannot do something willfully self-destructive like jump in a nihil, charge a battalion of Legionnaires singlehandedly, or play "bobbing for soulfire crystals" in the nearest forge. On an in-game level, this speaks to the bond between Shadow and Psyche, that one cannot simply destroy both with a single action. Out of game, it ensures that the Psyche's player doesn't have to come up with a new character every time the Shadow seizes the controls.



This is particularly important the first time the Shadow takes over, when the temptation to do something drastic will be at its highest. For the new player, it's important for the Storyteller to set limits as to what is and isn't on the table; how far the Shadow can take the wraith down the road to self-destruction without being unfair to the character's main player. Ideally, this should be discussed beforehand, so there's not an endless, interruptive stream of "I do this," and, "You can't do that." The inexperienced Shadowguide should go into her first Catharsis with a good sense of the limits of her power, and exactly how far she can push things before crossing a line.

That doesn't mean that a new Shadowguide shouldn't try to have fun with Catharsis. Indeed, within the bounds set by the Storyteller she should feel free to go wild. Some suggestions include:

Break Confidences — Sharing secrets that the Psyche knew is a great way to sow distrust between the wraith and the rest of her Circle.

Strain Friendships — Wraiths have little to rely on in the Underworld besides each other. A wraith in Catharsis can wear away at close relationships with casual cruelty, with lies, or with uncomfortable truths better left unspoken.

Hide Vital Items — Normally, the Psyche is locked away in the dark while the Shadow runs amok. This is the perfect time to hide a vital item, a relic, or an Artifact from the Psyche in a place only the Shadow can remember. That information can then be kept from the Psyche or bargained back in exchange for other favors (like indulging in a Dark Passion).

Alienate Allies — A little rudeness can go a long way. Even if the wraith explains that it was the Shadow talking, odds are that wraiths who were in a position to do the character favors will look less kindly upon her after being verbally abused or treated with disrespect by “her.” If it happens too often, who’s to say that the wraith is even telling the truth when she blames her Shadow?

Open Doors — What happens if the Shadow makes contact with a wanted Renegade or a Heretic cult? Doing so could land the wraith in a lot of hot water, and the old “It was my Shadow” excuse tends not to go over well with the Stygian secret police.

Absolutely Nothing — There’s no way the Psyche will believe that the Shadow didn’t do something terrible when in charge, and he will gnaw out its own metaphorical liver trying to find out what that is. What better enjoyment for the Shadow than to see the Psyche anxiously chase his own tail looking for evidence of non-existent sabotage?

All of these and more are things the Shadow can do when in charge that will materially damage the wraith without putting her in imminent danger of a Destruction Harrowing. The trick, of course, is that the Shadow doesn’t want other wraiths to know it’s in the driver’s seat, so that limits its range of actions. Selling off a beloved and powerful Artifact for pennies on the obolus would instantly raise red flags, as would a normally pacifistic wraith picking a fight or demanding the Circle suddenly take extreme action.

And if the Shadow gets caught in its masquerade, that’s all right, too. There will always be another time when it can take control, and it’ll put the lessons from this time to good use in avoiding detection the next.

Seizing the Controls

As with anything new, the Shadow may not know how to fully operate the resources at its command when first it takes control. This can manifest in a number of ways: clumsiness, forgetting which Arcanoi are available for use, reacting as a Shadow would rather than a Psyche, and so forth. These hiccups can lend spice to an early Catharsis, as the Shadow desperately tries to cover up its mistakes while the Psyche’s friends notice something odd might be going on.

In fact, the first time the Shadow takes over it might be completely unprepared.

First Harrowing

The first time a wraith gets Harrowed can be confusing for all parties concerned. The bulk of the responsibility, though, rests on the shoulders of the Shadowguide. They know the victim best, their Passions and Fetters, fears and ambitions, and they’re the ones in charge of arranging the Harrowing.

TO SEE OR NOT TO SEE

The Storyteller can decide it's the Shadowguide's call as to whether the Psyche does or does not see what the Shadow gets up to when it seizes the reins. Each has its advantages. Letting the Psyche know exactly what the Shadow is up to, helpless to stop it as it wreaks havoc, can feed Dark Passions and lead to great roleplaying opportunities for the wraith's main player. Not knowing what the Shadow did (but knowing it did *something*) offers an entirely different set of challenges.

Normally, the Psyche does not see what the Shadow gets up to, instead being locked in a featureless black chamber inside her own mind for the duration of the Catharsis, with the only voice she can hear being the Shadow's. Players experiencing Catharsis for the first time may choose to leave the room so as to avoid overhearing what the Shadow gets up to. Alternatively, they can attempt to distract the Shadow the same way the Shadow normally heckles them, albeit with less operational intelligence to go on. What the player absolutely needs to do no matter what, however, is avoid interfering in the Catharsis. Yes, it can be hard watching best-laid plans get undercut or confidences shattered, but such is the currency of the Underworld.

In practical terms, what this means is simple. The victim of the Harrowing is sent out of the room and the Shadowguide convenes a conversation on how the Harrowing is going to go. It should be based around a Passion or Fetter of the targeted wraith. However, this doesn't mean turning their character sheet over to the group and asking which one everybody thinks works best. The Shadowguide is still entrusted with the secrets of the character they're Shadowguiding for, and that means picking the focus of the Harrowing in a way that protects the target from unintentional metagaming.

