

DOOMSLAYERS: INTO THE LABYRINTH



A guide to the Labyrinth and those who dare it
for Wraith: The Oblivion™



DOOMSLAYERS: INTO THE LABYRINTH™

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Bruce Baugh: Dedicated to the 1.5 million Armenians slaughtered between 1915 and 1923. Every death counts, even when the world looks away.

Geoff Grabowski: Dedicated to the memory of Yelizaveta Yevgenyena Anichkova, shot in the Gulag, 1942. One of millions.

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Enthralled

By Lucy Taylor




A solo Doomslayer may be, by definition, a self-destructive madperson, but compared to how I used to live, it's practically a safe and sane existence. Those who say a lone and inexperienced wraith has no chance combating Spectres don't understand. I have no choice. In the Skinlands, I threw my life away, left the one I loved to seek another kind of ecstasy in an alley behind Sutter Street. If my life meant nothing, I'm determined that my death won't be as meaningless. And damn the consequences.

I've been warned to stay away from the derelict apartment building wedged between a porn store and a soup kitchen in the Mission District, so naturally this is what I look for when I arrive in San Francisco. The Skinlands

brush close to the Shadowlands here — death fondling life like a molester caressing a sleeping child. The death-scent seeps from the skin of the alkie slumped next to their shopping carts and sleeping bags. Death permeates the voices of two hookers squabbling in a doorway and glows in the eyes of the raggedy man slumped on a stool next to a sign that reads: *Why lie? I need money for beer. Give to the beerless.*

The nakedness of his appeal would make me smile if it didn't remind me of my own death — I had both love and money, but what I thought I “needed” was something else.

Then I spy the Caldicutt Arms and all my attention focuses on its grimy façade. Its walls are stucco and chipped brick, but I see more: skull faces leering from the cornices and maggots trapped and squirming in the mortar.



The place is a known haunt for those whose lives ended in gutters or doorways, who died of exposure and liver failure and beatings by their fellow street-scum. Inside, I thread my way among inhabitants of the Skinlands and the Shadowlands, many so soul-dead, arid and corpse-colored it's hard to distinguish one from the other.

On the sixth floor, near a cleaning closet, I feel a familiar frisson, an icepick-sharp cold that stabs through the swelter of the hallway. I open the door and see a green garbage chute at one end. Blackness pours up from the chute like an explosion of gore.

No wraith in her right mind enters a Nihil, but caution wasn't a high priority for me in the Skinlands — and neither is it now.

I touch the scabbard of my soulsteel sword for luck, adjust the dagger made of the same material that's sheathed against my thigh, then drop into the Nihil's pulsing gullet. Acid rain and neon black. Brain-blasting annihilation. A mind-scrambling spiral into an altered state so mesmerizing it's like a jolt of orgasm, amnesia and electro-shock combined.

The force of the fall feels as though it turns me inside out and spits the tatters of my mangled Corpus to the Far Shores. But then I'm through the Nihil and caught up in something worse — the unholy chaos of the Tempest, a force and fury that dismantles sanity. The sound itself, the flocks of shrieking nightmares that swoop down together in ungodly hordes, is enough to shatter the soul.

Lost memories scream past me: Alan and I making love, sweat-sheened bodies sliding wetly, the squeak and smack of skin on skin. Then me, disentangling, my eyes downcast with shame, mumbling, "I gotta go out. Something that I have to do."

"Like what?" he says, which is stupid, since he knows better than to ask.

"Just something."

"LeeAnn, please don't. You promised—"

He ought to know — an addict's promise not to use lasts no longer than the high, but still he begs me not to go or at least to let him go with me.

Forget it, hon. This won't take long.

By this point in my life, the "corner drugstore" feels like my living room. The dealers, freaks and strung-out whores are family or, at any rate, a grotesque facsimile thereof. I feel no fear.

It isn't Saks exactly, but it's where I do my marketing.

I never see the man who grabs me from behind and slams me to the sidewalk, but I get a good look at the one who puts a .32 slug through my aorta. He's scrawny and bald, with a tattoo of a bat between his eyebrows, and I live long enough to feel him rifling through my pockets, to feel the heat of my blood on the pavement and the cold of my heart as it falters and stops.

And still I'm calling out for Alan, wanting to be back in bed with him, to be safe in his embrace, safe....

While the memory of my last night in the Skinlands jabs at my mind like famished vultures, I hear a keening banshee wail. Something Oblivion-born, a charred and mutilated mockery of a human form, sweeps down at me. I do a boxer's weave and thrust my sword into the attacking Nephwrack, slitting its slithery underbelly from throat to single staring eye. The Nephwrack sizzles and chars. The Tempest opens up and belches forth an obscene horde — some screeching, roaring, hissing, others, far more treacherous, cajoling me with almost-human voices.

Terror slides along my Corpus like the kisses of a necrophiliac. Then suddenly a voice: "Quick! Over here! You'll be safe."

Above me, bisecting the violence of the Tempest, I see a Byway of glittery sandstone that glows and shimmers as though dusted through with sapphires and opals. And on it, a lone figure, beckoning me.

As I start to run, a diving Nephwrack catches my hair in its claws and rips out a chunk of scalp. I slash the creature with my sword, giving it a pedicure that removes everything from ankles down, then drop and roll toward the Byway.

The moment that my feet touch the preternaturally gorgeous road, the sandstone transforms. The inlaid gems dissolve. Replacing it: a dark and stinking alley that dead ends in a warehouse with rows of cans spilling the stench of garbage into the warm air of the San Francisco summer.

A scrawny man with a tattoo of a bat between his eyebrows glowers down at me, gun in hand. *You better have some money, bitch.* He cocks the gun. *Fires.* *You better have some money...cocks the gun. Fires...better have...*

Someone grabs my sword and snaps a soulforged collar around my neck. Agony claws at my cheekbones and torches my skull to the roots of my hair. Then soulsteel bracelets clamp around my wrists, binding them together with bone-fusing force.

"That's quite a death you had," says a voice that manages to be both achingly familiar and terrifyingly alien.

I look up, see Alan bending over me, eyes damp with phony Doppelganger pity.

"I love a good Harrowing, don't you? Especially with such a wealth of depravity to draw upon."

Pain razors through me, but at the same time, I'm gripped with an insane elation — Alan, who I thought I'd never see again, is here in front of me.

"I thought—"

"—that I was still in the Skinlands?"

He grins and twists the wrist manacles so that they tighten mercilessly. "I would be if it weren't for you. After you got yourself murdered, I started to obsess about what kind of drug could exert so much more power over you than

I did. I went back to your old neighborhood and found your dealer. I became a believer in no time. Did as much as I could, as often as I could. It didn't take me long to o.d. Remember how you used to tease me about being such a Boy Scout? You should be proud. I've come a long way since my Boy Scout days."

"After you died, you came...here?"

"No, I'm not a Mortwright. I tried it as a wraith. For a while. But—" His voice changes as if a spike has suddenly been driven through his throat. I realize he's been toying with me by speaking in the voice that I would recognize. *This is his real voice, gravelly and evil, full of sadistic mirth.* "I was bored and I knew where I belonged — here, in the Tempest with those like myself. It wasn't a hard decision. I was a good boy in the Skinlands and look where it got me: into bed with a drug-addicted gutterslut. I realized this was my chance to taste the dark pleasures you always knew about. I felt like a convict being offered a trip to Polynesia — I couldn't get here fast enough."

I listen to this dreadful voice, malevolent, corrupt, and try to match this with the Alan that I'd known — kind and generous, a social worker with Hospice Harmony. A man who'd scour the streets in his van, picking up the homeless, the derelict, the mentally ill,

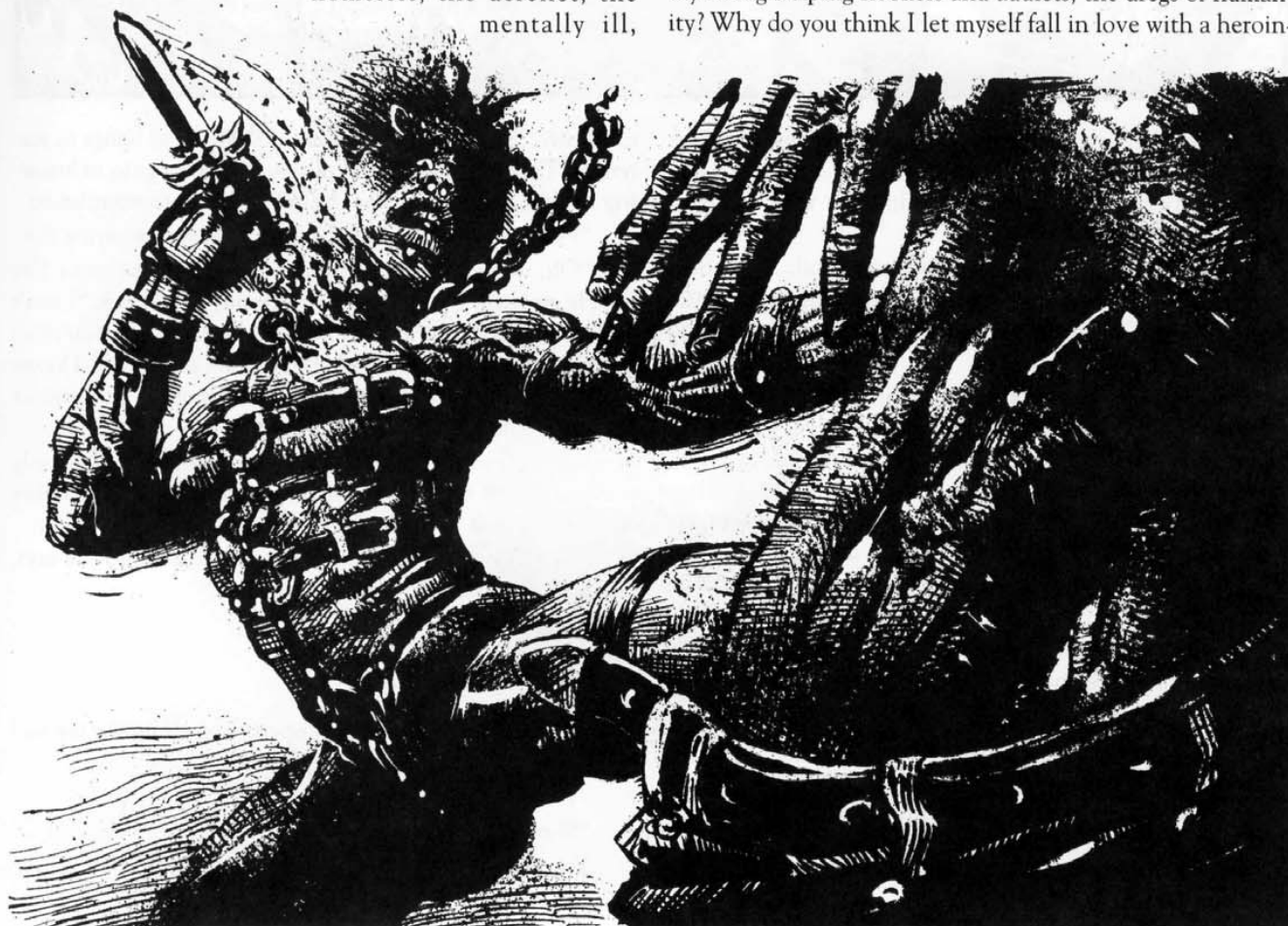
taking them to a place where they could have a clean bed, a decent meal, a night of relative safety.

He snags the metal ring inserted in my collar and yanks me to my feet. "Don't worry, you're not going to Oblivion yet. I still want you. More than ever. Everything — your Corpus, your mind, your soul."

As he speaks, I feel my Shadow getting stronger, howling with demonic mirth. A floodgate opens from the Tempest, inundating the alley with cold, foul seas. The waters seethe with maimed, inhuman creatures that bite and swallow their own flesh as they go screaming by, with relics and Artifacts from some wraith's worst nightmare.

Then a stream of sights and sounds and images batters my brain: the hypodermic needle — alluring, seductive — sliding into my vein, squalid hotel rooms where strange men offered magic — pills and peppers and crack and then, the Queen of Oblivion herself, the needle full of dark illusions, a liquid mindfuck in exchange for some brief and brutal coupling in the dark. My Psyche reels and screams, but my Shadow — she longs and pines and nearly swoons with lust for self-destruction.

"You can have it all back and more," Alan wheedles. "You can know me as I really am. Why do you think I made my living helping hookers and addicts, the dregs of humanity? Why do you think I let myself fall in love with a heroin-





addicted whore? I thought I was a good person, but it wasn't that. It was because I wanted to touch that dark side without ever having to admit to myself that was what I *wanted* without having to soil myself."

Images of self-destruction stab my mind. The soul-shrinking of primal *want*: coupling brutally with Alan while my brain burns for an even hotter lover, the cool soothing nothingness of grade-A smack.

Why deny yourself? You want him whether he's a Spectre or not. More because he's a Spectre, croons the voice I knew so well in the Skinlands, the voice that led me and tempted me and finally bullied me from the life of a middle-class clerk whose biggest vice was eating chocolate to an emaciated creature selling her body to buy the drugs so she could forget that she was selling her body to buy drugs so she could....

"It can be so lovely," Alan whispers. Longing crawls up my spine like a viper nesting in my hair.

"Remember when you told me you liked s/m games? That you liked playing master/slave?"

I remember those conversations. Me wanting Alan to tie me, whip me, bite me. Him always saying no. "You wouldn't do it," I remind him. "You said you thought that kinky sex was a barrier to love. I've learned a thing or two since then. Fuck love. Give me the kinky sex." He shoves

me down. "Slave, get on your knees!" My head hangs in surrender. The agony of the restraints, the worse pain of knowing what Alan has become, brutalizes me into submission.

"I want us to make love." I can't believe I'm saying this.

"Oh, we will. Although making hate may be more like it." He grabs me by the hair and jerks my head back. "I can't believe you thought you could be a Doomslayer. You're so weak, so easily controlled. No better than a barghest. I know you as you *really* are, remember? Nothing gives you greater pleasure than to grovel, crawl and beg."

I feel a surge of shame. What he says is true, but only partly. True for that Other part of me, the part that writhes with pleasure at the promise of torments to come.

"Chains or not, you won't refuse me anything," he says, "because deep inside it's what you want."

"Yes."

"You'll obey me."

"Yes."

"You'll lick my feet, you'll open yourself up for me so I can have you anytime, any way I want."

"Yes."

"Show me," he says.

Yes, my Shadow sighs.

"Show me with your hands and mouth."

Yes, yes. My Shadow is exultant.

"Little streetslut, show me what you are." He unclips the manacles, but leaves the collar on. I kneel before him. My hands tremble with contradictory desire — to caress him, hurt him, stroke him, *dismember* him. *You destroyed yourself once*, I scream silently. *You can't do it again. You can't....*

I reach for him, but grab the dagger on my hip instead and slash upward with such violence that not only is the collar cleaved in two, but a portion of my throat as well. Tendons sag from parted skin. No matter. I am free.

With my dagger at his mouth, Alan's complexion turns a corpse-rot green. I part his lips with the blade and nick the tip of his tongue, gently. I start gouging out a molar, and smile as I watch him flinch.

"So you want to explore the dark side? Maybe there's a slave inside you, just waiting to be chained."

The horror in his eyes reveals a grain of truth. For an instant, my Shadow tempts me with a different fantasy — Alan suffering a hundred humiliations, made to endure everything I ever dreamed about experiencing myself — and more.

But I can't do it — at least, not yet. Somewhere inside this creature is the old Alan, the man I remember from Harmony House, devoted and caring and kind. *Somewhere*. I retrieve my sword and slash the manacles and collar into useless shards before I begin my retreat back toward the Shadowlands.

You'll change your mind. You want to be enslaved, I imagine I hear Alan whisper. Or perhaps he really does.

Just one more time; what could it hurt?

Darkness is your way, and self-destruction fits your natural bent. Why deny yourself?

Why deny yourself?

Why deny...?



It's been a long time since I've hunted Spectres, but I still find myself lurking around the edges of the Nihils, possessed by lust and fear in equal parts.

The Nihils strengthen my Shadow and stretch my Eidolon to the limits of its being. Even now I hear her laughing, wheedling and cajoling, plying me with fantasies of degradation and confinement — her favorite sadistic game, like offering chocolates laced with strychnine to the starving.

One day, when I'm not expecting it, I may feel the ice of Stygian chains around my neck and know that Alan's found me. I don't know if I dread that day or long for it.

But each day without Alan, each day that my Shadow murmurs, whispers, croons to me her song of pleasure spun from pain, reminds me how seductive death is — even to the Restless Dead.







Expedition

by Matthew J. Costello



verybody...freeze."

Harry Stone didn't catch the irony of what he said — not until he turned around and saw the team behind him grinning. Though they were buried under Gore-tex parkas and hoods, he saw the grins on everyone's chapped, wind-burned faces.

Julie Chang, the team's microbiologist, laughed. "As if we could do anything else."

Harry nodded. This was spring on the Antarctic plateau. The wind chill made the current effective temperature hover at a bracing 55 degrees below zero. He turned back to the frozen hills just ahead. Even with polarized goggles, the glare from the sun turned the rolling white hummocks into an abstract painting of white on white, with hardly any features to pick out.

He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"What's up, Doc? Thought you wanted to make the base of the mountain by nightfall."

Harry kept looking at the flat sea of white, the frozen hills. It was growing perceptibly colder — though that seemed impossible — with every passing minute. Late afternoon was no time to dawdle here.

"I dunno..." Harry said. What was it? What bothered him? The snow looked like a still life, as if a raging sea had been frozen in a flash and then painted white. He turned to the man to beside him.

"I think we need ropes."


The man, Navy Captain Aaron Stafford, was attached to McMurdo station when he wasn't shepherding NSF expeditions to the plateau. "You think there are crevasses ahead? Well, you've been here before. But if we're going to tie up, let's do it fast, Doc. I don't want to spend the night out here."

Harry laughed. "Me neither."

He stayed in the lead while Julie, then Collins and Kennedy, the archaeological experts, followed. The archaeologists didn't say much. They acted as though they were here under protest. If Harry hadn't brought back those artifacts they'd be back at their NYU offices, nice and warm....

Stafford had his two lieutenants bring up the rear. They seemed the most unhappy to be here. Harry had heard Stafford yell at them after he caught them bitching about this trek.

No matter. What happened here could make them all famous. Assuming, of course, they didn't freeze to death first.



After they had the ropes on, Stafford gave the go-ahead and Harry turned back to the white plateau, a shade darker now as the sun slipped down a few more degrees.

"Okay," Harry said to himself, tasting the ice on his frozen mustache. He started marching, the nylon line rope trailing behind him. And with each step, he felt that apprehension, that sense that what they were about to do might be something that could change all their lives, maybe even change the world.

It should have been an exciting thought.

But it wasn't.

Night.

There had been no crevasses. That made the rope redundant, a fact Stafford didn't rub in Harry's face, but the delay meant that it was dusk when they got to the base of Mt. Deros. The South Face polar tents practically put themselves up but the harrying wind seemed hungry to bite at even a few centimeters of exposed warm flesh.

The vicious wind relentlessly buffeted the south side of the mountain. The tents whistled in response and everyone's mood, Harry could see, turned grim.

He shared his tent with Julie. Though usually irrepressible, this night she curled up in her bag, not sleeping, just lying there, listening.

Harry sat with the satellite photos of the mountain spread out before him. He had been through all the possibilities so many times. Now to be here, to look inside the caves...

This is what I wanted, he thought.

His fingers traced the shape of the mountain, the jagged lines. He looked over at Julie...asleep. Then he reached over to his equipment pack, unzipped a side panel and took out a small stone statue. Though it bore some resemblance to a tiki carving from a South Seas island, the statue had human dimensions. There were arms, hands with fingers, legs and feet.

But on closer look he could tell that they weren't quite right. Too few fingers on the hands, no true toes on the feet. But more...

The head.

Twisted into a parody of human screaming, like the bizarre painting by Munch, with the lips pulled back in a perpetual shriek.

It was some kind of totem. *Surely it's from the South Pacific*, Collins and Kennedy had said — nearly in unison.

Harry was no expert in archaeology, primitive or otherwise. His field was paleo-genetics. When he told them where he had found it, they had laughed.

He smiled now, thinking about it. He found it right here, at the foot of Mt. Deros. And when everyone realized what it might mean, nobody laughed any more.

He put the artifact back inside the bag. And, realizing that he couldn't put off sleep any longer — though he surely wished he

could — he lay back. He watched Julie's sleeping bag rise and fall with her steady breathing. She was asleep, too. He shut his eyes.

After so much white, the blackness. Then...sleep.

In the blackness, features emerged slowly. Great precipices dotted with towers loomed in the great darkness, and glowing openings gaping in the ground.

The leader looked at the two with him. They were young, their powers untested, their instincts unchecked. He was the only one who had actually faced Spectres. These two young wraiths were no Lemures, but could they be Doomslayers?

It all seemed so unlikely.

Now he would take them to the land of the Quick. Would they be able to remember what had to be done? When it all started there would be no time to think.

He reached down and opened the relic crate. The two young wraiths looked into it cautiously. At first it looked like just a jumbled pile of gleaming metal. He reached down and pulled up some of the spikes.

"We will take as much as we can carry."

The other wraiths nodded. In the distance one of the towers belched forth a gust of reddish smoke. The leader didn't like it here, so close to Stygia. The blackness was suffocating.

He handed each of the young wraiths a half dozen sharp metal blades and hooks. Supposedly they knew how to use them. He'd soon know whether they did or not. And he wondered what kept them trapped here — they said so little. Did they have any idea why this was so important? Did they even care?

"You will have to see. There will be so little time." The leader lowered his voice. They must understand that they had to see the difference between death and life, to know who was an enemy and to protect those who might be alive.

"What if we're too late?" one of the young ones said. "What if—"

The leader raised a hand. "We won't be."

Had they even been back to the Skinlands?

Would they return here afterwards? Could he rely on them?

The crate was empty, and they were each loaded down with an assortment of blades and coils of wire. He hoped it was enough.

He—

Harry woke up.

The suffocating blackness had been replaced by the garish glowing turquoise of the tent. The wind still howled, but the morning light turned the tent into a glowing ball. He looked over toward Julie's sleeping bag — but she was gone.

The dream faded. Harry wondered *Do I keep dreaming about the blackness, of that place, those apparitions...because of all this blinding whiteness? Or is it a premonition?*

I wish — he thought — I was home. In my apartment, with my stupid tabby cat, and glass of merlot, and a Cubs game on TV. I wish—

The zipper of the tent flew down.

Stafford popped his head in. "Oh, you're up. Good. I have everything ready. The cameras are all set."

Harry nodded. Showtime, he thought. "Be right there," he said as he slipped out of his fluffy sleeping bag and into his cold parka.



Outside, Julie squatted by the satellite mini-dish.

"Any news from home?" Harry asked.

Julie didn't smile. "Storm front coming in. McMurdo wants us to hurry."

"Then let's hurry." Harry looked towards the other tents, and everyone getting ready. "As you may have guessed, this isn't a great place to be caught in a storm."

The cave opening wasn't far, a half-mile trek partly up the side of the mountain. But how far in would they have to go — to prove he was right, to find some real evidence that a civilization of some kind existed here millennia ago, before the most ancient civilizations known?



This whole expedition was based on a few odd artifacts, and some strange infra-red satellite scans of Mt. Deros that suggested that there was something *inside* the mountain.

And if he was wrong? Talk about coming storms.

Harry pressed a button, and his South Face tent comically folded itself into a neat package not much bigger than the Sunday newspaper. He packed up the rest of his gear and by the time he was done, so was everyone else.

It was showtime at latitude 84 degrees.

But in the blackness....



The leader looked at the two young Doomslayers, weighted down with so much gleaming metal and coiled wire. They looked grim-faced, somber. This was not the happy homecoming to the Skinlands that they might have wished for.

He had said — an attempt at humor — "At least you won't feel the cold...."

But as soon as he said it, he realized that it wasn't funny. It was sad, poignant — filled with all the loss that went with their twisted existence.

Twisted? Cursed.

Then, just before they passed over, made that cosmic step into the world of the Quick, he told them why this was so important.



"It could all begin here," he said. Was he trying to get them to understand the absolute necessity of what they were about to do...or was it something else? Was he simply worried about their ability? They looked up, uncomprehendingly.

"Imagine," he said, "an army of the living...controlled by Spectres."

They showed fear then. One of the young ones said, "We should have an army with us."

The leader laughed. There was an army, there was a war — but this was only one battle, one he had been waiting to fight for three decades. "We must go," the leader said. The others nodded, concentrated and followed.

When they finally arrived, the three of them didn't move, blinded, frozen, *overwhelmed* by the whiteness.



Harry took the lead — this was his junket after all. The tungsten lamp mounted on his head showed what he expected, the smooth walls of the cave. This was no natural formation. It clearly had been constructed.

Right behind him, Julie wore a camera harness for purposes of recording everything.

Still, there were no signs that something might have lived here, certainly nothing as dramatic as the odd totem in his pack.

Stafford came beside him, as if reading his thoughts.

"What's our turnback time, Doc?"

Harry scanned the frozen tunnel ahead with his light. The tunnel loomed long, with no turns or forks in sight.

"Two P.M."

Stafford shook his head, making his lamp cut a bright swath in the tunnel. "That's too late. You heard the report. There's shitty weather coming and our choppers can't come any closer, not at this elevation."

Harry turned to the Captain. He might be an old Antarctic hand, but maybe he didn't understand the importance of what they could find. An extra hour might mean the difference between success and failure. "Captain, you can take your men back anytime you want. I'm turning back at 2." He looked at Julie. Was she game for this bit of bluffing?

Stafford turned away. "I may just do that, Doc. I may just do that."

1:10.

As there were plenty of forks now, a maze inside the frozen tunnels, Julie walked beside Harry. The others hung back, as if the creepiness of these tunnels, all the forks that led to more forks, all of it without any markings of any kind, was too much for them. As they crept along, Harry began to feel doubt. Could the caves be a natural formation, some bizarre geological anomaly that made these smooth boreholes under the mountain?

"Kinda quiet," Julie joked.

Harry smiled.

"Nobody here but us humans."

Each of their steps echoed on the stone floor. But Harry also heard the others behind them...lagging behind. Would Stafford turn around and leave Harry on his own?

Harry had to admit, his bluff had started to seem a bit hollow.

Being here, in a place that possibly was more ancient than the sphinx, more ancient than Sumer or the earliest human encampments, was getting to him.

"How about a few rounds of 'A Hundred Bottles of Beer on the Wall'?"

Julie laughed. "We could swap dirty jokes. I heard this one about grafting that's really—"

She stopped. Harry turned to her, but once he saw her face, he quickly followed her gaze.

She looked down a narrow tunnel leading left. But now Harry's light, joining Julie's, picked up something else: a shape, a figure barely visible at the far end.

"I was getting used to the emptiness," he said.

"This could be it," Julie said. "Though I don't know why I'm here. Not like we'll find anything alive in this meat freezer."

Harry started down the tunnel. It grew so narrow that Julie trailed behind him.

"Doc, whatcha got?"

Stafford's voice bellowed from behind. Harry kept walking.

The walk down the tunnel was claustrophobic, as if the walls could close in on him at any time. And all the time, the shape, the figure at the other end grew more clear, more defined.

And it was familiar.

It was a large version of the totem, the same elongated head, the droopy mouth, the over-sized eyes now catching their light. Was this some kind of Easter Island-type site, Harry wondered. A place to worship something?

Or — twisted thought, especially here — was the totem a model of its builder?

The narrow corridor ended in an oval chamber. Four totems stood on a floor marked with a swirling pattern.

"God damn," Julie said.

Harry nodded. This did look like a damned place. He turned to Julie. "Getting all this?"

She said nothing. He looked at her.

Which is when it began.



The leader felt the darkness starting to cover this frozen wasteland. One minute he and his team were neatly hovering over the expanse of whiteness, the next, they could feel the evil like a sudden gravity well blooming below.

They had to hurry. Now that it had started, there were only minutes to stop it.



Julie's face wore a smile. There was nothing odd about that. But limned by the tungsten lamp, the smile seemed like a death grimace.

"Julie," Harry said.

Julie turned to the others filling the small cavern, the foggy clouds of their breath making empty word balloons.

Harry watched one of the Navy lieutenants, his jaw open, his purplish lips quivering, pull an ice axe from his belt. He buried the axe in Stafford's skull before the Captain could respond.

Harry backed up — right into one of the totems. He tried to catch up with what was happening. *What should he do? What's going on?* His breathing was rapid and shallow.

Julie ripped off her video harness and smashed the shoulder-mounted camera to the ground. When she turned back to Harry, though, she wasn't Julie anymore.

Her face had become a distorted shadow, nearly liquid as if all the features — eyes, nose, mouth — were arbitrary.

Harry felt something behind him. The cold stone of the totem. He felt it...move. He leaped away.

I've got to do something, Harry thought, as he watched one of the other Navy men slice down Collins and Kennedy. Harry heard a sick groan from the far corner of the chamber. He turned and his light picked up another totem moving, so slowly, as if in sync with each person being cut down.

Three of them — Julie and the two Navy lieutenants — now sported those blackened, amorphous features. A terrible, shrieking noise filled the room and a small part of Harry's mind realized that these creatures were the ones making the noise.

He didn't know what was worse, looking at these dark figures as they moved toward him, or staring at the totems struggling to move, to live.

Then a great roar filled the oval chamber.

The leader and the other two Doomslayers manifested in the room. He looked at the man leaning against the wall, and he saw the Spectres already in full possession of living bodies. He turned to see the imprisoned creatures, the depraved Dwellers, slowly moving.

For a moment the Spectres didn't see them.

"Now," he whispered.

The young Doomslayers didn't move.

"Now!" His voice was louder than even the shrill screaming that filled the chamber.

And the wraiths fell on the Spectres, using their ghostly blades on the human bodies. Yet with each cut, the hacked piece of flesh kept moving, demanding the Doomslayers strike again and again. The leader himself attacked what was once a woman, turning her into a ruin of blood and shadow.

The Spectre fought back, first with an ice pick and when that was deflected, with ghostly blackish fingers in attempt to wrest the otherworldly blade from the Doomslayer's hands. But he was practiced and dodged the snaky grasp.

And when the woman's body was finally unrecognizable, the Spectre freed itself from its mutilated parts, hovering in the chamber for a moment. Was it ready to fight or escape?

The Doomslayer unspooled the metal coil. If he could wrap it around the Spectre, he could follow it back to the Shadowlands, where the battle would continue.

But the Spectres were quick. They waited for a moment over the carnage of the still-quivering bodies, then vanished into the very stone walls of the chamber.

The leader turned around. The young wraiths looked shaken by the blood and horror, but he knew they would recover. Instead, he directed his attention to the lone survivor. The Dwellers had stopped moving, the energy to release them turned gone. Once more they were merely statues.

The leader moved close to the man squatted on the ground, shaking, crying, sobbing. The Doomslayer came close to him.



Harry watched the figure approach, thinking that it was about to use one of those blades on him.

Instead, the figure touched his shoulder.

I know this...man, Harry thought. *But from where? Why?*

"It's over," the man said.

Harry nodded. Somehow he believed him.

"But no one must come here again. You can make that happen?"

Harry nodded. Even in his crazed state he could see that. Nothing was found here. The storm came. Everyone died. Except for him. All lost in a crevasse, or swallowed by an avalanche.

"You understand that?"

Harry's voice was thin in the empty room. "Yes."

"Good."

The figure pulled back, ready to leave. Then he hesitated. Looked right at Harry. As if sensing Harry needed something more...to understand this.

The figure came back. And touched Harry's forehead.

"I waited for today, you know. I knew it was coming. So I had to wait...to be here for you."

Harry looked at the figure. Then, his eyes tearing, he knew.

He could barely say the word.

"Dad?"

The figure nodded. Now he embraced Harry, and Harry didn't mind the chill.

Because when it was gone, so was the figure. Harry looked around the chamber. He knew what happened here was important, though he couldn't pretend to understand it.

Harry cried during the trek back to the mouth of the cave, where he waited out the storm. And he cried again the next day, climbing down from the forbidding heights of the Antarctic Plateau to where the helicopter from McMurdo waited to take him away.

Ghost Story: The Supplicant

This section of the Labyrinth believes itself to be a subway station. It is the same as when I passed this way three of the maze's cycles ago. It is secure in its identity. Rancid-butter fluorescents flicker from the ceiling, throwing down a sallow, bug-flecked light. Tunnels gape before and behind. Honey-thick smells of subterranea waft from the darkness, where deadly third rails spark and pop. A steel door hangs just a few inches ajar at the end of the platform. Behind it, a smokeless red barrow-flame blazes, roaring like lions and giving off a stink like boiling ammonia. Something is screaming inside the flames, struggling blindly; smashing against the cracked and blackened porcelain walls trying to get out. Something had been in there, smashing, when I was here last. I no longer concern myself with seeking explanations for such things.

The priest is bobbing her head, entranced in self-desolation. She moans in an ecstasy of desired denigration accomplished as the Maw fills her, rules her, becomes her. She reels to the wall and her head smashes against the tiles. Spoiled plasm splatters the slick white surface, sizzling and evaporating as if exposed to an unseen flame. She lies on the concrete floor, her body arching. Like most of those who embrace Oblivion completely, she will not endure. But there will always be others eager for her post.

Threat? Smell of ammonia? Will we meet the Night now? Does the train come? Hungry Maw is near. Hungry Maw sees all that happens here. Rattle-clack like childhood train rides, so comforting. Soon the ambush. Nervous.

I feel the distant thoughts of others before I hear the rattling roar down in the tunnels. Before the cave-damp rush

of displaced air pushes its stagnant paws across my face. They were too far away, too hidden, for me to know who they were from. The priest would tell me that.

The Nephwrack hag ceases her convulsions, and eyes like stagnant wells fall on me. She is rotting. She does not decay in the mortal sense, but suffers the liquescent dissolution of the Underworld. Gnarled, carcinogenic lumps dot the surface of her Corpus and weep thin streams of milky plasm. She opens her fanged jaws to croak. "Hungry Maw. Coming."

Relief. Anxiety. Readiness.

Another casual murder? You are completely hardened, then, after so many?

"Sergeant Steuben?"

"Yes?"

"Shoot (Murder) the priest," the sound of the shotgun blast is the comma in the sentence, "and order the men to stand-to for action. The train will be full of hostiles. You may give the order to fire when ready."

"Yes, General."

My bodyguard deploys crisply under Steuben's orders. My Mortwights are better-disciplined than the run of the Shadow-eaten. The metal-on-metal shriek of the train wheels braking on the tracks is present now in the rumble of the oncoming subway car. The ammonia stench is mixed with the scent of forgotten basements, places where wounded pets had crawled off to die in damp corners. The thoughts of the two groups are too close now, too similar to be distinguished. Anger, hope for Oblivion, reflexive anxiety and the once-adrenal rush of pre-combat exhilaration fill the aether.

The subway train that arrives is ghastly — graffitied and touched by

Oblivion; melted, rusted, warped and rotting on its wheels. The glass of the windows is opaque, or cracked, spray-painted over or just nonexistent. And it is full of the servants of the Maw.

Another slaughter, another battle fought in the name of—

Peace. Shut up.

The train is here and there are bodies falling, vanishing, evaporating around me. With a pistol in each hand I gun down the Spectres that the Maw has sent to kill me. I fight and am unexcited. The needless breaths my Corpus draws by reflex do not speed up. I have found that a complete lack of emotion, utter control, is the method by which a man becomes a deadly machine in combat.

You mean you want to die, and that's the real reason you don't dodge or become excited. For all your talk about peace, what you really want to do is snuff yourself out like a candle flame because you were betrayed by the only man you ever loved.

I will have silence while I destroy. I am calm. Today the voice is strong. It might distract me, if I was not so disciplined. Other days it is like an echo, a whisper in an empty house. Today the door does not close so easily, and it nags at me as my Companions and I put down (murder) our assailants.

You loved him, but all you were to him was another cup to drain. You disagreed with him, belittled his accomplishments beside those of his father, and then he murdered you. You, who loved him and lay with him! You fight so hard to deny that what you did was the petulant anger of a lover scorned. Is that the reason you want—

Peace. Universal peace. No more pain. No more suffering.

No more broken heart.

Shut up, weakling. I want Peace.

Elation! Victory! Exhaustion. Sadness at not having met dissolution.

I wonder if one of those voices is my own.

I seem to have lost track of what I was doing. My Corpus, loyal servant, has finished up the job for me, and I notice that I am reloading my pistols in a sudden silence. I look at the remains of the battle and try to analyze it. This is the commander's most critical skill. To analyze an engagement and understand the causes behind the outcome. I excel in this. It is why I succeed even though I cannot choose when I take the field or when I leave it. It is how I win battles with suicidal troops among whom the strongest are also the stupidest. It is why I carry on to victory even though constantly forced to assault fortresses without a siege train or the time to establish a proper circumvallation. It is my Gift.

Hungry Maw is a commander of the old style. My Companions are typical for elite infantry, weaker, but armed with modern firearms. They are practically unknown within the Labyrinth, and little enough in the houses of my enemies. His warriors are Shades and Nephwracks: fanatics, direct-route thinkers of the Church of the Mouth. On an open field, we would slaughter them. Here, in these tight quarters, we are, at best, their equals. My forces have come out ahead because our enemies were cramped together in the subway car and did not possess the element of surprise. We have still suffered serious casualties, though. I will be particularly vulnerable in case of further ambush, though this group probably comprised the cream of the Maw's forces. Even with my forces at half strength, as they are now, I should be able to carry on unless I am unlucky.

We board the subway train. One of my Companions informs me that he spent

his living days in the city called New York, where such conveyances are common. He operates some sort of control, and the train begins to move; down the track, towards the Temple of the Maw. The Maw styles itself a Malfean, like many of the Nephwracks who retain their intelligence as their size increases. He is wrong. I have walked the halls wherein slumber the Neverborn and have returned whole. Where Hungry Maw is a shadow across the sun, they are an eclipse never-ending. Hubris is at the heart of all the New Malfeans. Hubris and hunger. Their posturing no more makes them Neverborn than the overweening pride of the one I served in life—

—in Love.

Than His overweening pride made Him the God He proclaimed Himself to be.

I come to ask a favor of the Hungry Maw, that he give to me five hundred of his Mortwrights for a project I am planning. Because I do not force any to bend knee or neck to me, I wage my wars by the generosity of those who do. I hope that the Maw will grant me these five hundred without overmuch bickering. The Maw should be eager to purge itself of these followers, at the root of so much bickering and dissension among his people. They will not trouble him after they enter my service. I do not quit the field while I still possess an army. Only my Companions are exempt from this. Only my Companions are truly my own, and they serve me from love or hate or whatever it is that motivates them.

Mostly because they're professional soldiers used to discipline and who think you're the best chance to tuck mankind into the universal grave and then turn off the lights, I'd imagine.

Their motivations do not concern me, only their loyalty.

Still — I want troops and thus they will be refused. Like many of the New Malfeans, the Maw fears the favor he be-

lieves me to have among the Neverborn. Self-centered beasts. They do not understand that in the war for Peace even the most gifted general is but a pawn, to be expended in the pursuit of victory.

Worry. Anxiety. Hope for another fight. Fear we will End with our purpose unaccomplished. Eagerness to advance the Mission.

The walls are rushing by the bullet-riddled train, and the noisome reeking wind is licking at the wisps of hair my skull retains. I can see the red light of bloodfire torches burning in the distance, coming closer. I can hear nothing except the Hive-Mind's voice over the ongoing squealing crash of the train's progress. I reflect on the last time I rode a train. Life is too poetic, and my gambles have been too successful of late. I wonder, have I drawn a doom down on my head?

You've started to fear a cosmic justice, now?

I see that in the future, I will not permit myself these superstitious maunderings.

The end of the line comes, and there is no ambush. No flashing guns, no roaring Shades hungry to rend my Corpus, no doomed last stands. Only a disjointed, squealing stop when the subway ends and the temple of the Hungry Maw begins.

Disappointed?

Hunger.

Hunger.

Hunger.

Hunger.

The Hive-Mind here is active, and thinks as the Maw thinks. It is a constant struggle, not to succumb to the hunger. While its might is small in comparison to that of the Neverborn, the Gnawing Mouth is not a force to be ignored. The temple is walled in scratched obsidian, the stone devouring the light. The pillars, the halls, the floor — all are scored almost matte with toothmarks.

This place was not cast out by the convulsions of the Labyrinth's fractal. It was bitten into existence, gnawed from nothingness in a tribute to the Maw's respect for Spectral superstition.

There are dozens of priests here, clad in masks with articulated, functional jaws on them. Shades in shackles pull at their chains, seeking freedom to devour. They drip plasm from mouths Moliated to outlandish size, or warped that way by their attunement to the Labyrinthine tide. If things do not go my way, I think that perhaps this place will consume me as well.

I arrive at the Maw's seat, and there is a performance in progress, part Pageant and part Harrowing and part acting in the traditional sense. There may be a plot, but it seems mainly to involve vulpines, violence and bestial rape. Similar to barghests but without muzzles, the vulpines of this pack have been specially Moliated for the performance. They can derive no physical pleasure from their actions, so I assume this tableau was intended to symbolize another form of possession and devourment. Perhaps it was simply excess on the director's part. We are, after all creatures of excess.

How delightful.

I ignore this performance and address the Maw over the cacophony of growls and shrieks. "I come to beg of you 500 Mortwights, to make war on the Shadowlands."

The performance does not stop. It cannot stop. The bloated thing that is the Maw turns a face to regard me. Another regards distractedly the dreamlike rape and devourment taking place in the God-king's honor. The other two heads are busily feeding themselves, stuffing ragged chunks of Corpus, dripping plasm, down gullets painstakingly made efficient for the task.

"Didn't the guards devour you?"

"I'd say the answer to that statement seems baldly evident."

"So why don't I have the rest of my followers seize you and feed you to me?"

I raise my hand and tick off reasons on skeletal digits. "Because then the hundreds of prisoners and 300 oboli I have hidden elsewhere in the Labyrinth under guard will never be yours. Fractious Mortwights will continue to trouble you. You will be weak after my Companions cut down most of your personal entourage. You yourself may pass into Oblivion.

It looks puzzled, "Oboli?"

"Yes. Oboli. To help support your networks of Doppelgangers in the Necropoli of European Russia. Half the Labyrinth knows about them. And even beyond all this, not all my men are with me. The rest of my troops have been ordered that, should I not return, they are to harry you and harass you, finally leagu-ing with your worst enemy at the most inconvenient moment to bring about your downfall." My men are cocking their guns and loosening their swords in the sheaths. This is when the killing will start.

Hunger.

Anger.

I hope the combination of carrot and inordinately large stick will deter him. If not, I will at least die with the small satisfaction that the cause of Peace —

— Oblivion —

— **Peace** will be strengthened by the loss of someone whose appetite outweighed its intellect. This, at least, will be some consolation.

The Maw thinks for some time as the performance nears a convulsive and disjointed end. The echoes of the thoughts roll around us. I realize that the Maw is close to becoming a Hekatonkhire, a Hundred-Handed One, a Onceborn with the mind of a beast. I can feel the urges, the mindless surge of emotion, fighting for control. In the Maw, in the room, in me.

Hunger. Anger. Hunger. Anger.

Fear.

Finally. **Fear.** "It is done. The delivery shall be in three days, in the Confluence of Grinning Skulls." We withdraw in good order, ready to stage a fighting retreat if the Maw's fear and hunger for my bribe turns to anger at my threats. There is no other way to do this — it is the curse of my chosen method.

The Tempest is in a blow as the army readies itself. My Companions are about me. The team that will open the Nihil is ready, out there in the blowing rags of storm.

Eagerness. Before-battle exhilaration. Hunger for Nothing. My Psyche won't stop bothering me. Excitement.

I think of the quiet peace of desolation and the sleep of the universal grave. The Nihil is open, now. Four thousand Mortwights and my thousand Companions are ready. There is not a whisp of wind a-blow in the Ruhr Necropolis. In the distance, through the tempest and the distortion of the Nihil, I can see wraiths on the streets, going about their business.

This will change everything. No more peace until the storm-gongs ring. No more calm times for Stygia. No, from now on eternal vigilance shall be their lot. Yet, when I reflect, it seems almost as if my victories have bred ever more difficult battles. Where once I mustered tens of thousands for the sack of Enoch and the interdiction of the Styx, now I am pleased to field 5000 Spectres for a series of pinprick raids to keep my enemy off-balance. *This seems like such a hopeless task. I should just cast myself into the mouth of Oblivion and be done with it.*

I wonder how long I worked to make myself say those words and have them make so much sense. I am so very sly, almost admirable, in a low sort of way. I smile, and raise my sword above my head. I let it fall, and as one man, we march. For Victory, and for Peace!

Still Life with Impending Doom

I can hear it coming. I'm trying to imagine what kind of feet — or whatever — can make that heavy echoing sound, and failing. It won't be much longer till I find out, though.

It's pitch-black now. My last soulfire torch went out, I don't know how long ago. If I reach out my hands, though, I can feel the wall in front of me. Feel that last carving, slowly etching itself. Sometimes little shards of Labyrinth-stuff clatter to the floor, though mostly they just get sucked back into the wall with a sick little sucking sound. Off in the distance and far below there's a trickle of plasm. As the man said when he'd been tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail, "If it weren't for the honor of the thing I would as soon have walked."

We hit the top of the Labyrinth two days ago, those with Argos flying and carrying the rest of us. H.B. wanted to test his latest theory about connections between glow zones and veins of crystallized Angst, so we made our descent from the Rome Necropolis. There are a lot of glow zones in this part of the Labyrinth. (Just my luck to be stuck somewhere they're scarce.)

There were seven of us: H.B., the androgyne who takes (took) pride in having been rejected from both the Harbingers and the Masquers; Lords Burton and Travis, an inseparable pair of ex-Skeletal Legionnaires looking for distraction from some grief they didn't talk about; Kyle, a Neo-Fisher looking to keep ahead of the patrols; a disillusioned Nhudri-worshipping Artificer calling itself Master Control Program; tormented artist/programmer Drawer; and me, teenage hacker ace for the Hierarchy until caught out on the wrong end of an administrative power play. We weren't what anyone would rush to call dreams of psychological togetherness,

but then that's not what the Doomslayers are there for. We were all ready to go take insane risks for the sake of exploration and information-gathering.

There'd been minor Maelstroms battering at the Necropolis in the last few weeks, and H.B. figured we'd find some fresh cracks down below as a result. Sure enough, we did. A valley meandering between two old ridges was split crosswise, so we had our pick of ways into the Labyrinth. H.B. went for one where there was a cascade of liquid plasm, something that looked like electric-blue water, so that we'd have a good marker and maybe a little extra illumination once inside. The Lords placed some climbing anchors and we made our way down and in.

Something rustles around overhead. Suddenly it drops in my lap. I'd scream, except that my Shadow isn't letting me use my voice. Whatever the thing is, it's got at least a dozen long legs — it feels like at least three joints in each, but I'm not sure and I don't really want to know. The body brushes up against my chest for a second. It's thin and slimy. A stalk rising out of the middle of the back whaps me in the face a couple of times. Then, with a spasm running from both ends in toward the middle, it flips itself off me and scurries into the distance. In a second I can't hear it anymore. Those legs must have some kind of cushioning — or the floor might have gotten spongy and soft.

I really, really hate Plasmics.

After it goes, I start feeling an itching sensation where the stalk hit. The thing probably hit me with some low-grade caustic or other. If I were going to survive, I'd have to get it treated.

He's giving me more credit than I deserve. I don't want to be here any more than he does.

Oh, sure, I'd love to see him make the last leap into Oblivion, but whatever's coming for us isn't going to make a distinction between him and me. We already know its kind can eat Shadows. I'm not ready to take the plunge.

But I've got no more choice about it than he does.

The first few hundred yards of Labyrinth below the outside were pretty well eroded. They must have been open to the Tempest a lot of the time — it looked like an active area. We followed our stream down a vertical shaft to a small abandoned confluence, where three passages came together. The last of the erosion faded before we touched ground, and from then on it was the standard stuff of the Labyrinth: matte-black, cold and rocky to the touch, roughly square passages with only the occasional protrusion. Our stream meandered off down an old channel at the corner of wall and floor, then turned left. We followed it.

H.B. and Kyle had been talking with other Doomslayers just before we left, you see, and they had something like a map. You never get really reliable orientation down here, of course; things stir around, as the universal corpse goes through rigor mortis. But they had a general idea where to go, or so they said, and off we went.

There were a bunch of dull hours after that. Oh, we found some big chambers, one so huge that we could only explore half its circumference before burning out a torch. But after a while it's all the same thing: more black rock, or at least black stuff that acts like rock.

So I admit it. I was jumpy. I panicked.

We had encountered absolutely nothing but our reflections in the stream for, I dunno, six or eight hours, and I was starting to feel it. Even worse, I was on rear guard. All of a sudden I heard some-

thing stumbling down a side passage a few hundred feet behind us. I grabbed the relic blunderbuss H.B. had given me, ran back up, turned and let fly. The muzzle flash blinded me for a couple of minutes, and the roar blanked out my hearing for half that, and the recoil tossed me up against the far wall. I'm not sure if I passed out or not, but I wouldn't be surprised.

When I got it back together, the others were gathered around, and man, were they mad at me. The Master Control Program was chewing me out up one side and down the other, and Lord Travis seemed ready to Moliat up a sword and run me through right there. Finally, when I could get a word in edgewise, I asked what the problem was.

H.B. quieted everybody down. "The problem, sir, is that you wasted precious ammunition taking out a Nothing. Look at it. The thing wasn't even self-aware. If you'd just kept quiet, it would have passed us by. As it is, we're out one load. Furthermore, you've probably alerted every Spectre within ten miles to our presence, which means that the very moment you can walk, we have got to get out of here."

That was the high point of the trip, as far as I'm concerned; it's been all downhill since. All of us Shadows got a fine meal out of the argument. The Lords and the Fisher wannabe came right up to the brink of Catharsis. We were all expecting a chance to get control and do some real damage once the fools got back to the Shadowlands. None of us expected this.

The footsteps below me have just gotten a lot louder. There can't be more than a confluence or two between me and the thing. I suppose it's a Malfean, unless it's something I've never heard of. It's not so much that I'm afraid to die — I did that once already — but I don't want to die *here, now, like this.*

Anyway, we beat feet away from the stream (one more thing H.B. hated me for) up through a series of small passages, coming out maybe halfway back to the outside in a perfectly round passage running very gradually downhill. The Drawer

smiled for the first time. He'd come this way before, and he knew that this chute ran to some half-flooded confluences where there were some long-time glow zones. So we were back on track.

More tedium. The next time we saw a Nothing I kept quiet, and sure enough, it shambled on past us. I thought Drones looked pathetic — and I still do — but Nothings are far worse. Nothings have all of that mindlessness on top of being Shadow-eaten. There's, well, nothing left. Just a vague urge to go eat, I guess. The thing's face was like clay left out in the rain too long, wiped smooth of absolutely every individual detail. I've never felt sorry for the Shadow-eaten before, but I felt sorry for that thing. I wished I could put it out of its misery without getting us in more trouble.

A couple of times the Lords thought they heard something behind us. H.B. wasn't sure, worried a bit that their anger at me might be provoking them into imagining things to blame on me, but also respecting their training. Of the bunch of us, they were the only ones who could really be said to be prepared for the expedition. Funny how that works.

Finally we came to the first of the wet rooms Drawer knew about. The plasm here was clear but really thick, sort of a very slick jelly. There was a raised ledge on one side of the chamber, but the floor sloped off at about forty-five degrees, so the exit on the far side was completely submerged. There's usually a variety of "rock" formations around plasm flows, and this place was no exception. Stalactites hung down from dips in the ceiling, and there was one with a fast enough drip to spread rings across the plasm pool every few minutes. I could make out ledges along the wall, the accumulation (so the Lords said) of rim deposits at times when the plasm level was different than it is now. There were Plasmic nests on some sort of a growth on one of the ledges, something weird that looked like metallic cobwebs. The webs were covered in creatures that hung off them and dipped

snouts longer than the rest of their bodies into the plasm.

And we got our glow zone to study. Off at the far end of the ledge, just inside the next passage, there was a ten-foot band of Labyrinth stuff with a dim red glow. I, of course, had never seen one, so H.B. was only too happy to lecture me on the basics: There are these places where the Labyrinth lights up. Nobody knows why; our group was hoping to get some answers. Mostly the glow is in the solid stuff of the Labyrinth, but sometimes it's in the empty space of passages. Nobody knows why that happens, either. Maybe we'd have found something out, if we'd had more time.

The footsteps below are louder and closer. Little flakes of ceiling are getting knocked loose and dropping into my lap. One hits the welt that Plasmic left. For a few seconds I think I'm going to pass out from the pain, but I don't. Kind of wish I did, actually.

I feel like I'm waiting in the Mines of Moria, but it's not Gandalf who's coming.

We'd been there just a few minutes. H.B. had us spread out do some surveying, looking for veins of anything other than the usual Labyrinth stuff. All of a sudden there was a huge crash. The ceiling overhead started cracking, and more Spectres than I can count came pouring through.

In a blink of an eye, H.B. and both the Lords had been run through on Spectral swords. They crumpled. I think maybe H.B. got sucked into a Harrowing, but the Lords were dead...destroyed...whatever, on the spot. In the next blink, Kyle and the Master Control Program got thrown up against the wall and smashed flat by these Spectres with huge flat paws instead of hands. I didn't see what happened to Drawer.

I ran.

My lantern went out. My backup torch wouldn't light. But I didn't stop. I just went plunging on down whatever way felt like it would take me away from the Spectres.

So much for training, practice and courage, huh?

After I don't know how much time, I suddenly found myself falling. I'd crossed the opening of a shaft without warning. The fall wasn't too bad — I'd guess no more than about thirty feet — but my legs twisted up like pretzels. I couldn't — hell, still can't — walk. For a long time I just lay there, catching my mental breath, and starting to worry. I didn't hear anything apart from this one trickle of plasm and the occasional moan that you get *everywhere* in the Labyrinth.

Finally I realized I could take another try at the torch. After some fumbling I got it lit, too. And that's when I sealed my fate.

This passage is perfectly square, very obviously carved smooth by Spectral hands (and paws, I guess, after I saw what got Kyle and the MCP). Then something else came along and put pictographs into it, hammered in a foot-wide band that spirals all the way around the passage at a forty-five-degree angle. The pictographs are done in a weird style, sunk very deep into the walls and distorted in a way that makes them almost holographic. I wouldn't be surprised to find that there's some illusion-crafting Arcanos involved in making them, assuming whatever's coming feels like talking first.

Whatever did the crafting is still at work, too. The last couple of panels seem to be carving themselves. There's a small crackingsound once or twice a minute, and a chunk of wall pinches itself up and out, getting at the design in *somebody's* mind. It's not quite the most disturbing thing I've seen since my death, but it's right up there.

Anyway, what the images represent is the story of Charon's Shadow. The early ones show Charon's entry into the Shadowlands, and the emergence of his Shadow as a distinct entity. Then there's a sequence of twenty or thirty that must be landmarks in Stygian history, though I recognize only about half of them. In the pic-

tures, sometimes the Shadow wins, sometimes Charon does. Early Pardoners show up to work with Charon, and one woman in particular acts as his Castigator for a really long time. (No time codes here, but from what I know it must be centuries.)

I dragged myself along the floor to read the rest of the story.

Several pictograms show a Pardoner ritual that I've heard talked about. Nobody in my social scene knew if it was real or not. Heh. Not like *I'm* going to tell them. In the pictures, the Pardoners pull Charon's Shadow completely out of his body so that Pardoners can beat on it for a while. Charon looks exhausted in each of these, but it must be nice to take a vacation from the damn thing once in a while.

Says you.

In the last of these, though, something goes wrong. The next pictogram is a long view of the Onyx Tower, with the Shadow beating tracks straight for the Labyrinth. Teeny little faces peer down from Charon's windows, and there's enough rendering to show that they are more than a little angry and afraid.

For the next half-dozen panels, the Shadow wanders around in the Labyrinth. It bounces off some minor Spectres, runs away from some powerful gatherings, and spends time making gestures that don't make any sense to me. Then it comes into a Malfean's lair.

Everybody in Stygia has seen pictures of what's at the other end of this huge, huge, huge cavern. It's Gorool, big as unlife and even uglier on its home turf, surrounded by Spectres of every kind. And Gorool *eats* Charon's Shadow. In one panel, they're standing facing each other, Charon's Shadow bigger than human but Gorool looming so high up it takes a lot of perspective trickery to get it all in the frame. The next, the Shadow's bitten in half and going down one of Gorool's throats.

The next panel is more flow chart than illustration. I think it shows how Gorool absorbs all the knowledge of Charon's Shadow while stripping out its consciousness, but it'd take someone a lot more knowledgeable about Spectral feeding habits to say for sure. But it fits: Gorool showed up knowing so much about Stygia.

I reached out to touch the carving of Gorool. That was when the alarm went off.

All of a sudden, wham! My Shadow was in charge, I dropped to the floor, and I could hear a long inhuman scream blasting down way, way below me. Then there was a rumbling sound as something started coming back up.

My Shadow let go in a few minutes, for all the good it did me. After all, I'm not going anywhere very fast anyhow. Sometimes I think it might be as scared as I am about this.

One for the moron, there. Yes, I got a last shot of unexpected Catharsis, but in return I got a mental spike a mile high ordering me to stay right here and wait for "the answer." It doesn't sound like any answer I want to hear, but when the Uncreated speak, you listen. So I twisted his — my — our legs back into splinters again, to make sure he couldn't get us out of here when he resurfaced, and let go. Pity he missed the pain. It was exquisite.

Whatever it is, it's just about here. This isn't the kind of secret the Labyrinth wants to get loose, I think. I don't know who carved it, or why, but it doesn't look made for the eyes of anything like me. For hours now I've been listening to increasingly distinct footfalls from something that must mass as much as a house, or more. Gorool was huge in that pictogram—his servants might not be too trivial themselves.

I wish it was over. The waiting is a drag. I wish it would never end. I wish something would pick me up and carry me home. I wish I were still alive.

I wish....



MacDougall 98



Introduction: The First Fatal Step



Nobody knows how many Spectres there are, but there are a lot. Nobody knows where they're going to come from next, in what strength or with what powers and infernal devices. The only thing that is known about them is their intention: complete and utter destruction.

Most wraiths think about this and decide that the best offense is a good defense. They build their Citadel walls high, arm themselves with soulsteel and wait for the inevitable. *Maybe we'll be able to fight them off*, the guards and Legionnaires say. *Maybe we'll be able to hold*.

But not every wraith is content to let the enemy come to him. There are a few brave souls who have decided that the only hope lies in taking the fight to the enemy. Some of them do it for money, some do it out of hatred and some do it for — well, no one wants to look too closely at what motivates a Doomslayer.

But regardless of why they do it, they do it. Wraith after wraith takes on the mantle of the Doomslayer, and goes hunt-

ing Spectres. Some do well, returning with trophy after trophy. Many are inducted into the Orders, or help the Guilds in their subversive struggles against Oblivion. Some make a few trips and decide to flee to the safety of Stygia.

Some never come back at all.

There are always more wraiths willing to descend into the Labyrinth itself — albeit briefly — in the hopes of showing Oblivion that the battle's not quite as one-sided as the Malfians might think. And the more Spectres who get taken down — in the Labyrinth or in the Tempest, on Byways or attempting to infiltrate the Shadowlands — the fewer there are for the next assault or Maelstrom.

That's why the Doomslayers keep descending into the pit. That's why there are always going to be more willing to take up arms against a sea of Spectres. And that's why, even if a Doomslayer goes down permanently, another one is going to be waiting for his turn at vengeance.

Welcome to Hell. Are you going to be a permanent guest, or just visiting?



How To Use This Book

Doomslayers: *Into the Labyrinth* is intended as a resource for players and Storytellers for chronicles involving Spectre hunting and the Labyrinth. The book is split into thirds, each covering a different aspect of Spectre hunting.

The first part of the book is devoted to Doomslayers themselves. Starting with an overview of who and what the Doomslayers are, it runs down the Doomslayer Orders, Guildwraiths who have joined the fight and even those odd wraiths who go off solo. Tactics, Artifact uses, new powers and the methods by which Doomslayers can pick up Dark Arcanoi (and fool the Hive-Mind) are included as well. Finally, it wraps up with character creation — the blueprints for building your very own Doomslayer character.

Part two shows you the other side of the coin — Spectres. In addition to being a brush-up on Spectral basics, this section goes inside the hearts and minds (and other, less identifiable aspects) of the participants in the Oblivion War. While Coldheart may lead his minions against Stygia, fiercer battles take place in the bowels of the Labyrinth where slumbering Malfeans command their servants into conflict through dreams, and Nephwracks seek to ascend to the status of the Onceborn. New Dark Arcanoi and castes of Spectres are detailed, as are Spectral tactics and ideas for working Spectres into (or making them the focus of) your chronicle.

Finally, we have the descent into Tartarus itself: a description of the Labyrinth. Here, for the first time, is information on what Doomslayers are likely to find in the tunnels carved by the Neverborn. Everything from the non-Spectral inhabitants of the Labyrinth to the ways in (and speeds at) which the eternal maze changes can be found here, as can some descriptions of prime sites in the Labyrinth itself.

To close out the book is a selection of some of the brightest lights of the Doomslaying profession, as well as some of their counterparts on the other side of the wall. A menagerie of Shadowed Plasmics — non-Spectral inhabitants of the Labyrinth — are the last thing you'll see in this book.

Hopefully, they won't be the first thing you see when you cross over.

Evoking the Labyrinth

The environment of the Labyrinth is rich and complex. It is also very alien. Storytellers may well want visual references to supplement the text here; sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words. Below are some excellent sources for invoking the imagery and mood of the Labyrinth, beyond the well-known works of Ligotti, Lovecraft and Giger.

Books

Planet Earth: Underground Worlds, Donald Jackson and the editors of Time-Life Books; Time-Life Books, 1982. For awe-inspiring photography and fascinating little anecdotes, Time-Life nature books reign supreme. This volume contains page after page of pictures of complex cave phenomena and sometimes-disturbing pictures of cave-dwelling wildlife. It also has excellent diagrams of the operation of various pieces of climbing gear modified for cave use. If you have time for just one book, this should be it.

Other useful references include:

The Cave Divers, Robert F. Burgess; Dodd, Mead & Company, 1976. Burgess was one of the pioneers of cave diving in Florida, and conveys the culture of that community as well as the nature of the caves he and others explored. The combination of zealous protection of secrets from outsiders, intense (but not bitter) competition among peers and mutual delight in discoveries made is very appropriate for Doomsday communities.

The Greek Myths, Robert Graves; Moyer Bell, 1988. Only the unwise would take Graves' word for the details of the historical worldview of the ancient Greeks. But as an imaginative evocation of a vanished world, this collection is unsurpassed. His passages on the underworld and the beings who dwell there make an excellent starting point in understanding the mindset of the wraiths who probe the Labyrinth.

Underground Railways of the World, H.C.P. Havers; Temple Press Books, 1966. This book is specifically useful for a sense of the scale of effort necessary for safe construction underground, and for the range of calamities than can befall excavators. The details of engineering differ radically in the Labyrinth, but this gives the Storyteller a starting point from which to extrapolate.

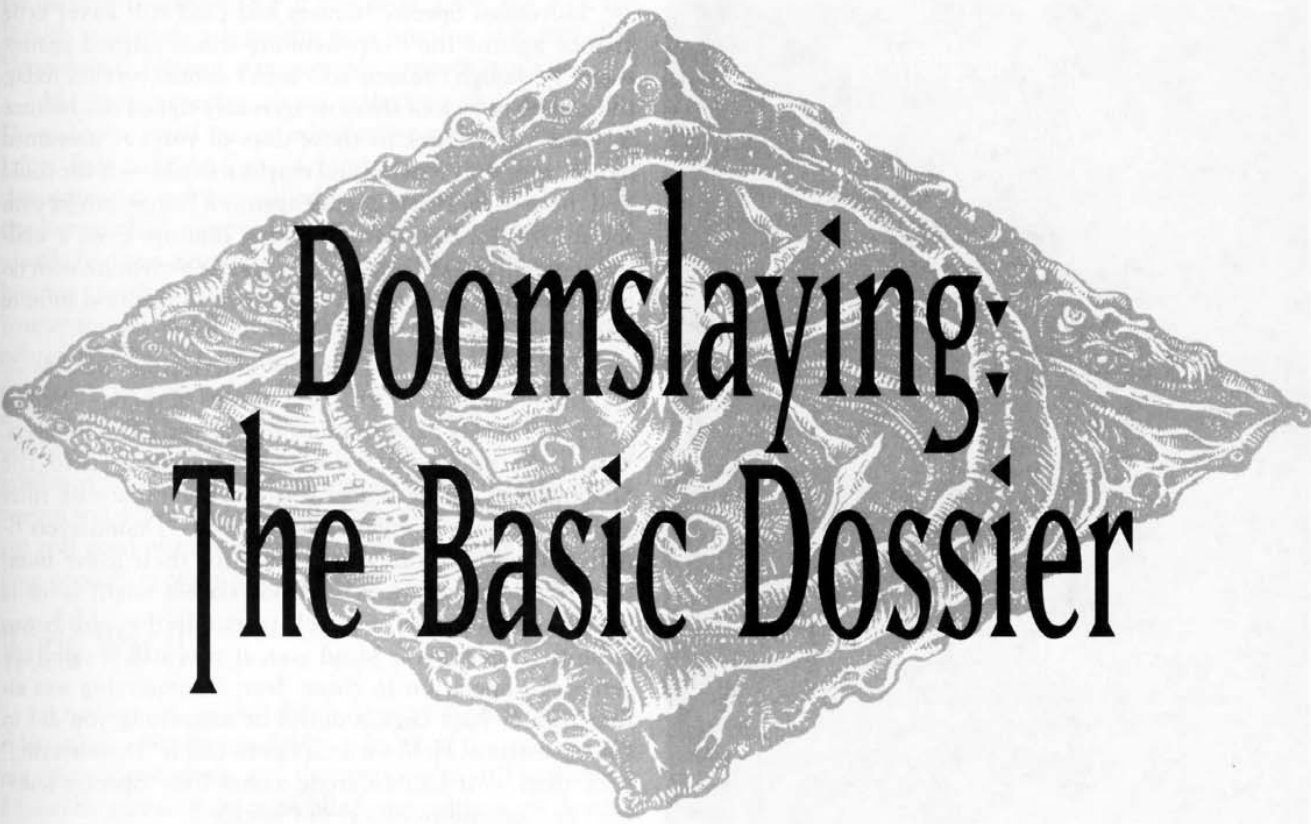
London Under London, Richard Trench and Ellis Hillman; John Murray, 1984. This volume lacks the visual power of Jackson's book on the natural underground, but is a gold mine (or perhaps Angst mine) of information on the human presence underground. From the Roman efforts to channel subsidiary rivers underground to the history of tunneling machines to the role of dedicated subway lines in mail delivery, this is a succession of marvels. The cover painting, of a formal banquet held in a freshly excavated subway tunnel, is the seed for a good episode all by itself.

Online Resources

There are many excellent sites related to the underground world on the Internet. The Virtual Cave (check a search engine for the current URL) offers the best set of pictures and explanations; a number of the specific details in later sections of this book were inspired by the site's pages. The community of *alt.caving* is generally very friendly and willing to answer questions, and its members are keen to share their enthusiasm with newcomers.







Doomslaying: The Basic Dossier

Declaration of War



it down and shut up. We haven't got a whole lot of time and you've got a lot to learn. The first thing you have to know is this: Don't ever know too much. You know too much and you become a liability. If one of the enemy gets ahold of you and picks your brain, we're all fucked. Keep your eyes forward, don't slouch, don't read anything that doesn't belong to you and I won't have to kill you — again. Your history lesson will be brief and I won't repeat anything, so try to keep up. What's that? No, I'm fresh out of pencils. Use the guy sitting next to you if he screws up.

I guess somebody thinks you're slick enough to join the Doomslayers. Well, you *are* dead — that's the first requirement. Looks like you've seen some action — that big desert affair in the Skinlands, maybe? Combat experience is a plus, but it's not everything. Been to see a Pardoner lately, kid? I didn't think so. That little bugger looks like it's ready to pop right out and try to eat my face. That's good. I like that kind of attitude in a Shadow. Well, enough of the pleasantries, let's get started. We've got a ton of stuff to cover and less than zero time to do it in.

Who Are They?

The basic breakdown of Doomslayers is as follows:

- The Order of the Thorn takes the fight to the enemy in organized, military fashion. Its members take a fair number of prisoners; no one outside the Order knows why.
- The Martyr Knights observe important Stygian political figures for signs that they've been replaced by Doppelgangers, and rout what impostors they discover. They also work on rehabbing Spectres, or so the story goes.
- Helldivers are Masquers who go in, usually solo or in pairs, to perform specific missions inside the Labyrinth. Those can be assassinations, extractions or whatever else — the point is, they have to go under deep, deep cover to pull the assignment off.
- Darksiders are Pardoners who cater to the needs of other Doomslayers. Some go so far as to serve as combat medics for the soul, keeping Doomslayers' Shadows in line even in the heart of the Labyrinth.
- Solos is a catch-all term for any wraith who Doomslays without belonging to an official organization. Some go through training, some don't. Some do it for the money, others for less understandable reasons.

First Wave

Like I said, combat experience is a plus, but it's not everything. The war with Oblivion — and specifically Spectres — has been going on since everything began. The first wraith to enter the Shadowlands had to deal with her dark side just like the rest of us. It probably wasn't long after that the first Spectres appeared. Now that doesn't mean the Doomslayers started back then. I'm just trying to make the point that this battle has been going on for a long time, fought by Restless from all walks of life, many of whom had gotten no combat training. What really makes the difference is the will to exist. If your nerve breaks, you'll be dragged screaming into the pit of the Labyrinth like so many others before you. That might happen anyway, but it's best to hedge your bets.

For centuries, small groups of Spectres could attack the Shadowlands with little fear of retribution. The Legions fought off the Spectres when they attacked in force, but couldn't react quickly enough to small incursions. Victims of such attacks were left to fend for themselves, hoping the Legions might arrive before they were dragged into the abyss. As a result, vengeful survivors occasionally took it upon themselves to hunt Spectres by whatever means they had at their disposal. These pockets of amateurs never worked in concert and rarely succeeded with any consistency. Lots of them ended up losing the battle with their own Shadows, thus becoming what they had most despised.

