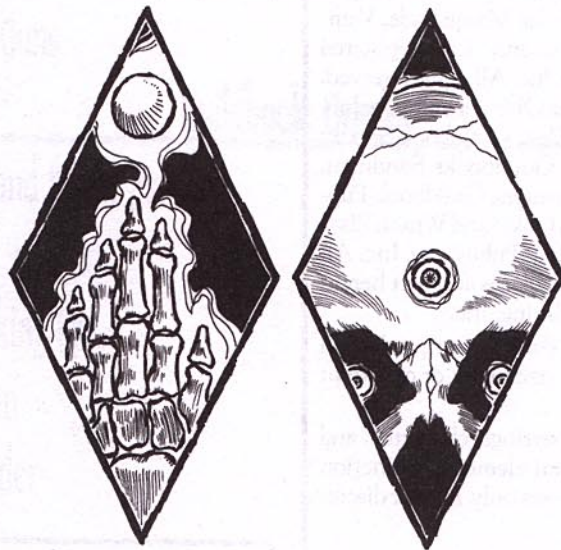
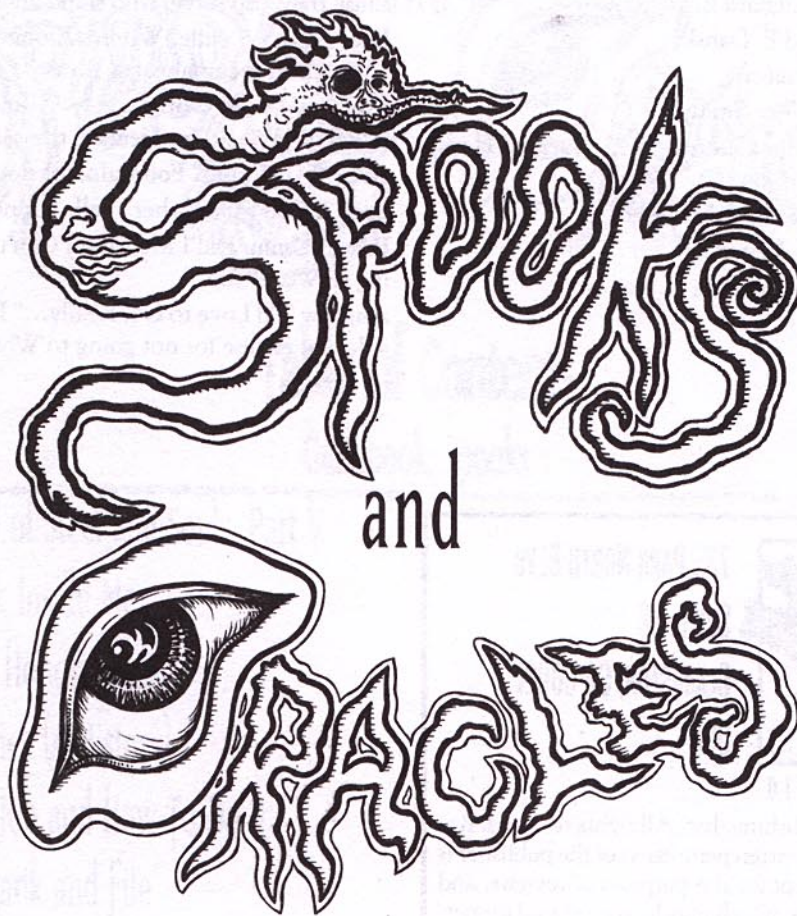


GUILDBOOK:



The Spooks And Oracles Sourcebook for Wraith: The Oblivion™
Guildbook Six

GUILDBOOK:



By Mark Cenczyk and Dawn Kahan

Credits

Written by: Mark Cenczyk and Dawn Kahan

Additional Writing by: Richard E. Dansky

Development by: Richard E. Dansky

Editing by: Cynthia Summers

Art Direction by: Lawrence Snelly

Art by: Mike Danza, Pia Guerra, Fred Harper, Henry Higgenbotham, Jill Thompson

Cover Art: Eric Lacombe and John Cobb

Cover Design: Conan H. Venus

Layout and typesetting by: Conan H. Venus

Special Thanks (WorldCon Edition) To:

Stephe "I've Got a Dealer Badge and You Don't" **Pagel**, because they also serve, who stand and wait...

Dean "Cat's Cradle, Witch's Broom" **Burnham**, for keepin' on truckin' deepinahearta Texas.

Stewart "Von! Von Lovely Allmen! Two! Two Lovely Allmen!" **Wieck**, for greeting the Moorcock-loving hordes.

Greg "I Can't Go" **Fountain**, for not going to WorldCon.

Fred "I Can't Go Either" **Yelk**, for not going to WorldCon.

Brian "Umm, Did I Mention I Can't Go?" **Glass**, for not going to WorldCon.

Andrew "I'd Love to Go, Really..." **Bates**, for at least having a decent excuse for not going to WorldCon.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
CLARKSTON, GA 30021
USA

© 1998 White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction without the written permission of the publisher is expressly forbidden, except for the purposes of reviews, and for blank character sheets, which may be reproduced for personal use only. White Wolf, Vampire the Masquerade, Vampire the Dark Ages, and Mage the Ascension are registered trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. Werewolf the Apocalypse, Wraith the Oblivion, Changeling the Dreaming, Werewolf the Wild West, Guildbook Spooks and Oracles, Guildbook Artificers, Guildbooks Sandmen, Guildbook Masquers, Guildbook Haunters, Guildbook Puppeteers and Pardoners, Shadowplayers Guide and Wraith Players Guide are trademarks of White Wolf Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. All characters, names, places and text herein are copyrighted by White Wolf Publishing, Inc.

The mention of or reference to any company or product in these pages is not a challenge to the trademark or copyright concerned.

This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

Check out White Wolf online at

<http://www.white-wolf.com>; alt.games.whitewolf and rec.games.frp.storyteller

PRINTED IN CANADA.



Sister Acceptance created by Jackie Cassada and Nicky Rea.
Fix and Artemus Vanderwaal created by Mark Cenczyk.
Yaeko created by Heather Grove.

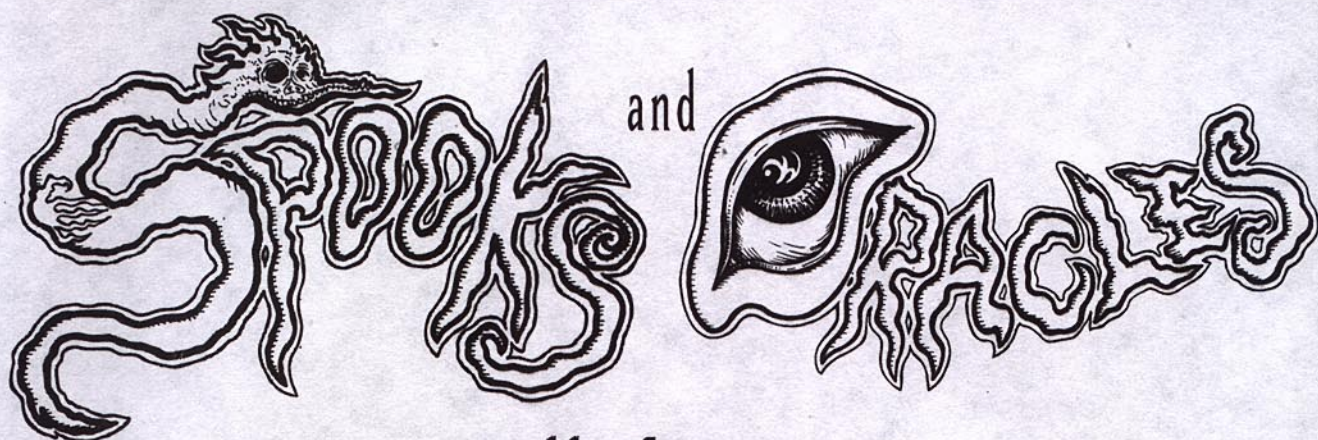


Table of Contents

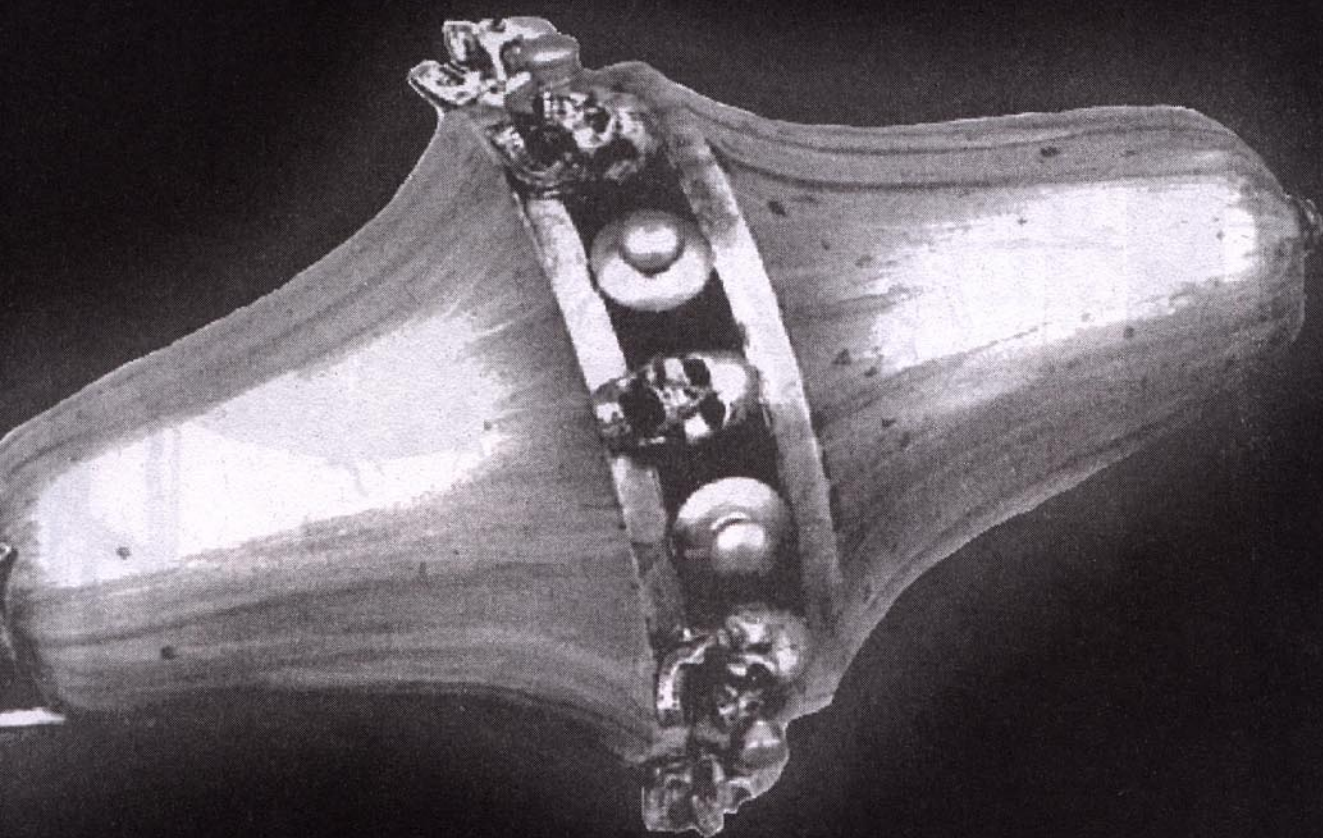
Guildbook: Spooks

Ghost Story: A Road of Steel and Souls, Part V	6
Prologue: The Spook Inside Me	12
Chapter One: Those Honor Bound	18
Chapter Two: Inquiries (A History)	32
Chapter Three: The Job and How To Do It	44
Chapter Four: The Rank and File	56
Appendix: Friends With Long Guns	68

Guildbook: Oracles

Ghost Story: A Road of Steel and Souls, Part VIII	78
Chapter I: Déjà Vu	84
Chapter II: Inside the Unblinking Eye	90
Chapter III: And It Was Written	112
Chapter IV: Opening Them Wider	122
Chapter V: (Un)Familiar Faces	130
Appendix: Portraits Hanging on the Catacomb Walls	142



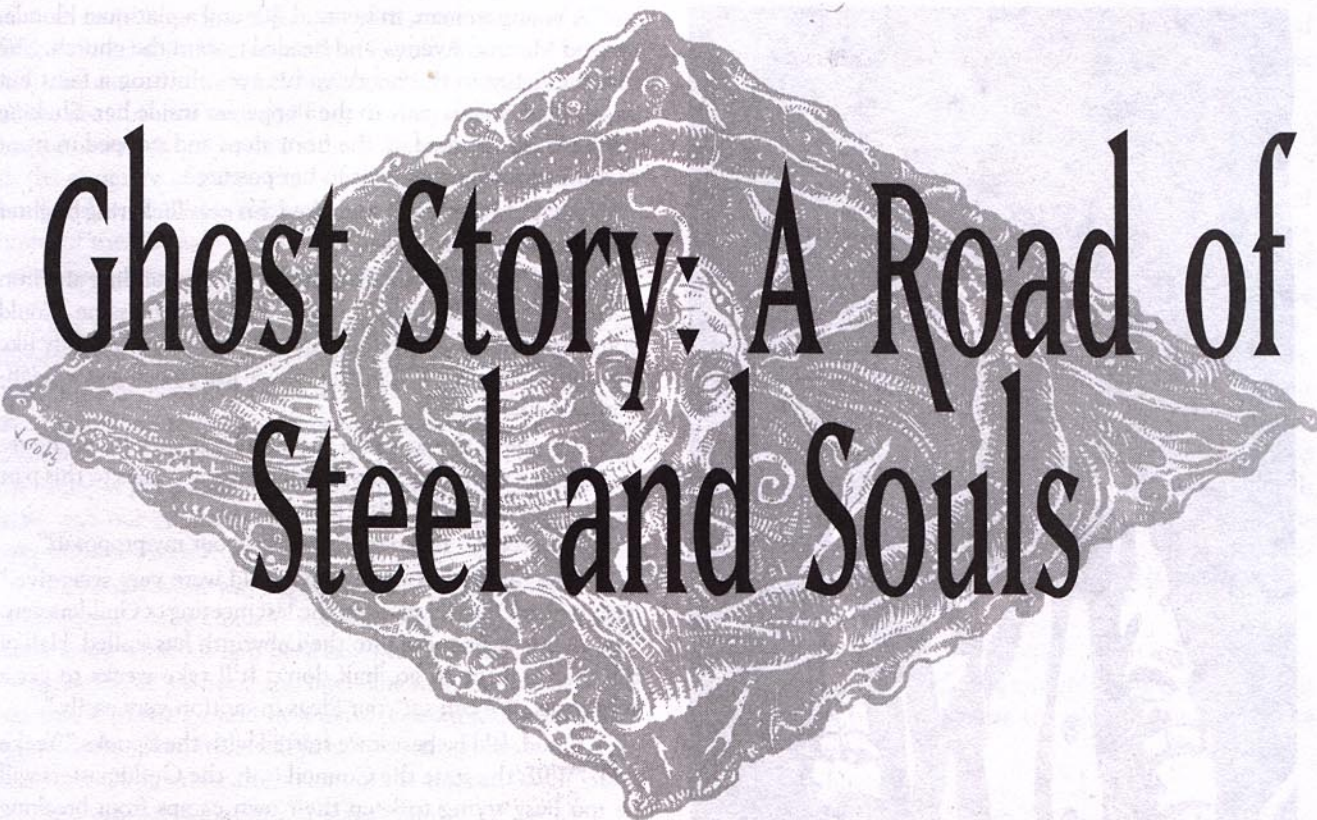


"When a soul passes over into the next world, can
nothing give it power to return?

Not even love, or hate?"

—Frederic Barbarossa





Ghost Story: A Road of Steel and Souls

Part VII: The Whole World in His Hands



y all rights, St. Ignatius should have met the wrecking ball years ago. The church was over 150 years old, and looked twice that age. Ivy that had once served to give the walls character now simply smothered them in a rat's nest of dead tendrils. The walls themselves sagged under the weight

of decades of neglect, their stones barely held in place by disintegrating mortar. The iron fence that ringed the property was mostly rust, and the stained-glass windows had long ago been smashed in.

The only thing keeping the city from condemning the property was the fact that it had been declared a historical landmark 10 years previous. Municipal politics being what they are, however, the addition of a large network of steel scaffolding to the front of the building was all that had come of any attempts at a restoration of the site. The skeleton of pipes and wooden planks was *supposed* to shore up the front façade temporarily, until the real repairs could begin. That work had been done two years ago. Now the scaffolding was the only thing keeping the east wall from falling onto Munroe Avenue.

The bells in the teetering structure tolled a quarter to seven in the evening. A tall figure stepped out from the shelter of the massive front archway of the church and stiffly craned his neck upward to check the time. The scaffolding stretched up to the top of the steeple, however, and the cage of beams and wood planks and canvas tarps obscured the clock's face. Seeing this, the figure spat out a phrase that had no place being said within shouting distance of a house of worship, then sat down on the steps of the church to wait.

In the Shadowlands, Fix perched himself in the memory of the steeple and watched the scene unfold through the heavy, swirling mists of the Shroud. He had been observing the mortal for almost a week, ever since a Monitor had Fettered him. After crossing a few palms with oboli and making a few inquiries, Fix had learned of the agenda shared by the Monitor in question and a Puppeteer of his acquaintance. He had originally been willing to watch and listen. Things had changed in the past 48 hours, though. Now Fix had no choice but to act.



A young woman, in her mid-20s and a platinum blonde, crossed Munroe Avenue and headed toward the church. She saw the figure in the doorway, his eyes emitting a faint but steady glow visible only to the Puppeteer inside her. Shaking her head, she walked up the front steps and stopped in front of him, annoyance evident in her posture.

"Nice choice," Seth remarked, his eyes flickering brighter for an instant as he looked her over.

Yaeko looked around her at the wobbly building and iron bones of the scaffolding. "I wish I could say the same. Could you possibly pick a more obscure meeting place? A body like the one I'm wearing is courting suicide just by being in a neighborhood like this."

"It's out of the way and the Shroud is thin here," he replied with a shrug. "Besides, hardly anyone comes to this part of town. Even on the other side."

"Whatever," Yaeko said. "What about my proposal?"

"The higher-ups within my Guild were very receptive," Seth replied. "Especially after the last meeting of Guildmasters. The debate over going into the Labyrinth has stalled. Half of the Guilds want to go, half don't. It'll take weeks to get a consensus. We can set your ideas in motion very easily."

"Good. It'd be best if we started with the Spooks," Yaeko said. "With the state the Council is in, the Guildmasters will be too busy trying to keep their own camps from breaking apart. I say we go after them with everything we can. A full-scale assault on Fetters of the major Bosses."

Seth nodded in agreement, inwardly smirking at the thought of Vanderwal's expression when his Fetters went up in smoke. The Spooks had always been a thorn in the Monitors' side, nothing better than a bunch of punks who'd do anything for a price. Their have-gun-will-travel attitude always brought a lot of unwanted attention to those who had good reasons for crossing the Shroud. Now it was nearly impossible to get anything done in the Skinlands without meddling from the top. You always knew where the Spooks had been: Everything was a shambles, and there'd be Legionnaires crawling all over the place. The Monitor inner circle had eagerly warmed to the idea of their role in Yaeko's proposal. The Spooks would fall. After them, the Haunters. Proctors next, then Puppeteers, and then one by one by one the rest of the Guilds, until finally the Artificers were toppled from their pedestal. Soon no one would be able to get through the Shroud without coming to the Monitors.

Seth looked at Yaeko, his Puppeteer ally. Her Guild would be one of the first to go. He felt bad for her. But not too bad. She was doing it to herself, after all.

Fix watched the two mouthpieces talk and knew it was time to move. The night before, he had reached through the Shroud and gone to work on the scaffolding, loosening key rivets all over the structure. It was nothing spectacular, just

enough to let him finish the job with a minimum of effort. Bracing himself on the ledge of the steeple, Fix unhooked the mace he carried with him from his belt. He looked down to where the Consorts were standing. Timing was of the essence; he had to do this before they moved. Targeting a specific joint in the structure of pipes, Fix swung the weapon up over his head and, with all his might, struck through the thin membrane of the Shroud.

The ironwork of the scaffolding began to creak ever so slightly as it struggled to hold on to the church's front wall. Suddenly, the main braces around the steeple gave way and the structure collapsed with shocking suddenness, its skeleton accordioning straight down to the pavement. The force of the collapse pulled several major chunks of the steeple and front wall out of place, launching the masonry missiles all over Munroe Avenue.

Yaeko saw what was happening, and immediately let go of the pretty young Consort she was using. The poor woman never knew what hit her. Seth saw what was happening also — a fraction of a second too late. The man he had Fettered was struck to the ground by a massive section of piping and stone blocks. Even from where he was sitting, Fix could hear bone crunching under the weight of the impact.

Unfortunately for Seth, it wasn't fatal.

Fix smirked at the mangle of metal and stone that he had wrought. He quickly leapt down from his perch and stood over the crushed and broken body, smiling like a bastard. With a whistle, he swung the spectral mace over his head and down onto the inert body, crushing the skull beyond any recognition. Then, even as the Nihil opened up to claim what was left of Seth's soul, the Spook stepped over to the front door of the church and, touching the warped panels, burned the letters F-I-X into the thick oak.

And then he left.



In the memory of a room far removed from unwanted eyes, five figures sat around a table. Four of them watched the fifth.

They waited.

The fifth spoke. All he said was, "Hit me."

The dealer flipped over a card from the deck. A jack of diamonds lay grimacing up from the table. Its name was once Graffanino. That is, its name had been Graffanino, until Graffanino had gotten himself caught with his hand in the till. So Graffanino's Boss, a Spook named Cormier, handed him over to a Circle of Artificers who owed Cormier a favor. They worked for months dealing with everyone Cormier sent them, 52 souls in all. Finally the forgers finished their project: a complete deck of soul-hammered cards. Cormier presented the deck to his Boss, who loved a good game of poker as much as the next dead guy. And when your Boss sits on the Commission, you treat him well. Cormier's Boss, Vanderwal, accepted the deck graciously, and then noticed something missing from it: the joker.

No one saw Cormier after that.

The player stared for a long minute at the card. A nine of clubs and six of hearts fell from the player's hand on top of the jack.

"Son of a bitch."

"You oughta stick to chess," quipped Cianfrocco, the dealer. He and the other three tittered for a minute at the joke.

Vanderwal rolled what was left of his eyes toward the heavens, or at least toward where the heavens would be if such a place existed in the Shadowlands, which it didn't. The barb, in its own way, was not without respect for what Vanderwal had gone through to be its target. Many years ago, Vanderwal had gotten on Midian's bad side, and found himself forced into one of the Haunter's infamous chess games. The word was that Midian had never lost a chess match, and that the losers... well, Vanderwal was playing with 16 of them. It was not an enviable position to be in. Odds were over a 100-1 against Vanderwal's walking out of Midian's attic. And yet, here he was.

Allensworth, seated at Vanderwal's left, snorted. "I still can't believe you didn't end up as the queen's pawn. Midian never loses a chess match. The Deathlords won't play him, not even on a lark."

"Old Ironmask didn't lose that one either," Vanderwal said. "He just didn't win. We chased each other around the board for days. Ended up in a perpetual stalemate. He didn't lose, but he didn't win, either. We agreed never to talk about it to anyone else. Well, he agreed, at least." Vanderwal cracked a quick smile at Allensworth. "Besides, what fun would it be if I played the Grand Master Midian to a draw and couldn't tell my poker buddies about it?"



Womack, seated at Vanderwal's right, spat vehemently, "Hell, Midian's a pushover. He thinks he's invincible. Even I could take him."

Cianfrocco broke in, "Don't be stupid, Womack. You say that 'cause you're sitting here. Hell, your poker playing's a disgrace. As for chess, you think 'check' is something you say to a waiter." Womack sputtered, while the rest of the poker players laughed. "Anyways, we got bigger things to deal with. Like what happened at the last Guildmasters' meeting."

"Yes, what did occur?" asked Batiste, the last of the group. "Has a consensus been reached? Will a journey to the Labyrinth be undertaken?" Batiste was one of the more genteel Spook Bosses. He ran the Silver Maple Combination, which controlled most of the Toronto Necropolis, and did so with elegant brutality. Batiste had been a dapper gunrunner during Prohibition, and endeavored to maintain the "look" well into death: crisp dark suits, precise speech, a soulforged carnation in his lapel. He thought he brought a touch of class to the inner circle of Spooks. The rest of the inner circle thought he looked like a twit.

Cianfrocco laughed. "Not bloody likely. They're all yelling over what happened to Ember still. The Artificers want the Masquers' heads on a platter, the Oracles are gabbing about doom awaiting any expedition, and frankly if Master Chanteur

pulls out his damn mandolin once more I'm gonna reach over and feed it to him."

"Might improve his singing voice," said Vanderwal.

"Can it. That little stunt you pulled two weeks ago came up. The Monitors are screaming for your head. Fer Charon's sake, what were you thinking?"

Vanderwal straightened in his chair. "The Monitor brought it on himself. I gave Fix complete discretion to act as he saw fit. He did what he had to. Anyone here, if he were in the same spot, would have done the same thing."

"That's beside the point," Cianfrocco replied. "Now we gotta watch our backs from another direction. By Charon's Oar, anyone but Fix... ah, screw it." There was a long silence at the table.

"So nothing's been decided?" Womack asked.

"As far as the Guildmasters, no. As far as we're concerned, however, things are different."

"You mean we're going into the Labyrinth," said Allensworth.

"One of us is, yes," Cianfrocco said. "And I know just the person for the job." Cianfrocco sat back and stared pensively at the figure seated directly across from him.

"Don't you even think it, Cianfrocco. Midian gave me that same half-stare when I was still trying to figure out how

many spaces up and over a knight moves." Vanderwal became visibly agitated. "I am not going down there."

"Not you, stupid. Your number-one gun."

"Fix? He'll never go for that."

"He ain't got a choice. Neither do you. Send Fix — and his Gang, too, come to think of it — down into the Labyrinth. They can bungee down a Nihil or walk straight into the Veinous Stair if they want. I don't really care which. But they're going. Fix thinks he's bulletproof anyway. Let him prove it."

"What do you expect him to find?"

"It ain't *what* I expect him to find, it's *who*. And I don't mean Charon. There're bound to be other Guilds who'll try to go down there on their own. If there is anything down there, we'll let them worry about finding it. All Fix has to do is wait for whoever to resurface, and...." Cianfrocco trailed off. They all knew what he meant.

"But what of Charon?" Batiste inquired. "How shall we endeavor to locate him?"

"Charon's not in the Labyrinth. That's where the rest of the Guilds are wrong. He's in the Skinlands. I talked to a Mandelbrot who's got an ear with the bigwig Haunters. They're all convinced that Charon didn't disappear with Gorool. They think he stepped through the Shroud and was reincarnated. Problem is, they can't find him." He laughed, and not pleasantly. "Course, that figures. They're looking in the wrong place."

"What do you mean?"

"Look at it this way. Charon is supposed to have lost his Fetters a long time ago, right? That's why he was cooped up in his palace for the last couple centuries? Uh-uh. Charon wasn't that much of a fool. There's no way he could have run Stygia, even up 'til Gorool appeared, from the Tower. And there's no way he would have let the Deathlords get total control over Stygia. You know what they're like. The Incompetent Seven."

"So what do you think happened?"

"I think Charon knew the Deathlords couldn't handle ruling Stygia. So he made sure that their Fetters were destroyed without their knowledge. He probably did it himself."

"That's crazy," Womack said. "How could he have done that without any Fetters himself?"

"Oh, Charon could do it. Before he took care of the Deathlords, he made sure that he had one Fetter left, that no wraith or group of wraiths could destroy."

Allensworth asked, "What was it?"

Cianfrocco sat back. "You all should know. You step into it practically every day."

The four Spooks looked around at each other and at Cianfrocco, dumbfounded. And then the answer came to them. Typically, it was Vanderwal who said it.

"The Skinlands?"

"Bullseye."

"Bullshit. How in the name of the Lady of Fate is that possible?"

"It's not that crazy. It explains a lot. It explains why the Haunters can't find him, for one, because they're trying to zero in on one particular Fetter of Charon. They don't realize that the whole damned thing is *the* Fetter. It also explains how Charon could destroy the Deathlords' Fetters without their knowledge. They were subsumed into his. Nobody figured it out, 'cause nobody would ever think that the entire Skinlands could become the Fetter of one person. Frankly, I gotta hand it to the old boatman. He really put it over on everyone."

"But why would he do that?"

"I figure it's a big power play. Charon's on an extended vacation to his Fetter while the Deathlords are losing credibility every day. Stygia's going down the flusher. It needs a leader. It needs Charon more than ever. He knows this. He's just biding his time until the situation gets to the breaking point, and then he'll step back through again. It'll be the *Pax Stygiae* all over again. Charon's word as law. Nobody to give him lip, because he'll be the one to save us from all the idiots he left behind."

"So what do you propose we do about it?"

"Nothing," Cianfrocco said. "We do nothing. It's business as usual. Watch the other Guilds who can cross over into the Skinlands. Add to the chaos. Get your people to help stir things up as much as possible. Meanwhile, every time a Spook crosses over, we let Charon, wherever the hell he is, know that we know. Leave subtle hints at weak points in the Shroud. Get his attention. Let him know he's not as clever as he thinks. Then when he comes back, we'll ride in on his coattails."

"I like it," Womack said. "I like it a lot."

"Me too," Allensworth said.

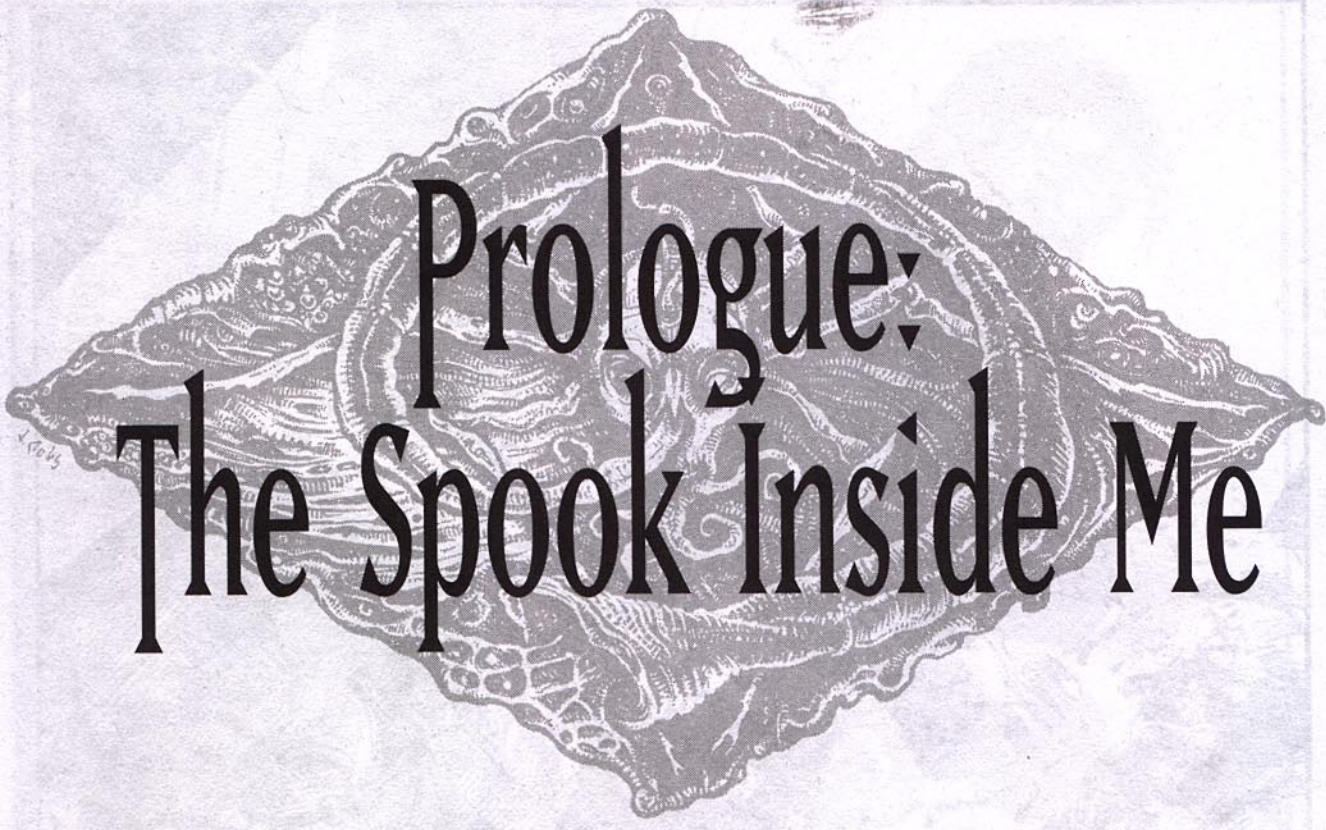
"As do I," added Batiste.

Vanderwal looked at the four. "You're all fucked in what's left of your heads, you know that." He sighed laboriously. Cianfrocco waited.

"Oh, what the hell," Vanderwal said. "Count me in."







Prologue: The Spook Inside Me



Why do I do what I do?

I've been asked that question more times than I care to recall over the past century or so.

And no matter how many times I'm asked, I never get tired of answering.

I've been asked that question by everyone I meet, in every possible place I've gone. I can't get away from it. It comes up in the back booths of every bar I go into in every Necropolis I operate in. It comes up right after a firefight when the pain in my Corpus is so severe that it doesn't subside for a week. And it comes up when the Stygian magistrates pick me up for a "routine inquiry" — and they always do — and chain me in a basement interrogation room, with the clank of the forge pounding through the walls.

I've even been asked that question by clients who shouldn't care *why* I do what I do, as long as I *do* it. You know the type — the little person, the nobody who couldn't catch a break in life and catches fewer in death. The type who sees her last Fetter about to go the way of all things and hands her last obolus to me to make sure the Spectres don't get her. And I take her payment, whatever she offers that looks good to me, and I shore up my body to reach through the

Shroud and do my business and save her hide, and that's not enough for her. She wants to know why I do this. A half-step away from Oblivion, and she starts getting philosophical. Panic makes you do strange things, I guess.

I give all of them the same response:

Because I can.

Because no one else will.

Because someone has to.

And because it won't let me stop doing it.

Talk to any Spook and he or she, to varying degrees, says the same thing. If all you see when you see the Spooks is a bunch of headbreakers and troublemakers, then you really don't understand what the Spooks are all about. We're not just muscle for hire — although, rest assured, we do our fair share of legbreaking. But there's more. There's always more.