Next comes actually plotting the Harrowing. This is done in conjunction with the Storyteller and, to a lesser extent, with the other players. The idea is to create a shadowplay based around the Passion or Fetter, one that the Harrowed wraith is going to have to think his way out of while under incredible duress. The other players can potentially have roles in the Harrowing, acting as temporary supporting characters, and everyone should know their role — and the escape condition going in. So if the Harrowing is targeting a Fetter of someone's beloved comic book collection, the Harrowing could take place at a comic shop where the wraith gets told the thing he loved most in the world is worthless, with the other players taking the part of store staff and customers jeering and mocking. Alternatively, the other

players could be superheroes angry at the way the Harrowed wraith treated them, or maybe firefighters in a blaze that threatens to devour both the comic collection and something — or someone — else of value. The possibilities are endless. The trick is making sure everyone knows their role and the escape condition.

The Storyteller ultimately runs the Harrowing, but she takes her cues from the Shadowguide. That's why it's important for the Shadowguide to have a clear idea of the character who's getting Harrowed and to be able to communicate the pertinent aspects of that to everyone else involved.

What Not To Do

There are some pretty simple guidelines for things to avoid when Shadowguiding during a Harrowing:

Don't Give Everything Away — It's necessary to give the rest of the group an idea of a Passion or Fetter of the targeted wraith. That doesn't mean you should spill all of his secrets; indeed, it's the exact opposite. Keeping the bulk of the Harrowed character's sheet secure prevents other players from gaining a possible unfair advantage. If you're stumped as to which Passion or Fetter to choose for the Harrowing (assuming it hasn't been chosen for you through destruction or other means), consult with the Storyteller, who should also be familiar with the target's character sheet. Bringing other players in at this stage, no matter how well-meaning, can be a violation of trust.

Make the Harrowing Tough (But Not Too Tough) — Every Harrowing has an escape condition, a way to think through the chaos and pain to escape (largely) intact. It's up to you (with help) to come up with that condition. On the one hand, you don't want to make it too easy. If there's only one obvious choice as to what the wraith can do, then he's going to make that choice and it won't be much of a Harrowing. On the other, making it impossible doesn't help, either. What you're looking for is to split the difference, to come up with something that's not obvious but which can be discovered with a little thought and — most importantly — is in line with the character and his development. The solution to the comic book store Harrowing could be to reject others' judgement and love the comics for what they are, not what someone else thinks they're worth. The solution to the fire could be learning what to sacrifice and what is of value. Every Harrowing is different, but each one has that same path at its core, a way out.

Don't Sideline the Other Players — Not every Harrowing has to involve the entire crew. In fact, some of the most intense Harrowings can be one on one scenarios. But Harrowings can take a good chunk of time, and you don't want to put all the other players on the bench for however long it takes. Odds are, for your



first (or second or third) Harrowing, you're going to want help anyway, so keeping the rest of the group involved is a win for everyone.

Don't Be Punitive — Make no mistake about it, a Harrowing is not supposed to be an enjoyable experience *for the wraith being Harrowed*. That doesn't mean it's supposed to be an unpleasant experience for the players involved, especially for the player of the Harrowed wraith. Make it tough, make it challenging, make it thought provoking, you can even make it funny if you want. But don't make it a way to diminish other players, or their enjoyment of the game. It's not the time to get back at the player who wouldn't take your offer of Shadow dice, it's the time to challenge and delight them with roleplaying opportunities.

Don't Be Afraid to Ask for Help — If you're stuck, ask for help. Your Storyteller is there to work with you to ensure the best possible experience for everyone. So are the other players. Once you bring out the target of the Harrowing, draw on the creativity in the room to come up with the best Harrowing possible. You don't have to do it yourself, you just have to lead the process.

Fine Tuning

Nobody expects you to get all of the subtleties of Shadowguiding exactly right, right off the bat. There's an adjustment period where you and the player of your Psyche get used to one another and figure out a good play relationship. Don't be

afraid to ask the player of the wraith you're Shadowguiding for feedback, and the same goes for the Storyteller. They may be waiting for you to start the conversation before offering any advice or suggestions. At the same time, you can provide feedback to the wraith's player. If he's just stuffing their fingers in their ears every time you talk or offer Shadow dice, that's a problem, too. Psyche and Shadow have a relationship, one that should be echoed by you and the wraith's player. Be open to doing what it takes to make it a fulfilling one in terms of gameplay for both of you.

Part Three: Storytelling for the Recently Deceased

Running a chronicle for freshly Reaped wraiths has a unique set of challenges and opportunities. These come into even sharper focus if it's the players' introduction to the world of **Wraith** as well as the characters', and as such, there are some storytelling techniques that are particularly appropriate for the situation.

Wraith can be a bit overwhelming. Trying to absorb new rules for new states of being and a new setting with multiple levels of reality all at once can be too much for new players who are just trying to get their figurative feet wet. As such, it's a good idea to take players' experience level into account when storytelling, and to gently restrict the flow of information that new players have to absorb. Or, to put it another way, they shouldn't have to take in all of Charon's laws, the politics of the Guilds and the Deathlords, the history of the Ferrymen, and the proper care and feeding of Harrowings all at once. New Enfants are going to discover the Underworld bit by bit; their players can do the same.

The good news is that the rules of **Wraith** can reinforce this sort of slow drip of knowledge, as opposed to hurling players into the deep end immediately. Passions and Fetters in particular can serve as anchors that root characters while their players drink in the larger world around them, and eventually become ready to potentially move on.