Individual Spectre hunters had (and still have) little chance against the overwhelming forces aligned against them. Although firearms still aren't common relics today, the complete lack of them dangerously tipped the balance in favor of Spectres in those days of yore. A untrained hunter with only a sword and maybe a shield — if she could find those — had little chance against a Doppelganger with the rest of the Hive-Mind backing him up. Even a well-trained fighter had little chance against a creature with no regard for its own personal safety, not to mention infinite reinforcements.

The invention and mass-production of firearms — and the subsequent destruction of tons of them — helped to tip the scales back in favor of the early Doomslayers. When trained soldiers began streaming into the Shadowlands during World War I — complete with rifles and occasionally even artillery pieces — Doomslayers finally had weapons to compensate for their lower numbers. While only one in 20 Doomslayers might actually have a working rifle or pistol, tactically the odds began to shift in our favor. Mind you, it was still a catch-as-catch-can operation in those days; Doomslaying was either part of your Legion duties or something you did in your spare time. Hell, we didn't even call it "Doomslaying" back then — it had different names like "Spectre hunting" or "bagging trophies" or "suicide."

The Great Depression

After the Fourth Great Maelstrom, Spectres flocked to the borders of the Skinlands creating whatever misery and despair they could. It was the time of the Great Depression and it was very easy to create such feelings in the hearts and minds of humanity. Charon, seeing that the forces of Oblivion were running unchecked, offered a bounty for to any wraiths willing to hunt and destroy Spectres. With that offer, the rag-tag groups of Spectre hunters found the first semblance of organization and Stygian support. The Doomslayers — so nick-named by the denizens of Stygia because the term "doomshades" was in vogue for Spectres — were recognized by Charon and even were folk heroes briefly. Mind you, the Orders had been around for a long time before that in various forms doing various things, but this let them codify. Most of 'em mashed into two groups, and they put their head honchos on a council called the Five. Things started getting organized.

With so many Spectres to hunt, Doomslaying paid well indeed. In the process of collecting bounties, individual Spectre hunters met and discussed tactics, traded weapons and shared information. Soon, these amateur gatherings formed into professional groups of Spectre hunters acting in concert with one another. (Mind you, there had been organized groups with names like "Brothers to Wolves" and "Chain and Crescent" and whatever else running around

for literally centuries, but it was only when Joe Average Wraith really started getting into hunting Spectres that Doomslaying became a respectable profession.)

More mercenary than military, the first solo Doomslayers acted out of self-interest rather than public safety. Five to eight Spectre hunters with similar tactics, dispositions or territory allied for safety and profit. While the hunters had personal reasons for hunting, they could usually find the monetary reward to be enough impetus for hunting together. Most Necropoli honored Charon's offered bounty for any confirmed Spectre slaying, and some even offered additional rewards for particularly pesky Shadow-eaten; bits of Corpus had to be brought back for the "kill" to be verified, and a Pardoner had to give the final thumbs-up. Some of the brighter Doomslayers started fighting to subdue at this point, figuring that a Spectre Corpus *plus* a reward was worth more than just the reward. Some of them got real good at capturing Spectres; the others didn't last long enough to make a fuss over.

World War II

It was brutal, and we didn't do enough. A lot of us got sidetracked — understandably — by all of the ugliness going on during this one, and those of us who still had strong Hierarchy connections got pulled into other work details. You know, dealing with the casualties, establishing no-fly zones, stuff like that. That meant that the hunts got toned way down for the five or six years right before the Fifth Great Maelstrom, which meant that when the storm blew there was a half-decade backlog of Spectres. And with all the crap that had been flying down below, that half-decade had produced a ton of Mortwights, and a higher-than-usual percentage of Shadow-eaten.

In other words, we were totally unprepared for the numbers the Fifth Great Maelstrom hit us with. We got forced out of our M.O. and had to fight on the defensive. As good as we were, we were not built for that sort of thing and we got butchered. Oh, sure, the assaults were fended off and the storm ended, but we got the crap kicked out of us. That meant we had to recruit, and fast. Fast recruiting meant lousy recruits, which meant botched operations, which meant we weren't as fast to catch up as we might have been, and so on. In other words, the '50s sucked for us, too.

On the bright side, once word got around how bad things really were on our end, a bunch of Masquers got into the act. Called Helldivers, these guys were a cross between idiot thrill-seekers and very professional assassins. They took a look at our ops (with some help from the Five, I hear) and started going deep- cover into the Labyrinth. Their job down there was simple: Cause havoc and don't get caught. It took them a while, but once they got into the swing of things, *damn*, they made some noise.



The Spectre Menace

The mission of the Helldivers shifted into high-gear once the Masquers Guild took an active role in Doomslaying. Operatives were sent deep into enemy territory. Now that the help of other Spectre-hunting professionals was available, deep-cover Masquers could finally mimic more than just the look of the enemy. With Darksider and Martyr Knight help, Helldivers could truly masquerade as Spectres and, for the first time, Doomslayers could tap into the Hive-Mind. What they found in the cacophony of malevolent voices was something terrifying: a million, million eyes focused on Stygia. Not all of these eyes stared out from the Abyss, either. Some of them were much closer to home. The Doomslayers, the very wraiths ordered to destroy the Spectres, were *infested* with Doppelganger spies and informants. The first Helldiver to discover this treachery paid for his keen perception with his Corpus, but too many others heard the truth whispered along the Hive-Mind. What followed shattered the Doomslayers as a whole — but allowed them to be reformed, stronger than before.

The Five, unprepared for such audacity on the part of the Spectres, retreated from their Doomslayer squads. Without direction or coordination, the Thorns started acting like

mercenary thugs. The Helldivers, protected by the Masquers, proceeded to pin-point traitors throughout all levels of the various organizations. The Pardoners took the stagnant and confused Darksiders back for retraining. Everything fell apart.

Thankfully, the Five didn't just go hibernate. They went back a ways, put their heads together, and decided to rebuild from the ground up. The Thorns got put back in line, by force in some cases. The Martyr Knights were pulled temporarily from assignment and attached to a line of researchers — the Hospitallers — whom the Five managed to detach from assignments in Stygia. Bad apples were weeded out and tossed. Communications with the Guilds were reopened (illegal, shmillegal) and we got our Helldivers and Darksiders back (as if the Helldivers ever stopped — half the time, I swear they're doing this for kicks). At the same time, Solos were encouraged to get down and dirty, so as to provide a smokescreen for more organized activities. Once the setup was done and the organization was set up, the Five went back underground. Now no one ever talks to them, no one ever sees them — hell, you'd think they were a myth until the minute your orders arrive on your doorstep.

But that's where we are now. The Thorns are back in kick-ass mode, the Martyr Knights are in place and functioning, the peripherals are working with us and the Solos are making a lot of noise. It's just the way we like it.



Why You're Here

(And Going Down There)



So much for history. It's great to know what's behind the banner you're holding up, but you need to know more than that if you're going to put your souls at risk. Any of you who think you're doing this for fun, get the hell out right now. You won't last half an hour with that attitude, and you'll get everyone around you hammered flat right next to your apologetic ass. No, you need more than that to go in the hole. Listen good, listen real good, and maybe you'll hear something that tells you the real reason you want to go bobbing for Spectres.

Motivation

So what made you buy into the recruiting pitch, anyway? Got your reasons, huh? Think it would be fun to wax bad guys? Maybe it might even get you chicks — you can be a big hero in the Pathos bars those Spook bastards run, huh?

Forget about it. There are a lot of reasons for doing what we do, but those ain't any of them. We take all types except morons, you know. We've got the folks who want revenge on Spectres who've done them wrong already. We've got the martyr-complex kids, who want to go out in a blaze of glory. There are the nuts with notions of Redemption, the homicidal maniacs and my personal favorites, the greedheads.

The Doomslayers started, more or less, because of Charon's bounty. There's no denying our mercenary origin. Money alone rarely provides enough reason to your neck (if you actually use the lump on the end of it), but dinero can be a big incentive to some. The Necropoli still offer a reward for Spectre ears or noses or whatnot — though bringing back the whole Corpus can be kind of risky. If you think you got looked down on before, just try collecting those rewards. You'd think the Legions would show a little respect for taking out a Spectre. No way! They just toss you your oboli and tell you to shuffle off before they call security, all the time looking down their noses at you. They probably treat their barghests better. Doomslaying might pay well, but glamorous it ain't.

It sounds kind of strange, but some Restless join the Doomslayers out of fear. I don't know what could make them more afraid for their existence than hunting Spectres. Maybe they got mixed up with a Solicitor or they double-crossed the Artificers and don't want to be an ashtray for all of eternity. Seeing as how they have nowhere else to go, they come here. They might get torn to pieces by Spectres or eaten by a Malfean as a result, but at least they aren't ashtrays. Not to get to metaphysical, but maybe


they fear something in themselves and hunting is the only thing that can exorcise their personal demons. I don't know, I ain't no damn psychologist.

I hate the thrill-seekers the most. They think they can grab a gun and go shoot up a bunch of Nephwracks and walk away before the Shades cut them to pieces. When the second wave of Shadow-eaten come in, you can watch that thrill turn to fear. When the third and fourth waves come in, the fear turns to panic. Pretty soon, the thrill-seeker is screaming for his momma. Sometimes they work out, though. If somebody who is in this for fun can survive the first few trips, he usually gets a grip and becomes a fine soldier. Most don't make it that far. Hell, most don't survive the second wave.

Revenge is a pretty strong motivation, but it's a dangerous one. Doomshades make regular raids on the Shadowlands looking for new recruits or snack cakes, and there's a lot of folks who lose friends to those raids. Many Doomslayers have lost loved ones or friends to Oblivion and now they want a little payback. I tell you, though, revenge is the most dangerous reason to go hunting Spectres. First of all, your Shadow probably gets a real kick out of random violence and hatred, and is right there urging you to sign up so it can get the Rage/Fear/Hate combo platter on a regular basis. Second, revenge will screw with your judgment and force you to make foolish mistakes. You'll see some Shade who looks like your friend or the Spectre that finished him off and — Bam! — you lose control. You go charging off after your buddy and stomp straight into an ambush. Be careful with revenge, son. It might keep you warm at night, but it's more likely to get you killed, for good this time.

Duty? Nothing so simple could explain why some Doomslayers risk their necks down here. The word "duty" just doesn't cover it. It's not a matter of doing the "right thing" or any kind of moral question. It's a sense of destiny, that one belongs to the Doomslayers simply because it's the right place to be now. Some Doomslayers feel that the reason they died was to fight this war. Their fate draws them into the melee and they have no choice but to follow. That sort of crap sounds defeatist to me, but they're damn good fighters even if they're convinced they're going to lose. Just don't listen to them too long when they start expounding on the inevitability of fate and you'll do fine.

The soldiers in the next room can go back to Stygia at any time, but they stay on for their personal reasons. There are Doomslayers out in the field right now who don't have that option. I'm talking about the Helldivers who are buried in deep cover up to their armpits in Shade dung. I can only surmise that they do it because they were ordered to go there. Maybe they had their own reasons for joining the Helldivers, but the Masquers that sign up get their missions from on high. They have no choice but to follow instructions. I hear that a Masquer can turn you into far worse things than an ashtray — ever heard wallpaper that hasn't quite lost sentence yet? So I don't probe too deeply into Helldiver motivations.



I have no shortage of friends among Doomslayers. That's one reason Restless sign up to come down here; to belong to something. You'd have to be a real good friend for me to come down here and help, but some Restless find companionship with the rest of their cells, the sort of companionship that watching the ass end of Stygia rot on guard duty can't offer. Here you find yourself part of something that works. Everyone watches each other's back (you have to, otherwise they might have turned on you when you weren't watching). Don't get sappy, kid, you haven't been here long enough to be my friend.

You'll have to figure out what brought you here all by yourself. You may think you know — I saw your eyes twinkle when I mentioned bounty — but you may find new reasons in time. That's enough psycho-bullshit for the day, though. I guess it's enough to know that you are here and you need to learn how to survive. Now let's strip that weapon one more time. I want it done in 30 seconds this time, and then I want your thoughts on restocking ammo on a deep Labyrinth run.

The Front Lines

The Orders

Often at odds with the Legions, rarely liked by the populace and never trusted by anyone, the Doomslayer Orders perform a thankless job for which they are uniquely suited. While every Doomslayer has her own reasons for hunting Spectres, each Order has its specific purpose and tactics. With their superior tactics and unmatched firepower, the Thorns hunt Shadow-eaten in the very heart of the Labyrinth. On the home front, the Martyr Knights risk their own existence to find the Spectres who have infiltrated Restless society. Both groups form the front line in a war against the most malevolent opponent ever to exist.

Order of the Thorn

We're the front line in a war that can't be won. We're the cannon fodder. We do and we die and no civilian is the wiser. Thorns pack the best weapons we can find, dive into a Nihil and tear a hole into Hell. The Malfeans' minions aren't very happy with us, but I've never been one for popularity contests. If you join up with us you'll probably end up Spectre fodder in a matter of weeks, but it'll be one kickass ride in the meantime.

What's the most dangerous job in the world? Hunting an implacable enemy that has nearly limitless resources and the ability to read your mind. How to win such a battle? If I knew that, we wouldn't need to recruit you, but we've got an idea or two. For one, you try to cut down those "limitless resources" by killing any Spectre you see. For another, if they can read your mind, you can try to read theirs. Sounds simple, right? There couldn't be something more impossible in all the Shadowlands.

— Javier Melo, Order of the Thorn

Have you seen pictures of the Million Man March or maybe been to an Olympics? Ever look into an ant hill after a bulldozer has churned the soil? Ever taken a real good look at the stars at night? Add those numbers together and double them and that might come close to describing what we're facing. Those folks back on the Isle don't understand what we're up against. More Spectres cross over every damn day and they all want a piece of the Shadowlands. But does anyone care? Of course not! Most Restless just want to go about their business, as if there's nothing happening down here. Every single Spectre, the whole fucking Hive, wants one thing — everything — and no one up here gives a rat's ass.

At any given time, at any place in the world, the Spectres could crawl out of a Nihil and rampage over a Necropolis in force. They're not ready up there. So that's why we're down here. If we stem the tide, if we destroy a few more of them than they do of us, maybe we've bought Stygia a little more time to prepare. We're ready. We have to be — nobody else is.

— Cameron Schilling, Order of the Thorn

Yeah, it's me. I'm back. Time for part two of the lesson. Buckle up and knuckle down. Here's where things get tricky.

Spectres aren't dullards. Sure, they may seem a little short-sighted, and you might even say some of them are unimaginative, but don't even think for a minute that they are stupid. After the first Doomslayers started jumping through Nihil, the Shadow-eaten got wise to them. Unfortunately, those first Doomslayers brought their greatest weakness with them and had no idea how to fight it. The doomshades got all the information they needed from the 'slayers' Shadows. Entire Doomslayer units vanished in massive Spectral ambushes.

In other words, we got our asses kicked.

I have to give those first proto-Thorns credit. They went through Nihil with nothing more than some sharpened sticks (OK, so they had swords and spears. What am I, a history teacher?). They didn't know their enemy very well, while their enemy knew them inside and out. The odds must have been incredible and, from what I understand, the losses were high. In some ways, the doomshades were smarter than us. It took those Doomslayers a while to figure out that their own Shadows were ratting on them. It took them a little longer to figure out what to do about it.

If the Shadow provides so much information to the enemy, and it in turn knows what the enemy is up to, maybe you can get it to spill a little. Keep it talking (as if it ever shuts up!). Placate it, enrage it, let it pity you, let it get good and stuffed on Angst and listen very carefully. Drunk on power, it'll start spouting off about how deep the shit is around the corner. There you have it. The Spectres are around the corner...well, metaphorically speaking. Offer a Shadow some rope and it'll hang all its Spectre buddies.

No, Thorns don't let their Shadows take over, but they do ride that edge. When the Shadow is brimming with Angst and full of hubris, it is more likely to screw up. It may slip and provide important intelligence as it mocks the Psyche. On the verge of victory over the Psyche, the Shadow loses the war. Remember I said Spectres are a little shortsighted — here's proof.

Martyr Knights

We sit, and we watch, and we learn. We learn everything there is to know about our surveillance targets, then we go back and learn some more. Why? Because you never know when a Doppelganger's going to get inserted in your target's place, and the lack of those little mannerisms you learned to expect will be the key to unmasking the impostor. It used to be that you could just use a little bit of Castigation to tell if someone was a Spectre or not — not that high-ranking impostors would let you get close enough to run the tests. But these days, they're making some new Artifacts down in the Labyrinth that mask a Spectre's true nature. That's when our expertise comes in handy. We can tell when someone's acting...off. When the little things are wrong. And once we're sure that there's an impostor in place, we can use that knowledge to flush the bastard out into the open.

— Clarissa Poddington, Martyr Knight

Sacrifice. It's all about sacrifice. You sacrifice tending your Fetters. You sacrifice the Passions that don't tie into the job. You sacrifice your friends and your social life, because you always have to be watching. And sometimes, when you flush out a Spectre and he realizes he's not getting away, he comes after you to make sure he's got company on the ride back to Hell. That's when you have to sacrifice everything.

I've been Harrowed in the line of duty twice. We got the Spectre each time, though. That's what counts. That's why the sacrifice is worth it.

— Milton Ericks, Martyr Knight

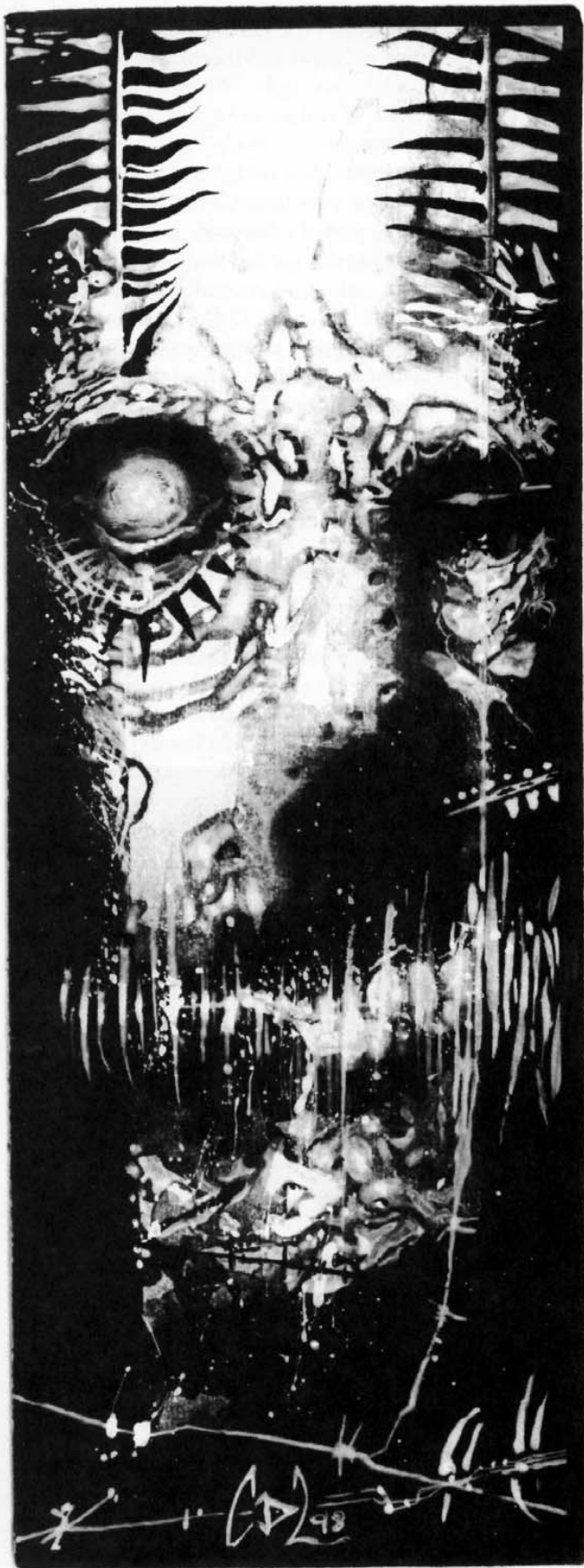
The Martyr Knights do the job that no one else wants to do. They stay home in Stygia and the Necropoli and watch for infiltrators. Sounds easy, right? Wrong. They watch the top officials for signs of replacement, and since those guys always have something going on that's illegit, they don't want to be watched too closely. As a matter of fact, more than one Martyr Knight team has gone down to the forges as part of a CYA maneuver by a crooked Anacreon.

A lot of Martyr Knights get lost that way. Even more go bughouse on the job — do you have any idea how boring it is just watching someone for years? Dull as dirt, and twice as slow. But when Oblivion slips a ringer into a Citadel, that's when you'll be glad that the Martyr Knights are on the job. They'll find the impostor, force him out into the open and never stop until they get it done. They're scary, obsessive bastards, but they're ours.

Solos

I do what I do for the money. That's right, money, spelled O-B-O-L-I. If I stayed in the Necropolis, my mouth would get me in trouble sooner or later and I'd get my ass exiled or forged. This way, doing what I do, I can make some serious cash without doing so in a way that endangers my good Hierarchy standing. Everyone expects Doomslayers to be assholes anyway, so I've got an excuse to be rude when I bring in the Spectres for bounty.





And believe me, the bounty is sweet. If you're not a forger or a Masquer, there's no sweeter gig in the Underworld. I mean, I get paid for beating Spectres over the head and hauling them in to make useful materials? Tell me where to sign up? In the meantime, I can indulge my bad attitude and get rich at the same time.

Now that's a sweet gig, indeed.

— Adrian Sagmoen, Solo Doomslayer

You join the Thorns or the Emm-Kays, you got to take orders, right? I don't do so good at taking orders. I do pretty good at waxing Spectres, though, right? So I figure, why take orders when I can figure out the hard parts — hit the Spectre, watch the Spectre fall down, put the chains on the Spectre — all by my lonesome. From where I sit, that does a lot more good than sitting around waiting to be told who to go whack. I'm more efficient this way, see?

— "Shecky," Solo Doomslayer

I have nothing against other Doomslaying organizations, but they're too rigid, too set in their ways. The best way to fight Oblivion is with spontaneity and energy, and the older groups have lost that. We — and others like us — fill in the gaps. We bring the fight to the other side a lot faster and with a lot more verve than the Thorns can muster these days. Mind you, I have the utmost respect for the Thorns and the Martyr Knights, and I'm sure that in their day, they did one hell of a job fighting Oblivion. But we're just better at it right now. It's nothing for them to be ashamed of.

— Sharyn Lansing, Solo Doomslayer Captain

The Solos are the wild cards in all this. That's because they're all over the map. Some of them are serious hunters who don't want to get involved with one of the Orders, for whatever reason. Some are unlicensed Reapers who've decided to go semi-legit, at least for a little while. Some are just lazy bastards who can't be bothered with discipline.

The thing is, you can never tell. The bunch of slackers you write off as losers might be as professional as they come in the tunnels, while the armed-for-bear guys down the hall might be all show and no balls. It's a crapshoot. The best are as good as anything you see elsewhere, the worst will get themselves destroyed and you with them in under five minutes.

Guild Representatives

While not officially involved in any capacity, two of the secret Guild organizations make significant contributions to the war against the Spectres. The first, the Masquers, sends their agents deep into the Labyrinth to remove the greatest threats, up close and personal. The second, the Pardoners, helps fight the war within every Doomslayer — stemming the tide of Angst within their Shadows. Without the former's reps, the Helldivers, the Malfeans would eventually overwhelm the Doomslayers. Without the latter's contribution, the Darkersiders, the Doomslayers would be overwhelmed from the inside. Pick your poison, kid.

Helldivers

I can't speak for very long or I'll be missed. As it is, I'm running a real big risk just coming up here to speak with you. You don't understand what it's like to always have something inside your head, crawling around your thoughts. It's not like the Shadow. When the whole Hive buzzes inside your brain, it's a million times worse than your Shadow saying bad things about your mother. If they notice that this particular brain has taken a walk... let's just say my first order of business as a real Spectre would be to find you and express my displeasure.

The Look

You seem a little nervous. It's the third eyeball, isn't it? I have to look the part. In order to get the information we need to fight this damn war, Helldivers need to look like Spectres, act like Spectres and sometimes think like Spectres. I don't want to talk about some of the things I've had to do to maintain the ruse. I can't help it if you feel uncomfortable, the Spectres seem to think I look OK. This is probably the easiest part of my job. I've been messing with my Corpus since I came over. It's just self-image, right? You choose to look like you did when you died, I simply choose to look like one of them.

The biggest problem I have with the way I look is coming home. It's hard to come out of the job and just resume a normal life. I forget myself sometimes and keep my muscles and tendons on the outside of my skin. Most wraiths don't take well to my appearance — hell, I even had some Thorn try to erase me once. The one thing that keeps me fully functional in the Labyrinth is also the one thing most likely to get me zapped in the Shadowlands. Ironic, huh?

The Talk

Acting like a Spectre can be a little tougher than looking like one. I avoid the Necropolis raids easily enough — most of those aren't well-organized and nobody seems to miss me. The tough part is finding my way around the Labyrinth and making it look like I've got somewhere to go on days when the rest of the Hive isn't off storming the castle. What does a Spectre do on his day's off? The answer is simple: They don't get any days off. Spectres don't rest along a hillock to contemplate the wonders of the universe. I can't pretend to be a janitor sweeping up the Labyrinth. I have to be a Spectre. That means I'm always on the move, keeping my head down and my ears open. I'm waiting for the day when I am singled out amongst the Hive to participate in a Harrowing — that should be fun. Do I call in sick? If I do, I'd better get out of town real fast.

Every Helldiver has his own style. Some prefer to walk in, learn what they can, take out the offending Spectre they were sent to hit and vamoose! Others enjoy moving among the Shadow-eaten, taking their time sopping up intelligence. I've known a few Helldivers (maybe they've gone a little over the edge) who participate in all the Spectre games, get real chummy (as chummy as one can be with a malevolent force of ultimate destruction) and actually fit in. For me, the trick is to gather information from the Hive-Mind, erase a nasty Shade or two and spot a Doppelganger heading out to the Shadowlands while looking like a Spectre too busy to do anything important. So far I've gotten away with it.

The Walk

The force we're dealing with isn't human, but it can be all too human at times. If Helldivers are to go down into the Labyrinth and read its collective mind, without being spotted, we need to let it inside of ours. That means a lot of risk, because if it gets too far inside, either I'm toast or I'm turned, and neither possibility is real pleasant to contemplate. So that means keeping my surface thoughts as much like a Spectre's as I possibly can, which means thinking some pretty sick thoughts. I don't like doing that, but if the choice is between thinking about eating kittens and actually doing it, well, I'll just think evil thoughts, thanks.

Maintenance

I see my Pardoner — my personal, private, not-Doomslaying-at-all Pardoner — every time I come up for air. I won't go to a Darksider, either. If you've heard some of the things I've heard, you'd stick to your hometown Pardoner as well. There's something scary going on with those guys, some kind of hunger to get close to Oblivion and then prove that they can still pull away. That's playing with fire, and this little dead boy doesn't want to get burned, no thanks.

— Sister Twister, Helldiver

Darksiders

There are many other bearers of the iron lantern who consider my calling foolish. I consider them excessively conservative in turn, so we have a fine cycle of contempt going, but that does not matter. What matters is that the Doomslayers, each in their own way, do some of the most important work there is. They fight nothingness on its home territory, bringing the virtue of existence right to abnegation's doorstep. They are brave and foolish and absolutely essential, and we owe it to them to assist them in their work. To that end, many of my compatriots tend to their needs here.


But even that is not enough, sometimes. I, and others like me, are willing to render the ultimate sacrifice to enable these brave souls to perform to their utmost. We descend with them through the storm, and tend to their Shadows even in the maw of the Void. To do less would be unconscionable, exposing them to unnecessary hardship and obstacles. To do less would be to encourage their failure, and we cannot afford for the Doomslayers to fail.

I am often asked why I do what I do. My response is always the same: Why do you not do the same? But such is death; there are cowards on both sides of the Shroud. Those of us granted bravery will persevere in any case.

— Brother Fortitude, Darksider Counselor

Cells

One tenet crosses all the lines between various types of Doomslayers: isolation. The job, by its very nature, demands the necessity of being cut off from any potential allies. Know too much about your friends, after all, and you just might betray them to your enemies.



As a result, Doomslayers operate in the classic "cell" structure common to most resistance organizations. Rather than lining up in ranks, Doomslayers break themselves down into small groups that operate independently of one another. Only the command structure of the entire Doomslayer operation knows where multiple cells are operating at a given time, and ground-level cells are deliberately kept isolated from one another. There isn't even much lateral contact between cells; communications go up the ladder to the Five, then back down the other side to the target cell. Shadows, and their propensity for chatting with the other side, tends to make dissemination of information an unacceptable risk for Doomslayers, and so most are content to work in ignorance.

While such tactics may protect Doomslayers' cells from infiltration and betrayal, at the same time they prevent large-scale cooperation and actions. A hundred Doomslayers may be needed for a particular strike, but because of the nature of the cell structure such a strike is nearly impossible to coordinate or operate. After all, putting the various squads in the field with one another produces an unacceptable level of cross-cell recognition.

First Causes

Originally, Doomslayers operated as any other army; coordinating attacks, training together and sharing supplies and intelligence. Doppelgangers could infiltrate units easily, return home with the squads and report other activity back to the Hive-Mind. When the Helldivers first tapped into the Hive-Mind, they discovered this tremendous leak. Nearly every unit of Doomslayers was compromised, either by spies within their own ranks or through ties to other units. Tactical projects returned the following certainty: If things continued as they were, every single Doomslayer would be located and destroyed within five years. As a result, the decision was made to cut all ties between Doomslayer squads, so as to prevent further infiltration by Doppelgangers.

While splitting the Doomslayers into independent cells curtailed counter-intelligence activities by the Spectres, it also severed important lines of supply and communication. Every Doomslayer cell was forced to act on its own, without regard for other Doomslayer cells. Only the coordinating activities of the Five, rapidly enforced after the initial confusion of the split into cells, prevented a complete dissolution of the Doomslayers in the ensuing chaos.

Size Matters

Doomslayer cells vary in size from assault squads with a dozen or more members down to hard-nosed veterans operating on their own. The optimal number tends to be eight, with half as many new recruits hanging onto this core and learning the ropes. Larger groups tend to be tactically unwieldy, while smaller groups get cut down or disrupted by Catharsis too easily.

In the field, Thorns stick the closest to traditional military structure. Not coincidentally, Thorn cells tend to be the largest, often having one or two sergeants as well as a commander

to pick up the slack in crisis situations. The Thorns have been known to send groups as large as 50 wraiths on single missions, though such massive groupings are broken down immediately afterward for reasons of security. Generally, though, the Thorns stick to cells of eight to 10 wraiths that operate with military precision and by military strictures.

Martyr Knight cells consist of two wings of three members each, never more and never less. If a cell gets compromised, the members are either recycled into R&D or command, or retired.

Solo cells generally run about five members, though they can get large and unwieldy on those occasions when Renegade gangs and Reapers decide to go Spectre hunting. The operations and tactics of such groups — if the too-often shouted cry "Get them!" can be counted as such — vary wildly. Tightly focused groups of Solos usually run along lines parallel to those followed by the Thorns, and achieve similar success rates. Looser clusters of wannabes often rush in where angels and Legionnaires fear to tread. Sometimes they achieve victory through surprise, sheer weight of numbers and enthusiasm. Other missions produce less desirable results.

Cells consisting of one member are uncommon, and they tend not to last very long. Doppelgangers can replace a single wraith with much greater ease than they can an entire squad; lone-wolf Doomslayers who announce themselves tend to get bolted into a Pardoner's chair for thorough vetting immediately. Within the Thorns, single-member cells are treated with suspicion and are rarely allowed any more than superfluous information. Helldivers who return home from deep-cover missions are thoroughly interrogated and Castigated, not necessarily in that order, to limit the possibility of infiltration. If a Helldiver had a partner who didn't come back, the intensity and length of the survivor's debriefing process usually doubles.

Payoffs

Oboli is a subject near and dear to many Doomslayers' hearts. The process is simple: The Doomslayer brings either incontrovertible evidence of a "kill" or a whole Spectre suitably restrained to the check-in station at the local Citadel. Kills are tallied and the Doomslayer gets paid in oboli. The usual rate is five oboli for every four Corpora, less for Doomslayers who bring in only ears, claws, fangs and so on. This process enables the Hierarchy to subsidize the Doomslayer program partially from its own products, and encourages Doomslayers to go out and kick some Spectre butt. Occasionally Doomslayers try to barter for their kills, but there are tight restraints on what the head of the check-in point (usually a Marshal of the Grim Legion) can swap out.

Bits of untended Spectre Corpus tend to dissolve into nothingness in about a week, so it behooves Doomslayers to check in frequently.

Communication Breakdown

He thinks too much. Such men are dangerous.

— William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*

Doomslayer cells rarely communicate directly, but instead receive direct commands from the Five on their individual missions and objectives. Orders are generally left at drop points, carved into the plasm of drones coincidentally pointed at cell members, handed down during Castigation sessions with Darksider-friendly Pardoners or hammered into the faces of oboli that Doomslayers receive for their bounty. (Rumors that Intimation is also used to deliver orders is pure speculation; after all, the Solicitors have long since vanished from the face of Stygia.) Such tactics have led to speculation that the Five have strong connections within both the Hierarchy and the remnants of the Guilds, but such speculation is short-lived. Harboring suspicions about the nature of the Five is handing information to the enemy through the conduit of the Shadow; sharing those suspicions merely widens the security breach.

As a matter of course and safety, most Doomslayers just try hard not to think about the Five. They just put their heads down, take their orders and do their jobs. It's too dangerous otherwise.

Cells who have knowledge of one another avoid communication at all costs, and commonly shuffle lineups in hopes of rendering damning information obsolete. When two cells do communicate, they do so for as little time as possible, and preferably in a neutral location with lots of escape routes. The Midnight Express is a particular favorite for this sort of thing; so are the so-called "Free Necropoli" such as Atlantic City. Byways and haunts are regarded as unsafe sites. Only the desperate or the stupid choose such locales for meetings.

Fearful Symmetry

Doomslayers who gab too much, or even think too much, about the nature of the Five, rarely last long. It's not Spectres who get them, though — it's their putative allies. A Doomslayer who yammers — or speculates — too frequently about the Five inevitably passes his guesses along to a Shadow that's in regular communication with the other side. The damning information gets dropped into the Hive-Mind, through which it spreads. In particular, the tid-bit somehow manages to find its inevitable way into the mind of a Spectre captured by one Doomslayer group or another. Said Spectre then spills the beans — including the source of the leak — to its captors. They have the option of acting upon said info and tying off one of their own as a loose end, or of allowing the blabbermouth to continue on and hope that he doesn't come up with anything too accurate.

Usually, only one representative from each cell attends a meeting, though the others may be in the vicinity to provide backup in case things go wrong. Occasionally, meets are called for by Spectres hoping to nab two cells at once, but if there are enough Doomslayers waiting in ambush, the tables can get turned on the would-be ambushers quickly.

Even if a meeting proceeds without a hitch, both cells involved take great care to change their *modi operandi* afterward; most move their bases of operations and change their next few mission objectives. Due to the complexities involved in meetings, cells rarely go to the trouble. Instead, they depend on the communications from and tactics of the Five, which have an astonishingly low interception rate.

Although the Underworld is a vast battlefield with seemingly limitless space, independent cells of Doomslayers often find themselves crossing tactical paths, and occasionally swords. Thorns have the worst track record for that sort of thing, often going full-tilt into battle without checking to see if there are any deep-cover Helldivers or Solos in the way.

Talking

While the secrecy of the Doomslayers is a much-ballyhooed topic, it's nowhere as tight as the Five would like. Basic information, such as the nature of the Thorns, the Martyr Knights and even the existence of the Five themselves, is more or less common knowledge among the Stygian populace — the suspicion is that Doppelgangers leak it. Furthermore, despite the best efforts of the Five, there is some camaraderie that leaks across cell lines. Much of that can be traced to the as-yet mixed training programs for Doomslayers that the Legion of Fate hosts on Eurydice. The teaching staff for these programs is mixed, as is the class makeup. After all, everyone — even the best-trained Solos — needs to learn the same basics. Unfortunately, some of the boot camp friendships formed under these conditions resurface at odd times, and in the field that flash of recognition can be deadly.

Furthermore, some Darksiders work with multiple cells, as do many Helldivers. Throw in the established staff of the Hospitallers — who do not adhere to the cell structure at all — and suddenly it looks like the only Doomslayers making an effort toward secrecy are the Five and the members of the Orders who work in the field. Truth be told, that's not so far off the mark, but then again, they're the ones who need secrecy the most. However, pity the poor bastard who comments on the apparent discrepancy between the party line on secrecy and the way things work in the field. Such comments have a way of getting back to the Five, with occasionally unpleasant consequences.

Needless to say, Spectres love to create this sort of confusion, and gladly sacrifice some of their own in order to see two cells of Doomslayers hammer out their differences with soulsteel.

When cells run into each other in non-combat situations, wariness still prevails. After all, you never know if that bunch of "Doomslayers" over there really are who they claim to be, or if they're a bunch of Doppelgangers waiting for you to lower your guard, or real Doomslayers who've undergone Catharsis together....

In truth, field collaboration between Doomslayer cells is limited by a severe lack of common ground, which can serve as verification of intentions. One can't talk about one's mission, mutual acquaintances or training history without breaching confidentiality. So there's no way of verifying where the other guys came from, whose orders they're following or what they're really up to. All a Doomslayer can do in regard to his newfound allies is cross his fingers and watch his back.

Cell Reproduction

Cells, especially those of the Order of the Thorn, occasionally take on too many recruits and become tactically unwieldy. After all, a small team can sneak into the Labyrinth with minimal chance of being detected, but a squad of a dozen or more is too big to hide and too small to fight a mass action. At a certain critical mass of personnel (usually around 12 fully trained members), a cell splits into two or sometimes three smaller organizations. Typically, the eldest members of the cell take their chosen recruits and start new cells in entirely different locations — the idea being to avoid any possible connection between teams. Occasionally, one of the new teams stays behind in the group's old territory, but even then the cell's base haunt gets swapped out for a new one. None of the newly formed cells retains information as to the whereabouts and activities of the others; this is deliberate. What they don't know, they can't betray — and cells that have grown too large have a nasty tendency to attract an excess of unwanted attention.

New cells rarely form spontaneously, with the exception of groups of Solos. These independent Spectre hunters rarely last long, let alone create new cells through recruiting. Indeed, most "cells" of Solo Doomslayers are simply existing Circles who turn their attention to a new profession. Most are infiltrated and destroyed, or overwhelmed in combat, in a space of weeks. A rare few such cells survive and prosper, attract recruits and develop reputations, but most meet unpleasant ends through lack of secrecy or preparation.

Helldivers don't often have unique cells per se; there's little profit in it compared to other Masquer work. Most attach themselves to mixed groups of Thorns or Solos, and many work in tandem with individual Darksiders. A team of Helldivers is generally a short-term grouping, pulled together for a specific mission. Extractions, Spectral hits and short-term infiltrations are the only reasons Helldivers gather in numbers, and even then they take care to mask their identities and callings.

Current Affairs: Story Ideas



here are all sorts of stories you can tell about Doomslayers heading into the Labyrinth, fighting off Spectres, uncovering hoary secrets of years past, and scrambling desperately for the exits when things get too tough. You can tell stories about Doomslayers getting hijacked on a Byway, trying to keep the road clear while valuable cargo is moved through. You can even tell stories about Doomslayers infiltrating the Labyrinth, pretending to be Spectres — and maybe going a little too far in their masquerade....

Those are the *basic* stories you can tell about Doomslayers. But Doomslaying can be a subtle and many-faceted craft, and there are other stories you can tell of the profession. Here are a few.

Supply Lines — Thorns Against the Legions

Of course we deserve the best. That's because we are the best! You don't see those Legion pukes jumping into a transport headed for the very gates of Hell. Nah, they just stay up here behind their comfy desks just waiting for something to happen. But, when something does happen, and the Shades are crawling over the battlements, it's too damn late for them to do any good! So what do they need with all of the best weapons, ammo and vehicles? By the time they get around to using them, the fight's already over!

There is plenty of tension between Doomslayers and Legion regulars, and that can make for some good stories. Perhaps the Circle hears that the local Legionnaires have been hoarding all of the best equipment, and decides to mount a raid on the local supply dump. Of course, if the wraiths get spotted, they'll be marked as Renegades, to be forged on sight — but is the risk worth it? On the other hand, what if the Circle is returning from an unsuccessful Helldive — unsuccessful because the wraiths didn't have enough solid equipment? Why was the good stuff held back, and where do the Doomslayers look for payback?

If you're looking for slightly more friendly interaction, consider the idea of a team of Doomslayers and a team of Legionnaires in a good-natured contest to see who can bring back the most Spectre hides. Of course, there's no cheating allowed, right? Right.

Spectre Infestation — Martyr Knights Overwhelmed

Frankly, I'm a little concerned at the number of losses we've sustained over the past couple of weeks. It seems we are losing twice as many good agents as we gain raw recruits. At this rate, I'll be recruiting Drones by the end of the month.

Occasionally Spectres in place get wise to the fact that they're being watched — so they invite some friends over to help clear some maneuvering room. At times like this, the Martyr Knights

can take heavy casualties, and those holes need to be filled fast. In such instances, the recruiting process can get a little haphazard, and some very strange wraiths end up on surveillance duty. Perhaps the Circle is a group of wraiths hastily inducted into the Martyr Knights, but whose members discover that they have to act to prevent catastrophe. Do the characters go against their training? What if they don't, and disaster strikes? On the other hand, what if they do and they're wrong?

Conversely, you can run a campaign of paranoia and terror, wherein a Spectre-in-place is picking off the Martyr Knight cells watching her, one by one. Who can the characters trust? Dare they try to contact the other cells for protection — or is that what the Spectre wants them to do?

Double-Cross — Darksiders Infiltrated

I try to keep my composure, but it becomes more difficult every damn day. The other 'slayers depend on me to keep their Shadows in line, so how do I tell them I might be losing control of mine? I can't tell them and retain their confidence. Without their trust, they will surely stop asking for my services — all will be lost, should that happen.

When this first started, I felt like I was accomplishing something. The Thorns would dive into the Labyrinth and I would accompany them. My purpose, my calling if you will, was to quell the nasty consciousness within each of them as they fought. The last thing these warriors need is for one of their own to turn against them at a critical point.

And now I might be the turncoat. I might turn traitor. I can handle their Shadows, but can I handle mine? But if they know I'm on the brink, will they trust me? And if they don't trust me, will they let me heal them? And if they don't let me heal them, how long before one of them succumbs?

A Helldiver team's trust in its Darksider has to be absolute. If the slightest doubt creeps in, the team's equilibrium is suddenly shattered. A Doomslayer who distrusts his Darksider might not seek help until it's too late, and the results can be disastrous. And all it takes is a single slip, a lone second of Catharsis or uncontrolled Thorn use, and the faith a Darksider's team has in her can be destroyed.

A tense story can come from such an instance of devastated faith. The wraiths might be on a dangerous mission, deep in the Labyrinth, with a Pardoner they don't trust. Of course, the characters' survival might well hinge on trusting that Pardoner....

Wild Cards — Solo Confusion

What choice do I have but to fight back? They destroyed all of my friends and now they're after me. I certainly wouldn't choose to hunt Spectres, but they leave me no other option — kill, or be killed.

I'm not crazy, but I am paranoid. You have to be to survive. They can shapechange. They can talk to your Shadow. They can talk to one another with their minds. All I've got is my wits, this shotgun and my fear.



You ask why I won't join the Thorns or some other Doomslayer Order? Why should I trust them? Anyone I contact could be one of them and then where would I be? Probably cleaning the Labyrinth sewer with my toothbrush.

The Thorns nearly put me down two weeks ago. A bunch of their jarheads stomped into my hideout and started shooting up the place. When the smoke cleared, they claimed they had heard a renegade Shade was holed-up there and needed persecuting with all due prejudice. They thought I was one of them! The Thorns said their information was dead on the money. I bet they just got tricked by some Mortwright. I'd sooner forge my own head than join those buffoons.

You'll have to send my apologies to the Masquers — if you can find one. Seems I put down one of their Helldivers a couple of months back. Well, how was I to know he wasn't one of them? He shouldn't have been walking around looking like that if he didn't want to get shot. Green, scaly, four-armed devil walks into a bar (stop if you've heard this one) starts asking for directions or something — I really wasn't listening. I dropped him before the bartender could explain what was going on. I guess they use that bar as a contact point and scaly had forgot to lose the costume. What're you gonna do?

Nobody likes the Solos. They're rude, crude, obnoxious and indelicate, and they have a tendency to stumble into the middle of long-term plans that other groups of Doomslayers have laid. Mind you, the Solos generally don't care — they're after bounty and loot, and maybe revenge.

But a team of Solos that finds itself in the middle of a complicated Thorn operation might suddenly have more than it can handle. With Spectres coming at them from one side, pissed-off Thorns from another, and the Legions stepping in to sort the whole mess out, the Doomslayers might find themselves in a whole heap more trouble than they can handle....

More Story Ideas

- **Retrieval** — A cell member was left behind on a Helldive. Do the survivors go after him, even if it means disobeying orders?
- **Greed Is Good** — An older Doomslayer tells the characters about some fantastic Artifact he saw on his last dive. He even thoughtfully provides a map. Hmmm...
- **Hold the Line** — The squad gets orders to hold a Byway against all comers. Soon enough, they're knee-deep in Spectres. Can they hold out? And what's so important about this Byway that they have to hold it?
- **Cat and Mouse** — The characters are a Martyr Knight team, reasonably sure their target has gone over. Can they flush him out before he catches them?
- **First Time Out** — The characters are a bunch of Solos who decide to go all-out and hunt Spectres. Of course, they're totally unprepared for what they stumble onto — Spectres just love fresh meat.
- **Damning Evidence** — On a Helldive, the characters uncover evidence that a local Anacreon has gone over to

Oblivion. Bringing back evidence gets problematic, however, as an awful lot of Spectres don't want the news to reach the outside. Besides, who in the Citadel is going to believe evidence uncovered in the Labyrinth by a bunch of wiggled-out Helldivers?

What We Use: Artifacts and Relics



ttention, students. I am Ramon Fenellosa, and I have been assigned to instruct you in the use of equipment for various Doomslaying tasks. I have been a Martyr Knight for 57 years as of last March and entertain some belief that I am good at it. If you pay attention, you may also become good at your callings, or at least cease to be net liabilities in the war against Oblivion.

Weapons

Living Chains (Level 3 Stygian Steel Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

This is the sort of commodity over which barroom brawls rage. Some of my colleagues dismiss the Living Chains as too "weird" or otherwise unsuitable for use. I believe that reach is never to be spurned lightly; in war, victory generally goes to those able to strike without being struck. They say, "But it weakens your Corpus!" I respond, "As though war itself does not?" It grants 10 feet of empty space I can maintain between my foe and myself. Many of the best Helldivers seem to agree, though I do not on general principle glory in the support of Helldiver judgment. Living chains can span sinkholes, assist in maneuvering vertical passages, and more rapidly remove their wearer from danger. Bravery is a fine and worthy thing; foolhardiness is neither. Accept the benefits your situation provides.

Loyalty Blade

These are useful weapons with a tricky little catch. Nhudri manufactured them for the Hierarchy after the Abominations, and designed them with a simple limitation: though otherwise regular soulsteel, with the usual capacity for aggravated damage, they cannot cause harm to a legitimate member of the Hierarchy. Of course, "legitimate" does not mean that the pulling bureaucrat is moral, or wise, or possesses any other worthy quality, only that he is anointed by his superiors for the task he discharges, doubtless far better than could someone troubled with conscience or curiosity. A monster in good standing is protected; a hero in exile is not. The Artificers do not care to tell us how the Loyalty Blade discerns this mark of approval, and independent examination generates no particular insight.

So the utility of the Loyalty Blade is limited in a not uncommon situation: that in which you have good reason to suspect that a bureaucrat is now a Spectre, but cannot yet prove it. The moment you convince the target's superiors that you are correct, the blade strikes as finely as any, as it does the moment your target evinces possession of any distinctly Spectral ability. And of course the issue does not arise among Helldivers. You may therefore wish to avoid completely alienating the local authorities, who can deny you the use of this weapon if they choose.

Nhudri's Embrace (Variable Level, **Buried Secrets**)

This is one boon the Hierarchy dispenses readily to those of us who demonstrate commitment to the war against Oblivion. The Legions monitor us to make sure we do not put the Embrace to some nefarious use, of course, but by and large we are trusted with these. Within wraithly society, as you may have learned by now, there are a number of competing views about what to do with Spectral prisoners. The Legions seek instruction; the Order of the Thorn seeks knowledge. But all require subjects on which to practice their respective crafts. There is no substitute for these quite literally "soul-forg'd manacles" to keep captured Spectres caught.

Soulfire and Souled Weapons (Variable Level)

If you need a detailed explanation of why these are desirable, you are quite likely too stupid to be allowed to roam free and may wish seriously to consider throwing yourself into a forge.

Oh, very well. I must remind myself that some of you are new, and may have treatable ignorance rather than pathological stupidity. The Hierarchy harvests Pathos from its victims, whom it is pleased to call "subjects." Diligent servants pump the extract through a crystalline refining system and into black prisms, the secret of which the Usurers do not share. When charged, the prisms glow and cast shadows as though aflame, whence the name "soulfire" comes. As a prism's stored Pathos discharges, its flames flicker and dim.

Crystals range in size from pocket-sized artifacts that have roughly the Pathos capacity of a healthy wraith up through globes suitable for mounting on relic vehicles and even larger units that must be attached to solid floors. Recharging takes but a few minutes, once you have the attention of a Pathos accumulator operator. That may require weeks, or more, depending on the whims of the bureaucracy.

Souled weapons — weapons into which soulfire crystals have been implanted — have a utility that I trust is self-evident. Unfortunately for those of us whose agendas are not wholly congruent with those of the Hierarchy, neither original access nor recharging permission comes readily for these weapons. Our benevolent lords and masters wish to retain some advantages for themselves.

Artifact Level	Max. Charge	Size
1	10	pocket-sized crystal
2	20	portable prism too large to conceal
3	30	cone requiring two wraiths to lift
4	40	vehicle-mounted sphere
5	50	globe requiring permanent mounting

Soulfire crystals attached to weapons free wraiths from the need to spend their own Pathos to power effects.

Artifact Level	Weapon Type
1	pistol
2	rifle
3	machine gun
4	grenade; explosive

Stygian Steel Armor (Level 3; **Buried Secrets**)

Ah, this is most excellent equipment. Had we had such things in Catalonia, perhaps the fascists would have had a more difficult time, but that's a story for another occasion. Stygian armor is seldom dispensed to those of us who so often embarrass the Hierarchy by revealing the defects of their own safeguards against infiltration. But if your chosen mission is Helldiving, you may well expect to receive a suit if your commander has reasonable Hierarchy connections. You, after all, will be one of the glorious warriors in the front lines, as the propagandistas would have it. And even we are not altogether left bereft, sometimes receiving a suit as payment for particular services rendered. Once given, as you may imagine, such a suit receives the best of care.

Velvet Glove (Level 4 Artifact)

It is most unlikely that you will come into the possession of this Artifact and be allowed to retain it. But if you do, so much the better for you. I still think it much preferable to avoid closing to hand-to-hand combat when you have any alternative, but sometimes you do not have an alternative. On those occasions, unexpected damage-dealing capability is very welcome.

[Note: The wraith fortunate to wear such a glove does four extra dice of damage with each blow, even one as soft as a slap.]

Resources

Avery's Sweets (Level 1 Relic, **Buried Secrets**)

Some years ago I worked as part of a team that included a teenager much given to saying, "I have come here to chew bubble gum and kick ass, and I'm all out of bubble gum." I never did find out just what he was alluding to; I had no opportunity to pay attention to youth culture when alive and have had more pressing demands on my attention since. I do think of him, now vanished down the Well of the Void, when I am able to consume one of these fine candies.

Bedside Candle (Level 2 Artifact)

Maps are unreliable in the Labyrinth, as you either already know from experience or will learn shortly. But this device, within its limitations, does work. You attune the Bedside Candle to your Haunt merely by letting it absorb the ambiance of that place for a day. Then you may light the wick with a touch of soulfire and it will burn for a day. For that 24 hour period, no matter where you are, the candle's smoke will waft in the direction of your Haunt. The Bedside Candle is a simple thing and cannot alert you to the shortest or safest of routes, but in the depths of the Labyrinth you are likely to appreciate any assistance available. Once you return to your Haunt and let the candle rest, it restores itself over the course of another day.

Cloak of Night (Luxury, Level 3 Artifact)

It is a law of unprogressive social organization that there will never be a surplus of any of the most useful goods that society can produce. So it is with the Cloak of Night, which I (like many of your fellow Doomslayers) would take over any but the very finest armor. Its pitch-black appearance hints at its legacy. The Harbingers and Artificers combine their precious secret lores to weave the cloak out of threads drawn from the stuff of Nihil. Wearing it, you gain great stealth and astonishing resistance to damage. Since only the foolish fight battles except in conditions of their own choosing, this is a supremely useful resource, naturally hoarded by the Hierarchy. Very nearly the only thing better would be a high level of innate aptitude for Argos, and if you possess that, you are likely more useful and needed elsewhere than in the Labyrinth.

[Note: The cloak adds three dice to its wearer's Stealth Dice Pool. It also adds two dice to the wearer's Soak total for damage dealt by Nihil and Maelstroms.]

Flask of Liquid Pathos (Level 1 Artifact)

The conditions of our existence as wraiths include a regrettable number of mysteries which prove very resistant to all efforts at solution. The origin of these flasks is one of those. Should you discover it, and be able to document your discovery, your position in the afterworld will likely be enriched by a substantial influx of fame and fortune. In the meantime, we may use them even though we do not readily understand them.

Each flask contains a liquefied essence of a particular emotion and the associated Pathos. Nothing in the flask itself indicates what its contents are, though by now most are labeled. When you drink the contents, you receive an infusion of that "flavor" of Pathos; any actions you take or arts you power with the resulting energy carry a distinct overtone of the emotion in question.

Once you have consumed a flask's contents, you must recharge it. This is a very simple process. Simply bury it in ground where the emotion in question is very strong: a prison or war zone for hate; a brothel for lust; your beloved's home for love; and so on.

[Note: Each flask contains from one to three points of Pathos distilled from a particular emotion. Its capacity and nature do not change over time. Recharging takes one week per point of Pathos.]

Guardian Orb (Level 5 Skin Artifact, Buried Secrets)

In the 1970s I frequently worked with an Englishman, John Drake. He referred to the Guardian Orb whose use he sometimes arranged as "Rover" for reasons he preferred to be obscure about. The Hierarchy is reluctant to let anything so valuable outside its direct control; one would hate to think of extra safety being granted to rabble like us, merely because we protect the Hierarchy on its most vulnerable flanks. On the occasions when their beneficence overcomes their caution, you will likely find the Orb's protection useful indeed, even if its size bars you from the narrowest of Labyrinthine passages.

Instant Nihil (Level 2 Artifact, Buried Secrets)

The Hierarchy in its infinite wisdom has decreed that it is unwise to go about tearing holes in the fabric of the Shadowlands. Only the bitter or petty would raise doubts about whether the constant destruction of souls might itself constitute any sort of invitation to Oblivion, and since I strive in all things to be a gentleman, I shall merely note the Hierarchy's view. I shall also note, however, that my friends among the Helldivers say that there is nothing more useful for the immediate escape from Labyrinthine dangers. Every Helldiver wishes for Argos; this is a reasonable substitute. The matter is less pressing for those of us who primarily operate in the Shadowlands, but an Instant Nihil saved my Corpus once, and I would gladly acquire another if the opportunity arose.

Maggot Revolver (Level 4 Spectre Souled Weapon, Buried Secrets)

Yes, this is a vile weapon, and overuse keeps your Pardoner busy and your Shadow happy. Has it escaped your attention that we are not entirely able to prosecute our war in accordance with Hoyle? This is a welcome addition to one's arsenal for those occasions when Oblivion's more powerful servants join the battle — if your soul is well-prepared beforehand.

Using the Maggot Revolver

The Maggot Revolver is a heavy revolver (difficulty 7, Range 35 yards, Rate 2, Angst cost of two per bullet, damage 6) with a Bloodfire crystal containing 10 points of Angst attached to the handle. It fires no mere bullet, however, but a species of Shadowed Plasmic called Shadow Maggots. One is delivered as ordnance to your target for each success on a damage roll. In the next round the maggot begins burrowing into the target, doing an additional die of damage per Shadow Maggot present. The pain from this experience raises the difficulty of all the victim's actions by one.

Removing the Shadow Maggots may take some effort. They can be dug out, but this does fresh damage to the target. So, in all probability, does Moliata aimed at cutting off or transforming the injured areas. Purify (Castigate •••) kills Shadow Maggots (one per success rolled) without collateral damage, and it is therefore the treatment of choice.

I did not speak in jest about the state of your soul. Every bullet you fire from a Maggot Revolver feeds your Shadow. This is not the weapon on which to depend in every occasion!

Redeyes (Level 2 Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

This device contributes most to Helldiver missions — as a rule, if a Martyr Knight mission leads into the Labyrinth, something has already gone horribly wrong. If your Helldiver expedition has some ready way of distinguishing between Redeyes and actual Spectres waiting in ambush, these beacons may well be useful. Redeyes becomes less useful in the midst of great Amphiskiopoli.

Scribbler's Pen (Level 2 Soulsteel Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

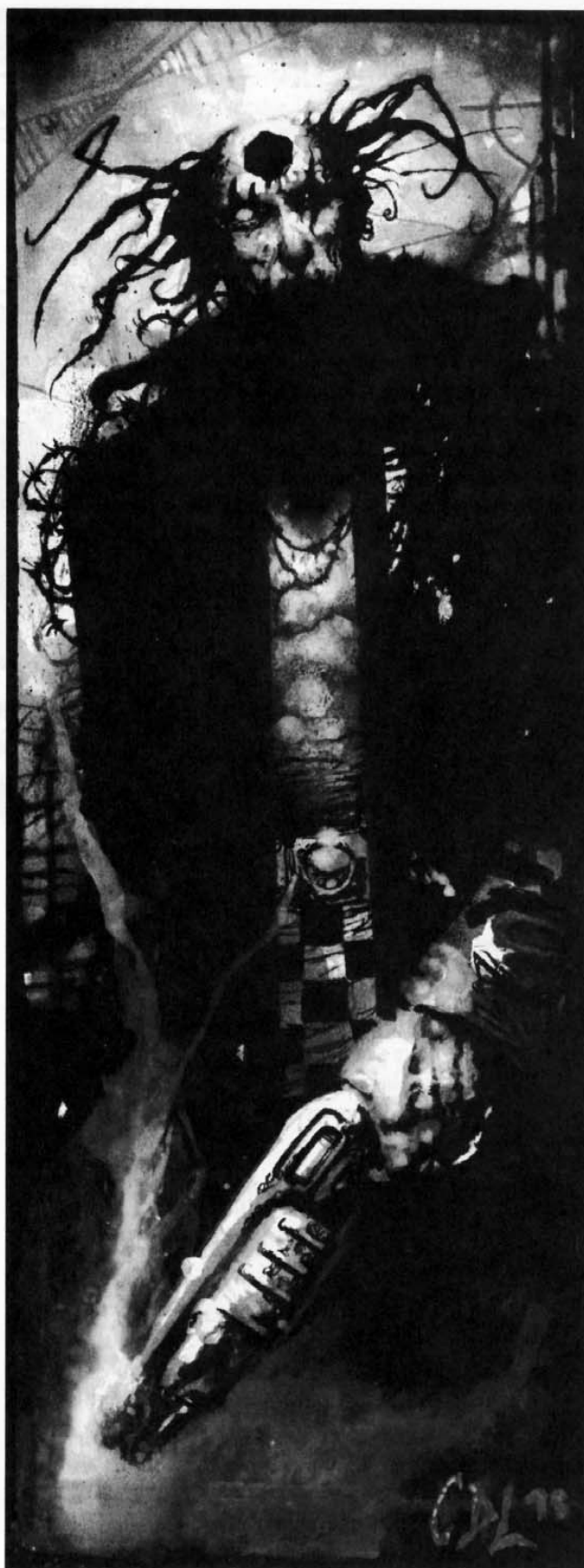
In death, as in life, I am a man of actions rather than a man of words. So, to varying degrees, are all of us who pick up the burden of protecting the all from Oblivion. But some things make it worth the effort of recording one's thoughts. This is most emphatically one of them. As one of my American colleagues once put it, "when you're hip-deep in Spectres and your Shadow's having harsh words with you, a rush of Pathos is just what Dr. Feelgood ordered." Yes, the pen renders you unconscious as part of the infusion. This is but one of many reasons we operate in teams.

Soulfire Lantern (Level 2 Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

It may have come to your attention that you may not wish to be seen while in pursuit or otherwise on active duty. (If it has not come to your attention, I refer to my earlier remarks about forge insertion.) Naturally, our lords and masters hoard Lanterns, for fear of their falling into "subversive" hands. But your commanders may be able to obtain a loan of one, and unless you already possess feline tendencies or some rare art, you should be glad of the chance to use the lantern.

Star of the East (Level 2 Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

The Star of the East is the subject of nearly as many acrimonious disputes as Living Chains, in my experience. I find it undesirable to travel into danger with the equivalent of homing signal flares announcing my presence. If my death taught me anything, it was that concealment is an asset not to be lightly discarded. Others, however, find the Star quite useful, and some of these even manage to return from the Labyrinth.





Stygian Wall Flies (Level 3 Soulsteel Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

Speaking practically, you are unlikely to get one of these. But if you do, and if you can retain it in the face of our lords and masters' perpetual acquisitiveness, you have an excellent tool of intelligence. Forewarned is forearmed, a saying the no less true for its being trite in the mouths of the ignorant. I have used mine to prepare for the final coup against four Doppelgangers, and I am given to understand Helldivers value theirs most highly for detecting Spectral cities ahead.

Wail Tongue (Level 4 Skin Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

Perhaps it is merely a misplaced sense of self on my part, but I personally entertain no desire to graft a Plasmic entity into my mouth. However, from time to time I work with a Martyr Knight who subjected herself to the grafting, and I must confess that her new ability proves useful on every mission we share. Even a moment's delay can make the difference between a Destruction Harrowing and a clean escape, or (even more desirable) between that Harrowing and return with prisoners. One does, of course, have to hope that the long-lost mate of the tongue donor does not rise from the Tempest to remonstrate with the grafted.

Artificer Resources

Our relations with the Artificers are troubled. Some among them, most particularly the damnable fanatics of the Cult of Nhudri, see the Labyrinth as some sort of personal hunting grounds and resent our "encroachments." Others appreciate the value of diversified action against a common foe. Proceed carefully, try to avoid giving offense, and seek always to appeal to their self-interest.

Tumblesuits (Variable Level Artifact)

The name is inelegant, but the concept is one you will come to appreciate if you spend any quantity of time in the Labyrinth. A tumblesuit comprises one or more layers of soft soulforged material, the cast-offs of typical forging, in fact; those pieces are far too pliable to have any martial use. Woven into a suit, this material compresses and expands as need be, absorbing many minor shocks, scrapes, and nicks. Tumblesuits have no value as armor, but cushion damage from falls and other distractions.

[Note: Each layer adds one to the wearer's Soak total for non-combat damage, at the cost of adding one to the difficulty of all Dexterity-related tasks for every two layers. (This is rounded up: one- and two-layer tumblesuits add one to difficulty, three- and four-layer suits add two, and so on.)]

Whisp (see **Guildbook Spooks and Oracles**, p. 128) may be substituted for the best-suited sorts of forging cast-offs, but it is only half as protective as a properly constructed tumblesuit.

Masquer Resources

Of all the Guilds, we work most closely with the Masquers. Indeed, the Helldivers are all but a wholly owned subsidiary of the Masquers. As a man with a sound grasp of historico-cultural realities, I myself feel some distrust over the instability of form in which the Masquers delight. But I cannot and do not doubt their commitment to the struggle against Oblivion.

Candelabra of Souls (Level 3 Artifact, **Buried Secrets**)

Ah, a lovely device; the Candelabra is simultaneously both aesthetically pleasing and most useful. But it's not really worth fighting over with the whole of the Masquers Guild. Perhaps they would let you use one if you demonstrated a common interest in some task.

Quicksilver Mirror (Luxury, Level 3 Artifact, **Masquers**)

There simply is no probability worth speaking of that the Masquers will allow you to own or even borrow a Quicksilver Mirror, but they might allow you to consult one safely ensconced in a guild hall. You must arrange for this in advance, paying a (generally very substantial) fee and indemnifying them against Hierarchy anger at the occasional mistaken identity. That done, you may transport a suspected Doppelganger to the Mirror and see its true face. Doing so can be very useful when your target is both well-placed within the Hierarchy (so that overt confrontation is difficult) and equipped with defenses, so that the usual intrusion-and-revelation techniques are unreliable.

Façade Brooch (Luxury, Level 4 Artifact, **Masquers**)

This is all but essential for those of you who will choose to spend extended periods in the Labyrinth. While you wear it, you cannot be detected by Shapense. This does not protect you from the other means Spectres use to flush out infiltrators, but if you propose to disguise yourself as something inanimate rather than another Spectre, this gives you a very important competitive edge. It goes without saying that Façade Brooches are rare and that the Masquers do not dole them out lightly.

Pardoner Resources

We need the Pardoners. If you have any measure of self-preservation whatsoever, you will never deliberately antagonize the Pardoners — remember that by doing so, you jeopardize not only your own Corpus, but the existence of all who may be threatened by your conversion to Oblivion. Fortunately for us, the Pardoners hate Oblivion as much as we do,

and are far more generous with their special tools than the Hierarchy is. Ask politely and you may well receive useful artifacts in return. Being gifted with the presence of a Darksider is a sign of some favor in the Pardoners' eyes — never refuse such, or you risk both giving offense and total destruction.

Instruments of Chastisement (Common, Level 2 Artifact, **Pardoners**)

Even those whose calling brings them more frequently into contact with Oblivion than ours do not entirely escape the urge to euphemism. These are whips and chains. And no, I do not care if you would rather not be beaten. Flagellation is vastly preferable to becoming Shadow-eaten.

Iron Lantern (Rare, Level 3 Artifact, **Pardoners**)

The brethren are loathe to let these out. But on any mission in which you join forces with Pardoners, petition most earnestly to have one included in the mission gear. Everyone, without exception, needs a safety zone.

Sandman Resources

Dreamspider (Luxury, Level 2 Artifact, **Sandmen**)

It may take you a moment's thought to grasp the utility of a device that can only monitor the waking thoughts of mortals. But when you are hunting Spectres given to interference with the Skinlands, such information may be vitally useful. Consider the influence and activities of the so-called Spectral Cults, and the advantage of knowing what's going on in such organizations.

Since the Sandmen have scarcely more love for Spectres than we do, albeit for very different reasons, they are generally cooperative in arranging the use of a Dreamspider.

Spook Resources

The Spooks are often difficult to deal with. The people of my homeland pride themselves on a certain resistance to outside influence and to the enthusiastic preservation of local distinction in the face of outside homogeneity. But we are nothing in this matter as compared to the Spooks. But allies are where you find them, even standoffish ones like the masters of Outrage. The Spooks possess tools most useful to our cause, so cooperation with them is in your interest.

Compass (Level 1 Relic, **Spooks**)

Spooks use relic Compasses early in their Spooking careers. These point always to Stygia, allowing the Spook to orient herself and establish other bearings. After a few years

of experience, they no longer need their Compasses. From time to time experienced Spook have been persuaded to donate them to us, since we too have need of preserving our bearings in hostile environments. If a Spook is part of your team, of course, you most likely already have access to one such Compass.

Fetter Boutonnieres (Level 1 Relic, Spooks)

If you were so fortunate as to receive a proper funeral with flowery commemorations, specially trained Spooks can construct relic boutonnieres. Their apparent health is linked to the well-being of the subject's Fetters, and indicate dangers of which the wraith would not otherwise be aware.

These are almost exclusively the property of Lifeline Spooks. Their value to us should be obvious. As the front-line soldiers of the war against Oblivion, we face constant threats from Spectres, not all of whom are foolish enough to mount direct assaults. Some pursue indirect means as well. A Fetter Boutonniere may save your existence, or at least allow you to save your own.

Barrowbombs (Level 5 Artifacts, Spooks)

Though our war is against the passive principle of destruction itself, yet must we as soldiers inflict destruction. There is never an excuse for doing a duty badly: If you must perform a task, perform it well. Barrowbombs are perhaps the finest implements of destruction you will ever wield, if your lot is to wield one. Were Comrade Molotov still with us in a form suitable for conversation, as opposed one designed for the supporting of heavy furniture, he would share my delight.

[Note: See *Guildbook: Spooks and Oracles*, p. 54, for the details of Barrowbomb mechanics.]

Resources Harvested from the Labyrinth

Spectral Skins

Yes, the actual skins of actual Spectres. Some Helldivers favor wearing them as a means of disguise. I favor the majority school of thought about those people, ably summed up by my old friend Drake as "sick stupid sods." It seldom works — Spectres identify each other through senses that have nothing to do with the perception of exteriors. The skins are hard to remove, and the process destroys a Spectre who might have been interrogated or compelled to teach useful arts. I will assign any of you I catch engaged in this tactic to something suitable for your mental capabilities, and while we don't have latrines to clean here in the Underworld, rest assured I can find something equally pleasant.

Doomslayer Locations

The Emerald Keep



This structure is the seat of the Emerald Legion's best-known elite formation, the Guardians of the Labyrinth. The Emerald Keep is a miniature replica of the Seat of Thorns, complete with walls of a brilliant, rippling green. Faced with highly-charged slices cut from a Soulfire crystal supposedly found in excavations on the Venous Stair, the Emerald Keep burns hot enough to vaporize any wraith or Spectre within spear-cast. This shining beacon is surrounded for almost a half-mile with a seemingly impenetrable maze of the same strange brambles that surround the Seat of Thorns, supplemented by thickets of strange, malevolent wire.