The Spooks have existed, in one form or another, since the earliest days of this capricious little plane of existence. Be glad that we do. Because sooner or later, you're gonna need to come to us.



I never considered myself a violent person. Oh, sure, I watched football games and went to Schwarzenegger movies and read Mike Hammer novels like any red-blooded American male. But that was all detached violence, safely on the screen or between the covers of a book. Reading *I Am The Jury* didn't mean that I harbored a latent mean streak. Hell, I only got into three fights in my entire life, and those were all playground shoving matches. I never even liked the *idea* of fighting, at least not for the sake of proving how tough I was. That probably explains why I got my clock cleaned all three times things got nasty.

I definitely didn't think I was capable of killing someone.

But it happened, and the ironic part is that I had to wait until I was dead before I was able to tap this part of me. I know what you're going to say — my Shadow got the better of me. Well, you're wrong. I knew exactly what I was doing when it happened. I knew exactly why I did it. And given a second chance, I'd do it again in a heartbeat.

It was over a woman. Her name was Constance. She was from down south, Georgia or one of the Carolinas — I never could remember which. We both worked at the same magazine; I was a correspondent and she was a photographer. I was a 30-year-old dy-

namo-wannabe, a year or two out of journalism school and scrambling to pay off my student loans. Constance was only 26, but she had a couple of awards under her belt and a sixth sense for the perfect shot.

We were together a lot, on and off the job, and I savored every minute of it. Connie was brilliant and beautiful, and she had a sense of humor that was just twisted enough for my tastes. I can still remember the night when, after a particularly pleasurable episode of lovemaking, I looked deep into her eyes and asked her to marry me. And I can still remember the dance my soul did when she said she would.

We never did get married. I went on extended assignment overseas, covering a civil war in some African country you've probably never heard of. There I stepped on a tripwire and got cut to pieces by a homemade fragmentation bomb placed in the shadows of some nondescript alley in some forgettable village in the middle of goddamned nowhere.

It took years for me to make it back, dead, to New York, or to the dirty, cold, weather-beaten monstrosity that pretends to be New York in this world. And all I had to get myself there was Constance. I could feel her presence coursing through me. I could see in my mind's eye her blonde curls and green eyes, and hear her laugh. She was the only thing that kept me going in this nightmare of a world.



Connie was still there. She had gotten quieter in life, but I half-expected that. I suppose in a way it was nice to see some evidence that yes, she did miss me, but that wasn't the reason I clawed my way back. It was everything for me to see her again, however Shroud-clouded my view was. It sounds strange, but I felt stronger when I saw her, more solid — more alive, if you will. Wherever and whenever I traveled through the Shadowlands, I could feel her with me. I didn't know the term "Fetter" at first, but I knew that was what she was to me: my Fetter, my lifeline, my connection to hope.

And I could feel my lifeline breaking.

Connie had started going out with someone, a hockey player. Things turned bad fast in the relationship. He would have a bad game and to work out his frustration he'd hit her. She'd go into work on the cloudiest days of the year wearing these huge sunglasses to hide the black eyes. The vitality seeped out of her with each passing day. She would stay late at work, pushing herself harder and harder just so she didn't have to go home to that abusive roach.

I saw her crying herself sick in the empty office more than once. Every single ounce of my being was hurting along with her. I could feel a part of me slip away into nothing every time she was hit, every time she wept, every time she suffered.

That's what happens when you start to lose a Fetter. If it's a thing or a place, it hits you like a shotgun blast. But if it's a person, the agony is endless. You feel yourself dying all over again, slowly being eaten away as the pain of your Fetter is magnified a few dozen times for you. You will literally do anything to reverse the process. You will lie. You will cheat. You will steal.

And you will kill.

I thought of several ways to do it. A fall down stairs. A sabotaged brake line. A fire. But the ideal situation never presented itself. And in the end, I didn't plan anything. I just did it.

The bastard actually came to her office one night, drunk and loud and utterly repulsive. He had been traded that afternoon to a team on the West Coast, and Constance was going to go with him. Not asked to go, mind you — she was going, and that was that. She said she'd be damned if she went anywhere with him. I almost cheered. The old Constance, the Constance who didn't take shit from anyone, had resurfaced. Seeing her, the real her, again made me realize I missed her.

And how much I hated him, for trying to beat the best parts of Connie into submission.

He was furious. I watched him yelling and sweeping things off her desk, while she just sat there and



waited for him to run out of things to throw. It was almost comical. He threw the desk calendar. He threw the phone. He even threw the electric pencil sharpener and nearly had it land on his foot because he'd forgotten that it was plugged in.

Then he got to my picture. Connie had kept a photo of me on her desk all this time. I'll never forget the look on his face when he picked up the frame and saw my face staring back at him. He dropped the frame.

And hit her, hard, knocking her over a drafting table and spilling proofs and drafting utensils all over the floor. I looked into his eyes, and all I could see was a cold mist of rage and power and violence. I felt alarm bells going off in my head. They became shriller when I saw him pick up a pair of cropping shears and advance on her.

I flung myself through the Shroud and at his figure. The force of my impact knocked him to the floor. The shears flew out of his hand and across the room. He turned to see what the hell had happened, then got his head snapped back by an invisible boot as I kicked his face. It felt good to see the blood flow. But it wasn't enough. I reached down and pulled him to his feet, and then higher, my insubstantial frame holding a six-three, 245-pound professional athlete a foot off the ground through an unholy mixture of fear and love and desperation and revenge.

He kicked and screamed, and to shut him up I slammed him into the wall. The white noise in my head deafened me as I slammed him into it again and again, driving his silhouette into the plaster. He lunged out at what he thought was me, swinging left-right-left at the air. I let the punches pass through me for a few seconds. And then I hit him. His head snapped back and he fell into the wall again, then slid down to the floor. Still, it wasn't enough. I reached to the floor and picked up the shears. I had never picked up something in the Skinlands before, and it was like trying to hold on to an electric eel. My hand was bitten by a flurry of shocks, and the scissors kept wanting to fall to the carpet.

But I finally got hold of them. I stood over his body and grabbed the shears with both hands and broke them into pieces where he could see. I wanted him to know what was about to happen to him. I wanted him to be afraid.

Then I grabbed his neck and squeezed. I could feel the muscles in his neck bulge in reflex action. It was like trying to throttle an oak tree. He was coughing and choking and clawing at an assailant he could not see, but his hands passed through me and I barely noticed. I kept squeezing, digging into his muscles, into his jugular and carotid, digging until I could reach his

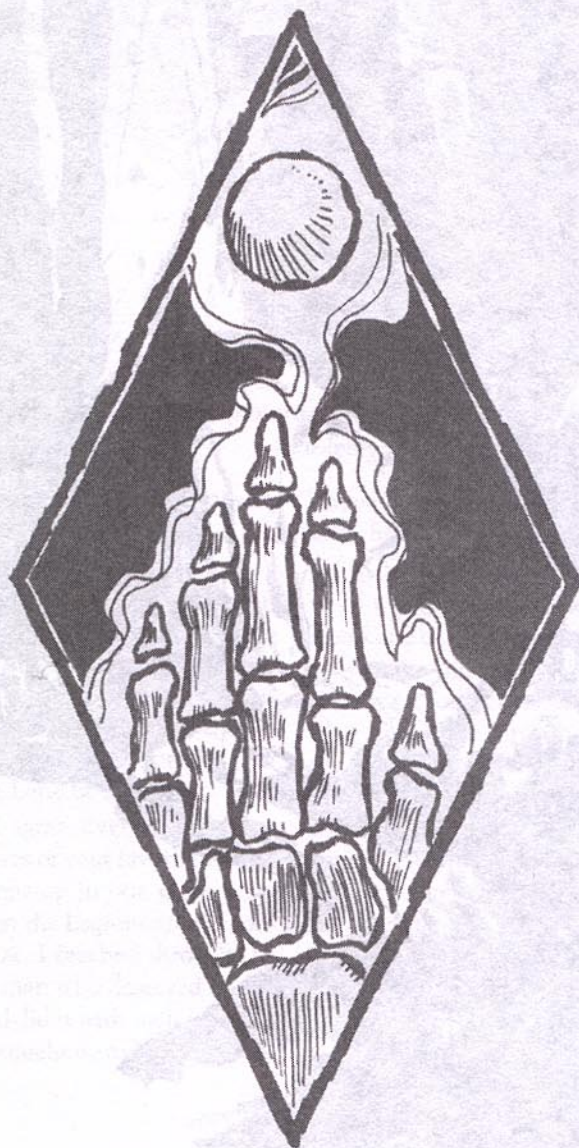
spine and snap it with every iota of strength I had. Then, blackness.

When I came to, the Shroud had come up like a wall. Constance was standing over the spot where her permanently ex-boyfriend had struggled and thrashed against my strangling him. His body had vanished — I guess I'd taken care of that during the moments I couldn't remember. She stood there and stared, wide-eyed, at nothing. I watched her for as long as I could, until she went back and picked my picture up from the floor. She dusted the frame off, and kissed the glass, and put it back on the corner of her desk. She left the office, exhausted and shaking, but free. And alive.

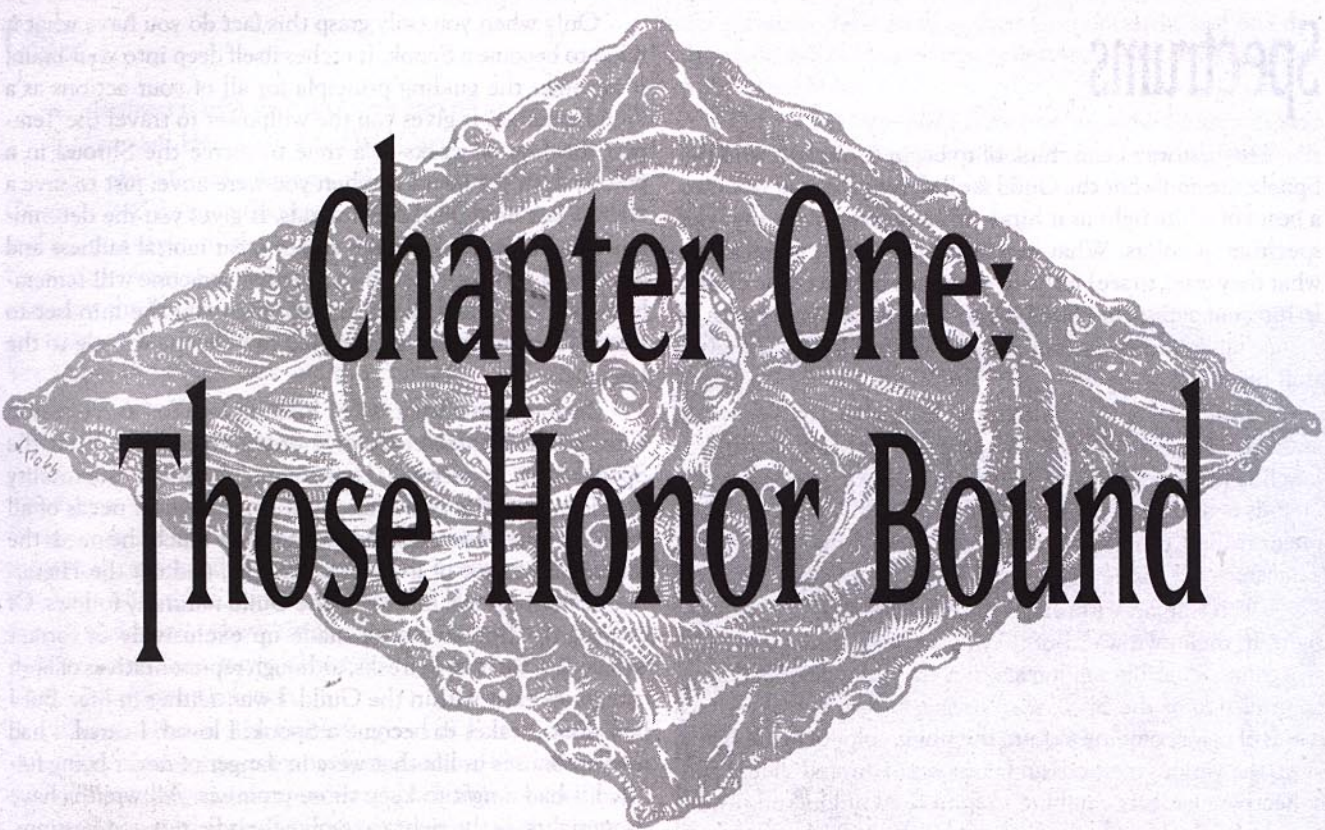
I spent a long time after that trying to regain control over myself. My Shadow wouldn't shut up. He kept

talking to me about Connie, trying to convince me to bring her into the Shadowlands. He kept whispering about the *Dictum Mortuum* and the danger I had gotten myself into, and how much easier it would be if I made her a wraith like me. The thoughts my Shadow put inside my head were brutal and seductive at the same time. I physically ached for her, but condemning Constance to this sort of existence sickened me. Frankly, I didn't want her to die, not even for the sake of riding death's whirlwind with me. As long as Constance was alive, she would always be a part of me, my bellwether in the turbulence.

I needed her to live, but more importantly, I *wanted* her to live. She was all I had.







Chapter One: Those Honor Bound

As material fortune is associated with the properties of the body, so honor belongs to those of the soul.

— Ptolemy



It was sort of fitting that I joined up with the Spooks.

After what I had done, there weren't a lot of places I could go. It wasn't as if people were falling over themselves to associate with me or hide me from the authorities. I had committed a serious crime in the eyes of the Hierarchy; I had broken the *Dictum Mortuum*, the law laid down by Charon that expressly prohibits any and all contact with the Land of the Quick.

Big effing deal, you say. And I agree. Everybody does it. Even if it's just to stand on the shores of your favorite beach, or walk through the house you grew up in one more time, people find a way to get across when the Legions aren't looking. But I did a lot worse than that. I reached through the Shroud and killed a man. It was a man who deserved to die, but I nevertheless did the deed, and did it with such violence and force that his soul plummeted straight into Oblivion. And

I hope it stuck in the gullet of a Malfean and made the bastard choke.

I didn't just break the *Dictum Mortuum*. I shot it to pieces.

I wasn't on the run long before the Spooks found me. It seems one of their number had been impressed by my actions, by what he called the "righteous anger" that I had exhibited in taking another person's life. He sympathized with me, with what I had gone through and what had driven me to commit the fatal act. He said he belonged to a group of wraiths a lot like myself, wraiths who had, at one point or another, found themselves and those people and things they loved in mortal danger. He offered me sanctuary from the Hierarchy. He offered me support in safeguarding my Fetters. And he offered me the chance to make something relatively decent out of my time in this limbo, the chance to help my fellow wraiths who couldn't help themselves, who had nowhere else to turn.

It was an offer I couldn't refuse.



Spectrums

The best way I can think of to begin to explain who the Spooks are and what the Guild is all about is to compare it to a beam of white light as it hits a prism and separates into the spectrum of colors. What most wraiths see (or, more likely, what they want to see) is the in-your-face nature of the Guild: lashing out across the Shroud, knocking on the undersides of seance tables, driving people out of old houses — hackneyed stuff like that.

Or they see what we do in the back alleys of Necropoli and side roads of the Shadowlands: starting riots and fires, tangling with Legionnaires, hijacking freshly Reaped caravans of souls bound for Stygia and the Deathlords' coffers. One big uncontrolled (and uncontrollable) mega-gang — Death's Teamsters.

I won't argue with either interpretation. They're both right, in their own way. But they're both only one side of the spectrum. What I'm talking about is the other side, the more colorful side of the Spooks, so to speak. Just as the various bands of color combine to form the single color of white light, so do the various methods and purposes of our individual and collective members combine to form the Guild. And just as each individual band of color is an indispensable component of the spectrum, so too is each facet of the Spooks an invaluable part of the greater Guild machine.

The Loyal Order

The Spooks are the most diverse Guild of the lot, at least as far as membership goes. The rank and file includes loners, fallen Heretics, disillusioned Renegades and discharged Legionnaires; even the higher levels of the Guild boast the odd Anacreon or Overlord who's been booted out of his or her post. Unlike stuffier Guilds such as the Artificers, we don't really care if you've been working for the Hierarchy or chanting on about Transcendence or playing freedom fighter. After all, everyone goes through their stupid and naïve phases, even in death.

What we do care about is how seriously you take this plane of existence. The survival of a wraith in the Shadowlands depends on facing up to a whole metric shitload of hard facts: the delicate cat-and-mouse games of your Shadow, the constant dangers of the Tempest and the Spectres and other beasts lurking in it, the unquenchable thirst of Oblivion for your soul — and the fact that the Hierarchy has no fucking clue how to handle any of it. We're all on our own trying to escape this place, and we can't count on the Deathlords. Stalin once said that one death is a tragedy, but a million deaths is a statistic. And frankly, that's all we are to the Deathlords. One big column of statistics.

Only when you truly grasp this fact do you have what it takes to become a Spook. It etches itself deep into your brain; it becomes the guiding principle for all of your actions as a Guild member. It gives you the willpower to travel the Tempest for days or weeks at a time to pierce the Shroud in a place you never heard of when you were alive, just to save a client's last hold on the Skinlands. It gives you the determination to keep working at a site of great mortal sadness and death and sacrifice, just to ensure that someone will remember what happened there. It also gives you the mindset to smash someone's face in for trying to blow the whistle to the Legions.

Zealotry isn't what we're looking for. You can't reason with, control, threaten or give orders to zealots. What the Spooks want in a recruit is her comprehension of the totality of this half-world, of the essential psychological needs of all wraiths. When a recruit understands how much she needs the mutual assistance of individual wraiths, and *not* the Hierarchy or the Legions, loyalty to the Guild naturally follows. Of course, the Spooks aren't made up exclusively of former wiseguys or Semper Fi freaks, although representatives of both categories exist within the Guild. I was neither in life. But I had what it takes to become a Spook. I loved. I cared. I had made promises in life that were in danger of never being fulfilled. I had a *right* to keep those promises. All wraiths have those rights — the right to resolve their Fetters and Passions, the right to fight to keep Oblivion from swallowing them, the right to *matter* beyond what Quick existence offered. But not every wraith can do it on her own. That's where we come in.

The Spooks provide the type of goods and services that your ordinary wraith simply can't get anywhere else, because it's illegal, or too dangerous to do herself, or so important that she's afraid she'll screw it up. That's how the Guild commands the degree of loyalty and dedication it does from its members and clients, past and present. It's not about threats and kneecappings and dropping some stool pigeon into the nearest Nihil. It's about protecting a wraith's respect, allowing her memory to live on after her — 'cause let's face it, memory's the only thing a lot of us have left. It's about throwing a life preserver to a wraith who's flailing and splashing, trying to keep her head above the waves of Oblivion.

Don't get me wrong, though — we're not the Boy Scouts. We do a lot of ugly things, too. Everyone in the Guild's got one or two Obliviate notches on her belt. But that comes with the territory sometimes. Talking about Right and Wrong in capital letters and about how good you feel after you do a job really doesn't make a difference in this place. There's a war going on in the Shadowlands that the Hierarchy doesn't want to admit it's even fighting, a war for the future of both Quick and Dead alike. My fellow Spooks and I are the loyal soldiers in this war. And we're combating Oblivion with the only means we know how: raw, brutal, primal force.

Cause...

My business is with souls and what goes on in them.

— Dashiell Hammett, *The Dain Curse*

The older Guild members refer to what we do as The Cause — and do so in that tone of voice where the capital T and C land right in the pit of your gut and sit there. The Cause represents the singular nature of the Spooks' Guild. It's what sets the Spooks apart from both the Haunters, where we got our start and from the other Guilds who cross the Shroud. You know, the Puppeteers and the Proctors.

The Cause deals with the relationship between Life and Death, with the connections that each wraith keeps with the people, places and things he loved in the land of the Quick. The Cause is based on a single, simple premise: In order to function in the Shadowlands, in order to have any hope of achieving Transcendence, every wraith needs certain things that keep him viable, so to speak. Fetters, Haunts, the memories of the living — these are all examples of the energies that enable a wraith to move closer to Transcendence — or at least further from Oblivion.

The problem is, life, and Life, goes on. Fetters get lost or destroyed. Places of great emotion and sorrow, like battlefields or ancient burial grounds, crumble and fade away or get plowed over to put up highway off-ramps or one-stop oil change franchises. People forget, or never know, what happened in the old mansion up on the hill, whether the family it housed was big and loving or small and dysfunctional. And that's just on the individual level. Governments and peoples are notoriously eager to forget what happened. They edit the accounts so that the real story of how continents were colonized or millions of innocents were slaughtered in wars and pogroms vanishes into the mists of history.

And every time that happens, every time a Fetter is destroyed or a resting place gets plowed over, another wraith loses one more avenue to Transcendence. Every time a civilization forgets or ignores the blood spilled and bones broken by those who perished to make their corner of the world better, Oblivion grows more potent, seeping into the chasm of memory that such sociocultural self-absorption creates. And all too often, those wraiths who see their Fetters and Haunts being fed to the mangler of time can do nothing but watch and wait for a Harrowing.

I know. I felt the fear and the rage myself, boiling over inside me with no avenue to release the pressure. I've met a lot of others who feel that same pressure welling up within themselves. A lot of them find some way to release it, however messy the manifestations of this might be, but just as many don't know how to deal with their inner demons. They're law-abiding types who never pushed the envelope in life and can't seem to bring themselves to do it in death. They try to maintain whatever passes for normalcy in this world as

the parasites chew away at their Corpora daily, and one day they succumb to Harrowings, or become Spectres, or just plain walk into a Nihil.

But we act. We push ourselves into the Skinlands and work to save the few things that wraiths can still call their own. We protect their Fetters. We protect their memory. And by doing so, we protect their hope.

That is The Cause.

Spook Spectrums: The Lifeliners

The Lifeliners were the first Spooks to articulate The Cause for the Guild, which allowed them to stage a coup within the Haunters' Guild and break out on their own. Needless to say, Lifeliners command a lot of clout within the Guild because of this simple fact — so much so that one word from a Lifeliner Boss can redirect the entire course of Guild policy.

Lifeliners are the Spooks whom most individual wraiths come to when they need help. These guys protect wraiths' Fetters, be they inanimate objects or living people. Such protection runs the gamut from such arcane endeavors as ensuring that an ancient Fetter gets unearthed and put in a safe place (like a museum), to smashing through the Shroud and stopping an assailant from killing the person who represents a wraith's last Fetter.

Lifeliners adhere to a strict code of conduct within their own Locals and Combinations. They rarely enlist the help of other Spooks outside their own spheres, partly because of the Lifeliners' reluctance to bring in inexperienced help, and partly to keep their own groups free of any possible taint from other, less-than-honorable divisions of the Guild. In addition, the austere existence and depth of focus on The Cause that the Lifeliners espouse gives a Lifeliner a better handle on her Shadow than any other Spook is likely to have; at least, that's what they say. Many other Spooks feel that the Lifeliners, despite being a crucial part of the Guild and the larger population of Restless, are drifting away from the larger scope of Guild interests. A lot of Spooks fear that the Lifeliners may one day turn disgusted at the direction of the Guild and sell out any Spook who isn't one of their kind.

...and Effects

We're not animals. What can I tell you? We have our methods and we attract clients. We must be doing something right.

— Robert B. Parker, *Promised Land*

The war against Oblivion is fought on many fields, with many weapons and in many ways. And everywhere you go, you'll find Spooks in the middle of the fray, in many different guises, performing whatever tasks are necessary for our clients. There are literally hundreds of Spook groups working in every major Necropolis and along every major Byway. You can find us patrolling Haunts and weak points all along the Shroud, ensuring that the wraiths who use them for gathering spots remain unmolested by others. You can find us reaching through the Shroud to meddle with the march of modernization, driving new tenants out of old homes and making redevelopment efforts a nightmare for the construction crews. You know how it goes in the movies, right? Someone comes along and builds an office on the site of an ancient burial ground, and as soon as the joint opens up for business the tenants have more plumbing problems than they know what to do with? That's one of the Guild's specialties.

Of course, we also help wraiths to help themselves. Sometimes your average wraith needs a quick shot of Pathos in order to keep going or to fuel some of his own Arcanoi. We can provide that. Maybe someone loved a particular object in life and would like it for a useful relic. No problem, just get an Artificer who owes you a favor, and presto. A local Hierarchy Marshal's been leaning on a Circle unfairly. We've got connections who can encourage him to step back.

Spooks come in all shapes and sizes — as loaded a statement as I've ever made. No matter what a wraith needs, there's some of our number who can get it for you, and very reasonably. We only need to be asked.



Spook Spectrums: The Mementomorian

Groups of Mementomorian concentrate their efforts around sites of death and its remembrance. They are particularly active in and around national cemeteries, famous battlefield sites and national and international memorials where the Quick come to grieve, to learn and to find some semblance of closure. In addition, Mementomorian also watch for key times when such outpourings of Quick emotion are at their highest, such as Memorial Day, Good Friday, *Yom ha Shoah* and other such dates.

Mementomorian collect the mass emotions of the visiting Quick at such sites and during such times — sadness, honor, thanksgiving, introspection, love — and distill them into liquid Pathos, which then gets bottled and shipped. The Spooks provide this Pathos to any wraith or Circle of wraiths who can pay their price for such vital fuel in channeling their Arcanoi or running the machinery of the Shadowlands. Since the process of collecting this Pathos sometimes involves “encouraging” this sort of outpouring of emotion, and thus breaks the *Dictum Mortuum*, the Mementomorian are essentially engaged in an illegal practice, a form of “Pathos-running” in the Shadowlands.

In many respects, the Mementomorian are a throwback to the glory days of Prohibition rumrunners. And just as the police found themselves frustrated with the illegal liquor trade, Stygian authorities have had little success in fouling up the Mementomorian's networks of collection and distribution. Since the emotions of the Quick are not confined strictly to places like the memorials of atrocities or events like Veterans' Day, there are no real places for the Hierarchy to center their investigations. Since every wraith needs Pathos to function, there is little success in obtaining information from the general populace. (Plus, with the Mnemoid outlawed and systematically eliminated, there's a decided shortage of trained inquisitors.)

Despite the relative powerlessness of the authorities, the Mementomorian's activities are not without risks. Collecting and distilling Pathos into mass ingestible form requires the use of a special Pathos Flask. The Mementomorian maintain that the only Pathos they collect is from “pure” sites, thereby ensuring that the Flasks are filled only with “good” Pathos. Whether this is true is still up in the air, especially since the market for the Mementomorian's goods has increased dramatically. This has given rise to rumors that some corner-cutting Mementomorian have been peddling “inferior” Pathos, or even Flasks of Liquid Hate.



One Big Happy Family: Guild Structure

A man who doesn't spend time with his family is not a real man.

— Mario Puzo, *The Godfather*

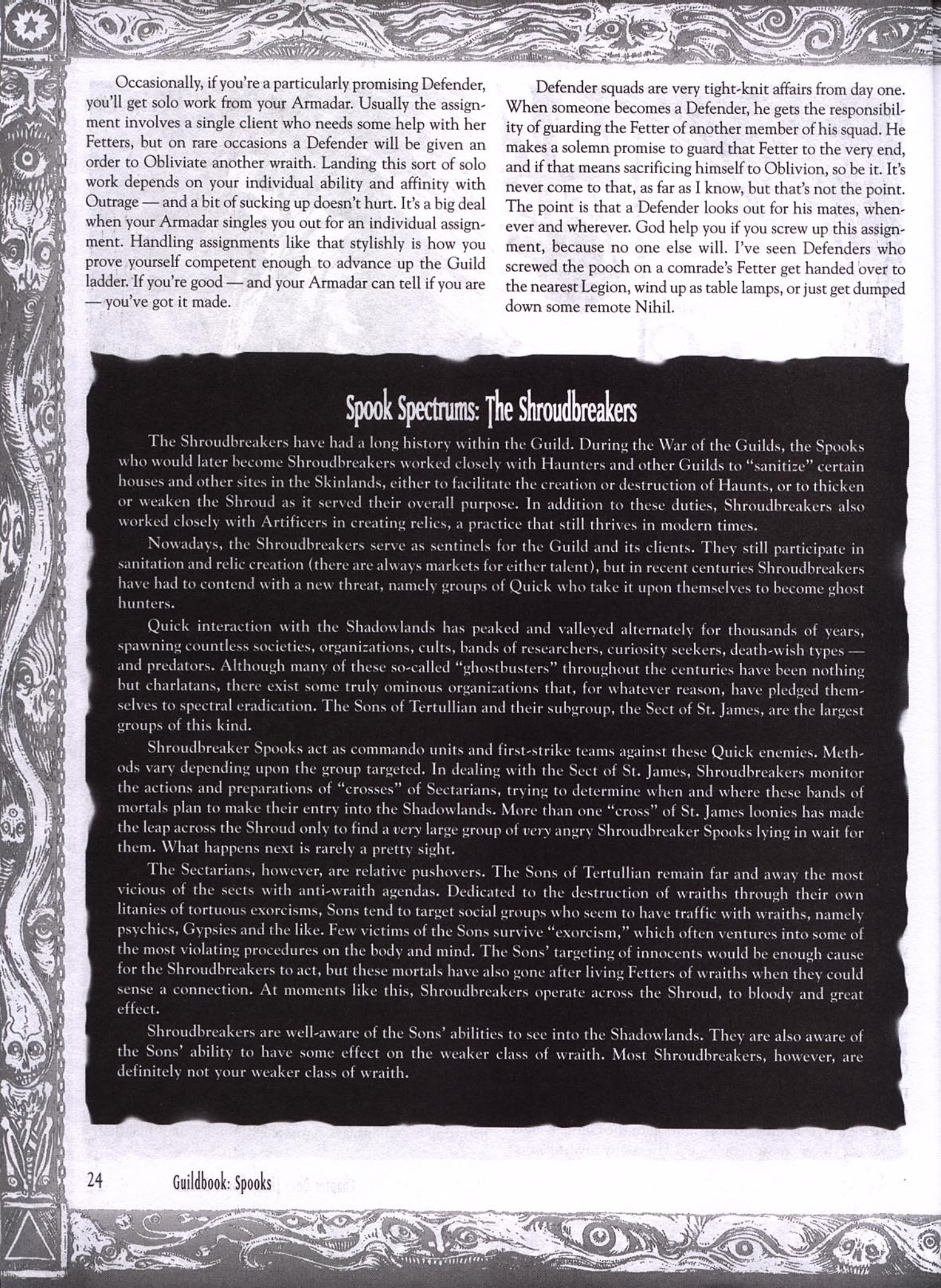
The Guild's structure is sort of like a cross between a large labor union and organized crime cartel. Same difference, if you ask me. But it works. Everyone knows exactly where he fits in the system, whom he's responsible to, and what happens if he screws up. Most outsiders can't believe that the Guild's organized at all. Turf wars in the streets between rival gangs of Spooks seem to happen as often as skirmishes with Hierarchy troops. Most people are shocked that the Spooks' Guild can even stay together, let alone get anything accomplished. But screw them. They only see the outside, the rough edges. Inside, the machinery runs smoothly.

There is structure and organization to the Guild, believe me. What throws most people (and Hierarchy investigators)

off is the apparent lack of communication among the different strata of Spooks. All the policy decisions come from the top, make no mistake about that, but all information is transmitted one-on-one from one level of the Guild to the next. Spooks don't hold large conferences. The heads of Locals don't get together for summits or truces or even to compare notes with each other. The higher-ups don't want anyone eavesdropping in on what they say or what they're told. That way, it's impossible to follow the course of information throughout the Guild if you're on the outside. The muckety-mucks say it's to keep the lines of communication fluid. I say it's to create an atmosphere of plausible deniability. Either way, it keeps prying eyes out.

Defender

The ground floor of the Guild consists of Spooks called Defenders, from the pledge we all take to defend the connections to the Skinlands of any and all wraiths who need our help. They're the grunts of the Guild, the hired muscle, the shakedown people. Defenders are grouped into squads of 10 each, led by a captain known as an Armadar, a sort of Spook tutor. Defenders mostly do group work — starting riots, perpetrating mass Outrages across the Shroud, things like that.



Occasionally, if you're a particularly promising Defender, you'll get solo work from your Armadar. Usually the assignment involves a single client who needs some help with her Fetters, but on rare occasions a Defender will be given an order to Obliviate another wraith. Landing this sort of solo work depends on your individual ability and affinity with Outrage — and a bit of sucking up doesn't hurt. It's a big deal when your Armadar singles you out for an individual assignment. Handling assignments like that stylishly is how you prove yourself competent enough to advance up the Guild ladder. If you're good — and your Armadar can tell if you are — you've got it made.

Defender squads are very tight-knit affairs from day one. When someone becomes a Defender, he gets the responsibility of guarding the Fetter of another member of his squad. He makes a solemn promise to guard that Fetter to the very end, and if that means sacrificing himself to Oblivion, so be it. It's never come to that, as far as I know, but that's not the point. The point is that a Defender looks out for his mates, whenever and wherever. God help you if you screw up this assignment, because no one else will. I've seen Defenders who screwed the pooch on a comrade's Fetter get handed over to the nearest Legion, wind up as table lamps, or just get dumped down some remote Nihil.

Spook Spectrums: The Shroudbreakers

The Shroudbreakers have had a long history within the Guild. During the War of the Guilds, the Spooks who would later become Shroudbreakers worked closely with Haunters and other Guilds to "sanitize" certain houses and other sites in the Skinlands, either to facilitate the creation or destruction of Haunts, or to thicken or weaken the Shroud as it served their overall purpose. In addition to these duties, Shroudbreakers also worked closely with Artificers in creating relics, a practice that still thrives in modern times.

Nowadays, the Shroudbreakers serve as sentinels for the Guild and its clients. They still participate in sanitation and relic creation (there are always markets for either talent), but in recent centuries Shroudbreakers have had to contend with a new threat, namely groups of Quick who take it upon themselves to become ghost hunters.

Quick interaction with the Shadowlands has peaked and valleyed alternately for thousands of years, spawning countless societies, organizations, cults, bands of researchers, curiosity seekers, death-wish types — and predators. Although many of these so-called "ghostbusters" throughout the centuries have been nothing but charlatans, there exist some truly ominous organizations that, for whatever reason, have pledged themselves to spectral eradication. The Sons of Tertullian and their subgroup, the Sect of St. James, are the largest groups of this kind.

Shroudbreaker Spooks act as commando units and first-strike teams against these Quick enemies. Methods vary depending upon the group targeted. In dealing with the Sect of St. James, Shroudbreakers monitor the actions and preparations of "crosses" of Sectarrians, trying to determine when and where these bands of mortals plan to make their entry into the Shadowlands. More than one "cross" of St. James loonies has made the leap across the Shroud only to find a very large group of very angry Shroudbreaker Spooks lying in wait for them. What happens next is rarely a pretty sight.