The (Friendly) Guide

The easiest way to immerse new players in the world of **Wraith** is with a guide who'll patiently explain the foibles of Restless existence for the characters every time they have a question. This kindly mentor, most likely the Reaper who cut them out of their Cauls, should appear to have the wraiths' best interests at heart, and may in fact do so. Alternatively, he may be leading the nascent Circle into the

arms of a Heretic cult or a Renegade gang — all for the most honorable of reasons, of course — or even delivering them to the Hierarchy in a way that dodges any unfortunate encounters at the forges.

It's highly recommended that if you're going to use a friendly mentor, you steer away from having said mentor character fall into catharsis or a Harrowing. Both can be deeply confusing to players who haven't been properly prepped for them. First encounters with these, especially as related to characters the wraiths were counting on to provide information and safety, should be handled very delicately. Wraiths should have the chance to notice something different about a mentor in Catharsis. As for Harrowings, we'll discuss them later.

Of course, not every guide is a friendly one. Some may only pretend to be friendly in order to lure innocent young wraiths into traps: the forges, the thrall-coffles, the waiting bellies of spectral abominations. These Guides with ulterior motives can still answer questions and provide info as to what exactly is going on; after all, they don't count on the Enfants being able to use any of that knowledge.

And then there are the actively inimical Reapers, determined to make the characters' time in the Underworld nasty, brutish, and eternal. Such figures may want to gloat over their victims, inadvertently providing a primer on the Underworld to the poor bastards who are so clearly doomed. When said hapless bastards inevitably escape, they're armed with the knowledge they picked up along the way, and thus are better equipped to handle the vagaries of the Underworld.

Each of these scenarios gives players the chance to discover the world through their incomplete perceptions.

Trial and Error

Newly-deceased wraiths also have a fistful of powers at their disposal, which they may or may not know how to use properly. Letting wild Arcanos effects play out while the characters have no idea what's going on or how to control their new abilities can lead to some key scenes, both frantic and comic, where the wraiths' new powers are put to the (harmless) test against wraiths who are likely to be more powerful, not to mention used to this sort of thing. And public display of Arcanoi can attract the attention of real Guildwraiths looking for new recruits, allowing the players to dip into another level of the world without being forced to sink or swim.

The Fast Route

To get a Circle up to some variant of speed quickly, the best thing you can do is provide multiple mentors, some of whom may have ulterior motives. Guildwraiths, Hierarchs, Renegades, a smooth-talking Doppelganger — all will have advice for the

Circle and for the wraith in particular who they've targeted. Functionally, this allows each player to suck down a unique branch of wraithly knowledge and manifest some expertise. That combination of knowledges and skills should enable the Circle to survive their first major encounter, and, armed with the knowledge of what they're up against, they should be ready to hold their own, at least against minor threats.

The First Shadowguiding

Once the players become comfortable with their characters, they should be looking to get comfortable with their Shadows. Remember, the Shadows are probably just as confused by their new status as the wraiths are, so they're not going to start out at full blast. Nevertheless, it can be valuable to encourage Shadowguides to make their first few steps towards a full conversation with the Psyche. Gradually this should work its way up to perhaps 30% of the time at most, partially to keep wraiths from devolving into inner dialog, and partially to make sure the Shadowguide's main character isn't neglected. Providing safe spaces where Psyche and Shadow can joust — potentially to the amusement or horror of their Circlemates — allows the players to get comfortable with the concept before it becomes a matter of life or death.

Storytellers may want to restrict early uses of Catharsis. First, the Shadow who takes control has to have a plan other than self-immolation; letting the wraith in Catharsis just run off and jump into the nearest Nihil in hopes of getting shredded on the other side defeats the purpose of the exercise. As noted elsewhere, the Shadow doesn't just want to bring down the wraith, it wants to bring down everything and everyone it can. And if that means sticking around and sowing discord that will pay off after many months rather than one defiant gesture of glory, the advantages of the long-term plot should be obvious.

The same goes for Harrowings. Sooner or later, someone is going to go down, and a Harrowing scenario will present itself. The first Harrowing can be stressful for all involved — target, director, and actors — and it's wise to ease the group into their first experience of Underworld psychodrama.

First of all, an initial Harrowing shouldn't be an impossible one. The moral choice the player must make to emerge intact should be reasonable and reasonably obvious. The threat can be real, but the Storyteller should assist the Shadowguide in putting the psychodrama together and arranging roles for all the other players. Everyone except the subject of the Harrowing is playing a different role, and should play it within the boundaries set up. Players and Storytellers should initiate a conversation in advance of a Harrowing to determine whether there are any subjects or themes that should be set aside for the comfort of those involved. And of course, if the Harrowing is making anyone uncomfortable, cut it off, return to the conversation to figure out where the no-go zones are, and don't trespass on that territory with that player again.

Back to the Surface: Passions and Fetters

Passions and Fetters are the two things that are really going to bind new wraiths to their old lives. One anchors them against the pull of Oblivion, while the other gives them power to affect the Underworld around them. Both should be focused on the most important things, people, and emotional drives from their living lives. Never will they be so close to the objects of their Passions and Fetters as when they first emerge as Enfants, and playing on that closeness can teach some valuable lessons. It's natural for new wraiths to immediately want to rush to their loved ones and reassure them that they are, in fact, still there. This provides an excellent opportunity to teach the new characters about the Shroud.