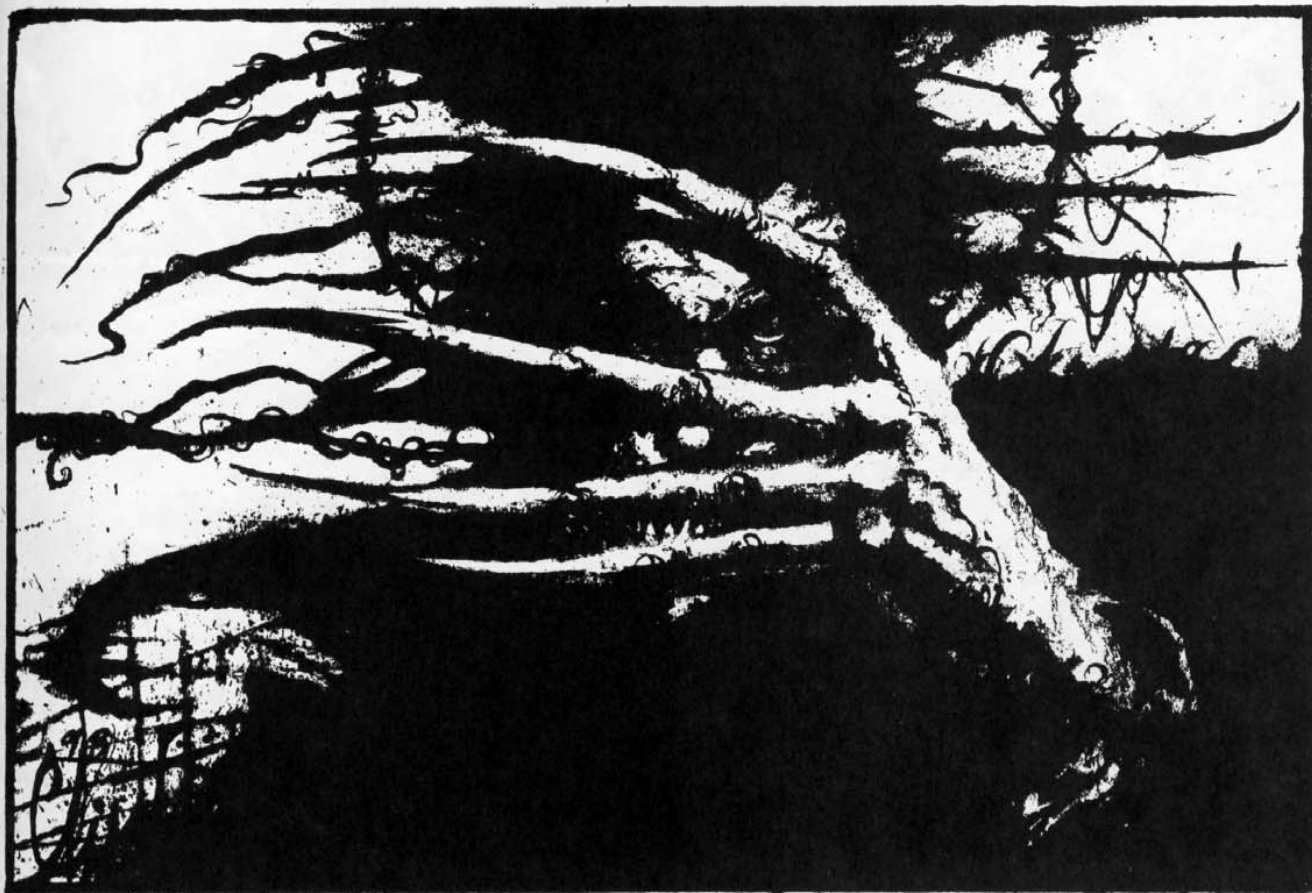
Access to the Keep is possible only through a strongly-held underground passageway under the walls, and thence through a variety of secret paths in the maze surrounding the Keep. Most of these routes do not exist until the thorns are ordered to part by specially trained guides well-schooled in the words used to command them. The thorns and most especially the wire are known to possess a certain malevolent intelligence. Even when the defenses are quiescent, it can be dangerous to stand in one place too long. When the hedge has been given orders to defend the Keep, it is suicide to pass close enough for a flexible tendril to lash out and grab an extremity.

The purpose of the Keep is to garrison the Veinous Stair and prevent Spectral armies from marching freely up and down it to lay siege to the City. Not close enough to the Stair to be neutralized through slow sapping, and strongly-held enough that no army can allow it to stand in its rear, the Emerald Keep must be either circumvallated or stormed before an army can storm Stygia proper.

The Guardians of the Labyrinth also perform other garrison roles. They patrol the area around the stair to check Spectral infiltration, and watch the small fissures and lesser stairs that open and close regularly near the Veinous Stair proper. They also supplement the private or Legionary guard for the mining operations when conditions on the Stair are stable enough to permit excavation.

The Commandery of the Martyr Knights

This dark and windowless octagon rises into the Stygian night. Built less than a century ago at tremendous expense, the structure houses the Order's tremendous collection of bottled Spectres, each of which rests in special containment



jar in a basement hewn from the Isle itself. Hundreds of exquisitely-crafted cylindrical soulsteel bells hang rusting on stone arms that extend from the side of the building. They are silent, save for when the Maelstrom-winds blow hard enough to set them ringing. They will not be rung by the hands of the Restless until the day the Martyr Knights discover the secret to the Redemption of the Shadow-eaten, when they shall peal out their song so that the Restless Dead of Stygia may know and rejoice.

The Commandery is designed on a highly compartmentalized model. There are eight entrances — one for each side — and members of the Knights of the Scroll belonging to a particular team may use only a certain entrance, and then only during certain hours. The doors are guarded by elite Thorns and Legionaries with Barghests especially trained to sniff out the Shadow-eaten. During the hours when a wraith from a group is permitted to enter and exit, the doors to the space allotted to their research group will be open. It is strongly advised that wraiths not attempt to open doors other than those assigned to their group, as certain of the portals are designed to provide the curious with a permanent discouragement from prying.

Access to other parts of the building, for example the library of Spectres stored in the basement, is by request. Special “janitors,” heavily Moliated (and if rumors are to be believed, equally heavily Intimated) thralls bound with extremely intricate versions of Nhudri’s Embrace, handle these requests as well as take care of the mundane tasks needed to keep the Commandery in working order.

The Five are said to meet somewhere in the Commandery. Since there is no way to get a good picture of the inside of the Commandery, or to tell who else leaves and when, it isn’t possible to say if they actually meet there or not. Some believe there are conference rooms on the upper levels accessible only from the air. Others say that there are passages up from the network or storm sewers and underground access tunnels sometimes called “Stygia’s other highways” that connect so much of the City of Iron. The more mundanely-minded say that there is simply an hour and a side where the Five come and go, dressed as normal researchers. Everyone has their own theory, and everyone has some scrap of evidence or rumor to support it, but the fact is that nobody knows.



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Doomslaying: One Step Beyond

Character Creation



his chapter provides essential information for creating a new Doomslayer character or converting an existing **Wraith** character into a bad-ass Spectre hunter.

The basic rules for creating a wraith character are covered in **Wraith: The Oblivion**. These rules are reviewed briefly and expanded as appropriate for creating Doomslayer characters.

Staring into the Abyss

Taking on Oblivion is not a decision one should arrive at lightly. Allowing others to fight the rising tide of Spectres certainly does not guarantee a longer existence, but charging into the Labyrinth itself definitely increases the likelihood of a shorter one. So, why would anyone in their right Psyche join a group dedicated solely to risking its existence in a seemingly

unwinnable war? The answers are as myriad as the members of that group themselves. Just as every seasoned veteran and green recruit has his reason for taking the fight to the Abyss, each player must determine why her character would seek such peril.

When creating a Doomslayer, the player must answer a few questions about the personality she creates. Why would this particular wraith seek out and join the any of the Doomslayer divisions? Was she reaped by a Doomslayer and pressed into service. Does she seek adventure or a quick, destructive end to her existence? Does she have a grudge against a particular Spectre or does she simply hate the whole lot of them? Your answers to these questions will determine your character's avenues of approach to Doomslaying, and probably the sorts of wraiths she's most comfortable with as well. After all, a Doomslayer out for vengeance is probably going to have some friction with a mamby-pamby ex-Thorn who just wants to redeem Spectres.

The Process

Step One: Personality

Choose: Concept, Nature, Demeanor and Order

Concept

Although most Doomslayers have the same overriding goal, they come from a variety of backgrounds. Many of them originally served in the armed forces, law enforcement or the intelligence community. On the other hand, the Doomslayers will accept anyone with the appropriate skill and the willingness to dive into the Labyrinth on purpose.

Nature and Demeanor

Choose your character's Nature and Demeanor from the options given in **Wraith: The Oblivion**. Many Doomslayers possess headstrong Natures, such as Bravo or Director. On the other hand, one can choose the twisted Bon Vivant, who thinks wrestling Shades makes for an entertaining eternity.

Order

Although the divisions among the various Doomslayer groups are not as formal as those of the Legions, or even the Guilds for that matter, Doomslayers do tend to fall into certain subgroups. Decide which group best suits your character's personality. Keep in mind that the Storyteller may have already determined the type of story and might limit the Order you can serve as a result.

Order of the Thorn: The military backbone of the Doomslayers, the Order treads heavily and its members carry the biggest sticks they can find. Loaded for bear with an arsenal of relic guns, swords and baseball bats, the Order of the Thorn uses every bit of firepower available.

Order of the Martyr Knights: As the Thorns confront the Spectres head-on, the Martyr Knights await the forces of Oblivion to invade the Shadowlands and Necropoli. Dedicated to the protection of the civilized Underworld, the Martyr Knights investigate possible Spectral insurrection and stomp it out wherever it appears.

Specialists: Although not organized into Orders, the Helldivers and Darksiders form specific subgroups within the Masquers and Pardoners Guilds, respectively. If the wraith belongs to one of these groups, she may still be associated with either the Thorns or the Martyr Knights as well. Helldivers use their shapechanging abilities to infiltrate the Spectres in an effort to complete assassination or intelligence-gathering objectives. Darksiders journey with other Doomslayer Orders, protecting the Restless from their own inner demons — their Shadows.

Solo: Of all Doomslayers, perhaps the most daring are those who operate completely independently. Hunting Spectres purely of their own volition, and acting without any supervision, individual pockets of wraiths take the battle to the Labyrinth. These wraiths might operate in cells or completely alone, but they lack the support — and subsequent bureaucracy — of the well-armed, but sometimes inefficient Orders.

Steps Two and Three

Select Attributes and Abilities

Prioritize Attributes and Abilities as listed in **Wraith: the Oblivion**. Physical Attributes and Talents are most often the highest priority. Helldivers and Darksiders often focus on Social Attributes instead of Physical ones.

Step Four: Advantages

Select appropriate Passions, Arcanoi, Backgrounds and Fetters.

Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi

Due to their exposure to Spectres and the forces of Oblivion, Doomslayers can develop Dark Arcanoi. Normally available only to Spectres, Dark Arcanoi allow a wraith to tap into her Angst and create spectacular effects. Primary among these abilities is Hive-Mind — the Arcanos that links all Spectres into one malevolent intelligence. Those wraiths seeking to infiltrate the Shades had best tap into the Hive-Mind or be marked immediately as a spy.

Doomslayers can have Dark Arcanoi at twice the cost of normal Arcanoi (10 points per dot). Dark Arcanoi may be purchased only with freebie points. Helldivers may purchase the first level of Hive-mind at the normal five freebie points, but must make any additional purchases at the regular 10 points per dot.

Doomslayers can increase their Dark Arcanoi with experience points at a rate of twice that of normal Arcanoi (level x 6). New Dark Arcanoi can be purchased for 14 experience points per dot. New Dark Arcanoi must be learned from another wraith who possesses the appropriate ability or from a Spectre willing to bargain for the tutorial. (See page 55)

Backgrounds

Doomslayers have access to two new Backgrounds and some of the Backgrounds found in **Wraith** are modified for them. The new Backgrounds are listed later in this chapter. The following Backgrounds have been adjusted to better suit a Doomslayer chronicle.

Contacts: Doomslayers may choose specific Spectres as contacts. Although this is a very dangerous game, 'slayers use information gathered from doomshades to hunt other doomshades. This can lead to betrayal, but frequently provides pertinent intelligence as the forces of Oblivion vie with each other for power.

Haunt: Quite often a group of Doomslayers is based out of a single Haunt. In this case, the Storyteller may allow the players to pool their Haunt Backgrounds in order to increase the site's overall level.

Status and Notoriety: These Backgrounds can be very dangerous for a Doomslayer to possess. Although they allow the character a certain amount of clout in the Shadowlands, they also invite unwanted attention that might interfere with the Doomslayer's efforts. Shades infiltrating the home city of the wraith can easily find her if her Status or Notoriety rise too high.

Step Five: Advantages

Record Pathos (Memoriam + 5) and beginning Willpower (5) and spend freebie points as described in **Wraith: The Oblivion**.

Don't Forget Shadow Creation

Doomslayers' Shadows are created like normal Shadows, but many share certain characteristics. Director, Martyr and Rationalist Archetypes are common among Doomslayer Shadows, as is the Rager. Dark Passions relate either to violent emotions like **Hate** and **Rage**, or in rarer cases to **Self-Loathing** and **Despair**. There's never any mixing of the Dark Passion types; the Shadow is either an introvert or an extrovert, with nothing in between.

Popular Thorns for Doomslayer Shadows are ones such as **Spectre Prestige**, **Dark Allies** and **Shadow Call**, used to attract attention in the Labyrinth. **Pact of Doom** is also common, as are things such as **Trick of the Light** and **Mirror, Mirror**, which can cause distrust in a Doomslayer cell through judicious application.

Switching Careers

In theory, any wraith can become a Doomslayer, just by deciding one day that it's the sort of thing he wants to be doing. Doomslaying is a profession, after all, and nothing more. However, there are a few basics that a wraith jumping into Spectre hunting should have. Is the character joining an Order, or staying Solo? If he's going with an Order, work out how he got recruited (and think about adding Mentor, Allies and Contacts as Backgrounds if you can). If the character is a Darksider or Helldiver in training, Guild Status is a good idea. It also makes sense to spend in-game time training for the rigors of Doomslaying, acquiring suitable equipment (see page 40), and dealing with the consequences of this sort of switch. After all, a Legionnaire who's abandoning his post to go hunt Spectres might run into some interference from his superiors.

On the whole, though, turning an established character into a Doomslayer is more a matter of preparation and inclination than it is a matter of strewing the appropriate dots around a character sheet.



The Art of Doomslaying: Rules and Regulations

Adventure is not a good reason to die, just as hate is not a good reason to die. Not even love is a good reason to die — not even life. What is a good reason to die? I really don't know, but I think I'll find out soon.

— Peter Gillis, *Strikeforce: Morituri*

New Talents

Helldiving

This is the Talent that defines Helldivers as a group. Helldivers Helldive, it's that simple. They have a practical knowledge of the Labyrinth's ways; veteran Helldivers learn to recognize on a subconscious level when they are approaching a dead end, what sorts of formations are most likely to conceal ambushes, how to distinguish dangerous Plasmics from harmless ones and so on.

Only the first dot's worth of Helldiving can be acquired through instruction. Further advances must be earned through experience. Advancement in this Talent comes as much through intuition and attunement as through the acquisition of documentable facts.

- **Novice:** You know that Oblivion is down and Stygia up, and can find your way along routes you've traveled before.

- **Competent:** You travel safely through the Labyrinth's normal conditions without delay, and can cope with most unusual situations without too much complication.

- **Practiced:** You can lead Helldiver bands and keep them together in the face of unforeseen changes and significant opposition.

- **Expert:** You know as much about the Labyrinth as one can expect to without becoming Shadow-Eaten.

- **Master:** Charon used to bring his difficult questions to you. Well, maybe not, but it's not like he's about to come back and contradict you....

Possessed By: Helldivers, Spectres, Extremely Foolish Void Engineers

Specialties: Extractions, Long-Term Stays, Nihil Slaloming, To the Void and Back

System: Make an Intelligence + Helldiving roll (difficulty 6) at the start of an expedition into the Labyrinth. Each success subtracts 10% from routine travel times. Each failure adds 10%. A botch adds at least 25%, and should lead the Helldiver and those following her into some sort of danger, such as Spectral ambush or benign-looking caustic plasm.

When the Helldiver encounters obstructions — rock falls, extended vertical passages, viscous plasm, and so on — the Storyteller may choose to call for a Dexterity + Helldiving roll (difficulty 6). Each success adds one die to the character's Dice Pool for movement, combat, perception, and other checks affected by the local environment. Each failure subtracts one from the Dice Pool for such checks. A botch raises the difficulty of such checks by one for each dot of Helldiving. The bonus or penalty applies until the end of the current scene.

New Skills

Labyrinth Gear

This Skill covers the preparation of the actual equipment to be used in the Labyrinth, and (when necessary) its repair and the improvisation of useful tools from raw materials and incomplete components. Labyrinth Gear combines general mechanical aptitude with an appreciation of the circumstances of the Labyrinth. Helldiving groups without anyone who possesses this Skill can make do with Helldiving, but the difficulty of all checks made this way is one higher than usual.

- **Novice:** You can hammer a bent spike straight.

- **Practiced:** You know what sorts of equipment Skinlands rock climbers, cavers, divers and other relevant groups use, and have some idea how to adapt Skinlands gear to the Labyrinth. Your handiwork is reliable.

- **Competent:** You can create new devices to suit newly discovered situations, and have an extensive body of experience in adapting existing gear when required.

- **Expert:** Helldivers compare you to Cousteau, Hillary, and Amundsen.

- **Master:** You surprise Malfeans with the usefulness of your work.

Possessed By: Helldivers, Thorns, Dead Spelunkers

Specialties: Jury-rigging, Relic Tools, Labyrinth Scrounging

Customized Arts

These are not new arts, but specialized uses for existing ones. They require training and study but not the investment of experience points that developing altogether new arts does.

Labyrinthine Martialry

Any Masquer with Martialry and at least 1 dot of this Knowledge can make modifications to Corpus, changing it to resist the effects of caustic plasm. This includes standing pools, Shadowed Plasmic venom and the like. Labyrinthine Martialry used to make Corpus into armor halves the damage Labyrinth-tainted plasm does to the subject, down to a minimum of 1 level per half hour. If the wraith doing the Molation achieves 2 or more successes on her roll, the tar-

get has no penalty to movement or action. If the Masquer achieves only a single success, the target has 1 less die than usual for all Dexterity-related Dice Pools for the duration of the effect.

Labyrinthine Soulforging

Artificers who have 3 or more dots of Soulforging and 1 or more dots of Labyrinth Knowledge may treat Stygian steel specifically to resist Labyrinth-tainted plasm. Characters wearing treated steel armor take half normal damage from plasm, down to a minimum of one Corpus level per half-hour.

Labyrinth Travel

Core Concepts



Helldivers dream of the perfect Labyrinth passages: smooth floors, walls with no sharp obstructions, ceilings high enough for comfortable walking. Perfect passages slope gradually or have natural (or artificial) steps of a size suitable for more-or-less-human-sized beings. Helldivers so fortunate as to find these passages incur no penalty to movement or action.

Unfortunately, Doomslayers don't often have such encounters — less than once per dozen trips, at best. The passages that Helldivers usually travel are cluttered. Debris is strewn across the floor. Crevices and stalagmites break smooth surfaces. Walls lean in and out, sometimes constricting so that Helldivers must turn sideways to squeeze through. Ceilings sometimes swoop so far down (or floors so far up) that Helldivers must duck, squat or even kneel, perhaps for a few feet, perhaps for dozens of yards. Routes rise and fall precipitously, sometimes through shafts long and steep enough to require ropes and anchors for any Helldivers who cannot fly. As a result of these obstructions, Helldivers travel at 75% of their usual movement rate while in the Labyrinth, and at Storyteller discretion travel speed drops to half normal or even less along unusually difficult routes. All initiative and combat rolls have a difficulty one higher than usual; particularly cramped quarters subtract 1 or more dice from Dice Pools for rolls requiring reach and flexibility.

Even worse conditions prevail in about a third of the Labyrinth. Shafts may run vertically miles before branching out at angles closer to horizontal. Some passages shrink to less than a foot in diameter or twist and turn every few paces, completely obstructing line of sight and most limb movement. Many of these regions are simply impassable to Helldivers who cannot apply arts to change their size. Others can be navi-

gated, but only slowly and with difficulty. Helldivers never move through these areas at more than half their usual speed, and more commonly manage 25% of their usual pace or less.

Spectres have fewer difficulties of this kind. The Labyrinth knows its own, on a level of primordial consciousness, and shifts itself just enough to make it possible (but not easy or pain-free) for servants of Oblivion to pass without significant delay. Powerful Spectres, whose souls gradually become coterminous with the surrounding Labyrinth, further improve conditions for the Spectres who serve them. Thus, the Spectres who experience most delays and difficulties are those who are independent and lack a superior to smooth things over, or who are so far removed from their faction's seat of power that help does not come.

Climbing

The Labyrinth is close enough to Skinlands caves in certain topological respects that many of the living arts of speleology apply. On the other hand, it is different enough that over-reliance on those skills brings certain doom.

The most fundamental difference is that the Labyrinth evolves, constantly reconfiguring far more rapidly than do Skinlands caves. The changes that take millennia to transform a living cave happen in days or weeks in the Labyrinth. Acute reshaping episodes flash by in minutes or even seconds. Doomslayers who expect the spikes they planted a week ago to still be there on a return trip or a future visit set themselves up for disappointment. Expeditions without adequate resources may risk it nonetheless, or may go to the other extreme of carefully hoarding all their gear, collecting it as they go. Better-funded groups can dispose or conserve as circumstances suggest.

The standard stuff of the Labyrinth is, in some ways, more suitable for rock-climbing techniques than real rocks. It seldom fissures under the pressure of piton-driving hammer blows, and rarely gives rise to dangerous falls or landslides. However, it is also prone to unexpected transformations of its own, and can be forced to change by Spectres with the Hive-mind arts of command.

Getting down into the Labyrinth is far easier than getting out again, in part simply because the entry is down. It is always easier to go down than up: In extreme circumstances one can always fall, if one is prepared to deal with the night-infinite terminal velocity that prevails in the Labyrinth. (Tumblesuits mitigate this danger, at the cost of clumsiness.) News of the Skinlands invention of mechanical ascenders revolutionized Doomslayer practice for getting *out* of the Labyrinth, however. An ascender is a simple clamp that yields when pushed up a rope, but locks and resists pressure to slide down. With a pair of ascenders, a mountaineer or caver can "walk" up a long rope, with very little more effort than walking on level ground. Now all but the poorest, most desperate or most fanatical Doomslayers use them, and so do many Spectres.



Dealing with Plasm

Since wraiths do not breathe, and do not take damage from environments that would harm the living (once they have updated their sense of self accordingly), most plasm encountered in the Labyrinth merely obstructs movement. The standard water-like manifestation drops movement rates by half and imposes an increased level of difficulty (+1) on any action involving fast or sustained movement. If there is unusual lighting — particularly rapidly changing lighting, which reflects unpredictably across layers within the plasm — all rolls involving visual perception are also made at +1 difficulty.

More problems arise when the local plasm is caustic. Blood-plasm (plasm that resembles living human blood), for instance, reduces Corpus levels by one for each hour that a wraith spends immersed in it. The form of plasm that Doomslayers call “stom-

ach-acid plasm,” a bubbling whitish liquid, does an aggravated level of damage for each minute spent in contact with it. Plasm-inflicted damage is usually slow, and aggravated damage is quite rare; “stomach acid plasm” seems to accumulate only where Spectres have broken light pipes, as the remnants of translucent intrusion crystal alter the nature of plasm trickling past them. But even slow damage accumulates significantly over time. Doomslayers preparing for long expeditions must give serious attention to means of healing or forms of protection.

Spectres who do not have a reliable means of self-protection, such as Larceny or Moliarte, make a point of avoiding damaging plasm. Scouts place warning marks in the vicinity of long-lasting plasm dangers.

When resources permit, Helldivers adopt a two-fold defense, combining the Masquers' Labyrinth Martialry with the Artificers' Labyrinthine Steel. With both arts applied, wraiths lose no more than one Corpus level per hour to Labyrinth-tainted plasm, and may lose much less. Well-equipped Doomslayer expeditions and well-outfitted Spectral gatherings feature stocks of equipment and talented individuals to work transformations. The less fortunate make do with that they can. Multiple layers of clothes and wrapping provide some protection for the unfortunate; such minimal defenses can at least protect their wearer until each layer rots away in turn.

What is it?

Plasm is a catch-all term for liquids found in the Underworld that have no earthly counterpart. The word refers to the stuff of the Sea of Shadows, as well as the internal fluids of wraiths and the assorted other liquids found in places like the Labyrinth.

Plasm Filters

Plasm filters are a relatively recent innovation, developed independently several times in the last century by Doomslayers with mechanical or chemical experience. The filter maker starts with a block of Stygian steel and re-melts it, blowing air through it and agitating it as it condenses, so that it forms a porous mass. The filter looks the same to the untrained eye, but is now less than 10% its original weight. When tossed into Labyrinth-tainted plasm, it acts as a sponge, sucking up between 10 and 20 times its own weight. Furthermore, the filter catalyzes a transformation in nearby unabsorbed plasm, which hardens into a dense thick gel, occupying about a fifth of its original space and clumped into large masses that are easy to walk around. It takes a minimum of half a day for the gel to melt, and at least twice that long for absorbed plasm to escape.

Unfortunately for all but the wealthiest or best-connected Labyrinth travelers, plasm filters are essentially one-shot items. They become extremely hot as they absorb plasm, and cool off very slowly. Further, they gain the weight of all the absorbed plasm, and never quite release all of it later. Once deployed, a plasm filter must usually be left where it lies. Scroungers, particularly among Spectres, do search for abandoned plasm filters, which are valued trade goods in the Doomslayer-Spectre trade that higher-ups on both sides prefer to ignore.

Young wraiths and Spectres refer to plasm filters as "iron rations," particularly when filters are stored with climbing gear and other provisions, and answer their elders' request for an explanation with only a laugh.

Mapping

In many cultures, the Western tradition of attempting to capture all the salient points of terrain and features on a single diagram is alien. Rather, the map shows only the most essential points. The Tokkaido maps of pre-modern Japan, for instance, show the major road as a straight line, with distances

Storytellers: Mapping

As the Storyteller, you need not put a tremendous effort into working up detailed maps. The Labyrinth is supposed to be an environment that changes and is hard to comprehend. Lay out the relationships between points of interest and focus your attention on developing those locales in more detail. Use in-character disparagement from veteran Helldivers to supplement the players' realization that elaborate efforts at mapping by their characters produce nothing particularly useful.

Doomslaying is not dungeon-crawling.

and features passed noted. This sort of abstracted mapping is far better suited to the chaotic conditions of the Labyrinth, and even it is limited in usefulness by the pace of change.

Most "maps" of the Labyrinth are simple sketches and diagrams indicating the condition in which the cartographer found things on her last trip. Hucksters and frauds produce beautifully rendered maps with far more grandiose claims, but these sell more to the ignorant of the Shadowlands than to anyone who actually spends time in the Labyrinth.

Oblivion's Arts: Using Dark Arcanoi

1:00 P.M.



Attention, students. Afternoon class is now in session. Please take a moment to familiarize yourself with the arrangement of the classroom. That is indeed a live Spectre strapped to the table, with four dissected Doppelgangers arranged behind it for your edification. Furthermore, that is indeed a fully equipped Martyr Knight standing by the door, which is locked. Ms. Lindroos, thank you for joining us today, and I sincerely hope that your services will not be required.

Some of you will have noticed the wreckage of the classroom at the end of this corridor, and may even have wondered at the fact that it is a burned-out hulk. We leave it that way as a memorial, and as an object lesson. Three years ago, Dr. Barrett's students did not pay sufficient attention to the safety instructions I am about to give you. Their test subject got loose, took command of the counterpart of Ms. Lindroos assigned to that session, and plunged all 39 wraiths in the room into a Destruction Harrowing with the aid of relic small-arms fire. Dr. Barrett returned last year as a heavily distorted Nephwrack. Ms. Lindroos dispatched him, and it is his hooks that decorate her office. Nine of the students have been spotted as Doppelgangers. Two students actually survived their Harrowings and now lead very quiet existences very far removed from our war. We have no reports of the others.

So let's discuss the handling of Spectres in the classroom.

Rules for Dark Arcanoi

Wraiths using Dark Arcanoi automatically switch the Angst cost of a Dark Arcanos power to Pathos. Being point costs are replaced by Willpower. Furthermore, all dice rolled for a Dark Arcanos are considered Shadow Dice for purposes of all 1s rolled.

Why Use Dark Arcanoi?

1:10 P.M.



he best war is the one you don't fight, because your enemy joins you voluntarily. With all due respect to the Pardoners and everyone else busy trying to Redeem Spectres, that won't happen here. Once Oblivion gets you, that's it.

The next best war is the one in which any move your enemy makes hurts him more than it hurts you. That won't happen here, either. Oblivion has a head start as old as the universe, and there's no place it can't go. (No, Ms. Lindroos, no offense intended. You and your colleagues do a first-rate job seeing that it does not go where we are, but you can't ensure that it *cannot* go here.)

So we're left with the garden-variety, straight-up war. We have to use the tools we can get. That includes the enemy's own tools: Dark Arcanoi.

Now, the knee-jerk reaction a lot of students give is exactly that — with the emphasis on the word "jerk." "Oh, we can't use Dark Arcanoi because they're eeeeevil," is the usual rationalization I get for such squeamishness. I say poppycock. Dark Arcanoi are valuable weapons in our arsenal for a variety of reasons. To wit:

- **The Dark Arcanoi are unexpected.** Spectres get cocky. They figure that they know wraiths from the inside out, and that we don't have any surprises for them. We're here to make their work more difficult. Springing Larceny on a Nephwrack who's decided to play with his food will certainly put a crimp in his digestion.

- **The Dark Arcanoi are useful.** Spectres can do things we can't, at least not usually. You may have noticed instances in which the Dark Arcanoi have given Spectres unexpected advantages — say, such as using Tempest-Weaving to pull all sorts of bladed nasties out of the storm. If you survive, you'll see a lot more like that. We need the edge. The utility of something like Tempest-Weaving is indisputable. You may not like Larceny or Hive-mind, but they can be the difference between escape and a Harrowing.

- **The Dark Arcanoi let us plan better.** All intelligence work is a matter of understanding your enemy's capabilities and intentions. Until we know what the enemy's capabilities are, we can't make a rational assessment of intent. Those of you who will work with the Dark Arcanoi play an important part in the formulation of military doctrine, because you show us exactly what our opponent can and cannot do.

So that's why we use Dark Arcanoi. The next step is showing you how they work, and how you can use them without losing your own soul in the process.

What's in It for Oblivion

1:30 P.M.



Let's clear up a misconception that some of you are carrying around, and let's do it now. We don't have a complete grasp of Oblivion's motives. That's not entirely a bad thing, because it means we haven't adapted to the idea of existing without hope of anything but annihilation. We send you to the Pardoners and ways away from the front line if you start showing a little too much insight into the way Spectres think.

With that out of the way, let's look at the most common reasons you're likely to get the chance to learn Dark Arcanoi.

Parole

We capture Spectres on occasion. It's not easy, but you can do it with the proper tools. (See page 41.) Mostly we keep prisoners for purposes of experimentation, but sometimes we let them go — in exchange for information. Don't go risking yourself too much for the sake of getting some extra prisoners, but when Fate tosses some your way, take 'em!

Get approval from your superiors before agreeing to let a Spectre go in exchange for instruction. If we find you suddenly using arts we can't account for any other way, we will probably treat you as a probable risk for being Shadow-eaten and proceed accordingly. If that's the case, I hope you like flogging. I hope you like it a *lot*.

If you do get permission, then you're looking at a lot of time in your Spectre's prison cell. It'll walk you through the process of learning a Dark Arcanos, at least one or two arts, and it will probably try to rope your Shadow into helping as well. That's something to watch out for. When we verify that you can use what you've learned reliably — and we'll compare your performance with all of our collected records and experience before we give approval; we're not about to take a Spectre's word on how thoroughly prepped you are — then we let it go.

Corruption

Spectres corrupt. It's what they do. It's the first part of the process of annihilation. Think of Oblivion as the universe's biggest pyramid scheme, with nobody getting paid out at the end.

Spectres particularly like to corrupt people who are useful or important. That means Anacreons, Legionnaires on guard duty and you. Spectres would just love to get more Doomslayers in their pockets, and damned if some of you won't be stupid enough to fall for it. I can stand here with

an honest-to-goodness, genuine, real Spectre right here, in all its ugliness, as an object lesson, and it won't sink in. There are those of you sitting there thinking you're too smart or too fast or too tough to get taken in by Spectral blandishments, and you're precisely the first ones who are going to go. If I could pick you out — and it weren't that you'd just come back in the next Maelstrom — I'd toss you off the Veinous Stair myself. If we had some reliable way of screening out the terminally stupid at the start of training, instead of having to wait for you to prove yourselves, I'd have more jingle in my pocket. The thought makes me sick, frankly.

Anyway, Spectres will offer to teach you "special-like" on the side if they think you're an easy target. If this happens, you do not accept right away. You hem. You haw. You stall. Then you come to us and ask for guidance. We think it over and evaluate the current state of your soul. If we approve, then and only then do you proceed as if it were on your own initiative.

Since some of you won't have paid attention, I will reiterate a point. If we find you using arts we can't account for your having legitimately, we will assume that you are being corrupted. If you suddenly start using arts that are heavy Angst generators, we will apply the Doppelganger quarantine procedures and then ask questions, and you won't like it. Not at all. So take a bit of care, damn it! We don't want to lose you, not for a while, not forever. We would really rather not get that much closer to the end of the universe as we know it, and we don't want to waste the time and effort putting you down.

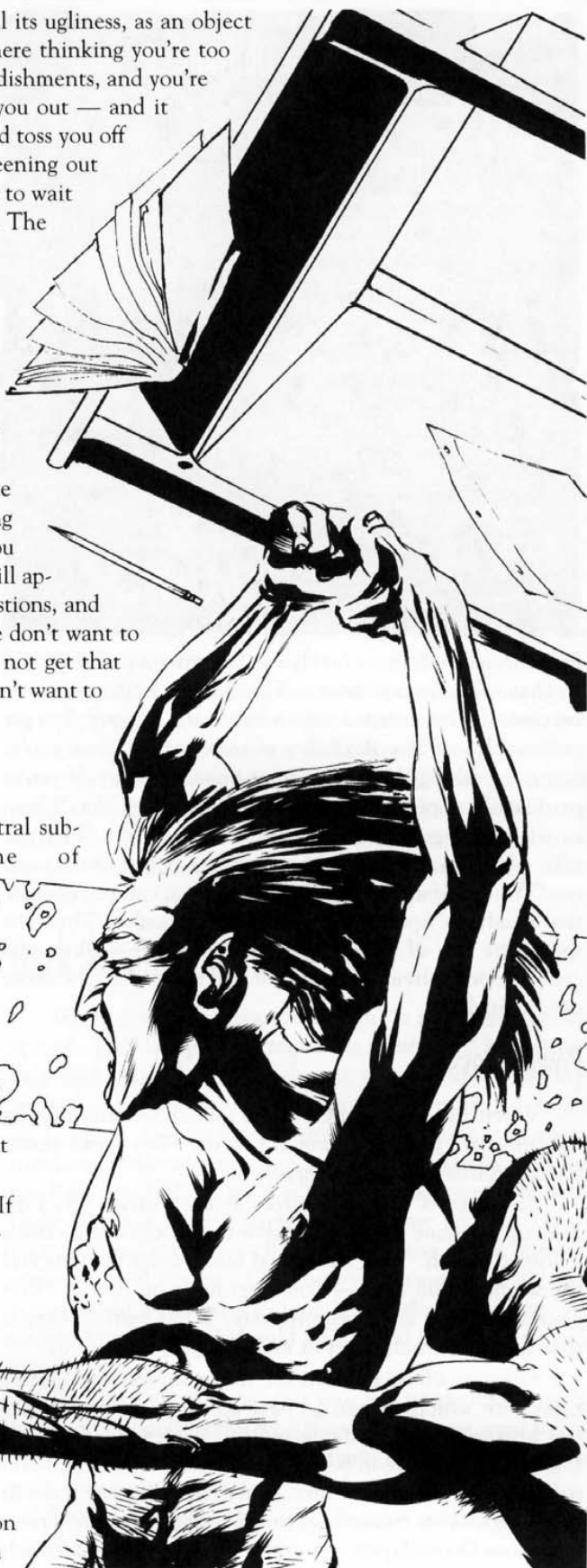
Targets

So what sorts of wraiths get chosen as targets for Spectral subversion? There are a few major categories. If you fall into one of these, you need to be extra careful. If you fall into several, why not brighten a Nhudri cultist's day and throw yourself into a forge right now?

- **Too much Catharsis:** You have a history of losing track of your Shadow's strength, so you end up spending a lot of time acting as psychic wheels for a little piece of Oblivion. How lovely for you. If this is your problem, I certainly hope there was some reason our mutual superiors let you get this far. Spectres figure that if they give you more toys that generate Angst, you'll end up giving your Shadow that much more time in control. They're even probably right.

- **Important position:** I've already touched on this. If you occupy a position that would let Spectres gain substantial new access if you turned, they'll make you offers. Even if you don't give, they'll keep trying.

- **Point of weakness:** Your Psyche may be in good shape overall, but perhaps you have some single flaw. If you rely heavily on a single Passion to regain Pathos, your new best-buddy Spectre just might offer you an art that looks like it will let you exercise the Passion more often, more fully, — just *better* somehow. If you have a



Idiots for Oblivion

Most chronicles involving player-character Spectres involve creatures of intelligence, drive, ambition and determination. But not all Spectres are that smart. Storytellers and players who want a change of pace may want to consider a chronicle revolving around the intellect-impaired of wraith society. Characters begin as dim-witted or simply foolish Doomslayers who quickly get in over their heads. Once Shadow-eaten, they set about hastening the end of all things with more enthusiasm than ability. If caught, they meet quick, unhappy ends, but a Storyteller using this idea might want to avoid bringing in the truly clever opposition. This is the Shadowlands as produced in the style of movies such as *Duck Soup*, *Airplane!* and *Raising Arizona*. The characters range from dumb to overly zealous to confused. Instead of passion and horror, this sort of chronicle is about obsession and bewilderment, and it can serve as a nice alternative to the usual race to Oblivion.

Fetter in jeopardy, your buddy the Spectre may offer you an art that will let you protect it. The more monomaniacal you become, the better it is for your buddy the Spectre. You get predictable, we lose flexibility of response and now you're doing something that makes your Shadow happy. If you're particularly stupid, you accept a pitch that runs like, "Okay, so you're going to lose this weak Passion/Fetter. Why not take what I'm offering so that you can better protect the rest?" You still face the Harrowing, and you can be very sure that Buddy the Spectre won't help you through it. Then you spend the rest of your existence that much weaker, and counting on Oblivion to help you out. Right. Pull the other one; it jingles.

Power Plays

When the armies of Oblivion talk about annihilating the universe, they don't mean just us. They mean them, too. Annihilation is for everyone!

So Spectres use us to strike at each other. They all worship the same Big Nothing, but that doesn't make them a unified bunch. They have rival leaders and factions and the whole sordid mess — you'll get more on that in other classes, so don't ask questions here. What matters here is that they hate each other as much as they all hate us.

Spectres whose factions are losing sometimes offer us tools with which we can go beat up their enemies. Spectres who are winning offer us tools to go clean up for them. It's the same gamble in both cases: that we'll do more harm to ourselves using their nice shiny toys than we'll do to Oblivion's forces. Sometimes they're right. A bunch of rambunctious Doomslayers can very quickly turn into a bunch

of rambunctious Doppelgangers ready to be hauled back here for dissection. Those are the people who keep Ms. Lindroos and her peers busy.

What's in It for Us

2:10 P.M.



ll right, so that's what the enemy is up to. Now let's look at our concerns.

We have a pragmatic reason for being willing to let some Spectres go. Once it becomes known that a given Spectre has spent time in our custody, its rivals use this an excuse to destroy it. "Can't be trusted," they say. "Probably gave away valuable secrets. Might even be a damn Masquer or somebody clever. Best rip it up now." Its own allies figure they can't take the risk that it might have betrayed them, and may do the destruction job themselves. On all sides of the factional fence, there's fresh discord and turmoil, which we then exploit.

It is our duty, as the soldiers on the front line, to think about the long term as well as immediate interests. Spectres don't last long, with a damn few exceptions. Wait a decade and most of this year's crop is gone, off to Oblivion one way or another. But knowledge lasts. What we learn we preserve, for our own use and future generations. A deal made now gives us an advantage for the rest of the war, as long as there's some continuity of intelligence operations.

Spectres also carry information for us. The information carried may be as simple as the names of other Spectres who've dealt with us but have managed to keep it a secret, or as complex as the assault plans for the next Maelstrom. Some truths are very damaging. So are some lies. In the weakened condition that usually prevails after they've been locked up a while, Spectres aren't in a position to figure out which tidbits they gather up are true and which aren't. Spectral fear, uncertainty and doubt are themselves valuable weapons for us. So is the content. Releasing one Spectre to plunge a dozen or a thousand into a fresh round of mutual annihilation can be quite a good deal.

The Deals

2:45 P.M.



o, now that you know what you should think about, what should you do? If you have the chance to pick up a Spectral favor, and your superiors give you the okay, what is it you'll be doing? Lucky for you, you've got me here to give you the answers.

You can try to speed things up, if you're feeling like a daredevil or just tired of the burden of thinking for yourself rather than taking Oblivion's orders. Make a Willpower check [difficulty 7]. Each success knocks a day per dot off the required time; with 2 successes you take five days per dot rather than seven days per dot. The minimum time is one day per dot: wraiths just can't absorb this stuff any quicker. If you fail, each 1 you rolled adds a day per dot. On a botch, your Shadow gets a point of temporary Angst for each 1 rolled, and there's the same time delay as for failure.

The Pact of Doom

I know that you kids know about this. You may have done it yourself — and for some reason our Pardoners let you stay with us anyhow — but in any event, you've heard about it and been lectured about it as part of basic training. But I'll pretend that you're just as ignorant as you are clueless. In the Pact of Doom, your Shadow taps into the Hive-Mind and sticks knowledge into your skull. It gets a nice fat Angstburger for every art it teaches you, so you get to be the next whiz kid at the cost of pushing yourself that much closer to the brink.

Now, in the usual course of things, your Shadow doesn't go tapping very deeply into the Hive-Mind, and that's a good thing. But when you've got a captive Spectre handy, things change. The Spectre acts as Oblivion's little relay station, passing along signals from deep down in the pit. If you're willing to spend some time and take some risks, your Shadow can suddenly offer to teach you all sorts of exciting new things, such as Dark Arcanoi.

The information dump isn't instantaneous, and you don't just suddenly wake up with dark secrets at your command. It takes time to gather, absorb and apply what your Shadow pipes in. Figure a week per Dark Arcanos art you're getting. Your Shadow gets its permanent Angst boost at the end of the process, in one big rush as you finish basic training. If you break off before finishing, your Shadow gets a fix of temporary Angst, (Note: This comes at a rate of one point per dot of Dark Arcanos), and you get bupkis.

Teaching

Once you know a Dark Arcanos, you can try to teach it to other wraiths, but it's hard. The process requires literally months of effort, and when I say effort, I mean damned hard work. You can't just expect someone to pick up Tempest-Weaving off the cuff, and if you teach it haphazardly, the consequences might be catastrophic.

Be aware that Doomslayers and the Hierarchy both take a very dim view of this kind of thing. In order to teach Dark Arcanoi, you need explicit authorization from someone with the clout to keep the Legions and Martyr Knights off your back, or you will be in Trouble — with a capital TROU — for spreading Oblivion's lore and influence around.

Point costs for learning Dark Arcanoi from a Spectre or another wraith are as stated in the character creation section on page 49.

Teaching Dark Arcanoi: Systems

For each month a wraith spends teaching a student, her player rolls Manipulation + Instruction against a difficulty of (11 minus the student's Intelligence). That's the number of experience points the student can spend on developing the Dark Arcanos that month. Now, if the roll fails, the wraith and the student each acquire a point of temporary Angst for each 1 rolled. On a botch, the wraith and the student both get tossed into Catharsis; it's Storyteller discretion as to when, how long and what the results are.

"Month" in this case means at least 250 hours of effort within a 30 day period. Yes, that's a lot of work, but so is teaching Dark Arcanoi. For every 10 hours less than that the teacher spends spend, the difficulty for that month's roll rises by 1. And if a week goes by with no instruction, the student loses both momentum and connection to the dark forces he's trying to manipulate. The month is lost. There is no roll and no gain.

Dark Arcanos Implants

Getting a Dark Arcanos implant is not a self-service option. This is a process requiring substantial infrastructure and trained personnel, not to mention extensive backup to make sure you don't go utterly nuts. If you get an implant, you do it with the approval of a well-organized institution, or you don't do it at all. Thank God for small favors. At least we don't have hordes of people with these running around loose. If you show up with unauthorized implants, you will be sent to the forges *immediately*. You will not pass Go, you will not collect \$200 and you will not walk out the door. These things are damned serious business, and should be utilized only under strict supervision.

To gain Dark Arcanoi this way, you need either to take body parts from Spectres who have the arts you want to use or to have a captive Spectre on hand to distill the arts you want into your implants every 12 hours for the duration.

(Note: See page 77 for the detailed mechanics of implanting.)



Power Transform

3:15 P.M.

Spectres have some other tricks up their sleeves that we can and do appropriate for our ends. The tricks, not the sleeves — don't be ingenuous, son. You'll only want Spectral sleeves if you're going Helldiving on a budget. (While I'm at it, I may as well note that the pop-wraith-culture image of Spectres going naked or exclusively in hip Skinlands fashions is ridiculous. Spectral clothing tends very much toward the functional. Those functions include terror, of course, but also movement and attack. It's very hard to fight effectively with piercing out the yin-yang and carefully tattered rags flapping in your face.)

The art called Power Transform, which you may well be offered if you're of particular interest to a Nephwrack, is an odd one. It doesn't give you any new powers, but it

changes the way your current abilities operate. See above for all the reasons you might get the offer, and think carefully if it comes your way. I've not accepted it myself, but I know Ms. Lindroos has, and it has demonstrably not impaired her usefulness to our cause. The late Dr. Barrett might testify to that, if more of him remained intact along with his hooks.

Power Transform hinges on an art of Contaminate that our scholarly section didn't identify until fairly recently. You can study the report for yourself, if you're so inclined; just fill out a requisition at the end of class. The short version of the art's effects, however, is this: The Spectre tampers with the flow of your essential energy. For each art you subject to the transformation, you pay Pathos costs equal to what the art used to cost you in Angst, and pay Angst equal to what the Pathos used to be. You can see the advantages, if you've got an art that's high in the element of the Pathos/Angst pair that you're weak in. But it's risky, since you then tend to go on to become overconfident. Sad to say, Oblivion's assessment that we can't be trusted to use new advantages safely is all too often valid.

New Contaminate Art: Power Transform

System: The player (or the Storyteller, if a non-player character Spectre is using this art) rolls Manipulation + Contaminate (difficulty 7). Each success allows the target wraith to swap the costs of one art. This transformation is irreversible; once this power is used on an art, that art cannot be changed back to its normal form. So, if a wraith has Power Transform used on her art of Muse (Keening ●●●), henceforth it costs her one Pathos but gives her two Angst to use. Obviously, not all arts can be inverted in this fashion — the appropriateness of using Power Transform is left to the individual Storyteller.

Wraiths can learn Power Transform themselves and use it on themselves or others. However, in most cases a Spectre merely offers to Power Transform an art or two for a wraith, rather than teaching that wraith Power Transform itself.

The Spectre can attempt to use Power Transform once per scene. Each 1 rolled on a failure requires a scene's worth of rest before the transformation can be

tried again; on a botch, the character also loses a point of Being or Willpower (whichever is appropriate, obviously) in addition to the cost of failure.

Most Spectres must use Power Transform while touching the target wraith. On rare occasions, the art can be invoked at a distance, through the Shadow of a wraith with whom the Spectre has previously dealt face-to-face (the Shadow, not the wraith). The difficulty is 8 if the Spectre has seen the Shadow in control, during Catharsis, and 9 if the Spectre has dealt with the Shadow only *sub rosa*. Using Power Transform from a distance takes an extra scene of intense preparation, during which the Spectre cannot take part in combat or other strenuous activity, and an extra scene of recuperation. Using Power Transform costs a point of permanent Being/Willpower; on a botch it costs an additional point of permanent Being/Willpower per level of the art the character was trying to transform.







Doomslaying: Tactics

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Guten tag. Welcome to today's lecture on the Underworld and your place in it. Today, we will be covering the topics of Doomslaying and Helldiving. Twice every year, the Legion has me come here to Eurydice to give this lecture to wraiths like yourselves, new to the Shadowlands. Every time, there is someone who must know "who is this man giving us this lecture" — as if the Ladies of Fate would not have you taught by someone of demonstrated competence. Nevertheless, these

are important lessons, and so I will tell you a little about myself. My name is Overlord Rudolf Mencken. While I was alive, I served on both the Eastern and Western fronts as a platoon and company commander. After that I was a noncommissioned and later commissioned officer with the *Legion d'Etrangers* in Africa and the *Indochine*. After my death, I was inducted into the Legion of Fate. While I was among the Quick, I saw more time in combat zones than most of you spent alive.

For the last 15 years, I have served almost exclusively in the Independent Companies of the Legion of Fate. These units, along with similar units among the other Legions, were first established after the Great War to help deal with the overwhelming number of Mortwights the conflict generated. The Second World War and the brutalities that the governments of the Quick inflicted on their populations in the middle of the

century made us even more important. I am told that things are much-lessened now, and if that is the case then the wraiths who came before me were brave souls, yes. Those of you from America cannot imagine the way it is in Europe. We do not go near *die Judentödtstadt*, the enclaves of Wire or the Gulags of the Communists in less than battalion strength. And Dresden, the Marne, Stalingrad — we do not go near them at all.

The Military Approach

Today's class will cover — however briefly — most of the ways that Doomslayers and Helldivers operate. We will start with the *military approach*. This is the approach by which a formed unit of troops searches/operates en masse to locate, fix and eliminate Spectres. Keep in mind that this lecture is meant to serve only as an introduction; this is basic training, not command college. Your drill instructors and your training platoon leaders will no doubt acquaint you with the fine points of battle drill before you finish your training. The rest, the theory, will wait until you prove through merit that you're ready for command.

Yes, I am aware that most of your work will be done in small units, eventually. However, before you know how to attack you must learn to defend, and the more wraiths you have holding the line with you, the happier you will be, *ja*? And if you know what you are doing in that line, the happier your compatriots will be with you.

The Chinese general-philosopher Sun Tzu said, "Know your enemy and know yourself, and in a thousand battles, you shall not perish." That, therefore, is how I will begin this lecture. First, we will talk about Spectres — how they think and fight, individually and as groups. Then we will go over some of the tactics that the Legion has devised to help its troops have a better chance in battle against the Shadow-eaten. After that, I will turn the floor over to other guest speakers, who will acquaint you with their own personal methods of dealing with the servants of Oblivion.

Know Your Enemy

I know Spectres as well as any wraith in the Shadowlands, at least in the context of battle. What they do on their off days does not concern me. Individually, the Spectre is very dangerous. His weapons are poorly made, but they are usually of Stygian steel, and will do horrendous damage to you if they connect. He does not care if he exists or does not exist, so you cannot frighten him. He is very aware of his surroundings and can talk with other Spectres nearby, so if you are seen by one Spectre you can assume that you have been seen by all of them.

The Individual Spectre

Understanding the Hive-Mind is crucial to understanding how Spectres fight. Some things we have learned from watching Spectres, other things we have learned from Spectres who have come back from Oblivion. The most important thing to remember is that Spectres are not like bees, little robots made of flesh, and they do not all share the same thoughts like monsters in some science-fiction novel. Instead, it is best to think that every Spectre has, implanted in his head, a radio that allows him to talk to any other Spectre in the world. Some Spectres can emit a stronger signal than others, even loud enough to give orders. There is really much more to the Hive-Mind than this, but as soldiers, you don't really care if a Spectre looks for the recipe in a book or in the Hive-Mind when he wants to bake a cake, yes?

The Spectre's strengths are also his weaknesses. Individually, Spectres do not care if they fall into Oblivion right now or some time later this decade. This means they usually won't retreat, even if they're outnumbered and surrounded. Most of them, especially Haints and Shades, are too brave. If they see you, *raur-raur*, they charge and try to eat you. If you are alone, then this could be bad, because they don't care how badly you hurt them as long as they can hurt you back. That makes them hard to fence with — they like to run up your sword.

But as a general, you like to have an opponent who only wants to fight the first thing he sees, yes? Because you can get him like the bull in the ring. Get him angry, a little pain here and a little there, and pretty soon, if you show him a red cape, he charges at it only to find nothing there, until sooner or later there is a sword there, and that, *tut-tut*, is the end for *Herr Bull*, yes?

Ach, I see some of you smiling and some of you frowning over *Herr Bull's* plight. You should be doing neither. If you are so weak that your temper rises over letting a stupid animal's anger kill it, then you should ask your Pardoner for a transfer. You will do much, much worse than that while you are doing this job. You will destroy utterly little children who beg you not to, and know that they are begging — not because they care if they exist or do not exist, but because they and your Shadow have decided that this is the way that will make you the most likely to surrender to Oblivion — and that your Shadow has let you know this because it knows that the guilt will eat you up inside anyway.

If you are smiling, you should not be, because bullfighting is a cruel and stupid sport. It is a dumb animal killing itself because it only knows one way to react to a given set of circumstances. If you enjoy that, then you, too, should talk to your Pardoner about a transfer, because if you stay in this profession, pretty soon your pleasure will be my business, yes? So you see, it is a knife edge we walk as soldiers. We cannot be saints or sadists. We must simply be accepting of our position and hardened to its brutality.

Spectres As Soldiers

So you now know a little bit about the Spectre as a military person. Now those of you who are worthwhile are probably wondering, "So how does he fight as a soldier?" The answer is that he usually fights badly. Spectres take poorly to discipline — the surrender to Oblivion is a selfish gesture. Spectres are like Vikings or Afghani tribesmen; fierce and brave, but direct, short-sighted and disorganized. There are three kinds of Spectral forces. I will talk a little about each of them, and then move along to the next topic.

For the purposes of clarity, some editing and collation of graphical aids and the spoken word has been performed by the ILTExPro staff.

Wild Spectres

Wild Spectres are not animals, as the name would make you think. True, some of them are not much smarter than animals, but what this really means is that they are Spectres who do not serve in the army of some Malfear or General of Oblivion. It also means Spectres who have been thrown out of the Labyrinth by a Maelstrom, since they often lapse from their conditioned loyalty if taken too far from their masters.

Wild Spectres are sometimes like dumb animals. A solitary wayfarer goes out and is caught in the Maelstrom, or a Shade is cast into a dark basement by the Maelstrom winds. Now a new menace roams the Necropolis hungry to do evil, yes? Mortwights are often similar to this; much anger with little thinking. Others are smarter; Doppelgangers, packs of Haints. They form Circles and work evil together. Some molest the Quick, others the Restless.

Whatever the case, these Spectres are like bandits, or man-eating animals. They are rough and tough, dangerous to a man or a small group but with no discipline or coordination. As long as you fight like men, do not break formation and stay away from terrain where you can be separated from your patrolmates, you will be safe. In Europe, we have had patrols survive attacks by packs of several dozen wild Shades and Haints by means of discipline and determination.

Wild Spectres are a problem all over the Underworld, but especially in Europe and Asia, and the parts of the Tempest near them. Things have gotten better, at least in the Shadowlands of Europe, over the last two decades in Europe as the Quick begin to forget about the horrors of the first half of the century. Many of the Spectres who were previously so dangerous have fallen into Oblivion or passed into the Labyrinth. But even in America, only the foolish go unarmed and alone. In Europe, we have military escorts and patrols that help to keep the Spectres away from the secure zones — still, it is not safe to travel alone, or after dark.



Temple Jannissaries

Temple Jannissaries are the soldier-proselytes of the Malfeans. Jannissaries are warriors, but not soldiers. They are organized in groups, somewhere between mobs and war bands, for their discipline. These gangs are usually led by an Apparition or a Nephwrack. The castes never mix, so you will see either Haints and Shades or else Mortwrights and Doppelgangers, but never the four all at once.

Jannissaries are terrible as soldiers. They rush into battle without thought and do not generally keep a reserve or consider tactics beyond closing with the enemy. When excited, they often eat their officers, which, as you may know, is not generally a desirable military trait. From this, you might think that Jannissaries are contemptible, and as soldiers, they are.

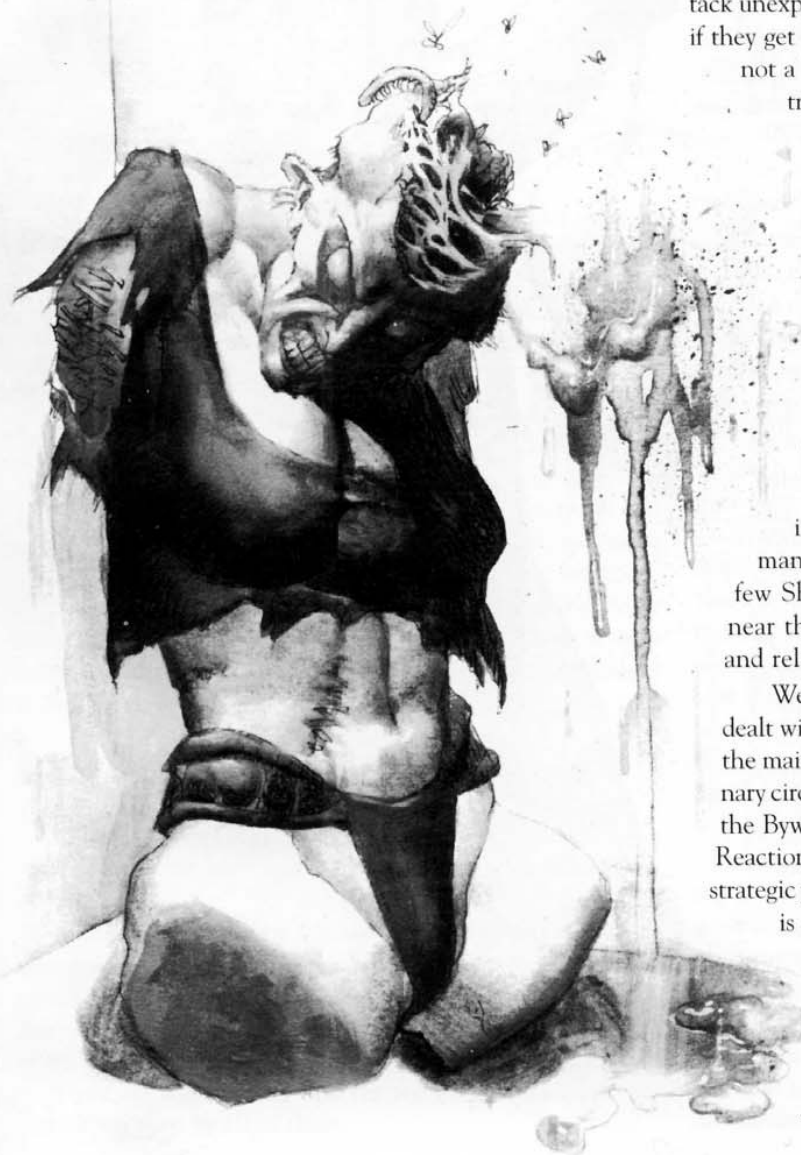
But you must never underestimate these Jannissaries, though. Just because they do not attend military academies or wear uniforms does not make them any less

dangerous as *fighters*. We are from an era of history in the Skinlands in which the thinking soldier always beats the valorous one. That is not so here, across the Shroud. When you are fighting Spectres, you must remember that individually they are stupidly brave and terribly fierce foes. They can probably beat an average Stygian soldier in a melee, oh, six-in-10 times, and a Legionary of Fate three-in-10, sometimes four-in-10 times. Do not fight against Temple soldiers without advantage or you will waste your troops, and when they decide to attack, you must never think that their morale will fail. It will not.

We rarely see Jannissaries in the Shadowlands, but they sometimes emerge from the Tempest during Maelstroms, when those without Fetters can persist longest in the Skinlands. Mostly, the Malfeans send their soldiers to attack Citadels and sack Necropoli. Many of these expeditions are raids for slaves and booty, but some just wish to Harrow and spread barrow-flame. These raids are very dangerous. Jannissaries usually attack unexpectedly or under the cover of Maelstrom winds, and if they get through the walls of the Citadel, it is a knife fight, not a battle. Under those circumstances, all the soldierly training in the world is meaningless, yes?

Jannissaries are much more common in the Tempest. There, Spectral war bands are a constant danger and the center of much of Stygia's military effort. One or more gangs of Spectres, as many as two or three hundred individuals *in toto*, will gather near a Byway. Usually, they cut it. The Shadow-eaten tear up the bricks and carry them away for building materials, to be reforged into some new shape. This is less of a problem with the old tram-mel-down roads, obviously. Most often, Spectres cutting the Byways is just a nuisance, but it is an expensive one! You would be surprised how many miles of road can vanish into the Labyrinth in a few Shadowlands days. Other times, the Spectres wait near the break to ambush travelers or coffles of Thralls and relics bound for Stygia.

We deal with this in the way that soldiers have always dealt with partisans and bandits in the sticks. We make sure the main Byways are open except under the most extraordinary circumstances. Strong patrols from all the Legions travel the Byways constantly, hoping to catch Spectres unawares. Reaction forces of Equitae are held ready in Stygia and other strategic points to relieve a beleaguered convoy or patrol. This is expensive and unproductive, but the roads *must be kept open*. As long as the Deathlords are willing and able to accept the cost of clearing the Byways, commerce as we know it will continue between the Shadowlands and the Isle. As soldiers, we must simply accept that our existence is the currency in which Stygia makes its payment.



Formed Units

I see some of you looking contemptuous, because you are thinking that all Spectres are like bandits and undisciplined mobs. What you forget is that Spectres are determined, and you should never be contemptuous of determination, or it will prove you yourself to be contemptible, yes? Even if history were not full of examples of careless and overconfident officers who were overwhelmed by troops far less well-equipped and motivated than the average Spectre, there is still reason to be concerned.

There is a saying, "Oblivion loves a good officer," and it is not just an old saw. The world has never been particularly kind to generals, especially the great ones. Oblivion has some remarkably talented soldiers, and extends them every courtesy. If you laugh at Bellisarius, who conquered, or al-Hajjaj and his thousand Shadow-eaten cavalry, they will teach you a lesson about laughing for your trouble.

The Generals of Oblivion

The Generals of Oblivion serve Oblivion itself, not the Malfears, and they gather, impress or recruit troops without the help of the Hive-Mind. And they are *real* generals, with *real* armies full of *real* soldiers, who do not *ever* fear or hesitate. The Generals are usually busy in the Labyrinth raising a new army, training it or planning a campaign. Sometimes they band together and sometimes they operate individually, and you can never tell what they'll be up to next. Marching Doppelgangers across the Shadowlands trade routes in the Middle East, pillaging small Necropoli in the middle of America — whatever they believe hurts Stygia the most. Usually they are right, at least from the military standpoint.

Each of the Generals favors fighting a different way. When and if you attend command college, staff college or the Stygian War Academy, you will be taught more about each of them. I will talk about a few of them, to give you an idea of the sorts of foes you will be fighting. If you wonder why we are telling you this so early in the recruiting process, it is this. If you fall to your Shadow, none of what you are about to be told is anything but common knowledge. So there are no security concerns. Our Legion believes that the ideal trooper must be educated, intelligent and capable of performing every task — even that of line officer — at least adequately. Your enlistment is forever, so we may as well begin immediately.

Coldheart

The most famous of the Shadow-eaten generals is without a doubt Coldheart. He was, we are fairly certain, named Cleitus the Black in life. He was a Companion of Alexander the Great, and saved Alexander's life at one point, if historical record is to be believed. He was killed by Alexander at a banquet during a drunken argument. Public enemy number one, *Herr* Coldheart.


He created the Tempest and sacked Stygia during the Third Great Maelstrom. We haven't heard much from him since — he campaigned during and just subsequent to the Fourth Great Maelstrom, but vanished from the scene. Not dead, we could not be so lucky — he was seen on the Midnight Express recently, but he has not fielded an army recently. Perhaps he has retired to a life of quiet contemplation after the beating Wolesley gave him in the Russian campaign.

Bellisarius

Another one of the leading lights, or perhaps I should say darknesses, of Oblivion. Those of you with backgrounds in military science will know him. For those of you without, he was a Byzantine general, who rebuilt the Bezant empire and endured years of torture and imprisonment out of loyalty to his Emperor. He beat back threats to the stability of Byzantium again and again, only to be re-imprisoned after each victory. He never killed his way to the throne, which he could easily have done. Perhaps he accepted this treatment for religious reasons, thinking that he would be rewarded in the afterlife, or that his emperor was divine. Whatever the case, he crossed the Shroud, flirted briefly with the Fishers, led the Crusader Knights for a short while, and shortly thereafter fell into disillusionment and became Shadow-eaten. He fought as an officer in Coldheart's army during the Third Great Maelstrom, then raised a banner of his own. He was quite the problem in the Flayed Lands for almost a century, and then dropped out of sight. He turned up during the Napoleonic campaigns again, fought mainly outside the borders of the Stygian Shadowlands — he led his forces into the affray surrounding the Indian underworld. He turned up again after the Taiping Rebellion, this time fighting against Stygia in the Tempest. The last we heard of him was after the Fourth Great Maelstrom, when he was said to be on the march in the Dark Kingdom of Ivory. More than that, we don't know.

al-Hajjaj

Weaker than the other two, but active, al-Hajjaj leads the only cavalry we know of in the Labyrinth. Some of his men are Shadow-eaten Equitae or Crusader Knights. Some are mounted on horses made from several Spectres Moliated together, and some are mounted on strange things from the Tempest. Very fast and very daring, he is a pain in the ass for the Byway clearance operations, and so many of you will learn to curse his name quite soon. He was a leading light and scholar of early Islam, but at the same time he was so cruel that he has become the stock wicked villain in Arabian folk tales. We think his fall was, like Bellisarius', of a theological character. He led a Cohort of Equitae for the Grey Legion for a time, which suited his style, and fell, along with several others of his Cohort, without much ado. Since then, he's been staging lightning attacks on the Byways and disrupting commerce and communications in ways that only cavalry can.



He even tried to deal a blow to the Midnight Express at one point, but it failed, and the Ferrymen were most displeased. It took him several years to recover his losses from their subsequent retaliation, and since then he has steered clear of the Midnight Express and the Ferrymen in general.

As general advice, if later in your career you find yourself facing one of these Generals of Oblivion or one of their subordinates, keep the following in mind. If possible, do not react the way you would naturally without reasoning out the implications — the Generals of Oblivion are inordinately fond of laying traps. If you are not expecting the engagement and the mission is not crucial, then try to disengage. Fighting a battle prepared ahead of time by the enemy for no reason at all is foolish. And most importantly, do not become careless or forget your basic drill. You may be slack with wild Shades and some Malfear's soldier-slaves and survive the mistakes to brag, but if you jerk around with the real soldiers, they will break your neck for you, yes?

But enough of the enemy. You will learn more about him later. Now we are on to a little of what they call self-assessment.

Know Yourself

Let us talk a little bit about how you will fight, and how you *should* fight, when you are fighting Spectres. As less-experienced soldiers, it will help you understand why things are happening the way they are, and help cut down on hesitation and confusion on your part. And if you are promoted to the ranks of the officers, it will help you be less of a pain in the behind for those people, like myself, often required to lecture in the Command College.

You have three basic weapons to use against the Shadow-eaten. They are not your sword, rifle and soulfire mask. They are instead:

Superior Training and Equipment

The average Temple soldier or wild Spectre has no particular training in the military arts outside whatever he was subject to when among the Quick. This means they lack discipline, cohesion and training in formation fighting. You have, or will have, all of these, yes? Even the armies of the Generals of Oblivion tend to be much like the conscripted masses of the Napoleonic period. The mindset of the Generals is typically that their troops will waste away quickly in battle. While most keep bodyguards, the bulk of their armies are born to die (so to speak) and will be thrown away without hesitation. While their troops fight with the verve and determination of the motivated suicide, overall training is often mediocre, especially in shock units.

Stygian troops, on the other hand, train for survival. While the militia of a Necropolis might not be much better than the troops of some Malfearns, the average professional Stygian soldier trains for decades and fights with regard for his survival and the survival of his comrades. Even the best units of Spectres have difficulty disengaging or performing complex maneuvers in the

face of the enemy. So while the average Spectre is superior to the average Legionnaire in a one-on-one battle, a properly handled force never has to fight Spectres on those unfavorable terms.

Stygian troops in general and this Legion in particular are also better-equipped than the run of the Shadow-eaten. The great advantages of the Shadow-eaten are that they have equipped many of their troops with weapons of Stygian steel, and of course there are the supernatural abilities of the Shade and Haint castes. Stygian forces, however, have in all other ways equipment generally superior to that of even to first-line Spectral troops. Armor is nearly universal, weapons are sturdy, Artifacts are fairly common, and the average Stygian force travels with some sort of support weapon. Spectres, on the other hand, are generally unarmored and lightly equipped (if at all) with artillery and other crew-served weapons.

In the Legion of Fate, the disparity between their equipment and ours is even more pronounced, since the Legionnaire-of-the-line carries a rifle and soulfire mask as well as a breastplate and sword. While some Spectral forces — like al-Hajjaj's Equitae — are very well equipped, you will generally be able to count on your opponents being marginally less well-equipped than allied Legions, and quite inferior in this regard to your own forces.

Speed and Shock Action

It might seem stupid to trust in shock action against an unflappable foe. And indeed, it is. The cavalry charge is of little effect against the Shadow-eaten. They simply never break and run. But it is important to remember that the Spectre as a soldier does not make decisions the way one of the Restless or the Quick does. The Spectre does not look to her officers for leadership, she looks to them for her next instruction.

A unit of Shadow-eaten soldiers — be it a platoon or a legion so great that you cannot see the end of it — can act as if one mind directed it. That is because one mind *is* directing it. Even if there is a chain of subordinates, the links are more like relay points for the messages of the leader than actual sub-commanders. The shock action we want to achieve is the psychological dislocation of the commander. The unity of command that makes the Shadow-eaten such a powerful force on the battlefield also works to magnify and multiply the severity of crises of judgment. Thus, we want to confuse, intimidate and mislead the *mind* that directs the body of the army. It can only think of one thing at a time, and if it can be made unable to think at all, then we can dispose of its troops as we wish.

It is important, then, that a Shadow-eaten force not be given the time to gather its collective thoughts and begin reacting. The commander or the force as a whole must be pressed relentlessly and if possible harassed with area fire to hamper his judgment while being forced to respond to confusing and constantly changing stimuli. In this way, the Hive-mind can be used to our advantage. If you hesitate, though — *snap* — they will crush you like a bug.