The Sectarrians, however, are relative pushovers. The Sons of Tertullian remain far and away the most vicious of the sects with anti-wraith agendas. Dedicated to the destruction of wraiths through their own litanies of tortuous exorcisms, Sons tend to target social groups who seem to have traffic with wraiths, namely psychics, Gypsies and the like. Few victims of the Sons survive "exorcism," which often ventures into some of the most violating procedures on the body and mind. The Sons' targeting of innocents would be enough cause for the Shroudbreakers to act, but these mortals have also gone after living Fetters of wraiths when they could sense a connection. At moments like this, Shroudbreakers operate across the Shroud, to bloody and great effect.

Shroudbreakers are well-aware of the Sons' abilities to see into the Shadowlands. They are also aware of the Sons' ability to have some effect on the weaker class of wraith. Most Shroudbreakers, however, are definitely not your weaker class of wraith.

Armadar

The title "Armadar" comes from an old Latin phrase, *arma dare*, which means to knight someone. The Guild uses it to refer to a "made" Spook, a Defender who exhibits just the right mixture of efficiency and ruthlessness to get promoted to the next level.

Don't misunderstand me, though — it's not about chalking up an arbitrary number of kills, like it is with some Mafia families or street gangs in the Skinlands. Yeah, every one of us Armadars have Obliviated at least one soul or destroyed someone's last Fetter, but we've all saved far more wraiths than we've been forced to destroy. Becoming an Armadar is all about understanding and practicing The Cause every time you do a job. Fear and terror isn't the point. Doing the job is.

It's an uphill battle to get promoted to Armadar, but once you get there the view's great. Armadars can take on their own personal clients without previous Guild approval, as opposed to Defenders who have to wait to get solo assignments. Each Armadar also heads a squad of Defenders, and pretty much runs them like her own private army.

But you have a lot of obligations as an Armadar, too. Each Armadar has "turf," a section in a Necropolis or other area in the Shadowlands that she's expected to control and maintain, by keeping gangs of Renegades and Heretics, overcurious Legionnaires and other unwanted presences out. In addition, Armadars are entrusted with the education of the members of their Defender squads in the subtle (and not so subtle) natures of Outrage. The Guild considers this education of a Defender a significant part of being an Armadar. Any failure of a Defender on a job ultimately reflects on his Armadar teacher, and in severe cases it leads to official sanctions or ostracism by the Guild.

Controller

A Spook gang is called a Local, and a Controller is the head of a Local. Controllers are older, established Armadars, Spooks who've been around for centuries and managed to broaden their own sections of turf all around the Stygian Empire. Every Necropolis plays host to at least one, if not several Locals within its walls, and the Controllers coordinate the activities of their respective Locals, arbitrate disputes and turf wars between Armadars and act as the (un)official Spook representatives within the Necropolis.

Controllers, however, aren't confined just to Necropoli. In the outlying areas of the Shadowlands, roving Controllers, usually masquerading as Legionnaires, check in frequently with floating Armadars and their squads to make sure everything runs smoothly in the less traveled regions.

Spook Spectrums: The Gray Gangs

The Gray Gangs consist mainly of the "younger" Spooks, wraiths of the modern industrial era. Most "Gray Gangsters" filled the rolls of labor unions and other such groups, as organizers, legmen and even strikebreakers — it is not uncommon for a single Gray Local to harbor fellow Spooks who were on opposite sides of the picket line in life.

The Gray Gangs are responsible for most of the smash-and-stab work of the Spooks within Necropoli. Riots, arson, destruction of property and hijacking of Reaper caravans bound for the Onyx Tower comprise most of the Gray Gangs' work. Gray Locals provide muscle for any who hire their services, and they take clients from inside and outside the Hierarchy with equal ease. Gray Gangsters often attach themselves to other Spook groups, providing added muscle for Mementorian distributors or reinforcements for Shroudbreaker shock troops.

Gray Gangsters often function as the "ward bosses" within Necropoli. Even in the cities of death, ethnic neighborhoods of Circles abound, places where wraiths don't go to the police (or in this case, the Legions) because the authorities couldn't be trusted in Life. Disputes and problems among these "marginal" populations of wraiths get settled in the same fashion as they were in breathing days, by the local politicians or mobsters, the ones who came from these neighborhoods, who knew how the system worked and how to get around it. That's where the Gray Gangs come in. In their semi-official capacities, Gray Gangsters exert a good deal of influence within their local Necropoli, and know what buttons to push and whose palms to grease to get things for their constituents. They're also not above breaking a few heads to get their way — but then again, who in the Spooks' Guild isn't?

Boss

A Boss is the head of a Combination, a larger network of Locals. He or she is elected to the position by the Controllers of all Locals under the jurisdiction of a single Combination, and acts as a regional leader and representative to the other Combinations and the Guild's governing body, the Commission of Five.

Bosses have a lot on their plates. They implement the decisions of the Commission, and make sure that orders filter down to the lower ranks quickly and correctly. They also strike deals between their own and other Combinations, and between their own people and other Guilds, to do things like



share resources and muscle — sort of like a Spook exchange program, if you will. And your Boss has the final say in anything you do or any request you ask. If a situation arises where you need help from another Guild, or have to destroy someone's last Fetter, your request goes to your Boss, who either accepts or rejects it. And the Boss' word is final with a capital F. There's no appeals, no going behind his or her back. Just suck it up, and find another way to get the job done.

Right now, the Guild network consists of 99 Combinations, so there are 99 Bosses. In addition, five of the 99 Bosses sit on the Commission of Five, making policy for the Guild as well as running their own Combinations. A few of the younger and lower-ranking Spooks think that's sort of a conflict of interest. They don't think it too loudly, though. Your Boss has more power than God, Rockefeller and a 20-megaton bomb rolled into one. He or she is your parent, your confessor, your best friend and your worst enemy, and sometimes all of those things at once.

The Commission of Five

At the apex of the Guild sits the Commission of Five, usually just called the Commission, or sometimes "C5." C5 is made up of five Commissioners, the most powerful and trusted Bosses in the Guild as elected by the entire population of Bosses themselves. All major policies and activities of the Guild originate with the Commissioners. C5 also mediates disputes between Combinations, as well as acting as the judicial arm of the Guild. One Commissioner acts as the "Guildmaster" delegate of the Spooks at all Conclaves. Niccolo Cianfrocco, the head of the Chicago Combination, is the current "Guildmaster" of the Spooks, and tends to be the *de facto* leader of the Commission by virtue of the information he gets as Guildmaster delegate (not to mention sheer bloody-mindedness).

The Commission started out with four members originally, until the newer generations of Spooks began to make their mark on the Shadowlands. Defenders and Armadars who had been mobsters in life simply picked up where they had left off in the classic pursuits: intimidation, extortion, racketeering and Obliviating. With bands of these modern-day Spooks getting back at old enemies and making new ones, the higher-ups had to do something to control these punks. The Bosses decided that, instead of a mass purge of these "Gray Gangsters," as they were known, a fifth Commissioner would be added to represent this younger generation of Spooks. So, C4 became C5.

I won't pretend that's the end of the troubles. The Commission still runs the show with an iron fist, but the tension between Cianfrocco and the fifth Commissioner, Artemus Vanderwal, isn't a secret within the Guild. A lot of Bosses, old and young guard alike, think that the current Commissioners have outlived their usefulness, and that the Guild needs new blood. But just as many Bosses like things the way they are, and don't see a reason to clean house upstairs.

Friends and Enemies

Nobody *admits* to consorting with the Spooks. We're a Guild, which makes us illegal. We specialize in transgressing the *Dictum Mortuum*, also illegal. And as far as what we're into in the Shadowlands — rioting, extortion, hijacking, trafficking in illegal relics and Pathos, the occasional Obliviate — well, as the old saying goes, with friends like these....

But we've got our friends and enemies, in high places and low, tucked away in the bowels of the Hierarchy bureaucracy or playing lookout on the Byways of the Tempest. Forget what people say in public about us. This isn't a black-and-white world. It's one big gray wash, and it's in that grayness that the Spooks live and thrive. What a Legionnaire sees as the breach of the *Dictum Mortuum*, a client sees as her last Fetter's salvation. What some Anacreon laments as an underground economy of Mementorian Pathos, our customers see as an easy way to get the energy they need to operate. The same thing is perceived in multiple ways by multiple people. And from that multiplicity, we know who our friends are, as well as our enemies.

The Hierarchy

On balance, the Hierarchy doesn't get it. They think the answer lies in the simple accumulation of souls to stop Oblivion. The Deathlords enact idiotic decrees like the *Dictum Mortuum* to keep wraiths out of the Skinlands, like they're the eternal flight attendants trying to keep us wraiths in Coach out of Business Class. As if that's going to keep Oblivion from rolling over everything.

Oblivion erupts whenever it bloody well feels like. What do you think a Maelstrom is? Hell, we've had five of them already in the Shadowlands, and each one unleashed more violence and pain than the last. And if past experience counts for anything, let me be the first to come right out and say that ol' Number Six'll make the first five seem like slight drizzles.

The point isn't to corral a wraith's actions in this world, or to put up these artificial barriers to a soul's completion of her tasks. The more the Hierarchy tries to stop souls from dealing with the people and things they left behind, the more harm it does to the Shadowlands. The more the Deathlords worry about their soul-ledgers than they do about the souls themselves, the more desperate the situation gets for the souls involved. And the more difficult Stygia tries to make it for a wraith just to *let go*, the more Angst grows, the closer a Harrowing comes, and soon there's one more soul down the maw of Oblivion.

Spook Spectrums: The Harrowsmiths

The Harrowsmiths are a breed apart from other Spooks. In fact, one could argue that they're a breed apart from most wraiths. The Guild doesn't like to talk about them, or even dwell for too long on the fact that they exist. Mention the Harrowsmiths to a wraith, and you'll see him back away in fear, twice as fast if he's on their list.

Every Spook has destroyed a wraith's Fetters or Obliviated a soul. It comes with the territory. The Harrowsmiths, however, specialize in this sort of practice, and even enjoy it to a certain degree. Harrowsmiths are convinced that The Cause is so sacred for the future of the Restless Dead, and that the Spooks are the only Guild capable of fulfilling its premise, that any opposition to the activities of the Guild emanates directly from Oblivion and must be destroyed. Translated into practice, Harrowsmiths believe that anyone who betrays the Guild or its clients deserves to suffer before being completely eradicated.

And they go about this making this prophetic vision manifest through everything from instant Obliviation to slow torture, breaking down a victim's Corpus until he falls into a Harrowing (hence their moniker). In the course of their work, Harrowsmiths will sometimes, after weakening a wraith to the point of delirium and hallucination, stage a *faux* Harrowing, beating psychologically at their victim until he gives up his fellow conspirators against the Guild, or coughs up the payment, or falls into a Destruction Harrowing and is sucked into Oblivion. The Harrowsmiths really don't seem to care what happens after they get their information, to be honest.

The Harrowsmiths are masters of pain, the closest things to Spectres a wraith ever meets. Like a Joe Pesci character in a Scorsese film, they tend to be high-strung and nearly uncontrollable. The Commission of Five openly laments the unseemliness of the Harrowsmiths' existence, but has also said that keeping these Spooks within the Guild remains the best way to control their activities. It also gives the Commissioners easy access to their services, but that's just common sense.



I'll admit, things have changed a lot since the *Dictum Mortuum* got announced. Charon's gone, the Deathlords are acting like a bunch of anklebiters in a day care center who just got denied their milk and cookies, and the whole bureaucracy of Stygia's so redundant and confusing that half the idiots cancel out the other half. Still, the Guilds are taboo, we Spooks doubly so. The Hierarchy is by no means irrelevant, and its power still hits the Restless like a falling I-beam. It becomes very tricky for us to maneuver sometimes, particularly when the local Overlords are freaking out because of reports of Spectres or Renegades in the area. They can clamp down a Necropolis like lightning and sit on the entire population like the proverbial 800-pound gorilla.

However, it's not impossible to get what you want. Politicians — not all, but lots of them — need help every now and then. Spook Locals aren't above hiring themselves out to The Man for some fair consideration on our end, or even doing a job *gratis* if it helps our interests. You've got to be careful with greasing palms, though. There's a very fine line between a bunch of Hierarchy pencil-pushers waiting for you to offer them a bribe and a bunch of Hierarchy pencil-pushers waiting for you to offer them a bribe so they can throw you in the forges. They're all looking to cover their asses, and that's what it comes down to.

The places where Spooks have the best rapport with the representatives of the Isle of Sorrows is in the smaller Necropoli and on the outskirts of Stygian rule. Often the Anacreons and officials who rule these places can barely keep things from falling to pieces without help. They're constantly under attack from Spectres and Renegades, or there aren't enough Reapers for all the souls that come across the Shroud, or their Legionnaires want to be transferred to cushier assignments. To these guys, a Gray Local or Shroudbreaker detachment is a godsend. Dealing with the Hierarchy is no different than dealing with anyone else. If you can provide them with a service they want, you'll be left alone. And if you can turn that want into a necessity, and make yourself an indispensable cog in the machine of order, then you're all set. They won't shut you down. They can't afford to.

Renegades

Frankly, the Renegades are one big inconvenience for the Spooks — hell, for any Guild. They have no structure, no network, no sense of what they want, except they don't want the Hierarchy telling them what to do. Hey, pal, *nobody* wants anybody telling them what to do. But most of the Renegades I've run across would flush the whole system down the Veinous

Stair just to prove a point. The problem is, they don't have anything to put in its place.

For all the crap the Hierarchy doles out, for all their stupid regulations and self-absorbed policies, they keep Oblivion at bay. They could do better, a lot better, but right now they're what we've got to work with. Besides, the Guild's got a lot invested in the Hierarchy. We've spent an incredibly long time fine-tuning our network of people and positions. Speaking for the Spooks, I'll be damned if I let a bunch of wild-eyed bomb-throwing ex-Bolshies chuck the whole system. We'd all be Spectres in under a week.

The Renegades do serve one important purpose, though. When you need a scapegoat, they're always available. It's easier to convince some Legionnaire you've got in your pocket to go after the Black Fist Brigade or Danforth's Flying Irregulars or whatever damn fool name most of these groups call themselves than you. It looks good to their superiors, and keeps Big Brother off our back. Besides, who in hell are the Renegades going to complain to about "persecution?"

Heretics

In general, the Spooks' Guild doesn't have much quarrel with Heretic cults. The Cause centers around helping a wraith to achieve Transcendence free of unwanted obstacles, and if a wraith feels the need to do so under the auspices of one Heretic Circle or another, that's his business.

Besides, many of our Locals' steadiest customers have been Heretics, who depend upon the specific services we provide. Mementomorian supply Pathos to those quasi-drug-oriented Heretic Circles, while Shroudbreaker Locals make a killing (literally and figuratively) in safeguarding established Heretic Haunts from intruders. Some of the Circles have been receptive to our requests to hide certain Guild members until the heat from the Hierarchy dies down. I've availed myself of that option a few times. It works, as long as you take all of the chanting and the attempts at conversion with a few grains of salt.

The Other Guilds

Of course, the Spooks aren't the only game in town. There are 15 other Guilds, and depending upon whom you talk to, the Spooks are anything from misunderstood knights errant to near-animals and everything in between, depending upon how badly someone needs the services of one of our number. It used to be, a long time ago, that hardly any of the other Guilds would associate with us. When we broke off from the Haunters, that Guild tried everything to discredit us publicly. They called us Renegades, said we'd all end up as torches for the Legions within a month, and spread bullshit rumors about how we were going to drag the other Guilds down to Oblivion. It was hard, so the Bosses tell me.

But the Artificers still kept in contact with us. They enlisted our services in Outrage to create relics and perform similar tasks for them. They even asked some of the old Shroudbreakers to go after key Fetters of important enemies during the War of the Guilds. They gave us what we wanted, what we needed — respect. Say what you will about the Artificers, I've heard it all. They're arrogant. They're megalomaniacal. They're old as sin and not nearly as attractive. Doesn't matter. They saw us as a Guild when we needed to be seen that way. I think that gave the Spooks the first foothold in the family of Guilds. And as far as the Spooks' Guild is concerned, whatever the Artificers' crazy notions about taking over might be, they've got the right of first refusal of our services simply for the respect they showed the Spooks long ago.

Relations between the Spooks and the remaining 14 Guilds tends to filter down on a case-by-case basis. Some Locals, in fact some whole Combinations, work closely with certain Guilds when they've got our kind of work. A lot of Gray Gangsters provide muscle for Oracle Gamblers in their gaming halls and that Guild's great relic riverboat casino, the *Belle La Fayette*. Harbingers tend to employ Lifeliners a lot to look after their Fetters while they take extended trips into the Tempest, and as far as the Pardoners go, *everyone* needs them. And even they have Fetters and Haunts they like to visit.

Allies: The Haunters

Ah, yes. The Haunters.

Hmm...

What can I say? They're family to us, in many ways. The entire Spooks' Guild *did*, after all, grow out of the Haunters. They provided a sort of structure to encourage the growth of the oldest Spooks' talents. We can't forget that.

But even in the best of families, you get a lot of tension. Rivalries, heated discussions, screaming matches at the proverbial dinner table — it all came out in the Haunters' Guild, which is why we pretty much cut our losses and got out of the house. I won't bore you with the details. Call it creative differences, if you want, that made us choose Outrage over Pandemonium.

What really made the Spooks break off from the larger Haunters' Guild was a fundamental philosophical difference between our crew and theirs, with that big plan they have to take over the Skinlands. The Haunters have always said that they want to bring down the Shroud and recapture the world of the Quick, like they had held so long ago. The Haunters wanted, and still want, to bring the Skinlands and Shadowlands together, to make the Quick recognize the existence of ghosts. Then they plan to take their place on the throne of this unified kingdom.

It's an interesting theory. So is time travel.



The thing that makes a Spook a Spook, and not a Hunter, is that we don't dwell on theory. There's no way the Hunters, or all of the Guilds for that matter, are going to bring down the Shroud. The Shroud isn't just a physical object. It's the collective force of thousands of years of the Quick saying, in effect, "There's no such thing as ghosts." That's hard in a lot of ways, but it's the way things are. Life sucks. So does Death. Wear a cup. The Shroud is much too powerful to collapse like a house of cards just because the Hunters can make cockroaches crawl out of your ass. But the Hunters still waste their time with this crackpot idea, as if they could get billions of people to wake up one day and believe in us. Makes you wonder why we hang around with them as much as we do.

The Mandelbrots are an OK group. They still believe in the power of Outrage, and out of all the subchapters in the Hunters' Guild, they're the ones a Spook is most likely to fraternize with. But as far as the rest of the Hunters go, the two-peas-in-a-pod speech they give about us being their well-meaning but simplistic younger siblings is the biggest crock I've ever heard. The Gray Gangs, I know, could take 'em or leave 'em, and they'd prefer the latter.

Enemies: The Monitors

I honestly can't believe, with everything the Monitors do, that they're not being hunted down like the Mnemoi.

Even the quickest glance at their Guild's history and current practices reads like the chronicle of a parasite attacking its host. They used to train themselves as full-fledged Reapers, you know. They'd corral new Enfants for their own purposes, and the souls they considered to be "runts" they'd ship straight off to Stygia.

The Monitors don't Reap anymore, but what they do engage in is just as bad. To the man, the Guild holds the Lifeweb ability over wraiths like the proverbial carrot on a stick. They won't permit a wraith to learn how to keep track of his own Fetters, unless he can serve the Monitors' purpose. And you wonder why wraiths come to us? We have our price, like anything else, but at least we're not running around pushing innocent souls into a corner. If a wraith needs help, we'll help him. The Monitors would rather watch a wraith get torn apart by Spectres than let someone "not of their kind" into the Guild. The whole lot's a worse band of criminals than people say we are.

The Monitors are invasive, callous extortionists. They don't provide a single service that one of our Locals couldn't provide, and what they do provide costs you a lot more than a sack or two of oboli. Because once a Monitor gets his hooks into you, he's got you for the duration. And he can snap your lifeline like that, for any reason at all, or no reason whatsoever.

The Other Side of the Shroud

Vampires

Admittedly, you've got to watch out for some of them. A few of their lot can put a spell on you that ranks right up there with being enthralled, probably worse. But it's basically just a matter of common sense and smarts. If you watch your back with the ones who can grab you, you've got nothing to fear from the rest of them. Besides, what the hell can a vampire do to you when he's only got a certain number of hours in the day to operate? And what can he do to you that Death hasn't done already?

Werewolves

They do like to fight, don't they? More power to 'em, I say. And when a pack of these overgrown Lassies pops its collective gasket and takes out a whole building, it's a sight to behold. The more they destroy, the more things surface in the Shadowlands. The more they worry and fret and fight like living hell to save the Skinlands, the more the Pathos rolls in. Encourage them, I say. Make 'em crazy. Direct 'em to do your work for you. It's a veritable cash cow when they Rage.

Mages

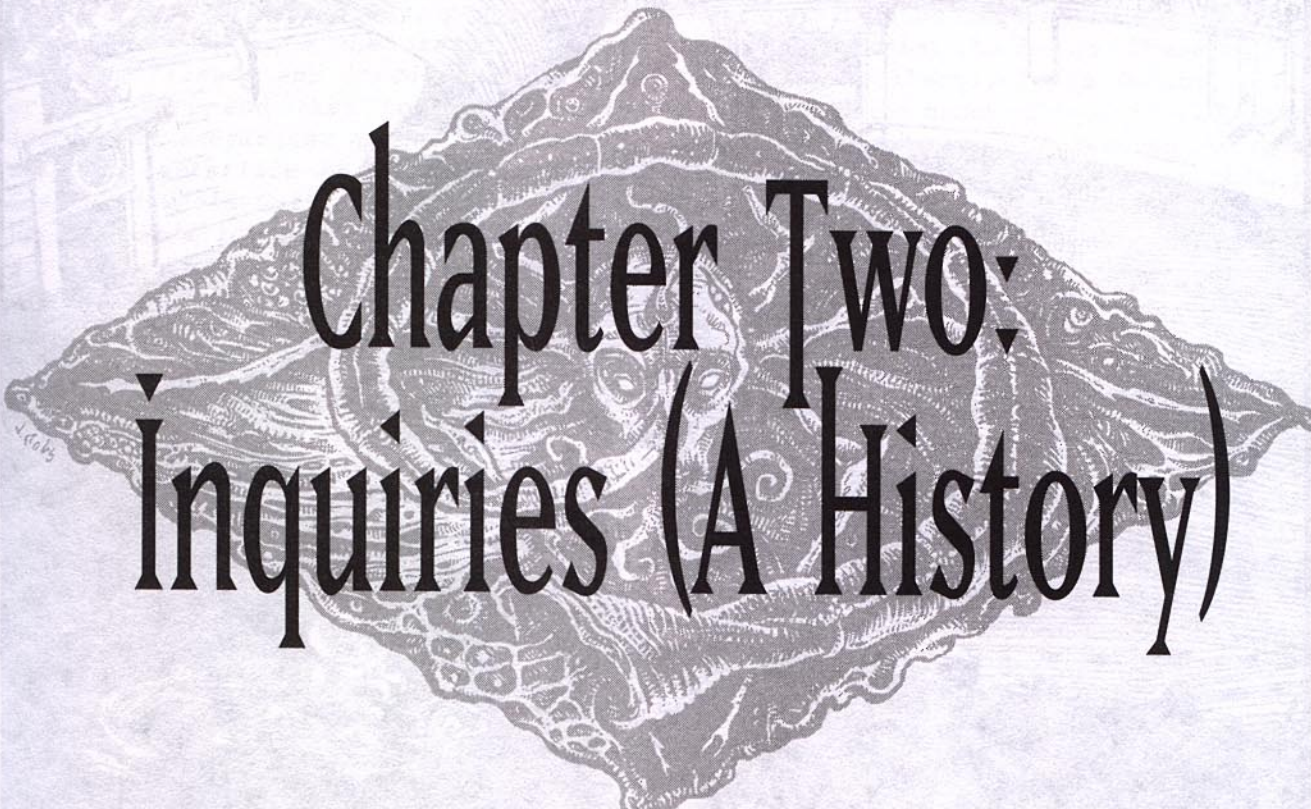
This crop tends to be more concerned with fighting its own little wars. Having said that, though, there are definitely a couple of groups to keep an eye on. The Euthanatos are ones for sending the Quick to their more untimely demises, and when a new wraith crosses over with a lot of things undone, he can make a good client, or even a possible Defender. The Nephandi, however, are the real enemies. They lie down with some pretty awful bedfellows — I wouldn't be surprised if a lot of their more powerful members have a direct line to Oblivion. We've got Shroudbreakers and Gray Gangsters watching a lot of their activities, but it's a tough battle from this side of the Shroud.

Changelings

The walking snakes in their crowd are helpful if you need a Fetter or two toyed with, because you can usually get them to help you out. And when the redcaps go ballistic on one of their razing sprees, they'll do just about the same in the relic department as some of those woofs I mentioned earlier. The Gray Gangs tend to watch the redcaps to see what they're going to break next. The Harrowsmiths watch to pick up pointers. I don't know which one's worse sometimes.







Chapter Two: Inquiries (A History)

"What do you want?"
"Information."
"You won't get it."
"By hook or by crook, we will."
—opening sequence of *The Prisoner*

TO: The Deathlords

FROM: Julius Overbrook, Chief Inquisitor, Magisterium Veritatis 3rd District, Stygia

RE: The Spooks' Guild — Deposition of Ivan (Jackie Blades) Bladomiroff, Armadar, Silver Maple Combination
My Dear and Most August Lords:

I am pleased to report that our attempts to turn Bladomiroff have proven very fruitful. In exchange for immunity from the forge and the guarantee of a new identity, Bladomiroff has agreed to furnish the Magisterium with information about the history and recent activities of the Spooks' Guild.

I have enclosed the first part of my report based on Bladomiroff's testimony. I have taken the liberty of summarizing much of the information he has provided us in several instances. Those places where I have left the testimony unaltered I have done so in order to capture the true flavor of his mindset in relation to the Spooks' Guild and his position within their structure. I believe that such direct quotation may prove useful to get an accurate "feel" for the typical Guild member's mindset.

This first section of my enclosed report details the understood history of the Spooks as an official Guild, while chronicling the course of their actions throughout the ages. More reports on specific objectives of the modern-day Guild members will be forthcoming in future dispatches.

B.C.O.
Overbrook.



BEGIN PART ONE OF REPORT

I. The Era of the Independents


First and foremost, it is clear from my conversations with Bladomiroff that the earliest history of the Spooks' Guild borders on the stuff of legends. The "official" history stretches back in time to presumably before the Sundering, when the Shroud was nonexistent. Individuals like Odysseus, Orpheus, Gilgamesh and others who freely passed to and from the Underworld are considered to be the forefathers of the Spooks, for their simple physical methods used in effecting the journey between Life and Death:

Bladomiroff: "When I was initiated, the ceremony talked a lot about our Guild stretching back to people like Aeneas and Orpheus and that crowd. It makes sense, if you think about it. Aeneas and his contemporaries were able to reach back into the living world through plain efforts. They

didn't take over someone else's body like Puppeteers do; they didn't make the walls bleed like Haunters. If you consider their actions as straightforward use of strength, you have to consider it to be a form of primitive Outrage, which we do. So if they used this type of Outrage, then they're the first Spooks."

After the Sundering occurred and the Shroud materialized between this world and the world of the Quick, it obviously became more difficult for Spooks to affect the Skinlands. As a result many of the first gangs of proto-Spooks began to turn their activities toward one of the Guild's oldest, and if my sources are correct, most lucrative practices on this side of the Shroud — namely, the collection and distribution of Pathos among the Restless Dead:

Bladomiroff: "The cults of the dead in Greece and Rome provided an unusual wind-fall for our forefathers. Both civilizations strongly believed in the existence of an underworld which bore a lot of similarity to the world they knew. Sounds fa-



miliar, doesn't it? Anyway, people became very concerned with the status of their deceased friends and loved ones in Hades or wherever, and they took great pains insofar as sacrifices and other things to make the afterlife more comfortable. In Greece, a whole Cult of the Heroes sprang up, fueled a lot by Homer's works, which got people involved in respecting the deeds of their past military giants. It carried over into Rome, too, since most of their mythology was lifted wholesale from Greece.

"So when people began to engage in these sorts of rites, it resulted in a lot of Pathos oozing through the Shroud into the Shadowlands, just ripe for the taking. So the Spook gangs took it, used what they needed, bottled the rest and gave other wraiths access to it. Things were a lot simpler back then, so there wasn't any real problem in this kind of practice. It certainly wasn't illegal by any standard. It was sort of like payment for earlier services rendered. We used to return to the Skinlands to talk with mortals when the Shroud was thin, and we helped the ones we liked as best we could. After the Sundering, we just took the Pathos from the Quick's sacrifices as our due and reasonable payment."

These harvesters were known as Nepentheans, and their practice of harvesting Pathos, according to Bladomiroff, has been a mainstay of the Spooks' Guild since these earliest times. Public festivals, Colosseum games, temple sacrifices, plays, the Olympics - everything provided some form of raw Pathos for the first Spooks. When Rome fell, Christianity and its rites of worship provided a suitably new resource of Pathos for the Spooks. Pathos, in short, was to be had anywhere a Nepenthean could tap into it.

II. The Haunting Time

Along with their newfound trade in Pathos, many Spooks turned toward other activities. When Rome fell and the First Great Maelstrom appeared, sending waves of Spectres to attack Stygia and the Isle of Sorrows, Spooks offered their services


to Charon and the Legions as mercenaries-for-hire to combat the demons. These wraiths were known collectively as Dolabra - The Axe. None of the names of individual Dolabra mercenaries have come down through the ages, however. Bladomiroff states that this is because of the highly secretive nature of their operations against Spectre hordes. Apparently Charon and the Hierarchy did not want to acknowledge that they had utilized outsiders.

Regardless of the level of Spook involvement in the Maelstrom wars, Bladomiroff is adamant that after the Spectre wars ended and the Second Empire was established, both the Nepentheans and Dolabra found themselves on the outside looking in. Both groups had little in the way of real services to offer wraiths except for selling Pathos. As a result of this lack of direction, a rift developed between the two main camps of Spooks: those who collected Pathos and those who were the supposed veterans of the Spectre wars:

Bladomiroff: "It was a full-scale turf war. Nepentheans would be waylaid by mercenary Dolabra and vice versa. The infighting got very ugly. The old veterans of the Maelstrom wars used to call in favors from their old Equitae and Legionnaire buddies, and they'd mount an attack on a Nepenthean gang's stronghold. So the Nepentheans'd get Renegades to help them. Since they had no real reason to be together, the Nepentheans would pay the Renegades in distilled Pathos, and create their own mercenaries.

"Anyone could see that any thought of truce was ridiculous. What the Spooks needed was some sort of organization. When the gangs received the invitation to attend the first Haunters' Conclave, they all jumped at the chance. Neither side wanted to rack up any more casualties. And that's pretty much how the Spooks got their first taste of any overall Guild organization, through the Haunters."

Apparently the Spook gangs were never satisfied with being attached to the Haunters. Whatever semblance of organization and control the Haunters' Guild offered was outweighed by the gap between the Guildmasters and those members who pre-



ferred to deal in Outrage as opposed to Pandemonium. The Spook gangs were a vocal minority within the Conclave on this point, but they remained irreducibly a minority. Eventually, certain Spook representatives came before the leaders of the Haunters to announce that they wished to leave the Guild to set off on their own:

Bladomiroff: "The general attitudes of the Quick actually had a lot to do with our decision to leave the Haunters' Guild. While still part of the Haunters, a few Spooks had begun to take on individual clients in a new field: that of protecting Fetters. This all happened during the Dark Ages, when the Church controlled practically every facet of peoples' lives. Mortals were obsessed with the afterlife, worrying about whether they'd wind up in Heaven, and were constantly making preparations for the next world, by praying and donating to the Church and making pilgrimages.

"Well, what happened was that wraiths who wanted to keep watch over their families and their lands began to approach the Spooks asking for help in this sort of thing. A lot of them wanted to make sure that their families were all right, but just as many wanted to get back at their enemies from beyond the grave. Spooks began to take on these wraiths as clients, and soon after they started to perform these tasks, the Quick fooled themselves into believing that it was the intercession of saints or guardian angels watching over them. These Spooks even referred to themselves as the Dulians, from an ecclesiastical term for the veneration of saints.

"It wasn't long after this that a group of Dulians, acting as representatives of all Spooks, went to the Haunters and voiced their differences with the direction the Guild was taking. The leader of the delegation was a Dulian named Ned Riddle; he's considered to be the man who first articulated The Cause. Anyway, he and some choice Spooks came before the assembled Conclave and stated their terms, and said that they felt overlooked and unwelcome within the Haunters' Guild. They felt that the use of Outrage was still a mostly untapped Arcanos, and they felt that they

could do better in trying to expand its uses and continue their work under their own organization.

"So Riddle and the entire company left the Haunters' Guild. They took with them a name that a lot of Haunters had been calling them under their breath - Spooks. It was supposed to be a term of derision, I'm told, referring to our unrefined art of Outrage. The formation of the new Guild marked the division of labor among the Spooks according to their particular talents: Dulians were the guardians of The Cause, Nepentheans were Pathos traders, and the Dolabra were a sort of private Spook army. In Spook history, they're known as the Three Leagues. Now their descendants are only three of many specialist groups within the Guild, but this trio is considered the original, the oldest set of demarcations within the Guild."

The separation, however, was not amicable. The newly formed Spooks' Guild bore the brunt of a vicious smear campaign orchestrated by the Haunters. One episode in particular illustrates the extremes to which the Haunters went in order to discredit the new Guild:

Bladomiroff: "In Spook history it's called the Village Incident, or just the Incident. You have to understand that the Haunters were livid about Riddle leaving the Guild and taking the rest of the Spooks with him. They went on and on about how we couldn't survive without the Haunters. No Guild would take us seriously, they said, and without their support we'd be routed by the Hierarchy. I won't say that those first years weren't rough, but on a strictly practical level I think we were doing pretty well on our own.

"Anyway, there was this Circle on the outskirts of Stygia that made its haunt at the intersection of two major Byways. The Restless living there were all from the same village in life, and had banded together for solidarity and familiarity. There was nothing special about the Circle. The location wasn't what you'd call strategically important in any way. It was just an ordinary community of Restless. If you ask me, that makes what happened all the more senseless.

"The local Hierarchy patrols in the region were alerted that there was a group of Spooks hiding out at this crossroads, which was called the Village. Now, the Hierarchy knew nothing about the new Guild, but they naturally assumed that it was just another type of Spectre or some such. It was the easiest answer available.

"The orders came down to root out the Spooks that were hiding out there. So a couple of Hierarchy patrols showed up and ransacked the Village. They destroyed the place, and what wraiths survived they sold to the Reapers in Stygia. The Legions never found any Spooks, though. That's because there weren't any Spooks to be found.