Also, it's highly likely that at least some of the characters will have family members as Fetters or have Passions related to their family. Their attempts at interaction with the living will provide ample chances to lay out how things work. Putting a wraith's family member in some light peril, such as an out-of-control car or an attempted mugging (as opposed to heavy plot-related peril, whereby a major nemesis is making an orchestrated attempt on someone's well-being), is an easy way to allow characters to learn the limitations and requirements of their new state in a way that's rewarding without too much risk. After all, the speeding car can be diverted by the driver if the wraith doesn't pull off the rescue, and the mugging can be averted through some non-supernatural intervention if needed.

That being said, there's every reason for characters to want to stick around their families. It's familiar territory, after all, and useful in denying the reality of wraithly existence.

There is much to be said for wrapping early plot hooks around loved ones, particularly ones tied to Passions and Fetters. Doing so keeps the character in familiar territory, which means as a Storyteller you're not having to explain all of the metaphysics of the Underworld at the same time as the characters are getting used to being dead. In other words, sticking around the old stomping grounds allows

STICKING AROUND TOO LONG

Something else to bear in mind is the impact the wraith's presence has on their living friends and family. The wraith's presence could seriously hinder attempts at closure and moving on; living relatives who are convinced that the ghost of their dead loved one is still hanging around are not likely to get taken seriously. Insisting on it ("I swear, Jimmy's ghost was here!") could have more serious consequences, professionally or personally.

you as Storyteller to feed the setting and roles to the players piecemeal, avoiding informational overload. For experienced players this may not be necessary, but for beginners, it's highly recommended.

Shared Passions and Fetters

Simply put, building a plot thread around a wraith's particular Passion means, literally, building the story around something the player is going to want to do. The system allows you to reward the player with Pathos for roleplaying in line with their character. It's even better if multiple members of the Circle have Passions or Fetters that intersect. This gives them a narrative reason for staying and acting together more pressing than "well, we're the PCs, so I guess we should hang out." Setting this up starts before the game during character generation, and it's good to bear that in mind if you want to reinforce in-character motivations for keeping the Circle together.

To choose shared Passions or Fetters, have a clear idea of the points of intersection you want to set up before walking all of your players through character generation. The idea may come to you independently, or you may get inspired by what one of the first players to build a character comes up with. Either way, building links into character construction so that the wraiths will want to interact makes your job easier. A shared Fetter is an obvious and simple example: Why have one wraith protecting a favorite bar or an individual when you could have two, or three, or five? A shared Passion is a little trickier to pull off, but, for example, having all the members of the Circle determined to take down a local crime boss or determined to save a landmark from soulless developers is simple enough. Note that not every Passion with the same sentence has to have the same emotion attached to it. "Wipe out the local crime lord (Vengeance) 3" is not the same as "Wipe out the local crime lord (Justice) 3," but they work well enough together to keep the Circle in line.

When Shared Fetters Aren't Enough

Sometimes a Circle needs more impetus to swing into action together than Passions or Fetters can provide. Maybe the wraiths just want to settle down and watch over their Fetters, or maybe they decide to go their own separate ways regardless. When that time comes, there are tools in your Storytelling kit you can use to bring the Circle back together, or at least make it seem like a very good idea for them to reconnect.

The easiest thing to do is to apply external pressure immediately. This can be in the form of a powerful enemy, be they wraith or Spectre, who targets one or more members of the Circle. With limited options as to where to go for help, the target may be forced to turn back to the broken Circle for help. This is especially effective if the enemy is hunting the entire Circle or, more subtly, a shared Fetter.

There's instant pressure for the Circle to swing into self-defense mode, whether for themselves or for their Fetters. Even the most recalcitrant wraith will probably set aside reservations about joining up if it becomes clear the alternative is to get picked off one at a time.

External pressure can come in many forms. A marauding Spectre who takes a fancy to this particular group of wraiths is one obvious threat, while the angry Reaper all of the members of the Circle previously managed to escape from is another. There could also be a local Anacreon who has her own reasons for wanting to clamp down on the Circle, or a whole legion patrol that comes blundering in just as the Circle makes the decision to split.

Introducing Oblivion (Or Not)

At the bottom (literally) of every **Wraith** chronicle is Oblivion, the devouring Void that sits at the heart of the Labyrinth. The longest, most personal fight every wraith has is against Oblivion in the form of their Shadow. Meanwhile, Oblivion's outward manifestations — Maelstroms, Spectres, and so forth — pound at the very fabric of Underworld existence. Really, it's hard to do **Wraith** without dealing with Oblivion on some level.

And yet, there's a case to be made for holding off on bringing the true scope and horror of Oblivion to a chronicle for beginners. Oblivion, after all, is big — really big — and a lot of beginning chronicles prefer to start small. Introducing the howling Void at the end of all things right off the bat can make an individual wraith's struggles seem unimportant when really, they're the most important thing in the game.

If you do decide to introduce Oblivion right off the bat, you can do so in a variety of ways. One is to collaborate with a Shadowguide to make sure the topic gets brought up — if anyone is aware of Oblivion from the get-go, it's a Shadow. Alternatively, something as simple as a Spectre screeching that Oblivion's going to take the entire Circle, or a Legionnaire explaining for the thousandth time that the Hierarchy's job is to keep souls from feeding Oblivion can introduce the topic with some degree of subtlety. Ideally, the Circle will decide that Oblivion is not for them, regardless of their Shadows' ministrations, but the ever-present threat of Oblivion will now loom over the chronicle. Then, the wraiths will have to consider whether their actions might, in fact, feed Oblivion.