Superior Officering

Because speed and shock action are so important to fighting the Shadow-eaten, it is also important that an officer be able to communicate his needs quickly and effectively to his subordinates. For this reason, the Legion of Fate uses mission-oriented orders. That means that officers issue orders that are simple, clear and concise, and no more specific than they need to be to outline the role the subordinate must fulfill in the overall plan. Subordinates are expected to be self-reliant and able to accomplish a task without any particular oversight on the part of their commander. As you can see, this is quite different from the way the Shadow-eaten fight. They think and act as one, and we think and act as many.

Bounty Hunting

There are some in the Underworld who undertake to hunt Spectres on an individual level. Some of these are bounty hunters, who stalk the Shadow-eaten for the bounty placed on their heads by Charon. Some of these bounty hunters are simply fools, while others are slavers who use this profession to make their efforts seem legitimate. Some tiny fraction of them are actually professional. These last few tend to be ideologically motivated, though some of them are simply highly professional for-profit operations.

We in the Legion of Fate have only limited uses for these rubbish-rabble of the Underworld. Disorganized and a waste of resources, they nonetheless perform several useful tasks, but not ones that we wish to spend our time on. First, they provide useful coffeling and transport services for Legionary operations. We sell them the Spectres for a markdown and they transport them to the Agora and trade them for their full price. This eliminates much of our administrative overhead, which is crucially important in a Legion as small as ours. This practice is also common in, for example, the Silent Legion. Large legions like the Grim Legion generally perform these services in-house. We must rely on the rabble instead, as we are always busy.

The other major use for these bounty hunters, is as skirmishers. We sometimes alleviate our Spectre hunting problems by issuing what you might call hunting permits. The Legion invites Doomslayers and slavers into an area having Spectre problems, and lets them work under the watchful eye of an infantry company, just in case things get out of hand. This produces rich harvests, and uncovers nests of potentially dangerous Spectres at no cost to the Legion. We also occasionally use groups of Thorns in Byway-clearance to perform a similar function in the Tempest. After you scatter a group of Spectres and get them confused, it helps to have extra hands there to round up stragglers and keep the pressure on. And, of course, Doomslayers are much more expendable than members of the Legion.



And on that note, I see that I am out of time. Next on the afternoon's agenda is a talk by citizen Anna Zhilinsky of the Doomslaying Orders. Anna is an old friend of mine and one of the Shadowlands' best-loved *sans culottes*. She has taken time from an extraordinarily busy schedule to come and speak with you as a favor to me, and you will all treat her with the respect that someone of her experience deserves.

Thorns and Martyrs



Thank you for the introduction, Rudolf. As always, I forgive you for your thoughtlessly authoritarian worldview, because I know how it thrills you so to get the goat of idealists like myself. Please, audience, treat me as an equal citizen in the Republic of Stygia, who may perhaps be in a position of greater knowledge than you, but is otherwise your sister.

In my life, I was an idealist who fought for the cause of Liberty. In my death, I am an idealist who fights for the cause of Existence. I am a member of the Doomslaying Orders, which for those of you who do not know is a group of like-minded wraiths that — with the gracious assistance of a number of different Stygian organizations including the Legion of Fate — pursues a war against the Shadow-eaten on a somewhat smaller scale than the sort of military gyrations Rudolf so delights in.

The Order of the Thorn

The Thorns are dedicated to fighting Oblivion on a personal level. Like the Guardian Angels or the knightly Orders of Christendom, the Thorns are made up wholly of volunteers. These brave wraiths carry on their organization's crusade against the Shadow-eaten for the usual reasons an individual dedicates her life to a cause — trauma, vision, duty. Whatever motivates them individually, the Thorns are united in their hatred of Spectres. They serve as the military arm of the Doomslayers.

What makes the Thorns exceptional, especially in contrast to the Legions, is their reluctance to kill. Some were once Shadow-eaten, or have lost loved ones to Oblivion, or are simply motivated by religion. Whatever the case, when a Thorn is forced to destroy a Spectre, then by his own assessment, the Doomslayer has lost the fight.

Whenever it is possible, the Thorns stop at nothing to capture Shadow-eaten. Their prisoners are either handed over to the Martyr Knights for Redemption or sent to the Order's soulforges so that they can be reshaped into weapons in the war against Oblivion.

The Thorns' membership includes some of Stygia's most fervent believers. The specific sort of belief is irrelevant — the devoutly militant of even the most disparate faiths find a common cause in combating Oblivion. The Order is full of souls whose

lives among the Quick convinced them of their religious or political duty to preserve souls from the Void; it is also home to the more devout among the Artificers, as well as to other members of religious groups whose beliefs originate in the Underworld.

It was as a Thorn that I began my career in the Doomslayers, and I can only say that it is a worthwhile task. I urge you, especially those of you who may be feeling a moral or religious calling to an individual role in confronting Oblivion, to see me after the lecture. By agreement with the Legions, we are able to take recruits from even active military service. If after this seminar is done, you think that you have the calling to the sort of personal involvement that the Thorns call for, then please see me. I'll be at the back of the auditorium. On that note, on with the presentation.

Catharsis Rider: (5 point Merit)

Wraiths with this Merit can, through either training or natural force of will, thwart their Shadows during Catharsis. A wraith with this Merit undergoing Catharsis can spend a point of Willpower to thwart her Shadow's desires: When the Shadow attempts an action that the wraith disapproves of, the wraith may spend the Willpower to prevent the Shadow from undertaking any further actions toward the general goal she had in mind. As an example, if the character's Shadow is going to push her child down the steps, then the Psyche may spend a Willpower to prevent the Shadow from undertaking actions against the well-being of the child for the duration of the Catharsis. As an added benefit, a Catharsis Rider can remember vaguely what her Shadow did if it has **Shadow Life**, and can tell when her Shadow is talking with other Shadows, or with Spectres via a Thorn or the Dark Arcanos Contaminate. This doesn't mean she knows what's going on, but she is at least forewarned that *something* is happening.

There are some problems with this, of course. Shadows that are repeatedly thwarted can become unpleasant company. Rather than Catharsis, a truculent Shadow can spend its temporary Angst to power Thorns that annoy its Psyche or simply store it up in an attempt to buy permanent Angst and seize control. And (significant for the Thorns) once you thwart the Shadow, you can't tell what it was really up to in the first place. So how far *do* you let it go, knowing that it knows that you have the ability to ride the Catharsis, and may just be misleading you?

Catharsis Rider is a naturally occurring ability of some wraiths, generally those who were very close to their dark side in life, or who possess great reserves of determination. It can also be learned, but only through years of self-discipline and difficult training. Not even one in five Doomslayers possess this Merit, but the ones who do are highly valued, both for intelligence and as partners.

Methods

The Thorns use a variety of methods with the same goal in mind: bringing back the Shadow-eaten intact. They avoid contact with large bodies of Spectres. Instead, they find individual Spectres or small groups and attempt to take them unawares. Most favor Nhudri's Embrace and the Living Chains, and avoid Stygian steel weapons when at all possible, since healing Corpus damage consumes Angst, and because a Spectre wounded by Stygian steel is more likely to be subsequently destroyed than one that is not.

Thorns hunt in small groups; never more than a dozen, rarely less than six. Normally, a cell responds to rumors or reports of Spectre activity in an area. There are a number of

ways that cells track and locate Spectres. Most Shadow-eaten fit a number of fairly regular profiles — once you build up a good library of data about a given nest, predicting the inhabitants' habits isn't all that difficult. There are other methods we in the Thorns use as well, but I'd rather not get into them. They're both technical and things we have developed over long years of practice.

After the Spectres have been located, the actual operation of capturing them is not difficult. Assuming one doesn't travel with a hundred men in battle gear, it is far from difficult to sneak up on a Spectre, or even several of them. They're usually careless and don't set watches very well.

Our tactics have been compared to those of SWAT teams, and they are similar. One of our primary methods,

Trade Secrets of the Thorns

Okay, *citizens*. I'll tell you what Secret Police Girl Liberty Lass won't explain to you. I mean, other than how she wasn't really a Polish *Contessa*, unless that's what they were calling expensive hookers in Krakow the week she blew town for Paris and points West. Or how she kakked her boyfriend in Paris during the Terror for being insufficiently progressive and *then* had the *cojones* to send him to the forges when he showed up here as a Spectre. Imagine that — him turning up as a Spectre after being sent to Mme. Guillotine by the only woman he ever loved or trusted. I must say, though, she certainly seems to regret her actions every time she's certain she sees his face in the crowded streets of Stygia. That's always good for a couple laughs. But anyway, What I'm gonna explain is the way the Thorns hunt the Shadow-eaten without getting turned into Spectre snacks.

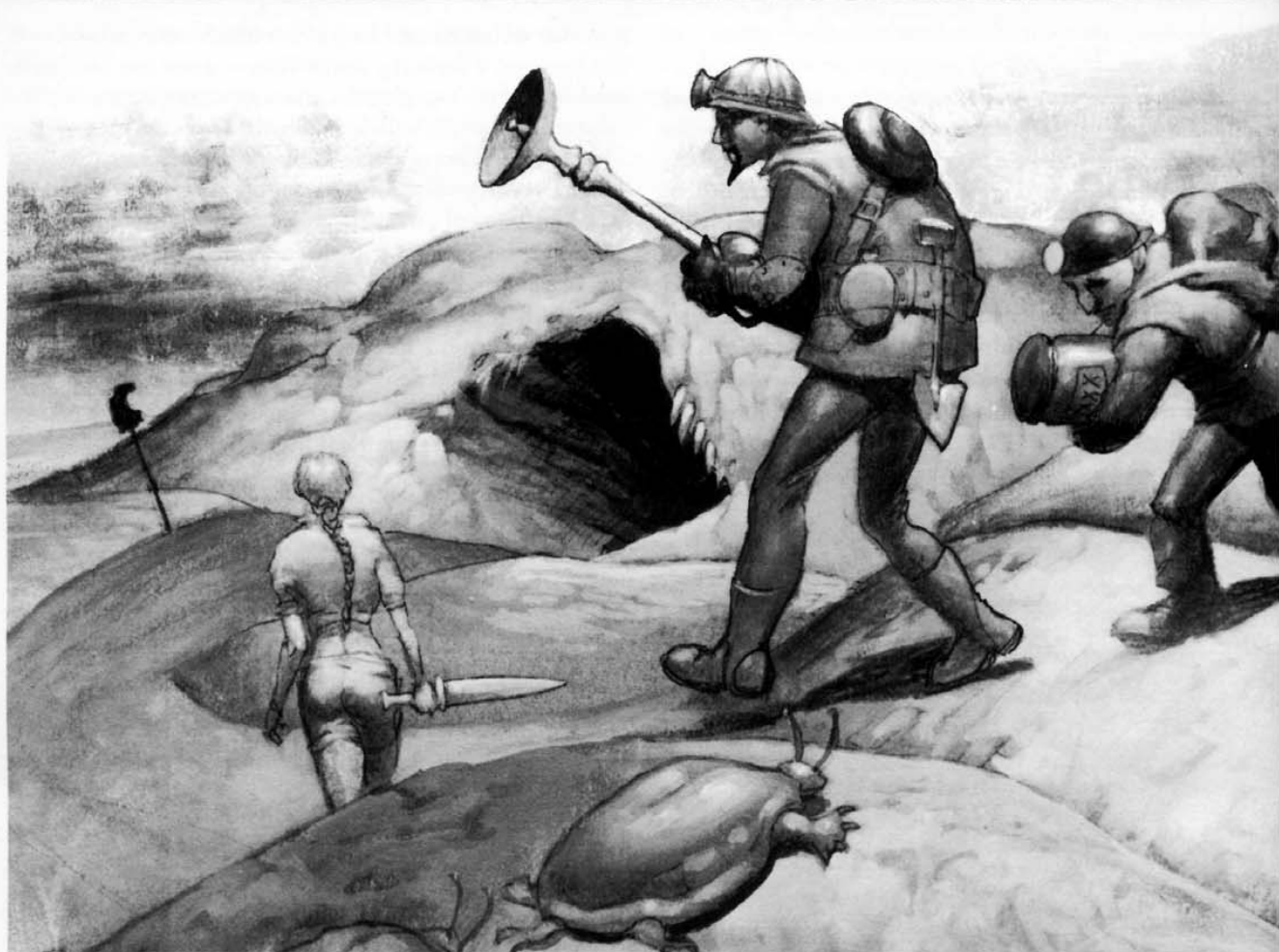
There's three ways the Thorns like to hunt for Spectres. The first is that they have these gadgets, like metal gags that bolt onto their faces, that mute their Shadows. That way their Shadows can't blow their presence to Spectres no matter what. This is pretty important, since these idiots like to keep their Shadows strong, just in case they gloat. The Thorns used to use only field agents with silent Shadows, but then they found out that silent doesn't mean mute, especially when you feed your Shadow Angst on purpose. Of course, the Psyche can't talk either, but that's not a really big deal when you're creeping over burnt-out rooftops looking for a pack of Haints.

The second way to they like to hunt is with the implants. They don't really like to talk about the implants, because they're supposed to be a big secret and half the Order thinks they're the Mark of the Beast. They're just Dark Arcanos prosthetics; intru-

sive devices that extend deep into the Corpus and let wraiths listen in on the Spectres talking back and forth. The Thorns are really careful who gets the implants, but it takes only one to sniff out a nest of Shadow-eaten. They got the technology of Arcanos implants from the Labyrinth, but refined it for their own purposes. You don't really want to know how they make the implants, or what happens if the people wearing them go down into the Labyrinth. Just remember your mother's advice and never volunteer.

The third way they hunt Spectres is the *big* dark secret. Yeah — like sticking aials onto their heads to tap into the Hive-mind wasn't enough. The Thorns like to work in the Shadowlands so much because they're the biggest abusers of the *Dictum Mortuum* in Stygia when it comes to mediums. With all those religious freaks in the Order, just think about it. How many of those crazies out there who hear the voice of God telling them to go root out devil worshippers and heathen cults are really working for the Thorns? And that's just the ones they delude. The really dangerous ones, the ones who know what's really going on, practice any profession they can that lets them get near suspicious crimes or possible Oblivion-cults. They're the real chiller-dillers. They know *everything*. If Doctor Doomshade or Brother Blackheart or whatever his name is over there from the Inquisition found out, they'd be dinnerware before you could say, "Crimes Against the Code of Charon."

So if you feel the compulsion to screw a metal facemask into your Corpus, to tune into radio K-LAB and to violate the *Dictum* so grossly that an excuse signed by three different Deathlords still wouldn't save your sweet Corpus from the hammer, you just see Lady Libertine and me at the back of the hall after we get done with the rest of this idiotic presentation, and we'll fix you right up.



and one you'll learn as members of the Legion of Fate, is to have a number of wraiths skilled in the Arcanos Argos move through either the Tempest or the Shadowlands — whichever is 'opposite' the Spectres. When the Thorns reach a point adjacent to the Spectres, the team uses Nihils or Tempest Threshold to cross. Meanwhile, another group attacks the Spectres directly to pin them. In many cases, the Spectres can be surprised, confused and overwhelmed. If not, then the team makes off with as many prisoners as it can.

Prisoners are taken either to the Commandery of the Thorn or the Bastion of the Martyr Knights. Important prisoners are occasionally loaned to the various Legions for interrogation as a good-faith gesture. Whatever the case, the Spectres never reach the Agoran market as forge-fodder. All the Thorn's soulforging is done in-house; no Spectre captured by the Order has ever left its grasp for crass, commercial purposes.

We Thorns are very concerned with security. Cells of Thorns operate with almost complete independence within a territory called a Mandate. Mandates are always specific, but can overlap. There are Mandates for Boston, the North American east coast and North America as a

whole. Cells are accountable to their superiors only under certain very specific circumstances. These involve recruiting new members, the disposition of prisoners and gross operational misconduct. In all other cases, the members of the cell are allowed to pursue Spectres according to their own whims. Successful cells are often asked to share some of their secrets with others through the Institute for Obliviographic Studies. Many choose to, some do not. If this were not the case, then a single Shadow-eaten agent could endanger the whole organization. Our secrecy also makes the Doomslayers into one of the most effective Stygia organizations for hunting Doppelgangers. Doomslayer cells know no favorites, and cannot be detoured away from a Spectre through bureaucratic pressure or political maneuvering. Only the *Magisterium Veritatis* is as effective at hunting the Shadow-eaten, but the *Magisterium* is concerned with Renegades and Heretics as well as Spectres, and with all due respect to the most esteemed Brother Charity, is concerned mostly with the City of the Iron Gates. The Thorns roam the Shadowlands, and the rumor of one of our cells' starting an investigation into a Necropolis administration had been known to panic and to flush out Doppelgangers.

Martyr Knights

The Thorns risk much to capture Spectres intact in order to subject them to the ministrations of the Martyr Knights. This group, the "other half" of the Doomslaying Orders, is much smaller than the Thorns. Composed of less than a thousand wraiths, the Martyr Knights are some of the most gifted practitioners of the Arcanoi and ministers to the Shadow in all of the Underworld. Their mission: To find a cure for the Shadow-eaten disease, and to find a method by which all Spectres can be Redeemed.

The Pardoners are among the primary contributors to the Martyr Knights, and part of the Order's membership is drawn directly from that Guild. These Darksiders are Master-class Pardoners who believe (as do the other members of the Order) in the eventual Redemption of the Shadow-eaten. The rest of the membership is of mixed but impressive pedigree: Pardoners with methods too progressive for the Guild to accept, Obliviographers, cosmetic Masquers and Monitors concerned with the repair of Fetters.

The Martyr Knights are students of the Shadow and Oblivion, wraiths who labor year after year to find not only ways to Redeem the Shadow-eaten, but also techniques to repair Oblivion-damaged Corpus and Fetters and reverse the growth of the Shadow. The Order keeps in very close contact with Darksiders pursuing independent or unrelated research and also sometimes talks with the various *Dybbuk* Circles researching Redemption. The commerce between the Martyr Knights and some of the *Dybbuk* groups extends so far as joint research and personnel exchange. The Doomslayers also help fund the Institute of Obliviographic Studies, and the Martyr Knights contribute a great deal of material to the library. This puts them in close contact with any number of groups studying Oblivion and the Labyrinth, and makes their theories very influential.

The Arcanoi of the Martyr Knights

The Darksiders and the other Pardoners in the Martyr Knights have developed certain specialized forms of Arcanoi used in their quest to Redeem captured Spectres. These arts are experimental in the extreme, and do not work very well. For this reason, they are not taught outside the Martyr Knights, though some non-Martyr Darksiders have learned Momentary Lucidity through Guild-brothers in the Order. The arts listed below are those currently in vogue. A number of other arts have been developed and subsequently been discarded as inadequate since the founding of the Order.

Castigate

••Momentary Lucidity

This art was the fruit of much Obliviographic study of the Dark Arcanos Contaminate. Momentary Lucidity does not work quite so well as the Contaminate level 5 equivalent

(Call the Shadow), but the Martyr Knights are working on a more sophisticated version. The Pardoner's player spends two points of Willpower and 3 points of Pathos. Then comes a Strength + Castigate roll (Difficulty 9 or the Spectre's Being, whichever is higher). If the roll is successful, the Spectre's Psyche may attempt a Catharsis check without Composure expenditure, even if it does not have sufficient temporary Composure to do so normally.

Usury

••••Composure Wellspring

Composure Wellspring is the focus of the Martyr Knights' primary research initiative. The Legion's current, best hope to Redeem the Shadow-eaten, this art has shown a great deal of promise. Composure Wellspring is in the very first stages of development, but the Order hopes to have a much better version available very soon.


Using Composure Wellspring requires the expenditure of a point of Willpower and a roll of Manipulation + Usury (difficulty 8). The target Spectre gains a point of temporary Composure and the Usurer loses a point of Pathos and gains a point of temporary Angst for every success rolled. The Spectre's Psyche may use these points of temporary Composure as normal. If the Psyche can get its temporary Composure up to 10, it is temporarily Redeemed. The newly reborn wraith cannot regain Willpower or Pathos, though, and if it undergoes Catharsis, it becomes Shadow-eaten again.

The Composure granted by this art dissipates. While Fronds powered by the Composure cannot of course retroactively cease to have happened, permanent or temporary Composure gained through Composure Wellspring dissipates at the per day rate of (three points times the number of days since the last Composure Wellspring treatment). This loss can be made up through continued infusion of Pathos via Composure Wellspring, but not through other Usury arts. If a Redeemed wraith ever fails to be treated for a full day, he once again succumbs to his Shadow.

Composure Wellspring requires a very controlled environment and several hours of time to carry out, regardless of the amount of Pathos transferred. It can't really be used 'in the field,' though a sturdy chair and a few sets of Nhudri's Embrace might do in a pinch.

Operations

The primary unstated goal of the Martyr Knights is the Redemption of the Shadow-eaten. Some members of the Knights, called the Knights of the Key, work in the field, traveling with teams of Thorns to observe the Shadow-eaten in their natural habitat. These Knights communicate with the other members of their Order through an elaborate series of cutouts and drops, to prevent the contact between Shadows



that can potentially compromise the operations of the Thorns and the research of the Martyr Knights. Many of these Knights are Darksider Pardoner, who not only undertake the dangerous task of ministering to the often unnaturally strong Shadows of the Thorns, but who observe and interrogate captured Spectres in the field prior to their being transferred to the Commandery of the Martyr Knights.

The largest group of Martyr Knights is the Knights of the Hospital. These Knights work in the Commandery, researching the state of the Shadow-eaten and endeavoring to bring about the Redemption of these souls lost to the light of liberty. They also perform most of the other Doomslayers' support functions; running the Order's soulforges, operating training cadres for new Thorns, helping staff the Institute for Obliviographic Studies, interacting with the Stygian bureaucracy, and whatever else is needed to keep the Doomslaying Orders in top-notch shape. Special teams of Hospitallers work on various topics in the Commandery, investigating the life cycle of the Spectre and

making their findings available to the Legions. While the security of the Commandery is not as tight as among the Thorns, special precautions are taken to prevent researchers in different groups from coming into contact with one-another, so that their Shadows cannot conspire to skew the results of their inquiry.

Of course, the most famous branch of the Martyr Knights — the one you've probably already heard of — is the Knights of the Scroll. These incredibly dedicated agents work in virtual isolation. Each cell of Scrolls, every member of which is a Pardoner of master class, among other talents, is assigned a high-ranking member of the Hierarchy to observe. Each observed Hierarch has three cells assigned to him, the members of which never make contact with each other or meet their superiors face-to-face after being assigned to their mission. For six years, the cell's only goal is to observe that Hierarch, study her every action, and determine if and when she becomes Shadow-eaten.

If the cell determines that the Hierarch is Shadow-eaten, they make a prearranged signal to their superiors. When two of

Trade Secrets of the Martyr Knights

These people are even crazier than old Anna here. Okay, so there's this organization made up of cranks too whacked to get into the Pardoner's Guild, loony Darksiders who think they can Redeem the Shadow-eaten and guys who dig soulforging Spectres 'cause it's what Jesus would want them to do. They never talk to one another or compare notes, because that might make the paucity of their results so painfully obvious that even their deluded asses would have to give in and admit they don't have a clue.

Here's the real scoop. First off, let me tell you precisely how many Spectres the determined crusaders of the Martyr Knights have redeemed in the last 70 years, since oboli and juice started falling out of the sky in truckloads. Nine. The magic number is nine. Precisely nine. No more, no less. Hey, not bad. Better than one per decade. Those must be some pretty gifted scientists and clergymen.

So at least they're rich, right? All those Spectres coming in and none of them getting Redeemed, they must be rolling in the oboli? Well you'd guess wrong, because the Martyr Knights almost never soulforge anyone. Well, they don't soulforge anyone except for the ones whose Psyches they accidentally burn out or disintegrate or rip screaming from their Corpus. Oops. Wasn't suppose to mention *them*.

See, they keep the Spectres they capture around for research purposes. About 19,561 of them (at last count) are sitting on shelves down in their basement in these prison-jars about the size of a good bottle of hard cider, carved out of soulfire crystals and charged with Pathos so their Hive-mind can't operate through it. They're pretty neat looking — you can see their faces through the crystal, all crazy and whacked out and really, really *pissed off*. You want to talk about some inhumanity, you should see

the janitors they use to clean that place. Pure drone, with enough Nhudri's Embrace and Intimation to make old Captain Charon himself double-check his footing before lifting his feather-duster from the ready position.

And let's talk about the Knights of the Scroll. So figure you and four or five people like you get this job. And all you have to do is watch this Overlord. Not just regard her, or turn your gaze to her, but *watch* her. You have to learn every single detail of her routine, like what kind of sandals she prefers to wear to see the Sandman who gives her dirty dreams, and why she likes those sandals particularly. You get to know her better than she knows herself. And, of course, you do this in what is essentially total social isolation. Except, of course, for the other five of your friends, who are also all watching this one particular Overlord, except when they're watching you, to see if you've gone crazy yet.

They usually lose one or two out of every team to what the reports like to call "work-related stressors," but Anna Darling won't mention that here at the recruiting pitch, will she? She won't tell you the reason that they let the Ministry of Truth do the snag work is because they had a couple of teams go nuts and take matters into their hands on folks who were a lot less Shadow-eaten than the teams were. Just like she won't talk about how her last watch team had to abort and she had to have six months with the Pardoner and the therapists to get her shit together after she flipped out; threw four Catharses in two days and got her sad Secret Police Hooker ass assigned to this job. Like you thought she was here because of her public speaking ability? Pure bullshit. I had her so screwed up and twisted around she couldn't have told you what the name of the guy she was watching was, and that's *just the way we wanted it*.



the three cells believe that the Hierarchy in question has succumbed to his Shadow, a signal is returned to the Knights of the Scroll watching him that they are to begin placing pressure on the Hierarchy to force him to reveal his condition. The Knights never kill, only force the Spectre to reveal himself. Once loosed, the Knights of the Scroll go to any length to get their quarry, and they know the subject's every nuance and habit. Justice is left to the hands of the *Magisterium Veritatis*.

Recruitment & Training

Let me tell you a little bit about the experience of joining the Doomslayers. The process of becoming a member the Orders differs depending on which of the organizations the aspiring Doomslayer wishes to join. Joining the Thorns is easier, but the training process is much more rigorous. Joining the Martyr Knights is much more difficult, but after the preliminary screening and interview process, the applicant will probably be made a part of a research team without much further ado.

The Thorns

The first step in joining the Thorns is to either find a recruiter — like myself — or else approach a Thorn in the field and request to be screened as a prospective recruit. After that, the next person you meet is a Darksider field pardoner. These Pardoners, while theoretically Martyr Knights, are spe-

cialists in treating the members of the Order and can examine the recruit and say definitively if the recruit has the potential to be a Catharsis Rider or otherwise has sufficient mastery over his Shadow to serve in the Thorns. This mastery of the Psyche over the Shadow and the will and determination to strike a blow against Oblivion are all that is required of an aspiring Thorn. The Order provides the rest.

If the recruit passes the initial examination, he is sent back to his normal life, to continue until the next time a training cadre is constituted near him. For reasons of security, there is no regular training camp for the Thorns. Instead, there are cadres of elite Thorns who have retired from service in the field. They travel across the Shadowlands instructing new recruits in the ways of the Order.

New recruits are put through intensive training in hand to hand combat and different Arcanoi. Those who show the potential to become Catharsis Riders (or who already are) are put through rigorous mental and spiritual exercises to weaken their Shadows and strengthen their wills.

The training period for new Thorns varies. Some are ready to go after just a month or so of general instruction. Others, especially those with the latent ability to become Catharsis Riders, may take a year or more of highly personalized instruction by a team of experienced Doomslayers. The benefit of this individual attention is that no Thorn goes into the field half-trained. Each and every one is skilled in the abilities he needs to perform his job successfully.

The Martyr Knights

The Thorns are the brave soldiers of Liberty carrying on the fight against Oblivion, but their courage and determination only holds the line while the real architects of victory labor without fanfare or recognition. If it takes a strong heart and an iron will to qualify for a place in the Thorns, imagine how much more is expected of a Martyr Knight.

Most Martyr Knights never swing a sword in anger while they are Doomslayers. Only the Knights of the Scroll, recruited from the most elite of the Thorns, are given significant training. These silent heroes of the war with Oblivion are taken to a secret location in the Deadlands and trained by some of the greatest masters of espionage and psychology to have ever walked the Underworld. After months, even years of training, they are given their assignments. For the rest of the Order, the Knights of the Key and Hospital, "training" mostly means "familiarization with the research and Castigation protocols favored by the Knights."

The Martyr Knights of the Key and Hospital are recruited from among the Underworld's leading lights in various fields. Among the Darksiders of the Pardoners, there is significant competition to earn a place in the Order. The selection process is straightforward; when the Five or the steering committee of the Hospitallers decide that a new research initiative is

Five

The Five Masters are the governing body of the Doomslayers. Originally constituted after the Fourth Great Maelstrom, when a variety of organizations united themselves under the rubric of the Doomslaying Orders, the Five hold advisory command over Helldivers, Darksiders and even Solos who are willing to listen. Positions on the Five are held in perpetuity. Theoretically, there are three Thorns — The Obsidian Blade, the Chain and Crescent and the Brother to Wolves — and two Martyr Knights — the Weeping Prince and the Scholar of Oblivion. The current holders of these positions may or may not be the same Masters who took the posts when the five organizations from which they take their names came together so many centuries ago. Almost never seen, the Five dress in elaborate and concealing regalia known to incorporate powerful Artifacts. It was determined when the Five were founded that any vacancies in their ranks would be filled by the unanimous decision of the remaining governors after *in camera* debate over the best replacement. The cellular structure of the Doomslayers makes it almost impossible to detect if one of the Five has been replaced, but most Obliviographers believe that the Brother to Wolves was destroyed while fighting Spectres at the gates of Stygia during the Fourth Great Maelstrom.

called for, a list of candidates in the various disciplines is drawn up and the prospects are approached. Those found suitable and willing to join the Order and work on the research team are inducted. Research teams do not generally dissolve until their projects are either resolved or deemed to be clearly insoluble. Occasionally, however, they do collapse — members of the Order between research assignments are the first picks to constitute new teams.

And with that, I'll conclude my talk. I give you into the capable, albeit somewhat sinister, hands of the mysterious Mister Whisper, here, I see, at the invitation of the Ladies of Fate to talk to you about the exciting profession of Helldiving. Any of you interested in further information about service in the Doomslaying Orders, please see me after the presentation.

Helldivers




Thank you. As Mme. Zhilinsky has informed you, my name is Whisper. Mister Whisper. I am here at the request of the Ladies of Fate to talk to you about the group of Freewraiths known as the Helldivers, of whom I have a certain degree of knowledge.

While rumors persist that this organization is associated with former members of the now-disbanded Masquers Guild, these accusations are entirely false.

The truth of the matter is simple. The Helldivers are masters of the art of Moliage — Masquers if you will, though only in the modern sense of the term — who enter the Labyrinth disguised as Spectres. We "wear their skins," as it were, though in a far more sophisticated fashion than most wraiths suppose. From a sense of obligation to put their masterful talents to work for the good of all the Restless Dead, and without any promise of remuneration, these highly skilled professionals don the very forms of Spectres through the use of their arts. Clothed in the semblance of the enemy, they descend into the Labyrinth to infiltrate the ranks of the Shadow-eaten.

Some Helldivers are anthropologists or trained agents of espionage. These Helldivers, whom we call the Agents of Insight, strive to learn the nuances of Spectral society and culture, as well as to map the complex flows of power and influence that form the political topology of the Labyrinth. Because of our unique docket, we Helldivers are intimately involved with the Obliviographic Institute. We are the eyes and ears of Stygia in the Labyrinth. Not all of our missions are to observe the preparations of the Spectres to make war on the Underworld. We are the arm by which scholarly inquiry into the Labyrinth is conducted. This is not just the simple anthropological study of Spectral culture, but any sort of scientific investigation at all. Any sort of device, instrument, sample or specimen must leave or enter the Labyrinth somehow, and the Agents of Insight are uniquely suited to fulfill this role as field agents and couriers.



The other Helldivers are the Kindly Minded Ones, assassins without parallel who stalk the Shadow-eaten that the Agents of Insight, or other Doomslaying organizations — even the Legions on occasion — deem to be most dangerous. Unseen and unsuspected, they work their way close to important Spectres and arrange for them to leave the scene, not with a bang, but with a whimper, if that. Poor devils.

Most of you are probably wondering how the Helldivers infiltrate the ranks of the Shadow-eaten without the ability to communicate with the Hive-Mind. I can say to you only that they do this through immense psychological discipline, and through special arts and tools they have developed. I will say no more, lest I endanger agents in place, but I assure you not to try this at home. It is not as easy as it looks.

Many of you have probably heard stories of other sorts of Helldivers, and the word has become used to indicate anyone

who enters the Labyrinth in search of Spectres. Most of these are maniacs with backpacks full of caving gear and automatic weapons. Some of them dive for the Legions. Others dive for other organizations — well-funded Heretical cults, mostly. Whomever these frauds work for, though, most end up taking facefuls of Spectral affection like the infantry got it at the Somme. The Labyrinth is a deadly place, full of lunatics and monsters of the worst sort, the sort of carrion-birds one expects to see feasting on the corpse of Creation. Not only are there the Shadow-eaten, but there are natural hazards as well, and strange Plasmics that have washed up or crawled in from the Tempest and adapted to new lives in the dark. The casualty rates for even experienced Helldivers from my organization are high, and our people operate by stealth. Think, then, of the calamitous casualty rates racked up by amateurs. There are many fools driven by their passion to prove themselves to

The Hive-Mind and the Helldiver

In exchange for their assistance, the Helldivers have an arrangement with the Martyr Knights. In return for their assistance to the Institute for Obliviographic Studies, the Knights provide Helldivers with specially modified versions of the soulfire bottles used by the Martyrs to imprison Spectres. Occasionally, Thorns are dispatched to capture a particular Shadow-eaten, if the Helldiver wishes to imitate a Spectre active in the Shadowlands. Otherwise, a generally suitable Spectre from the Order's collection is used.

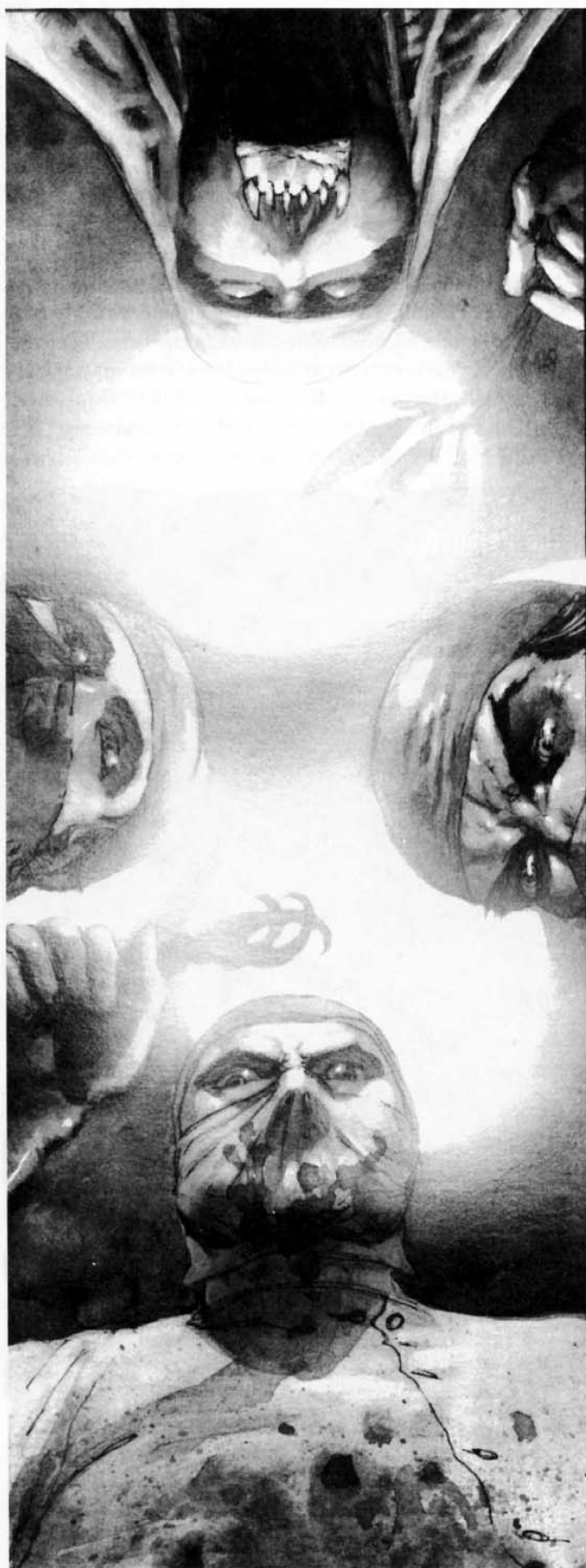
The soulfire bottles are modified by Artificers associated with the Orders working in conjunction with Helldiver-associated Sandmen. After the modifications are complete, the Spectre is placed in the bottle while the container is packed with high-grade Dreamsand and sealed.

Then the most secretive part of the Helldiving process begins: the work of the mockingly titled "Dream Team." These Underworld-class experts in the Arcanoi take charge of the Spectre and prepare it for the Helldive. A hand-picked team of Fetches performs the meticulous cosmetic alterations necessary to allow the agent to move about the Labyrinth safely. These modifications are extensive, and Oblivion's touch is difficult to simulate without permanent damage to the subject. During the course of these operations, a large cavity is opened in the chest of the agent for use later in the preparation process. If the Helldiver will be acting as a Fetch as well — imitating a particular Spectre for a long period while in close contact with its regular associates — these modifications may take as long as a week.

While the Masquers have their way with the agent, the rest of the Dream Team works on the Spectre. First, a chorus of highly talented Chaunteurs Keen the Spectre into a deep Slumber. Barring outside interference, it will not stir for months, sometimes even years.

After the Spectre has been "put to bed," the Sandmen who give the Dream Team its name move in. A combination of master Psychoneirists, Plotters and Oeneiric Pacers, the Dream Team members manipulate the highly malleable dreams of the sleeping Spectre. The memories of its captivity are made to seem like an unpleasant dream, and a new dream-existence is created for it. This dream of reality is as complete and perfect as the most exquisite love a Paphian has ever given a Deathlord; more intricate than memory and paced perfectly to match the constraints of the medium of dreams. And in the dream — which is nothing more than a dream of the captured Spectre's existence — the mission of the Helldiver is made to seem perfectly natural and reasonable. This might simply mean blotting out the memories of capture and incarceration, or it might mean a long-term process of replaying the Spectre's life and then having him relive it in the dream, with certain details and motivations altered subtly.

When the dream is complete, and the Spectre is ready to undertake the mission the Helldivers have planned, the Dream Team places it in the cavity already prepared in the body of the Helldiver agent. The specially modified bottle connects the Spectre's dream with the Corpus of the Helldiver, and they sleepwalk through a dream of the Helldiver's existence. Normally, the Helldiver remains aloof, allowing the Corpus to be guided by the will of the dreaming Spectre within him and listening to the silent whispers of the Hive-mind. He can seize the reins at any time, of course, but disrupting the dream too severely can make the Spectre much less useful as a tool with which to infiltrate the society of the Shadow-eaten. Too much confusion might even awaken the Spectre and cause the Helldiver no end of trouble.



have a larger phallus than anyone else in the Underworld. The ones operating by the philosophy of "if it moves, hit it until it stops" inevitably pay for it in the end.

I will now turn the podium over to the most esteemed Brother Charity of the *Magisterium Veritatis*, who will make a few closing remarks about the exciting secret war of counter-espionage his organization daily fights against Doppelganger agents in the ranks of the Hierarchy.

The *Magisterium Veritatis*



ello. My name is Brother Charity. I know you're all probably restless to get back to your training, or at least to stretch your legs, but I'd like to all to give me your closest attention for the next couple of minutes. This will be brief.

I'm a Pardoner. I work for the *Magisterium Veritatis*, the agency of the Hierarchy charged with rooting out threats to the Hierarchy. We go after Heretics and Renegades in the ranks of the Legions, usually. But I'm not with that part of the organization, so you can all cross yourselves or mention Karl Marx's name in my presence without worrying about the forges. To be honest, I could care less who you pray to or cheer for, just as long as it isn't Oblivion.

Chances are, at least one of you in the audience will fall to Oblivion by the end of your training period. In three years, one in 10 of you will have become a Doppelganger in service to Oblivion, and will be sent to the forges for your treason.

You may be thinking, "That won't be me." Think like that and it will be. None of you are special. Each and every one of you, given six or seven months, could stop being the pupil and start being the subject of the lectures of the nice people who came out today to tell you about their jobs.

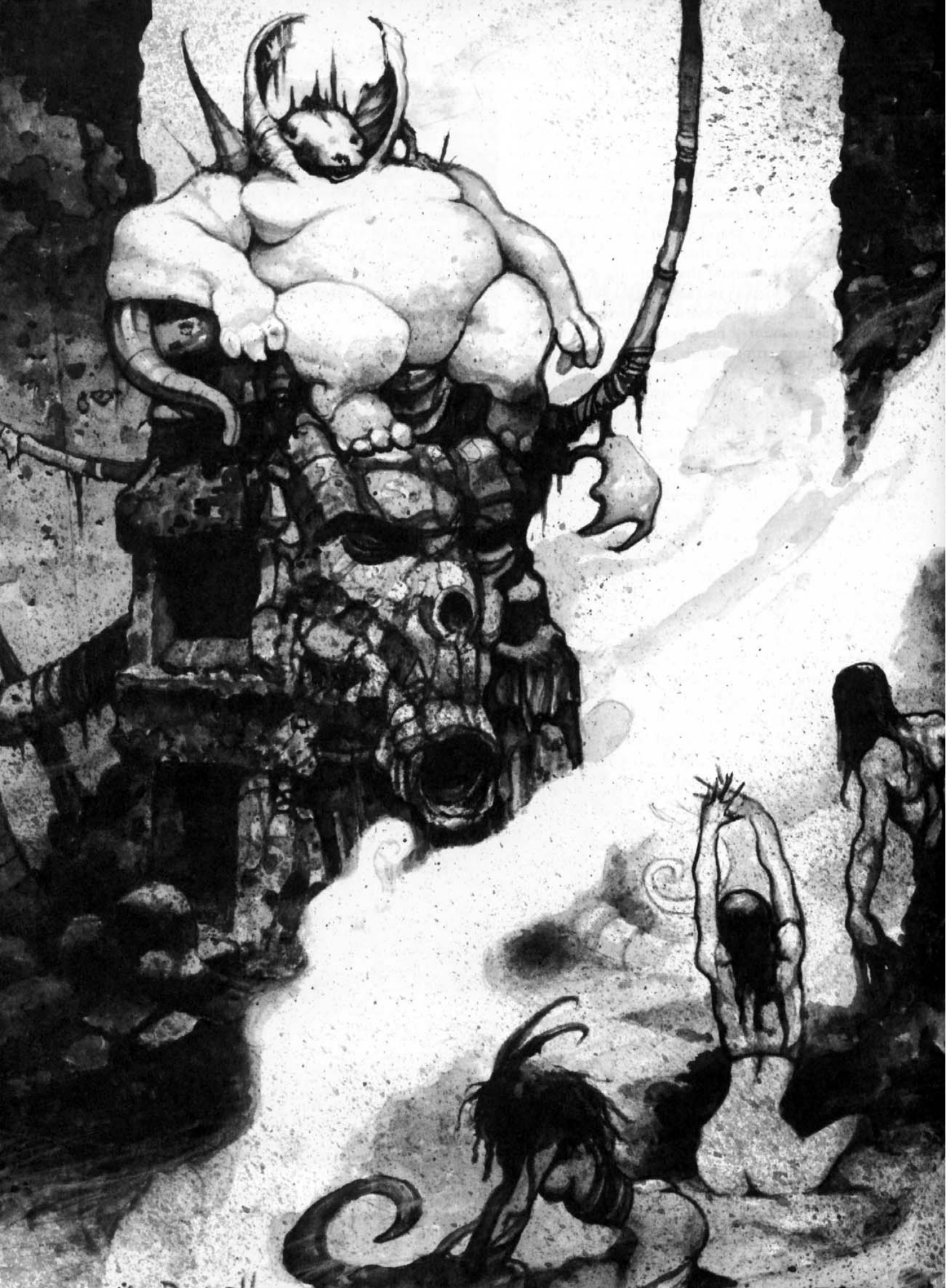
You have to think of yourselves as people with mental or physical illnesses, or as addicts. The truth of your situation *must never be lost to you*. Each and every one of you is standing at the gateway of a damnation that is very real. Some of you — those of you who understand the nature of your condition and the discipline required to overcome it — will pay heed to my words and save your Corpus from a terrible fate. Most of you will not. Most of you are thinking, "He's not talking about me." Rest assured, I am, and if you do not come to appreciate your situation, you will end up like this, this chain. And that's the best you can hope for. The worst is to crawl on your belly worshipping some filthy Oblivion-spawn and throwing seizures of self-destructive ecstasy just thinking about the idea of destroying the things you once loved.

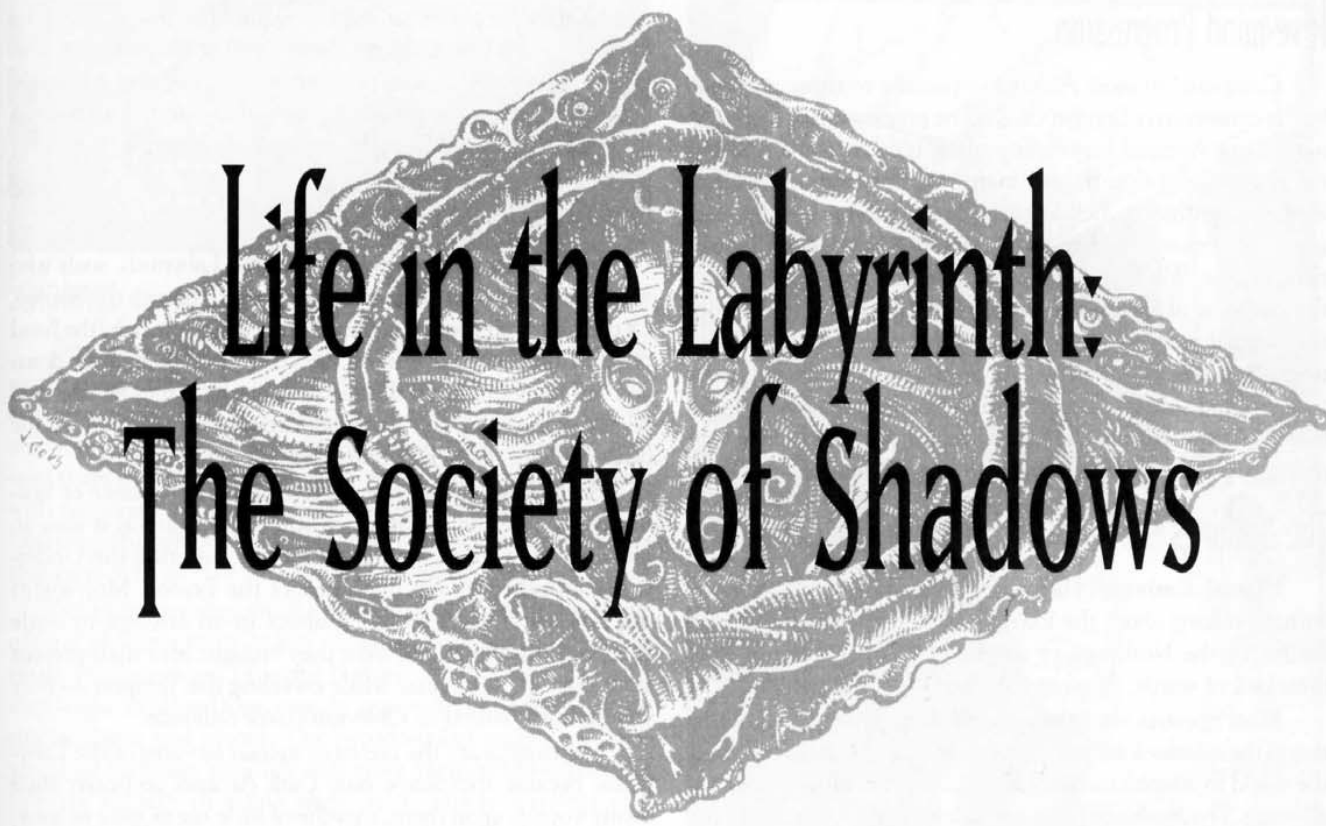

Normally, I bring a Spectre to this little talks — a nice ripe Nephwrack with the limbs gone and some good, active infestations — chained up tight, so you can all see the sort of future that awaits each and every one of you. Unfortunately, my regular guest managed to smash his head against a wall until he fell into Oblivion last week and in the meantime, we haven't gotten in any too severely mauled to be dangerous. So the object lesson of what you could become isn't present. I hope that after today's lecture, it isn't necessary, but I'm afraid that Nate the Nephwrack may have done Oblivion a great service by killing himself. He probably thought of that and was content as he hammered his maggot-infested head against his cage until it split open like an overripe melon.

Do not become the business of people such as Rudolph, Anna, Mister Whisper or myself. We will regret deeply sending you to Oblivion or forging you into an obolus. We will still do it, however, and we will be entirely correct, beyond any doubts of even the strictest system or morality in doing so. See your Pardoner regularly. Work with her to monitor and limit the growth of your Shadow's power. Keep track of the Angst you accrue and minimize or cut out entirely the use of Arcanoi that cause your Angst to increase rapidly. Most importantly, *make perfect your will*. It is by strength of will and strength of will alone that you will endure.

Have a good day, recruits. For both our sakes, pray we never meet again.







Life in the Labyrinth: The Society of Shadows

Caste



The social functions of the Labyrinth are dominated by its caste system. This system ranks Spectres based partly on their state — those touched most directly by Oblivion are ranked above those who stand farther from the metaphorical fire. The system is also in some ways role-oriented. Those who are the most immediate servants of Oblivion and the Malfeans — Nephwrack priests and Shade warriors — rank above menials whose only function is to tempt and spy on the Quick and the Restless.

This caste system is neither as inflexible nor as tension-laden as most Stygian scholars imagine. Unlike many caste systems, advancement from caste to caste is possible in the Labyrinth. Spectres who persist are eventually granted defer-

ence as Nephwracks, and so on up to the metamorphosis into Onceborn. While the Labyrinth is hardly a place of harmonious repose for its inhabitants, its tensions are in many ways similar to those of a large firm or corporation. They are internal struggles for self and group promotion, focused on advancement within the context of the existing social structure.

The image of a Labyrinth ready to burst into civil war over social issues is mostly a result of wishful projection on the part of Stygians brought up in the traditions of Republican Rome and her countless successor states. The embrace of Oblivion, the touch of the Hive-Mind, the tides of the Labyrinth — all of these bring changes to a Spectre that cannot be understood in terms of living values projected onto the afterlife.



Hive-mind Progression

Compared to most Arcanoi, especially to those practiced by the conservative Stygian Guilds, the progression of the Hive-mind Dark Arcanos is not particularly regular. Some Spectres never really develop it, and many develop certain forms of awareness within it. Below, each caste write-up lists the suggested progression of Hive-mind Arts for a Spectre of that particular caste. While some new Abilities are recommended for the purposes of flavor, the Storyteller can instead stick with the original progression of Hive-mind arts from **Dark Reflections: Spectres** if she wants. As always, Spectres may choose to learn additional, alternate arts at or below their level of mastery of the Arcanos through tutelage or by assiduously applying themselves to mastering different facets of the Arcanos.

The Nothings

No real treatment of life within the Labyrinth can be given without talking about the lowest caste of Spectres. Called the Zeroes, or the Nothings, or anything else indicative of their utter lack of worth, they are the losers of the Labyrinth.

Most Spectres are functional nihilists. Those who are passive in their outlook are not hopeless, but instead seek to strangle the world in silence — to snuff out all sound, all emotion and all being. The Nothings have surrendered completely. For them, there is no hope, no goal and no Being to drive them on through the grim and sunless world of the Shadow-eaten. They are utterly lost, and thus they are nothing.

Left to their own devices, some Zeroes seek the mouth of Oblivion and fall into it. Others sit quietly until the Labyrinth's walls engulf them, and they are not seen again. Nothings are mostly ex-Mortwights, one of the reasons for this caste's low rank, but a Spectre of any caste can become a Nothing. All that is required is a fading of the Passions, a failure of determination to continue on and the unraveling of the purely personal emotions that keep a Spectre going.

Nothings are to the Labyrinth what Drones are to the Shadowlands. Perhaps as many as half of the Mortwights to arrive in the Labyrinth become Nothings immediately, souldead at their moment of arrival in the afterlife. Others are Restless whose Shadow's victory brings nothing but a desire for dissolution and resignation to cosmic failure. Regardless of their origins, the result is the same — a failure of the will that results in a malleability that suits the needs of the Labyrinth surprisingly well. They also serve who simply stand and rot.

Nothings are a precious commodity in the Labyrinth. All of the uses that Drones are subject to in the Shadowlands — Thrallism, soulforging, Molation — all of these are apt to be a Nothing's fate. There are also...other fates that some Nothings encounter, ones that are unique to the dark propensities of the Labyrinth. After all, *someone* must play the innocent victims in Harrowings. There are other uses of an artistic or ritual, rather than practical, nature that Nothings can be put to. Phantasm

and Moliare are particularly apt to require raw materials, in the form of tortured Psyches and the shells that they inhabit. The Labyrinth's twisted dream-pageants and its seeming infinitude of moaning pillars, howling walls and other tortured furnishings are largely performed by and composed of Nothings.

Mortwights

Mortwights are the underclass of the Labyrinth, souls who were already Shadow-eaten when they passed through the Shroud. Of the Labyrinth's denizens, they are touched the least by the hand of Oblivion. They have never labored to tear themselves down and cast themselves into the darkness, nor have they felt the cold fingers of the Void as it twists and wracks their Corpus. To the other denizens of the Labyrinth, they are the fresh meat.

Seen from within, the Mortwights are the caste of brilliance. Where the devotion of others to Oblivion is slow in growing, they are created to its service, entering the Underworld unsullied by the fumbings of the Psyche. Mortwights did not spend years fumbling about in an attempt to settle their worldly affairs, nor were they brought into their present state through mischance while traveling the Tempest — they were reborn bathed in Oblivion's dark radiance.

Mortwights are the preferred menial servants of the Labyrinth. Because they know only Dark Arcanoi and carry their death wounds upon them, they are of little use as spies or assassins among the Restless. Instead, their skill at Tempest-Weaving keeps them in demand as skilled artisans and craftsmen. The Onceborn and their Nephwrack priests often employ dozens or even hundreds of Mortwights at a time. These work-Thralls winnow from the Tempest the proper accouterments for temples, festivals, important Harrowings and war parties.

Mortwights also have a certain popularity as soldiers. While they are much less powerful than Shades, Mortwights have the advantages of intelligence, Fetters and a basically human appearance. Because of this, and because of their uselessness as spies and assassins among the Restless, Mortwights are kept by some Malfeans. The Nephwrack general Coldheart is known to keep a bodyguard in the style of Alexander; a thousand Mortwights he calls his Companions.

Mortwights are the lowest rung on the Labyrinth's social ladder, and are pushing aggressively for change. As more Mortwights cross the Shroud, several elders of the caste who have risen to the status of Nephwracks have begun their own cults. These cults — built around the veneration and adulation of the Mortwright as the perfect physical servant of Oblivion — hold Shades, Haints, Doppelgangers and other Spectres as social inferiors fit only for slavery, warfare and entertainment. They stage slaving raids on other Spectral cults, both to liberate Mortwights held in bondage and capture servants of their own. This isn't a fight for social justice, but rather one for dominance. There are no creeds of freedom, justice or equality within the Labyrinth's winding corridors, only an endless struggle to eat or be eaten.

Mortwight Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Recall the Known
- Recall the Unknown
- Racial Memory

Striplings

Striplings differ markedly enough in attitude from the other sects and castes of the Labyrinth to demand (and receive) separate treatment. The Shadowlands are not kind to the young, and young wraiths are sometimes forged immediately, to prevent them from becoming Shadow-eaten. Left alone in the dark with no parent but hunger, pain and the backbrain whisper of Oblivion, the self-proclaimed Neverlived have forged a society that cannot be seen as a response to human cultural paradigms.

Striplings are very much creatures of pack and tribe. Packs of feral children frolic in the darkened passages of the Labyrinth, playing games of joyful hunger. Small groups coalesce into larger tribal nations, usually composed of Striplings from similar times and places. The pseudo-tribal society of these so-called children parallels the more regimented aspects of Spectre society in many ways, with Shade warriors and Nephwrack shamans, and even the odd Stripling Onceborn.

Striplings have a weak sense of identity, and this makes them preternaturally sensitive to the Hive-Mind. Most also exhibit a strong affinity for barghests, vulpines, *kuei* and other animalistic Spectres. Their intimate knowledge of the Labyrinth and their strong connection to the Hive-Mind makes Striplings much-valued within the Labyrinth as scouts and auxiliaries — but the Neverlived make their own deals for their own reasons, and never forget that they stand apart from the hierarchy of Oblivion.

Sections of the Labyrinth that the Striplings claim as their own are best avoided. While the Neverlived are weak individually, they are exceedingly cunning in the arts of trap and ambush. In the Shadowlands, Striplings delight in using their natural affinity with Shroud-Rending to torment mortals, especially mortal children. Many Stripling packs recruit abused, neglected or otherwise desperate mortal children just as the Stygian Guilds recruit talented humans.

Stripling Hive-mind Progression:

- Distant Whispers — This version of Distant Whispers (Hive-mind ••) can only be used on Spectres who are members of the Stripling's pack.
- Tribal Commune
- Taming the Beast
- Pack Wisdom
- Recall the Unknown — As per the normal (Hive-mind •••••) Art of the same name.





Doppelgangers

Doppelgangers command a position of low esteem within the Labyrinth, both in the perceptions of those around them, and in their own estimation. The average Onceborn sees Doppelgangers as new, uncertain of themselves, and likely to lose their Being or begin Emoting uncontrollably. Many are used as menial servants, expendable shock troops and bit actors in Harrowings. Some are destroyed, some lose their will to continue and become Nothings and a very few persevere. The ones who survive long enough feel the warping hands of Oblivion, gaining the respectability of Nephwrack status.

A fair number of Doppelgangers are sent into the Shadowlands to infiltrate Restless society. Most are quickly detected and destroyed. Some persevere and work their evil on the fringes of Restless society, or within the Guilds or various factions of the Renegades and Heretics. There they exert their influence. Some corrupt subtly from within, some work a less-subtle magic of assassinations and destabilization and some simply help the Shades come and carry everyone off to the bowels of the Labyrinth. It is largely a matter of each Doppelganger's personal style.

A few, a very lucky and dangerous few, make it past the keen-eyed guards and the Pardoners and the barghests, and find themselves a place within the Hierarchy. Some of these infiltrators are the simple sort, the kind to simply stroll up and unlock the Citadel gate during a Maelstrom. Others are planners and schemers, and far more dangerous. Slowly rising through the ranks of the Dark Kingdom of Iron, they wait until the perfect moment to do their evil, and if they can, they survive to strike again another day.

For the Doppelganger infiltrating Shadowlands society, there is little chance of advancement. Most such agents will continue to attempt to undermine the society of the Restless until discovered and forged. Some few return to the Labyrinth — usually after they begin to show signs of deterioration — but they are a tiny minority. For the rest, the only way out is through the fire.

Doppelganger Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Recall The Known
- Recall The Unknown
- Racial Memory

Shades

Shades are given great respect among the Shadow-eaten for the simplest of reasons: They'll eat you if you don't. While not particularly clever or good at leading and planning (or sentient, for that matter), they are fierce and strong and don't ask questions. They do occasionally Emote and eat their handlers, however, and this can be something of a problem in the field. But for the most part, these darkly passionate warriors are Oblivion's staunchest defenders and most fell champions.

However fearless and mighty Shades may be in battle, they aren't very suitable for other uses. Many Onceborn let some or even most of their Shades roam isolated sections of the Labyrinth, much like mast-feeding pigs in primitive agriculture. The Shades keep themselves busy, and the influence of their master's Hive-mind keeps them from wandering off or indulging in excessive fratricide. When they're needed, they're gathered up and formed into mobs under the leadership of a Nephwrack or Apparition.

Wild or feral Shades are fairly common. They either wander away from their master's control and forget where they belong, or just never have one. Feral Shades often run in packs, and these packs are both a prime source of Hekatonkhire and a major hazard of travel in the Labyrinth. Even the Shadow-eaten have no desire to turn a corner and be confronted by a pack of a dozen snarling Shades.

Shade Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Hive Awareness
- Collective Oracle
- Racial Memory

Nephwracks

Nephwracks are the Priests of Oblivion, true believers whose stigmata are apparent for all to see. The glorious twistings and mutations inflicted on a Nephwrack's Corpus as the ebb and flow of Oblivion wash through it are his glory and sign of status. Nephwracks are the highest caste in the Labyrinth, and act as both administrators and ritual specialists for their masters, the Malfeans.

While some of the most powerful Onceborn have Nephwracks whose sole duty is administration, most members of this caste are either priests or military officers as well as bureaucrats. Priestly Nephwracks are generally in charge of coordinating part of the rituals performed in obeisance to their Lord, as well as performing administrative tasks related to their ritual duty. For example, a Nephwrack in charge of making sure the Master's temple is made ready for services would also be responsible for making sure that there were enough Kindled torches and screaming sacrificial Corpora to perform his duties. The existence of a Nephwrack can be extremely difficult — not only because the rituals the Onceborn indulge in tend toward both extravagance and frequency, but also because there is usually incredible competition to gain a Malfean's favor.

By definition, Nephwracks do not have Fetters, and thus cannot exist in the Shadowlands for long outside of a Maelstrom. Administrative and religious duties in the Shadowlands generally fall to Apparitions instead. Only the youngest and hardest-put Malfeans, or the most important Oblivion cults can merit the expense of maintaining a Nephwrack in the Shadowlands via Splice Strand.

Nephwrack officers have a somewhat simpler life. Most are given a unit of Spectres to command, usually Shades or occasionally Doppelgangers. This force ranges in size from about the size of a Hierarchy patrol to 100 Shadow-eaten, depending on the size of the Onceborn's forces and the power and reputation of the Nephwrack. Nephwracks with large commands usually have them divided into individual war bands under the control of Apparitions who actually handle whatever Shades are part of the force. The Nephwrack's primary tasks are to keep its troops battle-ready and lead them to war at its master's behest. Keeping the troops ready for combat means anything from applying instruments of torture to them at regular intervals (to keep them from slacking off, of course) to grueling intense training in small unit and open field tactics. The details mostly depend on the Nephwrack in question and the standards applied by the Malfean to its forces. Unsurprisingly, the quality of units of Spectres can vary wildly, running the gamut from well-drilled infantry in the mold of the modern British Paras to screaming Shades that might as well be feral.

Most Nephwracks only survive a few years at their posts. Eat-or-be-eaten (literally) politics, Oblivion-fired deterioration and whims of their masters destroy most of them, and self-destructive tendencies count for most of the rest. Only a notable few persist for long periods, and those can survive to be exceptionally old indeed.


Nephwrack Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Broadcast
- Bid
- Compel

Hekatonkhire

It waded through the splinters of the gate. Its four legs moved like the arms of a water-wheel, and the mouths at the end of its primary arms bellowed challenges to the infantry that moved to seal the breach. They called this one Neck-biter, though I knew not why. The spears in its secondary arms glowed cherry-red, and stabbed down into the crowd of men who milled about its feet thrusting upwards with lance and spear. These were dismounted cavalry, then, the elite.

There was movement in the darkness, and a white flash of light that cast shadows as harsh as fracture-lines in glass. The Shades and Haints who had been milling around its feet withered as if leaves in a forge. Some of our own men fell as well, but Harrowings were to be expected for those who met the enemy at the gates of Stygia. The Deathlords had come to block the gate, and they came with fire and rage. They moved in with unbroken strides, their masks flashing fire when they deflected some chance missile blown towards them by the unaccustomed storm winds.



Charon was first among them, and struck with Siklos, twice and then a third time. Three times he swung, and the Deathlords struck at Neck-biter as well. There were flashes, and the Lady of Fate stood back, manipulating something in her hands. The Spectres who had been rushing forward to the gate tripped and fell almost as one man, impaling themselves on their weapons, limbs twisting backwards, some simply blowing into dust as their threads were cut short.

A primary arm struck the Smiling Lord, Oblivion pouring from the howling mouth. There was a crashing sound that I could hear from where I stood almost a bowshot distant, as the crystals in his mask shattered. And then the Smiling Lord Was Not. Siklos fell a fourth time, and one of Neck-biter's legs failed it. The Deathlords fell on it then, and it thrashed beneath their weapons and the flames of their masks.

The Deathlords stood unopposed in the gate then, and silence descended on the battlefield. Charon gestured to Cleitus, who was on his horse in the front ranks of the army of Oblivion. It may have been a gesture of challenge or contempt, or a request for parlay.

Cleitus raised his arm then, and let it fall. Horns blew, flat and out of tune, and shapes were seen moving through the press of the Shadow-eaten. One was small, just a young girl-child in shape, and black lightning crackled around her like a robe of office. The other was like a great bull, with brazen armored hide and a mouth that poured forth bruised red flames. The Christa Bellum and Baal. All three Hundred-Handed Ones reported marching with Coldheart were here with him.

Charon and the Deathlords fell back from the gate then, and a great groan went up from the ranks of the defenders. Charon cradled the mask of the Smiling Lord, and took it back to return to him when he emerged from Harrowing, if ever he did. I made off then, to find a place of refuge from the sack that was soon to be upon us. I am no coward — there are some things that a man may flee from and still call himself a man. The gate of Stygia that day was such a place....

Hekatonkhire are what could be regarded as failed attempts at achieving Onceborn status, or alternately as Malfeans more like Shades than Nephwracks. Huge, bestial, powerful but devoid of intellect, the Hekatonkhire are driven by their Passions and hungers. While the Hekatonkhire possess immense physical power and reflexive mastery of many Arcanoi, their minds are gone. Many have priests and followers, but they are objects of worship rather than God-kings of their followers. Their churches are directed by the Nephwracks bound to their will, or simply not directed at all, standing as decaying edifices of adulation. Some remain captive "deities," but most are eventually destroyed by their rivals or turn on their worshippers. Many Hekatonkhire are more powerful physically than Onceborn of similar stature, but possess a less profound mastery of the arts of the Dead. Instead, they have an assortment of Shade powers.

Some of the most powerful Onceborn have mastered Hekatonkhire, and keep them as fighting beasts. Most of these Hekatonkhire aren't fully under control, and are kept under loose leash to guard certain key confluences against intrusion. Some few have been bound, usually through a combination of Hive-mind and Labyrinthine versions of Nhudri's Embrace. These creatures are sometimes used like siege engines, to smash in the doors of Citadels. Three accompanied Coldheart's armies during the sacks of Enoch and Stygia during the Third Great Maelstrom, but at least one was destroyed by Charon and the Deathlords.

Pasiphae

I didn't know precisely how far behind me my new friend was. Maybe it was 20 paces, maybe 21. It knew, though. I could tell, because the distance hadn't altered by more than a single stride's length in the three days since it'd destroyed the rest of my team. I'd run twice so far, once at the beginning for speed and distance and once later, out of the blue to try to surprise it. I'd found out it was at least as fast as I was, and attentive enough that I couldn't get one over on it. I'd stopped once, and it hadn't. That had cost me three paces.

It didn't look like much, a lean black figure in tattered robes, with a huge rusty sickle that I'd seen destroy 11 well-armed wraiths. And there were the bells. He had a strap of jingle-bells at each wrist and ankle. Even when I wasn't looking over my shoulder at him, I could hear them back there, jingling. It was wearing a mask, one patterned after the Greek mask of tragedy, but leathery. Rugose.

It was walking me to death, and we both knew it. Even my Shadow had shut up, so things must have been bad. I didn't need to rest, and it didn't need to either. It was just waiting; waiting for me to make a wrong turn, or slip and fall, or give up and wait. And then it would use the sickle on me. Something about the way my friends had turned to dust when it cut through their bodies told me you didn't get a Harrowing if that thing cut you up. It was bad luck to run into a Labyrinth-walker.

The Black Reaper and I had seen some interesting sights together: a burning city where Spectral children set their hair afire and ran shouting through the streets with kuei barking at their heels; a white-tiled hallway lit by flickering blue fluorescent light, filled with literally hundreds of rusting, battered shopping carts; a maze of rotting-walled corridors full of thick masses of glistening cobwebs, and thousands of glistening red Plasmic spiders. We had seen a lot, the Pasiphae and I.

At first, I thought the light — dark but a little beaten, pale around the edges, like night just before dawn — was an illusion, or just another weird artifact of the Labyrinth. Then I could see that it was for real. It was a stairway up into the Tempest, looking very much like the entrance stairs to a subway station. I didn't know if it has been coughed up naturally in some convulsion of the passages, dreamt up by a Malfean with a taste for Byway robbery or executed by a mad architect over the course of 30 deranged years working only with her teeth. I didn't care.

I started to run for it, and I could hear the Pasiphae behind me change pace to catch up. And as I raced for the steps with everything I had in me, something changed. For the first time since we'd started walking, the Midnight Saint and I, I could hear its pace fall out of synchrony with mine. It was speeding up. I knew, I knew in my heart, that it was back there, scythe held high above its head and ready to strike, its black robes billowing out, the bells jingling so fast that they no longer denoted individual motions. And I knew it was going to cut me down at the top of the steps, just as my foot touched whatever it was that was out there.

And I ran anyway. I reached the top of the steps with my body aching and tears of plasm streaming from my eyes and my Shadow cackling in my ears one last time. But I didn't die. There was a sound, like a cricket bat hitting the ball, and I stopped, because I was sure that I was dead, and turned around. And there was a Ferryman, his one hand holding his lantern and the other one out, holding onto the Pasiphae's scythe like it was a twig.

He looked at me, and his eyes were as green as tomb-jade. "Go," he said, "This thing is not for you to see."

And I did, and for all I know, they stand there still. Call me a liar if you want, but every word I've said to you is true.

Little is known of the enigmatic beings called the Pasiphae, also known as the Saints of the Shadow-eaten, the Ferrymen of Oblivion, the Walkers of the Labyrinth and many other titles. Speaking little, they seem immune to the powers of the Hive-Mind, though they have incredible influence over its condition in their vicinity. The Black Reapers are also demonstrably the equals of most Onceborn in their mastery of the Arcanoi. Most of these unassuming beings go masked and carry scythes and lanterns. All dress in voluminous black. Those who have seen beneath their robes by chance have reported them to have smooth, featureless black skin, though this might be the description of only a single one of the Pasiphae repeated often.