"The Village Incident soon became one of the Hunters' main weapons in their campaign against the Spooks. Rumors spread to all the other Guilds. They said everything from the Spooks were using the Village as a base camp to the Spooks themselves destroyed the Village for no reason. Ned Riddle was furious. He kept insisting that the accusations were not true. The Spooks weren't like that. It didn't matter. A lot of anti-Spook violence came our way in the aftermath of the Incident. There was no reason for it. All the Spooks wanted was their own chance to form a Guild, without any harassment from the Hunters or anyone else.

"It got so bad that we had to fight back. Spooks tangled with anyone who crossed them: other Guilds, Hierarchy, anyone at all. It wasn't a matter of proving ourselves. It was just to stay intact and viable as a separate Guild. Pretty soon Riddle decided that the Spooks had to reach out to the other Guilds to tell their side of the story.

"Riddle went to the Artificers, since they were the oldest Guild and had a lot of clout among the others. (They also had a lot of big guys with big hammers, which was a bonus in this situation.) He explained the whole situation to the three Guildmasters, including The Cause and the reasons for the breakaway from the Hunters. The Artificers were very receptive to Riddle's address. They made Riddle a deal: If the Spooks would agree to help the Artificers in their work, the Artificers would officially recognize the Spooks as a Guild





and give them whatever help they needed. It was the jackpot, and Riddle quickly accepted it on behalf of the Three Leagues."

The agreement with the Artificers changed the inter-Guild political landscape drastically. Now possessing official recognition by the Artificers, the Spooks turned their energies toward clearing their name of the Village Incident stigma:

Bladomiroff: "We still had some friends among the Nihilists, who were never happy with the treatment the Spooks got under the auspices of the Hunters' Guild. Ned Riddle soon discovered the real story — that a Pandora Skia calling himself Despair had fed false information to the Hierarchy about the presence of Spooks in the Village Circle. In other words, this sonofabitch had set us up.

"The heads of the Three Leagues agreed that Despair had to be dealt with. I won't bore you with the details of how we got a hold of him, except to say that a couple of Nihilists helped point us in the right direction. Riddle gave Despair over to the Dolabra to teach him a lesson about cross-

ing the Spooks. They beat on him and cut him until his Corpus was nearly vapor. Then they took a bolt of Stygian silk that the Artificers had treated in soulfire and wound it tightly around his face. It took six days for the treated cloth to eat out his eyes. And at that point, Despair fell into a Harrowing. He never returned.

"Even Riddle was unnerved about how the Dolabra had dealt with the Hunter, but there was little he could do about it. It was business. The Spooks couldn't let the Hunters continue doing what they were doing to the Guild. After what the Hunters heard happened to Despair, they got religion real fast. The Council quickly called a truce with the Spooks and agreed to make a public apology in front of all of the other Guilds, admitting what they had done and officially recognizing the Spooks as a legitimate entity. Of course, the presence of a bunch of soulforgers in our corner had a lot to do with how quickly they capitulated, but the loss of Despair had been a real blow to the Hunters' Guild.

There was no way they could afford something like that again.

"Ned Riddle always said that the look on the head Hunters' faces was priceless. He could barely keep himself from laughing out loud as they stood there and owned up to their actions. With all of the other Guilds as witnesses, a truce was signed between our Guild and theirs, and the Spooks were allowed to get on with the business of expanding the Guild.

"Oh, and those Dolabra? Once they realized what they could do to another wraith to get him to confess, they decided to specialize in it. So they called themselves Harrowsmiths.

"But you probably figured that out already."

III. War Games

No sooner were the Hunters and Spooks officially reconciled to one another than the first stirrings that would later blossom into the War of the Guilds manifested themselves. While the Spooks' Guild existed ostensibly as a single unit, the different factions within the Guild often followed their own agendas, sometimes coming into conflict with one another in the process:

Bladomiroff: "The Guild still underwent a lot of growing pains at this point, and the War of the Guilds didn't exactly help matters. Spooks fought on both sides, each to his own ends. Shroudbreaker squads fought for whomever paid them, no matter what Guild it was. The Mementorians played practically every side against the middle and ran a huge black market in Pathos, weapons from Artificer forges and the odd relic or two.

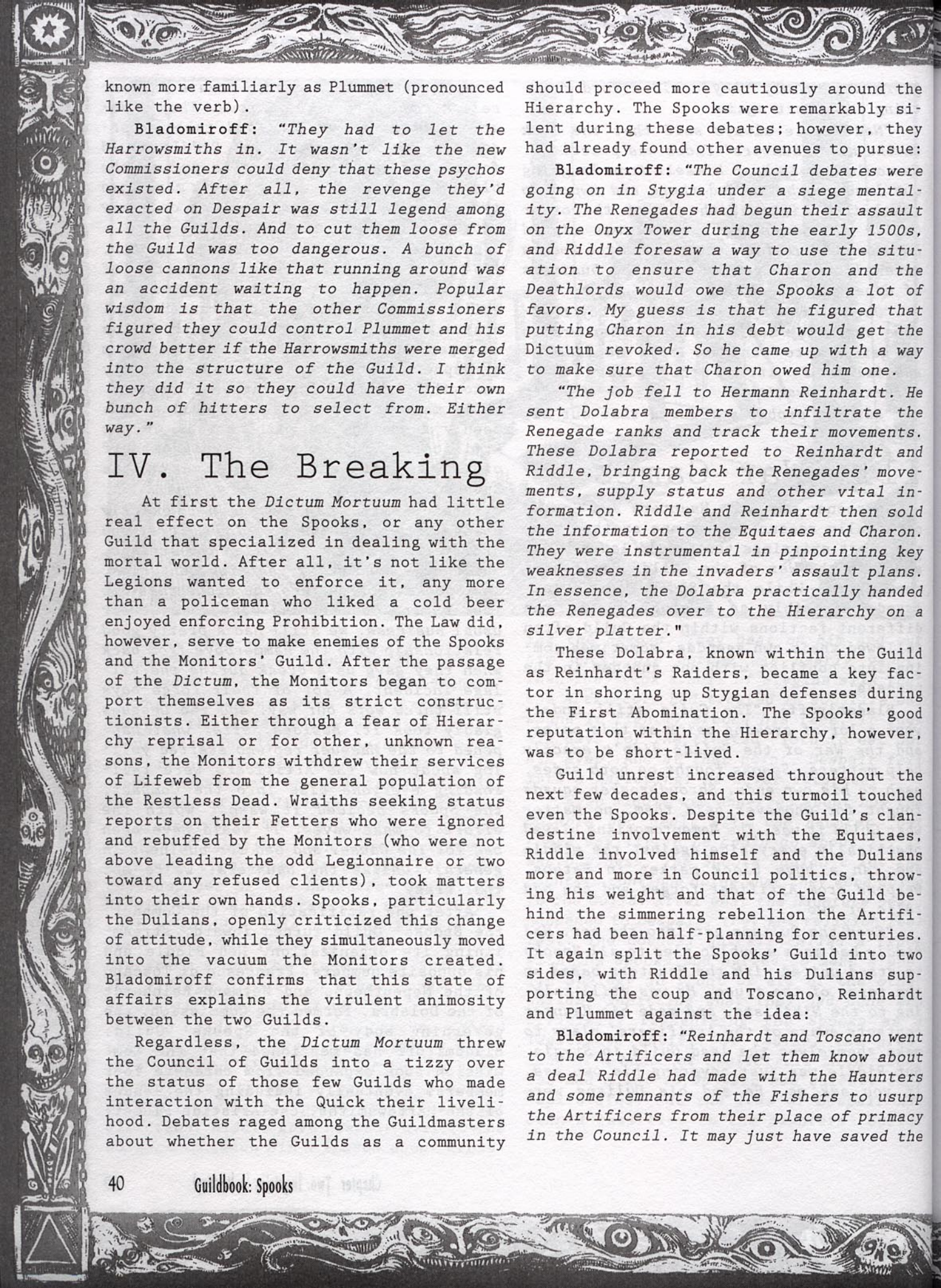
"Even the Dulians got into the act. Ned Riddle had made a public plea to all Spooks to stand united with the Hunters based on the terms of the truce. He was still talking to the Nihilists, and made his Hunter contacts aware of the Artificers' plans to make themselves the lead Guild in Stygia. But Riddle was just covering his own ass, if you ask me. He and his Dulians were

working with Artificers to create instant relics from across the Shroud. They'd destroy Inhabited targets and take a percentage off the top, which Riddle would forward to the Nepentheans to put on the black market. Hey, there's always more than two sides to a war. And we were on every single damned one of them."

The cessation of hostilities in A.D. 1354 left the Artificers in control of much of freewraith politics and activity. While the Compact of Guilds granted equal status to the 13 major freewraith Guilds on paper, it was evident from the postbellum atmosphere that the Artificers held firmly onto the reins of the larger community. While many former members of Guilds have openly lamented the machinations of the Artificers in this regard, Bladomiroff offers a different perspective on the Spooks' reaction:

Bladomiroff: "Things didn't exactly change with the Compact of 1354. Sure, the Artificers pretty much pulled the strings, but they'd been doing that for centuries. The Spooks settled into the niche that fit them on the Council and went about their usual business. We still had a pretty good relationship with the Hammerboys from back when they gave us a break during the Village Incident. A lot of their forge boys still threw work our way, and the Leagues gladly took it. Besides, after what happened to the Masquer rep who started yelling about how the Artificers were railroading everyone else into the Compact, the Spooks decided it wasn't worth the effort to make waves. It would have been bad for The Cause, and bad for business in general. Unlike the Hunters, we're not that crazy."

After the ratification of the Compact, the Spooks' Guild turned inward, streamlining its organization. Ned Riddle and his opposite numbers, Francesco di Toscano of the Nepentheans and Hermann Reinhardt of the Dolabra, formed the Commission, the governing body of the Spooks' Guild. Bladomiroff has mentioned that the Commission soon expanded from three to four members, eventually including the leader of the Harrowsmiths, one Aristide Plumét,



known more familiarly as Plummet (pronounced like the verb).

Bladomiroff: "They had to let the Harrowsmiths in. It wasn't like the new Commissioners could deny that these psychos existed. After all, the revenge they'd exacted on Despair was still legend among all the Guilds. And to cut them loose from the Guild was too dangerous. A bunch of loose cannons like that running around was an accident waiting to happen. Popular wisdom is that the other Commissioners figured they could control Plummet and his crowd better if the Harrowsmiths were merged into the structure of the Guild. I think they did it so they could have their own bunch of hitters to select from. Either way."

IV. The Breaking

At first the *Dictum Mortuum* had little real effect on the Spooks, or any other Guild that specialized in dealing with the mortal world. After all, it's not like the Legions wanted to enforce it, any more than a policeman who liked a cold beer enjoyed enforcing Prohibition. The Law did, however, serve to make enemies of the Spooks and the Monitors' Guild. After the passage of the *Dictum*, the Monitors began to comport themselves as its strict constructionists. Either through a fear of Hierarchy reprisal or for other, unknown reasons, the Monitors withdrew their services of Lifeweb from the general population of the Restless Dead. Wraiths seeking status reports on their Fetters who were ignored and rebuffed by the Monitors (who were not above leading the odd Legionnaire or two toward any refused clients), took matters into their own hands. Spooks, particularly the Dulians, openly criticized this change of attitude, while they simultaneously moved into the vacuum the Monitors created. Bladomiroff confirms that this state of affairs explains the virulent animosity between the two Guilds.

Regardless, the *Dictum Mortuum* threw the Council of Guilds into a tizzy over the status of those few Guilds who made interaction with the Quick their livelihood. Debates raged among the Guildmasters about whether the Guilds as a community

should proceed more cautiously around the Hierarchy. The Spooks were remarkably silent during these debates; however, they had already found other avenues to pursue:


Bladomiroff: "The Council debates were going on in Stygia under a siege mentality. The Renegades had begun their assault on the Onyx Tower during the early 1500s, and Riddle foresaw a way to use the situation to ensure that Charon and the Deathlords would owe the Spooks a lot of favors. My guess is that he figured that putting Charon in his debt would get the *Dictum* revoked. So he came up with a way to make sure that Charon owed him one.

"The job fell to Hermann Reinhardt. He sent Dolabra members to infiltrate the Renegade ranks and track their movements. These Dolabra reported to Reinhardt and Riddle, bringing back the Renegades' movements, supply status and other vital information. Riddle and Reinhardt then sold the information to the Equitae and Charon. They were instrumental in pinpointing key weaknesses in the invaders' assault plans. In essence, the Dolabra practically handed the Renegades over to the Hierarchy on a silver platter."

These Dolabra, known within the Guild as Reinhardt's Raiders, became a key factor in shoring up Stygian defenses during the First Abomination. The Spooks' good reputation within the Hierarchy, however, was to be short-lived.

Guild unrest increased throughout the next few decades, and this turmoil touched even the Spooks. Despite the Guild's clandestine involvement with the Equitae, Riddle involved himself and the Dulians more and more in Council politics, throwing his weight and that of the Guild behind the simmering rebellion the Artificers had been half-planning for centuries. It again split the Spooks' Guild into two sides, with Riddle and his Dulians supporting the coup and Toscano, Reinhardt and Plummet against the idea:

Bladomiroff: "Reinhardt and Toscano went to the Artificers and let them know about a deal Riddle had made with the Hunters and some remnants of the Fishers to usurp the Artificers from their place of primacy in the Council. It may just have saved the



Spooks' Guild. Without the support of the entire Spooks' Guild, the Hunters' revolt never materialized. I'm sure that we'd have been subsumed right back into the Hunters, the way Riddle was acting.

"Most Spooks who survived the coup attempt and subsequent Breaking will tell you that they never thought it was a wise idea. It was better to let the Artificers have their fun and inflate their egos, though, than to refuse to go along. So we did, and we paid the predictable price. The aftermath of the Decree of the Breaking practically decimated the Dulians. No one'll admit to it, but I think Reinhardt and Toscano handed Riddle and most of his crew over to the Hierarchy after the failed coup. And I know a lot of old Spooks who would agree with me.

"The future of the Dulians was a thorny issue. A lot of Spooks wanted to disband the Dulian League altogether. It's a good thing they didn't, though. If the Dulian League went, The Cause went with them, and so did our rationale for existing as a Guild. So the Commission began the painstaking process of reforming the Dulian League under the strictest interpretation of The Cause. The other Spooks combed through the ranks of former Dulians and plucked those who had refused to go along with Ned Riddle. There weren't a lot of them, I'll tell you, but there were enough to rebuild the new group of Dulians. These former Dulians chose new leaders and stuck to protecting Fetters - and stayed out of politics. They even gave themselves a new name, to symbolize the break with the past. They became the Lifeliners."

V. The Modern Spooks

After the Breaking was officially declared, some Spooks began to look toward other areas of influence. With Stygia growing at an exponential rate, the ability of the Legions to keep order throughout the Empire got weaker and weaker. Eventually it was decided by Charon that the first Necropolis should be founded, in the city of London. According to Bladomiroff, the

plans for a second city of the Dead were just what many Spooks were looking for:

Bladomiroff: "To put it kindly, the treatment of the first Necropolis in the *Historia Popularis Stygiae* is bullshit. Hell, what'd you expect when you've got a 700-something-year-old sexually ambivalent Italian writing it? The process was not as simple as sending in a brace of Stygian civil servants and the odd detachment of Legionnaires. It took a lot of work to found Necropolis London, and a lot of muscle, and I don't mean the nice whole-some sweat-of-your-brow kind. Squatters had to be relocated. People had to be, erm, 'persuaded' to accept the new order of things.

"The Legions couldn't do it alone, especially when there was a massive network of Spooks running around London, led by an old highwayman named William Castor. He was the head of a gang that called itself the Charing Crosses, after the neighborhood where they were headquartered. When the Legions tried to clear out this and other sections of London, Castor sent men to block them. When the Smiling Lord tried to set up central sites for collecting recently arrived souls, Castor hijacked the caravans. The Centurions could barely flinch without Castor knowing and countering it. Finally they gave up, went to Castor, and offered to lay off him and his Spooks if he helped do a bit of urban renewal.

"Castor agreed, and the Legions were able to get the London Necropolis underway. After things got settled, he transformed the organization of his Spooks into the first of the Gray Gangs. Castor appointed himself its leader, or Controller. And once Castor proved successful, other Spooks all over the Shadowlands in the sites of future Necropoli followed his lead. Individual Armadars who organized the Spooks within other Necropoli became Controllers too, and these wraiths became the building blocks of the Gray Gangs.

"The Gray Gangs ushered the Spooks' Guild into the modern era. Within a couple of centuries, Necropoli sprang up in practically every major city in the Western world, all under the jurisdiction of the Stygian



Empire. Souls flooded the streets, and Defenders poured into the Guild. The old system of the Three Leagues, especially in these new Necropoli, had to be reformed again.

"The Commission took its cue from two fast-growing entities among the Quick: labor unions and organized crime. They abolished the Three Leagues and set up a system of Locals and Combinations. The theory was that Locals would coordinate the activities of all Spooks under a specific vocation. All Lifeliners in a Necropolis or region in the Shadowlands would belong to a dedicated Local, headed by a single Controller. All Dolabra would be under their own Controller, all Gray Gangs, and so on. The Combination system placed all the Locals in one or more Necropoli under the overall leadership of a Boss, who would then direct and coordinate the activities of the different Locals under his aegis in accordance with the Commission. The two oldest groups of Spooks even updated their names. The Nepentheans, with a nod to their classical roots, renamed themselves the Mementomorianians. With the rise of the spiritualist movement in Europe and America, the Dolabra changed their name to reflect their change in focus. They became the Shroudbreakers. Stygia was moving into the modern world, and the Spooks made sure they followed suit."

The arrival of the so-called "Gray Gangs" on the larger Guild scene marks the turning point in the overall direction of the Spooks' Guild. Of all of the Locals and Combinations within the Guild, those affiliated with the Gray Gangs have grown the fastest in the modern industrial era. The Gray Gangs have become the Locals of choice for a significant percentage of the younger Guild members, who see unlimited opportunities in burrowing deep into the Imperial bureaucracy and attempting to control the output of the Hierarchy machine. It is this development that has preoccupied the entire Spooks' Guild since these Gangs began their rise to power, and its resolution will apparently shape the course of all future Spook endeavors:

Bladomiroff: "The new breed of Spooks has the old guard shaking their heads. The

oldtimers keep reiterating that The Cause centers around the dedication to assist individual wraiths, not the urge to grab hold of the government. The Gray Gangsters reply by saying that The Cause is supposed to be fulfilled by any means necessary, and that keeping the authorities off one's back is the best way to go about one's business unmolested.

"It's not going to go away soon, and it's not going to go away quietly, that's for sure. The new breed of Spooks is even starting to make its presence felt in the older Locals. Mementorians are getting pushed by Spooks who are selling inferior Pathos just for the quick buck. Shroudbreakers are starting to bully wraiths around instead of watching the line between the Quick and the Dead. Even the Lifeliners aren't immune to the effects of the new generation. Some Defenders are starting to demand better compensation for their work, or are even taking on their own clients illegally. The Commission of Five still keeps a tight hold on the Guild's operations, but I don't know how long the status quo is going to last. I'm afraid the Guild might split permanently; there's precedent, after all. If it does, then The Cause is done for, and Oblivion's one step closer to winning."

END PART ONE OF REPORT



MEMORANDUM

TO: The Deathlords

FROM: Overbrook

RE: Follow-up on Deposition of Ivan (Jackie Blades) Bladomiroff

My Dear and Most August Lords:

I am sorry to report that further testimony from Bladomiroff will not be forthcoming. It appears that the Masquers whom we had contracted to give Bladomiroff a new identity were in fact a group of Moliated Harrowsmiths, who then proceeded to infiltrate the holding center where Bladomiroff was being kept and destroy him.

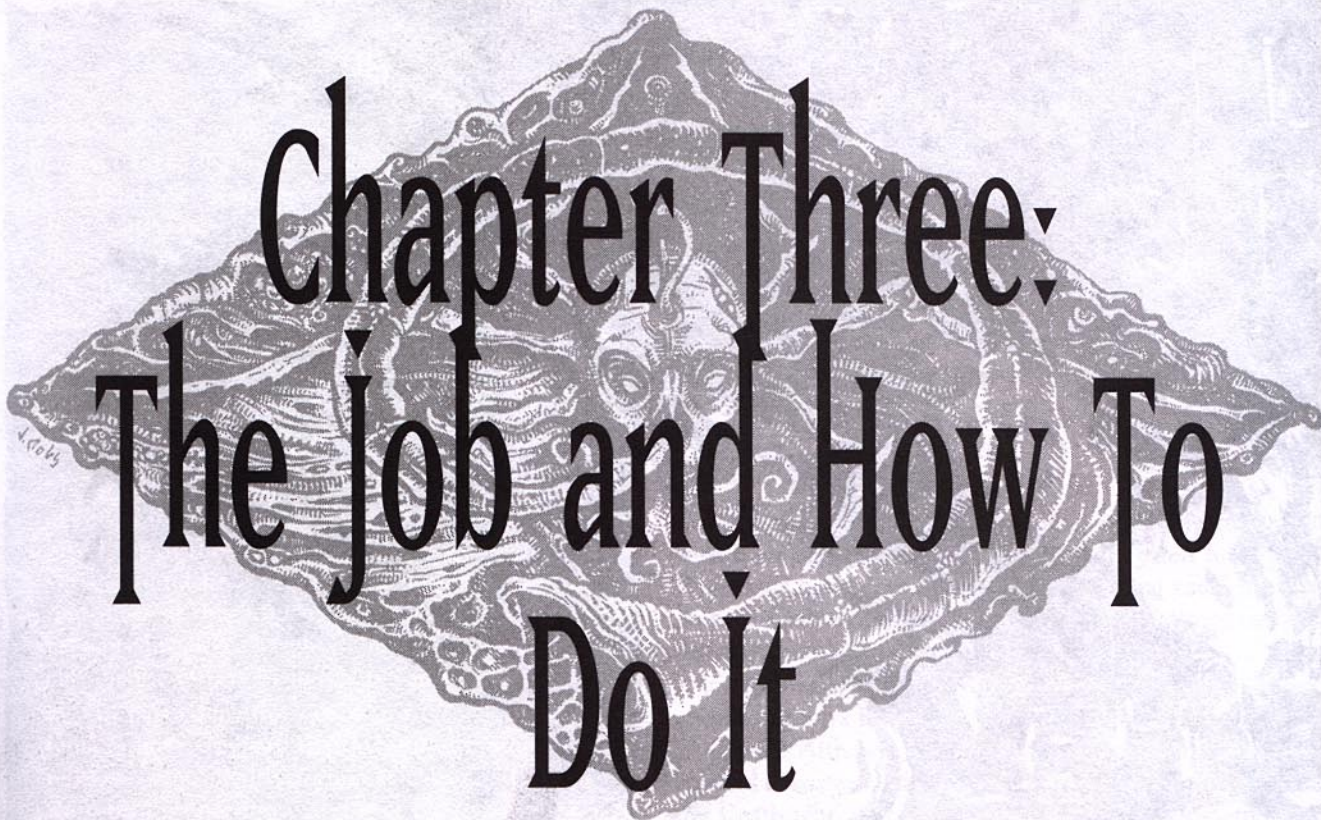
I am unable to discover at this time how the Harrowsmiths gained access to the cell where Bladomiroff was being held. I can only speculate that they either somehow coerced the guards who patrolled the cell blocks and or duped them into believing that they were sent by the Magisterium to begin work on the transformation of Bladomiroff into a different individual.

I cannot but extend my most forthright apologies to you Lords at the unfortunate developments that have transpired. I have initiated a thorough investigation into the breakdown of security in our holding center, and hope to have the culprits in my hands forthwith. Yet I fear that any further information about the present maneuvers of the Spooks' Guild will be impossible to obtain, as the ostentations hit on Bladomiroff tells us that the Spooks have definitely learned of our fact-finding endeavors, and possibly how to circumvent them as well.

B.C.O.

Overbrook.





Chapter Three: The Job and How To Do It

"Are you turning these men into murderers, Captain?"

"I sincerely hope so."

— Stephen Crane and Bucky O'Neil, *Rough Riders*

Outrage



To the untrained observer, Outrage appears to be one of the more straightforward (and less sophisticated) Arcanoi, and this commonly held perception often brands Spooks as little more than supernatural thugs. Admittedly, Outrage's effects are not subtle, as it is most frequently employed in the smash-mouth arena of back-alley combat. And when compared with the more aesthetically pleasing practice of Pandemonium as utilized by the Haunters, Outrage can seem decidedly vulgar in the eyes of most outsiders. Yet as with nearly everything else the Guild does, the full panoply of Outrage as practiced by the Spooks reaches broader and deeper levels than most wraiths can possibly understand.

Shadowlands Physics: So, Which Way *Is* Up?

Like its richer cousin Pandemonium, Outrage exists as another manifestation of the Wylding, drawn from a compact entered into by the Haunters' Guild centuries ago. Many of the more ancient Spooks claim that Outrage and its abilities came first, and that the forsaking of this Arcanos by the Haunters Guild for the more "genteel" arts of Pandemonium belies the shortsightedness and inevitable failure of the Haunters. A good many Spooks possess the knowledge and attunement with the Wylding necessary to perform both Arcanoi with relative ease, but the Spooks Guild firmly stands behind its marriage to Outrage, both for the Arcanos' legendary age and its usefulness in various Spook enterprises.



The power of Outrage flows from the nature of the Shadowlands themselves. Unlike Pandemonium, which tends to rely more on perceptual and psychological manipulation, Outrage taps into the physical malleability of the Underworld. Compass directions, inertia, gravity, momentum, balance and all other facets of the physical world do not act in their accustomed fashion in the Shadowlands, if in fact they act at all. Newton's Three Laws do not apply. Euclid is of no use. The Tempest is everywhere and nowhere at the same time; the geography bears no resemblance to anything on a Skinlands map. Even the simple feat of getting from Point A to Point B requires someone who's done it before and knows more or less where the destination is, or at least ought to be.

Outrage gives Spooks the ability to manipulate this fluidity in both the Shadowlands and the Skinlands *kinetically*. It allows a Spook to reach through the Shroud at its porous points and handle objects in the real world as if he or she were alive. In the realm of combat, Outrage allows a Spook to channel the corrupted properties of forces, vectors and angles against her opponent.

However, a down side exists to the use of Outrage under certain circumstances, particularly in its destructive capacities. Spooks who use Outrage at its highest levels, namely arts

such as Obliviate, expose themselves to the danger of stockpiling uncommon amounts of Angst. Some Spooks say that this Angst accumulation is due to pointless guilt, and that the rest of the Guild needs to bite the bullet and quit acting like a bunch of sissies. Others attribute this tendency to take in Angst to an as yet unstated, but understood, connection between Outrage, the original Covenant of the Wylding, and Oblivion itself. According to this theory, Oblivion can channel itself through the Wylding and into a Spook who uses Outrage primarily in its destructive phases. The instances of Spooks falling to Oblivion because of the number of "kills" on their record are far too sporadic to make any clear case one way or another, but the scuttlebutt among many Locals is known to lean heavily toward such sentiment.



Bulking Up

Spooks, regardless of their background or specialty, tend to display physiques that, to put it kindly, look as if they were assembled from cinder blocks. It is nearly impossible to mistake a Spook for anything other than what he is simply by sight, due to the effects of Outrage on the Corpus of its regular practitioners. Just as Artificers inevitably become scarred and blackened from their long hours at the forge, Spooks "bulk up" from their constant use of Outrage.

As the core power of Outrage is based on the Shadowlands' irregularity, so too does this process of "bulking" irregularly work on a Spook's Corpus. Even as the Spook shifts the fabric of the universe around her, so too is she shifted. The fact that most of this shifting looks like it could have been produced in a weight room is attributed to psychosomatic effects by most Stygian theorists.

In particular, the vast majority of Spook Defenders have Corpora that exhibit any number of tell-tale signs: slightly asymmetrical shoulders, torsos out of proportion with lower bodies, and other slightly shifted aspects of their physical frames. Many Spooks try to lessen the obvious nature of this "bulking" by wearing loose, undefined clothing, but as such remedies are scarce in the Shadowlands, the truth sooner or later asserts itself.

Outrage-ous Effects: An Arcanos Arsenal

• Affect Speed of Object

A simple use of Outrage, this ability allows a Spook to alter the speed of an object in flight or on the ground, in either the Skinlands or Shadowlands. This effect, when properly employed, allows a Spook to make small objects jet around a room or other finite area, or even slow them down to the point where they seem to be hovering in the air. It can also be used to affect the speed of non-solid matter such as the spreading of liquid or the dissemination of smoke or gas into or out of a particular area.

This art can be employed on about the same amount of material as can be affected by the art Ping. At Storyteller discretion, larger objects and greater masses can be affected with the investment of Corpus and greater expertise in the Arcanos.

System: To employ Affect Speed, a player rolls Dexterity + Outrage (difficulty 7). The number of successes determines the rate of increase or decrease of speed if the object is solid, or the rate of spread of the object is liquid or gaseous. Two successes doubles the speed (or surface area affected); three triples it, and so on. This art costs 1 Pathos to use. A botch results in the object stopping dead in its path. (Of course, if that's the effect the Spook is going for, the opposite holds true.)

• AfterImage

An increasing number of Spooks, particularly those who wish their opponents to know that their Fetters have been "targeted," have developed a sort of "calling card" for this purpose. Only a Spook with some low-level training in Pandemonium may employ this particular effect.

AfterImage allows a Spook to leave some sort of sign on another wraith's Fetter or some other object or place in the Skinlands. Although the Skinlands object is not physically affected in any way, AfterImage allows a wraith to see, through her Deathsight, that a Spook has been to visit something of hers. The particular AfterImage can be something as simple as a ghostly sigil of the Spook Local involved, or it can be something as large and ghastly as the image of the Fetter destroyed, superimposed upon the still-intact object.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Outrage (difficulty of the target's Willpower) to activate AfterImage. What occurs is a sort of hallucination on the part of the character whose Fetter is being targeted (hence the requirement of some elementary skill in Pandemonium). Each success results in a day's worth of an AfterImage projection.

AfterImage costs 1 Pathos and 1 Corpus to employ. A botch results in the projection of an AfterImage on the Fetter of the user himself. Despite the wraith's cognizance of his failure, the projection can still be unsettling, and in extreme cases can even lead to the accumulation of a point of temporary Angst.

• Recoil/Follow-Through

This particular effect taps into the physical force of a particular object's source, and can be used in one of two ways:

Recoil allows a Spook to reflect the force of an object thrown, swung or otherwise projected back onto its source. In practice, it creates a "true recoil" in the Shadowlands. For example, an object thrown by an opponent 10 feet toward the Spook using this Arcanos will reflect back on the thrower and knock him or her back 10 feet. A weapon swung in a

180° arc at a Spook will twist the swinger 180° in the opposite direction, in a sort of reversed-corkscrew effect. In short, whatever force is expended by an opponent will, under the effects of Recoil, be reversed back onto the opponent.

Follow-Through operates in the same manner as Recoil. It just does so in the opposite direction, doubling the intended range and force of the object. Thus, a projectile thrown 10 feet will in fact travel 20 feet. A weapon swung in a 180° arc will travel 360° and likely spin the assailant in a full revolution. Follow-Through is often employed on assailants too far away to engage in hand-to-hand combat.

System: To use either form of this art, a player rolls Strength + Outrage (difficulty of the local Shroud). For every object the wraith wishes to affect with this art, the difficulty is increased by one, but it can go no higher than 9. Recoil/Follow-Through costs 2 Pathos to use. A botch simply reverses the effect; in other words, a botch with Recoil results in the employment of Follow-Through and vice versa.

•• Wrench in the Gears

Wrench in the Gears enables a Spook to affect the flow of something through a simple mechanism, such as water through a plumbing system. The effect allows a Spook to cause slight irregularities in the systems of a large building, such as clogged pipes, low pressure in sinks and toilets, elevator cars that stop a few inches above or below the doors, and other such annoyances in the infrastructure. In some cases, Wrench in the Gears can be utilized in order to affect the flow of concrete into brick molds and similar adulterations in building materials, which can then be demolished with a good blow from the other side of the Shroud.

It should be noted that Wrench in the Gears does *not* work in the creation of relics. Because using this particular talent centers around the course of an object through a system rather than the system itself, Wrench in the Gears does not affect the outer mechanism through which the Arcanos is being employed.

System: Utilizing Wrench in the Gears requires a Strength + Outrage roll (difficulty of the local Shroud). The more successes achieved, the more pronounced the abnormalities in the system become. Wrench in the Gears costs 2 Pathos and 1 Corpus to use and gives the user a temporary Angst point. A botch actually improves the flow through the infrastructure and renders the area in question immune to further tinkering of this nature.

••• Irresistible Force/Immovable Object

As with Recoil/Follow-Through, this art can manifest itself in one of two ways:

Irresistible Force allows a Spook to exert an amount of force upon a person or object so great that any resistance or

countermeasure is effectively nullified. This is used particularly by Spooks employed in the destruction of buildings and other objects in the Skinlands, particularly when the art is focused on a weak point in the building's structure.

Immovable Object allows a Spook to increase the gravity exerted on an object in the Skinlands to the point where it cannot be picked up, lifted, shifted or otherwise moved by normal methods. Small objects seem to be glued to tabletops and/or floors, while more sizable objects seem to weigh several tons.

System: The player rolls Strength + Outrage (difficulty of the local Shroud). The difficulty increases by one for every object the wraith wishes to affect, but can go no higher than 9. If a wraith wishes to affect more than one object, they must be of similar sizes; a wraith cannot affect a baseball, a refrigerator and a Sherman tank at the same time.

This art costs 2 Pathos and 2 Corpus to use. A botch results in the object being affected seeming lighter or flimsier than it normally should, thus allowing it to be moved or countered with less effort.

Storyteller's Note

Splitting the dice pool in order to use Arcanoi with dual effects, namely Recoil/Follow-Through and Irresistible Force/Immovable Object, is not allowed. In other words, if a wraith wishes to employ Recoil on one object, he cannot split his dice pool to employ Follow-Through on another object. The same rule applies for Irresistible Force and Immovable Object. Although multiple objects can be affected with either art, only one facet of the art may be employed per round, due to the obvious opposition of each facet in question.

••• Relic Wrap

Many Spook Defenders and Armadars own relics which they use regularly in the Shadowlands. Relic Wrap allows a Spook to bend the Shroud around a particular relic. In effect, a protective "seal" is formed around the object in question which permits a Spook to take the relic with her when she reaches across the Shroud. This allows many Spooks to use their relics (often weapons of some sort) on Skinlands assignments.

System: To invest a relic object with Relic Wrap, the player rolls Strength + Outrage (difficulty of the local Shroud). The number of successes determines the duration of the Relic Wrap around an object. For this reason, most Spooks who use this art wait until just before they need to use the relic to employ Relic Wrap on their tools.