Introducing Transcendence

Many players want something to shoot for, an end game goal for their character. In **Wraith**, the best candidate for this is Transcendence, the possibly mythical state of resolving one's unfinished business and moving on. Introducing that early can give characters something they can choose to strive for, an end goal that can form the

backbone of an entire chronicle. And even if not every wraith in the Circle decides to seek Transcendence, they can certainly help their compatriots along the way.

The good news is that Transcendence is an interesting topic to introduce. Maybe the Circle hears about it from a Heretic they're temporarily chained with before escaping the forges. Maybe there's a crazy wraith preaching the gospel of Transcendence in the Necropolis' town square before Legionnaires shut him down. Or perhaps it's part of an overheard conversation, just a snippet heard before the crowd washes the conversant away.

Regardless, even if no one in the Circle is interested in following up on Transcendence, you can still use it as a story element. Maybe one of the Circle wraith's acquaintances decides to seek Transcendence, and needs the Circle's help. A (highly illegal and therefore dangerous) copy of one of the guides to Transcendence could land in the Circle members' laps, leading to all sorts of complications. Or maybe they see someone actually Transcend and get rounded up for interrogation by the local Hierarchy, who don't want word of that sort of thing getting around. There are more ways to work Transcendence into your chronicle than simply starting the players on the path, but starting the players on the path is a simple way to include it.

Once the Circle hears about Transcendence and decides whether or not they want to pursue it, things get interesting in a hurry. The road to Transcendence (if you believe in such things) is long and difficult, and Enfants are poorly equipped to travel it. Setting them up to take the first steps doesn't have to exclude the rest of the setting, however. In fact, a truer road to Transcendence might encompass all of the experience to be gained as a wraith. Starting a Circle on the hunt for Transcendence can include setting them out to search for something as simple as someone who can tell them what Transcendence is actually supposed to be, or a teacher who can guide them on their path. But there's plenty of sidetracking you can do along the way to even that simple goal in order for the Circle wraiths to gain more experience and a better sense of what they're looking to leave behind.

Rising

Something that new Enfants are likely to want to do, even if only temporarily, is to find a way back across the Shroud. However, the process of becoming Risen is beyond the grasp of any fledgling wraith, no matter how badly they want to accomplish it. Becoming Risen requires, among other things, a trip into the Labyrinth, something new wraiths are simply not equipped for.

However, if a player's desire to Rise is strong enough, it is possible to bait the hook for a plot by sending him in search of a wraith who knows the hidden techniques necessary. With this in mind, the answer to an *Enfant's* question of "how do I get back into my body" should never be "you can't," but rather, "I know someone who knows someone" or "there *are* stories." The player should not be flat-out discour-

aged if their desire is genuine and appropriate for the character. It's better to set their feet on the long road than to claim, for simplicity's sake, that it doesn't exist.

The Dictum Mortuum

If the Dictum Mortuum were strictly enforced, pretty much every Enfant who came along would be destined for the forges. Wraiths don't emerge with an innate knowledge of Charon's decrees, but they do most likely have an immediate urge to do something involving the living. They're also unlikely to have fine control of their Arcanoi, which means that even if they don't intend to break the Dictum, it may happen anyway. And while punishing the Enfants for their unknowing trespasses may seem like fun — and a good way to get them moving in a hurry — it can also be, well, punishing. Having a figure in the chronicle who can explain to the Circle what the basic rules of their new existence are, especially with regard the living, and who can gently correct early or accidental breaches makes for a smoother entry into the Underworld. This figure can be a friendly Reaper, a local Hierarch who takes pity on the confused newcomers, a Renegade with no love for the Dictum Mortuum or any of Charon's laws, or even a Doppelganger playing a long game and helping out the characters for her own reasons. Regardless, having someone there to explain what's going on in-game goes a long way towards making the world of **Wraith** accessible to beginning players.

HARSH RE-ENTRY

It's also possible to have the new wraiths' main point of contact be someone who is not a friend. This figure can be a centurion with no patience for Enfants who don't know the rules, a Reaper looking to make a quick obolus off their corpora, a fanatical Heretic, or even a hungry Spectre. At best, this figure will berate the wraiths for what they don't know; at worst, they'll attempt to inflict bodily harm. This can make for an exciting start to a chronicle with the wraiths on the run in a world they barely know or understand, but it's important not to punish them too much. Older, more experienced, and better equipped wraiths are going to have massive advantages over newcomers, meaning they're better employed as a means of pushing characters in a direction than as straight-up combatants. The time for a fight is later, when the characters stand a chance and they've had plenty of time to marinate in their dislike and fear of their initial tormentors. That'll make any victory all the sweeter.

Beginning Storytelling

Storytelling **Wraith** can be a daunting proposition. It's a complex world with a lot of moving parts, not to mention states of being, and starting out can be tricky. Fortunately, it doesn't have to be. There are some tricks and tips that can make your first time Storytelling **Wraith**, if not a breeze, then at least enjoyable for all parties.