The Ferrymen of Oblivion are known to frequent the area around the Mouth of the Void, and the surest way to find the way to the Temples of the Neverborn is to ask one of the Pasiphae for guidance. Rumors of the Pasiphae's true nature are manifold, and the beings themselves are entirely unwilling to discuss their origins. Some claim them to be the dreams of the Neverborn made flesh, or their children or angels of Oblivion, as the Neverborn Malfeans are its gods. Others claim them to be the discarded Shadows of the Ferrymen. From their garb and from the fact that

they seem to have no Psyche to trouble them, the latter may well be the case.





Haints

I'm cold, and hungry and wet the from Maelstrom. You don't mind I slipped in the back, do you? I'm so hungry. You'll feed me, won't you? You'll give me a nice...meal. Yes?

Haints — the Century of Monsters seems to have created endless swarms of these previously uncommon Spectres. Haints were previously relatively rare, dwelling in the areas of sacks or other atrocities. First seen in America during the 18th century (when they were called *bay kok*) they now swarm over Europe and Asia, making travel outside Necropoli difficult in many places. Even the Imperial Guard of the Yellow Springs and the companies of the Legion of Fate that patrol Russia's desolate interior have been hard put to restrain the depredations of these creatures.

Like Mortwights, Haints enter the Shadowlands with their Shadows in control. Unlike Mortwights, Haints are defined, not by their life, but by their death. Before their death, they had been reduced to an almost inhuman lifestyle while still among the Quick. And in the Shadowlands, they were reborn as something much like Shades. Almost universally victims of famine, atrocity or genocide, Haints appear as they did in life. Most are starved, riddled with the marks of disease and Oblivion-taint.

Much like Shades, Haints are driven relentlessly by their Dark Passions. Most hate the living and the Restless alike with admirable catholicity, and forgo the comfortingly cancerous culture of the Labyrinth to spend their existence as the bane of those who did not suffer as they did.

Appearance

Seen from a distance, a Haint might be mistaken for a normal wraith, a Doppelganger or a Mortwright, depending on the circumstances. People with the marks of fatal illness on them are, after all, not terribly uncommon in the Shadowlands. This misapprehension rarely persists, however — Haints have no eyes. The black fires of Oblivion burn within their orbits, instead, sometimes leaking out to char and peel the Corpus of their faces. This is nearly impossible to conceal, as the icy flames quickly warp blindfolds or glasses-frames or anything else left too near that is not forged of Stygian steel.

Character Generation

Each Haint's existence is marked by extreme hunger. While this hunger is mostly for violence and vengeance, all of them automatically suffer from the Flaw: **Endless Hunger**. The Flaw does not provide them with additional freebie points or count towards the character's Flaws limit. Also, because Haints have generally weakened Corpora from poor self-image and proximity to Oblivion, they begin the game with 8 rather than 10 Corpus levels.

Haints are created as if they were normal Spectres, but they automatically begin with one Shade power (generally one related to physical combat), one dot of Tempestos, and 4 points of Dark Arcanoi. One of their Dark Passions must be assigned a value of 5.

Haint Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Broadcast
- Recall the Unknown
- Unity of Being

Apparitions

I know how much pain you must feel. Do you think I didn't feel the same agony? To exist is to suffer. But there is surcease from the torment. There is nepenthe, for yourself and for others.

Apparitions are of roughly equal caste to Shades, above Doppelgangers but below Nephwracks in the hierarchy of Oblivion. Doppelgangers and Mortwights whose Corpus has begun to show the loving touch of Oblivion, Apparitions are a resting phase between the lesser castes and those truly embraced by Oblivion. Still anchored to the Shadowlands and protected from the touch of dissolution by their Fetters, Apparitions are the acolytes and mendicant monks of the Oblivion cults. Some Apparitions complete their instruction and conclude their apprenticeship to Oblivion quickly with a few carefully arranged arsons and a murder or three. Others persist for years, even decades, walking the Shadowlands as missionaries to the Restless and directing Oblivion cults among the Quick.

Not all Apparitions work in the Shadowlands. A majority serve out their terms in the Labyrinth humbly, waiting out the decay of their Fetters and serving as menials in the temples

of the Onceborn. Some lead units of Spectres into battle, while others act as monks or other lesser figures in the administration and actual rituals of worship.

Appearance

Apparitions appear much like what one would expect, beings somewhere between Doppelganger or Mortwight and Nephwrack in character. The Corpus of an Apparition displays the characteristic lesions, tumors and flaking or shingled patches of Nephwracks, but to a lesser extent. The effect is usually patchy, growing progressively more complete as the Apparition's Fetters slip away. The death wounds of those who were Mortwights gradually slow their bleeding until it is little more than a seeping of contaminated plasm, while the eyes of those who were Doppelgangers lose their characteristic black radiance.

Character Generation

Apparitions are generated just like Doppelgangers, with the following exceptions: They must purchase 1 dot of the Dark Arcanos Maleficence, but the other dots can be used to purchase normal or Dark Arcanoi. They also have only 6 points of Fetters (and cannot buy this total up to more than 8 during the character generation process). In exchange, they have 4 additional dots of Backgrounds that can be spent only on the Shadowlands or Status backgrounds.

Apparition Hive-mind Progression:

- Silent Whispers
- Distant Whispers
- Broadcast
- Bid
- Compel







Life in the Labyrinth: The Oblivion War and the Malfeans




The Oblivion War



While there can only be one end to the desire for Oblivion, the urge toward that final consummation has as many manifestations as the colors of autumn or a bruise, and is as varied as the possible arrangements of dry bones in dust. This variety

of approaches makes the Labyrinth a place of constant warfare. These battles are no ordinary strife — the Hive-Mind and the physical structure of the Labyrinth are intimately connected.

In the Labyrinth, control of a location grants more than simple possession — it is control over the very nature of the place, and over those who dwell there. To defeat an opponent is to defeat the ideas he espouses as well. Territory, power, followers; Oblivion's doorstep is a place of feedback loops and organic interrelationships, where the thought of change and change itself are often indistinguishable. The Oblivion War is more than a war fought among vermin to decide the disposition of Creation's corpse; it is a war to determine the very nature of the vermin who will attend the feast.



The term "Kindlings" is used for both areas of increased activity in the Labyrinth and for Spectres who are in an active phase. "Kindled" is another name for such hyperactive Spectres, though the term is also sometimes used derisively to refer to Spectral torches.

The Kindlings

The factions in this struggle are most often called Kindlings and Barrows. Kindlings are those Spectres in whom the flame of Oblivion burns bright. Actively pursuing destruction of themselves and others, Kindlings are the Spectres who most often come into contact with the rest of the Shadowlands. It is the Kindlings who scheme and war upon the Shadowlands when the Maelstrom-winds blow. Theirs are the priests and agents who seek converts among the Quick, the Dead and the Shadow-eaten. They are the ones who manipulate the Quick towards Oblivion in life, and who seek to unravel the fabric of the Shadowlands until there is nothing but the glare and haze of the Tempest above the twisting mouth of the Labyrinth.

The destruction of the Quick and the Restless alike should not be mistaken for the actual root goal of the Kindling. Activities which work to undo the Shadowlands and the various lands of the Dead are those most likely to attract the attention of those outside the Labyrinth. The countless other manifestations of this urge towards Oblivion — the endless, meaningless internecine strife, the mass orgies of self-destruction, and the like — go on ceaselessly in the black abysses below the Tempest. While such manifestations of carnage dominate the affairs of the Labyrinth, they do not dominate its interactions with the outside world. Thus they go largely unknown and unnoticed, even by those who make it their business to follow the goings on of the Shadow-eaten.

The physical cycle of the Labyrinth impinges upon the psychic plane as well. The storm-seasons of changing structure bring changing attitudes as well, and new ideologies blow across the Labyrinth on these winds of change. The Kindling-times are seasons of activity. Raiding, dark festivals and ceremonies in worship of the Malfeans dominate these hours. It is during these periods that the struggles for dominance among the Kindlings grow severe enough to manifest as open warfare between their followers. This is also the time when most war parties and spies are sent into the Shadowlands to infiltrate and destroy the society of the Restless.

During these frenzies of decay, whole art forms (some of them even comprehensible) blossom, reach their apogee and fade from practice. Some of this art is a spontaneous celebration of dissolution, a numbly joyful ritual of pain. Other pieces are done for public exhibition, or to do honor to the artist's Malfean Lord. When the Labyrinth is at the height of the Kindling-season, there appear across its width and breadth strange, fiercely energetic festivals of the damned.

We knew they were coming because the Kindled were first. They were all screamers, and they howled as the flames rolled up and boiled off them. They must have been Chaunteurs once upon a time, because the screaming didn't just sound bad, it was bad. I could see the Centurion and Kirkus reacting the same way I was, and I was glad we'd found a place to hide before the screaming got too loud.

The Kindled were in long-handled mancachers, the full-circle locking kind they sometimes use in Stygia with Thralls too dangerous to their handlers to be trusted in chains. They had two handlers, one for each of the two Mortwights pushing them along. The Kindled must have been really juicy inside, because the handlers looked a little toasty, like Artificers at the forge a little too long. Behind them were Doppelganger soldiers, who looked disciplined and ready for a fight. Then there were Shades in rolling cages, with Mortwights pushing them, too. There were extra cage-pushers, so I suppose the handles on the cages weren't quite long enough. After that came the big show. It was a Nephwrack on a sedan chair, with Shades carrying it. They had been really carefully modified, so they could only just barely do the job and nothing else. Their heads were Moliated, or maybe just warped, and sprouted feathered plumes. The feathers glowed brightly in colors I'd never even seen before. There were strange things down there in the Labyrinth for the Masquers to work from, I guess.

At each of the four corners of the chair a Mortwight plodded along, carrying a Stripling screamer nailed upside down to an X-shaped crucifix. The kids were soprano (maybe *castrati*, I had heard there were a lot of them around down here) and their crying was a high wail, with gargling undertones from the plasm running down into their mouth. They were definitely Chaunteurs, and they were screaming out a name.

Val-en-ti-nus, Val-en-ti-nus, Val-en-ti-nus

Then the whole procession repeated itself in reverse. Caged Shades and edgy handlers, more soldiers, and a couple of screamers with some charred-looking Mortwights pushing them along.

"Where are they going?" I asked when they had passed.

"Nowhere — they just never stop walking. They have a sort of route they follow. It's petty regular. We see them here all the time."

Gran Guignols of the Shadow-eaten, these impromptu assemblages of the lost can give birth to any number of events: huge, ghastly Harrowings directed by Malfeans, or the annihilation of all those participating in a self-destructive frenzy, or even the birth of a new Onceborn with the revelers as its court. As the cycle reaches its climax, the festivals spread and join together, until thousands of miles of the Labyrinth seem to throng with charnel celebration. It is not wise for Helldivers to attempt to participate in these activities, and those who have the poor fortune to be Harrowed during these festivals are often never seen again.

The Barrows

Oblivion in its passive aspect is the face of silent ruin and snow-drenched desolation. It is the aspect of *choking out*. It is not so much an impulse as a psychic pressure that mutes the Hive-mind's urges toward the dissolution. The Barrow-times are times of somnolence and quiet meditative vigil on the hollow darkness that lies within all things. It is during these passive periods that the Shadow-eaten are most submerged in their personal downward spiral toward the mouth of Oblivion.

We all thought it was some kind of fucked-up Spectre monument until Horsric leaned up against one of the pillars or stones or whatever. This stuff, it looked solid, but it felt like dust mixed 60/40 with cobwebs. It cracked under Horsric's weight with this horrible sound like fingers on Styrofoam. Claudius didn't want to mess with it, but Horsric, Jake and I ripped a big piece away. If I'd been alive when I saw the Shade underneath it, I'd probably have died of a heart attack. My God, it was the biggest, meanest looking Shade you've ever seen, and there must have been a foot of this cobweb-shit on it. It didn't even notice us, like it was in some kinda trance. And there were these little things, like bugs, that were living in it, like termites in an old house, you know? We checked a couple more, and it was all the same. There had to be thousands of 'em down there in this room, all on these concentric stone steps facing down, towards something really big in the center. We were going to go down to the bottom to check it out, but Horsric lost it. He started shrieking or screaming or something. I dunno, maybe he was having a Catharsis or just the screaming meemees, 'cause newbies do that sometimes on their first crawl. Anyway, he was running back for the door like a fuckin' rocket when he hit the cobwebs. It wasn't like he died, it was more like he just turned to dust. Just like that. That made it Big 50 time, and we cut out without dickin' around too much.

— Excerpt from *Non Gratum Anus Rodentium; The Helldivers In Their Own Words*, University of Pittsburgh Necropolis Press

The easiest image of the Barrow-Spectres is the stereotype: chambers full of frozen courtiers and ancient, dust-choked halls, the walls thick with sleeping Shadow-eaten. This simple stasis is not, however, the only face of the Barrow. If the Kindling-Spectres can be said to burn with their passion for Oblivion, then the Barrow-Spectres are glacial.

Patient, sparing, and orderly, the spirit of the Barrow-Spectre is that of the woman who calmly poisons her family, cleans up the mess, arranges the bodies just so, performs the ritual of paying the bills one final time and then sits down to a leisurely poisoned meal herself. Kindling-Spectres are full of energy, brilliantly, vibrantly seeking their dooms with an eye toward heavy collateral damage. By contrast, the Barrow-Spectre is careful and organized and full of economical, long term plots. Spectres tend to drift towards the extremes as they age. In the case of the Kindled Spectres, their quest for Oblivion becomes increasingly energetic — eventually, planning is cast to the wind. The Barrows' problem is the opposite of this — the most efficient means of witnessing the victory of Oblivion is generally to wait until the end of time when everything has been consumed by the great empty Mouth of the Void. As time passes, they fall silent, one by one. If the Kindlings tend to throw themselves into Oblivion, then the Barrow-Spectres are prone to sitting down and waiting for its arrival.

The Malfeans

The Hierarchy of Estates

Social interactions within the Labyrinth are rigidly defined by the caste of the Spectres involved. While social interactions within a caste have as full range as the circumstance of the Labyrinth permit, out-of-caste relations operate in very strictly defined fashions. The basis of the caste system is wholly religious — its foundation is the closeness of the Spectre in question to Oblivion. This precept, that those closest to Oblivion are made holy by proximity, is unchallenged. While certain groups agitate for increased status and recognition, the advancement they seek is that of their caste within the Labyrinth's pecking order, not a change in the foundations of the Labyrinth's social structure. As they stand now, the castes of the Labyrinth are ranked in the following manner:

- **At the top of the Labyrinth's social order are the Neverborn**, who crawled from Oblivion itself in the days before the Sundering.
- **Next come the Onceborn**, who have devoted themselves wholly to the service of Oblivion in their Afterlife, and have had Its mark impressed on their spirit. Hekatonkhire, Spectres with the physical abilities of Malfeans but none of the intelligence, also share this status.

• Below the Onceborn are the Nephwracks, who have been touched by Oblivion enough that even the most extensive Moliation can no longer conceal their nature. This mark of their exposure to Oblivion's dark radiance sanctifies them in the eyes of the Malfeans. They are the highest of the castes that can still be identified as human, and are expected to go through the motions of social interactions.

• Below the Nephwracks are the Apparitions and the Shades. Both of these castes have been touched deeply by Oblivion. In the case of Shades, the effect is demonstrated by the erasure of both personality and intelligence. In the case of Apparitions, it is the emergence of the first signs of Oblivion-taint that will distinguish them later if they survive and become Nephwracks. Apparitions are honored by some, but are still considered inferior to Nephwracks.

• Below the Apparitions and Shades are the Doppelgangers. Doppelgangers are due some small measure of respect — they have suffered the agonies of the Shadowlands at the hands of their Psyches and overcome them through devotion to the holy radiance of Oblivion. Their forms have not yet been glorified by the touch of Oblivion, however, and so they are of low rank until such time as they are elevated by the appearance of the blemishes and stigmata of high station.

• Lowest of all are the Haints and the Mortwrights. Both of these castes entered the service of Oblivion directly from the Skinlands. They are the least-touched of the servants of Oblivion, and are considered totally expendable. Often kept back from the forges purely for their utility as totally expendable shock troops, Haints and Mortwrights are the Labyrinth's equivalent of the Untouchable caste.

Behind the stark pavan of the Labyrinth's strife and change lie the machinations of the Malfeans.

From a battle for a nameless confluence of sewer-tunnel to the deepest dreams of the Hive-

Mind, the influence of the Malfeans is universal. From the struggles and ambitions of



the Onceborn to the subtle game of Labyrinth-shaping played in the darkest tunnels where the Neverborn dwell, these battles shape all facets of the existence within Labyrinth: political, spiritual and physical.

Neverborn; The God-Kings of Oblivion

Deep in the Labyrinth there are dark, forgotten passageways where feral packs of Shades gone white and eyeless in the dark hunt among the rust and rot by scent of Pathos. Below these unremembered corridors lie the temple-tombs of the Neverborn. Empty and silent, they are great, dust-choked monuments to the Neverborn, by the Neverborn. The supplicants to these megalithic shrines have numbered as many dozen in the course of history to date. Some of these temples face directly onto the Abyss above the Mouth of Oblivion, and their porticos have formed resting places for countless incurious travelers on the verge of the most final of destinations.

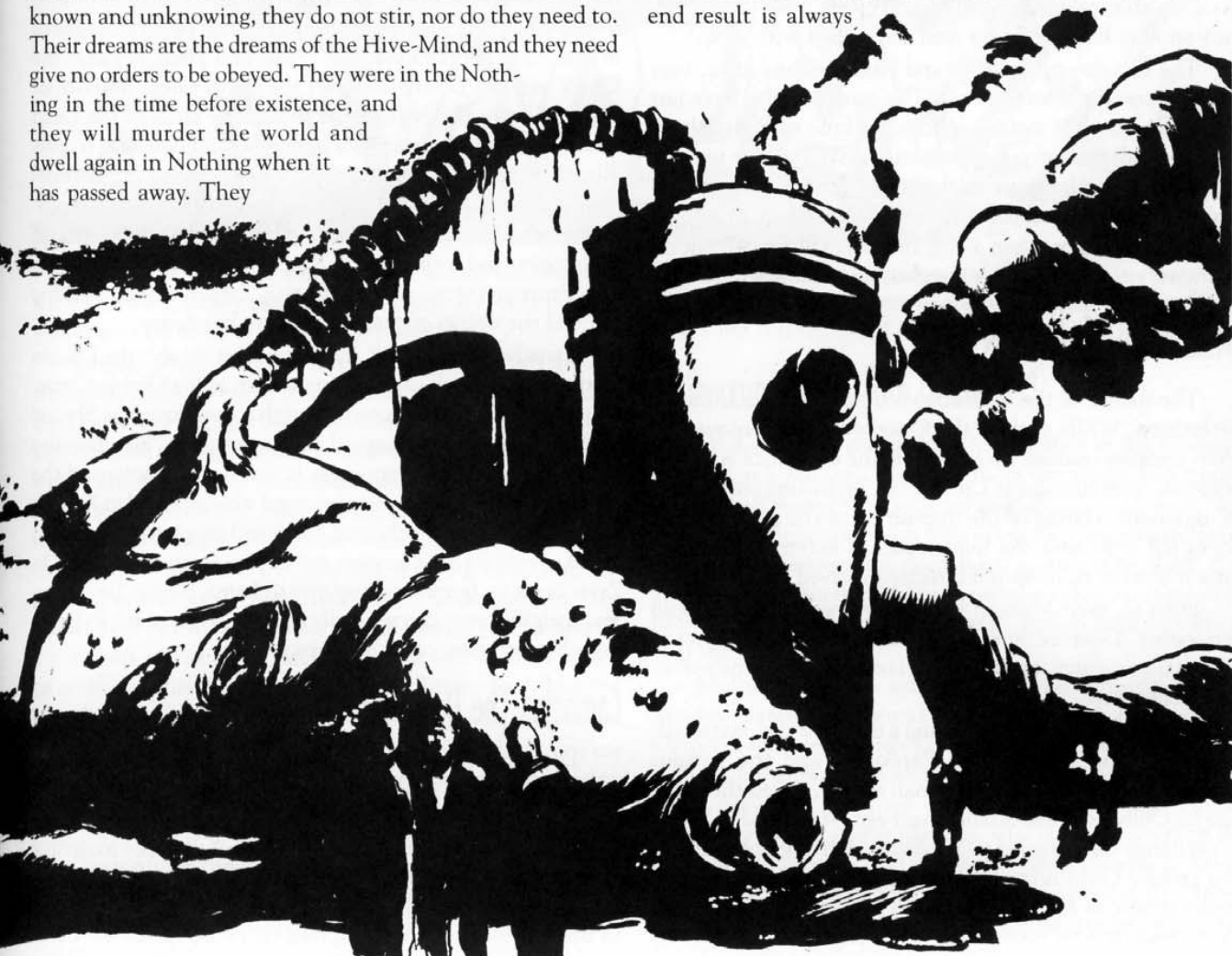
The vast majority of the Neverborn slumber in their temples, resting from the tortures of Existence and dreaming of a time when there will be only Oblivion. Nameless, unknown and unknowing, they do not stir, nor do they need to. Their dreams are the dreams of the Hive-Mind, and they need give no orders to be obeyed. They were in the Nothing in the time before existence, and they will murder the world and dwell again in Nothing when it has passed away. They



are from everlasting to everlasting, and the history of the world is little more than chronicle of their triumphs seen from the perspective of the losing side.

Some very few of the Neverborn are more active than this. For them, dreaming of the day when they too may be consumed in the soothing embrace of Oblivion is not enough. These walk or creep or crawl the passageways of the Labyrinth, seeking to speed the day of the final dissolution by their personal efforts. Like Juggernaut's Carriage, their progress is marked by the destruction of impediments, a dissolution not always unaccompanied by ecstasy.

Onceborn; Priest-Princes Of The Labyrinth

Of the creatures commonly known as Malfeans, the lesser sort are generally called the Onceborn, and sometimes the Oncelived. As their name implies, these Malfeans once walked the Skinlands as living things, and they have waxed great in death. The means of their growth are many; Emoting, the Dark Arcanos Larceny, and other methods involving the consumption of plasm and the raw stuff of the Labyrinth. The end result is always





the same. Like a tadpole becoming a frog or trout becoming steelhead, the Spectre (usually but not always a Nephwrack) gradually undergoes gross changes of morphology and habit. Its size increases and its self-image as a human gradually slips away. It becomes something demonstrably different; something great, twisted and godlike in its aspect. There is no clear line demarcating when one phase of monstrous existence begins and another ends, but the end result is unmistakable. Many Spectres fall along the road to this dark apotheosis, but there is no shortage of further supplicants.

While the power of the Onceborn increases as their size increases, most also become progressively less intelligent as they grow larger. As their Being grows, Malfeans tend to find it increasingly difficult to maintain their self-awareness amid the turbulent surges of their Passions. When their last vestiges of identity and intelligence slip away to the dark urgings of the Spectre's raw Being, a Hekatonkhire is born. Named after the Hundred-handed giants imprisoned in Tartarus by Zeus, these brutal, mindless creatures are godlings, full of strength and dark passion but devoid of reason or intellect. For Shades, who have already lost their personality to the Tempest, this result is foreordained. For the other castes, it is only another hazard along a road thick beset with them.

The Onceborn, Malfeans and Hekatonkhire alike, vary both in power and intelligence. The weakest, who have just begun the process of metamorphosis, are little more than large Spectres with enough self-possession to avoid service to some greater will. But however mighty they grow in strength and ambition, the Onceborn can never rise to displace the Neverborn, no more than a dog, however clever, can put on its master's clothes and go to work as an accountant.

Infamous Malfeans

The names of the well-known Onceborn is a litany of wickedness. While each of the Onceborn has a unique and often complex outlook on existence, the difference is mostly academic from outside the Labyrinth. Compelling philosophical questions relating to the disposition of the mountains of bones left over after the human race is exterminated have little relevance to those not directly involved in the effort.

Even so, each Malfean has its own particular style and personality. Their methods and philosophy are the subject of scholarly inquiry among Stygian scholars known as Obliviographers.

Obliviography supports around a thousand devoted scholars among the ranks of the Pardoners and the various Doomslaying organizations. A small school, called the Institute for Obliviographic Studies, has been established in Stygia to exchange the knowledge of various Obliviographic efforts and groups. Until now this information was contained primarily in rare or limited-circulation manuscripts. Funded by the various factions involved in subsidizing Doomslaying and

Helldiving, the Institute has a full-time staff of a dozen faculty and perhaps twice as many support staff. Security is extremely tight, especially over the library, and is generally provided by members of the Martyr Knights, the Unlidded Eye or the Beacon loaned to the school for this purpose by their parent organizations. While these guards are usually draw Library duty as an easy assignment after some particularly stressful event, they are still elite combat personnel, as several unsuccessful attacks on the Library have shown.

Below is a list of some of the better-known Malfeans, compiled from the records of the Institute. It should be noted that this list is far from exhaustive. A Legionnaire might know of a dozen more, while a devoted Obliviographer could probably name several hundred (though some would be obsolete or synonymic). On the other hand, a Spectre might know even fewer names than the Legionnaire — even those with extensive access to the Hive-mind are often highly restricted in their viewpoint.

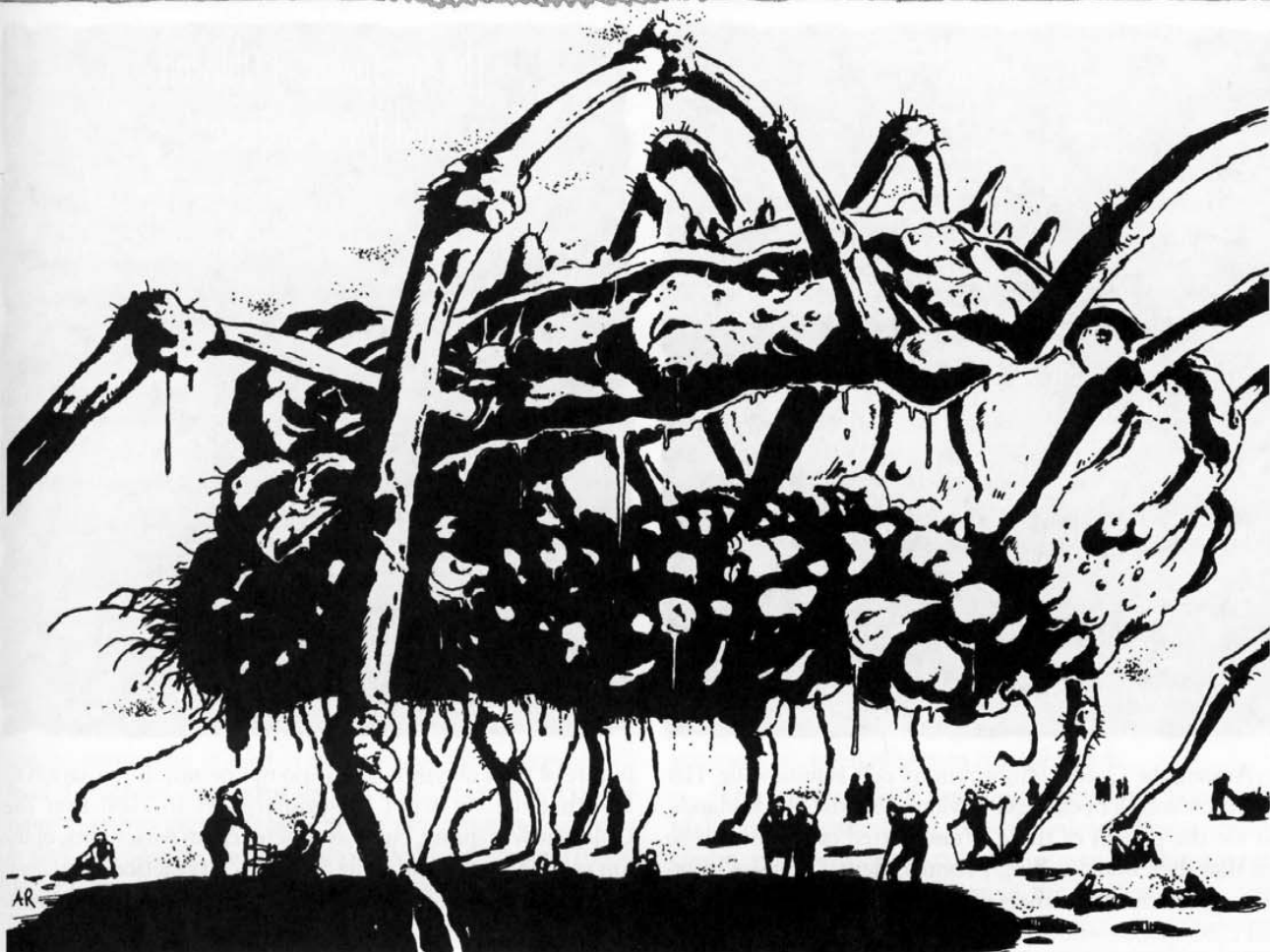
Zyras The All-Consuming

Zyras, also called Diké, appears as a huge — 18 feet tall — obsidian angel with six rust-splotched, blackened metal framework wings. She bears a brilliant black sword with shards of raw Angst worked into the blade, and plans to judge the Quick and the Dead alike after the Sixth Great Maelstrom has torn down the Shroud and joined the lands of the Dead and the Living. To bring this much-awaited occasion to pass all the sooner, Zyras has established a fine army of Shadow-warriors. She has also extended her reach into the Skinlands. Using a variety of methods ranging from the subtleties of Corruption and Intimation to simple expedients of imitating of divinity and terror tactic haunting, Zyras has been working to bend the events of the Skinlands to her desire.

Zyras has several cults, including most notably the Dikéan faction of the occult organization known as the Orphic Circle. Through them, she encourages mortals to tear down the Shroud through scientific and magical experimentation. She may also be the *Hecabe Morta* mentioned in certain invocations of the Giovanni clan, and the gleaming angel who appeared to Xarghis Moghadil, the self-proclaimed Khan and prophet of God who killed over 200 young women and boys in Russia in the 1980s. Zyras bears an immense antipathy to Lamachis the Devourer, and their followers can generally be counted on to fall to fighting whenever they come in contact.

Lamachis The Devourer

Lamachis (or alternately Lachesis) appears as a gnarled and hunchbacked old woman with a giant pair of gleaming shears. An undisputed master of Lifeweb and Fatalism, Lamachis is a mysterious figure. As one of the only Malfeans able to traverse the Shadowlands, she has brought pain and suffering to Necropoli across the Americas. Several attempts to destroy her have met with horrific ends, due to her over-



whelming prescience, her ability to manipulate the Fetters of the Restless seemingly at will and the keen edges of her shears, which are said to leave wounds that never heal.

Lamachis' true nature is unknown. She is known to have an extensive following in the Labyrinth that closely parodies the Legion of Fate. Her Nephwracks are called the Hags, and are Moliated into the forms identical to Lamachis' own. Likewise, Lamachis rigidly disciplines her troops through use of Hive-mind and careful selection techniques. She alleges herself to be the true Lady of Fate, Shadow-eaten and in her Crone phase, and that the currently reigning Lady is an impostor. Furthermore, Lamachis claims that on the Last Day, she will use her shears to sever all the threads of Fate and all the Fetters of the Dead, and the world will unravel into a haze of half-dissolved memories that flutter away into the Mouth of the Void.

Lamachis' assertion of her identity as the Lady of Fate has a certain amount of support among enemies of the Legion of Fate. There is also a theory that the Onceborn is a strange aspect of the Lady of Fate, similar to a Shadow. Mostly, however, Lamachis is thought of as another lunatic Malfean, like the half-dozen or so who assert themselves to be the Real Charon (some of whom did so even before the First Ferryman's disappearance). Lamachis has Zyrras' enmity over their con-

flicting views of the eschaton and their places in it, and encourages her commanders to stage harassing raids on Zyrras' larger, but less organized forces.

Mulhecturous The Filth Goddess

Mulhecturous, called the Filth Goddess or the Diseased Empress, is a Malfean whose methods are simple and whose worshippers among the Quick are almost exclusively mad. She appears as a huge crab, with tufts of swollen and rotting tissue poking from between the decaying segments of her shell. Pus and sick fluids run from these joints when they exert effort or bear weight, leaving an ectoplasmic trail behind her wherever she wanders.

Mulhecturous has only a small following among the Shadow-eaten. Her worshippers are prone to the same Oblivion-spawned ailments of the spirit as their mistress, but without her superlative ability to somehow persist in existence despite crippling degenerations of the spirit. Mulhecturous is a young Malfean, who emerged after the influenza pandemic of the early 20th Century. Most Obliviographers don't believe that she'll persist much longer — even the strongest Corpus can only survive so long under the onslaught of self-inflicted decay.



Gorool

Most emphatically *not* a Onceborn, Gorool was only a rumored presence at the Mouth of the Void before his appearance at the end of the Fifth Great Maelstrom. A whirlwind of scales and baleful hatred, Gorool has not been seen since he and Charon disappeared in a whirlpool at the conclusion of their battle. There are many rumors surrounding Gorool and Charon's fate, but none have as yet been proven conclusively true. Most souls, even those within the Labyrinth, pray devoutly that Gorool is gone forever — that the whirlpool took him and Charon out of existence altogether. On the other hand, those wraiths who believe that Charon used the battle as an opportunity to be reborn into the Skinlands find themselves pondering the terrifying notion that Gorool passed through the Shroud as well, and that when his current body dies he will come into his power once again.

The nightmare image of the mightiest of the Neverborn, as aware and as active as a Mortwright, is one that haunts more and more councils in Stygia these days.

Among the Quick, Mulhecturous' cult is minuscule. Her Apparition and Doppelganger servants walk the Shadowlands, alert for the prayers of those whose hatred or madness is so great that they would willingly contract lethal illnesses in order to spread them to others. There are also rumors of organized cults sponsored by Mulhecturous' Nephwrack servants, conspiracies to spread AIDS or the pneumonic plague through concerted action. If these rumors are true and the conspiracies are actually organized enough to achieve their goals, then they represent an actual threat. More likely, they're just an extension of Skinlands urban legends into the lands of the Dead.

Spirituality



The Labyrinth is united by its veneration of Oblivion as the Western world is united by the beliefs of the Three Great Monotheisms; sectarian disputes between the Kindled and the Barrow, and between rival Malfeans absorb at least as much effort as assaults upon the Quick and the Restless. The one thing there is no disagreement on is the fact that Oblivion is the one true god of the Labyrinth, and there are none before it. There are no self-proclaimed absolute divinities within the belly of Oblivion — the mandate of divinity extends from Oblivion to the Malfeans as its divine servants.

Whatever sort of self-aggrandizing behavior the Oncelived indulge in, it is in the name and interests of Oblivion. The Hive-Mind and the ideologically charged

The Spirituality of Oblivion and Personal Taste


The Spirituality of Oblivion is potentially an extremely strong subject for roleplaying. It is also perhaps the most difficult topic to deal with in a setting full of hard roleplaying questions. Properly portrayed, a chronicle based around this topic can be a tremendous roleplaying experience, a source of horror and an affirmation of the spirituality of the players. Handled improperly, it's little more than a chance to stick out one's tongue, mock religions you don't understand and generally insult anyone present who isn't spiritually tone-deaf. Because of this, and because many people are sensitive about religion in any context, it is strongly suggested that the Storyteller and the Troupe talk over the issue in a serious, honest and truthful fashion before dealing with the actual worship of Oblivion, lest they inadvertently don their motorcycle boots and dance on someone's feelings.

nature of the Labyrinth simply do not permit the situation to be otherwise. It is not from differences in ideal that the Oblivion War spring, but from differences in personality, opinion and practice. Also, while Spectres can practice mysticism, atheism and agnosticism are unknown in the Labyrinth. Oblivion is an obvious and palpable force there, and none can stand before its visage without averting their face. One cannot feel the pounding waves of the Hive-Mind's hunger for silence and harbor doubt. Those outside the Labyrinth may entertain the luxury of hope, but the Shadow-eaten are far too knowledgeable for such fallacies.

Religion at The Heart of Darkness

Like some mortals, the majority of the Shadow-eaten practice a faith without a great deal of intellectual depth. Life in the service of one of the Malfeans is much more like a cult than a religion. It is not something that a worshipper *does*, it is something he *is*. Even those Spectres who are not creatures of pure Passion tend to steer themselves by the feelings of the Hive-mind, operating from catechism without understanding, impulse without cognition.

To the average Spectre, his Onceborn lord and master is the center of existence and the locus around which all of Oblivion revolves. The successes of his Malfean are sure signs that the faith's time is nigh and all shall soon bow before its holy doctrines. The Malfean's travails are but the impediments that make the Onceborn's inevitable journey to supreme overlordship of the Labyrinth that much more glorious. The Master is at least equal to one of the Neverborn, possibly supe-



rior. To the worshippers, these are not matters of opinion, but axioms on which the order of the cosmos rests. Cooperation between followers of different Onceborn is extremely difficult to obtain, even if the Oncelived in question are willing to put aside their differences. Even periods that are generally marked by cooperation, such as Great Maelstroms, are generally marked by skirmishes between individual Spectres of differing denominations.

This insularity often makes life difficult for Helldiver spies. Rigidly defined schedules, regular indoctrination sessions with audience participation required and the sense of social unity engendered by shared purpose are a recipe for brainwashing and the strengthening the Shadow, followed shortly thereafter by Spectrehood. Those Restless with the best chance of success as spies — those with the ability to tap into the Hive-mind and the social flexibility to adapt to life in Labyrinth — are the ones most at risk from their activities. Their is no retirement from a career as a spy in the Labyrinth, and every Masquer or Pardoner infiltration agent knows it.

Enlistment and Conversion

I could hear it, up there inside my head — growing like a cancer, murmuring to itself in the darkness. Growing inside my head. I could feel it spreading through my Corpus, fingers of corruption reaching out a little farther every day, spreading like cracks in glass. My Shadow, she knew, too — the Pardoners can't fix this one. Eventually, I realized she was right, that the whispering was right. There was no way out of the pit but to stop worrying and learn to love it.

Entrance into a Shadow-eaten cult is rarely entirely voluntary. Even Spectral missionaries among the Restless make routine use of Intimation and the Way of the Scholar. By the same token, the Hive-Mind makes any question of free will among the Shadow-eaten difficult to answer. Most induction is far less voluntary than simple manipulations of the Will, however. Most members of Oblivion cults are forcibly converted. Some are Spectres cut from their cocoons by parties of missionary reapers who scour the Tempest and the Shadowlands. These same missionaries compete with the Ferryman, slavers and other Reapers of the dead to gather Enfants for transport to their strongholds in the Labyrinth, where the prisoners are re-educated.

Spectres captured in battle between different cults are also often subjected to re-education. The process is far less likely to be successful than when used on the freshly dead because of the various methods used to inculcate the Spectre with loyalty to their Malfean lord and then maintain it after the initiation process has been concluded. The Shadow-eaten do not stop with simple brainwashing, or even with the use of Mnemosynis, Intimation and the Way of the Scholar. There are other, more certain ways that can be used to ensure a new convert possesses appropriate fervency. Some groups place their novitiates in close proximity to the Malfean that forms the object of their devo-

tions. Others implant specially designed Artifacts to help ensure the loyalty of new members, or portions of the Labyrinth-stuff distinctive to the Cult's Amphiskiopolis. Some cults even graft portions of their Malfean's Corpus into newly-inducted members, giving them a direct link to their Malfean lord. Those Spectres who have been rendered incapable of disloyalty and then captured are generally used as Thralls of the most menial sort, lobotomized and Moliated or soulforged after a few perfunctory attempts at re-education.

Worship and Ceremony


Because the Onceborn Malfeans are God-kings, any location graced by their presence is *de facto* holy, at least as long as they are present. Most, however, have some more formalized sacred space where they receive the prayers and offerings of their worshippers. Some of the lesser Malfeans select a suitable confluence as the site of their temples, but most ambitious Onceborn choose to associate themselves with the divinity of the Neverborn by gnawing their temples out of nothing through sheer force of Being and hunger. In either case, the temple's decor matches the Oncelived's ethos, remodeled to suit the Malfean's mad eye with Tempest Wrack and items scrounged from elsewhere in the Labyrinth.

The ceremonies of worship performed in honor of the Malfeans are extravagant, to say the least. The specifics, of course, vary from cult to cult. Services of worship are generally focused around the Being of the Malfean being venerated, and serve to glut him with Angst from the fulfillment of his Dark Passions. The actual form of the services is sometimes a twisted mockery of the spirituality of the Quick, and sometimes a unique and ingenious sort of grotesquerie rarely seen outside the Labyrinth.

Even the tamest of these veneration expects the worshippers to assume grotesque and unreasonable poses during the ceremonies, to say nothing of the celebrants, who routinely make insane and heroic sacrifices of degraded self-destruction during the services. The priests and the most devout among the worshippers wear vestments of shocking character. Some of this clothing is left capable of screaming, while other articles are dramatically destructive to the wearer's good health. Sacrifices are also common, to a point where it is difficult to enumerate the horrific offerings made to the twisted personages of the Malfeans. Anything that can be imagined to be burnt, broken or placed within the jaws of a hungry Shade or Malfean has been so treated at some point.

Priests

The Nephwracks and their devoted acolytes, the Apparitions, perform the bulk of the Labyrinth's priestly functions. Since Oblivion cults are pretty much the only organized groups in the Labyrinth, this means that the average Nephwrack or Apparition is as much an administrator as a ritual specialist.



Some self-proclaimed Malfeans, especially the younger Kindlings, handle the entire workload of their cult's administration by themselves. Any Nephwracks present are there for their spiritual services, to perform religious ceremonies, help recruit followers among the newly Shadow-eaten and possibly start Oblivion cults among the Quick. In cults of any significant size, however, a hierarchy of Nephwracks and Apparitions handle the fine details of administration that their Onceborn masters cannot be bothered with. Neverborn tend to have more duties for their servants and priests, as they are prone to periods of dreaming torpor. More established than Onceborn, a Neverborn generally has a staff of up to a few hundred full-time priests and acolytes. Other Nephwracks and Apparitions are charged with taking care of administrative matters and managing the efforts of the Malfean's followers.

The staff needed for the administration of a Malfean's cult can quickly add up to quite an organization, and those closest to the Malfean are extremely defensive of their positions. Promotion is generally only possible with the dissolution of former superiors. Assassination is thus generally tacitly accepted unless for some reason the Malfean objects particularly to this — if, for example, it believes that a being should only be consigned to Oblivion voluntarily. In many cases, predation among worshippers is actively encouraged. This is especially true among the Kindlings, who see it as a test of vigor.

A Surfeit of Sects

There are hundreds of known sects of Oblivion-worshippers — even more than there are Malfeans. Every Nephwrack that sets its compass on personal divinity travels the road towards that dark apotheosis with an ever-growing congregation of followers. Some of these cults are particularly infamous, their names known even to rank-and-file members of the Hierarchy.

The Diligent Blossoms

The Diligent Blossoms is the name given to the cult of Rabark the Inhabited. The cultists have no name for themselves, since many of them are so dominated by Rabark as to have lost self-awareness. Also called The Tree That Blossoms Inward, Rabark is the rarest of all evils: an active Neverborn.

Best described as a state of being that creeps slowly across the Labyrinth, Rabark's form imprints itself over and grows to cover already-existing sections of tunnel. Thick-veined, spongy, rotten wood composes the majority of Rabark's form. Through it and ahead of it swarm teams of Doppelganger and Mortwright workers, led by Nephwrack savants and protected by Shade warriors. Rabark's main source of sustenance is the Angst and emotion invested in

lending shape to sections of the Labyrinth, and its creeping passage leaves nothing but the bare, dull black stone of the Labyrinth behind it.

The Diligent Blossoms prepare areas for Rabark's arrival. Foraging parties of Blossoms roam ahead and to the sides of their Master, demolishing obstacles and gathering captives to supplement Rabark's diet of shape and memory. Captives and other loose objects are stuffed into the great, twisted white blooms that sprout in waving masses throughout the tunnels and give Rabark its epithet.

Spectres are not the only members of the Diligent Blossoms. Many different sorts of Shadowed Plasmic have also come to live in symbiosis with Rabark's form. Many are tiny, mindless creatures. Those intelligent enough to be dominated by The Tree That Blossoms Inward and large enough to be useful servants work side-by-side with Spectres to tend to Rabark's needs.

Within the Labyrinth, Rabark is a great scourge. Like a mass of army ants, it and its Diligent Blossom servants proceed over and through all obstacles. The horror of Rabark's existence only impinges on the Shadowlands during those periods when The Tree That Blossoms Inward travels through regions largely or wholly devoid of shape and inhabitants. During these lean times, Rabark grows long, hollow roots that reach up through the Labyrinth to the Tempest, and from there tear Nihils into the Shadowlands. Out of the hollow roots pour Maelstrom winds, released from their storage in great hollows deep within Rabark's form. The Diligent Blossoms also pour forth as well, intent on carrying off anything possessing even a scrap of Pathos or imbued with the tiniest spark of memory. The Blossoms can strip a large confluence of its relics and inhabitants in less than an hour, and are much-dreaded as a result.

The Blossoms are very informal in their worship of Rabark. Since they live in constant spiritual commune with the Tree That Blossoms Inward, there are no ceremonies in its veneration. Every day and in every way, the servants of Rabark the Inhabited labor to support and increase their master. So devoted are they that they will carry their maimed and wounded on their backs to end their existence in the beds of flowers which give Rabark its sustenance.

The Words of Silence

The Words of Silence are a group of Barrow-Spectres who follow the Onceborn Elasheb the Eyeless, also called the Wordless One. Active for Barrow-Spectres, the Words believe that words are the greatest offense against Oblivion, since they carry and renew ideas and memories. Following the last commands of their master (who has chosen not to communicate for several centuries), they carry a war of silence into the corridors of the Labyrinth and the Tempest. The Words communicate exclusively via Hive-mind, and Moliat their mouths away so that they will make no noises through accident or shock.

Teams of Quieters, Word of Silence assassins and strongmen, lurk hidden and motionless for years or even decades at a time in the great stretches of territory the cult nominally claims. Attacking from ambush, the Words use specially designed soundproof bags and padded clubs to destroy or subdue their victims. Those they capture are Moliated into muteness and taken to the Quiet Places deep in the Words' territory, where they are subjected to the sleeping thoughts of Elasheb until they come to acknowledge the wisdom of the Wordless One.


The Words of Silence are best known in the Shadowlands for their habit of Byway ambush and their incredible loathing for Chanteurs. Their domain has many secret passages into the depths of the Tempest, and Quieters often worm their way up to lurk in the Tempest-glare. There they wait with bolo, sack and padded club for incautious travelers who have the misfortune to whistle, sing, talk or hum to themselves as they travel through the endless storm. These too are kidnapped and taken to the soundless regions deep within the Labyrinth, where they are taught the value of silence.

Chanteurs successful enough that their fame and name have filtered down into the depths of the Labyrinth must always be wary of the specially trained Stifled Shouts, a tiny but superlatively trained team of kidnappers who are the only Words of Silence who speak for any reason. Masterful infiltrators said to possess Artifacts that allow them to move in total silence, the Shouts delight in kidnapping and silencing famed Chanteurs.

The Brotherhood of Broken Dreams

The Brotherhood is an organization of former Sandmen who have become Shadow-eaten. Unlike most Malfean cults, the Brotherhood operates primarily in the Skinlands. Bringers of insanity to the Quick through dreams, they believe that their Lord, Mallus the Faceless, lives within the jagged, sketchy hallucinations of deteriorated schizophrenics, and walks in the dreamless dark of traumatic comas. The primitive practices of Dopplering and Terrorizing are favored by some members of the Brotherhood, but a combination of Phantasm and the Dark Arcanos Shroud-Rending is considered to produce a sort of





madness much more suitable for their master's inhabitation.

Some metaphysicians of the Dead argue that Mallus could not exist outside the Labyrinth, and is some other sort of being entirely. Others, particularly Sandmen, believe that Mallus is a hallucination of those who spend too long in these alien dreams, and who are themselves mad to begin with. Whether Mallus himself is a hallucination, demon or Malfean, his Brotherhood of fallen Sandmen is real, and as hated by the Sandmen as the Collectors. Generally the only reason a member of the Brotherhood who falls into the hands of Sandmen survives more than a few minutes is if the Sandmen have a pressing need to practice their interrogation skills.

The Mysticism of Oblivion

Even within the Labyrinth, where schools of thought are states of being, there are those whose beliefs can be said to possess a more nondenominational or ecumenical character. Nephwracks of a mystical bent, skilled practitioners of the Arcanoi who make a perilous living as freelance artists, Circles of unaligned Spectres, the enigmatic Pasiphae and a variety of others make a marginal existence independent of the Hive-Mind's sectarian divisions.

Some of these creatures, like the Pasiphae and feral Shades (if the latter can be said to worship) give their sole devotions to Oblivion itself in all its magnificent wretchedness. Others tend to see the Neverborn as the true divinities of the Labyrinth, only slightly below Oblivion itself in stature. In terms of the respect owed them, the Malfeans are considered by these Spectres to be Oblivion's physical avatars. While the Neverborn are inherently flawed by virtue of their existence, these dreaming beasts exist in closer attunement to the wishes of Oblivion than any mortal could ever dream to. Both those who worship Oblivion itself and those who worship the Neverborn regard the Oncelived as powerful and extremely dangerous beings who have appointed themselves godlings not by divine right, but instead out of hubris and ignorance.

Spirituality in Play

The most obvious adventure possibility for incorporating the spirituality of the Labyrinth into play is, of course, to have the characters be newborn Mortwights and Doppelgangers, and to follow their progress through the stages of Apparition and Nephwrack as they aspire to Onceborn status. This can be a compelling story, but it's also a little predictable, and in the end the characters may well turn on each other in the struggle for power and worshippers. Below are some other suggestions for integrating the worship of Oblivion into your chronicles.

• Defenders Against Heresy

The ideal characters for this chronicle consist of Doppelgangers, Mortwights and at least one Apparition, who find out through dreams and portents that the Nephwrack high priest of their slumbering Onceborn master has been misportraying the Malfean's wishes to his faithful. Rather than passing along the Malfean's true words and feeding him the specially prepared sacrifices, she has been fabricating them and devouring the captive Restless herself. Soon, she plans to murder her master and take his place as the object of the faithful's worship. Depending on the tone the Circle enjoys, this can be a head-smashing good time of a story, or a chronicle full of political intrigue and betrayal.

• Missionaries

The characters are missionaries of Oblivion. They might be an Apparition and his assistants trying to form an Oblivion cult in the Skinlands, or missionaries in a Renegade or Heretic Necropolis. The former can be an interesting extension of Haunter-type chronicles, where characters spend their time scurrying around trying to jimmy events in the Skinlands to their benefit. The second makes for a good spy story, with lots of suspense.

Blackmail, Byzantine political manipulations, arranged Harrowings, destruction of Fetters — anything goes as characters try to make converts and corrupt the community from within while blunting the efforts of those who would oppose them. Don't forget to spice things up by injecting servants of other Malfeans eager to steal the characters' budding congregation and Hierarchy troops and agents on guard for violations of the *Dictum Mortuum*.

• A Diet of Worms

Characters are priests and theologians of a Onceborn that has decided to forge an alliance or peace treaty with one of its rivals. They must meet in conference with delegates of the other Malfean in order to work out compromises between their masters' doctrines that will allow the two warring camps to join forces, or at least cease their conflict. The characters should be Nephwracks and Apparitions and possibly their high-status Doppelganger aides or Shade bodyguards.

Stories can focus around the Byzantine politics of the negotiations, both between the camps and within them, as well as on the actions of interested third parties. There is also, of course, the intense mental challenge of harmonizing the doctrines of two opposing factions so that neither side's beliefs are compromised while still giving the Spectres justification to work together and betray each other on the flimsiest of pretexts.

• Visionary Pilgrims

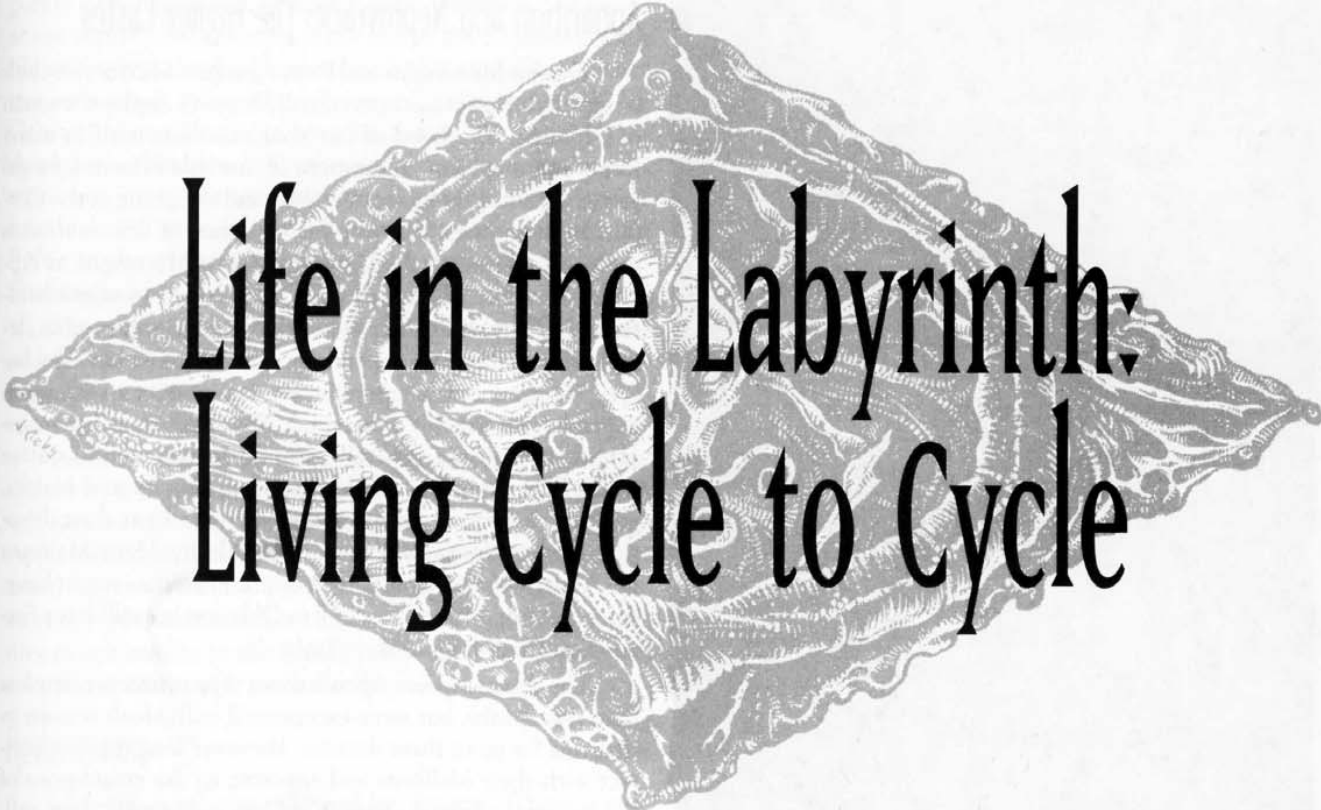
The Visionary Pilgrims chronicle serves well as a chapter in a story about growth and power, or as a short chronicle complete unto itself. The characters take the role of Spec-

tre pilgrims intent on making a journey to the Mouth of the Void, there to witness the cold splendor of Oblivion and visit the resting places of the Neverborn. The chronicle may end with the characters tossing themselves into the Mouth, being Redeemed by the prospect of utter destruction, or else simply traveling back to the outer levels of the Labyrinth.

Characters might also be traveling to the Mouth seeking the Blessing of the Neverborn, a charnel consecration said to be laid on those who are destined to become the champions of Oblivion. Whether the Blessing even exists, what it does, and whether or not the characters are worthy of it are all up to the Storyteller.







Life in the Labyrinth: Living Cycle to Cycle

The Life Cycle of the Shadow-eaten.

Mortwight and Doppelganger, Shade and Haint:
The Lower Castes



The life of every one of the Shadow-eaten begins with trauma. For a Doppelganger, this is the agony or hatred or despair of the final Harrowing or Catharsis that brings the Shadow into permanent ascendance. For a Shade, the last feelings

of the conscious mind are despondency and torment as the Maelstrom winds strip away sentience and personality. For the Mortwights and Haints, it is the simple trauma of a death that is so painful or that terminates a life so bleak that they cross the Shroud in a cocoon rather than a Caul, Shadow already dominant.

Shades and Haints hold a special place in the Labyrinth as warriors. Their physical power makes them prized as soldiers by

the Shadow-eaten, but their lack of intelligence generally limits their potential for advancement. They generally have a short, brutal, glorious existence unmarred by thought. Incorrigibly animalistic, Shades and Haints are generally run in packs by an Apparition handler in even the most stringently disciplined of cults. While the alphas of some feral packs have reached Hekatonkhire status, the average Shade or Haint is unlikely to survive much more than a year before becoming a casualty of battle or an intrapack dispute. Many don't even last that long.

The existence of a Doppelganger or a Mortwight is equally burdensome. While they aren't thrust into battle with the astonishing regularity of the Shades, their existence is a difficult one nevertheless. These castes serve as servants, menial laborers, second-rate soldiers and bit actors in Harrowings.



Striplings: The Caste that isn't

The Striplings are often regarded as a separate caste in the Labyrinth. While Striplings have a unique place in the structure of the Labyrinth, it is more one that exists alongside the caste structure than within it. Children do not last long in the Shadowlands — most either almost fall to their Shadows or are soulforged. Those who come to the Labyrinth find its rituals and its devotions strange and unappealing. As a result, the Shadow-eaten children have banded together under their own rulers, and practice their own form of devotion to Oblivion. Striplings follow a simplified non-hierarchical caste structure that divides their society into three distinctly separate but equal groups. Mortwright and Doppelganger Striplings form one group, Haints and Spectres another and Apparitions and Nephwracks the third. These tribal groupings are all closely linked via the Hive-Mind, and tend toward group consensus rather than hierarchical decision-making. Castes define role, but status is granted by demonstrated ability.

There are a number of Malfeans who were originally Striplings, and most tribes of Striplings worship one of these. Other tribes worship Oblivion personified, either through the Neverborn or by offering their devotions to the Void itself. It is among the Striplings that some of the Labyrinth's most devoted mystics dwell.

The use of Doppelgangers as spies is seen as an easy way for Malfeans to rid themselves of these troublesome and useless minions. Mortwrights are held in ever lower regard than Doppelgangers by the Onceborn, primarily because of their general inability even to enter the Shadowlands as spies. Mortwrights who do not show appreciable talent for the Dark Arcanoi are usually soulforged or used as cannon fodder immediately, just to get them out from underfoot.

Most Doppelgangers and Mortwrights don't survive the three to five years generally required for the first desecrations of Oblivion to appear on their Corpora. Most are destroyed in the course of duty or as random punishment for their natural inferiority. Others lose their sense of Being and become Nothings, ending their existence as a product of the forges.

It takes Doppelgangers up to five years to begin to show the deformations that mark them as true and loyal servants of Oblivion and qualify them for advancement into the higher castes. The process of Oblivion-warping is closely linked to the Spectre's metaphysical proximity to Oblivion, so Spectres outside the Labyrinth can take much longer to decay. Mortwrights who spend most of their time in the Tempest may take five to nine years to show the indelible traces of Oblivion. Doppelgangers in the Skinlands who take the time to tend their Fetters may go unmarked for decades.

Apparition and Nephwrack: The Higher Castes

The few Mortwrights and Doppelgangers who survive their tenure in the lower castes eventually begin to display the touch of Oblivion. The hand of the Void manifests itself in many forms: running sores, infestations of insectile Plasmics, fungal growths, cancerous lumps or scaling and sloughing of the Corpus. In most cases, the very first instance of deformation is sufficient to elevate the Doppelganger or Mortwright to Apparition status. These lucky few are trained in administration, theology and tactics — to what degree, and to what degree of specialization, depends on the cult to which they belong. Training can take from a few days to over a year, again depending on the cult in question. After basic training is completed, Apparitions generally take on menial administrative tasks. This heading includes handling Shades and Haints, practice of Arcanoi, assisting the Nephwracks at their devotions and similar tasks of basic responsibility. Many Malfeans use Apparitions to handle any mortal cultists they might have, since the Apparitions are close to Oblivion but still have Fetters that bind them to the Skinlands.

The time a Spectre spends as an Apparition is often less than six months, but some exceptional individuals remain in that role for up to three decades. However long it takes, contact with their Malfeans and exposure to the emanations of the material of the Labyrinth do inevitably take their toll. About 50% of all Apparitions are destroyed in the course of their tenure. The remainder join the ranks of the Nephwracks.

The multiplication of deformities across the Nephwrack's Corpus are only the most visible sign of other, deeper changes. As Oblivion strengthens its foothold in the Shadow-eaten spirit of the Spectre, the Fetters which bound it to its mortal life fall away one by one. This decay has nothing to do with the condition of the Fetter in the Shadowlands, or its quality of maintenance — like the loss of the teeth after exposure to radiation, it is indicative of a growing inner illness.

Those Fetters which persist too long are generally torn away using the Lifeweb Arcanos because of the pain the attachment to the Shadowlands causes the Nephwrack. When the last Fetters are shed, the Spectre is considered a Nephwrack. In some more orthodox cults, the Apparition caste isn't recognized at all. These groups treat deformed Doppelgangers and Mortwrights as less useful even than the regular sort, and measure the Spectre's progress entirely by her shedding of her Fetters. These latter groups often develop complex hierarchies based on the number of Fetters each Nephwrack retains.

The End

Eventually, exposure to Oblivion, the Hive-mind and the demands of a Master's will causes a Spectre to lose its sense of Being. This, the dissolution of the kernel of dark emotions that make up the Spectre as an *individual* — the

purely personal hatred, obsessive need, ceaseless despair — at the center of the Spectre is the end of the Shadow-eaten's life cycle. It is the final surrender to Oblivion. Some Spectres who reach this point fall immediately into the Void. Others become Nothings, and are fed to the forges or reshaped for other uses. Still others destroy themselves or join with the Corpus of their Malfeans. Regardless of the means by which the state is reached, the failure of the Spectre's Being is the end of its functional existence among the Shadow-eaten.

The enduring inhabitants of the Labyrinth, the Coldhearts and the Onceborn, are the rarest of exceptions. Most Shadow-eaten fall into Oblivion within 20 years of their inception. The existence of the average Spectre is short, fast and brutal.

As mentioned above, a Shade that survives three years of activity is a rare sight. Of 100 Doppelgangers, less than 20 will survive the two or three years required to make them Apparitions. Of those who make it, fewer than 10 will graduate to Nephwrack status. For Mortwights, the attrition is even more severe because of their low status and lack of opportunity to acclimatize to the Shadowlands. Of 100 Mortwights, one, perhaps two, ever reach the Nephwrack caste.

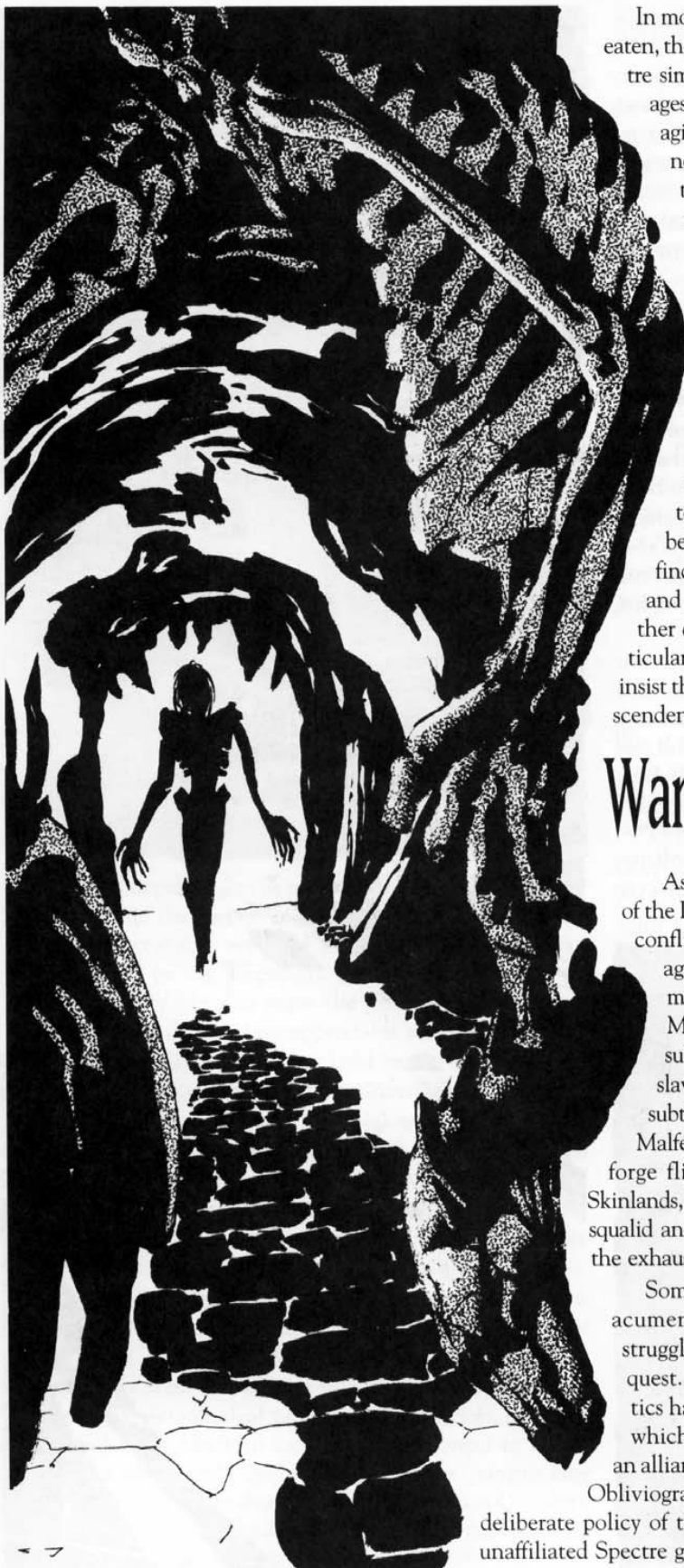
Redemption

Oblivion is not the only end for Spectres. There is still some hope for the Shadow-eaten, though without the pressure of their Psyches, most would instantly reject it. If the Psyche can reach 10 permanent Composure, then the Spectre may be Redeemed. This is a long, hard road, and Redemption of the Shadow-eaten is as rare or rarer than Transcendence among the Restless.

The Crisis of Being

When a Spectre spends its last point of Temporary Being to succeed at a task that doesn't concern its Being, or if it spends its last point of Temporary Being in a task which does concern its Being but fails, then there is a chance that the Spectre loses its Being and thus its will to exist. This is called a Crisis of Wills, and is the closest Spectral equivalent to a Harrowing. The Spectre and the Psyche make a standard Catharsis check, rolling the Spectre's Permanent Being versus the Psyche's Temporary Composure. If the Psyche succeeds, then the Spectre does not lose its last point of Temporary Being. If the Psyche fails, then the Spectre loses its desire to continue to exist. How this plays out is up to the Storyteller: It may fall into Oblivion, hunker down and wait to die, or destroy itself in some spectacular and immediate fashion (self-immolation in a barrow-flame has a certain charm). Whatever the case, the Spectre is no longer a playable character.





In most Redemptions, especially those of lower caste Shadow-eaten, the Psyche of the Spectre becomes dominant, and the Spectre simply becomes one of the Restless again. As the Spectre ages, this sort of Redemption becomes more and more damaging to the target. During the process, those sections of the newly reborn wraith's Corpus that are decayed or Oblivion-tainted are rejected. Even the most skillful Masquers cannot entirely conceal these scars, which serve to mark those who have once succumbed to Oblivion and since recovered. Spectres are particularly good at spotting the Redeemed, and reserve for them a special hatred rooted partly in envy and partly in contempt.

Generally, by the time a Spectre's last Fetters have decayed, there is no return to the Shadowlands and the society of the Restless for the newly-made Nephwrack. Even if its soul is Redeemed, the Spectre's Oblivion-ravaged Corpus dissolves entirely as it attempts to reject its very nature. Most Obliviographers believe that Spectres who are Redeemed in this fashion find the courage to embrace a wholly personal Oblivion, and pass into the Void willingly alone, without causing further damage to the Shadowlands or the Quick. Others, particularly members of the Pardoners and the Legion of Fate, insist that the surge of Pathos and positive emotions make Transcendence the likely final destination for these Redeemed souls.

Warfare

Aside from religion and worship, the predominant activity of the Labyrinth is warfare. There is much more to this constant conflict than the ongoing campaigns of the Shadow-eaten against the Underworld. Existence in the Labyrinth is marked by skirmishes between the forces of opposing Malfeans. Survival in the Labyrinth supports a constant subtext of furtive violence, of ambushes and opportunistic slaving. During the Kindled seasons (see page 92), the subtle struggles can become much more serious. Onceborn Malfeans, goaded to activity by the nagging of the Hive-Mind, forge flimsy alliances and make open war not only on the Skinlands, but on their nearest rivals as well. Many of these wars are squalid and disorganized affairs — tests of luck and numbers, and the exhausted victor usually falls to an opportunistic third party.

Some few Malfeans and Nephwracks gifted with military acumen have enjoyed great success in their internecine struggles, but the Labyrinth conspires against widespread conquest. The shifting nature of the maze's geography and politics has, until now, always led to would-be absolute rulers (of which the Labyrinth has a superabundance) falling afoul of an alliance that possesses overwhelmingly superior forces. Many Obliviographers argue that this eternal dog-eat-dog scenario is a deliberate policy of the Neverborn, and point to the continued success of unaffiliated Spectre generals like Ts'ao Ts'ao and Coldheart in this regard.

Military Forces

Military organization in the Labyrinth is for the most part nonexistent. Not only are complex functions like staffs, logistical support, forward planning and regularized officer training absent, basics like formalized battle-drill, uniform unit organizations, regular ranking procedures and equipment commonality are generally lacking at best. This leaves most military units as disorganized hordes or war bands capable of little more than charging at the enemy in an attempt to overwhelm him with shock and numbers.

The most common type of warrior in the Labyrinth is the Shade. These Spectres usually rely on their powers and sheer brute strength in hand-to-hand combat, since most of them no longer have the presence of mind to use anything but simple melee weapons or their hands and mouths. War bands of between five and 50 Shades are usually commanded by an Apparition or, in the case of elite units, an experienced Nephwrack. Since Shades often become excited and eat their handlers prior to battle, only truly expendable Apparitions are used as officers. This only exacerbates the situation, as competent small unit commanders generally don't fall into the "truly expendable" category. Even when Shade packs have competent handlers entering battle, the troops themselves are too often inept or suicidal.