Relic Wrap costs 1 Pathos and 2 Corpus to use. A botch destroys the relic.

Advanced Levels of Outrage

For a Spook, using Outrage requires less and less exertion as his familiarity with the Arcanos progresses. Defenders and some lower-level Armadars in their still-formative stages are restricted to manifesting its effects by the expending of pure physical energy. (Translated into game terms, this means the expending of Pathos and Corpus points in order to perform basic Outrage effects.) However, these Spooks are just the beginning stages of mastery of the arts of Outrage. Those Guildwraiths who've practiced for a while can get... creative.

As a Spook becomes more comfortable in the employment of his Arcanos, however, he finds that he can affect the Shadowlands and Skinlands with far less use of purely physical strength. Higher levels of Outrage are activated by the use of Willpower as opposed to Corpus in this regard. This change allows a Spook to use Outrage in combat or other potentially dangerous situations without leaving himself quite so vulnerable to physical attack. In essence, the practice of high-level Outrage (four to five dots) is a matter of telekinetic energy as opposed to physical strength. A high-level Spook wishing to use one of the simpler arts of Outrage (one to three dots) can substitute one Willpower point for one Corpus point in any application of the lower arts, to symbolize the character's elevated skill in his chosen Arcanos.

.... Shroudshield

Spooks pledge themselves to protect the Fetters of wraiths. But what if the Fetter is a living person, specifically, one who is staring down the business end of a .45? What is a Spook going to do, throw himself in front of the bullet?

Well, yes and no. Obviously, Spooks are neither bullet-proof, nor can they solidify their Corpus in such a way to act as a flak jacket. But they can do something to minimize the effects of a gun, or knife, or falling girder: They can make a Shroudshield.

Shroudshield is a slightly incorrect term; no such thing as a shield is created through the use of this particular art. What Shroudshield does is allow a wraith to fling himself through the Shroud at the same velocity as a bullet or other projectile and attempt to deflect or stop the motion of the object. When this art is used correctly, the collision of the two forces cancels each other out, thereby sending the bullet off on another course or stopping it completely.

Shroudshield is a very chancy art to use, and an even more difficult one to master. It's quite rare for Shroudshielding to stop a bullet completely. It's much easier for a Spook to attempt to deflect the path of an oncoming bullet or blade, and even easier to slow the projectile down so that it does not end up going too deeply into the person's frame.



System: The player rolls Stamina + Outrage (difficulty of the local Shroud + 2, but total difficulty no higher than 9). The more successes at Shroudshield, the more successes are removed from the attacker's roll. If the wraith's successes outweigh the attackers, the bullet (or knife, or baseball bat) simply stops dead.

Shroudshield costs 3 Pathos and 2 Corpus to use. A botch, besides likely killing the target, increases the damage to the wraith's Corpus by 2 and gives him 3 points of temporary Angst, just to add insult to injury.

Mortals who see Shroudshielding in action usually witness nothing more than a grayish or white blur. As always, the Fog comes into play at these times as well.

.... Bilocation

This particular art allows a wraith to affect both Skinlands and Shadowlands simultaneously. A punch thrown or weapon swung in the Shadowlands will not only hit its intended target, but will also have the same effects on any person or object within range of the wraith's force in the Skinlands.

System: The player rolls Dexterity + Outrage (difficulty of the local Shroud + 1). The number of successes determines the similarity of force and damage done to both intended targets. The art costs 3 Pathos and 2 Corpus to use. A botch results in the Skinlands target feeling no effect, plus it renders the user incorporeal for a turn.

.... Center of Gravity

Center of Gravity most clearly underscores the subjective nature of physics in the Shadowlands, not to mention its distillation into the Outrage Arcanos. This ability allows a wraith to pinpoint any part of a room or other small area, including his own Corpus, and to temporarily make it the center of gravity of an area. This allows a Spook to place objects onto walls and ceilings, conjuring up images of those Warner Brothers cartoons where a character opens the door and everything appears to be upside down. Center of Gravity also allows a Spook to "magnetize" an object, even one of non-magnetic material, for a finite period of time.

System: Center of Gravity requires a Strength + Outrage roll (difficulty of the local Shroud + 1). The number of successes determines the size of the area affected and the duration of the effect. The art costs 4 Pathos and 2 Willpower to use if the Center of Gravity is an object other than the wraith himself; if the wraith wishes to use himself as the Center of Gravity, the 2 Willpower is replaced by 2 Corpus.

The user accumulates 2 points of temporary Angst each time he uses Center of Gravity. A botch results in the wraith himself being pulled into the gravitational "field" he is trying to create, thereby immobilizing himself for two rounds.

.... Corsican Syndrome

The Corsican Syndrome is an extension of Bilocation, but in a more detached form. As with the fate of the two brothers in the Dumas tale, Corsican Syndrome acts primarily on the connection between a wraith and his or her Fetters. The premise is simple: Whenever a Fetter is damaged, Corsican Syndrome transfers the damage to its respectively Fettered wraith in the manner of Corpus damage. Blows, burning, cuts or other types of damage to a Fetter reflect directly upon the wraith involved, leaving the Fetter untouched until such time as the wraith falls into a Harrowing. In the case of a living person as a Fetter, Corsican Syndrome also works in the reverse, allowing the Corpus damage taken by a wraith to be felt by his or her Fetter.

System: The player rolls Manipulation + Outrage (difficulty of the targeted wraith's Willpower + 2; total difficulty no higher than 9). Every two successes rolled inflicts one Corpus Level of damage on the targeted wraith, or one Health Level of a living Fetter. The art costs 4 Pathos and 3 Corpus to use. A botch turns the Syndrome on the user himself, damaging his Fetter and inflicting three levels of Corpus Damage. Needless to say, this art is used sparingly.

Merits and Flaws

Even an Arcanos as eminently physical as Outrage carries its own selection of pitfalls and pinnacles for those who practice it. In addition to these purely Arcanos-driven side effects, the Gordian knotwork of politics and criminal endeavors in Stygia (in which the Spooks' Guild is firmly entrenched) can make life easy for some and dicey for others.

Note: These Merits and Flaws are intended strictly for use with Spook characters. Use them as you would use the Merits and Flaws in the **Wraith Players Guide** or the **Shadow Players Guide**.

Easier Pandemonium (2 point Merit)

In addition to Outrage, you also have a knack for picking up Pandemonium. Perhaps you are subconsciously more attuned to the Wyld than you are aware, or perhaps you're just a quick learner. Either way, you have access to those facets of the Pandemonium Arcanos available to both Spooks and Haunters (For a complete list, see **Guildbook: Haunters**).

Nice Abs! (3 point Merit)

By some strange quirk of fate, you have not been too obviously touched by the effects of your constant use of Outrage. Your Corpus does show signs of "bulking," but not in the typically overproportioned fashion of most Spooks. You still

appear physically intimidating (what Spook worth his salt isn't, after all?), but for all anyone else knows, you might have gotten those pecs from being a weightlifter in life. Your husky build certainly doesn't look like the mark of Outrage; this fact allows you to move through public situations without automatically getting red-flagged as a Spook. In practice, this Merit lessens the difficulty of all your Social rolls by one.

Quick Healer (3 point Merit)

Your Corpus heals faster than normal when "struck" by something in the Skinlands. Quick scrapes heal almost immediately, while more substantial injuries (getting "run over" by a car, for instance) tend to heal in about half the time they usually do for other wraiths. This Merit automatically decreases the difficulty of all Stamina soak rolls by one. In addition, substantial injuries require the use of one less point of Pathos to heal.

Lucky Shot (2-4 point Merit)

Every once in a while, the chips just fall your way. When this Merit takes effect, a throw or shot that veered off course somehow mysteriously kicks back on line and hits the bullseye (all at the Storyteller's discretion, of course). This effect works in both the Skinlands and Shadowlands, but tends to work better the more stable the system is. A misplaced throw or hit in the Skinlands, where gravity works only one way and physics follow set laws, has a better chance of righting itself than does one in the middle of the Tempest on the deck of a pitching dinghy with Spectres strafing your vessel.

In game terms, at Storyteller discretion you can ignore the results of any Dexterity + Firearms (or similar) roll and assume three successes. Of course, the Storyteller determines which rolls this Merit affects....

Bargaining Chip (2-5 point Merit)

As a Spook, you provide all sorts of services for people whom, frankly, the Hierarchy would frown upon if it knew about the kinky little skeletons in their closets. So you've got one or more things on a couple of key people who might prove useful if push comes to shove. The level of the Merit depends, obviously, on the nature of the information and the clout of the individual involved. A two-point *Bargaining Chip* might get a Centurion to turn his Legion's patrol in another direction away from your hideout, while a five-point *Chip* might get that Deathlord off your back, lest you leak the details of the deal he's cut with Yu Huang. In those specific instances where you interact with the person in question, all Manipulation rolls have a -1 difficulty.

Secure Fetter (3-5 point Merit)

One or more of your Fetters is an artifact in a museum, or treasured by its present owners, or in some other place where the chances of anything happening to it are extraordinarily slim. You need not continually poke through the Shroud to check on its status, and can freely move about the Shadowlands without a care for the Fetter's future well-being.

Psychosomatic Disability (1-3 point Flaw)

Something happened to you on your first use of Outrage. Either you didn't produce the effect you wanted, or the process completely backfired on you. As a result, you feel yourself prone to slip-ups every now and then whenever you use a particular form of Outrage (pick a particular art). This nervous tension can manifest itself in several ways, either through physical clumsiness or inaccuracy (a +1 difficulty on all Dexterity rolls), or psychological cold feet, or even a refusal to cut loose with full use of your abilities.

Disorientation (2-4 point Flaw)

Sometimes you get dizzy after using Outrage for a certain period of time. Your balance is off, focusing on any one point in the Shadowlands can be painful, and in extreme cases nausea manifests.

Wraiths with this Flaw must make a Stamina roll (difficulty 6-8, depending upon the point cost) to avoid ill effects after using Outrage more than once in a five-minute span. The disorienting effects include (but are not limited to): +1 difficulty on all Perception rolls; +1 difficulty on all Stamina rolls; and +1 difficulty to all rolls involving Outrage.

Slumber removes the effects of this Flaw.

Overkill (4 point Flaw)

You didn't *mean* to hit him/her/it that hard, but you did. Your excessive enthusiasm is a recurring problem for you, giving you a tendency to put too much into the Arcanos you use and thus aggravate both the damage and the mess you cause. In addition to this, your apparent inability to exercise some form of self-control at times increases the accumulation of temporary Angst by one point each time you use Outrage.

Monitored (5 point Flaw)

Some Monitor has your number. Admittedly, a Monitor who knows what he's doing can read anyone's Lifeweb strands, but knowing this guy's watching you gives you the sensation of chewing on tinfoil. You have to be exceedingly careful of your actions against any of his brethren Guild members, and are constantly aware that he may alert the Hierarchy to your doings just *because*.

Artifacts and Relics

Every Spook, from the newest Defender to the highest Commissioner, possesses an arsenal of relics and Artifacts, either out of personal attachment or functional necessity. Most Spook relics are personal items, with many of them finding their way across the Shroud with the help of an Artificer or two. Others are tools of the trade needed on the other side.

In general, Spook relics and Artifacts come in three categories: Personal, Local and Issued. *Personal* items rank barely above the level of a soulforged object, but often contain specific properties only accessible to a user of Outrage. *Local* items are used by specific Spook Locals in their everyday lines of work. Spook Locals tend to maintain strict control over Local items in order to guard their secrets from outsiders, and even other Guild members. Sometimes Local items are given to Spooks outside a particular Local, but that decision is strictly up to the possessors of the Artifact in question. *Issued* items can only be possessed by a Spook with the permission of his Controller or Boss. These are mostly special Guild weapons and other instruments of destruction, and get handed out only to the most trusted and experienced operatives.

Compass (Level 1, Local)

Compasses come in many shapes and sizes, but they all serve the same purpose: to orient the fledgling Spook when he first starts using Outrage. All a Compass does is maintain a fix on Stygia, thus giving the Spook who owns the Artifact a reference point for direction. Once the line to Stygia is established, other directions (like up, down and so on) can be established relative to that, allowing the Spook to do his dirty work without disorienting himself. Most Spooks only need a Compass for a few years at most.

Fetter Boutonnieres (Level 1, Local)

When a renegade Monitor left that Guild to join a Lifeline Local, he taught many of his colleagues a single use of Lifeweb in order to create a special sort of relic: a Fetter Boutonniere. Fetter Boutonnieres are often worn by Lifeline Spooks to give them an accurate assessment of the status of their Fetters while they are busy looking out for the Fetters of clients. These relics are crafted from the funeral bouquets at the gravesites of wraiths, and connected through a simple application of Outrage and Lifeweb to the Fetters of the wraith wearing them. The status of one or more of a wraith's Fetters is reflected by the "health" of the Boutonniere. A healthy, even vividly colored Boutonniere means that the wraith's Fetters are not being threatened. When the Boutonniere begins to wilt or lose petals, it signifies that a Fetter is in danger as its connection to the Lifeweb strand stretches and frays.

Fetter Boutonnieres are relatively common among Lifeliners, but they can only be crafted for a Spook from the flowers at his own gravesite. Obviously, wraiths who did not receive proper funerals (with requisite floral arrangements) cannot have relic Boutonnieres crafted for them.

Tempest Top (Level 2, Personal)

A Tempest Top is exactly what it looks like: a child's spinning top. By placing the Top on the ground and spinning it, a Spook can employ Outrage to create a limited field of disorientation around a human or inanimate target. Anything within nine feet of a Tempest Top in operation is sent spinning drunk-only (Wits + Athletics, difficulty 8 to be able to control your movement) for as long as the Top continues to spin.

Choose Your Weapon

Make it evil. Make it totally clear that this gun has a right end and a wrong end. Make it totally clear to anyone standing at the wrong end that things are going badly for them. This is not a gun for hanging over the fireplace or sticking in the umbrella stand, it is a gun for going out and making people miserable with.

— Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*

Every Spook carries a weapon of some sort, which can range from a simple relic Louisville Slugger to a finely crafted sword from Nhudri's forge. Even Fix, arguably the Guild's most prominent Armadar, carries a relic medieval mace for up-close work. Blunt instruments are the weapons of choice for Spooks; however, there are a number of relic guns and other, more modern bits of machinery floating around in the greater Guild arsenal.

In the case of more sophisticated artillery, such as relic guns, crossbows, bombs and other such material, the restrictions on the availability of ammunition and expenditure of Pathos apply to a Spook just as with any other wraith. However, as the Spooks tend to use such toys with greater frequency than pretty much any other group in Stygia, Guildwraiths have gotten adept at reloading their arsenals with a minimum of effort.

The Guild has developed a sort of "language" in regard to the use of modern-day relic weapons. The code is easy to understand by anyone unfortunate enough to be targeted by the Spooks. A Spook on a job first leaves a relic bullet, arrow or unlit stick of dynamite for the target (the Guild's equivalent of the fish wrapped in newspaper). Such an act is the target's first and last warning. If the target does not comply with the Guild's "requests," he is then destroyed, with the same relic ammunition used to send the original message whenever possible.



Pathos Flasks (Level 2, Local)

These items are used by the Mementorians to harvest and distribute Pathos. Flasks come in several sizes, ranging in capacity from one to 10 points of Pathos. One-point Flasks are carried for personal consumption, while 10-point Pathos Flasks are used to power large machinery in the Shadowlands.

Although called Pathos Flasks, these Artifacts can range anywhere in size from bottles (one- to three-point Flasks) to pony kegs or barrels (seven- to 10-point Flasks). When filled with Pathos, they emit a steady glow. As the Flask is emptied, the glow subsides until the Pathos runs out. The effect is not dissimilar in appearance to that of soulfire crystals; there have been more than a few occasions when a contingent of Mementorians has tangled with a squad of Legionnaires for carrying what appeared to be barrels of forge fuel.

The existence of Pathos Flasks, and their use by the Spooks, has been steeped in controversy since ancient times. A Spook needs to bury a Pathos Flask in the ground near a pre-approved Mementorian Pathos sink in order to replenish the flask's contents. It takes one full day to recharge every point of Pathos from a Flask. However, the process of recharging Pathos Flasks is often fraught with uncertainty. Since Pathos is essentially the distillation of Quick emotion, it is nearly impossible to predict, let alone direct, the form of emotion that gets distilled into a given Pathos Flask. Mass Quick emotion being as fickle as it is, the chances of a Pathos Flask

recharging with a full complement of "good" Pathos have gotten more and more haphazard with the march of the centuries and the infinite complications of human existence.

In practical terms, this means that a Pathos Flask may contain any mixture of Pathos and Angst, thereby acting in the same manner as unrefined fuel. Impure Pathos used to power a relic machine or automobile may in fact cause the internal mechanisms to fail at a critical moment (at the discretion of the Storyteller, of course). A wraith who ingests impure Pathos from a Flask may experience feelings akin to sickness, or in extreme cases, a sort of Pathos "poisoning" that will render her incapacitated, and may well feed her Shadow.

And then there are the Flasks of Liquid Hate. Recharged at sites of hatred, bigotry and oppression, these Flasks contain pure Hate Pathos. Any wraith who ingests the contents of a Flask of Liquid Hate automatically gains one to five points of temporary Angst. Many Restless have fallen straight into Harrowings immediately upon downing the contents of such Flasks.

The Mementorians adamantly maintain that every reasonable precaution is taken to ensure the purest Pathos possible from these Flasks. Yet with modernization bringing more and more technologically complex relics and machines into the Shadowlands, the demand for Pathos to fuel these devices continues to rise, and people on the whole aren't necessarily getting any nicer. Mementorians practice quality control as meticulously as possible, but the rush to expand

their control over the vast network of Pathos within the Stygian Empire leaves the industry prone to slip-ups, cutting of corners and deliberate sabotage. Still, it remains a thriving underground economy.

Getting Around

Out of all the Guilds, the Spooks' Guild pays probably the most attention to the vehicles in which Guild members choose to tool about. The black relic Dusenberglimousine is *de rigueur* for any Controller or Boss worth his salt; when one of these beauties rolls quietly down the road, you'd better pray it doesn't pull up in front of you. Armadars and Defenders tend to make do with more streamlined and functional modes of transport; motorbikes and relic roadsters from the 1920s or '30s reign among the rank and file. Modern Lincolns and Caddies are considered vulgar and characterless by many Spooks; the Guild may be a sort of mob, but at least it's an elegant sort of mob. This is not to say that a Spook never uses a modern-day relic vehicle. You have to dump the bodies in *someone's* trunk, after all...

Pop Box (Level 3, Personal)

Legend has it that a certain Armadar, known as Pop-up, used to leave a soulforged jack-in-the-box at the scenes of his crimes as sort of a calling card. When the handle was turned, soul-steel spikes popped out from all six sides of the box, embedding themselves deep within the hands of the unfortunate person who picked up the "toy." The device became an instant hit among the younger generation of Spooks, who began to devise their own versions of this weapon.

Today, those devices (known as Pop Boxes) are used frequently by Spooks, though Pop-up himself might not recognize his creations any longer. The appearance and functionality of these weapons has come a long way since the original prototype, and, depending upon the skill of the Artificer who crafts them, they can be made to resemble any shape.

Pop Boxes are often left among the rubble of a destroyed building in the Shadowlands, looking just enough like a clue to the tragedy for some poor bastard Legionnaire to pick up. Unfortunately for the Legionnaire who "discovered" it, lifting a Pop Box off the ground triggers the delay spring deep within its mechanism. After three seconds the Pop Box "pops" open, driving its spikes deep into whatever part of the Corpus happens to be closest. Some of the deadlier Pop Boxes can actually send their contents shooting out from within the Box itself, in the manner of a fragmentation grenade.

Pathos Sticks (Level 4, Local)

With all the uncertainty surrounding their trade, some Mementorian Locals have developed a system of testing the percentage of purity of Pathos in a Flask. Pathos Sticks act as litmus paper for Pathos. They are crafted from the shards of knowingly pure Pathos Flasks, in a process closely guarded by the Mementorians. After a Pathos Stick is dipped into a Pathos Flask, it glows at a rate comparable to the amount of "pure" Pathos within the Flask. The purer the contents of the Flask, the brighter the Pathos Stick glows.

Pathos Sticks are given (reluctantly) by Mementorians to fellow Spooks in exchange for agreed-upon payments. Pathos Sticks are only powerful enough to test the amount of Pathos in a personal-sized (one- to three-point) Flask; dipping a Pathos Stick into a five-point or higher Pathos Flask only overloads the stick and renders the reading worthless.

Barrowbombs (Level 5, Issued)

Barrowbombs are the most destructive weapons a Spook can have in her arsenal. The only way to make a barrowbomb is to fill an old Pathos Flask with barrowflame in liquid form, which is collected on the outskirts of those sites where barrowflame is prevalent. Liquid barrowflame, in contrast to the substance's normal manifestation, is a relatively stable compound in the Shadowlands. Of course, by stable one simply means that it can be handled (with Artifact gauntlets) and stored in containers without actively incinerating the poor fool collecting it....

However, when a live soulfire crystal (say, one that's been dropped into the Flask by an urban renewal-minded Spook) comes into contact with the liquid, a reaction occurs that turns the liquid into true barrowflame. At this point, the Spook simply heaves the barrowbomb toward its target, at which point the container smashes open and acts like a Molotov cocktail. With a little use of the Affect Speed of Object facet of Outrage, the barrowflame can be made to spread over a large surface area much faster than would normally, doing even more damage and causing even more destruction. Barrowbombs also come in non-projectile form. A timed release of soulfire crystals into a basin of liquid barrowflame can be used to create either a stationary incendiary device, or one of Vanderwal's personal favorites, the good old-fashioned time bomb.

Barrowbombs are most commonly found in hand-held form; the availability of obtainable liquid barrowflame precludes the use of skyscraper-leveling devices with any regularity. Usually a 10-point barrowbomb will take out anything up to and including a relic Sherman tank with little difficulty. However, there have, over the centuries, been enough explosions of such Schwarzeneggerean proportion to dispel any doubts about the Spooks' ability to roll out a 100-point behemoth when the situation warrants it.

Note: Barrowflame sticks to its targets like glue and must be scraped off, or it will continue to inflict damage. Removing barrowflame safely takes a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 8); the number of successes indicates the number of points' worth of barrowflame harmlessly scraped off. A botch means that the poor idiot trying to remove the barrowflame has instead managed to get some on himself, to predictable effect.

Barrowbomb Statistics

Pathos Flask Capacity	Blast Radius	Corpus Damage /Turn
1-2 points	6 feet	1 Level
3-4 points	12 feet	3 Levels
5-6 points	18 feet	5 Levels
7-8 points	24 feet	7 Levels
9-10 points	30 feet	9 Levels

Despair's Helm (Level 5, Unique)

Leave it to the Harrowsmiths to create something like this. Inspired by the tortures inflicted upon Despair, the Haunter who crossed the Spooks' path centuries ago, a few of the more enterprising interrogation specialists among the Harrowsmiths created this device in order to facilitate their questioning of exceedingly recalcitrant victims.

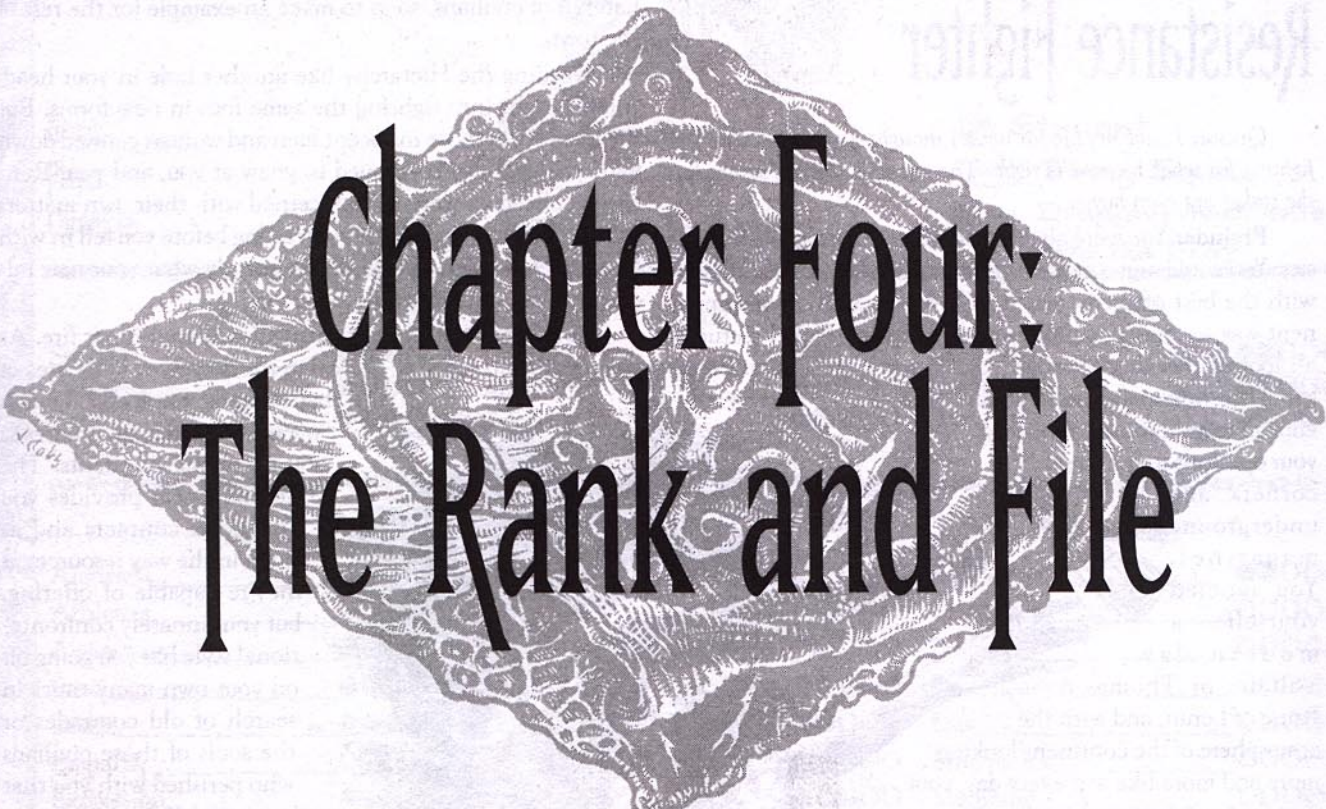
Despair's Helm is a full-face helmet with an opening in the top into which soulfire crystals can be placed. The idea behind this ingenious chapeau is that once the soulfire crystals are inserted, they begin to eat away at the Corpus of the wearer, with the rate of erosion dependent upon how spent the individual crystals are. The unlucky wearer loses one Corpus Level for every hour the Helm is worn, and suffers agonizing pain all the while as his Corpus slowly vaporizes. After all of a wraith's temporary Corpus Levels are expended, he falls into a Harrowing. Unfortunately, the Helm falls with the victim into the Harrowing, and re-emerges with him assuming he survives.

At that point, the Helm's function changes slightly. Rather than eating away at temporary Corpus (of which the victim doesn't have much, anyway), it starts wearing away his *permanent* Corpus instead. The results, from this point, are predictable.

Despair's Helm operates on the same level as a nuclear arsenal; that is, its power comes more from the sheer *threat* of its use. The Harrowsmiths have never had to resort to using the Helm on anyone, or so they say, so theoretically there's no reason to believe that it's anything more than a funny hat. Yet no one doubts the authenticity of the Artifact, and for obvious reasons no one wants to be the test case.







Chapter Four: The Rank and File

"What kind of life is that?" I said.

"It's the life he's got. Don't get all gooey about it. You'd walked into your place and he'd have put half a dozen .45-caliber slugs in your face. And liked it."

— Robert B. Parker, *Walking Shadow*

At its heart, the Spooks' Guild has always been a patchwork. Conceived in rebellion, it still maintains a healthy anarchic streak. Its structure and activities coalesced from a combination of administrative necessity and opportunity. Though its members' methods are not subtle, the Guild's power runs like fine threads through the fabric of Stygian society. A Spook is a killer and a kingmaker, a savior and a shark. A Spook is what she does, and what she does is always in furtherance of The Cause.

Resistance Fighter

Quote: *I gave my life for what I thought was right. Now I'm fighting for what I know is right. The enemy's still the same, but the stakes are even higher.*

Prelude: You were always a combative sort at the university. You could argue modern politics and classical philosophy with the best of them, and it didn't matter who your opponent was — students, professors and visiting Nobel lecturers all looked the same through your forensic crosshairs. Pretty soon the university halls weren't big enough to hold you, and you took your opinions to the street corners and underground magazines. You fancied yourself a modern-day Voltaire or Thomas Paine or Lenin, and with the atmosphere of the continent looking more and more like war every day, your speeches got more and more vociferous.

Then the occupying forces rolled in and took the city where you lived. When the soldiers hit the university quarter, the first thing they did was line up the entire faculty of your department and shoot the lot as enemies of the state. You and the rest of your classmates dove into the resistance movement for cover, and there you learned fast to put your money where your mouth had been. Day after day, as you watched the hostile forces take away more and more innocent people to places you'd rather not imagine, your little band of rebels did their best to sabotage the murderers' objectives. You made some progress: a trashed vehicle here, a refugee successfully hidden there, but there were so few of you and so many of them.

One night the risks you had been taking caught up with you. Your last accomplishment had been blowing up a guard post outside the city and killing three of the enemy. The commanding officer put a price on your head, and one of your own turned traitor. The soldiers came straight to the hideout in the upper room of the house and arrested everyone. At dawn the next day you and your crew were executed in the town square, along with a

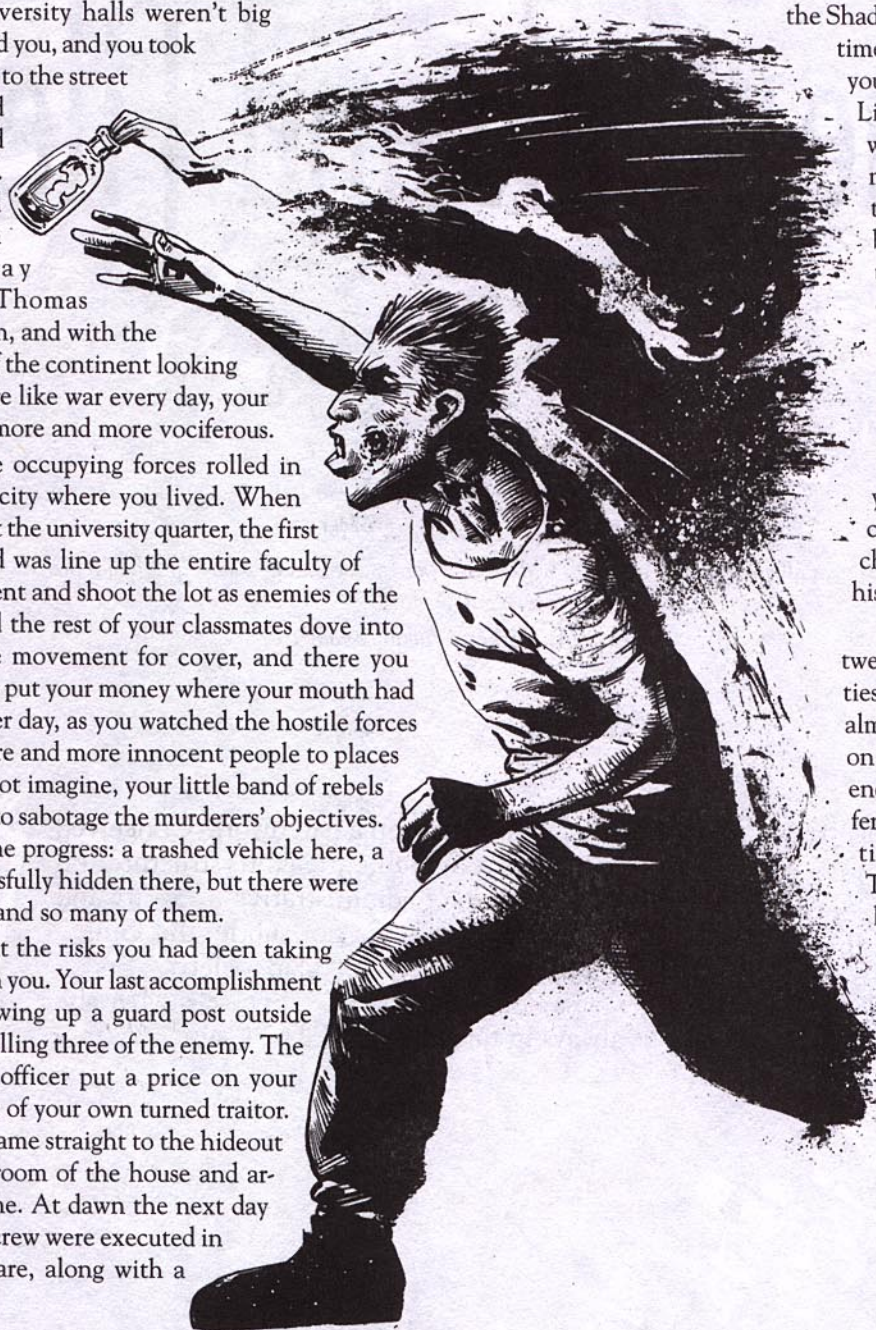
handful of civilians, so as to make an example for the rest of the town.

Needing the Hierarchy like another hole in your head, you fell right into fighting the same foes in new forms. But the memory of those innocent men and women gunned down with you that day continued to gnaw at you, and your Renegade colleagues were too concerned with their own matters to give you any real help. It wasn't long before you fell in with a band of Lifeliners. They offered exactly what your new talents and old wounds needed.

Concept: Death hasn't extinguished your inner fire. As an Armadar attached to a Local in a relatively volatile area of the Shadowlands, you spend as much time fighting off Legionnaires as you do taking in clients. The Lifer Local provides you with good contacts and as much in the way resources as they're capable of offering, but your innately confrontational style has you going off on your own many times in search of old comrades or the souls of those civilians who perished with you that morning. You have never forgotten the Judas who sold you and your gang out, and constantly keep your Guild channels open for any news of his whereabouts.

Roleplaying Notes: Between your Guild responsibilities and personal demons, you almost have a little too much on your plate. Throw as much energy into educating your Defenders as possible, both in tactics and propaganda about The Cause. They are your legacy, God forbid, should you be destroyed before ever completing your personal tasks.