Keep It Simple

Your first **Wraith** game doesn't need to be endlessly complex right from the off. Sometimes starting with a simple story is best. A good way to do this is to focus on one aspect of the Underworld to start with. This allows you and your players to get familiar with it, and then you can start to weave more of the setting in as you go. Which aspect you pick is up to you, but here are a few suggestions:

Storytelling the Skinlands

For new wraiths especially, the goings-on across the Shroud can be of paramount importance. Setting up their initial storyline to deal with such things can be an easy win, and allow you to ease into the machinations of the deeper Underworld at your own pace. Some sample chronicles could include:



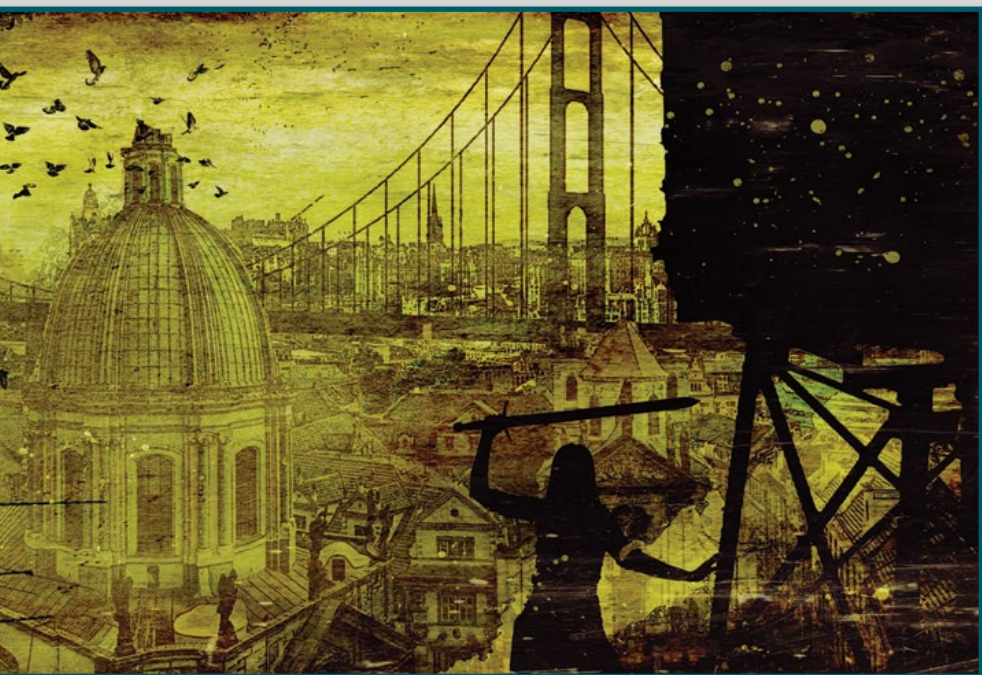
Get That Guy — One or more of the Circle members could have a Passion related to her killer. Better yet, maybe more than one of them was killed by the same murderer. Setting the Circle on the path to revenge, Dictum Mortuum be damned (if they even know what it is) as they muster their relatively feeble cross-Shroud powers can lead to a clean, powerful story.

Protection Racket — Flip the story on its head! The Circle could be invested in protecting something or someone. It could be a favorite hangout scheduled for demolition, or a family member on the run from hired killers. The pressure to conform to Stygian law versus the need to defend a beloved Fetter makes for great tension.

Poltergeist'n'Dolls — Sometimes, ghosts just want to have fun. Never mind the rules, never mind the Passions and Fetters, it's just fun to mess with mortals and watch them freak out. Of course, this can get the Circle in a lot of trouble, but the reactions they get are worth it. Or are, until they mess with the wrong human...

Storytelling the Hierarchy

At first glance, Storytelling a Hierarchy-centric chronicle sounds like it could be dull. Who wants to roleplay the endless bureaucracy of the dead? However, there's more to the Hierarchy than just organizing the rank and file of the restless dead. Some chronicle ideas include:



Defend the Citadel — Maybe there's a Maelstrom brewing. Maybe a pack of Spectres has set up camp nearby in the Shadowlands. Maybe there's a Renegade gang picking off travelers to and from the local Necropolis. Or there's a host of plasmics squatting across the only Byway out of the Necropolis and they need to be cleared off before any other wraiths are lost. The possibilities are extensive. Have the characters join their respective Legions and fight for their unives against external threats.

Root Out Corruption — The local Necropolis' Hierarchy has been infiltrated by a Doppelganger. The players need to root the impostor out before he can do irreparable harm. Of course, the Doppelganger isn't going to sit there quietly and wait to be uncovered. It will act to muddy the waters, cast suspicion on members of the Circle, and do whatever else is necessary until it's too late to do anything about its sinister plan.

Root Out Corruption, Non-Spectre Edition — Something's rotten in the Necropolis, and the stench is coming from the Hierarchy. Someone's taking bribes or engaging in unlawful soulforging, and it's up to the Circle to put a stop to it. That can mean going up against older, more powerful wraiths, so the Circle will need to tread carefully, make allies, uncover their evidence, and be very cautious before they make their move, or they could wind up in the forges themselves.

Your Friendly Neighborhood Reapers — The Circle could be tasked with Reaping new souls who cross over the Shroud within the Necropolis' general region. Doing so offers them a chance to be helpful to new wraiths. It also has the potential to bring the Circle into conflict with maleficent Reapers who just want the new souls as fodder for the forges. Wily, experienced Reapers of that sort can make for sturdy antagonists, particularly if they have hidden allies back at the Citadel who have an interest in conducting business as usual.

Safeguard This Package — The Circle has been selected to transport something (or someone) to another Necropolis. Whatever it is they're transporting, it needs to get there safely. But it seems like someone's let the cat out of the bag as to what they're guarding and the route they're taking. As a result, what should be a simple delivery becomes a running fight. And then there's the question of what's so important about the package. Maybe after discovering that, the Circle won't want to make the delivery after all...