If Spectral unit leadership and cooperation is poor, then inter-unit cooperation is worse. Relations between officers combine oneupsmanship, apathy and ineptitude in a potent mix. War bands forced to work together are generally led by a Nephwrack priest of high enough standing to harangue his officers into a semblance of cooperation. Still, discipline is poor, inter-unit communication worse and assassination of rival officers in many cases actively condoned. The armies of Oblivion win victories in spite of their organization, not through it or because of it.

Equippage

Most Shades and Haints go into battle unequipped except for their natural weaponry. Seven-foot-tall creatures that can variously exhale Oblivion, tear away Passions and rip armored wraiths in half with their claws simply don't need to carry knives. Those few who do carry weapons usually use simple ones. As a rule, Shades are enthusiastic about their work — clubs, maces, hammers, axes and chopping swords suit their approach. Other castes tend to rely on more conventional melee weapons. Swords are common in Spectral ranks, as are axes and clubs. Most weapons employed by Spectres are made from cut-rate Stygian steel. While the quality of this equipment is generally execrable, the fact that it exists at all makes fighting Spectres a dangerous chore, and makes battles in the Labyrinth even deadlier than they might be otherwise.

Weaponry and the Labyrinth


Spectre characters should be allowed to purchase Stygian steel weapons at the same cost as plain soulsteel ones, because of the ease with which Labyrinth material can be obtained by Spectral smiths in order to form alloys. Because of the lack of craftsmanship and the generally poor composition of the Spectral Corpus used in the forging process, however, the weapon should be assumed to break on a botch during combat. Sturdier weapons, or Stygian steel armor (which is rare in the Labyrinth), should be priced normally for Stygian steel equipment.

Firearms are fairly common in the Labyrinth, even if their actual usage isn't. While there are probably slightly fewer on a per-Spectre basis than exist among the Restless, far fewer see use as many Spectres discard the need for weapons (or simply don't understand them). Officers are generally heavily equipped with firearms, if only for protection against their hungry subordinates. Occasional bands of Doppelgangers or Mortwights are also armed thus. They're about the only ones, though.

Lack of ammunition and the poor visibility of the Tempest, Maelstroms and Labyrinth make Shades (and their straight-ahead tactics) even more effective than they might be otherwise, as these poor conditions limit the effectiveness and range of firearms fire. Even in the Shadowlands, numbers and shock action can and do carry determined units of Spectres into close combat with firearm-equipped opponents before the guns inflict unacceptable casualties. While the primitive tactics of the average Spectral army would be suicide in the open field, both geography and Arcanoi such as Argos ensure that there are almost no such straight-up battles in the Underworld.

The Exceptions

The Labyrinth, paradoxically, also produces a number of exceedingly fine military units, comparable to anything fielded by the Legions. Peculiarly, these units seem to have no allegiance at all, at least in terms of serving a Onceborn master of some sort. Each is led by a Nephwrack, and many are loosely affiliated with a number of Malfeans, from whom they draw resources. Others recruit openly, accepting refugees or Renegades from across the Shadowlands. The generals of these armies number among the finest soldiers ever to have walked among the Quick, and have retained their skills in the Underworld. While Cleitus the Black (better known as Coldheart), the "Charon of the Labyrinth," is the best known among them, he is far from alone. Bellisarius, al-Hajjaj and Ts'ao Ts'ao are also numbered in their ranks. History is often cruel to great generals, and there are no guarantees that justice will be served in the Underworld. For every military genius who serves the Legions, there is another who serves Oblivion.



Everything that has been said about the way of war within the Labyrinth is made a lie by these strategos' *strategoi*. Their troops are well-drilled and disciplined, their officers well-trained and intelligent and their plans are elegant, demonstrating their continued aptitude in military affairs. Why it is that these generals seem to hold an honored place within the Labyrinth is unknown. Most assume that they are a manifestation of the Hive-Mind's quest to deal with the problem of Existence in an efficient manner. Others point to the fact that most of the so-called Generals of Oblivion are rumored to have taken a pilgrimage to receive the Blessings of the Neverborn, and that al-Hajjaj and Coldheart are known to have done so. This school considers the Generals to be the personal servants of the Neverborn, and thus under their protection. The truth is genuinely a mystery — the Generals have fought wars and battles within the Labyrinth, both among themselves and with the troops of the various Onceborn. Some of them have been destroyed and their armies dispersed in these conflicts, so obviously the Blessing, if that is the source of their status, is by no means inviolable or foolproof.

Warfare in Play

Beyond providing an excuse for gratuitous combat to fill up blank time in the session, warfare both within and beyond the bounds of the Labyrinth can make for fascinating chronicle ideas.

The White Company

The characters are mercenary warriors who travel the Labyrinth, willing to join any fight for booty and Angst. Portraying a small and elite unit like this lets the characters break the bounds of the caste system, and the "floating" premise makes it good for Storytellers who want a lot of action and adventure without the overhead effort of serial plotting. While regular villains and employers may become features of the chronicle, the basic story needn't be anything more than episodic. This week, the protagonists fight against hopeless odds, next week, they explore a lost temple in search of Artifacts. Also, making the unit the core of the game lets groups that suffer from a lot of occasional players carry on a continuing chronicle, and allows the Storyteller to inflict realistic levels of fatalities on the players without destroying the chronicle.

Slavers in a Strange Land

Characters are part of a Spectre gang that specializes in slaving. What kind of slaving is up to the Storyteller and the players to decide — the gang might capture wraiths in the Shadowlands, Spectres in the Labyrinth or hunt for both in the Tempest. They may work for a Onceborn Malfean, or be led by an independent Nephwrack. The Thralls may be sold at independent, Renegade or Heretic Necropoli in the Skinlands or (more probably) to various cults within the Labyrinth looking for converts, forge-fodder or menial labor.

This chronicle can make an interesting game with a nice mix of conflict, politics and business challenge, as the characters have to capture prisoners and find a place to stay in business, all without falling victim to Stygian or Malfean quick-response forces or the cut-throat competition of the Labyrinthine slave-trade. It can also be very hard on the players if they have problems dealing with the idea of being a band of vicious slavers, so your Storyteller should be sure that everyone in the chronicle is comfortable with the subject matter.


Lives for the Master

In the Lives for the Master chronicle, the characters are the last remaining servants of a Malfean who was destroyed just prior to the beginning of the game. Now, nothing remains between the characters and Oblivion but the desire to avenge their godlike master's destruction. This is a good chronicle for players interested in espionage, backstabbing and politics, as they can join forces with the enemies of their enemies, sow dissent in the court of their foes, and otherwise indulge a weakness for political mayhem.

Romance of the Five Malfeans

The characters are the most trusted servants of a Malfean who believes he can unite the Labyrinth under one banner. Players take the part of Nephwrack generals or priests, Shade champions, Doppelganger spymasters and Mortwright or Stripling revolutionaries converted to the Onceborn's cause. This makes for an exciting, high-powered chronicle with lots of political fun and excitement. The group must remain cohesive while directing its coordinating efforts in both the Labyrinth and the Skinlands. The chronicle involves complex tasks like maintaining espionage rings, staging political coups, training armies and conducting theological crusades.

Leisure



Not all of a Spectre's time in the Labyrinth is spent in meditation on the spirituality of Oblivion or engaged actively in supporting her master. Even the most Kindle-spirited of Spectres sometimes turns away from his task to while away a few of the hours on the road to his extinction. As among the Quick, the means by which the Shadow-eaten pass the time are as varied as the Spectre in question. Sports are common, as are various expressive forms. There are of course many variations on the diversions listed below, and many more that cannot be described in the space available. Let your darkest imaginings be your guide in determining the nature of the amusements that distract the self-destructive, jaded flotsam of the Labyrinth from their labors and their plight.



Art

Just as the Shadowlands or the world of the Quick do, the Labyrinth teems with those who wish to express their feelings and emotions through any number of media (and occasionally Mediums). Most of these self-proclaimed artists are terribly uncreative, relying on trite, blunt forms like mutilation (both of the self and of others) or featureless black paintings, sometimes with hints of starving masses, burning children or other trappings of suffering. Often, in the latter cases, the canvases are able to change their images, or recite words with depressing connotations, or have simply been lobotomized and wounded and left to scream.

Whatever the case, the legions of the Shadow-eaten seethe with the desire to be understood, and burn with the desire that the world *encompass their experience*. If the sentiment is perhaps unoriginal, its practitioners are at least sincere. The Labyrinth boils with the composers of calligraphic tragedies, Chanteurs bewailing the death of the soul, actors in the universal tragedy, sculptors in media best forgotten, architects of the heart's agonies and more. Each cries out to the viewer to understand and experience in her heart the cold, pounding hunger of the condition of the Shadow-eaten.

Many Spectral artists work in their media purely for the sake of the expression, of the art. Others have commercial intentions. This latter group works, either in a directed or undirected fashion, under the patronage of some Malfean or Nephwrack. From these latter artists are drawn the detritus-arrangers, the mural painters and the architect-sculptors who help make the temples and residences of the Onceborn the tributes to Oblivion-in-progress that they are.

An art-centered chronicle works well to emphasize the personal, spiritual side of Oblivion without the religious trappings of a spiritual chronicle. This makes it ideal for groups whose players find religion in general, or the worship of personified nihilistic principles in particular, difficult to accept in their games. In such chronicles, Shades and Haints are probably out unless the Circle is extremely accepting of primal expression or the Spectre in question is rather exceptional for its caste. Nephwracks and Apparitions are ideal, though either as patrons or artists, for art-centered chronicles.

The Shock Factory

Most chronicles centered around art and artists focus on a group of artists, either all working in the same group medium (like a Harrowing Gang or Pageant Troupe) or working in the same or different individual media. Stories center around interpersonal relations between the artists, the rise and fall of careers and the tensions implicit in their professional relationship. This doesn't have to be a game centered entirely around talking — the media the artists work in could be anything from sculpture to lethal hauntings, allowing whatever degree of action the Troupe wants to be injected into the game.

Sports


The sport of the Labyrinth is predictably violent. Single, team and melee style gladiatorial combats between all possible combinations of Restless, Plasmics and Shadow-eaten are wildly popular. Hunting games are also popular, either as spectator sports or as participatory events in roughly demarcated sections of the Labyrinth. Team games in the style of *buz kashi* (Afghani polo) and *tlachtli* (Aztec jai alai) also have a certain degree of popularity, though they're generally played in the courts of the most powerful of the Onceborn, who have the sheer number of followers required to field teams. Most sports are strictly intramural, played within the armies of a particular Malfean. There are some very few sports leagues between allied Onceborn, but few alliances last long enough for participants to agree on a playing field, much less organize a sports league. Sport is also sometimes agreed upon as a means of settling disputes when two of the Onceborn have larger fish to fry and need to end a dispute quickly so they can look after more pressing concerns.

Like art or spirituality-centered chronicles, sport-centered games allow players to savor the particular feel of roleplaying in the Labyrinth without the threat of constant warfare. Unlike art or spirituality-centered games, however, sports still provide physical challenge, just of a more formalized nature. Shades have a place in the sports of the Labyrinth, other than as bodyguards of other characters, and social and political interaction don't completely dominate play.

Maelstroms

The fluctuation between Barrow and Kindling seasons expels huge quantities of Oblivion-tainted matter from the countless passages and chambers that make up the Labyrinth. This effluvium is made up of Angstblack, bits of decayed Corpus, and slushy plasm — all of it laden with the entropic essence of Oblivion. This alone makes Maelstroms dangerous to the Shadowlands, to say nothing of their hazard to Helldivers caught in their winds.

What makes Maelstroms truly lethal, however, are the Spectral flotsam and jetsam expelled with the Labyrinth's trash. The changes of Oblivion's season are marked by the expulsion of influences in opposition to the new prevailing order. Most of the expelled material is simply loose detritus of the wrong composition — but not all. Most Spectres suddenly trapped in sections of the Labyrinth where they truly don't belong are simply swallowed by the walls. There they sleep and dream the dreams of the damned until, in another cycle — or 10, or 100 — the barriers that hold them back melt away, and they are released to stalk the corridors once again.



Not all Spectres caught in the storm winds suffer this fate, however. Many Spectres are expelled from the Labyrinth as part of the detritus of each storm. Rejected by the Hive-Mind, enraged and unable to return to the Labyrinth, they wash across the face of the Underworld like choking smoke. Sometimes these expulsions are minor matter of tens or hundreds of Spectres. Like squalls, these little Maelstroms rage across the Underworld for a few hours, then subside. Other Maelstroms are larger, sometimes lasting for years, and tens or hundreds of thousands of Spectres can ride their winds. Regardless, eventually the wind dies, and those Spectres who survive the gale drift or are dragged into the Tempest, there to pass the time engaging in the petty brutalities of Byway robbery and slaving until the tides of the Labyrinth change enough to permit their return.

Maelstroms are the horror of Helldivers. There is a desperate search for shelter as compasses begin spinning wildly and the endless shrieks and moans of the Labyrinth are lost under the howl of the rising winds. Being crushed by suddenly shifting walls or impaled by emergent fortresses of bone is the least of the Helldiver's worries. Tight passages channel the storm-winds, making even the weakest Maelstroms frighteningly powerful — between Levels Three and Five, depending on conditions. Worse, Spectres aren't damaged by the Oblivion-tainted winds, and being hit by a storm-borne Shade tumbling along at 100 miles an hour can be a memorable experience.

Malestroms and Spectres

Expulsion from the Labyrinth is a traumatic experience for a Spectre, even if the rest of its Circle or cult goes into exile with it. Spectres forcibly expelled from the Labyrinth go up to 10 Angst automatically as they're ripped out of their accustomed place in the Hive-Mind and catapulted into the Underworld above. Spectres cast out as jetsam also become highly susceptible to Rapacity. The difficulty of the Being roll to resist Emoting is 8, rather than the usual 6. Expelled Spectres can *in theory* return to the Labyrinth within (at most) a few days of the Maelstrom. Competition for space makes this more difficult than it seems, however, especially for Spectres expelled as a group. The whole process of seizing and securing new turf can take a long time if the region of the Labyrinth where the Shadow-eaten finally come to rest is already densely populated. This period of dislocation is made doubly dangerous by the propensity of Stygian commanders to make sweeps of the Tempest just after moderate Maelstroms, looking for decimated or disorganized groups of Spectres to mop up.

Harrowings

For what we are about to receive, may the Good Lord let us be thankful.

— Traditional prayer of soldiers about to receive artillery

There were lots of people all around me, lots of adults. Mom and Dad and teachers and policemen. And kids like me, too. Girls and boys and older kids. They were all laughing and pointing at me, and there were hundreds, more than I could count of them, and some of them had TV cameras and I could see myself on these big screens like they have at the stadium. And they were all laughing at me and pointing and even though I tried to hide it and say it wasn't mine, they still kept calling me a girl and I tried to tell them that I didn't play with dolls, that it was just my sister's and I loved her but everyone kept laughing at me and telling me only girls played with dolls and I tried to pet my dog who was there too but he just snapped at me and I fell down and started to cry and wished so hard that I'd never even been born.

To Harrow, to pose the question of dissolution or continuance, is the original function of the Spectre and the Labyrinth, and it enforces an imperative from which there is no distraction. When a wraith falls into a Harrowing, the Labyrinth prepares for her by waking and summoning those needed for the services soon to be rendered. Defying the summons to a Harrowing is only possible for Spectres with the Hive-mind ••••• art (Strength of Will), who must still spend a point of temporary Being and make a successful Being roll (difficulty 8) to do so. Generally, this is not a problem — sufficient Harrowing Gangs are usually standing by to receive visitors that the Labyrinth doesn't have to induct Spectres whose intentions lie elsewhere. That doesn't mean it doesn't happen, just that it isn't particularly common.

Even those Spectres whose strength of will is great enough that they can exempt themselves from the festivities are still compelled to respect the metaphysical niceties of the ceremony. There must be a solution, and the Restless cannot generally be Harrowed more than once on any given trip to the Labyrinth (though this isn't *always* the case). Only during the height of the Kindle-season can even the strongest of the Oncelived step beyond the bounds of the Harrowing and actually molest the Restless who find themselves their playthings.

The call to the Harrowing automatically brings forth at least one Spectre with the Art Carve the Chaos (Tempest-Weaving •••••) if one is not already present. Generally, the Labyrinth's somewhat fuzzy relationship with time and space means that Spectres have had a chance to gather and perhaps even rehearse as the wraith tumbles towards them like a meteor. Regardless, the Spectres automatically understand the Harrowing's quarry and the Passions, personality and history of the wraith in question from speed-of-thought discussions with the incoming wraith's Shadow. From this material, they scramble to improvise the Harrowing's structure, choose among their available props, prepare the set with Carve the Chaos and then act out the drama when the victim arrives.

Harrowings and Tempest-Weaving

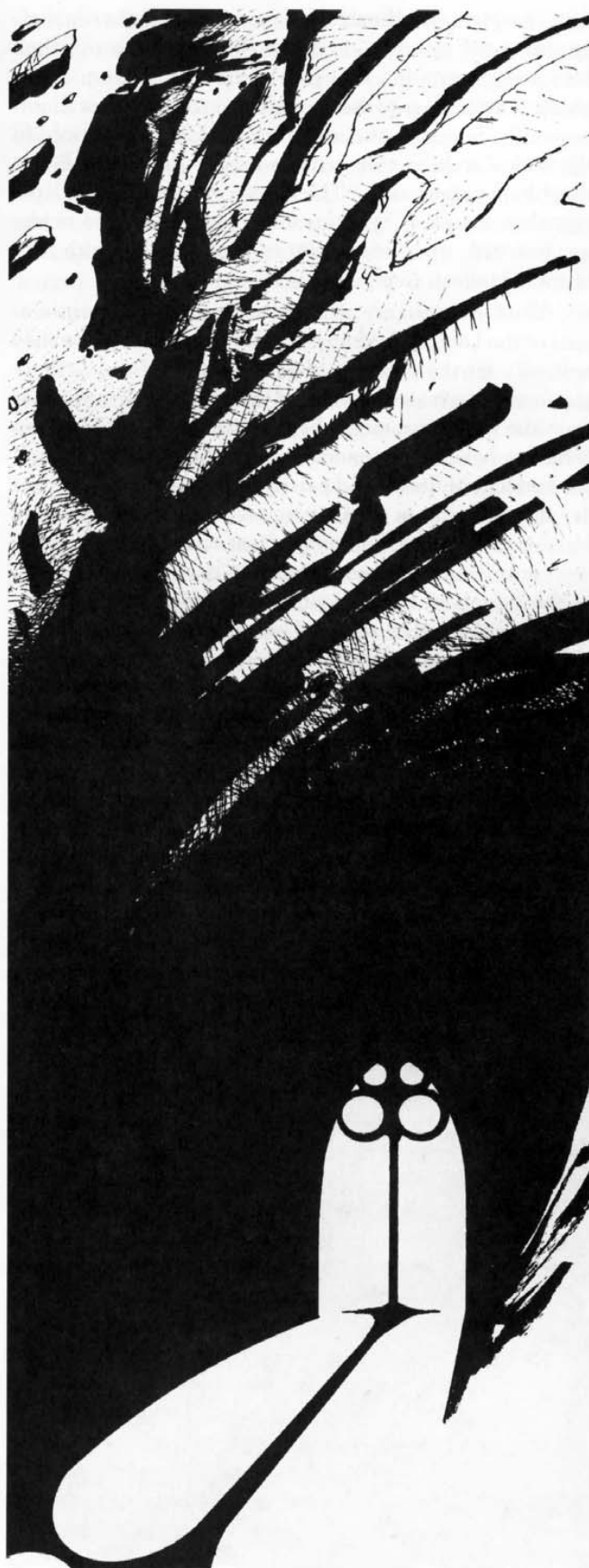
While Tempest-Weaving has a multitude of uses, preparing the settings of Harrowings is the primary purpose of this Dark Arcanos. When a Spectre is preparing for a Harrowing by gathering props or constructing a set with Carve the Chaos, the difficulties of all Tempest-Weaving rolls are decreased by 3 (minimum difficulty 4). A Spectre using Tempest-Weaving to prepare a set for a Harrowing or to gather props cannot gain points of Composure during the process, even from a botch.


It must be emphasized that Harrowings are lent an essentially dreamlike character by their metaphysical nature. The power of the Harrowing fills in the blanks, turning a Nephwrack with a cigar into the wraith's abusive father, and a vulpine with a matted fur coat draped over its shoulders into a beloved childhood pet. Things that would seem foolish or implausible outside the context of a dream seem natural. In fact, the Arcanos Phantasm can be, and often is used in the course of Harrowings, and a Harrowing Gang is just not complete without an ex-Sandman.

Interacting with a Harrowing as anything but an actor or its subject violates the integrity of the Harrowing. Spectres cannot do this — they either participate as actors or not as all, because those are the rules of the Labyrinth. Helldiving wraiths can choose to disrupt the sanctity of the ritual, however, and if a Harrowing is interrupted by outsiders, all bets are effectively off. While the interlopers might be able to save a wraith from losing his Fetters, they're going to have to fight their way out, and the refugee party now includes the wraith whose Harrowing was disrupted. Restless don't automatically snap back to a Fetter if a Harrowing is ended by outside forces.

Slumber

The Restless Slumber in their Fetters, but many of the Shadow-eaten no longer have Fetters, or have no inclination to visit them. For these Spectres, the walls of the Labyrinth are home and bed, and it is in the dark and frigid space between the passages that they dwell. During the short passive downbeats in even the most active Kindle-season, the inhabitants of the Labyrinth Slumber. Their sleep is an uncertain thing, not at all the merciful respite from consciousness that the Restless experience. It is a time full of the Hive-Mind's dark imagery and the painful touch of Oblivion. At the peaks of the active periods, if it can sleep at all, a Spectre may Slumber for only a few hours, then wake completely refreshed. On the other hand, a Spectre caught in a Barrow-pocket may pass into the darkness, unknown and unknowing, for centuries. Wise Spectres do not slumber in an unfamiliar section of the Labyrinth.





The Hive-Mind and the cycles of the Labyrinth often bring the erratic lives of the Shadow-eaten together. Minds that exist in close proximity tend to form meta-physical attachments that bring them to awareness simultaneously. Spectres who are often in close association, in the same Circle or cult, tend to awaken from Slumber at roughly the same time. The cycles of activity and lethargy that a pack of Spectres undergoes tend to coincide, not just with those of the rest of the pack, but with that of their Malfean overlord as well.

The Onceborn are as much subject to the storm-seasons of the Labyrinth as any Spectre they rule. While they normally set the regimen of activity around them, there are changes in seasons, cycles of lethargy and activity, that even the Onceborn must obey. These cycles of Onceborn behavior have a tremendous impact on the area around the budding Malfean, and particularly on the Spectres under their dominion. As an example, the Onceborn called Mountainstorm the Ablaze was most active approximately five centuries ago. It commanded an entire kingdom deep in the bowels of the Labyrinth, and its flame-eyed minions brought terror to the Underworld and Labyrinth alike. Yet Mountainstorm guttered and slipped into a torporous Slumber some four and a half centuries. Helldivers who have made their way to Mountainstorm's kingdom report it empty, the flames frozen and glowing like red and amber icicles. In some cases, they reported that sympathetic Slumber had set upon Mountainstorm's followers so quickly that in some cases, sections of their Corpora still protruded from the walls of the buildings and corridors of the Burning Kingdom.

Slumber and Spectres

Spectres regain all Corpus Levels not permanently lost and return to 10 Angst whenever they Slumber *within the walls of the Labyrinth*. Spectres with Fetters can Slumber in those in precisely the same manner as one of the Restless. Spectres Slumbering within the Labyrinth do not awaken from Slumber according to their own schedule, but instead according to the schedule of the Labyrinth. Because of this, most Spectres tend to avoid Slumber. Also, Spectres can be driven to Slumber by radical changes in their psychic environment, for example, by entering a zone of passive emotion. Helldivers almost never see Slumbering Spectres, unless they happen to be in the Labyrinth during a change of season. On the other hand, Doomslayer characters who duck out of rising Maelstrom winds into an empty room might suddenly find the room to be far less empty than they originally imagined.

Outside The Labyrinth

War


Other than Harrowings, the context most wraiths encounter Spectres in is as warriors of Oblivion, devoted to tearing down all the barriers that separate the living from the Dead, and Oblivion from the Skinlands.

Spectres most often make war on the Skinlands in the name of simple destruction. Hordes of Spectres displaced from the Labyrinth and packs of feral Shades ride Maelstrom winds to rip and tear through the cities of the Restless. Most of these displaced warriors are disoriented and charged with Angst by their recent separation from their accustomed place in the Hive-Mind. They make war upon the Shadowlands, destroying what they can and sending those unable to find cover screaming into Harrowings. While the strategy is less than elegant, it does have a certain straightforward efficiency, especially when many Shades can chew through soulsteel if given time to do so.

Not all those Spectres who travel the Underworld during the Maelstroms are like maddened beasts, but most are. Nine times in 10, the enemies who strike at a Necropolis are driven by pain and anger, and are less intelligent than they are cunning like starving animals. But once in a very long while, the invaders are the disciplined army of some Onceborn warlord or General of Oblivion, striking out against the Shadowlands or the other Dark Kingdoms under the cover of his frenzied brethren. These are the attacks that leave a Citadel empty save for flickering barrow-flame and shattered Artifacts. Most of these attacks are well-coordinated slave-taking or smash-and-burn raids involving distractions, fifth columnists, tactical thinking and all the other trappings of organized military operations. Executing these sorts of operations successfully is a matter of great prestige within the Labyrinth (as well as a source of scarce resources) and so military officers are greatly prized as servants by the Onceborn — if they don't overstep their bounds. Most Spectral armies are too disorganized to benefit much from even truly inspired leadership, and most of the better class of officers gravitate towards the service of the Generals. Even so, most Onceborn of note can at least *plan* elegant operations, though such strategies often fail badly (or at least fail badly at elegance) when executed.

Espionage

Going hand-in-hand with warfare, the infiltration of Restless society by Spectres is the most obvious form of interaction between the inhabitants of the Labyrinth and those who dwell outside it. In most places, Spectres must operate under false pretenses, masquerading as Restless. Most of these



unheralded Spectral emissaries are caught and destroyed. A very small percentage are not. Of those who survive, most content themselves with opening gates from the inside during Maelstroms, or with leading wraiths into ambush while posing as guides to the Tempest. The tiny handful who remain are deep-penetration agents who spend decades infiltrating the society of the Restless to gain intelligence information and encourage the Restless toward actions and ideologies more in line with the interests of Oblivion.

In places where Stygian power is weak, as in Renegade or Heretic Necropoli or on the outskirts of Stygia, Spectres need not go veiled, but can practice their trade openly. Doppelgangers and Mortwights are used for this duty, as they're more attractive than the Apparitions and Nephwracks, and much less likely to eat potential proselytes than the Shades, Striplings or Haints. These embassies of the Shadow-eaten perform all the regular functions of Doppelganger agents, but also serve as support bases for agents in operation in Stygian society and as distribution centers for Spectral propaganda. With some notable exceptions, these recruiting centers for Oblivion rarely endure — like all malignant cancers, they rapidly consume the host if left to grow.

Business and Mercantilism

If you ask anyone in Stygia, they'll tell you that nobody has any dealings with the Spectres, ever, under any circumstances, except to grant them Nhudri's Embrace, and then the mercy of the forges. They'll also tell you that the Guilds don't exist, that there's no such thing as Transcendence, and if you look enough like a member of the Unlidded Eye, they'll tell you the Deathlords are some of the most honest and upright spirits to ever walk the Underworld. Lies come as easily to the Dead as to the living.

There is a great deal more commerce between Stygia and the Labyrinth than anyone would like to admit. Everyone does it a little, and assumes they're alone in their sins. Spectres can provide some of the most prized goods in the Underworld, like soulfire crystals at far better prices than the Hierarchy firms with a monopoly on legitimate sales. While things manufactured under contract from the Hierarchy need to use (or at least seem to use) legitimate suppliers, the Renegades and Heretics are likely to go for the best price when fueling souled firearms.

Soulfire isn't the only thing that comes out of the Labyrinth. Spectres travel far and wide in the Underworld, and goods from other Dark Kingdoms wash up naturally in the Labyrinth as the detritus of Helldiving expeditions and Harrowings. As a result, people with Spectral connections can get even the most exotic goods at affordable prices. The Tempest also gives up its gifts to the Shadow-eaten much more

easily than to the Restless. Things thought lost forever in the Sea of Shadows can be found again, if the wraith is willing to pay the price. Also, unusual items and Plasmics dredged from the Tempest have a market value to a Spectre seeking Shadowlands lucre for whatever reason.

Spectres sell not only goods, but themselves as well. There might not be a huge market in the Shadowlands for practitioners of Hive-mind, but not even the fates meted out by the Arrangers of the Masquer's Guild are as painful as being dragged down a Nihil by a pack of Shades. Only the mad would think to strike such a deal with the Shadow-eaten, but the Shadowlands are full of the mad and the driven.

On their side of the balance, Spectres have any number of reasons to indulge in this odd capitalism. Some are simply so inculcated with the philosophy of mercantilism that they still go numbly through the empty motions of buying, selling and amassing wealth. Others do it to sow discord in the Shadowlands, or to build up funds to support networks of Doppelganger agents operating in the Hierarchy. Some hope to gain an edge in the Oblivion War, selling intelligence about their rivals to Helldivers and Doomslayers. Some philosophical Spectres (thankfully rare, the Labyrinth does not encourage forward-thinking planners) even see the establishment of commerce between the Labyrinth and the Underworld to be essential in the wearing down of the perceived differences between wraith and Spectre, Shadow and Psyche.

Personal Reasons

The last, but far from the least common, of the reasons for Spectres to interact with the world outside the Labyrinth is to take care of purely personal reasons. Once, each and every one of the Shadow-eaten walked among the Quick, and had a life full of loves and losses, success and failure. The Shadow-eaten remember this, even if they wish to forget. Just like the Restless, many denizens of the Labyrinth have Fetters and tend to them. Some are simple-mindedly direct in their methods, while others savor long agonies and carefully engineered failures.

This tending-to is generally of interest only to the Quick and those of the Restless who have the misfortune to share Fetters with a Spectre. While Spectral tending of Fetters is in theory a violation of the *Dictum Mortuum*, it is a difficult crime to prosecute. Informants, the regular method of prosecuting violations of the *Dictum*, are ineffective against the Shadow-eaten. Stygian patrols interfere with Spectres they find creeping around (their primary duty), but there is so much Shadowland and so few Hierarchy troopers to patrol it that realistic enforcement outside of high-impact areas like nuclear facilities and large business and commerce centers is nearly impossible.



March 92/



Life In The Labyrinth: The Arts Of The Dead

Guilds



one of the Thirteen Guilds of Stygia is actually active within the Labyrinth. That detail aside, there's nothing that says that some of the Guilds don't have some Shadow-eaten members. All of them do at some level, because Doppelganger infiltration is that pervasive. Of course, the assorted Guilds are victim to various degrees of denial, and tailor their responses to infiltration accordingly. The Masquers Guild is believed to cooperate with the Pardoners, using their peculiar talents to run double agents and disinformation campaigns, isolating their moles and using them to funnel bad info back into the Hive-mind. Other Guilds, like the Spooks and Haunters, even occasionally have problems differentiating between their Restless and Shadow-eaten when the former are in particularly foul form. Whatever the case,

none of the recognized Guilds consider their organizational bailiwick to extend to the Labyrinth's corridors and tunnels — or to the souls dwelling therein.

The practitioners of the Forbidden Arts are believed to be less particular in their recruiting. While the Alchemists are generally free of undue suspicion, their fellow lesser Guilds are not. The Solicitors supposedly operate from secret bases in the Labyrinth, at least according to the latest rumors. The Mnemoi are believed to have been largely Shadow-eaten at the time of their expulsion, but clear memories of the event are somewhat difficult to come by. Whatever the case, rumors run that the Mnemoi are either directed by or are the power behind a Malfean (or two). Of course, nothing about the masters of desire and memory can ever really be known for certain, but the stories are, as always, entertaining.

Arcanoi



The Arcanoi available within the of the Labyrinth are of vastly greater variety than those found in Stygia. There is but a single metaculture at the mouth of Oblivion, where the psychic atmosphere of the Labyrinth leads the inhabitants to undergo desperate adaptations in an attempt to adjust to its extreme conditions. The Thirteen Arts of the Dead generally accepted in Stygian society, the three Banned Arts, the seven Dark Arts, the four Arts of the Dark Kingdom of Jade — all of these and more are in common use in the tunnels of the ultimate maze.

Argos

The use of Argos by Spectres is surprisingly rare. While knowledge of the Basic Abilities is extremely common, the extended practice of this Arcanos is not. A Spectre interested in moving quickly is much more likely to learn Tempestos (see New Dark Arcanoi, below), which is significantly better adapted to navigation and travel in the chaotic environments of Maelstroms, Tempest and Labyrinth. A hundred of the Companions of the Nephwrack general Coldheart are said to be trained in the use of Argos to act as scouts and pathfinders, as well as to act as a test bed for Argos-based strategy and tactics.

Castigate

Of the Thirteen Arts, Castigate is probably the one least commonly practiced within the Labyrinth. Among the Shadow-eaten, Castigate survives primarily among those who prepare Doppelgangers to infiltrate Stygian society, as the role of itinerant Pardoner make an excellent cover for a Spectral agent. Such moles spend a great deal of time initiating Catharsis in other wraiths, and are constantly in contact with potential Shadow-eaten. Outside of this small cadre of professionals, however, the black fingers of the Pardoners are rarely seen within the Labyrinth's chambers.

Embody

There is no *Dictum Mortuum* in the Labyrinth. Consequently, Embody enjoys a wider practice among the Shadow-eaten than it does among the Restless. As the arts which interact with the living go, however, it lags far behind Outrage in terms of its usefulness to Spectres. Because of the extended investment required to manifest physically for long periods of time, and since the Spectre manifests only to her Consort, most Shadow-eaten avoid using this art of the Arcanos. Instead, more novel uses of the lesser abilities are superior for achieving Spectral ends. While such uses are little more than malicious — if occasionally fatal — pranks, there is a certain perfect hilarity to appearing around a blind bend as a speeding car navigates a treacherous and steep-

sided mountain road. Statue is also a well-loved favorite during Spectral haunting. There is just something deeply satisfying about the sight of a fleeing mortal snatching open a door in desperate flight and running straight into a somewhat *toothy* surprise.

Fatalism

Fatalism is, if anything, more common in the Labyrinth than in the Shadowlands, where the Legion of Fate and the Oracles Guild hold a near-monopoly on its practice. Nephwracks are the most common practitioners, and most Malfeans employ a cadre of full-time seers. The Arcanos is also popular among Doppelgangers and those Nephwracks who serve as close advisors, majordomos, generals and other functionaries to the Onceborn. These lesser practitioners usually learn arts up to the level of Foreshadow, but some reach greater degrees of mastery through sheer persistence.

The means of divination employed in the Labyrinth differ radically from those of the Skinlands. The most popular are: the quality and texture of tumorous growths in the Corpus of a sacrificial victim, the patterns in which sticks carved from the material of the Labyrinth fall and the designs formed by the spontaneous growths of cobwebs that occur in certain areas of the Labyrinth.

Inhabit

Inhabit is, along with Outrage, the Arcanos most Spectres prefer to use when interacting with the Skinlands. As in the Deadlands above, the Soulforgers of the Labyrinth also tend to

Losing Fetters in the Labyrinth

Normally the loss of a Fetter drives a wraith into a Harrowing. However, a wraith already in the Labyrinth isn't so lucky as to be merely Harrowed when he loses the connection to one of his Fetters. Should a Doomslayer lose a Fetter while in the tunnels, the results are horrific. The target is immediately swallowed by the walls of the Labyrinth, to be brought to the Mouth of the Void for a Destruction Harrowing with the final roll against Permanent Angst coming at a difficulty of 8. Willpower cannot be used on this roll.

If the target escapes, he is not expelled from the Labyrinth, but rather returned to the place from which he was snatched. Of course, with the physics of the great maze being what they are, that may put him miles from his companions' current location.

Spectres who lose Fetters are, oddly enough, not Harrowed. Instead, they are given over to Catharsis for a full day. This gives the Spectre's Psyche plenty of time to commit indiscretions that will not be looked upon kindly by the rest of the Hive-mind.



practice Inhabit, primarily because so many of them were formerly members of the Artificers Guild. However, both the New and Ancient arts of Inhabit are also practiced fairly often outside Artificer circles. Mostly, Inhabit is used among the Shadow-eaten as it is among the Restless, albeit with somewhat more destructive intentions. Command Line and Surge are popular among the simple-mindedly malicious. For those prone to more elaborate projects, such as the collapse of structures containing elderly persons or young children, power plant meltdowns and the organization of large-scale traffic accidents, Gremlinize, Kinesis and Creeping Rot are popular.

The other powers associated with Inhabit, namely Claim and Empower, are quite popular among the Shadow-eaten. Given that the Outrage ability Obliviate — often used in conjunction with Claim to create relics — costs a Spectre nothing more than a few points of easily replaceable Angst to perform, Inhabit is quite a sought-after Arcanos.

Keening

Keening serves much the same dual role among the dwellers of the Labyrinth as it does among the Restless. It is used either to manipulate the Quick or entertain the Dead. Dirges of despair, Muses of carnage and Requiems of nihilistic hatred make a popular repertoire for those Spectres who seek to target the Quick. Within the Labyrinth, Keening is used it is

used to lend color and emotion to events, as well as in warfare. Dramatic performances, ceremonies of ritualized brutality and religious services in the name of the Neverborn are all enriched by the Songs of the Spectral. While they engender the same effects as the Keening of the Restless, the Oblivion-ravaged voices of most non-Doppelgangers are most well-adapted to an uneven wailing and shrieking, rather the smooth and sonorous mourning that normal wraiths usually produce. Helldivers report that competitions among Spectral Chanteurs are often decided by the ability to drive a given target — or the opposition — to self-destruction.

Lifeweb

Lifeweb is popular among the older residents of the Labyrinth. Except during Maelstroms, most Nephwracks and all but a tiny fraction of Onceborn cannot spend more than a few minutes in the Shadowlands without risking destruction. This situation is made worse by a Stygian program of systematically destroying known Spectres' Fetters. It is also used as a means of torturing captured wraiths, by ripping their Fetters away one by one as the Restless are subjected to disfiguring Molation and the Maleficence power Corruption. It is said that the resultant Nephwrack or Apparition is of the fiercest sort, and some Malfeans have their personal entourage "custom made" for them in this fashion.

Moliate

Useful for the purposes of vanity, disguise and personal armament, Moliate is one of the most useful of the Arcanoi. As much in demand within the Labyrinth as it is in Stygian society, Spectral Masquers perform all the duties they do in the world above them — cosmetologist, armorer, assassin and spy — but with a slightly darker twist.

The Body Arts of Stygia are not suited to the decaying yet highly malleable plasm of the Labyrinth's denizens, nor are they to the aesthetic tastes of most of the inhabitants. Characters performing or attempting to imitate Spectral Moliations should pick up Plasm Modification instead. This is simply a version of Body Arts adapted to both the esthetics and the surprising array of tumors, near-liquiscent pockets, and inflexible inclusions so common among the Shadow-eaten.

Outrage


Outrage is an exceptionally popular Arcanos for those Spectres, like Haints and Apparitions, who spend a great deal of time interacting with the Skinlands. Not only are the Outrage powers especially attractive to a Spectre with mayhem in mind, but most of them also don't even have a significant cost. Obliviate is a particular favorite, as it feeds Oblivion directly and can be used in conjunction with

Shellride to make relics. The potential for mayhem isn't simply physical, either. Even the simplest of little pranks (Using Death's Touch to type "while 1 fork" from a UNIX command line, or pushing the release on the brake lines of a semi headed downhill) can be devastating if used thoughtfully. More complex uses rely entirely on the imagination and patience of the Spectre in question.

Pandemonium

Surprisingly, the practitioners of the Wylding flourish even in — perhaps especially in — the Labyrinth. Some members of the Haunters Guild, particularly Dr. Shudder, speculate that this is because while there is but a single end to the life of the Shadow-eaten, the paths that they can arrive there are as varied as the forms of snow and ice in the Arctic, and thus permit the Wylding to express itself. Others believe that certain portions of the Wylding may be Shadow-eaten, and thus used to fuel the arts of the Arcanos' Spectral practitioners. This undifferentiated use of Spectral and regular energy from the Wylding may be the reason for the high Angst cost of so many of the Arcanos' arts. If such is the case, then certain refinements of the process may be possible to assure that a Restless uses no Oblivion-tainted power, thus allowing the Guild to advance its goal of removing the Shroud without Pandemonium's current high risk of Catharsis.





Within the Labyrinth, the Haunters have even less organization than they do in the Shadowlands. Wildly variant arts are common, and most Haunters learn their arts either by experimentation, from their existence in the Shadowlands or from whatever teacher happens to be nearby at the time they begin their education.

Phantasm

Few things provoke as much fear as a nightmare, and this makes Phantasm a favorite of the Shadow-eaten whose Dark Passions relate to fear or terror. Some Shadow-eaten are loners, simply bringing madness and terror to the dreams of mortals one scream at a time. Others are organized, like the Sandmen of Stygia, and they produce pageants for both their own entertainment and the enjoyment of their Onceborn lords. Some of these displays are simply tableaux of terror, while other, more ambitious productions are designed to spread the despair of Oblivion among the living.

Of note particularly are the practices of bone-dust harvesting and the related use of Phantasm during Harrowings. Bone-dust is a gray, foul-smelling form of Dreamsand harvested by Spectral Sandmen from the non-dreams of psychotics. When spread during a Harrowing, it acts as Dreamsand, lowering the difficulty of Phantasm rolls by 1 (to a minimum of difficulty of 4). When sprinkled on one of the sleeping Quick, it causes the mortal to suffer a Night Terror and awaken breathless almost immediately. Thus, it is of some utility to those who seek to drive mortals mad.

Called Raindogs or Dustmen, Sandmen who work Harrowings form a distinct subculture from those who work the Skinlands. While the bands are not hostile, each group sees their medium as superior to the other's. Multi-media artists are not unknown, but are generally loners. Only the enigmatic group of performers known as the Theater of the Damned has established a reputation on both the Harrowing and pageant circuits. They are reputed to be much sought-after by the Sandmen of Stygia, many of whom wish to use them as fine costuming, or perhaps small iron boxes for their Dreamsand.

Puppetry

Puppetry is a great favorite among the Shadow-eaten. Tricks range from simply vile to lethal to large numbers of the Quick. Forcing a mortal to perform excitingly deviant sex acts with himself, willing or unwilling partners, animals and/or inanimate objects is an exciting standby for unimaginative Spectres, and is sure to generate lots of **shame-**, **guilt-**, and occasionally **hate-related** Angst. Playing exciting games like Russian Roulette and Chicken with oncoming school buses generates copious amounts of fear and anger, as does that immortal favorite — Going Postal. Puppetry also has useful applications for Doppelgangers, who can use it, like Inhabit, to vanish for long periods of time.

Usury

Usury is only moderately popular in the Labyrinth. The Hierarchy Art Sustenance is considered extremely useful, but most Usury arts simply give the Spectre Pathos, which Spectres don't have much use for. Some Spectres learn it anyway because they enjoy the feeling of sucking an opponent's existence into themselves, even if they can't really make much use of the energy. Others learn this Arcanos for the same reason that some Doppelgangers learn Castigate — it makes a good cover.

The Forbidden Arts

While Mnemosynis, Intimation and Flux are forbidden in Stygia, the bans on the Forbidden Arcanoi do not extend into the Labyrinth. This does not make them by any means common, however. Flux and Mnemosynis are both of marginal utility to the denizens of the Labyrinth, and the forbidden Art of Intimation is far too powerful to be allowed into wide circulation.

Flux

Flux is relatively uncommon in the Labyrinth, generally being a distant second to Outrage in its utility for meddling in the Skinlands. While it is useful for destroying things, Flux doesn't have the simple appeal of Outrage's smash and burn philosophy, or the Underworld usefulness of Obliviate. Some Spectres interested in interacting with the Skinlands but possessed of intractable Psyches and little patience learn to use Automaton as an alternative to Corruption, Puppetry or Rising. Others use Flux rather than Outrage for its more subtle processes of decay. Aside from these aficionados, however, Flux's following among the Shadow-eaten is relatively small.

Intimation

Intimation is among the most sought-after Arcanos in the Labyrinth. Like Hive-mind's Arts of Domination, Intimation is jealously guarded by those who possess it or learn its secrets. The users of Intimation can generally be divided into two camps. The first are those who combine it with Hive-mind in order to become powerful Nephwracks and Onceborn Malfeans. Use of Intimation in this manner seems to contribute directly to the user's suffering metamorphosis into one of the Hekatonkhire. The other frequent application is practiced by certain Doppelgangers, who combine it with Mnemosynis to become very, very dangerous threats to Stygia. These agents are thankfully rare, since few Malfeans are willing to encourage this combination of Arcanoi in their followers, and few Spectres endure long enough to complete such extensive training.



Mnemosynis

Mnemosynis, forbidden in the Dark Kingdom of Iron, is another Art more common in the world above than in the corridors of the Labyrinth. Those who practiced it in their Unlife among the Restless and later fell to their Shadows possess it, of course — but for some reason few others acquire the knack for meddling with memories. The Hive-mind simply blunts its effects, or else allows superior effects — at least when it is targeted against other Oblivion-dwellers. Only particularly ambitious Doppelgangers feel the need to learn the arts of memory, and those who do are usually sent to the Skinlands posthaste.

The Arts Of Jade

The Labyrinth exists below all Afterlives. There are no barriers of knowledge within it, and the Arcanoi of the other Dark Kingdoms are as common as their usefulness to the Shadow-eaten justifies. Storytellers running Spectre campaigns should allow characters access to whatever Arcanoi they're willing to let the players get away with using, regardless of Dark Kingdom of origin. In the interests of space, only the most commonly encountered of the non-Stygian Arcanoi, specifically those of the Yellow Springs, are featured below.

The Way of the Scholar

Almost as popular (and as carefully controlled) as Intimation, the Way of the Scholar is a favorite among those seeking either to gain power within the Labyrinth or to infiltrate Stygian society. This Arcanos, unlike Intimation, does not seem to make a positive contribution toward the user becoming a Hekatonkhire as they grow in stature. Way of the Scholar is also rather more favored than Intimation among those Doppelgangers seeking to infiltrate the Dark Kingdom of Iron, as the unavoidable signs of its practice are less familiar to Stygian eyes than the poisonous green glow of the Solicitor's baleful gaze. Likewise, Spectres who are sent to the Yellow Springs are often schooled instead in Intimation, the traces of which are less easily detected by the resident of the Dark Kingdom of Jade.

The Way of the Artisan

The denizens of the Labyrinth generally prefer soulforging to the manufacture of White Jade, if only because Stygian steel is easy to manufacture inside the Labyrinth and more durable than White Jade. However, many Spectres were workers of Jade during their initial unlife, and so too are workers of Jade in the Labyrinth as well. There tends to be no "regional" preference. Spectres are generally tend armed with a motley of equipment; some white jade,

some soulsteel, and some relics fished from the Tempest. Soft White Jade is, however, valued among those inhabitants of the Labyrinth whose culture is sophisticated enough to need the writing materials or extravagant decoration that can't be made from soulsteel.

The Way of the Merchant

Way of the Merchant (like Usury) is most often used by those Spectres who used it in life, or as a cover for agents among the society of the Restless. It is also rather popular as a secondary Arcanos among a small subset of those who manage Oblivion cults among the Quick. A variant form of Cash Money is used to accept the Angst trapped in offerings made to evil spirits. Returning the Favor is useful for making sure that cult leaders don't die at inconvenient times, or alternately, that they don't inconveniently outlive their usefulness.

The Way of the Farmer

The Way of the Farmer is not generally popular as an avocation for the Shadow-eaten. Kuei are generally of better service traded to any number of Stripling packs, who use them as animals. Many Striplings and some other Spectres learn Deaden Spirit, however, in order to supplement their own abilities (whatever those may be) to restrain Hungry Ghosts. However, like Castigate, the power of the Way of the Farmer to restrain *p'o* and Shadows makes it an excellent cover for those Spectres who would infiltrate the society of the Yellow Springs. Such efforts are aided by the secretiveness (to prevent gossip and scandal) of the Restless of the Dark Kingdom of Jade, as well as their general naïveté towards the Stygian process of Castigation. It is estimated that as many as one in 20 of the "doctors" of the Dark Kingdom of Jade is in fact a Spectre using her profession as a cover. Even if a false doctor is captured, fear of Imperial retaliation and loss of face often make wraiths the impostor has treated extremely reluctant to come forward.

The Way of the Soul

This ability of disciplining one's own Shadow isn't even particularly useful as a cover, and so is generally only known to whatever extent the Spectre mastered it before falling to her other half.

The Chains of the Emperor

The Chains of the Emperor are supposedly unknown within the Labyrinth. There are, however, reports that Spectres encountered in the Tempest near the Celestial Palace do in fact possess this Arcanos. Such reports have never been confirmed — or denied — by reliable sources, and so they could just as easily be part of some rebel campaign of propaganda as the truth.

Dark Arcanoi



o treatment of the Labyrinth would be complete without an examination of the Dark Arcanoi, the arts peculiar to the Shadow-eaten. The following section offers three new Dark Arcanoi (Corruption, Maleficence and Tempestos) as well as new Arts for two of the established Dark Arcanoi, Hive-mind and Shroud Rending.

Corruption

Just like putting on a new silk suit, it is. It takes a lot of saving and work to get there, oh the weeks and months of it, sometimes. But once you slip on those threads, there's nothing in the world that can stop you from going any place you please.

Corruption is in some ways a dark form of Puppetry. Practitioners of Puppetry essentially indulge in possession, coexisting with or supplanting the souls of their targets. A user of the Arcanos Corruption seek to bring

her target's soul close enough to her own, and to Oblivion, that she can join with it and seize control without the target ever realizing he's not the one making the decisions any more. Corruption is more difficult to master than is Puppetry, and less rewarding before great facility in it is achieved. On the other hand, success brings great rewards — a vessel in the Skinlands can last for decades if properly conserved.

Corruption relies on the manipulation of the mind and spirit of the target. The Spectre finds a victim among the Quick already like her and accelerates the similarity until such time as the host is ready for a final merger. The victim must have a strong tendency toward the Being of the Spectre, for which the Larceny art Emotional Infection often proves useful. A strongly disturbed personality with a weak sense of self is also suitable. Such victims often require serious preparation by means of Emotional Infection to be made useful, and may commit themselves to psychiatric care when they begin to experience violent or destructive urges. On the other hand, mortals who already have personalities similar to the invasive Spectre probably won't even notice that their behavior is being altered. Spectres can prepare a target as a Consort through the investment of Being just as a wraith can attune one through the application of Willpower.



Basic Abilities

Sense Likeness — In order for Corruption to work on one of the Quick, he must already be tainted with Oblivion. This ability allows the Spectre to scent a target's potential.

System: To use Sense Likeness, the player makes a Perception + Corruption roll (difficulty of the local Shroud rating). Success indicates the character has discovered a suitable victim for Corruption. The Storyteller should think a little about what sort of potential victims are lurking around before sending the characters to the area. Sense Likeness does not detect if someone is being Corrupted, since the Arcanos works primarily by reshaping the target's natural desires, rather than supplanting them with new ones. Note that this ability isn't useful exclusively for Corruption — it also provides a good alternate starting point for Maleficence, for example.

Soul Leech — Soul Leech is the Spectral art of possession. It is more dangerous and more powerful than Puppetry.

System: By spending a point of Angst and succeeding on a Manipulation + Corruption roll, the Storyteller can have a Spectre slip into someone susceptible to Corruption, there to practice her art. The difficulty of this roll is the target's Wits + 3, and the number of successes equals the number of scenes for which the Spectre may inhabit the victim. Spectres who have possessed a victim using Soul Leech see through his eyes

(and are thus able to perceive the Skinlands), but lose their ghostly vision. Spectres using Soul Leech should otherwise be treated as Skinriding users of the Puppetry Arcanos, including the vulnerability to electroshock treatments.


Arts

• **Lurid Visions** — This most simple of the Arts of Corruption does not involve controlling or warping the target at all. Success indicates that the Spectre implants a brief vision of some sort. Usually, the image is no more than an especially violent flash of imagination, but in the deeply disturbed, sometimes violent flashes of imagination are all it takes. Lurid visions can also be used to convey other information, but nothing more complex than can be portrayed in a brief, relatively static flash of imagery ("Go through the fire escape door," for example).

System: The Practitioner spends a point of Angst and makes a Charisma + Corruption check (difficulty 7). This and all other arts of the Dark Arcanos Corruption require that the user have first used the Soul Leech ability to inhabit the victim's body.

•• **Unbidden Hands** — Unbidden Hands allows a Spectre to make her victim's physical body undertake some particular task while his mind is distracted. Targets cannot be forced to perform lethal or self-destructive actions, like shoot-





ing someone with a gun or jerking the steering wheel of their car over to swerve into oncoming traffic, while under the influence of Unbidden Hands. However, Spectres can and do often push that envelope.

System: This art requires the expenditure of three Angst and a Dexterity + Corruption check, with the difficulty equal to the violence of the victim's thoughts and the relevance to the victim's thoughts to the task his hands are undertaking. Having the victim write "The bastard must die" a hundred times while he's thinking about his hated ex-lover is much easier (difficulty 4) than having him tie nooses while he's distracted thinking about how much he's going to enjoy playing with his new dog (difficulty 8). The victim may not spend a Willpower to resist this, though repeated use of Unbidden Hands on an unwilling victim makes it much less likely that his attention will continually drift.

••• **Urges** — The art of Urges allows Spectre to overcome the target's Willpower and make him undertake a single action of the Spectre's choice. This action must fulfill one of the Spectre's Dark Passions as well as be something that that victim would, on some level, like to do.

System: The player must expend two Angst points and then roll to see if the Spectre would gain Angst from a stated action. If the roll for Angst gain is successful, then she can make a Manipulation + Corruption roll (difficulty equal to the target's Willpower) to have the target undertake the action in question. If she succeeds in this roll, the target attempts the action and the Spectre gains the Angst. If she fails, then the target does nothing and the Spectre doesn't gain Angst. The target may spend a Willpower point to resist the action. A botch on an Urges attempt causes the target to feel revulsion at his own actions. This may result in the loss of Being already spent to make the target a Consort, or otherwise increase the difficulty of future Corruption attempts.

•••• **Fetter Rape** — This Art allows a Spectre to corrupt the small traces of soul that remain in a dead body, allowing it to Rise briefly. In order for this art to function, the body must either be a Fetter of one of the Restless, have Risen previously, or have been attuned to a wraith for the purposes of the Corruption or Puppetry Arcanoi.

System: The Spectre's player must roll a Stamina + Corruption check (difficulty 3 + the Fetter's rating, or 8 if it is not a Fetter). The number of successes is the number of days for which the targeted body can be inhabited before it suffers a final and messy dissolution. Treat the Spectre as one of the Risen, save it has no Conduit. A Spectre may spend Being points on a corpse to attune to it, just as if it were a Consort. The Castigation art Housecleaning can be used to drive a Spectre from a corrupted body, though nothing but the destruction of the Spectre or eternal vigilance can keep her from inhabiting it again at a later date. Wraiths who are Fettered to bodies that suffer final dissolution through the use of this Arcanos lose the Fetter and are Harrowed as a result.

••••• **Blissful Unity** — Through the use of this Arcanos, a Spectre makes a special (and dominant) place for himself in a victim's soul. Unlike the effects of Obliterate the Soul, however, the victim's soul survives the assault, and her body does not begin to die shortly after the use of the Arcanos. Furthermore, the victim remains in control of her body, but she now follows the Spectre's orders with absolutely no hesitation. In effect, this means that the Spectre does all the thinking when it is "in residence," but the victim uses her own Attributes and Abilities.


System: To form the initial bond, the Spectre must have attuned the target as a Consort. Next comes the expenditure of five points of Angst and a point of Permanent Being, and a Strength + Corruption roll. The difficulty on this roll is equal to the Target's Willpower + 3 (maximum 9), with no modifications for Consort status. Even a single success on this roll means that the process of Corruption has successfully begun. Success or failure still grants the Spectre's Psyche a point of Composure. A botch on this roll indicates spiritual incompatibilities which render the Spectre unable ever to use Blissful Unity on the target.

Strengthening the bond costs two points of Angst and one point of temporary Being to make a Charisma + Corruption check (difficulty is the target's Willpower). The player must accumulate successes equal to the target's Willpower to make the bond fully functional, though the Spectre may pursue this goal over multiple attempts. After the Spectre has accumulated sufficient successes, the victim is fully under her control, as detailed above. The victim now counts as a 1 point Fetter, and the Spectre no longer needs to roll for Soul Leech to possess her. Instead, it may simply spend a point of Angst to "get behind the wheel." Those who are successfully targeted with this power generally proceed to directly to Oblivion after death, though some occasionally become Mortwights. Targets of this power often take steps to prepare for their episodes, though such steps are as often beneficial to the Spectre as they are harmful.

Maleficence

You, yes YOU are the Chosen One my friend, the one that's gonna rip this world a new ASSHOLE and drag those heathen bastards down in the PIT! Yes you ARE! You just gotta understand that I'm the Angel of the LORD, and when you're walking with me, you're walking with the LORD (and he's holding your hand every step of the way, son, believe me). So you just get your ass out there in front of that congregation of yours and you give them the WORD, or am I going to have to make you break your ARM again, you stupid shit?

Maleficence is the power to invest beings with the power of Oblivion, usually through the medium of the Spectre's own Being and Angst. Most common among Mortwights and Apparitions, Maleficence is the Arcanos most commonly used to start Oblivion cults among the living, and to convert captured Restless to the faith of the Shadow-eaten.



Knowledge of Maleficence is not just a simple knack, but also an intuitive communication with and understanding of the goals of Oblivion. Users of Maleficence are the Labyrinth's equivalent of evangelists. Ideologically committed to Oblivion, these missionaries of entropy spread their beliefs in the Shadowlands as well as in the lands of the living. While openly proselytizing Spectres wouldn't last an hour in a Hierarchy Necropolis, some Renegade and Heretic Necropoli are less judgmental. In some of the more tolerant of these independent Necropoli, the rough voice of an Apparition or the cajoling of a strand-spliced Nephwrack street corner preacher are common sounds.

Basic Abilities

Sense Prayer — Practitioners of Maleficence have an intuitive feel for where they can do the most harm. The outflow of negative emotions causes them to become aware whenever someone within (Maleficence rating x 100) meters is actively supplicating the powers of darkness, Nietzsche, or whatever else seems appropriate for assistance. A successful roll of Perception + Maleficence (difficulty 6) allows the Spectre to sense the range and direction of the call.

Sense Investment — By means of a Perception + Maleficence roll (difficulty 6), the Spectre may sense when a mortal she is regarding has already had Being invested in him by another user of Maleficence. She might not *care*, but she can at least tell if someone she's evaluating has already been staked out.

Arts

• **Black Whispers** — This Art allows the Spectre to communicate directly with the mind of a mortal through "spoken" words. This art has a variety of uses, from driving deranged mortals over the brink of madness to delivering faux-infernal proclamations to the leaders of Oblivion cults.

System: To use this art costs a point of Angst, and requires a Charisma + Maleficence roll (difficulty is the local Shroud rating or the target's Willpower, whichever is higher). The number of successes rolled is the number of turns during which the Spectre may maintain contact with a mortal before being required to roll again. A botch on the roll means that the mortal, if opposed to the contact, has succeeded in learning to shut out or ignore the voice. In that case, add 1 to the difficulty of all Black Whispers rolls to affect that subject in the future.

•• **Benefice** — The art of Benefice allows a Spectre to invest Being into a mortal, with an eventual goal of later granting the mortal Spectral powers (See **Mediums**, p. 93).

System: This art costs three points of Angst and as many points of Being as the Spectre wishes to attempt to grant the mortal. Next comes a Strength + Maleficence roll (difficulty 5 + the number of points of Being the mortal is being given). It is assumed that most Spectres invest Temporary Being into their pawns. The investiture of Permanent Being in a Mortal is also

possible. While Permanent and Temporary Being cannot be invested in the same mortal at the same time, the investment of Permanent Being is no more difficult than that of Temporary. It's just more draining on the Spectre — Permanent investment requires the expenditure of 5 points of Angst for *each* point of Permanent Being that the Spectre wishes to grant the mortal. Targets who have been invested with Being have the difficulty of all rolls for Dark Arcanoi used on them reduced by 2.

Spectres grant Being to allow mortals to power abilities granted by Investiture, below. The effects of Benefice are more fully detailed in **Mediums: Speakers With The Dead**. If you don't have **Mediums**, the important thing to remember is that if you give the Mortal more Being than she has Willpower, she'll probably either end up a going psychotic or sitting in a corner blowing spit bubbles. The bleak and icy revelations of Oblivion are often rather difficult for the human mind to handle.

••• **Investiture** — The Art of Investiture empowers a Spectre to initiate certain processes of decay within the spirit of a mortal. These decompositions of the soul grant mortals certain limited supernatural abilities, as well as having subjectively unfortunate side-effects on the mortal's sanity and health. These powers (usually granted to the leaders of Oblivion cults) are a manifestation of Oblivion's touch, and can have unpleasant side effects on the user.

System: To practice this art requires the expenditure of a number of points of Angst and Being equal to the value of the power the Spectre wishes to Invest. The next step is a Manipulation + Investiture check (difficulty 8 minus the number of points of Being the Spectre has currently invested in the target). The Spectre must achieve a number of successes equal to the rating of the power being invested. A number of suggested powers are detailed in **Mediums**, but those without access to that supplement should assume that granting a mortal the first level of an Arcanos the Spectre possesses is a 5 point Investment.

•••• **Discipline** — Discipline allows a Spectre to make her displeasure known to a mortal in whom she has invested Being. Discipline is usually used to remind errant leaders of Oblivion cults that they, too, are mortal, though some Spectres do it just to watch their pawns writhe. This art is very similar to the Thorn: **Wrack** in its effect.

System: This art requires a Dexterity + Maleficence roll (difficulty is the target's Stamina + 3). The Spectre can opt to spend up to a point of Angst for each success scored on the roll. Each point of Angst spent imposes a -1 die penalty on the mortal's actions for a number of scenes equal to the number of successes rolled, and also inflicts severe pain on the target. Some victims literally break their own bones with muscle spasms, bleed from the eyes or manifest stigmata. Repeated use of Discipline on the Quick can drive victims to madness, or to the abusive use of opiates and other analgesics in order to blunt the pain.

..... **Conversion** — Conversion allows the Spectre to impose Oblivion-wrought despair on a captive audience, bringing them to an unavoidable awareness of Oblivion and its place in the scheme of things.

System: To use this art requires a Charisma + Maleficence roll (difficulty 7). For each success, the target's permanent Willpower or Composure is decreased by one, or his Permanent Angst increased by one. The choice is entirely up to the Spectre using the Arcanos. Wraiths whose Angst reaches 10 become Doppelgangers. Those whose Willpower reaches zero become Nothings.

Conversion is an extended process that works only on a captive audience. It takes several hours to use the power, and a given Spectre cannot use it more than once in a 24-hour period (though nothing stops Spectres from working in shifts). This power cannot be used on mortals, even mediums. A botch on a Conversion attempt adds a point of Composure to the Spectre's Psyche.

Tempestos

And then we ride the storm, our wings of choking smoke and filth surrounding us like the feathers of a dying carrion bird. Like the black wind of winter, we howl around the eaves of the Citadels. Prepare for the storm.

Tempestos is the power to ride and manipulate the winds of the Maelstroms. Virtually unknown until the Third Maelstrom, this Arcanos has since been refined, and has come into regular use by the Shadow-eaten. Practitioners of this Art are the shock-troops of Oblivion, often racing ahead on the first gusts of Maelstrom winds to attempt to seize inadequately guarded portals to Citadels. Haints are particularly skilled at this Arcanos, as packs of them roam the Tempest and the Shadowlands, riding squalls and staging hit-and-run attacks.

Basic Abilities

Maelstrom Sense — The Spectre can forecast the arrival of Maelstroms with particular accuracy. A successful Perception + Tempestos roll (difficulty 4) allows a Spectre to forecast the arrival of the next Maelstrom, providing the storm is due to arrive within a number of days equal to the number of successes rolled. A second roll (difficulty 6) allows the Spectre to ascertain the direction and duration of the Maelstrom.

Arts

• **Storm Seeker** — The Spectre can set himself adrift in the Tempest and allow her natural affinity with the storms of the Underworld to draw her toward a storm front.

System: Storm Seeker requires spending a point of Angst and making an Intelligence + Tempestos check (difficulty 6), in order to allow a Spectre to find a storm to ride. This process can take anywhere from a few hours to a few days, de-

pending on the Storyteller's whim and the local conditions of the Tempest. The size of the storm discovered is completely random, as is the Spectre's eventual destination.

•• **Ride The Nightwind** — This art allows a Spectre to take wing on the breath of a Maelstrom, a behavior which is substantially different from being pushed along by the winds of Oblivion.

System: By spending a point of Angst and making a Dexterity + Tempestos roll (difficulty 7) every scene, the player allows his character may fly at up to the speed of the Maelstrom winds — so long as he is moving in the same general direction the storm is. While the character cannot stop moving, he has incredibly precise control over his trajectory, and can make hairpin turns or fly suddenly straight up. The number of successes rolled equals the number of dice the character can add to his Dice Pool each round for the purposes of making acrobatic stunts. The maximum number of successes allowed on this roll than the Maelstrom's Rating x 2.

••• **Dust Devil** — The Spectre can now call up a minor squall to ride. If necessary, the storm tears open a Nihil on its way to answer the summons.


System: Calling up a storm requires spending two points of Angst and succeeding at a Manipulation + Tempestos roll (difficulty 8). The number of successes equals the number of scenes for which the miniature Maelstrom will last. The Maelstrom is always Level 1 severity. The Spectre who whistled up the storm can travel at the speed of the storm winds (50 to 75 mph) but gains no benefits to dodging or flying unless he also uses Ride the Nightwind. A number of other Spectres equal to the number of successes on the original roll may also ride the wind via this Arcanos, but the storm is too small and weak to carry other Shadow-eaten along in the normal fashion.

•••• **Tempest Fury** — The Shadow-eaten may now call on the fury of the Tempest in a limited but devastating fashion. The fraction of power thus summoned can be used as a weapon.

System: By spending a point of Angst and a point of Temporary Being, and succeeding on a Strength + Tempestos roll (difficulty 8), a player can allow his character to raise up a blast from the Maelstrom in order to smite a single target. The number of successes on the roll indicates the force of the Maelstrom hammering the target for a single turn. For the purposes of targeting the effect, any man-sized object or area can be considered a target. The attack can be used for a variety of effects: to breach gates, to smash relic automobiles or to pound a single wraith into a Harrowing.

••••• **Maelstrom Cauldron** — The practitioner of Tempestos may now call upon the full strength of a Maelstrom. By pouring his very soul into the effort, he can summon up a full-strength local Maelstrom from the depths of the Labyrinth — bringing with it all of the concomitant Spectral debris.

System: The difficulty of the task is equal to the level of the Maelstrom + 5. To summon the storm requires the expenditure of a point of Being and a roll of Manipulation +



Tempestos. The art also inflicts a level of Corpus damage for each success rolled, so that there are stories of Spectres literally tearing themselves to shreds in the process of summoning a storm. The number of successes equals the number of hours the Maelstrom persists. At Storyteller discretion, the process of raising the storm may well drain the Spectre of Angst as well.

New Arts

Shroud Rending

••• **Nightmare** — The Spectre may rend the Shroud over a sleeping mortal, allowing the dark influence of Oblivion to flow over her victim. Needless to say, this doesn't make for restful dreaming.

System: Nightmare costs one point of Angst and one point of temporary Being, then mandates a Dexterity + Shroud Rending roll with (difficulty equal to the local Shroud rating). If the roll is successful, the mortal experiences terrible nightmares. For every two successes (rounding down) rolled, the mortal's sleep is disturbed for a night, and he suffers a -1 die penalty to all actions until he gets a sound night's rest. While this penalty is cumulative over multiple uses of Nightmare, Nightmare itself can only be used on a single victim once per night. Mortals who suffer penalties to their Dice Pools equal to their highest Attribute + Ability combination can be assumed to have experienced nervous breakdowns. Such unfortunates require medication and temporary institutionalization, and will probably be prescribed a dream-suppressant medication. Continued use of Nightmare can cause long-term damage to a victim's mental health.

Keep in mind that this power is **not** the Arcanos Phantasm. While the demoniac dreams caused by Nightmare do tend to reflect the Spectre's Being, the Spectre has no control over or knowledge of the content of nightmares caused by the use of this art.

•••• **Lurking Presence** — With this art, a Spectre can tear a vicious rip in the Shroud, one that can intrude into the awareness of the waking Quick.

System: This art costs a point of temporary Being and three points of Angst, and also mandates a Manipulation + Shroud Rending roll (difficulty equal to the local Shroud rating). The number of successes obtained equals the number of turns that that target is no longer affected by the Fog (treat as Willpower 1 for Fog effects). Repeated use of this art in an area can lower the local Shroud rating permanently.

Hive-mind

The Hive-Mind of Oblivion is far more than a receptacle of knowledge. It is also a conduit for the will of the Malfeans and their Nephwrack priests. Far from being a simple

medium of communication, it is a *mind*, the collective thoughts of the servants of unbeing. It is a matrix in which the thinkers are but ideas, memes in a sea of collective consciousness. Those who truly learn the Hive-Mind's secrets are more than simply knowledgeable — they are the directive forces of the Labyrinth.

•• **Tribal Commune** — By means of this art, usually learned only by Striplings, a Spectre may communicate directly with other members of her pack. All of the other Spectres contacted have access to the full range of senses of the person broadcasting, but the broadcaster decides which senses she allows her packmates to share. A character invoking Tribal Commune may also "speak" into the minds of the other members of her pack for the duration of the Commune. Sharing senses is not an intrusive act for the recipients — they can decline or accept the sensory input as they wish.

System: Using this Art requires the expenditure of a point of Angst and a successful Intelligence + Hive-mind roll, difficulty 6. The number of successes is the number of minutes that the shared senses may be maintained. Acting while experiencing two sets of perceptions can be extremely difficult; players should add +2 to the difficulty of all rolls for actions undertaken while they are sharing senses.