Relics: Working sidearm with ammo, lists of contacts and safe houses, copy of Lenin's *What Is To Be Done?*





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: **Rebel**
Demeanor: **Martyr**
Shadow: **The Delver**

Life: **Student**
Death: **Firing Squad**
Regret: **Dragging Innocents
Into the Fray**

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●●
Dexterity ●●●●●
Stamina ●●●●●

Social

Charisma ●●●●●
Manipulation ●●●●●
Appearance ●●●●●

Mental

Perception ●●●●●
Intelligence ●●●●●
Wits ●●●●●

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●●●●
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●●●●●
Brawl ●●●●●
Dodge ●●●●●
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ●●●●●
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ●●●●●
Subterfuge ●●●●●

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●●●●●
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●●●
Leadership ●●●●●
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ●●●●●
Performance ○○○○○
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ●●●●●

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ●●●●●
Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Politics ●●●●●
Science ●●●●●

Advantages

Backgrounds

Allies ●●●●●
Contacts ●●●●●
Eidolon ●●●●●
Memoriam ●●●●●
Notoriety ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

Make Restitution to
Civilians (Forgiveness) ●●●●●
Fight Hierarchy ○○○○○
(Fanaticism) ●●●●●
Destroy Judas ○○○○○
(Revenge) ●●●●●
○○○○○

Arcanoi

Outrage ●●●●●
Pandemonium ●●●●●
Inhabit ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Fetters

Execution Site ●●●●●
Old Hideout ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Willpower
● ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Angr

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Thorns
Dark Allies (3)
Death's Sigil (3)
Pact of Doom

Guild Marks

Bulking Up

Pathos

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □

Dark Passions

Sell Out Local (Hate) ●●●●●
Kill Civilians All Over ●●●●●
Again (Sadism) ○○○○○
○○○○○

Ward Boss

Quote: *When you've got them by the Fetters, their hearts and minds will follow.*

Prelude: You came from the old neighborhood, where everybody knew everybody else and people looked out for each other. And no one looked out for your neighborhood more than the local alderman. He made sure everyone who needed it had a job, and that the streets were safe and people were left in peace. So what if he had to slip a few hundreds under the table to the local cops? He was the man you went to when you were in trouble, the man you looked up to for help. He fought for you and your family and friends.

You wanted to get into his circle of friends, so you started volunteering for his reelection campaign. At first you did simple things, like ringing doorbells and stuffing envelopes, but the alderman took a liking to your enthusiasm and dedication, and made you one of his public relations people. That lasted for a couple of years, until the alderman retired his seat and handed it over — to you. It was a dream come true.

Or so you thought at the time. You soon learned that you needed solid-steel guts to survive in the abattoir of municipal politics. Everybody was tearing each other's throats out for the same thin sliver of the pie, and you'd be damned if your old neighborhood didn't get the lion's share. You found yourself needing to do things that would make your old mentor blanch: dispersing brute squads, smashing up opponents' storefront election offices, hiring private eyes to dig up scandals. Pretty soon the business of deviousness was all that you were concerned with. You had stuff on the mayor,

the police chief and half your colleagues on the city council. The mayor may have been the man in the big office, but you were the one really running the show.

You made a lot of friends on your climb to the top, and just as many enemies. One night, after hours in your office, the brother of a local politician you had driven out of office showed up at City Hall and beat you to death with a tire iron. After you were safely dead, your career was fair game for the press, who dragged it liberally through the muck. Your constituents, however, gave you a funeral procession worthy of royalty through the old neighborhood.

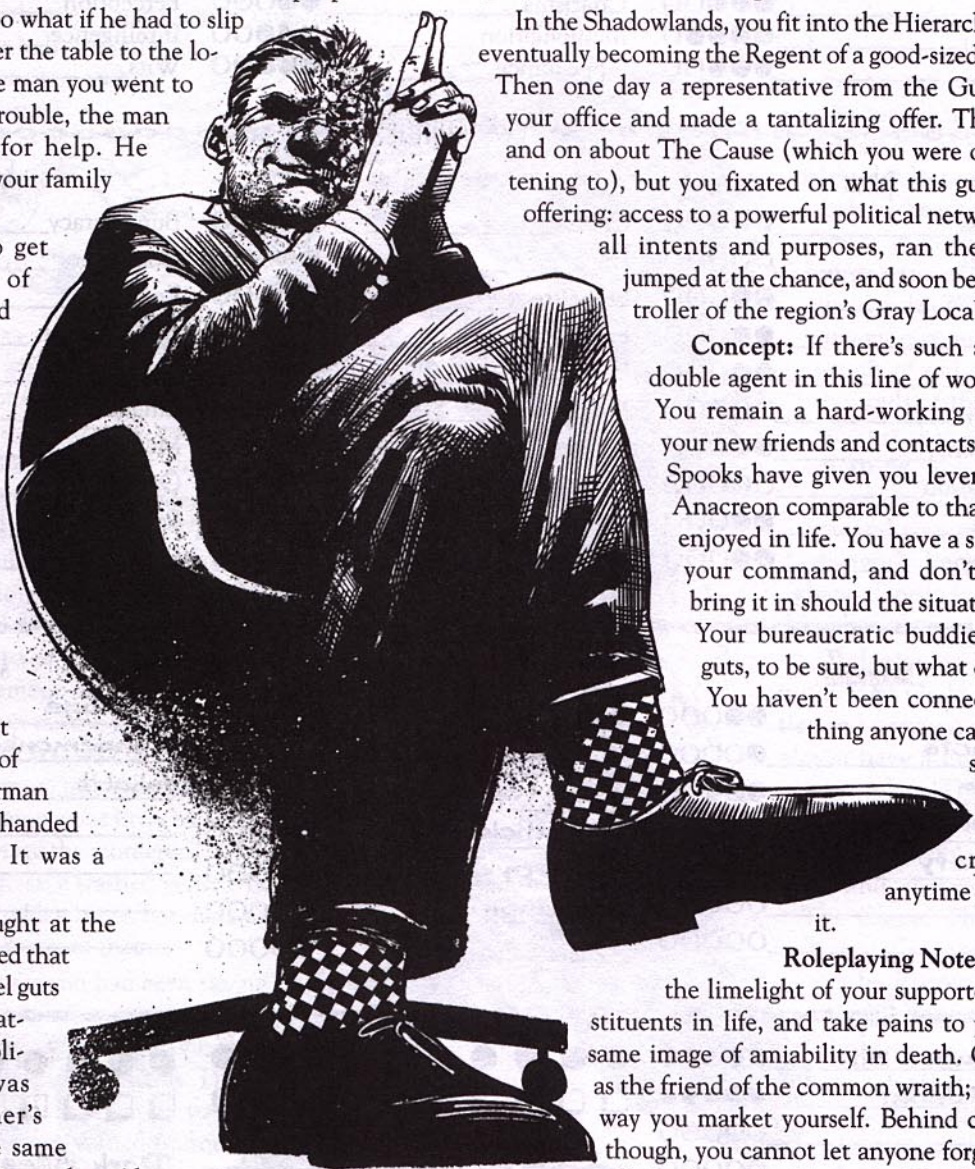
In the Shadowlands, you fit into the Hierarchy with ease, eventually becoming the Regent of a good-sized Necropolis. Then one day a representative from the Guild came to your office and made a tantalizing offer. They went on and on about The Cause (which you were only half-listening to), but you fixated on what this guy was really offering: access to a powerful political network that, for all intents and purposes, ran the show. You jumped at the chance, and soon became a Controller of the region's Gray Local.

Concept: If there's such a thing as a double agent in this line of work, you're it. You remain a hard-working Regent, but your new friends and contacts through the Spooks have given you leverage on your Anacreon comparable to that which you enjoyed in life. You have a small army at your command, and don't hesitate to bring it in should the situation warrant. Your bureaucratic buddies hate your guts, to be sure, but what can they do?

You haven't been connected to anything anyone can prove. Besides, they know that you can crush them anytime you feel like it.

Roleplaying Notes: You loved the limelight of your supporters and constituents in life, and take pains to preserve the same image of amiability in death. Come across as the friend of the common wraith; it's all in the way you market yourself. Behind closed doors, though, you cannot let anyone forget who's really in charge in this neck of the Underworld.

Relics: Lodge pin, old campaign button, key to the city (self-awarded, of course)





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: **Conniver**
Demeanor: **Bureaucrat**
Shadow: **The Perfectionist**

Life: **Politician**
Death: **Bludgeoning**
Regret: **Not Being Mayor**

Attributes

Physical	Social	Mental
Strength ●●●●○	Charisma ●●●●○	Perception ●●●●○
Dexterity ●●●●○	Manipulation ●●●●○	Intelligence ●●●●○
Stamina ●●●●○	Appearance ●●●●○	Wits ●●●●○

Abilities

Talents	Skills	Knowledges
Alertness ○○○○○	Crafts ○○○○○	Bureaucracy ●●●●○
Athletics ○○○○○	Drive ○○○○○	Computer ○○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○	Etiquette ●●○○○	Enigmas ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○	Firearms ○○○○○	Investigation ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○	Leadership ●●●●○	Law ●●○○○
Empathy ●●●●○	Meditation ●●○○○	Linguistics ○○○○○
Expression ●●●●○	Melee ○○○○○	Medicine ○○○○○
Intimidation ●●●●○	Performance ○○○○○	Occult ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○	Repair ○○○○○	Politics ●●●●○
Subterfuge ●●○○○	Stealth ○○○○○	Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds	Passions	Arcanoi
Contacts ●●●●○	Become Anacreon ○○○○○	Outrage ●●○○○
Eidolon ●●○○○	(Ambition) ●●○○○	Castigate ●●○○○
Memoriam ●●○○○	Increase Status Among ○○○○○	Molate ●○○○○
○○○○○	Quick (Egotism) ●●○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	Enlarge Power Base ○○○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	(Power) ●●○○○	○○○○○
○○○○○	○○○○○	○○○○○

Fetters	Corpus	Angst
Old Neighborhood ●●●●○	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
City Hall ●●○○○	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □	□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
○○○○○		
○○○○○		
○○○○○		
○○○○○		

Guild Marks	Pathos	Dark Passions
Bulking Up	■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■	Betray Gray Local ●●●●○
		(Betrayal) ○○○○○
		Rule with Stalinesque ●●●●○
		Brutality (Sadism) ○○○○○

Pathos Smuggler

Quote: *Let's face it. People are gonna use Pathos. And it's dangerous for amateurs to try and get it themselves. One hit of a bad batch of the stuff and they're sucking instant Spectre juice. I take all the guesswork out of it. I get them good quality at a reasonable price. It's just business.*

Prelude: You learned pretty fast in life that all people, no matter who they were, want something for nothing. It started in college, where you had a knack for spiriting exam questions out of departmental secretaries and selling them to anyone who could pay your price. When the administration finally caught you and booted you off campus, you drifted around for a couple of years hustling small caches of lifted swag on the streets. The local criminal elements were more bemused than angered at your entrepreneurial spirit, and it wasn't long until one of their representatives invited you to join the family, as it were.

You started hijacking trucks and sneaking goods across state lines, and got pretty good at it. Living in a city within shouting distance of the Canadian border, you graduated to running all sorts of shipments past the boys at the border: furs, jewelry, drugs, stolen art, electronics. Anything was fair game, and the money rolled in like water through a sluice gate. You weren't squeamish about defending your hoard, either. One day an overeager customs official caught you and a couple of the boys on the docks at 3 A.M. He didn't do anything about it, though — not after a round from your .45 blew what brains he had all over the pavement. That did it for your career, though. The feds sat on the city like a sumo wrestler, and the bosses figured you were too hot to keep around. The next border run you

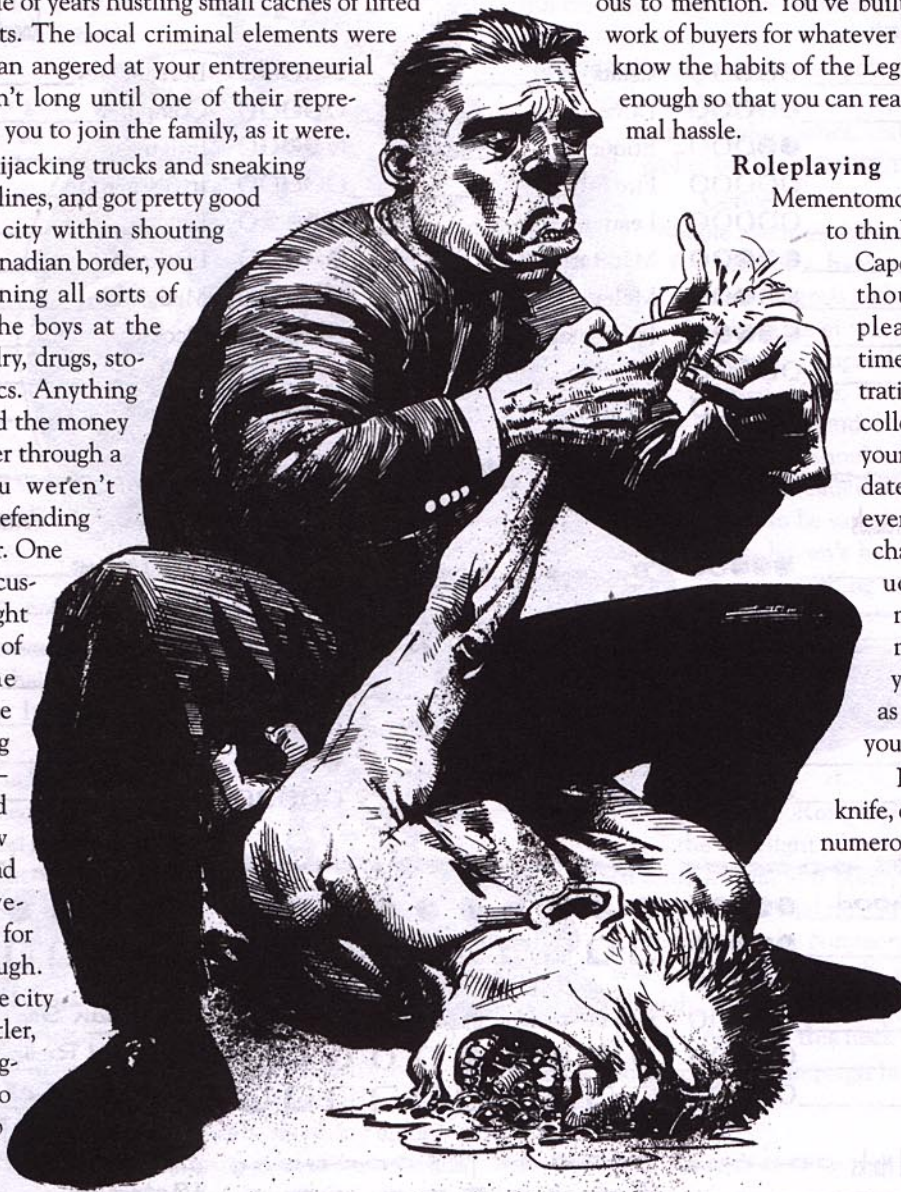
did, they wired your skiff with so much C-4 that all it left was a line in the police blotter.

The quick score was too easy for you to pass up even in death, and you latched on to a group of Mementorian Spooks practically right after you tore through your Caul. You mainly control the distribution aspect of the operation for your Local, sneaking Pathos, Artifacts, oboli and the occasional haul of souls right under the Legions' noses. The job's just as dangerous, but the adrenaline fires just as fast and furious as it did for you back in life.

Concept: You specialize in getting things from point A to point B, often through the most ingenious methods: smuggling liquid Pathos in with souls bound for Stygia with the help of crooked Reapers, ferreting relics and Artifacts around with traveling Renegade bands, and other tricks too numerous to mention. You've built up a nice-sized network of buyers for whatever you've got to sell, and know the habits of the Legion detachments well enough so that you can reach point B with minimal hassle.

Roleplaying Notes: The Mementorian Local you belong to thinks it's the last band of Capone's rumrunners. Although the conceit is pleasantly nostalgic at times, it can also be frustrating, since many of your colleagues don't go in for your slightly more up-to-date methods. Do whatever it takes to keep the channels for your product open, be it with money or more final methods. You need your customers as much as they need the Pathos you sell them.

Relics: Swiss army knife, cell phone, wallet with numerous identities





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: **Survivor**
Demeanor: **Gambler**
Shadow: **Mr. Adventure**

Life: **Smuggler**
Death: **Explosion**
Regret: **Never Making the "Big Score"**

Attributes

Physical			Social			Mental		
Strength	●●●●●		Charisma	●●●●●		Perception	●●●●●	
Dexterity	●●●●●		Manipulation	●●●●●		Intelligence	●●●●●	
Stamina	●●●●●		Appearance	●●●●●		Wits	●●●●●	

Abilities

Talents			Skills			Knowledges		
Alertness	●●●●●		Crafts	○○○○○		Bureaucracy	○○○○○	
Athletics	○○○○○		Drive	●●●●●		Computer	●●●●●	
Awareness	●●●●●		Etiquette	○○○○○		Enigmas	○○○○○	
Brawl	●●●●●		Firearms	●●●●●		Investigation	○○○○○	
Dodge	●●●●●		Leadership	○○○○○		Law	●●●●●	
Empathy	○○○○○		Meditation	○○○○○		Linguistics	●●●●●	
Expression	○○○○○		Melee	●●●●●		Medicine	○○○○○	
Intimidation	○○○○○		Performance	○○○○○		Occult	○○○○○	
Streetwise	●●●●●		Repair	●●●●●		Politics	○○○○○	
Subterfuge	●●●●●		Stealth	●●●●●		Science	●●●●●	

Advantages

Backgrounds			Passions			Arcanoi		
Allies	●●●●●		Pull off the "Big Score"	○○○○○		Outrage	●●●●●	
Contacts	●●●●●		(Greed)	●●●●●		Lifeweb	●●●●●	
Eidolon	●●●●●		Get Back At Those Who	○○○○○			○○○○○	
Notoriety	●●●●●		Hit You (Revenge)	●●●●●			○○○○○	
	○○○○○		Stay Loyal To Guild	○○○○○			○○○○○	
	○○○○○		(Loyalty)	●●●●●			○○○○○	
	○○○○○			○○○○○			○○○○○	

Fetters			Corpus			Angst		
Harbor Where you	●●●●●		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●			● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●		
Died	○○○○○		□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □			□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □		
Safe House	●●●●●							
First 45 you owned	●●●●●							
	○○○○○		● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○					
	○○○○○		□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □					

Guild Marks			Pathos			Dark Passions		
Bulking Up			■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □ □ □			Give bad Pathos to	○○○○○	
						Clients (Hate)	●●●●●	
						Turn In Local To	○○○○○	
						Hierarchy (Treachery)	●●●●●	

Harrowsmith Interrogator

Quote: *One last chance, pal. Give me the name of the guy you're working for and I'll let you go. Don't make me have to do this....*

Prelude: You were orphaned very young and bounced around the state foster care system. Going from one abusive home to another, you finally became unmanageable. The system put you in a state-run orphanage, but by then it was too late. One night you sneaked out of bed and through the darkened halls to the director's office, where you surprised him and his secretary engaged in a little after-hours recreation. Neither of them were afraid when you walked in, only embarrassed, but that changed when they saw you had a knife liberated from the kitchen.

You slit her throat quickly. He was not so lucky. You cut him slowly, painfully, his screams echoing through the building like a dying animal. You pulled his spent, hacked body over that of his dead secretary and set the place on fire. The office went up in flames, and soon after that the entire orphanage. You watched from across the street and saw a career opening up before you.

You drifted from there into a gang of toughs and soon became feared on the street — a rep as a “fixer” can be a good thing to have. Rival gang members who crossed your team soon found themselves visited by you and your portable horror show. After you got hold of them, your victims would have confessed to *anything* just to stop the agony. One day, you bit off more than you could chew, and paid a visit to the leader of a rival gang. Oh, there wasn't much left of your “subject” when you were done, but his troops decided they were going to take you down in revenge. You laughed off the threat at first, but it's hard to laugh off half a clip from a Tec-9 in the face.

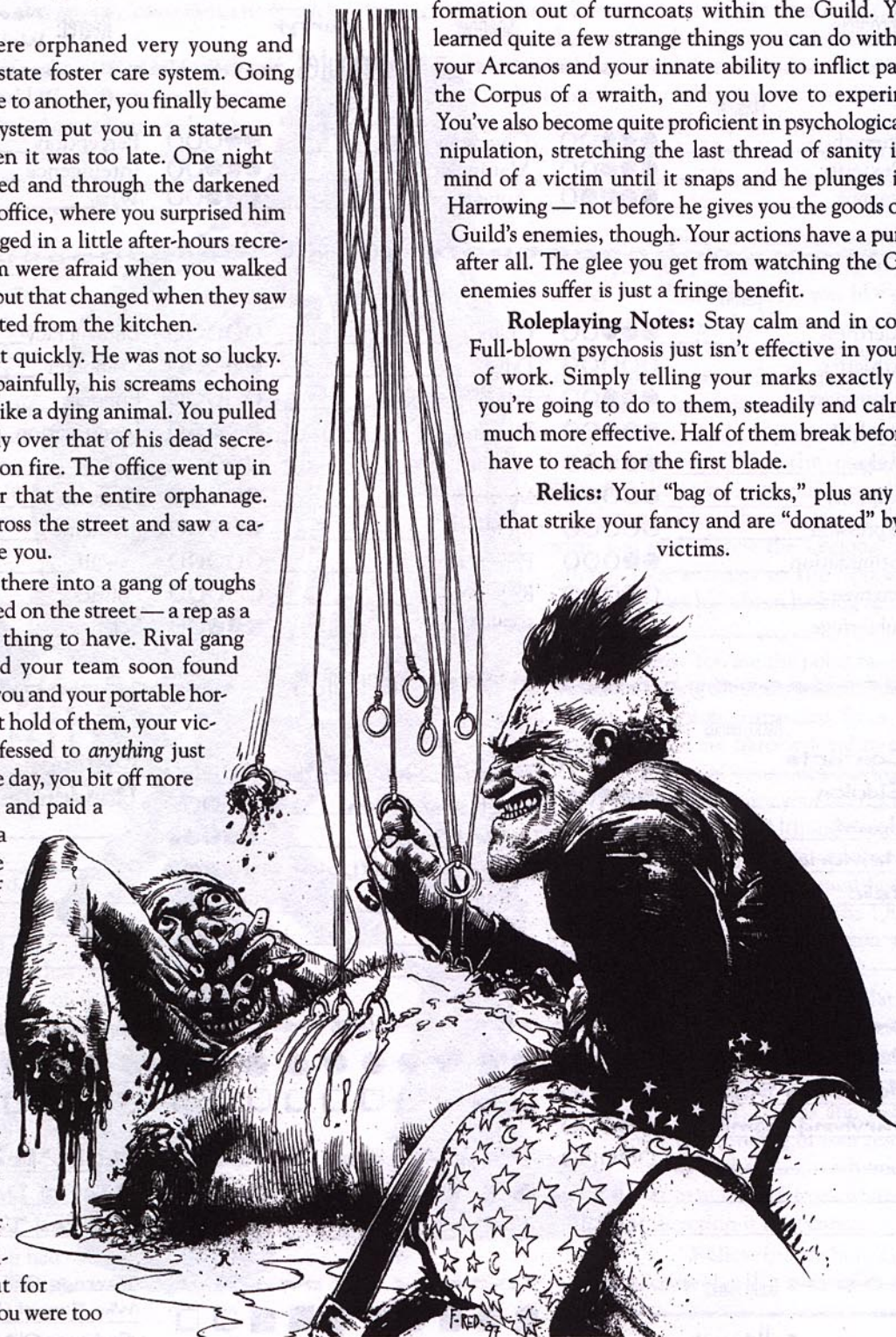
The Council of Inquisitors, while always on the lookout for new talent, thought you were too

volatile even for them. The Bedlameers thought you were too vulgar for their tastes. You disappeared from sight, but soon hooked up with a strike force of Harrowsmiths. You were perfectly willing to devote yourself to The Cause if doing so let you continue the experiments you perfected in life.

Concept: You specialize in hunting down and prying information out of turncoats within the Guild. You've learned quite a few strange things you can do with both your Arcanos and your innate ability to inflict pain on the Corpus of a wraith, and you love to experiment. You've also become quite proficient in psychological manipulation, stretching the last thread of sanity in the mind of a victim until it snaps and he plunges into a Harrowing — not before he gives you the goods on the Guild's enemies, though. Your actions have a purpose, after all. The glee you get from watching the Guild's enemies suffer is just a fringe benefit.

Roleplaying Notes: Stay calm and in control. Full-blown psychosis just isn't effective in your line of work. Simply telling your marks exactly what you're going to do to them, steadily and calmly, is much more effective. Half of them break before you have to reach for the first blade.

Relics: Your “bag of tricks,” plus any relics that strike your fancy and are “donated” by your victims.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: **Driven**
Demeanor: **Bravo**
Shadow: **The Rager**

Life: **Gang Member**
Death: **Drive By**
Regret: **Never having
Childhood**

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●●●○
Dexterity ●●●●○
Stamina ●●●●○

Social

Charisma ●●●●○
Manipulation ●●●●○
Appearance ●●●●○

Mental

Perception ●●●●○
Intelligence ●●●●○
Wits ●●●●○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●●○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ●●○○○
Intimidation ●●○○○
Streetwise ●●○○○
Subterfuge ●●○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ●●●○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●●○○○
Melee ●●○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ●○○○○

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ●●○○○
Occult ●●○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Science ●●○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Contacts ●●○○○
Haunt ●●○○○
Mentor ●●○○○
Notoriety ●○○○○
Status ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

Torture Foster ●●●●○
Home officials ○○○○○
(Revenge) ○○○○○
Learn New Talents ○○○○○
(Curiosity) ●●●○○
Eke Out "Normal" ○○○○○
Existence (Hope) ●●○○○

Arcanoi

Outrage ●●●●○
Pandemonium ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Fetters

Gang Hideout ●●●●○
Former Site of ○○○○○
Foster Home ●●●●○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Angst

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Thorns
Aura of Corruption
Infamy
Tainted Relic

Guild Marks

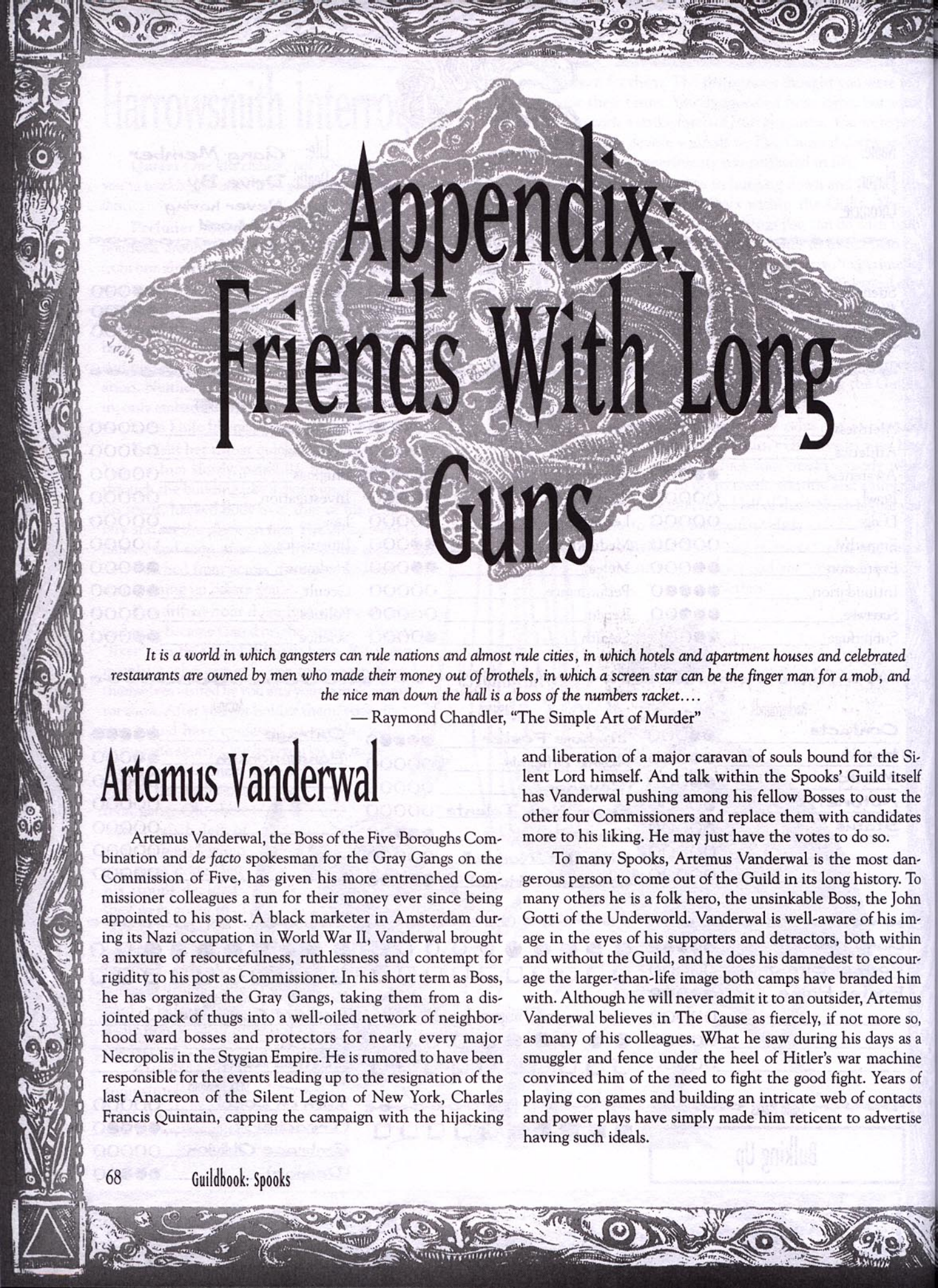
Bulking Up

Pathos

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □ □ □

Dark Passions

Turn on Local ○○○○○
(Treachery) ●●●●○
Embrace Oblivion ○○○○○
(Despair) ●●●●○



Appendix: Friends With Long Guns

It is a world in which gangsters can rule nations and almost rule cities, in which hotels and apartment houses and celebrated restaurants are owned by men who made their money out of brothels, in which a screen star can be the finger man for a mob, and the nice man down the hall is a boss of the numbers racket....

—Raymond Chandler, "The Simple Art of Murder"

Artemus Vanderwal

Artemus Vanderwal, the Boss of the Five Boroughs Combination and *de facto* spokesman for the Gray Gangs on the Commission of Five, has given his more entrenched Commissioner colleagues a run for their money ever since being appointed to his post. A black marketer in Amsterdam during its Nazi occupation in World War II, Vanderwal brought a mixture of resourcefulness, ruthlessness and contempt for rigidity to his post as Commissioner. In his short term as Boss, he has organized the Gray Gangs, taking them from a disjointed pack of thugs into a well-oiled network of neighborhood ward bosses and protectors for nearly every major Necropolis in the Stygian Empire. He is rumored to have been responsible for the events leading up to the resignation of the last Anacreon of the Silent Legion of New York, Charles Francis Quintain, capping the campaign with the hijacking

and liberation of a major caravan of souls bound for the Silent Lord himself. And talk within the Spooks' Guild itself has Vanderwal pushing among his fellow Bosses to oust the other four Commissioners and replace them with candidates more to his liking. He may just have the votes to do so.

To many Spooks, Artemus Vanderwal is the most dangerous person to come out of the Guild in its long history. To many others he is a folk hero, the unsinkable Boss, the John Gotti of the Underworld. Vanderwal is well-aware of his image in the eyes of his supporters and detractors, both within and without the Guild, and he does his damndest to encourage the larger-than-life image both camps have branded him with. Although he will never admit it to an outsider, Artemus Vanderwal believes in The Cause as fiercely, if not more so, as many of his colleagues. What he saw during his days as a smuggler and fence under the heel of Hitler's war machine convinced him of the need to fight the good fight. Years of playing con games and building an intricate web of contacts and power plays have simply made him reticent to advertise having such ideals.



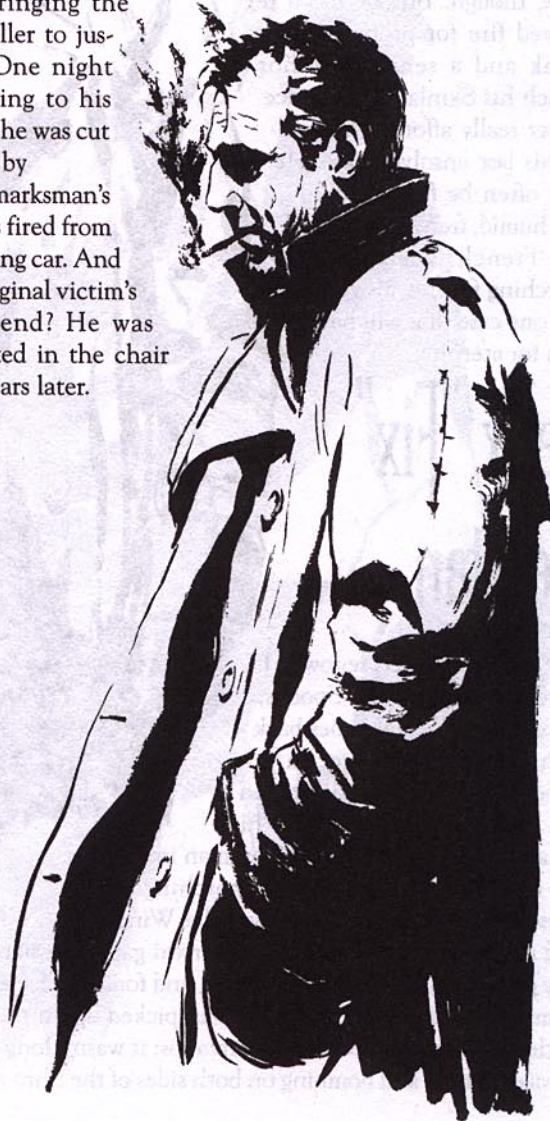
Roger Briscoe

You'd have to have been pretty desperate to go to Roger Briscoe. A private investigator from New Orleans, Briscoe specialized in divorce cases back in his breathing days. His work had him perched on countless fire escapes and peering through innumerable keyholes to dig up the dirt on suspect spouses. His milieu was the gutters and back alleys of the city, and his ethics mirrored those with whom he regularly consorted: the whores, dealers, pimps and thugs. He was cheap, weasely and often half-drunk on the job — in short, a mess.

At least he was, until the day a young white coed from Tulane was found raped and murdered on the outskirts of the campus. The dead girl's boyfriend, a young black man, was the last to see her alive, and eventually wound up being charged with the crime. Everyone, from the press to the DA's office to churches and the mayor, wanted the maximum pen-

alty: death. His lawyer, needing evidence to clear him, gave the case to his old college roommate Briscoe, half out of pity and half out of desperation.