Politics — There's always politics. And when the entities involved are potentially centuries old and are driven by Passions stronger than death, the possibilities for political entanglements, rivalries, and bitter feuds can boggle the mind. Just because the Circle may not want to get involved in politics doesn't mean someone won't involve them against their will. All it takes is one powerful wraith taking an interest in them for that wraith's enemies to want to move against them. And so it begins...

Storytelling Renegades

Renegade chronicles can be appealing. The Circle of wraiths sets up with no politics and none of the complication of the Hierarchy, and they've got every reason to stick together. Some possible Renegade chronicles are:

Infiltrate the Citadel — The gang wants to bring down the local Hierarchy outpost from within. That means joining up and going undercover. It also means probing for weak spots and averting suspicion, and if that means an innocent Hierarchy gets thrown under the proverbial bus, well, he probably deserved it anyway. This kind of Chronicle can end with a final uprising or with the Circle being found out and having to fight their way out.

Gang Violence — The gang the Circle is a part of has an enemy. It could be a wily commander at the local Citadel who's intent on wiping them out. It could be a pack of Spectres looking for easier pickings than the Necropolis offers. It could be a rival Renegade gang bent on taking what the Circle has for their own. In any case, the Circle is fighting for its existence.

Beat the Reaper — The Circle has decided that the best way to beat the local Hierarchy is to cut off its supply of new souls. That means beating the Hierarchy Reapers to new Enfants, taking them in, and inculcating them in the gang's philosophy. Some wraiths might appreciate this, but others might resent it.

Set Up Shop — This is a chronicle of building a Renegade gang from the ground up. They'll need to look for a safe haunt, allies, weapons, and more, all starting from nothing. Maybe they find what they need by scavenging, or by cutting deals with other wraiths. Maybe they'll take a more aggressive tack towards getting the necessities. Along the way they may attract new followers, or enemies determined to see them Harrowed, but the end result — an independent existence and a name respected (and maybe feared) should be worth it.

Storytelling Heretics

Storytelling a Heretic chronicle right off the bat can be tricky. Matters of faith, even fictional ones, can be sensitive topics. That being said, if the group is up for it, there are plenty of basic stories involving Heretic cults that you can explore together. For example:

This Wasn't in the Brochure — Maybe the Circle were all members of a religious community in their living days, and they were left completely unprepared for what the Underworld actually offered. The chronicle then becomes the story of the wraiths adapting themselves and their faith to their new existence — or finding a new faith that suits their existence better for them.

What Are These Far Shores? — Some wraiths firmly believe that Heaven awaits on the Far Shores, no matter what Charon might have said. Rumors of these Far Shores can trickle down to even the newest Enfants (in this case, the Circle), who may decide to organize their afterlives around reaching this fabled Paradise. To get there, they'll have to quest for more information, cut deals, and maybe cut a few corners. But the end goal is worth it, right?

Stop Those Heretics (No, the Other Ones) — To the Circle's way of thinking, soulforging is heresy. They'll do everything in their power to stop it, from breaking up Reaper caravans to attacking forge facilities in Necropoli. If they're successful enough, they'll make some powerful enemies.

Building Supporting Characters

When building supporting characters for your chronicle, you need to keep two questions in mind: What role do they fill for the characters of the Circle, and what role do they fill in the world? Supporting characters should generally fill a gap that the Circle or one of its characters has. They could be a source of information, a resource for arms or Arcanoi, or something as simple as a friend with access to a local Anacreon's files. The point being, the character is there for a reason and can do something the Circle members can't do for themselves. That doesn't mean he will do it, or that he will do it for free, but he does offer the possibility for characters that the chronicle may require at some point.

At the same time, each character needs to fill a role in the world. No one in the Underworld just stands around waiting to be helpful; they have other places to be, things to do, histories, and relationships. As you develop supporting characters, ask yourself what the character does that would put them in a position to come in contact with a member of the Circle. Guildwraith, legionnaire, relic hunter — the possibilities are endless. What matters is that the character has a function in the world besides servicing the player characters. A character who's just there to help (or, conversely, bedevil) the players stands out and diminishes the believability of the chronicle as a whole.

Building Antagonists

The same rules apply for hostile characters. Interesting, compelling antagonists provide something for the Circle to fight against and also have a place of their own in the world. Not every antagonist needs to come with a fully fleshed out backstory — the guard watching over a coffle of thralls the Circle intends to liberate doesn't need to be a complex, deep personality if his only role is to shout for help and defend himself. Of course, if he gets away, he may conceive a hate for the Circle, at which point it's time for you as a Storyteller to dig a little deeper into this guy's background and character sheet, to the point where he may become a recurring opponent.



SPECTRES IN THE BACKGROUND

Low-level, ravening Spectres make great introductory villains for a **Wraith** chronicle. If their only purpose is to destroy, they're great for spicing things up with a fight with no strings attached. They can be much more than that, however. You can have the Circle run into the Shadow-Eaten version of someone they knew in life, which is always good for a shock if it's the group's first real taste of what Oblivion can do. Doppelgangers can deceive and entice. And a powerful Shade or Mortwight can decide the Circle are their personal prey, and pursue them (directly or through intermediaries) until the Circle is strong enough to stand up and give a good reckoning of themselves. You don't need to prepare backstories for every single Spectre who comes riding a Maelstrom wind and cackling as they attack the Circle. You do need to think about them like any other character if you're going to have one stick around for a while, though. Just remember that "implacable enemy" is a perfectly fine role for a background Spectre to fill.