••• **Broadcast** — One of the most important manipulative abilities of Hive-mind is the ability to broadcast one's thoughts and ideas at short range. This causes one's own thoughts to form the psychic "background noise" of one's immediate area.

System: A point of Angst and one of temporary Being are spent, and the player rolls Being + Hive-mind (difficulty of the Being/Willpower of the target). For each success, the Spectre adds an additional die to her pool for any social interaction rolls for the rest of the scene. Botches cause the character to lose track of her own opinion and come around firmly to the point of view of a nearby character with a high Being.

••• **Hive Awareness** — Some Spectres develop an inherent sense for the state of the Hive-mind near them, and can feel the whispered thoughts of others nearby.

System: For a point of Angst, a Spectre's player can add his character's Hive-mind score to his Alertness or Awareness. This works *only* for the purposes of sensing Spectres, and he cannot sense anything other than the presence of other beings connected to the Hive-Mind. Spectres are *always* connected to the Hive-Mind even if they have just one dot in the Hive-mind Arcanos.

The Hive-Mind itself is always double capitalized. The Arcanos by which the Hive-Mind's individual components communicate has only the first word capitalized.

••• **Taming the Beast** — By means of this Art, a character may tame certain animalistic Spectres like vulpines and *kuei*. Doing so requires an extended action that must be taken out of combat — you can't possibly tame an animal that's busy chewing on your Corpus.

System: The Spectre's player makes a Charisma + Hive-mind check, with a difficulty equal to the target creature's Being + 3. The Spectre must accumulate successes equal to the target creature's Being in order to tame it successfully. Rolls are made every hour period, and missing a roll makes the character subject to possible attack (Storyteller's discretion). As always, difficulty can and should be varied for roleplaying. This art cannot be used on Barghests and other non-Spectral creatures. Use of this Art costs one Being and one Angst to start, and one Angst for each additional roll. Characters who miss a roll or have to break off the taming process and being again later have their successes reset to zero and must spend the point of Being again.

•••• **Bid** — The character may give one command to a single Spectre, who then must follow that command to the letter. Often used by Apparitions running packs of Shades, Bid is useful for getting one's point across without argument.

System: The player spends two points of Angst and a point of temporary Being, then makes a Manipulation + Leadership roll (difficulty is the target's Being + Hive-mind). The maxi-

mum difficulty for the Manipulation + Leadership roll is 9. The target follows the *spirit as well as the letter* of the command for a number of scenes equal to the number of successes — assuming, of course, that there were any successes at all. Characters under the influence of Bid may spend a point of temporary Being to avoid performing a directly self-destructive action.

•••• **Collective Oracle** — Through the use of this Arcanos, a Spectre is able to extend her consciousness far beyond her immediate vicinity and sift through the near-infinite knowledge of the Hive-mind. Usually this is attempted in an effort to prognosticate the best way to undertake a particular task.

System: Using this art requires the expenditure of two points of Angst and a point of temporary Being, plus a Wits + Hive-mind roll (difficulty variable). For each success, the player may roll an additional die on the task over which the character consulted the Collective Oracle. A character cannot undertake a consultation of the Collective Oracle and then *not* perform the action she consulted the Oracle about. A botch on Collective Oracle means that the character has listened to the wrong voice — that of her Psyche. The Psycheguide may then force her to accept as many Psyche-dice as it wishes on the task.

•••• **Pack Wisdom** — Pack Wisdom is an Art generally learned only by Striplings, who live and work as almost one entity. This art allows members of a pack or circle to use the Hive-mind to act through the Corpora of their fellows.



System: The Spectre to be acted *through* must possess and have successfully activated the Hive-mind art Tribal Commune, and must consent to the task being undertaken through his Corpus. The Spectre chosen to act through him must possess Pack Wisdom and spend three points of Angst, and then makes a single task roll through the target character.

The Abilities of the character activating Pack Wisdom are always used in the check, but the Attribute used varies. If the task requires an Appearance check, then the Appearance of the target character is used. If it uses a Physical Attribute, then the *lower* of the two characters' Physical Attributes are used. Otherwise, the Attributes of the character activating Pack Wisdom are used.

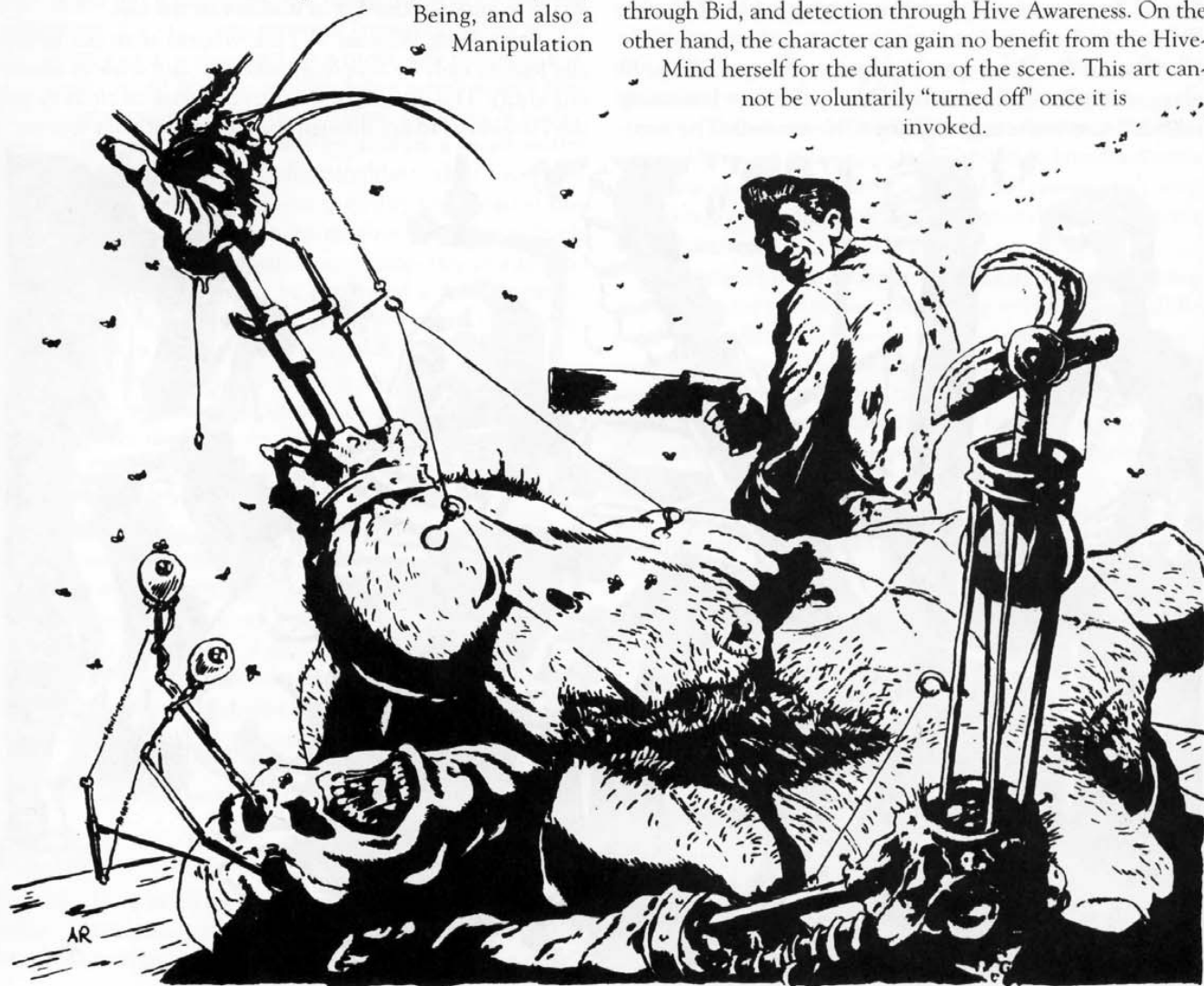
••••• **Compel** — The Spectre may use his force of will to dominate the thoughts of those around them through the Hive-Mind. Used by commanders, Onceborn (and occasionally Nephwracks with delusions of grandeur) Compel features the Hive-Mind at its most terrible.

System: This art requires the expenditure of three points of Angst and two points of temporary Being, and also a Manipulation

+ Hive-mind roll (difficulty is the highest Being + Hive-mind of the Spectres commanded, maximum difficulty 9). All Spectres who are within earshot must follow the *spirit as well as the letter* of any one command the Spectre chooses to give for a number of turns equal to the number of successes achieved. All the Compelled Spectres must be given the same command. The character's Psyche gains a point of Composure each time he uses this ability. As with Bid, targets may spend a point of Being in order to avoid undertaking a directly suicidal action.

••••• **Unity of Being** — The character who masters this Art has mastered the ability to stand separate from the Hive-mind. Knowledge of Unity of Being is punishable by dissolution, so very few Spectres are willing to risk that in the pursuit of something most of them frankly don't want — a distinctly solo identity once more.

System: At the cost of one point of temporary Being and the gain of a point of temporary Composure, a Spectre may make herself immune to the effects of the various Hive-mind arts for the remainder of a scene. This includes immunity to mind reading through Recall the Unknown, compulsion through Bid, and detection through Hive Awareness. On the other hand, the character can gain no benefit from the Hive-Mind herself for the duration of the scene. This art cannot be voluntarily "turned off" once it is invoked.



Artifacts

Arcanos Implants (Variable Level Artifact)

Through the use of these implants, a Spectre or a particularly self-destructive wraith may mimic exactly the effects of a particular Arcanos ability. The appearance of Arcanos Implants always varies wildly, but each is uniquely ugly and highly invasive. For each level (dot) of the ability to be mimicked, the user takes one permanent level of Corpus damage, which can never be healed. If the user is one of the Restless, he also gains a like number of points of permanent Angst.

The level of the art imitated by the Implant is equal the level of the Artifact, and is also used in place of the bearer's Arcanos rating for the purposes of the stat + Arcanos roll to use the art in question. Normally, the implant is powered by the user, who pays the Angst and Pathos costs associated with the ability. An implant can be set with a 10 point Bloodfire crystal, but while this increases the Artifact's level by a point, doing so also makes it impossible to use the device once the Bloodfire has been exhausted. The secret of Arcanos Implants is unknown to the Artificers of Stygia, and so the devices are generally not available to the Restless.

Note: Every Arcanos Implant is individual in its appearance, but they are never subtle and never attractive. Examples include a set of wings made from soulsteel, feathers and tattered Corpus to imitate Phantom Wings (Argos 2), or hooks cut from broken mirrors and shattered polychrome ceramic set into a Spectre's hands to imitate Agon (Phantasm 5). Let your imagination run wild. If worn outside the Labyrinth, Arcanos Implants reduce the user's Appearance by a number of dice equal to the item's level for the purposes of anything except fright and intimidation. On the flip side, though, the user of an Implant can decrease the difficulty of Intimidation checks by 2.

Bloodfire Pins (Variable Level Artifact)

Bloodfire Pin is the generic name for a class of Artifact commonly seen in the Labyrinth. Some of these items are simple stickpins with a Bloodfire crystal affixed, while others are set into rings, barbells or other sorts of piercing hardware. In the end, the shape is unimportant, though. What matters is the Bloodfire crystal and the piercing point.

Despite their rough appearance, Bloodfire Pins are exceedingly sophisticated work, and often difficult to come by. At the wearer's command, they can channel the Angst contained in the Bloodfire into the user's Corpus. Angst is transferred 2 points at a time, and for every 2 points of Angst drawn from the pin, the wearer takes a Corpus level of damage. Any number of points of Angst may be drawn from any number of pins at once, so long as the Angst is drained 2 points at a time. Angst may not be put back into the pins without the use of the Dark Arcanos Larceny.

Shadow Prosthetics (Variable Level Artifact)

One of the greatest weaknesses of the Shadow-eaten is the ravaging effect that Oblivion has on their Corpus. Pieces decay or tear away, to regenerate only as gnarled lumps or never to regrow at all. Shadow Prosthetics are an attempt by Shadow-eaten Artificers to address this problem.

Each level of Shadow Prosthetics allows the user to possess a temporary Corpus level above and beyond those allowed by her permanent Corpus rating, to a maximum of the normal 10 levels of Corpus that a wraith or Shadow-eaten usually possesses. For example, a Nephwrack with 7 Corpus levels remaining could have 3 points of Shadow Prosthetics implanted, and thus effectively return to 10 Corpus levels. There are, however, a few drawbacks to this scenario.

The first is that the prosthetics are just that — hooks and grippers and artificial limbs. They don't actually replace the Spectre's deteriorating Corpus; they just help fill in for the parts which no longer function properly. When a Spectre loses all 10 points of her permanent Corpus, she falls into Oblivion and is destroyed, regardless of how much hardware she has.

The second problem is that the prosthetics can become damaged or disarranged. When someone using Shadow Prosthetics rolls a 1 on a soak roll, her prosthetics become disarranged, and she loses a number of levels of Corpus equal to the number of points of Prosthetics she has. This circumstance can be corrected with a few minutes of shifting and twisting in a low-stress situation, but odds are that if the Spectre's trying to soak damage, she's not in low-stress surroundings. If the Spectre has more than four points of prosthetics implanted, then she is incapable of fixing the problem and someone else must help her with it.

Pardoner's Guard (Level 2 Relic)

Made from the relics of religious icons that have crossed the Shroud and been lost in the Tempest, Pardoner's Guards are infused with 1-10 points of Angst. Each point of Angst serves to fuel the Guard sufficiently to deflect an attempt by a Pardoner to reveal the bearer as a Spectre. Pardoner's Guards are essentially useful only to Doppelgangers under deep cover, and some in particularly sensitive locations carry two or three at once.

Vulpines

Vulpines are the barghests of the Labyrinth, pure and simple. Spectres who have been rudely lobotomized and Moliated into roughly canine shape, these creatures have a vaguely fox-like cast to their features. Vulpines are run in packs of up to a dozen, with each pack handled by a keeper through judicious use of Hive-mind.

Vulpines cannot be tamed by normal wraiths, though a culpine may pretend to be calmed for purposes of lowering an opponent's guard. Even the muzzles normally used to quiet *kuei-go* and barghests have no effect on these unquiet souls.



Mar. 1941




The Great Maze: The Labyrinth Beneath Stygia

The Well of the Void



he Void is the center and the bottom of the Labyrinth — in a sense, what all the rest of the Labyrinth exists to serve. Those who are sufficiently tired of existence find it not far away: around the next corner, down a flight of steps, behind the last doorway or at the foot of the bed. When it

serves the purposes of the Neverborn to intervene, they can lead those seeking the Void along a lengthier route, to some place the soon-to-be-dissolved can perform one final service. Otherwise, the Void unfolds its final threshold for the convenience of the ready. The Void can appear *anywhere* in the Labyrinth, in the parts ruled by other kingdoms and in the wastes where no great powers prevail.



In addition to the Void's ubiquitous manifestations, there is a fixed entrance, at the bottom of the Veinous Stair. Here a well, miles across, descends indefinitely down into darkness. Above the mouth of the Stair it narrows, varying from half a mile to a few yards as it passes through layers of Labyrinthine matter. Below the Stair its shaft is smooth...or would be, were it not for millennia of labor imposed upon it, by Oblivion-worshipping Spectres carving out sanctuaries for themselves at this final place within existence.

Around the rim of the Well and along its length, the usual black Labyrinth-stuff is broken by veins of a white marble-like substance. When trod upon, the veins emit short moans and sometimes discharge flashes of memory gleaned from those who have already passed on down. Their intensity varies from featherweight touches up to the hammer-blow insistence of Mnemotechnics. Most are the memories of the very recently departed — no more than months old — but snippets of lives lost longer ago do sometimes linger. The memory veins serve as a last test of the supplicant's readiness: those who flinch or are startled still cling to their existence enough to be useful as tools. The pull of Oblivion leads them back from the brink, to discharge some task. Only when the intrusion fails to disrupt the supplicant's march into the Void is it truly time. Those who cannot be disturbed are ready to contribute their little fragments to the Void, to hasten the end of all things.

The Final Gathering

Communities of the not-quite-ready eke out pathetic existences in chambers opening onto the Well. They range from the deluded hoping to summon the next Great Maelstrom by force of will to the confused seeking a sign about how to proceed to the despairing who still retain some tie to the rest of the universe. All scavenge what nourishment they can from those about to plunge into the Well. While waiting for fresh supplicants, they turn to carving their stories, hopes and fears into the walls around them. In some places, particularly along the two great stairways that spiral down into the depths of the Well, the carvings reach back dozens of feet from the original surface, reflecting untold generations of sculptors trying to efface or transform their predecessors' work. These lost souls shape their caves into echoes or parodies of their Skinlands homes, places in the Shadowlands they conquered or destroyed and other dwellings that made an impression in days before the drive to seek Oblivion became dominant.

There is no fixed point beyond which return is impossible, down in the depths of the Well. Sometimes those who try climbing or flying down vanish forever, just a few seconds after leaving the lowest ledges. Other seekers after obliteration remain visible for hours or even days. Oblivion has its own rhythms, which remain obscure even to those who have been observing it for a very long time.

The Veinous Stair



The Veinous Stair is the spine of the Labyrinth, the Axis Mundi of the world under Oblivion's sway. It is the counterpart of the River of Death in the Shadowlands, the place to which traffic naturally flows, the fixed point in the eons-long circulation of the Labyrinth. It runs from a fixed point in Stygia to a fixed point in the surface of the Labyrinth and then on down, the only feature of the Labyrinth that remains stationary relative to the universe above. Even the exterior mouth of the Well of the Void drifts along with its surrounding, but no changes of Labyrinthine terrain dislodge the Veinous Stair.

Its single invariant feature is its steps: 18 inches wide and 12 inches deep, with very little variation. Some seem to have been carved from the top down, others from the bottom up. Most of its length is the usual black stuff of the Labyrinth, but the full range of common variations and many exotic ones appear from time to time. Waves of distortion sometimes ripple upward from the Well when the flow of souls is particularly heavy, altering soul-high sections in pulses that travel up faster than the fastest Harbinger can bring warning. One of the leading causes of the loss and Shadow-devouring of Stygian miners is falls occasioned by the transformation of the portion of Stair beneath them into brittle balsa, throbbing hair, glistening slick foam or something equally unsuitable for wraiths' tread.

The side shafts sunk into rich veins of Angst, soulfire and other valuable raw materials help give definition and stability to the Stair. Reinforcing rings of Stygian steel make it much harder for passages to shift shape or position. Very few things are impossible in the Labyrinth, however, and every generation has its tales of epic mining disasters in which entire crews are crushed or lost. This corporeal effort gains support from the sustained willpower of those who toil within the Labyrinth for Stygian ends. Their beliefs unconsciously drive back the worst of the Labyrinth's inconstancy. In compensation, however, the unmined passages just beyond the limits of regular Stygian passages are *more* variable than usual, some shifting more rapidly than the eye can follow. Nightmares of chaos sweep around the miners in search of opportunities to feed and destroy. Any effort to extend a mine shaft or open a new one requires the support of the Legions.

Few glow zones lighten the Stair's route through the Labyrinth, but there are various sources of illumination. Spectral squads ranging across the exterior of the Labyrinth hoard relic strobe lights, destroyed during atomic bomb tests, and use them to blind or at least disorient wraiths moving on the Stair above. Since there are never enough of these extremely high-intensity lights, less fortunate Spectres assigned to the effort supplement their ranks with spotlights, movie studio klieg

lights, signal flares, lighthouse lamps and whatever else comes to hand. Inside, Kindled Spectral torches inflict some emotional damage on wraiths, and are replenished from below if any of the torches manages to escape. In addition, some of the veins being mined glow from internal illumination, or from lights reflected up from the depths.

Whenever and wherever they can, Spectres with arts of concealment sneak onto the Stair to write slogans, paint diagrams and even carve frescoes aimed with propagandistic intent at the intruders. They mock Stygian history and accomplishments, cast aspersions (often accurately) at the motives of those commanding the miners and soldiers assigned to the Labyrinth and proclaim the inevitable triumph of Oblivion. They lay out little tableaus showing the extent of Oblivion's influence in the Shadowlands, wherever possible gathering details from available Shadows. They provide testimonials as to the pleasures of existence of the Shadow-eaten, emphasizing the new opportunities to fulfill Passions and goals Stygia denies. When all else fails, they settle for straightforwardly shocking and disturbing images calculated to exploit the fears of viewers.

Unreinforced passages open and close as frequently along the Stair as anywhere else in the Labyrinth. The more stable of these become subject to exploratory mining; those that show signs of instability are marked and avoided by the ranks of regular wraiths. (For Doomslayers, on the other hand, the instability is a promising sign, offering hopes of access to new stretches of the Labyrinth.) Those who are in the Labyrinth because it's their duty, rather than out of choice, try to take no more chances than are absolutely necessary, and the vistas of passage, chamber and plasm offer no particular temptation to them. The occasional raids by foraging Shadowed Plasmics do nothing to make exploring any more attractive, either.

To Spectres, the Stair is at once wonderful opportunity and galling, gaping wound. There are always plenty of desirable targets creeping along it: miners, soldiers, and explorers, all with vulnerabilities and far more appetizing than fellow Spectres as sources of nourishment. But at the same time, the Stair and its occupants are a stabbing reminder of how much of the universe has not succumbed to Oblivion. There are infinite depths within the Labyrinth...but there's a very large, very diverse, terribly vital span of existence above, and the battle continues. Foresighted Spectres must deal with the constant disruption of their plans by foolhardy brethren so anguished by the torment that they brook no delay, rushing instead into disorganized melee and shattering more coordinated ventures.

Some Doppelgangers have given up on the prospect of joint action for this reason, and prefer to operate solo instead. The lone Doppelganger stakes out a vantage point and nabs the last straggling member of a group of wraiths, quickly adopting the victim's appearance and returning to Stygia with the others. Over time, a large contingent of Doppelgangers develops in miners' and soldiers' communities, poised to disperse for action elsewhere in the Shadowlands.



Floyd Collins, the Great Deceiver

The 1920s were a time of intense competition among cave proprietors throughout Kentucky. The success of Mammoth Cave as a tourist attraction led to endless efforts to cash in by others, with tactics up to and including setting fire to each others' guide stations and planting ringers in lines of customers to recommend alternate attractions. There were even pitched gun battles with all the panoply of Prohibition-era racketeering, driven by the ingenuity, greed and desperation of Kentuckians seeing their first and only shot at success.

In such an environment, the discovery and exploration of new caves was very important. Far and away the best discoverer and explorer of his time was Floyd Collins, an uneducated local with a remarkable talent for underground maneuvers. Crystal Cave was one of his discoveries, along with a swarm of lesser-known caves. He met a slow and painful end in 1925. On his way up from a recently discovered cave, he became pinned in a narrow shaft by a rockfall. For a week, rescuers could bring him food, water and light, but could not manage to extricate him. Then a cave-in left them able to get close enough only to hear his voice. Volunteers worked heroically to dig a 60 foot shaft down to reach him, but it took another two weeks to do so. When the would-be-rescuers found him, he had already been claimed by starvation and exposure.

The saga of his entrapment and rescue efforts was one of the great news events of the 1920s. At least 10000 people gathered on the scene by the second

weekend; the story was on the front page of the *New York Times* the day after day.

Floyd emerged across the Shroud as a Mortwight. He was filled with rage at the greed and folly of those who, he felt, had set him up for destruction. The whole region was densely populated by both Spectres and wraiths soaking up the emotions of the crowds; once his death became known and the flow of Pathos began to dry up, the Spectres embarked on a general slaughter, and feasted greatly on insufficiently agile wraiths.

In the decades since his death, Floyd has dedicated himself to foiling efforts at underground activity of all kinds. Up until the 1960s, he focused on Skinlands caves, hoarding the Pathos roused by retrospectives about his case to power extended use of Embody and Pandemonium. After the loss of his Fetters, the Veinous Stair became his primary hunting ground.

When he sees a small party of ignorant miners, soldiers or explorers, Floyd takes on the appearance he had in life: taciturn, but with an occasional bright smile revealing his prominent gold front tooth. He undertakes to find out what the wraiths need, and to guide them to safety. Then he leads his victims through torturous passages terminating in (depending on his whim of the moment) a bustling Amphiskriopolis, a dead end or simply a long fall down. He may summon Spectral help and devour the victims on the spot, or he may fly off with Argos and leave the victims behind to perish slowly.

The Engulfed Cathedral

Dear Mother, dear Mother, the Church is cold
— William Blake, "The Little Vagabond"

The Long Drowning

Porte d'Noir is a promontory on the French Mediterranean coast. Since prehistory, the caves at its foot have sheltered pirates and others with grudges against the local authorities, while its heights have been home to symbols of the authorities (who have often been dealing secretly with those below).

In the 12th century, the bishop of the region contracted with Jean-Jacques Sforza to design and build a unique monument to the glory of God. He got just that. Sforza was a closet Gnostic, and built the fullest architectural embodiment of that view of humanity's innate alienation and the eternal war between the true God and the false Creator. The congregation gath-

ered on lower levels whose decorations emphasized the irredeemable corruption of all flesh. Visions of monsters and the deadly sins wove around tableaux depicting the failure of all efforts at virtue. The celebrants discharged their duties on middle levels whose motif was the folly of creation and the need for salvation through escaping the world-prison. The upper reaches of the cathedral suggested the blank inhumanity of purified spirit, freed from everything that matter-trapped humanity can know. By the time any Church official with an interest in orthodoxy as a matter of belief discovered what Sforza was doing, the work was almost complete. Sforza himself went to the stake for heresy, but the cathedral remained. If it proved intimidating to the masses, the theory ran, then it might yet serve some purpose.

Sforza became one of the early Mortwights, and lingered to supervise the development of his vision. In the 17th century he captured the soul of the departing Bishop Matthias Henriot, the first full-blown atheist to hold the see. Henriot had gone into the clergy as a secure means to prominence and power, and was quick to transfer his allegiance to the Malfears, whom he saw as far more effective authority figures than any Rome could offer. Together, the two established a

proliferation of Spectral cults among the local Satanists, occultists and other "visionaries."

The Cathedral of Porte d'Noir met its end in 1943. Maquis leader and anti-clerical zealot Luc Seydoux struck a combined blow against occupier and clergy (or so he intended) by dynamiting the largest caves beneath the promontory, so as to bring down the cathedral, its staff and the local office of the Nazi regime in one fell swoop. It worked...but Seydoux's own charge detonated prematurely, sending him spiraling down with the objects of his hatred. The accumulated weight of suffering, doubt and fear surrounding the cathedral ensured its transference whole across the Shroud. Henriot, Sforza and many of their followers were on the other side, waiting for it to come to rest.

The ensuing fall lasted subjective years, and took the cathedral through at least one collective Harrowing, purging all those not sufficiently Shadow-eaten to serve in the environment prepared by Sforza's masters. At length the cathedral plunged through a recent rift in the exterior of the Labyrinth and crashed into the floor of a mile-long chamber half-filled with water-like plasm. The reverberations sealed the opening above and the Engulfed Cathedral was born.

The Engulfed Cathedral in the Present

Sforza immediately set about rebuilding his damaged masterpiece. Newly created Spectres showing too much independence became part of the building materials; others labored to fit them into the gaps and cracks created by the fall. Older Spectres assigned to Sforza's command joined in, using manipulative arts to bring forth Sforza's vision of alienation more fully. The upper reaches of the living cathedral had been stark white marble; now they became shiny black, commemorating the overarching power of Oblivion. The lower reaches emphasize the inevitable death and dissolution of all living things, and the torment of existence perpetuated past death. After Sforza and Henriot discovered the Garou, Wyrm motifs began decorating buttresses.

The body of the Engulfed Cathedral blurs into the stuff of the surrounding Labyrinth. Metallic and crystalline supports stretch out to the walls. Beneath the surface of the plasm, turbines transform the flow from not-yet-healed cracks into the energy necessary to sustain the internal processes of the cathedral. Overhead, the spires of the cathedral are raw Labyrinth-stuff, inseparable from pre-existing stalactites. The rhythms of Labyrinthine evolution affect the cathedral as well: When the tides of entropy are strong, it melts, and when the tides of stasis are strong, only the lightest touch is necessary to restore its earlier form. Glow zones pass through the cathedral from time to time; Sforza would love to trap some for permanent effects, but has so far been unable to do so.

Construction never stops. The original body of the cathedral is now lost in a maze of extensions. Most of the main chamber is full, and recent modifications stretch down side

passages. Barrow-flame blazes around the main altar and the spots where construction is most active; a pair of Barrows marks where the resisting were slaughtered immediately after the cathedral's arrival. The warrens Sforza has set aside for his own use loop through spatial distortions, offering him infinite space in which to pursue his private ambitions while taking up just a portion of one wing of the cathedral.

Illumination in the environs of the Engulfed Cathedral comes from stained glass panels set in front of Kindled Spectres. Sforza and Henriot have a strong preference for those who can scream recitations (and distortions) of sacred texts, to complement the blasphemous designs set into the panels. Originally, all the designs were targeted at Christian imagery, but in the half-century since the plunge, Sforza has broadened his vision to include the negation of *all* religious aspirations. Those passing down the cathedral's halls cast multiple shadows; there are also some shadows cast by no one at all. Recent recruits have applied Arcanoi to add animation and responsiveness to the cathedral's decorations, to heighten the sense of active menace. Many of the statues are actually Being-drained Spectres, locked into immobility for some infraction of orders or other.

The Engulfed Cathedral serves as rallying point for many Spectre cult-promoters. They take refreshment in the glories of the cathedral, and heal here the wounds suffered by too-close contact with the living. Sometimes they bring the souls of worshippers back with them, to grant visions of the wonders waiting across the Shroud. But Sforza is sometimes too impatient for his own good: His inopportune rants about the superiority of atheism repeatedly bring Void worshippers to the brink of attacking his sanctuary of heresy. Henriot, for whom it is all simply a choice of pathways to personal power, smoothes over such differences with slick rhetoric when he can, and serves his own ends.

Seydoux hates the Cathedral and everyone associated with it except his personal followers. But his identity is so tightly bound to it that he is unable to leave for any extended period of time. He works out his frustrations in commando raids on the Shadowlands, hoping to inflict indirect damage on the beliefs of his enemies.

Industrion

Progress! Do not speak to me of progress, sir. I gave my life the cause of progress, building a world in which men might strive to the highest heights of human potentiality in a society purged of the political and social dross of the ages. They would not have it. They spurned it in favor of trinkets. Now I merely give them what they — what you all — seek most dearly. If you do not like it when you have got it, so much the worse for you.

— Dr. Benjamin Rush, addressing a captured Helldiver in 1922



Industrion, the City of Perpetual Industry, is the graveyard of two centuries' worth of reformers' ambition. It originated with the death of Dr. Benjamin Rush. In life he had been one of the Founding Fathers of the United States, a doctor, temperance activist, scholar and dedicated public servant. His later years were marked by growing concern for the abandonment of the republican ideal of self-regulation and respect for natural hierarchy in favor of democratic leveling. Like many of his revolutionary peers, he died with the sense that his heirs had gone astray. His Shadow claimed him for good during Andrew Jackson's second administration, having convinced him that America could not be the vessel of his still-living hopes.

The Shadowed Rush gathered like-minded new Spectres around him, despairing reformers from across Stygian territory. Together they set out to give their unworthy successors what, in their anger, they thought the Skinlands now most wanted: junk of every kind. Industrion is a factory city, dedicated to producing useless and dangerous goods by wasteful and destructive means. Authority rests with the hardest-laboring inhabitants of the confluences through which Industrion spreads, Rush and those of his fellows who now simply wish to see the industrial world destroyed. They are served by willing, though less fanatical, Spectres, and by the growing ranks of their victims.

Industrion's heyday was the middle of the century. There is no room in its vision for solid-state circuitry, nor for the industrialization of the Third World, and its founders pass into the Void more readily than they adapt. But as long as there are factories in Stygia, Industrion will never fall into complete quiescence.

At the heart of Industrion is the World Factory, sprawling across 50 acres and rising up, along its tallest extensions, to a height of almost a mile. Raw materials constantly arrive at the factory from all directions, carried in from mines and relic-harvesting missions. In addition to huge chains of bearers dragging sledges, Industrion's masters employ trucks constructed from bits and pieces of relics. Such vehicles belch caustic fumes and drip highly corrosive liquids as they plod along.

The raw materials hauled in are reduced to their essential components by combinations of gears and cams that tower into the darkness between Kindled flares. The conveyor belts between conversion stations are rickety and prone to collapse; they must be constantly supplemented by muscle power...and start up again unexpectedly, adding ravaged Corpus to the pile of components. Sprawling vats of digestive acids sometimes tip over, rotting anyone caught below in a few excruciating seconds. The output of the World Factory is damaged goods: Artifacts that crumble in moments of need, relics that absorb Pathos without producing any effect, magical toys that leech out Shadowlands users' Corpus levels. The goal of Industrion manufacturing is to breed dependence and then shatter it.

The main chamber of Industrion has been squared off by dint of much Spectral digging. The scaffolding supporting the World Factory fills the whole chamber, with pieces of machinery draped within it. Supporting equipment stretches off in every direction, including up and down. A waste shaft runs across the chamber, stretching a total of three miles with only minor angling side-to-side even when it passes through the center of the World Factory. Useless fragments of broken vehicles and machinery clutter passages for at least a day's march in every direction, as neatness is not an Industrion priority. Pipes carry in and out plasm of many varieties, and the results of obscure Tempest-Weaving practices.

Andrew Carnegie in Hell

To the lords of Industrion, Andrew Carnegie is the symbol of almost everything wrong with the world of their descendants. He made an immodest amount of wealth through manipulation of the economic order they despise. And then he had the gall to turn around and do good to the communities he had come to dominate, appeasing the masses and placating the elite who might otherwise have challenged him and his kind. Rush would prefer to see more outright villains, to whom he grants the virtue of honesty, and fewer of the sort of more efficient manipulator Carnegie was in life.

An Industrion patrol on its way back from spreading damaged Artifacts in the Shadowlands captured Carnegie in 1937. Recognizing the immense value of their prize, they took him straight to Industrion's operational center. Rush and his colleagues cast Carnegie into a looping series of Harrowings, drawing on Lifeweb as needed to keep creating fresh targets of attack. A typical Harrowing, which may comprise a very extended experience, lasts seconds or minutes from the point of view of the Labyrinth at large. Carnegie has spent six decades going through them, with a subjective duration of many centuries. Unsurprisingly, he is gradually losing his sanity as a result. It survives only because the zeal of his Harrowers leads them into distortions of his life experience so great that he recognizes the untruths and regains the knowledge of being manipulated, and thus can turn his anger outward rather than inward.

Carnegie is imprisoned in a seven-foot-square metal box high up in the World Factory. The lords of Industrion sometimes gather to observe his torment; the rest of the time he is simply ignored. Wraiths who succeed in breaking his confinement and current Harrowing might win for themselves a valuable ally...or might be turning loose a dangerous, insane but highly effective threat to the Hierarchy.

The Chambers of Wisdom



ount Wilhelm Liebeskohn was an early devotee of Machievelli; when he died, he did not linger long in the Labyrinth on his way to the Void. But he did make a lasting impression on the Onceborn Kosikomor. Roused to wakefulness, the would-be Malfean set about creating a realm in which to apply its understanding of the essence of statecraft, and to facilitate this goal, it sent its servants out to trap aristocrats and diplomats.

Kosikomor has been experimenting through the centuries in search of the defining traits of the consummate rulers — intending, of course, to subsume those traits within himself when he feels doing so is warranted. With each isolation, addition, subtraction or redefinition of character, his subjects are left with fewer scraps of their original identity. So it is peculiar fragments of personalities who inhabit the shells that sweep in stately array through the Chambers, endlessly discussing the fate of real and imagined lands. They do not shout, but deliberate with what they imagine to be sober attention. They wear garb appropriate to their imagined status as diplomats of the postmortem world, with decorations awarded by authorities (some of whom even exist outside the minds of the Wise), and live in a perpetual evening. Delegations of the Blind carry messages from one plenary session to the next, and discharge all the functions of discreet servitors.

The Chambers of Wisdom radiate in three dimensions around a central hallway that runs 100 miles in a straight line from the Veinous Stair. The Great Hall of Reflection is circular, a full 100 yards in diameter and 50 feet tall, with alternating mirrors and trophy cases holding relics of the great diplomatic achievements of the Wise. Copies of the Treaty of Versailles destroyed during World War II occupy places of honor. So do the accords by which the Allied powers abandoned European Jews to the Nazis, the professions of eternal peace signed between the United States and various native nations, the League of Nations' solemn profession of neutrality with regard to the Armenian genocide, the early covenants between African slavers and their European customers and the like. What matters to the Wise is that proper form is followed. Future conflicts emerging from unjust content are irrelevant, or even desirable, in that they offer more scope for diplomacy.

When a particular agreement among the Wise catches the fancy of Kosikomor, it dispatches Spectres to arrange for its implementation. Agreements about imaginary kingdoms do no particular harm, but Spectral meddling in the affairs of the Skinlands has exacerbated many of the political tragedies of the last four centuries. The Wise do not have nearly the influence they imagine, but their orders can worsen an existing calamity or tip a calamity-in-the-making over the brink.

The Wise and the Foolish

Unlike many Spectres, the Wise make no trouble for intruders unless the intruders attempt to interfere in the deliberations of the Wise. Rather, intruders are subjected to extended harangues on the merits of various positions. The Wise call upon the Keening arts of Muse and Requiem to bring in new recruits, voluntary or otherwise, sending them back to the outside world fogged with the vision of perfect order.

The Long White Tree

The Shadowlands include some terrain features that vanished long ago from the Skinlands. Around Puget Sound, there are three enormous waterfalls which ceased to flow on the living side of the Shroud with the end of the last Ice Age. But those falls were the centers of habitation for a very long time, and they remain active as sites for gathering for commemorative rituals. In the Shadowlands, therefore, the waters continue to flow. They plunge through the Shadowlands, down into the Tempest, gradually transforming from water into plasm, and into the Labyrinth, to pool in a series of seven oval chambers.

Two centuries ago, a ragtag band of lordless Spectres set out to make a place for themselves; they chose these pools, with their ready and stable access to the realms above, as their new base of operations. Exploiting the fears and losses of the early years of European contact, they constructed a tempting wonderland of delights for the wraiths of the native peoples of the Sound (and for unwary spiritualistic seekers among the newcomers). The seven chambers became a linked moonlit landscape united by the eponymous giant barren pine tree, whose branches weave through the ceiling of each chamber. Stars twinkle among the branches in alien, yet inviting, constellations. Gentle animals graze peacefully along the banks of the pools, while nocturnal flowers bloom and release pleasant smells. The founding Spectres had never heard of Swar, but the impulse to decoy occurs frequently among Spectres.

The first "plants" and "animals" decorating the trap were Nothings and Drones Moliated into convenient forms. Since then, the populations have been swelled with the addition of the souls of those duped down into the White Tree's clutching branches.

Most of the peoples at whom the trap was aimed resist it easily. They can tell the difference between gaudy ersatz solace and the tougher but more vital alternatives they practice. But there have always been some for whom the quick fix is preferable; the booming interest of recent decades in Native American spirituality has brought forth many more victims much less prepared to resist Spectral wiles. The earnest

but ignorant seeker of thrills through shamanism is prime fodder for a Spectral cult after receiving some guided tours of the "happy hunting ground" beneath the Long White Tree. Those victims who share their visions with enthusiastic fellow travelers do Oblivion's work for it.

The teachings of the lords of the Long White Tree place a heavy emphasis on liberating oneself from artificial constraints. To become one with the universe, they say, one must experience all things, good and bad. Step by step they lead their devotees down a path that culminates in the unrestrained exercise of all their Shadows' Dark Passions. More and more of those "enlightened" who have rested under the Long White Tree enter the Shadowlands as Mortwights, fit for use as their masters command.

The Lodge of Final Maturity



Among the Algonquin and other peoples of northeastern North America, there was a traditional rite of passage to manhood involving the ceremonial herb *wysoccan*, known to botanists as *datura*. When undergoing this rite, boys were confined in special longhouses and fed nothing but *wysoccan* (a hallucinogen) for two to three weeks. Boys subjected to the rite would, or so it was intended, forget what it was to be a boy and learn what it was to be a man.

The Lodge of Final Maturity draws on the experience of Spectral Algonquins and anthropologists to treat the Psyches of wraithly prisoners. Instead of Harrowings, wraiths abducted from the Shadowlands of former Algonquin territory are plied with gentle visions, in which they have the chance to peacefully resolve Passions and Fetters. Prisoners' Shadows receive covert instructions from the Lodge's operators to keep quiet during all this. When it works, the Shadow achieves triumph not through superior strength but through the total collapse of the Psyche, as it believes its work is done and it no longer needs to resist.

The Lodge spreads through a network of small chambers outfitted as cells, each holding a single wraith. Next to each cell are secret rooms from which Spectres can observe their victims and apply useful arts with the benefits of both proximity and concealment. Wraiths who prove too resistant to the treatment are fed to the forges or tossed as tokens of appreciation to nearby Spectral bands, who keep a watch for escapees. The chambers within which the operators dwell resemble traditional Algonquin longhouses carved from stone. The ceilings and walls have been carefully sculpted over the centuries into a semblance of wood, the themes of Algonquin art modified to invoke the glory of Oblivion and of surrender to it.

In some moods the Lodge's operators dream that if they can avoid entanglements in Spectral politics, they may someday emerge as a new dominant power, sweeping all before them with the armies created through their techniques. In the meantime, they try to keep their activities as discreet as possible.

Skylight



Some rare Amphiskiopoli open directly onto the Tempest, being as much on the Labyrinth as in it. Skylight is one of these. Its inhabitants share two qualities: They all possess high levels of Argos (and generally Tempest-Weaving as well), and they have all lost their Fetters. Skylighters launch themselves in embittered attacks on anything intelligent moving in the Tempest, lunging as high as they can reach while hoping to drag others down if they cannot themselves rise.

The design of Skylight draws heavily on aerodromes, reflecting the aviation background of the Nephwracks who rule it. Labyrinth-stuff resembling pitted aluminum or rotting canvas is the standard construction material; buildings resemble hangars and barracks, most glowing with a faint putrescent green light. More than is usual for the Labyrinth, Skylight's designers aim specifically for upsetting psychological impact on the not-yet-Shadow-eaten carried here. Relic aircraft covering the gamut of conditions from better than new to unrecognizable junk line the runways and spill out from over-full hangers. While all the denizens of Skylight can fly on their own power, many delight in using planes (and helicopters and airships and autogyros and gliders and other forms of air travel) like those they flew in life.

Even when not yet forced into it by Oblivion's taint, Skylight Spectres tend to favor heavy Moliation into classic images of revenants. Skeletal bodies clad in shreds of crumbling flesh and uniforms are the norm. Zombies, Frankenstein's monsters, Nosferatu, and severed brains in life-support systems all have their devotees as well. Their vehicles are similarly treated for effect; most Skylighters would simply not feel right going to battle in vehicles that did not appear nearly shattered by enemy fire, draped with the corpses of their original pilots or otherwise displaying the immanent presence of death.

Skylight operations would be more effective if the site's leadership were more unified. But the factions — early aviation pioneers, Great War casualties, World War II casualties, victims of commercial disasters, airship crews and so on — all press for the supremacy of their own style and are reluctant to subordinate their own claimed advantages to central coordination. Thus, most of the potential of combined-arms tactics goes to waste. But on the small scale, Skylight raids are as dangerous and destructive as any either above or below the Tempest.

The Labyrinth Elsewhere



The whole universe faces Oblivion; within the Labyrinth gather the forces representing the doom of every part of the rest of existence. But different lives call forth different deaths, and there is tremendous variety of Spectral force and Labyrinthine support.

Beyond the passages and confluences known to Stygia, there are vast barren realms before fresh concentrations of Spectral activity emerge. Very few Doomslayers, Legionnaires or (for that matter) Spectres cross these cyclopean wastes. Such deserts are devoid of large numbers of Spectres, but not of dangers of their own: catastrophically active Labyrinth regions, the Barrows of long-ago Spectral lords and their followers, Shadowed Plasmics — all areas in which disappearances are common. The prospect of spending weeks or months (or years) plodding through such scenes arouses little excitement in even the most masochistic Spectre.

The Yellow Springs: Darkness Enthroned



The dividing line between Tempest and Labyrinth blurs beneath the Dark Kingdom of Jade. The perpetual storm above shades imperceptibly into a realm of chaotic terrain dominated by the Citadels of the Yama Kings and Yu Huang's Hell. There is no firm distinction between "inside" and "outside" as in the Stygian Labyrinth: The Jade Labyrinth holds yawning chasms deeper than worlds and broader than the eye could discern, even if the perpetual storms of knives were to let up for a moment.

Yu Huang's legions of servants include both wraiths and Spectres, the latter the former servants of Lung Wang, now bound to the victor in the long-ago battle between the Malfean and the emperor. Spectral patrols guard the perimeter of the lowest part of Yu Huang's empire; their lord has no desire to face the complications that would ensue from other Spectres probing the recesses and mysteries of his great work. Spectres elsewhere have a vague but emphatic sense that trying to encroach on Yellow Springs territory is more trouble than the rewards are worth, and most turn elsewhere for their pleasures as a result.



Hell

The dark counterpart to the Jade Palace, Hell is the foundation of Yu Huang's authority in the afterworld. The Emperor's subjects know what fates await rebels; scarcely a family anywhere in the Jade Empire escapes the loss of one of its members to long (or perpetual) torments there.

Hell is an outcropping of the Labyrinth, conveniently lifted high into the Tempest long before Yu Huang conceived the plan of reifying his subjects' fears into a palace of torture. It may once have been a smooth, almost cylindrical, mountain, but millennia of erosion have left it a twisted, jagged mass, well-suited to the Emperor's purposes. Conscripted wraiths labor side-by-side with Lung Wang's vanquished Spectres to create the embodiment of each fear of a hell that seizes their master's subjects. Hell is therefore constantly being updated — few parts are ever permanently closed down, but many are redressed every few centuries, and brand-new ones are created as popular fright provides suggestions.

In Hell's early years of operation, innovative torturers incorporated views of the seemingly endless drop all around into some tab-leaus, and drew on the native winds of the Tempest as extra instruments of torture. The results proved not entirely satisfactory, however, in that captives sometimes managed to escape. Even today, stories circulate in the lands above that Hell can be beaten. Since then, all new hells have been carved from within the bowels of the mountain, digging down ever farther. It means more work, but then conscripts and Spectres are equally expendable, and to Yu Huang the reduced risk of escape is worth any number of laborers.

Wu Hua and the Pit of Salt and Iron

Wu Hua

The Yama King Wu Hua has an ancient interest in governance in all its shades of tyranny, oppression, corruption and betrayal. His favored sphere of influence is therefore the north direction of the *kuei-jin*, and his favored arts are those of glamour, command and deception.

Like all of the Yama Kings, he has strained relations at best with Yu Huang, but unlike most of his peers, he has managed to maintain something like a wary truce for most of the last several centuries. Wu Hua's *akuma* and other servitors do clash with those of Yu Huang, but not as part of any grand strategy. All lords of the doom-seeking know that it is simply very difficult to wield reliable control, and most adopt a policy of not peering too closely at minor infractions except when they need the raw material for object lessons about obedience.

The Pit of Salt and Iron

Through the ages, Wu Hua has remodeled his lair a great many times. Its current form draws inspiration from early imperial Chinese structures, both physical and conceptual.

The Pit is, as its name suggests, a huge pit, gaping raw and white in the midst of Labyrinthine crags. The terrain is almost pure crystalline salt, laced with shards of Labyrinth-stuff that resembles granite and quartz. Citadels rise like giant iron nails in the midst of the pit, in accordance with a numerological strategy that makes full sense only to Wu Hua. The vast laboring classes under his rule mine through the salt in search of the occasional vein of something useful. They work barefoot; those under sanction receive one or more cuts to their legs and feet at the start of each work shift, the better to maintain a level of pain and discomfort that reminds all of the benefits of serving Wu Hua without question. Within the citadels, the favored ranks carry messages to and fro, and implement the orders created by the even more favored few who report directly to Wu Hua.

Each Citadel culminates in a very long spike, on which are impaled *akuma* who have tried to defect and souls captured on their journeys through the Tempest before they have the opportunity to draw the Second Breath. Wu Hua enjoys the public display of peril to those who would pursue other paths. From time to time he flies up, in the form of a shadowy creature akin to a winged lion, to devour parts of the impaled, while providing them with just enough power to heal before the next round of feasting. Observers report that some of the impaled appear to be Harrowed souls trapped after an unsuccessful resolution, but it is difficult to investigate closely without enjoying the full confidence of Wu Hua...and those who have it do not wish to jeopardize their position by prying.

Within the Citadels, Wu Hua's followers make plans for the corruption of leading *kuei-jin* institutions and, as they have free time, those of the living societies of eastern Asia. Wu Hua delights in (and rewards) schemes of subversion which work through art, introducing dangerous new ideas in forms calculated to play upon aesthetic sensibilities among the ruling order. The Pit is a terrible place of torment, but above the Tempest, Wu Hua cultivates the image of the delicate, sensitive, terribly aware advisor. However, the Pit has its role in the scheme of things: Atrocity is a means of aesthetic stimulation, too, and Wu Hua caters as gladly to talented purveyors of horror shows as to flower arrangers and masters of opera.

Some who have managed to infiltrate and escape from both Yu Huang's Hell and the Pit of Salt and Iron report the presence of individuals in each who seem to have originated in the other. There is constant politicking for influence in the Yellow Springs, so this may simply show that some enterprising flunkies have managed to make a change of master. Rumors of closer ties between the masters swirl, but then this is true of every possible pairing (and more complicated alliance) of lords of the afterlife.

Dealings with the Rest of the Labyrinth

The rest of the Labyrinth is at best a hazy idea to the natives of the Yellow Springs. Most simply assume that Yu Huang's authority runs on indefinitely in the realms where he can bring the former legions of Lung Wang to bear, or guess that beyond the imperial legions lie only the Yama Kings. Imperial patrols are ef-

fective enough that Yu Huang's subjects very seldom have the chance to experience the contamination of external thoughts or visions. And there are always more hells to be carved, more roads to be paved, more ways to use up the Corpus of those who persist in questioning too publicly the assigned nature of things.

Only the most courageous — or most desperate — Yellow Springs denizens succeed in the leap past Tempest and guardians to any other part of the Labyrinth. The vast majority of these disappear into the wastes between kingdoms. Of the minority that reach someplace else suitable for their ongoing existence, few meet with favorable or credulous receptions. Their new hosts assume that the refugees are deranged, lying or in some other way not worth believing. Those who decided to return are again far more likely to meet an unfortunate end than to make it to their homes, and again encounter little belief. Their isolation perpetuates itself; they form secret communities of their own or yield to Oblivion.

By the same token, what Spectres and Doomslayers elsewhere think they know about the Yellow Springs and the darkness below is far more myth than fact. Very, very few outsiders survive encounters with Yu Huang's patrols. Those who do face a constant struggle for survival in the face of an all-encompassing bureaucracy which can call on both wraithly and Spectral resources to preserve the glory of the Emperor. Escape is as difficult as penetration. The cumulative burden is so great that perhaps one individual (or occasionally a fortunate small group) returns with any useful information in the span of a century. The gap of knowledge does not lie empty, however; stories fill it. Rumors of thousands of Stygian wraiths enslaved (never mind that Stygia does the same thing) in White Jade factories, dragons and other Plasmics stalking palace corridors and other, less believable stories are told and retold on the Isle of Sorrows, growing wilder and wilder with each retelling.

The Flayed Lands: Darkness Occupying



In the days when the Four Houses flourished, the Labyrinth was an unknown realm far away, far below the endless clouds gathered beneath the Fifth Sun. It was not a metaphysical problem, merely one more mystery to be solved at such time as immediate pressures might lessen. Spectres were taken to be some form of predator not yet catalogued, while Shadows either chose (or were unable to) manifest in the fullness of self-expression available to their Stygian brethren or were misunderstood and wedged into the frame-



work of Mixcoat's cosmology. The idea of a force of destruction with absolutely no interest in the delicate dance of balancing opposites seems not to have occurred to anyone with influence.

Among the great many things lost by the wraiths of the Houses in the Flaying, wraithly confidence in the rightness of their views of the nature of the world was among the most important. Spectral activity soared as the ranks of the Houses were destroyed, injured, captured and soulforged. For the first time, Shadows stood forth as distinct entities inimical to the well-being of their counterparts. The crisis of invasion was engulfed in a crisis of faith.

Today the conquered American Shadowlands display the same cosmological position as that of their conquerors: The Tempest lies below, and the Labyrinth below that. Networks of Nihils commemorate the greatest tragedies of the Flaying, and of the centuries of slaughter since. Some Spectres take particular pleasure in stalking sites where followers of the old ways gather in attempts to preserve their heritage — freshly renewed fear and disillusionment are potent nourishment. Spectral bands compete to find the forms and behaviors most upsetting to their tradition-seeking targets.

The New Sun: Darkness Repulsed

Neither Stygian wraiths nor Spectres know much about the New Sun. From the sanctuary of its environs, the House of Ix Chel maintains covert contacts with as many contemporary devotees of the old faith as its explorers can find. They issue out to provide instruction in the traditional rites, and to maintain at least some semblance of coordination among sympathizers in the wider Shadowlands. Military bands equipped with True Obsidian weapons drive back Spectres intruding through the Nihils that occasionally open; within the sealed confines of the New Sun, the Houses apply every available means to keep Shadows at bay.

In the absence of a Malfean conceiving a great passion for its destruction, the New Sun goes largely disregarded by its potential assailants below. The word among Spectres is that attacks on the Houses are too much work for too little reward. As for Labyrinth travelers native to Stygia, they simply do not know about the New Sun. If they did, they would feel no particular urge to do anything about it, either.

The African Labyrinth: Darkness Confused



he unique nature of the African Underworld gives rise to unique complications for the Spectres who would prey on it. It is an even tougher target than the New Sun, and therefore even more frequently abandoned by those with the opportunity to aim for better targets.

Spectres violate the unity of living and dead that characterizes the Underworld, each being a dark half whose light half no longer exists (or ever existed, in the case of the Neverborn). Underworld students of Spectral nature and culture say that Spectres are composed of shadowself separated from soul, dreamself and heartself; would-be healers seek to identify these lost elements and reunite them. Spectral students of the Underworld say that *abambo* have one of the most fascinating and well-developed delusional systems to be found anywhere beyond the Shroud.

It is extremely difficult for Spectres to enter the Underworld. Nihils open only rarely, and even the recent genocides have created openings that close in relatively short order. It is far easier to prey on the *abambo* who occupy the Lost Kingdoms. These smaller realms yield far more readily to Spectral onslaught. In every century, at least one falls to become a new Spectral enclave, ready to harvest unwary seekers. The Labyrinth beneath the Underworld is a blighted, inhospitable region, where no great Spectral lords flourish. Most of the Spectres trying to eke out an existence in such difficult circumstances are outcasts: heretics, the last survivors of lords who have been destroyed by rivals, those trying to flee Oblivion's pull. More "normal" Spectres sometimes travel into the wastes to hunt down such prey, but not often.

Doomslayers seldom venture up into this Underworld, though ambitious groups sometimes try attacking Lost Kingdoms under Spectral control. The obsessions that drive Doomslayers fit in very poorly with the dominant mood of this Underworld, and Doomslayers can feel sufficiently alienated in the midst of a culture they already understand.

The Sea that Knows No Sun: Darkness Challenged



he Polynesian afterlife would offer an altogether wonderful win/win situation for Spectral forces from elsewhere if it were not for the complications of the predators already there.

Modern-minded wraiths enter the Sea with Shadows conforming, more or less, to Stygian norms. The native customs of the Deadlands do not provide effective means of containment or response: once the belief in *tabu* fails, there is essentially nothing else to restrain a Shadow bent on destruction. Passions (and wraiths) abound for the harvesting.

The Ainu offer other feeding opportunities. As the ever-larger numbers of modern wraiths demonstrate, the universe neither cares about nor enforces *tabu*, and so Ainu find their destructive impulses growing. It takes ever-smaller nudges to release their pent-up hostility in charges at both modern wraiths and the traditional obstructions to self-indulgence.

The Ainu find themselves developing ever-better approximations of Shadows, and their rage and despair at this only feeds the cycle of destruction.

But the Maku lay claim to all the wraiths within the Sea, and Spectres from beyond the Sea's borders challenge them at their own peril. The Maku are growing stronger as well as more numerous in response to the deepening schisms within all the Deadlands. A century ago, interlopers could fight with the Maku for privilege of harvesting and expect a reasonable number of victories; now they can expect mostly to meet horribly painful ends. When interlopers succeed, they bring fresh confusion to Ainu seeking to draw on their traditional connections with the Maku and thus help fuel fresh chaos. The Nihils that follow in interlopers' wake help stir the Sea into more frequent storms. Permanent disturbances mark the most common zones of intrusion, and widen a bit every year. This disturbance, though, strengthens the rage and determination of the Maku, who then win more battles against intruders. The cumulative effect is of a constantly teetering equilibrium—never good for the wraiths of the Sea that Knows No Sun, but increasingly difficult for outside Spectres as well.

The Labyrinth beneath the Sea is almost completely filled with various forms of plasm, and with exotic Shadowed Plasmics adapted to that condition. Most chambers free of plasm have been made so by the sustained pumping effort of Spectres or Doomslayers who feel the need for such a space. Powerful Maku sometimes claim lairs for themselves, in which they gather legions of followers who are sufficiently alien that only the highest levels of Hive-mind can bridge communication gaps. Outsiders have learned that it is best to avoid them altogether.

Swar: Darkness Rivaled



he City of Delights is not so much an extension of the Labyrinth as a reinvention of it. The Malfean whose body is the city gathers an ever-stronger horde around itself, both to maintain its current position and in the hopes of invasion and conquest.

By the time Swar's growing power and self-awareness disturbed the dreams of the Malfeans below, it was too late. The city's framework and operations were too securely in place to yield to indirect disruptions. The ensuing Spectral attacks only convinced Swar's victims of its purity—surely the forces of Oblivion would not pit themselves so viciously against a mere rival, but only against a powerful embodiment of hope in the midst of death. The intermittent smaller raids that have broken out since then reinforce this, as well as providing an outlet for Dark Passions among those not quite yet ready to storm the city themselves.

The mind of Swar has learned that probing into the Labyrinth is unwise: Malfean probes and Malfean-ordered attacks inevitably ensue. So Swar's main attention is directed up, toward the source of

being. Skinlands necromancers in southern Asia sometimes notice its passing in the form of inexplicable waves of disruption of their magicks. Their most careful examinations have not yet linked these with Swar, though they know of its existence; they suspect undiscovered Spectral forces elsewhere in the Indian Shadowlands.

Swar has experimented with maintaining small, covert passages down through folded Byways to quiet portions of the Labyrinth, through which its servants can be sent. So far nothing significant has come from this. It is possible that some group of Spectral or Doomslayer explorers might find the lower end, pass upward and emerge to confront the very center of Swar and its most powerful servitors. It is less likely that they would return to tell of the experience. So far Swar has given rise to no distinctive classes of Spectre to call its own, but some part of it would like to do so. If these efforts bear fruit, care would be needed to avoid creating a widespread alarm in response.

Infiltrators

The most recent tactic of some ambitious Onceborn is the infiltration of Swar by Doppelgangers. The strategy calls for them to become established in the internal hierarchy of the city, which remains largely mysterious to the Onceborn, and by loyal discharge of duties to rise through the ranks. Once the infiltrators are in positions of influence, they will be able to open blocked passages and mount a coup against the current regime.

It will be many years before the attack can be seriously considered. The first infiltrators to succeed in entering Swar did so only five years ago, and their ranks are growing very slowly—the Onceborn do not wish to give any cause for alarm whatsoever.

The Kingdom of Clay: Darkness Incorporated



here the Australian Shadowlands are dominated by wraiths of European origin, the rules of Stygia apply. Wraithly and Spectral visitors find few surprises. The Labyrinth is twisted so that the portions beneath the Kingdom of Clay are adjacent, at least on some levels, to those beneath Stygia. The exterior stretches the normal distance, with intervening kingdoms and wastelands, but inside there is a unity of power based on the unity of souls. Australian, European, and American Doomslayers therefore have far more frequent contact with each other than their non-delving kin who stay above. On occasion this proves very handy, when Doomslayers irritate the local wraithly administration and must relocate to avoid the forces.

The Dreamtime: Darkness Negated

Things are altogether different in the Dreamtime. It does not experience Maelstroms, and it has no direct connection to the Labyrinth. Furthermore, there are no Nihils within the Dreamtime. The handful of outsiders who know enough about this situation to appreciate its uniqueness have no explanation for it, while those who dwell in the Dreamtime have little interest in solving the mysteries of outsiders.

The Mirrorlands: Darkness Riding

The forces of Oblivion are as thoroughly barred from the Island Below the Sea and its mysteries as they are from the Dreamtime. So they pursue two major lines of peripheral attack, hoping to isolate *les Mystères* from their worshippers.

One tactic draws on African forces, while the other exploits the weaknesses within Mirrorlands society.


Lost Efik

Of the various African peoples who sold their neighbors as slaves to the Europeans, the Efik were the most systematic and often the most brutal. As Efik magicians and tribal leaders died, they found themselves denied entry into the Bush of Ghosts; they gathered for mutual defense on small islands, forming a Lost Kingdom of their own. In time they fell to their Shadows, and Lost Efik became a Spectral stronghold.

Today, adventurous Spectres from Lost Efik set out in pursuit of the descendants of those then enslaved, all across the world. Since the Mirrorlands represents one of the largest concentrations of such prey, it is very high on their list of targets. Hunting Spectres have long since blazed reliable paths both through the Tempest and across the Labyrinth. While there are the perpetual dangers of untamed afterlife, there is very little organized opposition to the Efik's movement. The Underworld looks inward, and the Atlantic and realms below are remote from any concentration of existence strong enough to matter to the Hierarchy or Oblivion's greater servants.

The Lost Efik forces assist remaining Baka, much preferring to sacrifice others rather than themselves, where possible. They also work to cultivate the Shadows of *les Invisibles*, offering promises of insights *les Mystères* will not grant, or the power to avenge themselves on Skinlands foes without the limitations of the Petro faction. Such appeals work best on the most gullible, who are seldom suitable building material





for great armies, but who at least make a perennial distraction — if not a serious disruption — to Mirrorlands society.

Where necessary, the forces of Lost Efik manifest directly in the Mirrorlands, striking at the ties between living and dead. High levels of Tempest-Weaving and Shroud-Rending can do a great deal of damage to fragile bonds, particularly when directed by careful study through Lifeweb, and Lost Efik Spectres excel at all three Arcanoi. The risk in such attacks is that they breed coordinated response — the focus of a distinct external enemy allows opposition without such benefit to Shadows as would be created in the wake of apparently random revenge attacks and the like. For the time being, Lost Efik cannot muster nearly enough troops to make a decisive sweep across the Mirrorlands, so its lords save direct attacks for the most dire occasions.

The Petro

Of the two major factions in Mirrorlands society, the Petro forces are more numerous and more active than their rivals. The Petro have had significant impact on Skinlands history: Their strength added to living revolt has made the difference in slave revolts and later crises.

But there is a weakness in the Petro view of the world and of appropriate tactics. They see all evil as external: the Baka, slavers, the Spectres of Lost Efik, the monsters of the Tempest. Believing themselves backed by all the forces of justice, they sometimes fail to maintain the level of introspection and mutual self-awareness necessary to avoid playing into the waiting hands of Oblivion.

Slowly, carefully, the Shadows of Petro leaders (and well-placed followers) turn their Psyches toward less and less constructive goals. Disputes within the faction — and with the Rada faction as well — turn more bitter and vicious than necessary. Atrocities in battle disgust the weak-stomached, driving them away from coordinated action. Incautious manifestation in the Skinlands invites retaliation and the attention of mortal ghost-hunters.

Shadows are driven into automatic Slumber when their Psyches come in contact with *les Mystères*. To counter this effect, those self-same Shadows work to cut away Creole wraiths from the beings below. In time, perhaps, the next Great Maelstrom will wipe away the mystery and leave the Mirrorlands ripe for a final harvesting.

The Iron Box



Within the empty reaches between major centers of Spectral population, there are surprises. The Iron Box is one of these.

The Iron Box was founded 1700 years ago, when Chinese court historian Sima Qian found himself unable to countenance the ongoing distortions of history required to promote the glories of Yu Huang's reign. In life, Sima had allowed himself to be castrated as punishment for an imagined slight against his Em-

peror, rather than preserving his honor through execution but abandoning his great chronicle unfinished. But in death he felt that he had done enough, perhaps too much. So he fled into the endless empty passages beyond Yu Huang's patrols. After a century and a half of wandering, he settled in area roughly equidistant from the Yellow Springs, Swar and the eastern edge of the Spectral concentration beneath Stygia.

Here he toiled to write a completely honest account of his people's history. He carved it, character by character, into carefully polished walls. There is no iron, or even semblance of iron, in his confluence: The name reflects the Chinese tradition of the truthful historical account locked away in an iron box which even the Emperor cannot command to be opened, so that whatever the lies of the present may be, the truth will survive for the future. Sima was filled with the urge to lay down the story he knew, and then to supplement it with the history of the rest of the world.

Once he finished the history of China on both sides of the Shroud, Sima set out to explore. He spends decades traveling, observing, remembering, then returns to the Iron Box to record. On most trips he recruits allies from among the world's historians and storytellers. Herodotus joined him when the Hierarchy conceived a dislike for the Herodotean perspective on Stygian foreign affairs; Antonio Gramsci labors beside Sima, rescued from the brink of Oblivion after the Fifth Great Maelstrom; chroniclers of Tahuantinsuyu (the Incan empire) set down the first permanent narrative of their society, its triumphs and the costs of victory; lore-keepers from around the world write and debate. They all share a series of cubical rooms, nine feet on a side, with openings in each wall (and floor and ceiling), forming an ever-growing collection of reading and writing surfaces. Space for Slumbering was set aside early in the Iron Box's history in irregular, barely altered caves beneath the record rooms.

So far, outsiders — Doomslayer explorers in each case — have discovered the Iron Box only four times. None of the discoverers passed along the news of their discovery, preferring to find some solace in the knowledge that down in the bottom of things, truth still flourishes. The last time this happened was during World War I. Characters who discover it a fifth time must consider what to do with a uniquely rich but fragile compilation of the true story of the world. It lies at least a month's march away from the nearest Labyrinth entrances, but distance would be no guarantee of safety if powerful forces became roused to claim the Iron Box's secrets for themselves.

Searchers After Truth

Note that Sima has never become dominated by his *p'o*; he uses the Labyrinth because it hides him from dangerous prying eyes above. Nor are his allies exclusively Spectres. The Iron Box is a tremendously diverse gathering of souls.

The question remains, however, as to why the Labyrinth itself allows Sima and his compatriots to continue working. That issue troubles the historian at times, and far more than he cares to admit.





The Great Maze: Traveling the Labyrinth

Introduction



The Labyrinth is as close as one can get to annihilation and still exist at all. Everything that dwells here is turned toward the task of destroying the universe. Diverse factions of Shadow-eaten may fight over means and strategies, but never over their shared, ultimate goal. Obsessive Passions take the place that lighter desires, ambitions and dreams occupy in the minds of beings closer to the source of life and mind. Those who do not plunge immediately into Oblivion wait only because they think (or hope) that they can do more damage along the way by postponing: Nobody expects to escape.

For Doomslayers, the Labyrinth is It, the Big Target, the place where they strike at the enemy on its home turf. But the Labyrinth itself is also their enemy: lure, snare, trap in a thousand guises. Doomslayers may spend their afterlives in

the maze, but it never becomes home to them — not until they succumb to their Shadows, in any case.

The Labyrinth circulates over time, its evolution serving as the gradual settling of blood within the toppling corpse of reality. Like the processes of decay and decomposition it represents, the Labyrinth has no fixed resting points, but is in continuous evolution toward the hoped-for, dreaded, feared, expected condition of ultimate extinction. Thus there is a perpetual flow of surprises for the universe's volunteer pathologists and morticians — the Doomslayers.

The Labyrinth runs wider and deeper than the human mind can readily comprehend, and within infinite space there is infinite diversity. But there are also norms that those who spend time in the Labyrinth can come to rely upon, both in terms of what the place is like and in how the Restless Dead function within it.

The Typical Labyrinth

Composition



The bulk of the Labyrinth is black "stone," which absorbs almost all light cast upon it. Explorers must peer carefully to distinguish walls, floors, and ceilings from open pits and concealing corners. Every few hours, walkers may find a passage in which the blackness is broken by veins of fiery red Angst-fueled illumination, molten silver and turquoise soulfire and exotic materials in other garish colors. Or they may find embedded in the stuff of the Labyrinth veins of shattered Spectres and wraiths, which moan quietly when alone and rouse in a barely-sentient way to furies of cries and shouts when trod upon. Perhaps once a day, walkers find the largely featureless corridors and shafts of the Labyrinth coming together into confluences, home to Spectral crowds, where raw stone-like material is transformed into the semblance of machinery, buildings and all the trappings of civilization. Once the excitement is over, however, the undisturbed black returns.

There is no air in most of the Labyrinth, but then nothing native to it breathes except for effect. Around confluences hosting warriors returned from Tempest and Shadowlands engagements, Nihilis and other places of activity, air currents sometimes sweep through, stirring loose fragments of Labyrinth-stuff into tenuous dust clouds. Battle-grounds are often littered with shards knocked from walls, and may add razor-sharp fragments of crystal to the dust. (Many Spectres prefer to abandon an old home disrupted by warfare rather than spend the massive effort needed to clean up the debris.) Broad expanses are filled with plasm that has dribbled down from the Tempest. Most often the pools of fluid are as clear as water, but an infinite array of other manifestations sometimes block Doomslayers' way: plasm reminiscent of blood, gray fluid disturbingly reminiscent of wounded Corpus, white foam, scalding-hot vapor or an iridescent, sludgy liquid that clings to ceilings as if lighter than air. Plasm might blast through previously empty chambers with the force of a flash flood, or seep in at a rate of a few drops per century, carrying dissolved Labyrinth-stuff that re-coagulates into formations that dwarf earthly stalactites and flowstone in strangeness. There's simply no way of knowing what one might encounter.

The typical Labyrinth passage is a rocky, irregular corridor wide and high enough for a human-sized being to walk through with minimal difficulty. The corridor usually runs within 10 degrees of either horizontal or vertical, apparently following lines of stress and fracture within the Labyrinth. Near confluences, passages become wider, higher, and

smoother. In areas that have often served as Spectral battle-grounds, passages twist at odd angles and shudder through complex curves, when they are not blocked altogether by cave-ins. In places where plasm has been leaking in for a long time, there are more vertical shafts, and the other passages tend to angle down away from them. Areas where passages narrow, shrink and curve are favored spots for ambushes by Spectral guards watching for intruders. And sometimes, passages open into chambers wide enough to hold buildings (or cities, or continents...).