Briscoe took the case and proceeded with his usual meandering methods, until something extraordinary happened — he began to believe the suspect was innocent. Suddenly Briscoe was a man transformed, retracing the dead girl's steps that night, re-interviewing possible witnesses, combing over forensic reports. For his pains, Briscoe got foul looks and closed mouths every step of the way. His agency's answering machine filled with crank calls and death threats. Still Briscoe persevered, calling in whatever small favors he had left to solve the case. He accused the police and the DA's office of railroading a black man into the gas chamber. He made public denouncements of the mayor. He ignored subpoena orders from judges who wanted to see what he had, calling them partners in the unfolding travesty. Roger Briscoe dared the entire world to stop him from proving his client innocent and bringing the real killer to justice. One night returning to his office, he was cut down by three marksman's bullets fired from a moving car. And the original victim's boyfriend? He was executed in the chair two years later.



Roger Briscoe reached the Shadowlands flummoxed by his failure to prove the young man innocent. He was Reaped by a gang of Renegades, who slapped him in chains, but these slavers found their caravan waylaid on an insignificant Byway by a group of Gray Gangsters. Picking over the prisoners, the Spooks pulled Briscoe from the chain gang and invited him to join them. Puttering around with the group of Defenders who rescued him from the coffers of Stygia, Briscoe eventually joined up with the Lifeliners.

Roger Briscoe has never really been much of a team player. He rose quickly to the rank of Armadar for the sole purpose of building an independent client base. Briscoe holds court in his old office building on Bourbon Street in the New Orleans Necropolis. He is now a Lifeliner, and hires himself out to lost and desperate souls in much the same fashion as he did in life. There's a difference now, though. Briscoe has a renewed fire for protecting the weak and a sense of honor which his Skinlands existence never really afforded him until his last unsolved case. He can often be found walking the humid, frenetic streets of the French Quarter, still searching for the answers to the one case that will haunt him for eternity.

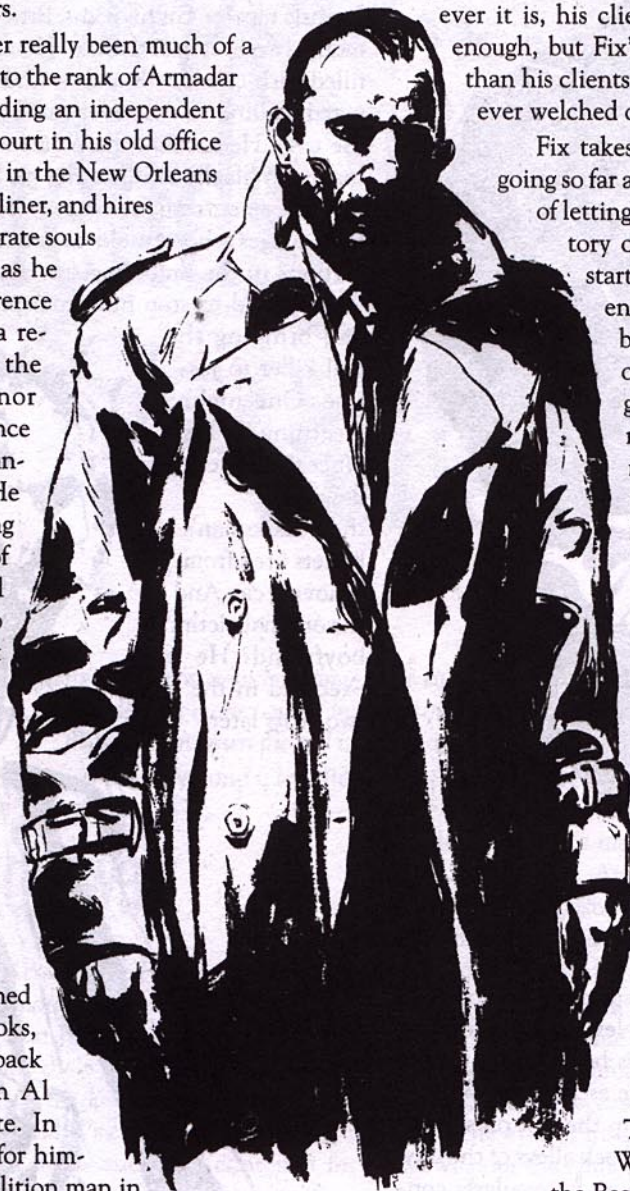
Felix "Fix" Hessian

The most widely renowned mercenary among the Spooks, Felix Hessian's career goes back to his days as a slugger in Al Capone's Chicago syndicate. In life, Hessian made a name for himself as an arsonist and demolition man in the early days of Prohibition, torching warehouses and wiring bombs all over the Windy City. When he died at the hands of a hitter from a rival gang, Hessian naturally gravitated to the Spooks' Guild, and found a place with a Mementorian Local. Felix Hessian picked up on the more subtle operations of Spooks' pet Arcanos; it wasn't long before he was torching and bombing on both sides of the Shroud with

the same energy he had once exhibited for Scarface Capone himself.

Known universally as Fix, Hessian is considered to be the Guild's top torch man. He is a Mementorian, active in the distribution of Pathos to wraiths, and nominally employed by Artemus Vanderwal. Fix, however, is his own man. He offers his services to any Controller or Boss who is willing to pay his unique price: One day, Fix will come and ask for a favor, and whatever it is, his client must do it for him. It seems simple enough, but Fix's favors often carry a much larger price than his clients ever expected. Yet, curiously, no one has ever welched on him.

Fix takes a good deal of pride in his work, even going so far as to sign it on occasion. He is never afraid of letting everyone know who blew up that old factory on the outskirts of the Necropolis, who started the fire in that Skinlands office that enabled it to reconstitute as a relic, or who barrow-bombed the Anacreon's relic limousine, complete with Anacreon. No Legionnaire who has seen a massive pile of rubble spewing black fire and prominently marked with the letters F-I-X ever forgets who the perpetrator was. That's exactly how Fix likes it.



Mickey "the Curse" Doyle

It seems incredible, but there was a time when it was great to be a Red Sox fan. Back around the turn of the century, before the Yankees became the team, the Red Sox were perennial powerhouses in the American League. Cy Young, the greatest pitcher in the game, was the ace of the Red Sox pitching staff for most of the first decade of the 1900s. Tris Speaker led the Fenway nine to three World Series titles during the 19-teens. And

the Beantowners had a phenomenal pitcher and slugger in a young man from Baltimore named George Herman Ruth — the Babe.

Mickey Doyle was a sensational young catcher from western Massachusetts whose one dream was to catch Babe Ruth. His dream became a reality when the Red Sox signed the tough little Irishman at the end of the 1919 season, promising him that when the Babe took the mound on Opening Day, 1920, Mickey Doyle would be behind the plate.

It never happened. Babe Ruth was traded to the hated New York Yankees in the off-season, and Mickey Doyle was crushed. Like every other Red Sox fan that winter, he couldn't believe it. Trade the Babe? How was that possible?

Unlike most of the fans, however, Mickey Doyle could talk to the owner, Harry Frazee. A few days after the trade, Mickey went to see Frazee, demanding to know why he had traded the Red Sox's star player. Doyle had signed a contract hoping to play with the Babe, and with that in mind he demanded to be traded to New York, to follow his idol. Doyle was rebuffed by the owner, who said that he was a member of the Red Sox whether he liked it or not, and if he knew what was good for him he'd show up to spring training and like it.

Mickey was crushed. He stood there and said that he'd never play for an owner as stupid as Frazee. He said he'd rather die than put on a Red Sox uniform after the trade of the Babe. And he swore that if he had anything to do with it, the Red Sox would never win another World Series again.

Ever.

Mickey Doyle stormed out of the building — and straight into the path of an oncoming streetcar. He was killed instantly, crushed under the trolley's wheels.

When a passing squad of Shroudbreakers found Mickey Doyle, he refused to leave the confines of Fenway Park. With a collective shrug and grin, the squad found a use for Mickey as a sentinel, setting him up to watch this section of the Shroud in the middle of the Boston Necropolis. Mickey pledged himself to watch over Fenway and its environs. His mostly disinterested Armadar let him. And Mickey watched, and waited, at the bandbox of a park that became his one and only Fetter.

In his entire tenure at Fenway, Mickey Doyle has crossed the Shroud a total of four times:

In the 1946 World Series, he took hold of the baseball from a shortstop named Pesky, who was trying to throw out a Cardinal runner breaking for home in the ninth inning. The throw came too late. The run scored. The Red Sox lost.

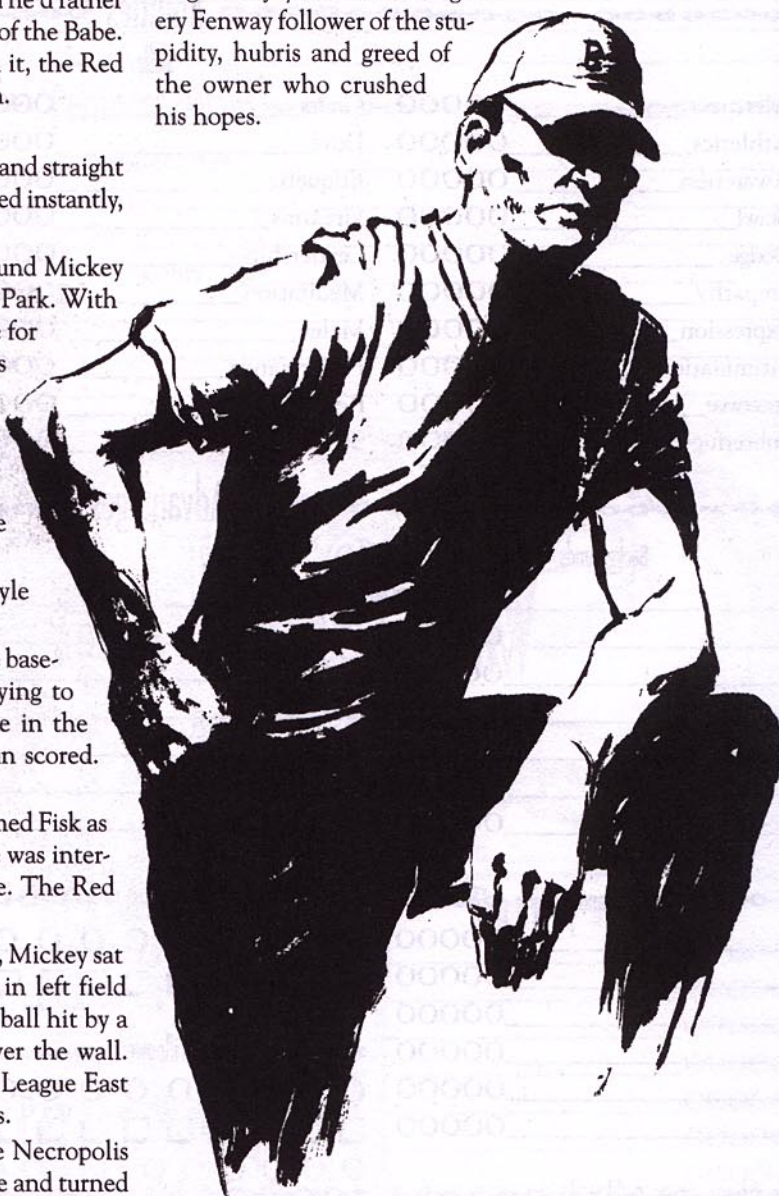
In 1975, he stood in the way of a catcher named Fisk as he tried to catch a pop-up. The catcher swore he was interfered with, but the umpire called the runner safe. The Red Sox lost.

In 1978, on the last day of the regular season, Mickey sat atop the Green Monster, the 37-foot-high wall in left field that is a signature of Fenway Park, and helped a ball hit by a scrawny Yankee shortstop named Dent carry over the wall. The Yankees won the game, and the American League East as well. The Red Sox never made it to the Series.

And in 1986, Mickey Doyle traveled to the Necropolis of New York, where he stood on the first-base line and turned an easy out for a fielder named Buckner into one of the most unforgettable moments in World Series history. The ball

skipped through his legs. The run scored. And again, the Red Sox lost the Series.

His fellow Defenders have given Mickey Doyle an appropriate nickname. They call him the Curse. For close to eight decades, Mickey Doyle has patrolled the streets around one of baseball's oldest parks. As he checks for Renegades in the clubs along Lansdowne Street, watches the vacant lots at the end of Yawkey Way for impending signs of a Nihil opening and tangles with the odd Legionnaire on Brookline Avenue, Curse Doyle feeds off the despair and frustration of four generations of Red Sox fans, a despair he creates. He wears his old Red Sox uniform, which never saw a single game. But Mickey Doyle remains a true baseball fan, a fan whose dream was permanently deferred. And sadly, he can find no greater joy than reminding every Fenway follower of the stupidity, hubris and greed of the owner who crushed his hopes.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Shadow:

Life:
Death:
Regret:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●○○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○

Social

Charisma ●○○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○
Appearance ●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○
Wits ●○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arcanoi

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
○○○○○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Armadar

Implements of Destruction

Guild Marks

Bulking Up

Pathos

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □



History
Life

Death

Pertinent Details

Age	Apparent Age	Gender
Date of Birth	R.I.P.	Height
Hair	Eyes	Weight
Race	Nationality	
Garb		
Other Distinguishing Features		

SHADOW

Psyche:
Shadowguide Player:

Archetype:

Thorns

Angst

Dark Passions

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Psyche Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○

	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○
	○○○○○



Expanded Background

Allies

Spectrum

Eidolon

Guild Status

Contacts

Status

Memoriam

Mentor

Notoriety

Wealth

Artifacts

Relics

How You Fit in with the Organization

Guild Secrets Known



Merits & Flaws

Type

Cost

Flaw

Type

Bonus

Fetters

Experience

Total:

Total Spent On:

Ancient/New Arts Known

Usual Haunts

Guild Standing & Contacts

Standing

Rank

Guild Contacts

Apprenticed to:

Combat

[illegible]

Brawling Table

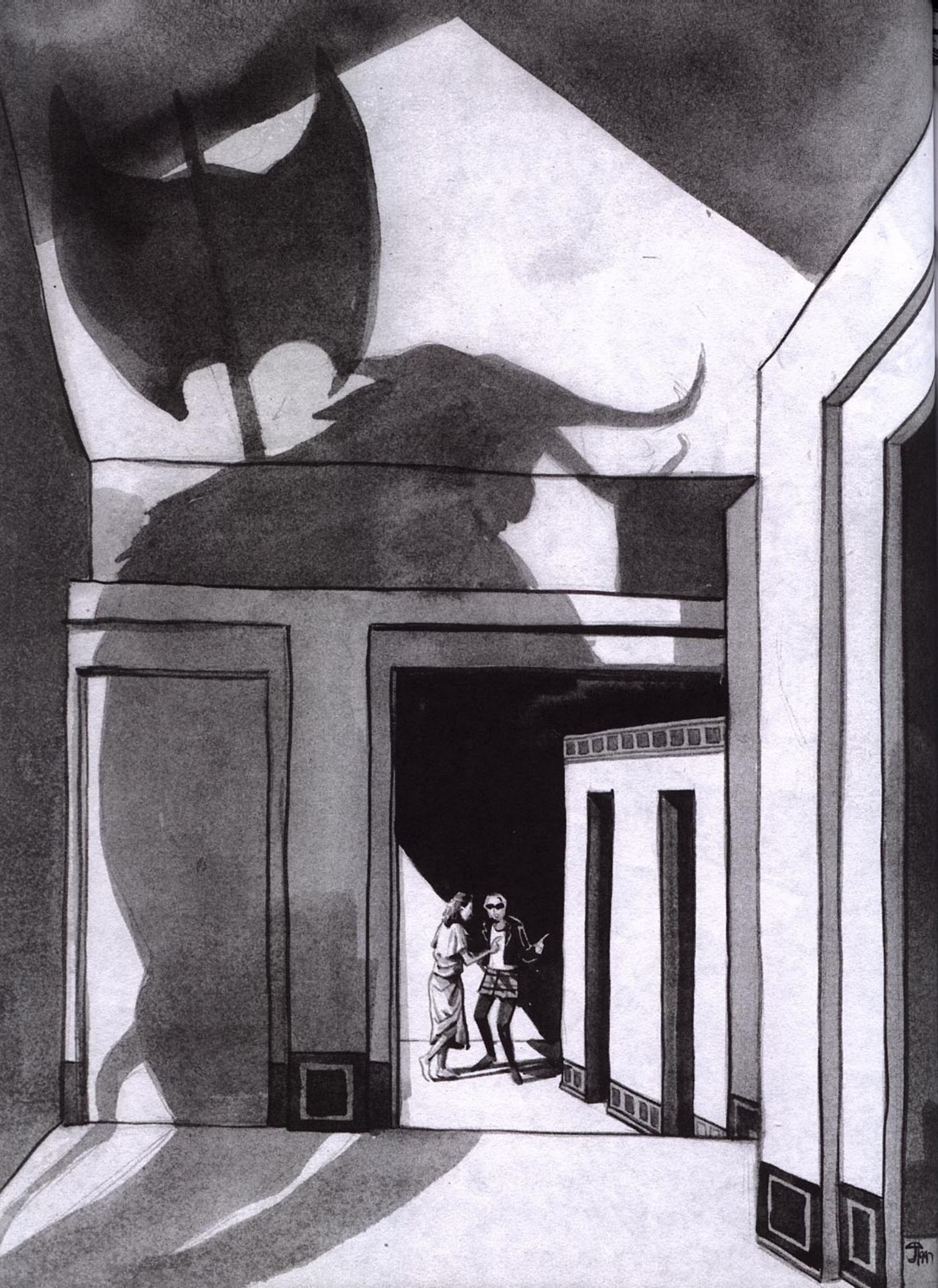
Maneuver	Accuracy	Damage
Bite	5	Strength +1
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Claw	6	Strength +2
Kick	7	Strength +1
Body slam	7	Special; see Options


Armor:

See those sad women who had left their needle,
shuttle, and spindle to become diviners;
they cast their spells with herbs and effigies.
— Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno*, Canto XX









Ghost Story: A Road of Steel and Souls

Part VIII

Chronicle of a Life Foretold



Octavia walked swiftly into the marbled bowels of the Temple, her tentacled mask tucked under one arm. She strode far too quickly, nearly running, but then, she could not afford to tarry. Her soft footfalls echoed down the corridors, and her steps took sharp and tangled turns in directions

the eye had trouble following.

She swung open the heavy doors with a fat hand, bursting into the hidden antechamber to join the flurry of activity. The doors had not even shut behind her before she announced, "As it was said, the Monitors have been 'Fixed.'"

"As it was said, so it has been." The chorus of voices responded instinctively.

Finnegan tapped his fingers in quick staccato on his podium and erased the chalkboard with a smear of his sleeve. He jotted down new white numbers on gray slate. "Fixed odds — my favorite! Closing numbers on 30-to-1, outside bets at 2-to-12, our favor. Ante up, dearies, the game plays on."

A gaggle of runners halted their tasks and rushed the bookie with small purses of oboli. The Gambler sank behind a sea of togas, batik wraps, stained robes and leather jackets, each wraith clamoring to make his bid. Octavia eyed her own wager on the board, and mentally counted the return off of her hiring fee from the Sandman Guildmaster. Considering her insider information, it had been a wise investment overall.

"Very good." The flat tone came from the orchestrator of the mayhem, a willowy Delphic priestess with an aura of command. She stopped placing markers on the wall map stretched before her and addressed no one in particular, "Tell Perci to confirm his Sighting. Let the Deathlords have their answer, and steer them into the Labyrinth with the others." An anonymous figure detached from the wall and fled out the door with a flicker of hems. The line of similar servants inched forward by one place and quietly stood, ready for any command. "Your calculations were correct, as usual, Finnegan. Does your Dealer worry about his continued seat on the Pantheon with you around?"

The Irishman shrugged wide shoulders amidst the dying commotion, "What he doesn't know, doesn't hurt me." The priestess smiled momentarily in response.



"Deidre?" the 28th Pythian hesitantly interrupted her superior. "Requests are flooding the system, the Lemures don't know what to do. We cannot keep Oracles from reporting visions to their clients without pre-emptive screening. Too many Guilds and independents have sought services since the last Guild meeting. To dismiss so many petitioners would be inappropriate and highly suspect. Even the Hierarchy's agents wait at our doors, and they are not known for their patience."

Deidre, fourth Pythian, looked unconcerned as she traced more lines of the Web. "You played them well, Octavia. 'The Guildmasters' have kicked over an anthill, and now they try to round up the ants. They are too afraid to make any decisive action before seeking our advice."

"But aren't we all swept up in the chaos as well?" Octavia sighed, exasperated. "Webs within webs — I think I have lost track of the original strand."

Her superior smiled a gentle condolence and set down her stylus with broken-boned grace. "Then you need to be reminded, that is all." She cast an eye behind her. "Can you hold this together for me, Finnegan? Come, Octavia. Walk with me."

"Hyklot—," the Pythian spoke while walking through the threshold. She stopped at the lip of pooling plasm and eyed the Augur. "Are we disturbing you?"

"One moment." The wrinkled man brushed his oily locks away from his face with the back of his hand, and continued to squint into the Corpus of the *Enfant* sprawled on his table. Its eyes were unfocused and still milky with the Caul. As for Hyklot, fresh plasm soaked his arms up to the elbows; he could not have been at this augury for long. His hands worked, still sorting through the fragile wraith, making wet, squelching sounds. After a few minutes, Hyklot wheezed a raspy sigh and reached for his plastic bookmark, sticking it swiftly into place. "Now, then, how many I help you?"

Octavia had trouble masking her disgust. The Augur wore his loose skin like the folds of her robes, and his grimy kohl facial was a mockery of Mesopotamian beauty. His wet hair and arms contrasted with his paper-dry face and feet; the whole image of the Augur was a complete divergence of Delphic aesthetics. The two Oracular groups respected one another, but did not enjoy sharing company. To avert her eyes, Octavia glanced at her companion. If Deidre felt any discomfort, she hid it well.

"Are you still tracking him?" Deidre inquired.

His black-lined lids drooped over tired eyes, and he nodded slightly, "The one we believe to be him, yes." Hyklot's voice grated like the wind through rusty hinges, slipping out of the gap running through the neck of his Corpus. He gestured with a dripping hand to the dissected thing before him. "I am reading now of his failing health, his struggle with the *Health Care System*," he pronounced the words carefully. "Hunh, a misnomer if ever I heard one. He ages swiftly. We do not have long left, if this is the one, to complete our design."

If this is the one...! Octavia heard her Shadow mumble.

"Of course this is the one," Deidre insisted with an uncharacteristic snap. "All the strands point to him. This is Charon's soul, alive in the Skinlands, and we must bring him home."

"Of course, of course," the drained, de-mummified man replied placatingly. "All eyes have seen Charon beyond the Final Descent.... Gives one hope of return someday."

"Then Charon is alive." Deidre seemed pleased to hear her subordinate phrase this as a statement rather than a question.

"Did I *address* you?" Hyklot hissed. He dipped his hand into the body and closed upon something, twisting his thin wrist as if plucking a ripe fruit. He held out a patch of skin from the small of the *Enfant's* back and massaged it between sensitive fingers as if reading Braille. "Ignorant *Kassandra*, it is Written that Charon — did not fall — through the Temple... and into the Labyrinth."

He paced the small altar as his gasps became quicker, punctuating faster thoughts. "That which was... Chosen — *lifted* — through the Shroud. That which was... sloughed... sank into... darkness. To join — to join —," Black eyes framed in kohl widened, clawed thumbs piercing the membrane through. "The Betrayer!"

Hyklot threw gobbets of mutilated Corpus against the wall, and dove upon the *Enfant's* midsection with rabid energy. He splashed fistfuls of plasm out of the body, flicking his fingers as if dispelling phantoms from his eyes, and sprayed droplets all over the room. "It is there! That which was allied by the Betrayer — they both seek *Gorool*! They plan to destroy Charon's Quickened soul! Must find it — in here. The answer lies... within the map. The Web, it—"

Under the headband, his plucked brow furrowed, knotted. "It...." His fingers clenched reflexively and held. A momentary silence was broken with a snarl and two fistfuls of torn muscle. "Lost it! Lost the Sight! Who has betrayed the Lady's Chosen One? Must See it, know it...*You*!" he growled and gripped Octavia's arm with surprising strength, lifting her bodily off the littered floor. "You are mine to map!"

Deidre spoke with quiet conviction, "I cannot permit it, Hyklot. Drop her."

The next moment passed with aching slowness — Octavia's eyes wild and her voice making small sounds in her throat, Hyklot's hand clenched rhythmically on his victim's upper arm as if pumping the loose plasm within, and Deidre glaring, arms crossed, looking mildly bored with the Augur's failure to immediately comply. Hyklot searched the Pythian's face for reprieve, but found none.

Slowly, he acquiesced. Octavia collapsed to the floor, staining her robes with gritty bits of Corpus and cradling her arm to her chest. Slowly she stood and backed away from the seething Augur, glaring.

Hyklot's expression softened to one of pitiable loss, one which could only be comprehended by those who touch Fate and then feel it slip away despite all attempts to keep it, hold it, just for a moment longer. He nearly wept, but even that seemed to cost too much. "We must gather him, Deidre. Before they find him and feed him to the Betrayer, Reap him on their grain...."

"Have you Seen this?"

He slackened and spread his hands of gore and grime in apology, "No."

Octavia could not contain her words any longer, "You think that you can See past the likes of *Gorool*? That you alone are the one to scry the reborn soul as if of a common wraith? Only Charon has done this, and only the Lady could Weave his Fate! You are blind, Ventricle, with your own need for personal glory!"

The former prince slit his eyes like a godling cat, the blackened orbs burning. "Did you speak, *infidel*?" Hyklot snatched the grip of his weapon which released from the wood with a bell-like 'ping.' "Listen: You sit in the playbox because we place you there with a script and a face. The moment your weakness betrays your Sight, I will be there to trim your station!"

His blade flashed like a bleak crescent moon and severed the Caulead head in one smooth motion. The sightless face bounced on the floor and came rolling to rest at their feet. On the altar, a softly roaring vacuum of colorless light unzipped and sucked the *Enfant's* headless Corpus into the void. As the loose limbs slipped over the edge, the rushing sound cut short, and the Nihil sealed itself up as if it had never been.

With deliberate care, Hyklot bent down and lifted the head in a fistful of hair. His voice slithered past lost teeth, "No offense intended, Fourth Pythian."

"None taken, Fourth Augur." And she pushed her shaking underling out the door.





"So... no one must know Charon's soul lives on." Octavia had recovered gradually on the walk through the sculpture gardens. "Does anyone suspect?"

"Suspect? Naturally. They all suspect." Deidre steepled her hands at her waist, wrists dangling at unnatural angles. "None shall know the truth, however, until he has returned and been Reaped by our emissaries."

A Doomsayer, walking briskly with steadfast purpose, marched up to the two conversants. His bass voice shook the stone underfoot, "Doom Is Upon Us All."

"Of course it is." Stony-faced indifference met Deidre's comment. Obliging, she added, "We will attend to our Pardoners at once." He nodded, and continued on his way. Deidre and Octavia watched him leave. In the distant grounds, a heavy figure bent forward and began pursuit.

"And all of this about the Labyrinth and Gorool — nothing but a ruse?"

The scream that punctuated Octavia's sentence ended in a high-pitched shriek.

The thin Delphic permitted herself laughter, the sound strained and worn through the stress of constantly manipulating the Web. One would not have suspected the Doomsayer capable of such an octave. "Let the Pardoners go into the Labyrinth full of regrets, let the Spooks wait in the shadows to steal their hard-earned treasures, let them all scurry about like the insects they are! We must keep their focus scattered. We must call him back to us."

He'll slip through your fingers; you can't cauterize every strand of the Web, a voice whispered behind Deidre's ears. *You have already failed.* She froze, pressing her fingertips to her temples; the tension must be draining her Eidolon. But she remained in control — of this situation, and herself.

"None of those tales are untrue, my dear. There is certainly plenty to be found in the Labyrinth, and much to be learned through seeking Gorool, but it's not what the others might expect. The Weaver has been tracing it all; we will learn it by and by." Her expression changed again as she saw a blur of motion flicker behind the columns. The sentry had earned his oboli and then some. "The challenge is to ensure Charon returns to us and does not fly beyond us in Death."

"But —," Octavia sputtered over the thoughts, "you mean to keep him from Transcendence? But we can't possibly! That goes against the Way for all souls! The Lady of Fate—"

"The Lady of Fate chose Charon for wraiths, not for Transcendence. His time has not yet come. He is needed here, above all else. His own Shadow was the downfall of his First Reign, as we and the Pardoners and the Monitors knew, and without our guidance it shall end his second as well. The Deathlords are an unfortunate obstacle that guarantees the ruin of all that he's built. They are destroying the only chance we have of recovering Charon in their arrogance by publicly denying the Guilds. Is it not ironic that it as they follow

Charon's decree, he brings about his own demise? Thus it is appropriate that we break his remaining law, the *Dictum Mortuum*, to save him." She sighed and touched a statue, listening for something Octavia could not hear. "We are at each others' throats. Selena's Fated scripture read there could be no return without the Guilds. All of the Guilds, even the forgotten ones, must be aligned for Charon to return."

"But this was Scripted years ago," Octavia murmured. "Why ever would he not have listened to the words of the Grand High Oracle?"

"He would never listen, but he had to be told. *That* is the Way: for Charon to do just what he feels must be done, but to be armed with the knowledge of what is right."

And you? Are you certain you know what is right? You thought so in the E.R., too, back in '76. Too bad they don't give consolation prizes for nice tries, dearie. I know you better.

In the ensuing silence, Octavia hesitated before speaking her next thought, battered as it was on rumor. "Was that the case during the Breaking?"

Deidre smiled off her Shadow. "That was *exactly* the case during the Breaking, a show staged by the Lady of Fate herself. Neither Selena nor Charon knew that they were playing their parts until it had ended. Selena went to counsel Charon, and he listened — he truly *heard*, then suddenly refused to believe. He actually roared against the Grand High Oracle! In retrospect, it's amusing. How could they have been so blind? But once the Final Descent played out its ovation, the visions returned, reaffirming his place in the Underworld. He belongs here."

"What guarantee is there that he will not go to peaceful rest?"

"There are no guarantees. Now, we interfere. Batiste assures the Dealer he has his own Spooks molesting Charon's mortal shell, and Sandman contracts aren't that hard to purchase." She cast a meaningful eye to her audience who felt appropriately uncomfortable. "The Haunters and the Harbingers still owe us favors for our advanced warnings about the coup's inevitable failure, the Monitors and Proctors are our unknowing allies, and Skinriding provides a personal method of scrying the Skinlands for those Oracles who can be trusted. Who better to affect the living soul of Charon than the hearts and the fists of Pandemonium? No one will rest unless we allow it."

"So you plague his newborn life in order to cast him through the Shroud?"

Deidre 'tsked' with admonition. "Octavia, how did you ever get this deeply involved while being so base? With all that personal attention, Charon would be earmarked by all the Guilds and the Hierarchy, too. No, the Gamblers have managed to calculate a statistical model, a sporadic pattern to our endeavors that will affect nearly 300,000 souls in vari-

ous manners so that the one, true focus will not be discovered."

"The dreams...?"

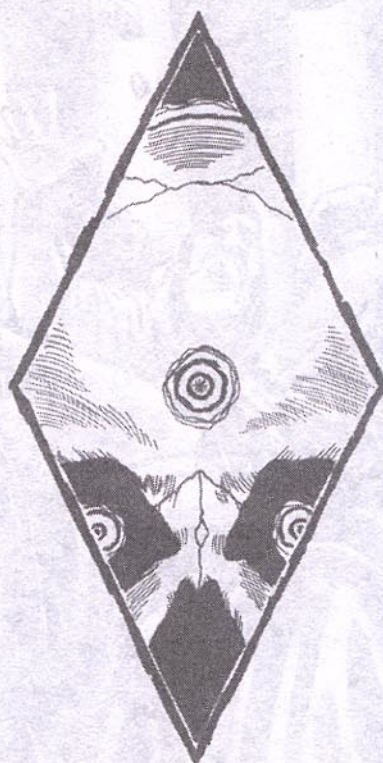
"Are only part of it. It is a world-wide campaign we're launching. I imagine the Dark Kingdoms would not be pleased if they knew that our heresy has invaded their territories. In as much as we can help it, they will not discover our involvement. I have arranged for an expensive front to divert that possibility. Nevertheless, any risk is worth the price of saving all that exists here. Even the suffering of Charon's soul."

"But is that... proper for the Chosen One? To be put through such suffering?"

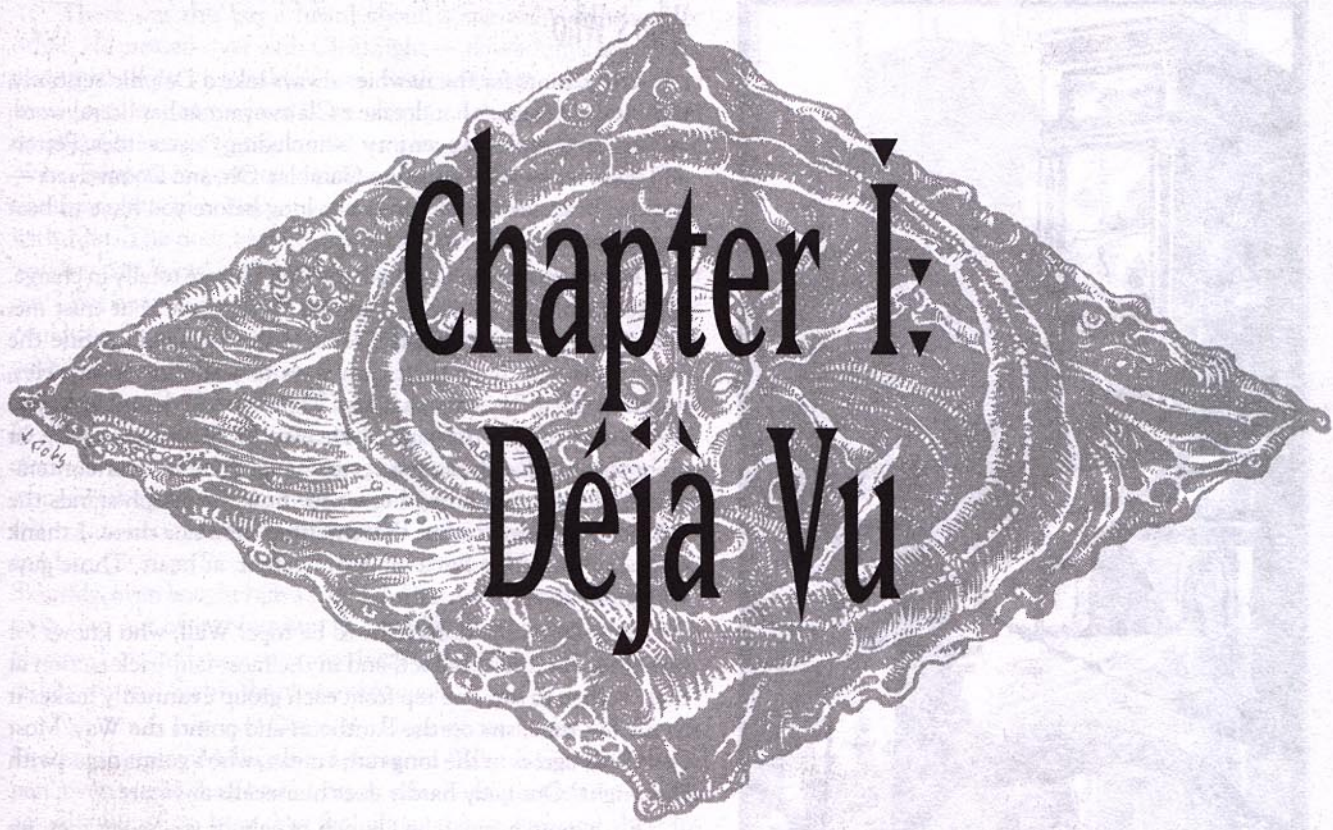
Is it proper for the Chosen One? Is it? Is it...?