By the same token, not every hostile character needs to be involved in direct action against the Circle at all times. A puppetmaster on the Isle whose machinations the Circle inadvertently interrupts might bend all of her considerable powers to making life miserable for them, but she may inadvertently direct some resources their way from her own enemies. (And this may happen more and more if they prove resourceful in thwarting her again and again.)

The bottom line is, however, that if you want your antagonists to be memorable, they have to mean something to the Circle. The arrogant Anacreon who declared them outlaws, the vicious Reaper who wants revenge for their escape from his chains, the mortal responsible for multiple members of the Circle's deaths; all of these have a link to the Circle and serve a role in the Circle's story. The tighter that link, the more memorable your antagonist will become.

One on One

Not every session needs to involve the entire Circle. It's sometimes good for there to be a little one on one roleplaying between Storyteller and player. This can be beneficial to all parties. Each player gets time to develop his character without the pressure of other players needing to share the spotlight, and the Storyteller can

get to know the character a bit better. This is also a useful technique for beginning Storytellers. Tackling one character at a time before taking on the whole group (and their Shadows) can let a new Storyteller ramp up to speed and get a sense for what sort of chronicle she wants to tell based on character interaction.

Supporting Cast

Many of the characters in your game may have Backgrounds that necessitate the creation of a supporting cast: Allies, Contacts, or Mentor, for example. However, if your chronicle features new wraiths, it doesn't make sense for them to come into the Underworld with social connections already in place. That's where you come in.

(One exception is if there's someone the wraith knew in life who predeceased them, and who is waiting on the other side to help once they cross over. However, this trick only works so often, and is best saved for truly significant relationships.)

What works best instead is using play to introduce the characters who will become their friends, allies, contacts, and mentors. If a player has three dots in Mentor on their sheet, it behooves you as a Storyteller to prep a character who is of sufficient power and gravity to fill that role, and to figure out a way to get that character into the chronicle on friendly terms sooner rather than later. This doesn't mean J. Random Wraith walks up and announces that he's a wraith's new mentor. Rather, the mentor figure could just happen to be in the crowd when the wraith does something noteworthy, and is intrigued enough to follow up. Alternatively, you can use the figure as a plot point in someone else's storyline — maybe the Circle is assigned to make a delivery to that wraith, who takes a shine to a member of the group, or perhaps the mentor figure is the one who, sensing potential, saves the Circle from the forges and advises one of them as a return on his investment.

The same goes for Contacts and Allies. It's the easiest thing in the world to say "You have two dots in Allies, that means you can talk to this particular wraith," but it's also one of the least exciting. More interesting is to work with the player to put them in a position to acquire two dots' worth of an alliance through roleplaying.

Some of this depends on whether you want to involve the player in building her ally. If that's the route you want to take, you can sit down with the player and map out what sort of wraith she wants to be allied with — maybe she's interested in getting in touch with the local Renegade power structure, or she wants friends in her character's Legion. Just because you crafted the ally character together doesn't mean you still can't introduce them through roleplaying. It just means the player has some idea who's going to be coming down the pike eventually.

Another alternative is to create the Background-mandated character on your own, so that their presence comes as both a surprise and a natural part of the chronicle. Done that way, the Background points feel earned rather than bestowed.



BUT I PAID FOR THAT

Players can also acquire mentors, allies, and contacts throughout the game through the simple process of interacting with the characters they come across, leaving some players to wonder why they spent points for something other players seem to be getting for free. While you shouldn't penalize good roleplayers for doing what comes naturally, you should make sure that players get what they paid (in points) for. That means making sure that the relationships dictated by points spent get attention and have time to blossom, and that these supporting roles show special interest in those characters who've been set up as having mentors, contacts, etc.

Missed Connections

The potential problem with creating the Background character entirely on your own, without the player's input, is that the player might blow off (or blow up) the chance to connect with their supporting character through roleplaying. A particularly ill-timed Catharsis or a moment of suspicion can wreck the most carefully planned "accidental" meeting. If that happens, it's up to you as Storyteller to pick up the pieces and bring things full circle. Sometimes it's as simple as having the character follow up at a later time. Sometimes it's more difficult — trying to convince a relic smuggler to become a reliable contact is going to take an expensive token of good faith, one that a session plotline could revolve around. The bottom line, however, is that you should strive to bring the supporting character (or characters, depending on what the various members of the Circle have assigned points to) into the chronicle smoothly and appropriately.

HANDBOOK^{for the} RECENTLY DECEASED

It's a big afterlife. What are you going to do in it?

***Handbook for the Recently Deceased** is a guide for those who are new to the Underworld - players, Shadowguides, and Storytellers alike. It offers advice on how to handle new players, new wraiths, and new chronicles, all with an eye towards the inexperienced at being restless dead.*

From the first words of the Shadow, to the first Harrowing, to the first time a player asks, "What do we do now?" the Handbook has the answers. Let it be your guide to the Underworld as you set foot in the Shadowlands for what could be the first time.

Handbook for the Recently Deceased includes:

- Chronicle ideas for campaigns featuring new wraiths — and new players.
- Advice on handling first Catharsis and first Harrowings.
- Helpful hints and suggestions for players just starting out in the world of **Wraith: The Oblivion**.