Most passages are featureless, marked only by occasional outcroppings or in-turnings of the walls. Inhabited confluences are extensively remodeled into the patterns their overlords prefer, whether factory, hospital, prison or some other suitable staging ground for the ongoing war against existence. Any area where Spectres dwell for a long time becomes reshaped, both by conscious carving and by the impression of their wills onto Labyrinth-stuff. The history of the Labyrinth is there for careful observers to read, in the imitations, mockeries and inversions of Skinlands and Shadowlands homes that succeeding generations of Spectres have made on their way to Oblivion. In between the places shaped by Spectres, there are long passages reworked by plasm and Tempest creatures adapted to Labyrinthine existence. Labyrinth-stuff eroded and deposited into towering stalactites and stalagmites, chunks of wall carved out for arranging into nests or dams and growths of exotic plasmics neither plant nor animal all add variety to Doomslayers' journeys. More "natural" variation occurs closer to areas of activity: passages near the outside or prominent entries like the Veinous Stair, near confluences, around the Mouth of the Void, by Malfean lairs and so on.

Illumination

The Labyrinth is dark. The vast majority of its spaces contain no illumination at all, but that only bothers intruders. Spectres have arts to compensate for the failure of sight, and the Plasmics that share the interstices of the maze have senses all their own. Wraiths who want light must bring it with them.

There are some "natural" sources of light to be found in the maze. The most common of these are veins of soulfire, their exposed surfaces flickering and sometimes flaring brightly in response to stimuli or happenstance. Some veins of crystallized Angst (or bloodfire) also glow, their light rising and falling with a rhythm like that of breath. Occasional trickles of plasm are luminescent as well, and barrow-flame pyres can be found — if one knows where to look.

Further, some of the Plasmics who have settled in the Labyrinth generate their own light, either to hunt, to lure prey, for a sense of security or for some motivation that escapes observers. Such creatures are highly prized possessions among Doomslayers, since they are adapted enough to the Labyrinth to escape the uncertainties that cloud Arcanos use, without having the active malevolence an enslaved Spectre would.

Some confluences are brightly lit. This is not necessary, but some Spectral lords find it desirable, for verisimilitude or intimidation or even aesthetics. Spectre-generated illumination tends to be harsh and often extremely dramatic, since it is decorative rather than functional.

In areas where Harrowings often occur or there is a regular flow of plasm, there may be shafts letting in the twilight of the deeper Tempest. By the standards of the rest of the afterlife that light is dim, hardly perceptible, but in the eternal blackness of the Labyrinth it gains vividness by contrast. Some Spectres gather to hoard glimpses of the realms they intend to conquer next; others seek to blot out hated reminders of the universe not yet bound over to Oblivion, and whole wars sometimes erupt over the control and disposition of these openings. Doomslayers must weigh the advantages of quick and direct access against the virtual certainty of Spectral activity at the bottom of the shaft.

Spectral Torches

The other common form of lighting created by Spectres comes from immolated fellow Spectres. Low-ranking Spectres absorb the ambience of Kindlings (see **Common Variations**, below), then are yanked from it, chained or embedded in a wall or otherwise anchored and set on fire. The intensely concentrated Being generated in the Kindled acts as an Angst absorber, draining free environmental Angst and converting it into fuel — Spectral torches can burn a very long time. Some corridors uncovered by miners extending shafts from the Veinous Stair have been lit by the same burning Spectres for at least a millennium. Blazing Spectres cut loose tend to go out, their sudden movements disrupting the balance of forces that kept them lit. Most lose essentially all mind and personality within a few years of ignition. What remains to shuffle the Labyrinth are charred hulks with no individuation; the process of Torchmaking is one of the common sources of Nothings.

The Kindled who scream are more valuable than those who don't, and are a steady component of Spectral trade. Kindled who have some arts of Keening command the highest prices, and may (unlike their less valuable kin) be carefully tended by powerful Spectres, in whose service they grace Harrowings and special displays of power in well-constructed confluences.

Population

Most of the time they are in the Labyrinth, Doomslayers have the local area all to themselves. They can never count on solitude for long, however. Spectral warbands use whatever passages seem most convenient to their leaders. Roving patrols check the security of confluences and vicinities important to Spectres with enough power to command the patrolling. Ungoverned low-ranking Spectres scabble in search of sustenance, weapons and anything that might buy them influence. Weeks may go by with no contact with Labyrinth dwellers, or Doomslayers may have scarcely an hour to themselves. Apart from the general tendency of more activity immediately before and after the Labyrinth disgorges Maelstroms, there is no particular pattern to the level of Spectral resistance any given expedition encounters.



The most common fate met by Doomslayer bands is the unexpected arrival of large numbers of Spectres. A passage can go from dead stillness to a teeming mass of activity in minutes or even seconds. Approaching Spectres make little sound or other disturbance, except through the Hive-Mind, and it is very difficult for those not yet Shadow-eaten to detect them at any distance beyond immediate visual range. Ambushes are generally less dangerous than these horde movements, since ambushes typically involve only a handful of Spectres, while the hordes can number in the dozens, or hundreds, or tens of thousands.

Then there are the risks of the Amphiskiopoli, the Spectral cities, discussed below.

Even places where no Spectres reside are seldom completely silent. There are cracks as Labyrinth stuff fractures, drips as plasm makes it way toward Oblivion and moans that emerge from the very walls. Shrieks echo without apparent source. Some of these random sounds can be linked with the veins of Angst that permeate the Labyrinth; others are mysteries, at least to those not present at the Labyrinth's creation.

Entrances and Exits


The outside of the Labyrinth is wrinkled and cracked by both internal and external stresses. The tides of stasis and change force everything into new configurations, casting up mountainous ridges or collapsing them into valleys choked with debris. Ruined sec-

tions of the Shadowlands sometimes plummet through the Tempest to crash onto the Labyrinth, setting off Labyrinth-quakes that make existing passages collapse and break open new ones around their impact craters. Tempest storms, and Maelstroms on their way up out of the Labyrinth, erode, rot and destroy protruding features. Slower currents push or pull sections of the Labyrinth miles from baseline elevation, insofar as such a thing can be measured at all.

In the midst of this chaos there are countless openings, ranging from pinhole cracks through which plasm oozes to pits and canyons so wide that their far sides are lost in Tempest mist and fog. Of those that are more than microscopic, most are between one and 15 feet across. Much smaller, and the natural resistance of the Labyrinth-stuff closes the opening immediately; much larger, and tremendous force is required along enough distance to connect deep-lying weaknesses within the Labyrinth. The one fixed feature of the landscape is the Veinous Stair, and the armed caravans moving along it. Other openings linger for years, decades or even centuries, but in time they close as unpredictably as they opened. Once the process begins, most iris shut in the space of days or weeks.

There are also the holes blown open by Spectres for use in Harrowings (or teased open by the mysterious rules governing the process), and the channels at the bottom ends of Nihilis. Only the most profoundly foolhardy Doomslayers use these without very extensive preparation, and most of those who try meet ghastly ends. These are the routes of desperate flight, when all other alternatives





fail. Such passages tend to be smooth and straight and very quick, but they also tend to be full of Spectres in the full flush of activity.

Doomslayer expeditions usually leave by an opening other than the one they entered through. One of the basic principles of survival in the Labyrinth is constant movement. Retracing one's steps is a good way to encounter Spectres who have detected one's presence and are gathering for attack. Spectral patrols rise from the depths after major bouts of Labyrinthotectonic activity to keep a watch out for intruders (and refugees seeking to escape Spectral authority). Doomslayers with the resources to do so contract with friendly Harbingers to fly over a chosen section of Labyrinth to scout the current topology. Veteran Doomslayers can estimate the probable patterns of passages beneath various surface formations, and work out contingency plans. Less lucky groups trust to the observations they can make themselves while descending through the Tempest.

Leaving the Labyrinth is not strictly a matter of geography. There is an element of will, or some other spiritual factor, as well. If a Doomslayer enters with the overriding determination to accomplish a particular goal, the Labyrinth may not release her until the goal is achieved. All routes to the outside curve back; all level paths lead down; all straight lines curve. If the goal cannot be achieved, the wraith may be in for a long, long stay...there are "Flying Dutchman" Doomslayers who have been there for centuries. Periodically, younger wraiths encounter these wanderers, but all offers of help are rejected. The ancient Doomslayers trudge on in pursuit of their lost goals. Some of them somehow avoid succumbing to their Shadows and Spectral assaults, and linger on, and on; a minor school of Stygian philosophy says that they will survive even after Stygia is smoking ruins trod upon by Coldheart's troops.

Sometimes, too, exits close up for other reasons. Tempest-weaving Spectres can draw the Labyrinth in upon itself (and may seize the opportunity to follow Fetter links back to their owners). The normal processes of Labyrinth realignment create risks of closure that grow greater the longer intruders spend below: Avalanches cover valley chambers, tremors slam together the opposing sides of a rift and storms fill open passages with caustic plasm. And sometimes changes happen *quickly*, as whole landscapes transform themselves in response to the dreams of the Labyrinth's masters, or perhaps their own impulses.

Common Variations



very standard and condition in the Labyrinth warps between the dual pulls of expansion to encompass the universe and contraction into the maw of Oblivion. The common characteristics of the Labyrinth, given above, can and do change without notice, varying from region to region and within a given spot over time. But some deviations occur more commonly than others, and are well-known to Doomslayer communities. They are taken in stride when discovered.

Composition

Most Labyrinth-stuff is black, but passages and confluences can display the full spectrum of colors. White, gray and red are most common. The walls, ceilings, and floors of passages are almost always dominated by a single color; it is rare to encounter anything that resembles complex minerals with multiple colors or textures.

Most veins of incursion material are a few inches wide and no more than a few feet in cross-section, though they can run untold miles through the solid bulk of the Labyrinth. Some are much broader, filling a whole passage for many paces, or even miles. These tend to be the targets of Spectral (and, near the outside, wraithly) mining operations, but if they have only recently been uncovered in freshly opened passages, adventurous Doomslayers or Spectres can try to hoard the rewards — and concomitant risks — for their own small band. In some places, multiple veins interpenetrate, turning passages into kaleidoscopes of exotic materials.


In addition to the various forms of liquid and gaseous plasm, there are passages in which the stuff of the Labyrinth itself becomes liquid. It ranges from the smooth thickness of quicksand to the slippery fluidity of dilute acid. Liquid Labyrinth-stuff usually retains the color of the solid material around it but becomes slightly translucent. It usually pools like normal liquids, but occasionally has a high enough surface tension that a liquid-filled passage can abut one filled with "air" or vacuum without leaking.

Temperature

Most of the Labyrinth has no particular temperature, and does not register as either hot or cold to the beings within it. (Emotional and psychosomatic chills are common, but that is an entirely different matter.) There are regions, however, in which something does give a distinct impression of one extreme or the other. Chills are more common than surges in temperature by about a three-to-one margin. Gusts of wind without discernable cause create wind-chill, and some forms of Labyrinth-stuff absorb ambient heat, either storing it for explosive release as goutts of flame or piping it off to some other part of the Labyrinth. Crystal structures resembling glaciers chill long stretches, and can last a very long time. Conversely, some otherwise ordinary lengths of Labyrinth-stuff emit a distinct and unpleasant warmth, usually in conjunction with a very high humidity. The areas around Kindlings often reek of sulfur, usually from bluish flames bursting through small cracks in nearby passages. In rare instances the heat rises to such an extent that Labyrinth-stuff itself melts, creating corridors as dangerous as Skinlands lava flows. This is a distinctly different condition than the room-temperature softening described above.

Illumination

In some places Labyrinth-stuff glows. This is usually the sign of Spectres Slumbering not far beneath an exposed surface, and the glowing spot created this way is vaguely humanoid, growing more detailed the closer the Spectre is. But in some cases —



about one third of the glowing zones known to Doomslayers — the glow is a property of the Labyrinth itself. The light in these places is usually a harsh white glare, casting shadows and reflections so intense that it is difficult to make out the true shape of the surrounding passage. Such “glow zones” usually stretch for a few yards along one surface of a passage, but there are glow zones miles long in which the whole passage shines harshly enough to pierce any eye protection short of a layer of Stygian steel.

Nobody (except perhaps the oldest of the Shadow-eaten and the Neverborn, who do not deign to answer questions) knows what makes glow zones. Such places fade in gradually, endure for up to centuries at a stretch, and then fade as quickly as they formed. They do not correlate with veins of unusual material, or with the presence of plasm or Plasmic wildlife, or indeed with any other variable scholars Doomslayers have thought to examine. Mystics regard the glows as marking the passage of some spark of vitality escaping up from Oblivion, or as a treacherous manifestation of Oblivion's advance; pragmatic Doomslayers use the glows when convenient and dodge them when inconvenient.

Population

In some places the random sounds of the Labyrinth become more coherent and organized. Voices deliver long speeches in dead languages, on subjects ranging from complaints about sex lives to political and philosophical diatribes. Only in a very few cases do these seem to match up to historical personalities; the consensus among Doomslayers and Spectres alike is that they are manifestations of incomplete souls that, for whatever reason, never achieved existence in the material universe. Chanteurs with the taste for Labyrinth exploration sometimes try to capture these voices, usually without success.

Entrances and Exits

The geometry of the Labyrinth does not necessarily have very much to do with the geometry of the rest of the universe. It folds, compresses or expands and evolves in response to internal rhythms of Oblivion's influence. Such maneuvering sometimes manifests itself in the form of space-twisting entrances and exits.

Space-twisting openings look exactly like normal ones from the outside. There is a break in the upper crust of the Labyrinth and a way down inside. The other end of the opening also looks like the rest of the Labyrinth. The twist becomes noticeable only after travelers move away from its immediate vicinity, and find that a 10-pace climb down left them many miles beneath the surface of the Labyrinth.

A given twist is usually stable for the duration of the opening, with normal geometry returning when the opening closes. About 15 percent, however, are more volatile, leaving the lower end of the opening drifting through the Labyrinth. A party of Doomslayers or Spectres using an evolving-twist opening may end up separated by very considerable distances depending on how fast the twist is ex-

panding. Most evolving-twist openings move little faster than human walking speed, but some advance with much greater velocity. Most treacherous, and rarest, are those which skip from one part of the Labyrinth to another rather than sweeping along a continuous route. The Storyteller should not use these in an adversarial way without very careful consideration of the consequences.

Exotic Variations



The Labyrinth never becomes entirely predictable. There has never been a single year since the founding of Stygia in which those venturing down from above failed to discover something new, either within those realms directly beneath their homes or out among the other kingdoms of the Labyrinth. Nor can the rank and file of Spectres become complacent. The Neverborn do not discuss whether they are surprised, but the active ranks subservient to them often are — sometimes fatally.

This section covers some of those twists. None of them should ever become routine. Rather, they are suitable for bringing out when the Storyteller wishes to introduce variety into chronicle experiences that have become a little too routine and mundane. When the characters begin to take their circumstances for granted, it's time to spring one of these surprises.

Composition

Rare regions of the Labyrinth are composed of substances not at all like stone. The most common such manifestation is the appearance of part of a body: skin, or bones, or organ tissues. Sometimes such places pulse with a semblance of life, though they do not (so far as Doomslayers can tell) belong to actual creatures. A passage consisting of miles of gently undulating lung tissue is likely to give even the most tough-minded Doomslayer the urge to find an alternate route.

Other organic matter, or the facsimile of it, is the next most common class of manifestation. Dead tree trunks, mounds of rock-hard leaves, ceilings of sunflowers above walls and floors of sunflower seeds and endless layers of fish scales all define some passages that Doomslayers have traversed; who knows what else is out there, waiting to be discovered.

Simulations of the works of human hands are the rarest of all variations. There are passages composed of the pages of books in dead languages, or careful mosaics of knives and nails, or lakes of bleach, but not many. The ones that aren't actively dangerous are something like tourist attractions for adventurous Doomslayers, while the ones presenting some sort of menace are simply marked for avoidance. Most of these sorts of simulation resemble terrestrial buildings and other places where Pathos concentrates.

Illumination

Light pipes form when a vein of translucent or transparent material reaches the outside of the Labyrinth. Tempest light ricochets down its length to emerge deep inside the great maze itself. The resulting pools of sunlight (or light as close to the sun as the Labyrinth will ever come) seldom last long: Spectral bands quickly smash closed the open veins, and usually block off the outside opening for good measure.

A rare phenomenon kindred to the glow zone is the glow space, in which the void (or dust, or air or whatever) within a passage becomes luminescent. This is never the mark of Slumbering Spectres, and is linked with glow zones only because both involve mysterious illumination.

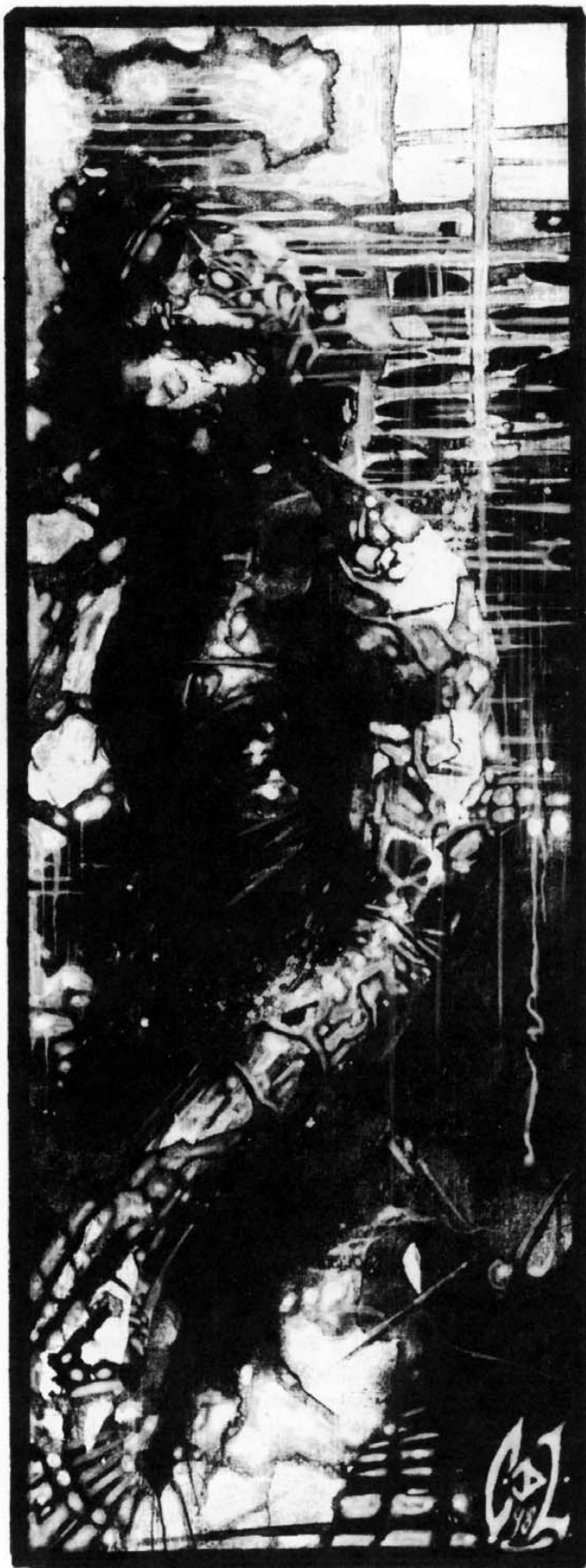
Traveling glows do exactly what the name suggests: They move along walls or through the space of passages rather than existing permanently in one location. They comprise bands from inches to miles in length, and move at speeds from glacial to many times the speed of sound. Traveling glows are rare enough that there are no "typical" manifestations; the Storyteller has a free hand to create an interesting unexpected effect and confront players with it. Such phenomena wreak great havoc on ambushes and assaults, and can seriously disrupt the activities of confluences where the lighting is, for whatever reason, important to normal activity. Glows like this tend to rise, emerging from some unknown zone of distortion far down in the Labyrinth and seeking an outlet into the Tempest. Desperate Doomslayers and Spectres alike agree that following a traveling glow is a way out of trouble when all others have failed.

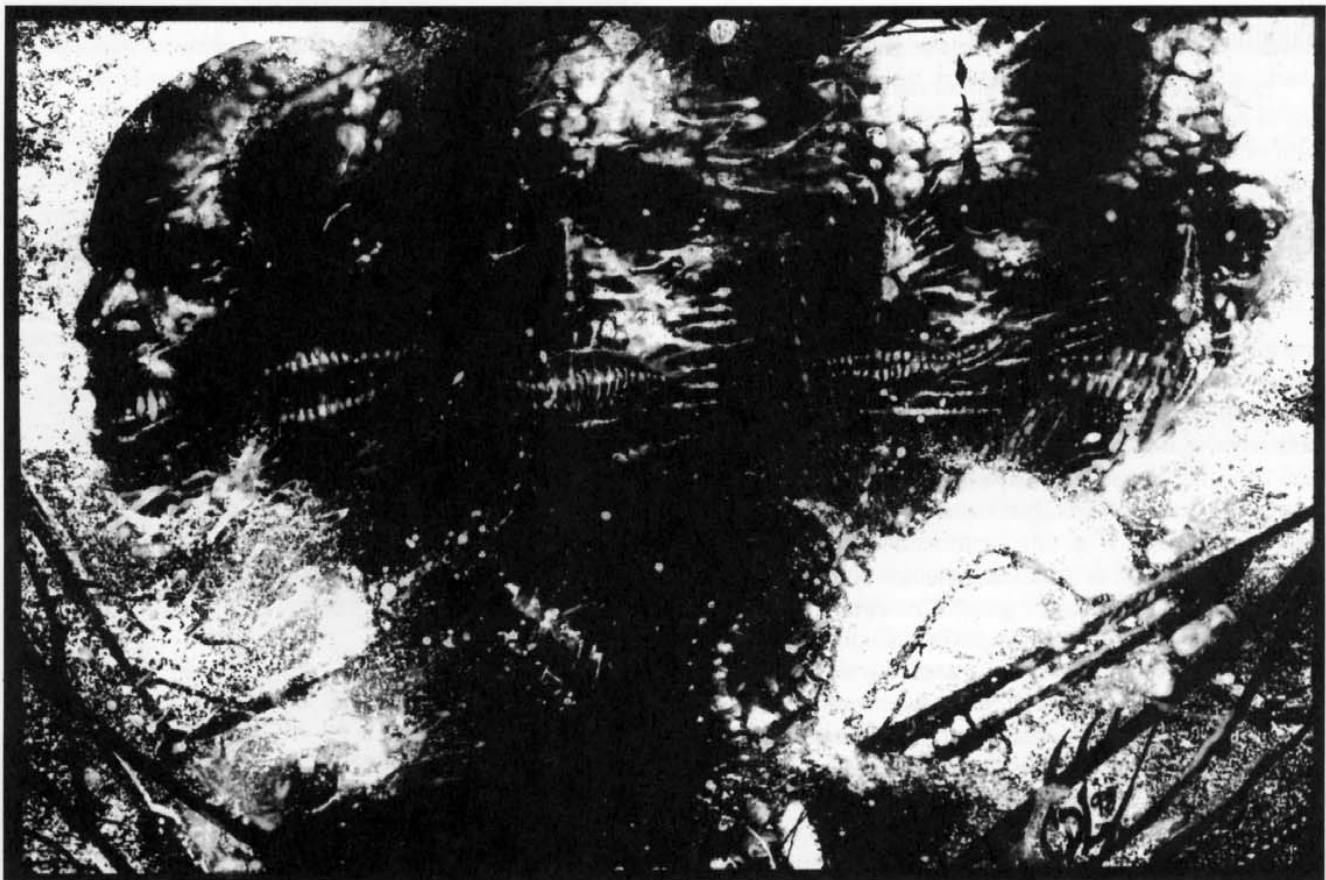
Population

In very remote regions of the Labyrinth — the parts beneath the Shadowlands of the Moon and further out — there are Spectral communities that do not fit any of the regular classes. Some are not human-derived at all, but seem instead to be the Shadow-eaten forms of pre-human races and of beings that have never existed on the Earth. There is very little information available about them, because of the intrinsic difficulties of traveling hundreds of thousands of miles through the Labyrinth as well as the dangers of dealing with unknown entities. Most Doomslayers have never even heard of these beings, or choose to dismiss the stories as the sort of gossip that inevitably appears in gatherings where having the latest bit of brand-new discovery is an element of status. The handful of those who take the stories seriously enough to investigate tend to keep their results to themselves.

Entrances and Exits

In addition to the compression and extension of time found in Kindlings and Barrows (see *Amphiskiopoli*, below), the Labyrinth can twist and fold time as it can space. A few times each year, bands of Doomslayers return with stories of strange al-





most-encounters: seeing themselves as they entered the Labyrinth a few days earlier (or, occasionally, as they left it a few days later), or of peering through a window opening onto a ledge high above a Skinlands city's street level as it was a few years earlier. Perhaps once in a decade, travelers come back with plausible stories of direct encounters with their older or younger selves, as opposed to glimpses gained at a distance.

For a long time these encounters were generally assumed to be the results of especially tricky Doppelgangers, but gradually evidence from Doomslayers with Castigation accumulated. Their other selves were not Shadow-eaten. It further emerged that Spectres sometimes had similar encounters, to their great bewilderment. Doomslayers most willing to probe deeply into the Hive-Mind find that there is little information on and less concern about these manifestations on the part of the lords of Spectral society. To them, these events are just one more thing that is neither serious threat nor useful weapon. What a handful of fanatics and lunatics do has little relevance to the plans of the great. Creatures with a more limited perspective are left to their own devices to puzzle the implications of multiple copies of a single soul co-existing.

Spectres and Doomslayers both know that their kinds sometimes just disappear from the Labyrinth. An individual (or a group) steps around a corner, goes beyond the next bend and never returns. There is tantalizing but incomplete evidence that, very occasionally, the disappeared emerge in a different time. Stygian archivists tend to be uninterested in the queries of

Doomslayers, and the Hive-Mind is unreliable about personal details, so the curious on both sides of the Shadow-devouring gap can only wonder. Likewise, stories of travelers who emerge unfamiliar with the present moment but intimately conversant with a lost era may all be explainable in light of the temporal retardation of Barrows. There may be something more, however. Since the first step in examining such rumors is generally to seek out the sites of alleged dislocation and risk one's own disappearance, few reliable observers care to invest effort in the attempt. The accounts of those foolhardy or suicidal enough to probe repeatedly into known trap areas carry little weight.

Amphiskiopoli



Within the Labyrinth, there are gathering places of the Shadow-eaten. These are the *Amphiskiopoli*, the cities of doubled shadows (or doubled Shadows).

The smallest *Amphiskiopoli* are merely wide spots in the road, where passages join in chambers that offer some vantage point for small groups of Spectres huddling for mutual security. They offer no advantages other than that of their location, and any benefits of Labyrinth-stuff composition or terrain features.

Power

In larger Amphiskiopolis, where hordes of Spectres dwell, their shared existence translates into additional power. A thousand Spectres sharing a common purpose and overlord each receive an extra point of Being while within the Amphiskiopolis. Intruders, both Spectral and wraithly, have one less effective point of permanent Willpower than usual with which to resist efforts at control. Thus Spectral warfare customarily involves the capture of hostages and their transportation to the captors' Amphiskiopolis, to better produce loyal servants. Every hundredfold increase in the permanent population of an Amphiskiopolis adds a point to the denizens, and subtracts 1 from uninvited guests. Thus the largest Amphiskiopolis are quite literally cities of doubled Shadow, and only the best-prepared or most-deluded Doomslayers even think of intruding.

The larger the Amphiskiopolis, the sharper its boundary. Where power is not an issue, nothing delineates the settlement from the rest of the Labyrinth except the declarations and actions of the inhabitants. Once benefits of community begin accruing, a distinct edge forms all around the Amphiskiopolis (including through the solid stuff of the Labyrinth, there to be discovered by anyone tunneling or passing intangibly through it). When the Amphiskiopolis begins to make its presence known, at first only a small region, a few paces across, offers any benefit automatically. Throughout the rest of the claimed area, and on several times that distance further through the surrounding Labyrinth, there is a declining chance of the benefit's being granted. At the boundary of the settlement it should manifest about half the time; the Storyteller may adjust the probability up or down, but not make it either completely reliable or so unreliable as to be useless. As the benefit increases, its effects are felt more uniformly throughout the settlement, and less often outside. The region of uncertainty contracts, until for Amphiskiopolis with 5 or more points of benefit it all rushes in with a single step across the threshold.

Older Amphiskiopolis are readily discernable. While the Being boost itself leaves no visible manifestations, the Spectres who dwell within mark their thresholds in distinctive and usually elaborate ways. The cultures of the eras in which they lived find twisted echoes in the design of complex gateways and lintels, or in parodies (or despairing recreations) of famous monuments. Entryways feature inscriptions to inspire unity and dedication among the faithful and fear among outsiders. In areas where inter-Amphiskiopolis warfare is common, the real thresholds are surrounded by false ones, delineated so as to lure outsiders into traps. After a few centuries of frequent struggle, mile upon mile of Labyrinth can be morphed into a bewildering record of vanished front lines, as given over to the demands of war as World War I trench zones, but older and further-reaching.

The transformation of confluence into empowering Amphiskiopolis is not automatic or mechanistic. It emerges from concentrations of Spectres who are in fact pursuing shared ends. Sometimes it takes more than a certain number


(usually a power of 10) of Spectres present to initiate or increase the benefit. It may take only a few years or as long as a generation to start the process. The community must be sustained to preserve the benefit; levels of assistance drop after half or more the Amphiskiopolis' population has been gone for a year or more. Abandoned Amphiskiopolis revert to Labyrinth norms in 10 to 20 years...during which they are the scenes of pitched battles between small bands of Spectres hoping to claim the fading boon for themselves.

Architecture

Spectral settlements pay less attention to rules of orientation in three dimensions than their Skinlands and Shadowlands counterparts. Inanimate objects need flat spaces because of gravity, or what passes for it within the Labyrinth. But Spectres do not, except for psychological reasons. Many take an active pleasure in doing things that would be impossible to beings more tied to the expectations nurtured by the physical universe; designs that would confuse an M.C. Escher are common. Spectral attitudes toward the preservation of existing Labyrinthine features tend to one of two extremes. The more devoutly Oblivion-worshipping seek to minimize the imposition of their wills on its substance as made manifest in the Labyrinth. They mark Amphiskiopolis thresholds and make genuinely necessary modifications, but otherwise exist in the state of nature. Others seek to maximize the imposition of their wills, obliterating every trace of the form their settlements had before occupation. Through this act of general transformation they hope to leave some trace of their presence, or even to postpone the moment of their own annihilation.

Shadowlands cities are architectural hodge-podges, with the remains of both the places that inspired deep love, affection and other positive emotions those that were foci of hate, despair and the panoply of Dark Passions. In Spectral cities, there is no tempering. Any trace of the Skinlands allowed to survive in Amphiskiopolis is there because it is a reminder of one or more Dark Passions. No beauty survives unmarred; no pleasant scene goes uncorrupted. Since Spectres need very little shelter from any force except those strong enough to smash both Being and defense, and since the Hive-Mind largely negates the possibility of private existence in Amphiskiopolis, architecture is primarily utilitarian and propagandistic. Possessions get the shelter they need (or they may, if Spectres pay attention, which is by no means always the case); the buildings Spectres actually use are ceremonial and evocative.

In earlier ages, re-creations and relics of the bleakest temples to blind worship of the primal death-urge were common among Amphiskiopolis. In the modern day, Albert Speer's heroic monuments to the collective will are much favored, along with every form of shoddy mass production. The idiosyncrasies and personal histories of dominant Spectres show in the oddities decorating a particular settlement: symbols of whatever the Spectre hated most in life, or trophies of the destruction of a



powerful wraith's Fetters. Since Spectral regimes seldom endure very long, layers of accretion are very common, as new tenants impose their own landmarks on top of the old ones. The tables where Spectres gamble with each other and with imprisoned wraiths for stakes so high that they are known only to the participants nestle side-by-side with the orgone tanks of Spectral scientists and ancient desert cemeteries. Everything that serves Oblivion has its place in the Amphiskopoli.

Kindlings and Barrows

Time is not as rigidly consistent in the Labyrinth as in the universe above; sometimes it catches and pools, sometimes it plunges ahead toward the unseen consummation of things. Spectres refer to areas in which it moves more rapidly than elsewhere as Kindlings, and areas in which it slows to stagnation as Barrows.

Kindlings ignite in regions of intensely concentrated Being: Amphiskopoli granting 4 more extra dots of Being to their inhabitants. The collective drains off some individual definition and begins to transform the local environment. The more synchronized the Dark Passions and Natures of the inhabitants are, the more rapid their shared experience becomes. The extra time gained this way does not lead to quicker trips toward extinction for the Spectres involved; the condition of Kindling is therefore eagerly sought by all except the most self-loathing Spectres.

Time may move as many times faster within a Kindled Amphiskopoli as there are points of increased Being granted there. The transformation of Kindling does not move in rigid lockstep coordination with the boost provided by Amphiskopoli inhabitation — many Amphiskopoli receive only a fraction of the possible benefit, usually due to lack of unity of drive among the inhabitants. Since it is difficult to unite thousands or millions of Spectres so thoroughly, it is difficult to create a Kindling in which time moves many times faster than elsewhere.

But Kindlings are not in accordance with every Spectre's vision of their role and destiny. The most devout worshippers of Oblivion gather their forces to attack Kindlings. If they win, both victors and victims are offered as a mass sacrifice to the power of Oblivion and its perpetual servants, the Malfears. All the accumulated extra Being goes up in smoke and ashes.

What remains are dulled, deadened regions known as Barrows, the utter opposites of Kindlings. Not every destroyed Kindling becomes a Barrow, and Barrow-flame sometimes rises from not-completely-annihilated Spectral remains. But if a Kindling is utterly destroyed, then a Barrow is the inevitable result. Knowledgeable observers can trace the history of ideological triumphs within the Labyrinth by the Barrows of the losers, and Doomslayers examine Barrows for Artifacts and information. But there is a risk: Time runs as many times more slowly than usual within a Barrow. The normal flow of time permeates the Barrow only gradually, drawing it back at the rate of 10 percent or less per century.

The Theory of the Labyrinth

Origin

The true nature of the Labyrinth is as mazy and confused as the passages that permeate it. The points of general agreement are two-fold.

- The Labyrinth as it now exists was created at the dawn of time, gnawed from the stuff of raw Creation by the Neverborn.

- Oblivion was not always as powerful and malevolent as it is today.


Everything else is in dispute.

Overly pedantic observers — particularly those who worked magick in life — try to link the Labyrinth to the sphere of Prime in a variety of ways. Completionists identify the Labyrinth as Dark Prime, the capstone *qlippot* as Prime is the capstone *sephiroth*. Reflectionists identify it as Negative Prime, the opposite pole of Prime, recipient of the endless cascade of being that emerges from Prime, takes on form, passes through the realms and finally pools drained and barren at the end of things. Inversionists say that the Labyrinth is itself part of the Shard Realm of Prime, and that the terrors of Oblivion are entirely the result of clouded perceptions. (Inversionists customarily meet their end while probing the deepest ranges of the Labyrinth in search of evidence to confirm their theory.) Deniers hold to the psychological interpretation of the Shadowlands and believe that the Labyrinth has no objective existence at all.

Among the vast majority of wraiths who do accept the Labyrinth's existence (also known as "sane" or "clueful" — Deniers tend to be the first ones tossed over the walls when a Maelstrom hits), there is only limited consensus about the origins of the Labyrinth. Most wraiths tend to accept the thought that the Neverborn created the Labyrinth; it's the wherefores of the matter that people argue about. Theories, mainly bandied about by Heretics, range from a change in the personality of God to the disruption of the original planetary order in the fashion suggested by Immanuel Velikovsky's heirs to the suggestion that the original Malfears are nightmares in the dreams of Creation.

Destiny

Almost all observers who stop to think about it agree that there seems to be nothing in the way of Oblivion's eventual triumph. (There are, of course, always observers unable or unwilling to think about it, who promulgate theories even less grounded in reality than the ones discussed here.) As always, though, the details are open to dispute.



There is something like agreement that the Sixth Great Maelstrom will someday overwhelm the Shadowlands, in the absence of something sufficiently dramatic, like the return of Charon in his full strength and glory. A minority claims that the danger is overstated, with the triumph of Oblivion not due for long eons yet. Optimists who think that Oblivion is just going to go away or reach stasis tend to get laughed at.

Among those who agree that doom is coming soon, there is no agreement about what doom will do to the parts of the afterlife not now under Oblivion's sway. Speculations run from

the explosive growth of the Labyrinth to the transformation of Tempest and Shadowlands into the stuff of the Labyrinth. Then, in almost every speculation, the fate that befalls the Shadowlands will strike up through the Skinlands to all the levels of the Umbra.

Philosophically minded wraiths believe that living mages tend to underestimate the place of Oblivion, and feel that it underlies not just the Dark Umbra but the whole of the universe, if only one probes deeply enough. Doomslayer experience has yet to find boundaries on the Labyrinth; wraithly scholars take this as confirmation.

Deliberations

Dear Frances:

Imagine my surprise when your buddy and mine, Xerxes Jones, turned up on my doorstep. I've never seen him looking scared before, not even on front-line missions, but now...well, let me tell you about it.

You remember that I transferred to Border Security Division last year, wanting to get my hands dirty. From time to time we've been getting useful intelligence filtered from, our commander said, a fellow Void Engineer who'd infiltrated a well-equipped occult group. The last few snippets were very handy in recent Haunt-smashing raids. Turns out that Xerxes is the informant! He'd been recruited for the Orphic Circle, which I've never heard of but is apparently very well thought of by those who think well of such things. You can just imagine him, happy as a clam doing fringe stuff even by *our* standards, and all the while being able to justify it as keeping mankind safe.

Until recently.

I'm not quite clear on the story, but it sounds like he put in a proposal for the release of a Shroud-crossed nuclear weapon, which he'd detonate in the Tempest. He wanted to "study the impact of greater force than can be released by conventional explosives." Some people don't change much, eh? Reminds me of that time on Farside, just with a bigger bang now. Well, they went for it. But they want him to set it off in the *Labyrinth*.

So he went poking around in the usual databases, found that I'd gone for the BSD, and dropped by. He's scared stiff. He knows enough about the Labyrinth to really, really not want to go in there. If he does go in, he really, really doesn't want to do it alone.

I'm sure you can guess the rest of the story. He wants me to go in with him. You, too, if you're up for the adventure of a lifetime. But as Einstein is my witness, I have no idea if I'm going to or not. Sure, I owe him my life, and you do, too. But is this way I want to risk it? Maybe I'll try to persuade section command to make a full-blown raid of it. Being Xerxes, he naturally hasn't told the chain of command about this. Do you think he should?

Your confused friend,

Susan



Appendices

Appendix I: Shadowed Plasmics



Just as plasm sometimes makes its way down into the Labyrinth, so too do the creatures native to the Tempest. The winds of retreating Maelstroms sweep Tempest dwellers into the Labyrinth, as do gusts originating within the Tempest. Individual creatures and small communities may seek shelter from predators, or blunder in unawares. Most Plasmics tossed into the Labyrinth soon die or return to their native environments, but some adapt. Gradually, new and stable forms emerge, better adapted to existence in the Labyrinth.

Doomsayer scholars discovered the first such creatures centuries ago. After extensive debate, they settled on the name "Shadowed Plasmics" for the whole class of Tempest-dwellers that have evolved enough to flourish in the Labyrinth. Not

all Shadowed Plasmics show any particular Oblivion taint...but most do. Most Shadowed Plasmics possess a destructiveness above and beyond that necessary to survive in an environment where the only common prey is either Spectres or others of their kind — and that feeds Oblivion. In Skinlands cave ecologies, trapping and stealth are the dominant strategies of food-gathering; among the Shadowed Plasmics more energetic predation is most common. Further, Shadowed Plasmics show a willingness to waste food in orgies of Corpus-rending that has no equivalent in the higher world.

There are no Labyrinth-wide species of Shadowed Plasmics. Each successful incursion gives rise to new varieties. But there are recurring ecological niches, which lend themselves to categorization.

Plasm Dwellers

The most friendly environment for Shadowed Plasmics is in and around pools and flows of plasm, where the ecology most closely resembles the one in which their ancestors dwelt.

At the bottom of the food chain, there is a tremendous variety of small creatures, usually vaguely insect-like or amorphous like jellyfish, which feed on mineralized fragments of energy. Such creatures are known collectively as Harvesters. Chips of crystallized Angst, soulfire and other accumulations of spiritual potency washed along in streams of plasm provide the scraps necessary to sustain their existence. Variety in this diet comes from the occasional piece of wraith or Spectre Corpus, shredded beyond the point of recovery or otherwise rendered inert.

Most Harvesters float about in liquid plasm without making any significant effort to move themselves. A few have rudimentary sensory organs and the capability to swim in the direction of potential foodstuffs. Some skim across surface tension, dipping feeding extensions down into the plasm and up into whatever is on the other side. The vast majority of Harvesters are microscopic, and the biggest are less than an inch long.

Tangled webs of predation depend on the Harvesters' ability to concentrate nourishment from the rare available sources. In most Labyrinthine environments the ecology of plasm pools is very simple, with no more than one or two levels of predator above the Harvesters. The most common forms are bigger plasm-dwelling creatures, taking advantage of the relative consistency of the liquid to grow (in some cases) to many feet or even yards in length.

Bigger and older accumulations of plasm support more complex food chains. In plasm oceans deep within the Labyrinth, there are creatures to rival the Tempest's Wyrd and Kraken, monsters that span chambers and kingdoms. A minor but persistent school of thought in Stygia tries to account for Malfeans as the culmination of the process of teratofoming Plasmics, despite all the evidence to the contrary. What is indisputable is that there are creatures of Shadowed plasm as complex as the Spectres around them, with motives as inscrutable to the Labyrinth's natives as they are to those who try to probe its secrets from outside.

False Skins

Physical: Strength 6, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 0
Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 5
Arcanoi: Moliat 4
Willpower: 4
Permanent Corpus: 10
Angst: 6

Image: False Skins are almost completely transparent, with all their internal organs made distinguishable only by very slight variations in the index of refraction (or its equivalent for senses useful in the Labyrinth). They cover from two to 20 or more square feet, but are only a fraction of an inch thick. Their success as secondary predators rests on their ability to imitate the plasm on which they float, appearing to be merely a thicker-than-usual layer of surface tension. While on the prowl, False Skins lie motionless, stirred only by whatever currents flow beneath, waiting for the touch of primary predators hunting Harvesters or simply cruising along the surface. Then the beasts snap into motion, enveloping their prey and crushing it into a smooth paste. Digestion takes over from there, breaking down the prey into chunks that can be rendered transparent and absorbed.

Background: A wide enough variety of creatures exists on the interface between plasm and the surrounding Labyrinth that some forms of Shadowed Plasmic have adapted to prey on them. The False Skins comprise the most successful such experiment.

Large False Skins are strong enough to smash typical Spectres and Doomslayers; even smaller ones can inflict very serious damage on an unwary wraith, and the damage caused by crushing is Aggravated. Cautious explorers probe plasm pools with a variety of devices (or underlings) to establish their safety before diving in. Among Doomslayers, the most common tool for this purpose is a 10-foot pole with a far end that branches into capped prongs very much like plasm-skimmers' feet.

Storyteller Notes: False Skins have absolutely no awareness beyond that necessary to identify prey. They have no capacity for planning, no sensory organs capable of receiving input about the environment more than a fraction of an inch away, and no sense of pain. They reproduce by budding and sending the offspring downstream, or by attaching buds to the limbs of creatures passing through.

False Skins only use the art of Rend, with which to rip apart their prey.

Foureyes

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 4, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 0, Wits 0
Talents: Alertness 1, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Dodge 3
Dark Arcanoi: Larceny 2
Willpower: 5
Permanent Corpus: 2
Angst: 4

Image: Foureyes are among the largest of the plasm-swimming Labyrinth fauna, growing up to eight feet long (though most are two feet or less in length). They resemble eels, with roughly cylindrical bodies and small fins in both dorsal and ventral positions. Unlike eels, however, Foureyes also have pairs



Foureyes

of tentacles spaced every few inches. In tight spots, Foureyes retract their fins and extend their tentacles to push against too-close Labyrinth walls. The name "Foureyes" comes from a diamond pattern of four black-and-red spots at the creature's front end, which resemble eyes. In reality, though, they are the organs through which Foureyes exercise their Dark Arcanos. The primary sense a Foureyes uses is a highly delicate sense of touch, used to interpret vibrations in the surrounding plasm.

Background: Foureyes tentacles leave trace residues that carry distinct emotional scents (not strong enough to grant Pathos, but noticeable), which Foureyes use to claim territory.

Storyteller Notes: Foureyes are very unassertive. They need no aggression to capture prey—they use Emotional Infection to drive victims into suicidal despair, then feed at their leisure.

Snouters

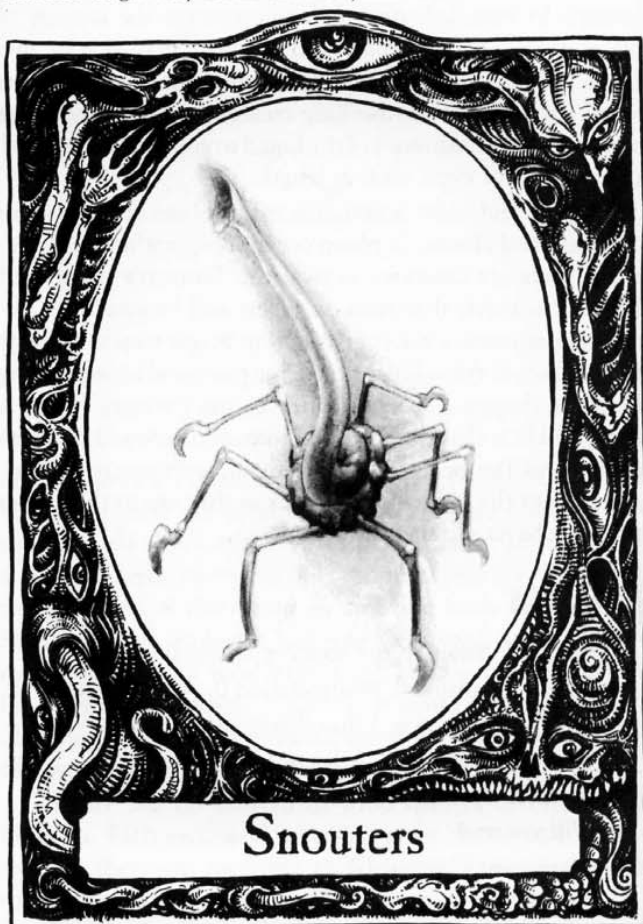
Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 2, Intelligence 0, Wits 1
Talents: Alertness 3, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 4
Willpower: 5
Permanent Corpus: 5
Angst: 10

Image: Snouters have small, almost spherical bodies that sprout anywhere from four to 20 legs evenly spaced around their waist. Each leg ends in a single claw designed to hook into Labyrinth-stuff and maintain an anchor while the body dangles. Snouter bodies are never more than about eight inches long, but their eponymous snouts stretch 10 times that length. A Snouter's usual feeding strategy is to hang down above a plasm pool or stream, high enough up to be invisible to any creature beneath the surface, while using its snout to suck up small Harvesters or snag bigger prey.

Plasm-dwelling forms tend to be clear or whitish, but Snouters are usually very dark, so as to blend in with the normal conditions of the Labyrinth.

Background: Snouters are not representative of the Labyrinthine ecological niche they share; they are included here because they are large and noticeable, and hence more likely to come to the attention of travelers than better-adapted forms.

Storyteller Notes: Some Snouters have more than usual intelligence for Shadowed Plasmics, and actually develop rudimentary strategies. Their peripheral vision is extremely good, and they sometimes try to lay traps for travelers, though human-sized figures are too large to yield to a single Snouter's attack. A group of them, gathered out of sight on a ledge, however, can easily bring individuals down—one more reason not to go very far in the Labyrinth solo.



Snouters

Amphiskiopolis Dwellers

The next most common environment for Shadowed Plasmics is the space in and around inhabited confluences. Scavengers find rich gleanings from the waste and debris of Spectres, and Spectres' victims.

Mimic species imitate various kinds of Labyrinth stuff — most commonly normal black walls or plasm-deposited extrusions — to wait for food to pass by. Then they drop down (or spring up or across, as appropriate) to engulf their chosen targets, latching back onto actual Labyrinth stuff to begin digestion.

Whereas Mimics can stretch across several square yards, active predators tend to be much smaller, so as to evade detection. They are seldom larger than the feet or hands of the Spectres on whom they feed. The standard predatory strategy is simply to sneak as close as possible to a chosen Spectre, rush in, grab a chunk of Corpus, carry it off to safety and then feed upon it. More sophisticated variations use lures, mimicking everything from the appearance of a freshly uncovered vein of Angst to the sound of a lost Doomslayer somewhere nearby. Luring predators usually work in small packs, with one working on the prey while the others prepare to attack.

Labyrinth Crickets

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 1

Talents: Alertness 4, Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Dodge 5

Arcanoi: Fatalism 2, Moliat 3

Willpower: 5

Permanent Corpus: 3

Angst: 8

Image: Labyrinth Crickets have jointed cylindrical bodies from six to 60 inches long; each joint is about two inches long. Eye stalks rise in threes from every third joint, and three legs emerge from each joint. The feet all have sticky pads, so that Labyrinth Crickets can run on any surface and change direction without loss of speed. Their most distinctive feature is a cluster of three antennae at each end of their bodies, stretching out from four to seven times (or even more) the length of the cricket's torso. These branch into very fine filaments, suitable for detecting even the slightest vibrations through Labyrinth walls and whatever fills the space within a given passage. Each set of antennae converges on a fringed mouth, which has no teeth but can gradually wear down prey through a combination of crushing and digestion.

Background: As with much of the nomenclature applied to Shadowed Plasmics, the name "Labyrinth Crickets" is used ironically, to make the creatures so named seem less formidable. Some Labyrinth Crickets have a specialized art that allows them to meld their antennae with Labyrinth-stuff, turning all the

walls for yards around into extensions of their sensory organs. These work in pairs, one scuttling off to investigate potential food uncovered by the other.

Storyteller Notes: Labyrinth Crickets are representative of non-plasm-dwelling Shadowed Plasmics in that they spend a great deal of time motionless before bursting into frenzies of activity, and in that they have one particular sense highly developed for use in hunting.

Labyrinth Crickets possess the arts of Foreshadow and Martialry only. Those with the ability to merge with Labyrinth walls have Perception 5 for purposes of Foreshadow checks.

Spears

Physical: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0

Mental: Perception 4, Intelligence 1, Wits 2

Talents: Alertness 5, Athletics 4, Brawl 3, Climb 5, Dodge 2

Arcanoi: Moliat 4, Pandemonium 5

Willpower: 7

Permanent Corpus: 4

Angst: 6

Image: Spears resemble roughly hewn stalactites or stalagmites: They are from one to four feet long, tapering at one end into a blunt point, and have the flat black coloring of typical Labyrinth-stuff. Small stubby claws protrude from their bodies at irregular intervals, enabling them to creep along Amphiskiopolis surfaces. When hunting, Spears maneuver their way into elevated positions, then launch themselves down passages at chosen targets. Once it is in flight, a Spear's blunt end splits open to reveal clusters of fangs, which tear off chunks of Corpus once the target is impaled.

Spears have no visible sensory organs. They do have light- and sound-sensitive patches, which are protected beneath thin layers of hide.

Background: Spears take an unusually vigorous solution to the problem of obtaining food. Where Spectres are alert and actively modifying their environment, Spears have a tough time surviving, but few Spectres are so conscientious. Spears particularly like to make enclaves for themselves right on the very edge of a Kindled Amphiskiopolis. They observe and calculate with the advantage of accelerated time, then aim for targets moving in normal time.

Storyteller Notes: Spears possess only the arts Martialry, Rend and Tempus Fugit (and can use the latter only on themselves).

Wall Dwellers

Various forms of tunneling Shadowed Plasmics drain Corpus, Being and Dark Passions from slumbering Spectres. This is a delicate process, because the victims must not be awakened, but countless creatures have made the adaptations necessary for slow, gentle extraction of everything nourishing from their victims.

Borers

Physical: Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 7
Social: Charisma 0, Manipulation 0, Appearance 0
Mental: Perception 3, Intelligence 0, Wits 3
Talents: Alertness 2, Athletics 4, Brawl 4
Arcanoi: Castigate 5, Moliare 5
Willpower: 8
Permanent Corpus: 9
Angst: 10

Image: Borers resemble moles as designed by H.R. Giger. They are roughly human-sized, with slick black chitinous hides that protect internal organs comprised of a mix of soft tissues and support fibers almost as tough as Stygian steel. The spade-like claws clustered around their six eyes are *tougher* than Stygian steel, and are prized as weapons. Borers' eyes nestle beneath perfect crystal-hard hemispherical lenses. A Borer has no single mouth; instead, all six claws have small pores through which fragments of a victim's Corpus filter into the Borer's digestive system.

Background: The existence of a plentiful food supply in the form of slumbering Spectres inevitably gave rise to forms of Shadowed Plasmic capable of taking advantage of it. Borers are the most successful and widespread example of such a form.



Borers

They can tunnel at rates up to 10 miles an hour. Thanks to constant low-powered uses of Castigate, they sense approaching targets, and slow down for the final approach. Borers precede direct attack with blasts of Purify and Defiance to stun Spectres into immobility, then speed up to hit with all claws in furious activity. They loop around and around through a rended Spectre as long as is necessary to absorb all the available nourishment — the carnage may extend over two to three days.

Storyteller Notes: Borer claws do aggravated damage on any roll that produces 2 or more successes. The toughness of their hide adds a die to soak rolls.

Borers do not possess the arts of Housecleaning or Imitate.

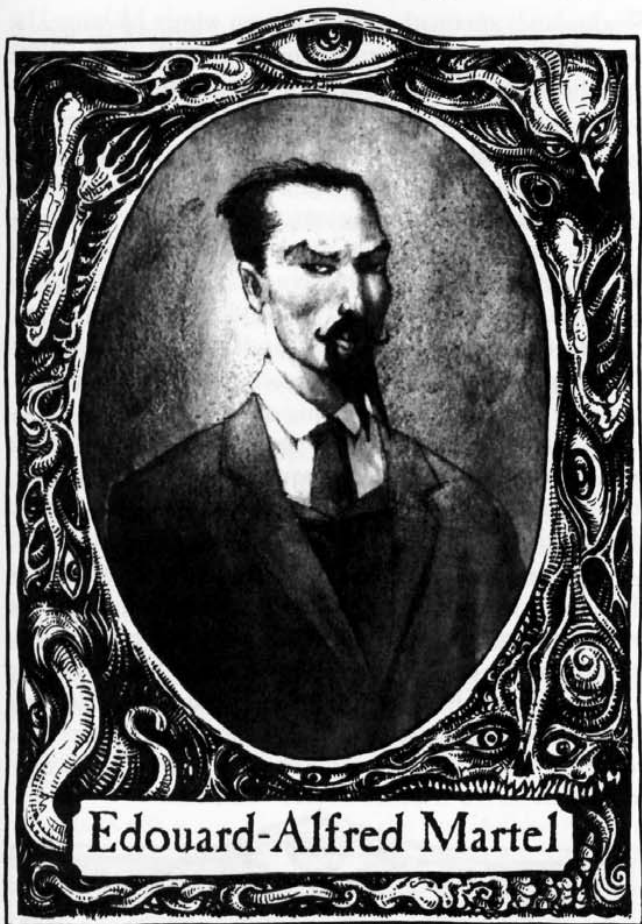
Chamber Dwellers

Some creatures have adapted to occupy the empty (or at least unpopulated) chambers of the Labyrinth. Food is scarce in these places, so creatures are often few and far between. But some of the biggest and strangest Shadowed Plasmics are found in these environments. The Hemochiropterates, for instance, are bat-like animals ranging from two to five *thousand* feet in wingspan, and have bodies so adapted for life in the open spaces that they cannot land. Feeding tentacles spring in a pair of spirals ranging from head to tail, and rows of mouths run along the Hemochiropterate's sides, just below the wing joints. They feed on *everything* that moves within their territory, but have a special fondness for the human-sized green eggs borne by certain species of tree-like fungoids beneath glow zones in the largest chambers. Some Spectres worship them as avatars of the active principle of destruction; a few of these try to convert Wurm cults in the Skinlands to Hemochiropterate worship, with little success.

Appendix II: Famous Faces

The Gentleman Helldiver

Edouard-Alfred Martel (1859-1938) is known in the Skinlands as the father of modern European caving. Not wealthy enough to explore caves without concern for paying the bills, he worked as a lawyer while devoting his enthusiasm and leisure time to caving. His concern for science and belief in the necessity of careful, systematic organization shaped the activities of his successors; even today European caving is more a sport of the upper classes and an offshoot of field geology than its American counterpart. Martel pioneered a great many mechanical innovations in ladders, pulleys and the like, greatly extending the depths accessible to exploration. His passion for documentation contributed to changes in water management policy across Europe, as he demonstrated irrefutably the ways ground-level and subterranean pollution could spread throughout a watershed.



Edouard-Alfred spent his first 40 years in the Shadowlands existing quietly, taking advantage of his new condition to explore in ways he could not while alive. From time to time he took the risk of attempting to communicate his discoveries to his former colleagues with the help of mediums, but nothing much ever came of it. In the end he decided that the risks were not worth it. In the 1970s, as his Fetters succumbed to urbanization and misfortune, Martel finally looked up from caving long enough to see what new horizons might await him. Chance encounters brought him to the Helldivers.

The challenge of the Labyrinth renewed Edouard-Alfred's enthusiasm for existence. Here was a realm whose mysteries he would never outgrow! Further, there was clearly a desperate need for men of science to bring order and discipline to the haphazard undertakings of the driven and desperate. Martel takes the threat of Oblivion as seriously as any Deathlord, but does not feel it comprises an excuse for sloppiness. One of his early utterances quickly became a motto among his supporters: "When my life was at stake, I took every precaution. How much more careful shall I be when my soul is the wager!" Even Helldivers who intensely dislike him admit that return rates have risen substantially since Martel's advice on preparation and record-keeping started catching on. Still, many are glad to keep him personally at a remove even while following his recommendations.

Martel's Corpus looks much as he did in the era of his great accomplishments. He seems perhaps 40 years old, with thinning and receding black hair, alert eyes and a carefully trimmed, forked goatee. He favors conservative suits in dark colors when not on expedition, and rugged simple climbing gear when descending into the Labyrinth. His manner is formal and reserved, but those who are willing to take the time for his elaborate exposition may find the reserve dropping, replaced by an exuberant enthusiasm at the prospect of infinite knowledge needing harvesting.

In the early years of his exploration of the Labyrinth, Edouard-Alfred had a number of close calls with annihilation, from sources ranging from Spectral attack to an unexpected pit into the Well of the Void opening to accommodate a Doppelganger who'd replaced one of his servants. Since then he has spent only as much time in the Labyrinth as his personal Pardoner thinks wise. Between descents, he spends time with other Helldivers: interviewing them, arranging for scientific measurement of interesting phenomena and suggesting strategies and tactics. Those who owe existence and safety to his innovations hold attitudes that begin with deep respect and rise to hero worship; others sneer at him and his cult of technique.

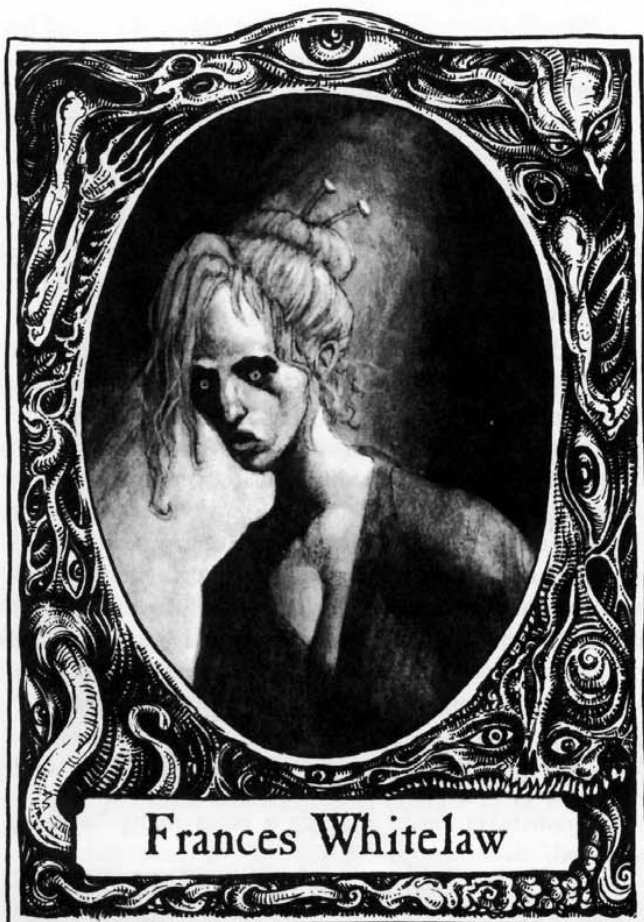
The Lady of the Deeps

Doomslayer ranks include a great many "walking wounded," those who have lost something (or several things) crucial to more normal wraithly existence, for whom Doomslaying is an essential anchor in the ceaseless struggle for purpose. These wraiths have lost Fetters, Passions, Corpus to unhealing injuries and even memories in some cases — almost everything but a single burning desire. The Lady of the Deeps is one of these wounded souls.

Frances Whitelaw died in 1644, one victim among many of the English Civil War. Cavalier forces burned down her family's cottage around her, thinking that her father had been sheltering Roman Catholics from Cromwell's zeal. (He had not.) The pain and anger she felt while crossing the Shroud were very nearly enough to push her into waiting Spectral arms as a Mortwright, but luck intervened. Frances pulled back from the emotional brink, channeling her rage into a hatred of the destructive impulses responsible for her death.

After trying out a number of ways to express her rage most effectively, Whitelaw settled on Doomslaying. She quickly rose through the Martyr Knights' ranks, gaining nearly universal respect for her perceptiveness in spotting Doppelgangers and her unswerving dedication to exposing and destroying them.

But there are prices to pay. Her Fetters vanished long ago. So have the objects of all but her central Passion. Today she is an extremely intelligent but completely fanatical woman, wholly subsumed into the search for Oblivion's influence in Stygia. Nothing else matters to her. While there is no remaining discernible trace of kindness in her, cold



Frances Whitelaw

rational pragmatism leads her to appreciate the value of allies. Therefore she spends half of her time training young Martyr Knights who show proper devotion to the cause. Those who fail to grasp her points immediately quickly lose access to her, so there is a constant undercurrent of envy surrounding those who retain her favor. Many within the Hierarchy would like to send her to the forges to remove the persistent annoyance of her presence, were it not for the fact that she is almost invariably right in identifying Spectral infiltrators.

Whitelaw's self-image has eroded over the years, reduced to only a hazy general concept. She is of average height, no particular age, of average build, with drab features. It is only during the hunt that she kindles into life. Her eyes become bright, her skin picks up color, her pace quickens and her voice gains intensity. Once the latest servant of Oblivion is no more, though, she reverts to listlessness.

Senior Legate and Overlord Jody Clemson

Since his death at the Battle of Belleau Wood, Jody Clemson has risen to be one of the single most respected and successful tacticians in the Hierarchy. A backwoods boy from Arkansas in life, Jody entered the Grim Legion on the field at Belleau Wood and was immediately sent to the front lines without sufficient training, assigned to help mop up the

Shadowlands aftermath of the German winter offensive. He proved his natural leadership and tactical acumen on the battlefield, was decorated three times as a hero and was promoted in the field to Marshal by the end of the campaign.

After formal military education and a stint in the Stygian garrison, Clemson was stationed in Europe again with Grim Legion clean-up and Reaping crews just in time for the Russo-Finnish war and the starting campaigns of World War II. By the end of the war, Clemson was a legend among the troops and one of the most respected young officers in his Legion.

His cohort was assigned to patrol the borders with the Yellow Springs, and staged several successful cross-border raids. Clemson's men claim that during one spectacularly successful assault, he single-handedly destroyed a member of the Imperial Guard while trying to save one of his men from being captured. Clemson denies this, claiming he just distracted the Guardsman long enough for the soldier to run.

Whatever the case, Clemson was promoted to Overlord by the Smiling Lord himself, and sent to staff college in Stygia. He worked in contingency planning and quartermaster's posts for a few decades. He has recently come back to the Shadowlands to look after some of his Fetters — his Quick family is having some problems of an undisclosed nature — and to help work on a continent-wide inter-Legionary contingency security arrangement in the event of another Great Maelstrom.



Akbar al-Khabir

Akbar al-Khabir

Born in 1037, Al-Khabir was known as the Lion of Spain when alive, and was a famous wrestler. Struck down by cholera before he was 30, he was rescued by a Reaper of the Skeletal Legion from his wife and daughter, who had also died of the plague but crossed the Shroud as Mortwights. His daughter was destroyed by the Reaper, but his wife escaped. Shortly thereafter, Al-Khabir left the Skeletal Legion and joined the Doomslaying organization known as the Chain and Crescent. When it joined with the Brothers to Wolves and the Obsidian Blade to form the Thorns, he changed allegiances easily, and became even more enthusiastic.

Al-Khabir has refused promotion for the last six centuries, and has put more Spectres in Nhudri's Embrace, including his wife, than any other Doomslayer. His Corpus is a mass of scars and marring from the teeth and swords of Spectres; some claim he looks like an Artificer who has spent too long near the forges, but without any charring or blackening. Rumors circulate constantly that al-Khabir is one of the Five, supposedly the Chain and Crescent himself. He doesn't even bother to deny this. He just frowns and reaches for the next Haint.

The Knife

The Knife is considered to be the best Helldiver to ever walk the corridors of the Labyrinth. Almost no one knows anything about The Knife, other than its name and its reputation. Of course, that reputation is for having gone everywhere worth going in the Great Maze and destroyed more Spectres in the course of its job than most people have seen. The Knife's trademark is a knife carved from relic bone and set with Stygian steel edges, which it leaves at the sites of its assassinations. The Knife's espionage, of course, is perfect, and leaves no trace.

Rumors say that the Knife: travels with a team of Sandmen; is one of the Redeemed; is a Spectre under the effects of Intimation and Mnemosynis; is Charon attempting to redeem himself for years of misrule; and is the Messiah of the Underworld, able to walk among the Shadow-eaten with impunity because He is fated to be their Redeemer.

Whatever the case, when the threat is dire or the need great, the call goes out for the Knife.

Spectres

The Consulting Imperialist

In life, Han Fei helped prepare the intellectual foundations of Qin Shihuang's triumph as the first emperor of China. Han was prominent in the School of Law, whose tenets started with the rejection of tradition's authority and went on to advocate a regime very much like 20th-century totalitarianism:



Everything not forbidden would be compulsory, with harsh punishments for all disobedience and equally generous rewards for all obedience. Qin took Legalist (or Realist) doctrines as the basis of his dynasty's governance. In the Yellow Springs, Han delighted in the triumph of his teachings, at least until Qin entered the Yellow Springs himself, and subsequently embarked on a purge of the innovators on whom he'd relied.

Han was one of the few Legalists to escape. He was already on the brink of losing control to his p'oi; persecution pushed him into the abyss. For a long time he wandered the Labyrinth as an all-but-mindless Doppelganger, unknowingly moving a bit ahead of the ever-expanding border of Yu Huang's domain. Decades later, he gradually recovered his sense of self and tried to return to the Yellow Springs. All his efforts ended in failure, with a number of very close escapes. Eventually Han gave up and sought new frontiers.

Han's peregrinations brought him to realms of the Labyrinth associated with the Dark Kingdom of Flint sometime about 700 C.E. As he rose from Doppelganger to Nephwrack, he joined forces with native Spectres in a succession of triumphs culminating in the Southern Death Cult, a Spectrally influenced cult that dominated the whole of the American Southeast for centuries. Then the Flaying began, and all Han's works crumbled. Bereft of followers, he wandered again, settling in Labyrinth beneath Stygia not long before the Fourth

Great Maelstrom. Here he went into business as an advisor to anyone willing to listen, drawing on millennia of political philosophy to craft the most effective assaults on the living and the not-yet-Shadow-eaten alike.

The long course of Han's wandering is commemorated in his Corpus. Human form left him long ago. His main body resembles a stylized lion carved out of green-veined Labyrinth-stuff; protrusions carry human-sized busts of living rulers he and his students have corrupted over the centuries. He moves on a myriad of stumpy legs jointed to pivot in any direction.

Han Fei's Spectral career is a monument to the idea that a single Spectre, willing to walk long and far enough, can spread bad ideas very widely indeed. Now that his Spectral students in the eastern reaches of Stygia are caught in political and social turmoil, he is considering whether or not it may be time to move again.

The Musician

The Musician first appeared in the streets of the Paris Necropolis in 1927. He had no memory of his life, or death; his first memory was of standing on a narrow cobblestone street, clutching a broken violin in one hand and a blood-soaked quill pen in the other. To this day he does not know, and there seems to be no ready way to find out, precisely *when* he died. Truth be told, he doesn't much care.

He has no interest in Spectral politics, and has managed to avoid becoming the target of any Spectral anger intense or

sustained enough to lead to his destruction. Nor has his Corpus altered very far from its original appearance, though his fingers have grown longer and more numerous, and his chin is longer and broader than the human jaw should be able to accommodate. (Both of these modifications let him better perform on his favored instrument.)

The Musician's drive is a simple one: He identifies talented living musicians and drives them into some obsessive behavior that culminates in deaths calculated to turn them into Mortwights. He hopes someday to form a Spectral orchestra capable of playing music that can crack the heavens and unleash Oblivion's full might immediately. There is no room in this plan for the recognition that the vast majority of his victims arrive filled with hate for the one who engineered their deaths, but he persists in the hopes that given sufficient numbers of victims, even a very small fraction of them may eventually add up to something impressive. The rest generally go on to be recruited by some high-ranking Spectre or other. Many become highly successful Doppelgangers, infiltrating Stygia through the Hierarchy elite's fondness for culture.

The Musician works on a single target at a time. The obsession he implants varies, depending on his whim and the target's vulnerability: dangerous sexual practices, rock climbing or skydiving with insufficient regard for safety, auto or speedboat racing — whatever comes to hand. A given corruption may flower into death in mere weeks, or it may be the work of years. The Musician is patient.



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