Deidre's anger exploded through the grove, "He is not destined to have a peaceful life, only a meaningful one!"

Abruptly, Octavia felt the ground shudder a moment to her right. The Minotaur who had been shadowing their steps halted mid-stride with a poleaxed look, bowed surprisingly low and lumbered off to the southern grounds. As he turned, Deidre's voice was low and thin. "Just do as you're told, puppet. We know our Way from here."







Chapter I: Déjà Vu

Unnecessary Introductions



Hey, get the lead out! Come on and keep moving. I think you'd be lighter on your feet now that the shackles are off. No, don't talk, not until we're away from your former "employer." I hope you're worth the cash because I hate pulling favors for the Pantheon just because I have to, and

your old pal Julius is one tough mother. No joke, he'd give Oedipus a run for his robes. Your destiny's taking a sharp turn to the right, my friend, and you're lucky that someone kept a finger on your strand of the Web.

You're late, you know. We were expecting you to jump last New Year's, what with Angelo's rape trial, the miscarriage, the downsizing.... *Finally* you went off the meds. Took you long enough. We had you slotted for early December, and here it is, Indian summer. You've got strong karma, but not a great sense of punctuality. Don't worry, I won't hold it against you, even though I lost the eight-to-one odds to Bookie Bea you'd be here by Christmas. Oh, well, never gamble with a Gambler. You'll learn it all soon enough, and hey, if you've got the Gift, most of this should be *déjà vu*.

Eye Know You

Why the look? Don't let the robes fool you. I had to "dress to impress" in order to get you out; only the Delphics deal with the Hierarchy *mano e mano*, and what can I say about their fashion taste? Under this glorified bedsheet, I'm 100 percent Clairvoyant. Give me my deck over a fistful of bay leaves any day. Tarot don't do me no wrong, and who wouldn't pay to give their ego a stroke? It's more true now than when I was breathing.

You're starting to get the idea, hunh? Yeah, I can tell. You've been a Thrall for only a bit, but you've heard the rumors, and I get to be the one who tells you: They're true. The Guilds still exist. Don't jump for joy or nothin', my head can't take it. I bet you don't need a crystal ball to tell you which one we're due for, do you?

It's no wonder they had you shoveling in the lower strata. Anyone with a hint of Sight can see your deathmarks and read you like a book. You're absolutely *dripping* runes. You were *meant* for us. Those voices in your head, they were right all along. Don't look so surprised! Every single one of your stories came true, didn't they? I know because I'm one of them; the Oracles, the "Unblinking Eyes," and the Eye's been watching you for some time. Yes indeedy, "Eye" know you....



Who's Who

Okay, hints for the newbie: always take a Delphic seriously, never take a Augur's hand, take a Clairvoyant at her literal word, and take a complete inventory — including fingers, toes, Fetters and relatives — after visiting a Gambler. Oh, and Doomsayers — well, you can take them for just so long before you have to beat feet, y'know?

In case you haven't guessed, the Delphics are totally in charge. There are only a couple of hundred "priestesses," but trust me, that's enough. They hold the reins of the Pantheon, while the other sects who have their own ways to jostle for power. Hey, watch it! That first step's a doozy. There's more than one way to bust your neck on this side of Heaven 'n' Hell and usually far more painful than having a vertebrae go crunch. Ever contemplated life as a shoehorn? I can't see how the Aleph stands the Artificers, personally, but that's neither here nor there. I thank my lucky tea leaves I'm a modern heathen at heart. Those guys are *serious* about pest control.

How do the factions fight to be tops? Well, who knows for sure? Me, I'm just a contact, and in the most laid-back faction at that. Suffice to say, one rep from each group eventually makes it to the big-time, sits on the Pantheon and points the Way. Most everybody agrees in the long run; I mean, who's gonna argue with Fate, right? Our Lady hardly does housecalls anymore.

So, a more mismatched bunch of yahoos you never met, no offense intended to anyone, really. But honestly, since "faith" is such a big part of this power, it's tough to get all the gang together under one roof. "How many Augurs does it take to change a light bulb? Zero — there's no room for his head *and* a light bulb." It's all the same. Everyone's got the answers but no one wants to tell. Let's put it this way: As far as the Guild goes, I'm a moron, and even I can tell you all the muckety-mucks know something's up. The bottom line is that we're supposed to tout how all the Guilds have to survive against the Hierarchy, *all* of them. This is none too popular a notion with the locals considering who some of our Guildish neighbors are, but cries of "Can't we all just get along?" make me think more of "pot/kettle/black" than singing "Kumbaya." Cripes, I sound like a Doomsayer. That, or a French scriptwriter.

Anyway, if you want details, ask the next guy down the pike.

Why Me?

Can you help it? Nope, me neither.

I haven't met many Oracles who didn't have a touch of the Sight in the Skinlands. You know what I'm talking about: ESP, precognition, weird dreams or voices about stuff that came true, even a little Radar O'Reilly, like when you know something's coming a few seconds in advance. We all had it in dollops or tons, and we've all got it here double-strength, even if we don't want it. Sometimes especially if we don't want it. But it's not like you have a lot of choice in the matter.

There was this guy I heard about, some old Corinthian or other. He crossed-over with ClearSight — drove him crazy. Stark raving bonkers. He couldn't stop Seeing things exactly as they were going to happen, and there wasn't a damned thing he could do about it except stand around watching the previews over and over. Trapped in your own private hell of reruns — brrrr. The Pantheon was in a major pickle trying to figure out what to do with him. The poor bastard was a loose cannon of Angst, like a walking dart board for Oblivion screaming, "Look at me! Look at me!" But he was also the best reader for a clear run that any client could pay for a look-see. Gamblers didn't even bother quoting his odds, he was nth for nth.

So this poor slob quit the Delphics and went Traditional. Made it all the way to "Vuv," that's, um, Seventh Augur. Personally, I think he just *really* needed to cut somebody up. Still no good. He stopped taking clients, he stopped going to the Weaver, he stopped telling anybody anything, even the Grand High Oracle. Selena tried to get him Pardoned within an inch of his soul, let him Skinride, even bought him a Paphian Dream-Whore to see if that'd snap him out of it. Nothing. Eventually, he got swallowed by a Harrow-hole and never was spat back out. Sad, really. I'll take my mildly myopic Sight, thankyouverymuch.

What was I saying? Oh, yeah. Here we are in the land of the Dead with tons of folks all caught up in 'What's Going To Happen' even worse than on the other side. Now people's existences actually hinge on how they feel about themselves and their futures — self-image problems are a hell of a lot more important than they used to be, you know? Funny how you can't say "their lives" since no one really is living anymore, but the devil you know's better than the devil you don't, right? People want to stick around. Everybody's gotta know their story. Or, better yet, the stories of their Fetters anchoring them to the Shadowlands. I mean, what's going to happen to *them* is a pretty big deal, I tell you. What's Maudlin's bumper sticker? "No Fetters, No Fly." Grasping straws is our specialty. Nothing's better than a desperate client; you can suck him like a lollipop.

Of course, this is just my opinion. A real Delphic Pythian would tell you differently and feed you the line about how we were the guides of Charon from Lady Fate on down the line, charged with guiding lost souls toward Transcendence or some such crap. We foretold what would happen, but nobody listened. Those few who did became our clients, our allies and our chattel. Those who didn't got the Veinous Shaft. Mostly true, mind you, but only three Guilds got completely hosed in the uprising and we only managed to save four before the shit *really* hit the fan. Yet for the most part, we're all still in one piece, so to speak. And if we're all supposed to be all buddy-buddy, it's a good thing that most of the inter-tribal hunting has slacked off a bit. Now if we could only let go of one another's throats; stranglehold's bad for mutual *juju*. "Sticks and stones break more than bones since everything's soulforged anyway!" Think of *that* next time you trip over another cobblestone. Of course the Doomsayers would just blow this whole thing off as a warning of the worst yet to come. Cheery bunch, ain't they?

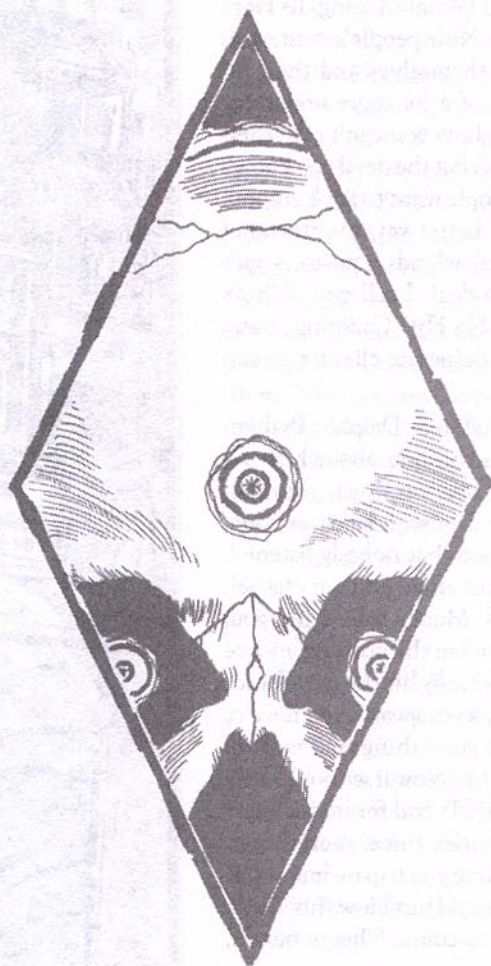


But now with Charon gone Fatalistic, and the Web is being stretched all over the place through possibility *ad infinitum* to find his soul, we're basically told to just keep doing what we're doing. *De nada*. Business as usual on the homefront and straight on 'til morning. I tell you, I've begun thinking that we're just peeking through the Veil to tickle our funnybones. With Charon M.I.A., there's half the discipline out searching his Lifeweb and the other half digging his Fatal grave. Nobody seems to even agree to disagree; with the Deathlords breathing down their necks, it's no wonder. "Do The Delphi," as they say. Never give a clear answer when a vague one will do!

I tell you, *everybody's* in a snit-fit for power, and most are too busy to see who's gaining from behind. All in all, it just gives the Gamblers more consensus to buck. Take my advice — never bet against Charon. He always comes out rosy down the possibility streams. It's just taking us a while to catch up with him. You know what I'm saying? Uh, guess you don't. Well, when you check out the Temple basement, you'll see what I mean.

The Temple — wow, wait 'til you see the place! The only things like it here is like the Sphinx's schnozz (intact!) or the three walls from Jerusalem. Anyway, they've been fixing up the place like you wouldn't believe. A whole corridor has gone completely virtual, and I have no idea how many prophesies were pushed for that to happen. You'd think the Afterworld was coming to an end. You don't understand, the Delphics *never* change. That's why the Gamblers decided to do their thing off-shore — too many rules in-house. But, be it ever so slanderous, there's no place like home.

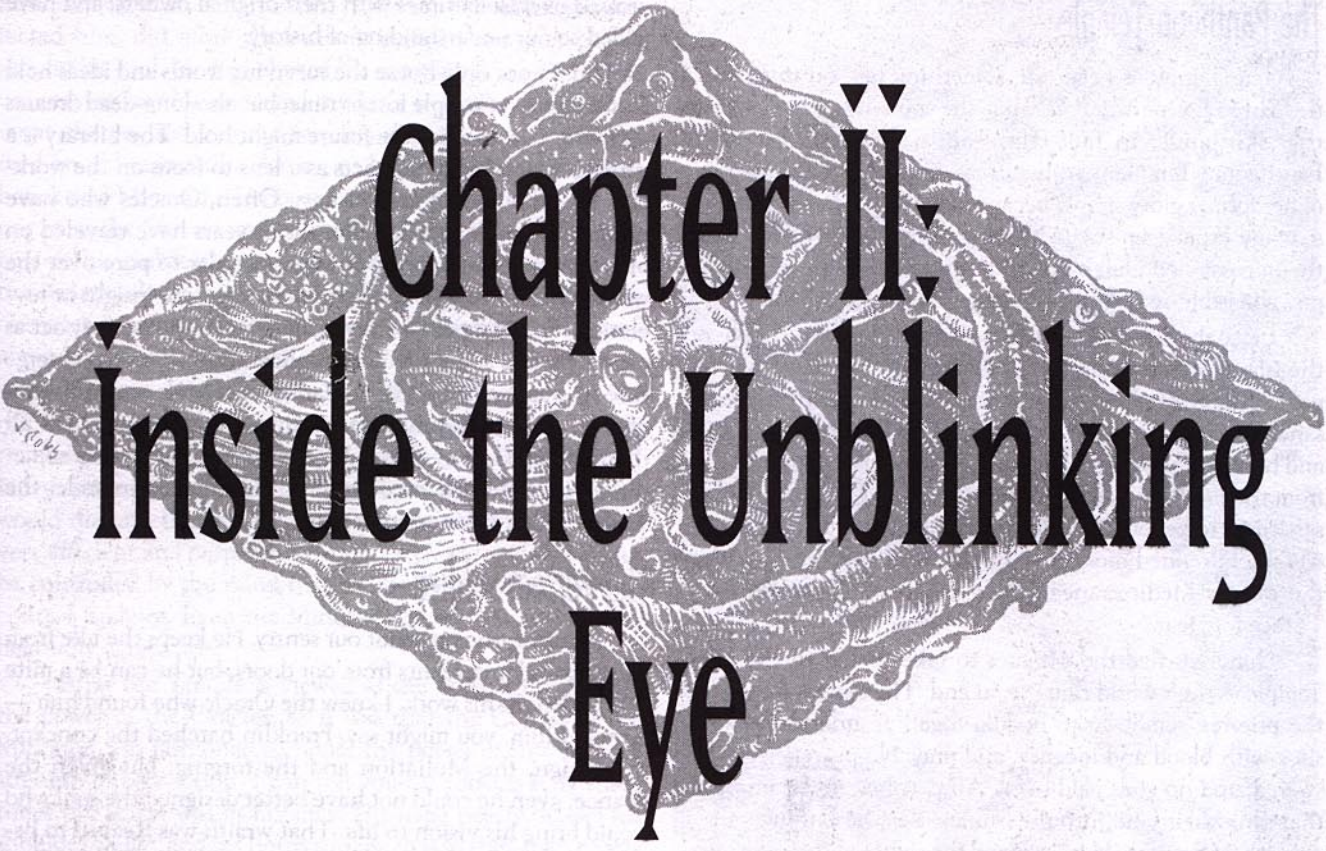
Huzzah! This way, and behold! Just slide under the steps, and don't mind the dust. Who can really tell this close to Stygia proper? Go around the corner, and you'll be met by one of the guides, can't say who exactly, but he'll take over from here. Let me have your hand. Don't sweat it, ninny, I'm not a Blade-boy. Curl your pinkie, and check out those lines! Yeah, I'll be watching you, butter on bread. But hey, I've got to go ditch this toga and head back to the relative safety of my day-to-day. Life and Death wait for no wraith, but if I keep "Gone Fission" on my door, my reputation's toast. I'll be "Seein'" you! And hey, welcome to the club!



Term Glossary

- Annihilation:** The Doomsayer practice of throwing soulforged objects into a Nihil.
- Ass-In-The-Hole:** Derogatory term for a Clairvoyant or a Gambler without a deck of cards; ref. not having an "ace in the hole."
- Aleph:** Leader of the Augur Oracles, first letter of the Hebraic alphabet.
- Augur:** An Oracle who predicts via reading patterns in splattered plasm.
- Blade-Boy/Blade-Girl:** Slang term for Augur hopefuls.
- Blades of Jade/Jade Blade:** An Augur who follows Eastern traditions.
- Blind-Eyes:** Wraiths who have no Oracle Sight.
- Clairvoyant:** An Oracle who predicts via any number of pagan modalities.
- Clairvoyants:** Leaders of the Clairvoyant Oracles — *Dama D'onore* (female) and *La Guardia* (male).
- ClearSight:** The ability to scry the future perfectly with no ability to change it.
- Delphic:** An Oracle who predicts via hallucinations.
- Dealer:** Leader of the Gambler Oracles.
- Do the Delphi:** Expression referring to vague prophecy, especially when done deliberately.
- Doomsayer:** An Oracle who predicts only negative outcomes.
- En-lil:** An ancient seer who would scry using animal sacrifices to the gods.
- Enochian:** Angelic alphabet used by certain occultists; ref. Dr. John Dee and Edward Kelly.
- Fulguriatores:** Ancient Oracles who read weather patterns for prediction.
- Gambler:** An Oracle who predicts via numerically derived probability measurements.
- Grimas:** Stregherian term for "male," or "High Priest."
- Haruspices:** Ancient Oracles who used animal sacrifices for prediction.
- Kassandra:** Derogatory term for an Oracle whom no one believes, usually implying she is incompetent or cursed.
- Lady/Our Lady/The Lady:** Affectionate contraction for the Lady of Fate.
- Mouri:** Derogatory term for a Doomsayer; ref. similarities to Mourners.
- Prophet:** Leader of the Doomsayers.
- Pythian:** A Delphic Oracle with active and accurate Sight while scrying.
- Sight:** Any of the Oracular abilities to see into the possible future.
- Signbearers:** Seconds-in-command of Doomsayer cultists.
- Sofit:** The altered symbol used for a Hebrew letter when it is written at the end of a word.
- Strand (of the Web):** One possible outcome of the future.
- Streghs:** Clairvoyants who follow the Stregherian belief of creating one's own destiny.
- Trusks:** Clairvoyants who follow the Etruscan belief of preordained destiny.
- Unblinking Eyes:** Slang term for Oracles; occasionally confused with Monitors and Mnemoi.
- Ventricle:** Derogatory term for an Augur; ref. *Auricle* instead of *Oracle*.
- Web/LifeWeb:** The conceptual representation of all possible futures.
- Whisp:** Matter composed of evaporated souls.





Chapter II: Inside the Unblinking Eye

If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up someplace else.

— Yogi Berra

Where We Have Met Before?



ise. Are you ready? We continue your journey here. Attend my words and step warily, for from here on in, the physical world is only half as important as what you make of it. Believe in yourself and your path is assured. Doubt yourself and you are forever lost.


My name is Etharias, and I am your guide into the Pantheon. I trust the Page brought you safely and speedily? It is a deceptively short route to the Temple from this position. Once we cross the boundaries of the city proper, direction becomes the better part of discretion.

Now then, see here — you walk almost ahead of me. Does this not seem familiar, like we are in an old dream or treading a distant road nearly forgotten? It's part of what binds us, this familiarity. It is a common element, like needles tracking the pole — we all end up here together on our way between what has been and what will prevail. I have seen you — read you, really — on the walls the others wrote. I saw where our paths had crossed before, though on the far side of the Shroud, no

closer than mirror images touching. Perhaps it would be a better analogy to say “reflections in a pond,” since the barrier is a thin one, at the very least. What is my floor becomes your roof. We affect one another, even subtly. It would not surprise me if we all touched consciousness with each other throughout the history of time, but there is no way to prove that revelation. It is a pleasant, if idealistic, thought nonetheless. Forgive me my musings. This way.

I'll tell you of all that you see, all that remains, and all that I may. Do not ask the questions I cannot answer; better yet, for safety's sake, do not ask questions at all. If I fail to mention something you wish to know, it is because the Way was already chosen that you learn these things for yourself. While I do not deny my station as *raesh*, I would not be so bold as to challenge the Lady herself. She chooses as she will. I will attempt to be impartial as an interpreter rather than as an official emissary, but I have once been, and continue to be, only human. Forgive me also my clouded vision. We have an abundance of pens lost to the living. Take notes diligently; anything may provoke a vision or memory, and we are loath to lose your precious first ones here.

Come then, we have nearly returned.



The Pantheon Temple

The Temple is beautiful, something rare on this side of the Shroud. One wonders what she must have been like in the Skinlands; in fact, thousands there still do. The Pantheonic Temple is truly a treasured relic, retaining most of her former glory simply because she is fresh in the minds of so many. From deep-sea archaeologists to science-fiction buffs, the impassioned Quick keep our Guildhouse "alive." Simply put, she is blessed. And a blessing here is rare indeed.

Once she stood in the heart of a mighty port acropolis on the island of Santorini, the gilded bulls of white marble and gold a tribute of prosperity to Poseidon and Cleito. Her inner sanctums were built at the height of the Minoan Golden Age, and her body was dressed in mosaics of exotic indigo and gold from the Far East. Yet when the tremors began, there was no sanctuary to be found within her walls. After the destruction which obliterated most of the island and wrecked havoc on the nearby Mediterranean shores, Santorini was renamed Thrace for "fear."

Hundreds fled their homes to take shelter in the High Temple as their world came to an end. The devout flocked to the priestess' embrace to huddle together around the altar, slick with blood and incense, and pray. No prayers were answered, and no gods paid heed. All perished in the eruption that sank their land into the Sunless Sea, here to lie on our own Isle of Sorrows. Here, beyond the sight of breathing men, she came to her final rest — but her story lives on in the minds of many.

Pericles, son of Xanthippos, had inscribed the cornerstone when the Temple was first consecrated. A young man, Solon, witnessed this event. In later years, he became a leader in Athens, and he is known to the living as the founding father of democracy around the sixth century BCE. When Solon heard of the tragedy of Thrace, he passed on his recollections as the story of a lost island of wonders which sank in a day. It is uncertain whether the story was first told to Solon's comrade and distant relation, Dropides, or whether Solon spoke in confidence to his own son, Critas. Who knew if the world would keep believing the word of politicians? Solon was a wise man. In either case, Critas was an interested follower in the works and words of a great philosopher and storyteller of his age, Plato. Plato was the one who gave birth to her fame: the legend of Atlantis.

She is ours now, as is the priestess who tends her. It was always Fate's will. Selena would be the first to tell you so.

The Library of Ages

Behind the main building of the Temple lies what used to be the quarters of the servants and priestesses who dedicated their lives to her service. Now that smaller architecture houses the Library of Ages, a repository for tomes that have

crossed over, sometimes with their original owners, and have added to our understanding of history.

Books not only house the surviving words and ideas held by thousands of people lost to time, but also long-dead dreams and visions as to what the future might hold. The Library is a catalog of possibility that acts as a lens to focus on the workings of the human consciousness. Often, Oracles who have not gained Sight in many months or years have traveled on pilgrimages to the Library of Ages in order to pore over the words in these volumes and perhaps gain some insight or revelation. Someone else's story or imaginative verse may act as a catalyst and spark prediction once again. Patterns emerge throughout the history of humankind, of violence and innovation, disease and discovery, science and religion. It's all there, mapped as even the Weaver maps, but that is something you will learn once you visit the Catacombs under the Temple. That is for another time.

The Perfect Soldier

I must warn you about our sentry. He keeps the idle from dallying and miscreants from our doors, but he can be a mite overzealous in his work. I knew the Oracle who found him — tethered him, you might say. Franklin hatched the concept, the design, the Moliation and the forging, but given the chance, even he could not have better designed the soul who would bring his vision to life. That wraith was Reaped to become the Minotaur, and he is so very well-suited to be what he now is.

His name has been erased, as has most of his original Corpus, which is just as well. If we need him, best it be an anonymous favor. There has been a Minotaur guarding the Temple for as long as the myth has existed in the living world, a nearly impossible task given the shelf-life of the average wraith. Then again, we choose durable servants, and the Minotaur's omnipresent duty allows the Shadow little room to work. He is a fearsome enigma, and that is enough to deter most wraiths from darkening our doors. But the secret of the Minotaur is most ingenious; this one is quite possibly the eighth incarnation.

We have replaced him time and again as those first selected faded into ennui and mindlessness. It is best that no one knows the difference — the falsehood of his eternal vigilance has served its purpose well over the years. He was — no, is what has been described as the perfect soldier. The Minotaur takes orders without question, obeys them to the letter, and is tireless in his pursuit. No one is a harsher taskmaster than the Minotaur himself. He has no regrets and no conscience, save the shame of failure. He has the utmost respect for authority and demands nothing in reward, acknowledgment or praise in return. He exists for the job well done.

The wars of the civilized world forged his soul long before he arrived here. The atrocities and horrors sluiced off

him like water off of tarpaulin. None of it touched him, affected him, did more than mirror-polish the armor he set around his soul. He had obeyed his commanding officer with unswerving loyalty, answered similarly to courts and government charges and victims' families throughout his life, and died an old man still adhering to his own code of personal honor and his word. He obeyed orders. The fact that he did not cross the Shroud and emerge as a Spectre served as witness to his guiltless conscience. This apparent self-satisfaction intrigued my colleague, and Franklin moved mountains to snatch him from the public eye before anyone else learned about him, this perfect soldier.

He was never the mind behind the maneuvers or atrocities. No part of his heart or spirit was involved; he was merely the hands of the killing machine. His were the hands which killed without a tremor, the fingers which pointed to who would die and that squeezed the trigger when told. He has very efficient and purposeful hands. Of course, hands need to be controlled by the mind that wields them. Power without control is chaos. Even the Minotaur knows this and wholeheartedly agrees now.

Just as the Temple is viewed as the body which houses the power of the Oracles, so it was that the Corpus of the Minotaur was fashioned to house the power of this soldier's strength of conviction. I can tell you his torso is fully three times the size it was in Enfancy. His head nearly masses his shoulder width, and his horns surpass that as they span nearly two forearms' length. His hair is coarse and sooty black, his eyes burn flame like smoldering coals, but it is his horns — his fabulous horns — that are the true terror of any who cross the Pantheon.

I believe his horns are his one vanity, for they shine with a polished luster I have never seen on even the most dutiful Centurion's sheath. Those magnificent horns gleam like poured mercury, flawless waves of spiked Stygian steel. I have seen the Minotaur pierce the body of a wraith and throw it over 10 feet with a toss of his powerful neck. It was beautiful.... Apologies — please, remember you speak with one who carves into the living body to scry with my Arcanos. A piercing attack is a rare spectacle of expertise.

As it is, simply remember not to trespass or run. He notices these things.





Initiation

It was a wraith, it had to be, Moliated to look like something feral, grotesque. Its body was a parody, mostly ribcage, like a racing greyhound with a head and neck strangely serpentine and scaly. It was a nightmare on the block. It had lots of teeth. The cowled Guild members had nailed its limbs through the bindings and into the Great Altar with pegs of obsidian-black metal. Its face (muzzle?) snapped and twisted about, as it tried to get a chunk out of someone. Plasm spurted from the wounds. The Augur came to me and unsheathed his blade with one hand. He beckoned for me to come forward with the other. Obediently, I held out my hand to join him. I was grabbed and slammed head-first into the altar, the mouth of the monster hissing hot and rabid in my face with renewed vigor. My arm twisted behind me as the blade tore a deep line of fire from my wrist to my elbow. My hand was pinned with a spike between my shoulder blades, the skin peeled away and stapled casually to my back. I screamed myself hoarse, but no one cared. The group descended on my exposed Corpus like so many vultures on a kill, reading my Fate with thirsty fingers. They didn't warn me that the Corpus read tonight would be mine.

HOW MANY YEARS HAD I SPENT POLISHING THE URNS, THE BASIN, EVERY CREVICE ON THAT LOW DAISY? MY RITE BECAME A NUMBING CHORE THAT BLOSSOMED INTO A LOVING OBSESSION. I KNOW EVERY LIP AND CURL OF THE CAULDRON AND ITS FILIGREE STAND BY HEART. I COULD SKETCH THE SANCTUM'S WESTERN MOSAIC BY TOUCH ALONE. WHEN THE TIME CAME, I WENT THROUGH THE MOTIONS AS IF IN SLUMBER. I WAS DISTANT EVEN BEFORE THE OFFERING WAS BURNING, EVEN BEFORE THE TENDRILS OF SMOKE ENTERED MY BODY AND GAVE ME GLORIOUS SIGHT. IT WAS A PERFECT, PLACID RHYTHM THAT REMINDED ME OF MY SLEEPING CHILD'S HEARTBEAT, HELD CLOSE WHEN I STILL BREATHED. IT WAS TOO MUCH TO DESCRIBE, TOO MUCH TO HOLD ONTO. IT WAS - IS EVERYTHING.

It was very personal and poetic. I thought, "This is what Michelangelo must've felt like," because I was flat on my back poking pinholes in the arched ceiling with calculated precision. The number crunching alone had taken me nearly five months, five long months until I even dared think about punching the first hole. I stayed there, slept there, prayed there until my butt was numb and my eyes unfocused. I created my cosmos again in exacting detail and outlined the zodiac with my own plasm leaked from a finger-cut. The figures glowed slightly when the curtains were drawn. This was the sky I could no longer see, but Amethyst had lent me her prized book of star charts to recreate my heavens. I felt I was playing G-d.

I could still hear my asshole brother's warning, "who ever heard of Initiation with blackjack? You're asking for it, Earl." chickenshit. The crew at the Dealer's table didn't even bat an eye, just shuffled and dealt the hands. My cut. And so: Jack showing and five of hearts shy, I was sweating (or would have been sweating, if I were of a kind to sweat anymore), but I was cool. These gamblers, they were rocks. Then I figured, what's the worst that could happen? So I told the Dealer to hit me. This got an eyebrow from the skinny jerk at his left. Nobody else moved. The Dealer's pause pissed me off, so I put a little steel in my second request. "Hit. Me." The Spook with muscles like bialys leaned in a mite and, grinning like a bastard, said, "you sure?" I yelled at him: "Damn straight!" And he broke my nose. The room busted up like it was the goddamned Three Stooges marathon. I swore for half an hour before someone gave me a towel.

My robe stuck to my back, caked with drying plasm. I had left the Pardoner and sat in silence, thinking about Oblivion, until I was summoned. I rose and stepped into the semi-circle. A low, murmuring chant bubbled up among us, the ancient words slipping from my lips to join the swelling sound. I remembered feeling worthless, unworthy to be here at all, just a shimmering haze before the Final Death. I banished these thoughts with my practiced mantra. Then like a swallowed explosion, the fabric of reality tore right before me. The hole was a vacuum, the edges of this world flapping like skin, drinking in all light and hope. It was disgusting, vulgar, sexual. The Prophet began screaming her Words of Truth: she warned us to be strong, to recognize what is real and what is illusion. The terrible things in this universe did not include the thing before us. The gathering brought forth objects from their sleeves and tossed them into the sucking vortex. Each offering streeeeeetched like bubble gum before popping out of existence. As I was instructed, I stood before my Prophet and sank to my knees - I had nothing to give. She laid gentle hands upon my shoulders and lifted me to my feet. In one smooth movement, she tore my robe down the front, ripping the fabric and my new scabs off my body, and tossed the stained remnants into the Nihil. The group screamed their chorus, even the words slurping into the Void. I stood before the mouth of Oblivion, naked, purified and vindicated. I now know what is coming. I have seen it for myself. I am at peace.



Reflections on Revelations

I have not seen what I have seen. I do not believe what I believe. I-rd. These are magical, unexplainable matters, and I beg you not to make me a part of them!

— Phillipe "The Mouse" Gaston, *Ladyhawke*

I've been skimming over this album of initiates, and now I find that I'm more reluctant than ever to be here at all. Being one of the recent vintage of wraiths, I'm in the unique position to sample the wares, as it were, and choose for myself which path I'd like to follow. (Though from what Etharias, Cristoph, Amber-O's and Knucklebones have implied or all-out said it's all in the hands of Fate, anyway, and this whole choice is a farce. I think they were trying to be comforting.) What is distinctly less comforting is the not-so-subtle insinuation that after I make my decision, I'm to be brainwashed or brainwiped or some such thing so that I cannot remember, much less reveal, the dark secrets of the different divisions that make up the Pantheon. This record I hope to include with the memoirs which seemed to have passed on with me. The secrets of these things will not die. I will stow this volume away, and perhaps have my own edge over this crazy, undead civilization of backstabbing politicians.

Fate — ha! Personally, I never put much stock in the "New Age" hype while I was alive. (Boy, that even looks strange on paper.) Admittedly, I read the occasional horoscope and pulped my fortune cookies during staff power lunches like anyone else. Other than that, the funny feeling of *déjà vu* or *vusà dé* was the only thing I experienced similar to what Fatalism gives to my (fellow?) Oracles. This is real. And now is the time to choose. Whether the choice is really mine or not is totally irrelevant. Except it's I, not "Fate" who gets stuck with the consequences. If Fate is a Lady, I just hope she doesn't know about the skinmags in my closet back home.

Once I decide what cult I'll join, I may go into the "basement" like the Page suggested. But once that's done, there seems to be no going back.

The Pantheon

The Guild of Oracles, those with the Sight, is known as the Pantheon: a panel of representatives who stand as the incarnations of their various Arcanoic methods. The basis of Fatalism is linked inexorably with ideas of mysticism and a higher power which speaks "through" the Oracle rather than by the individual herself. Whether natural force or god or alien intelligence, all Oracles believe they get their visions from "somewhere" and most often "someone." As they say, Fate works in mysterious ways.

Those attuned will always hear, even in the Skinlands, but Fate speaks to each person differently, and it needs to be translated from the discordant dreams that the Guild's Arcanos produces. I have discovered that Fatalism throws the Freudian psychology of dream interpretation on its collective ear. I have actually witnessed moments when something that looked like a cigar was definitely not a cigar! (The less I dwell on this the better.) This place is far more nightmare than dream.

In any case, the particular modes of communication and interpretation along the strands of Fate's Web are recognized and honed by different factions of the Pantheon. Each faction is devoted to its own, particular *modus operandi*, but all types of Oracles seem to be equally successful in their forecasting (much to the dismay of the Pantheon seat-holders who constantly vie for superiority over one another). Equality is not an honored virtue here. Thus, we find the basis of intra-Guild politics.

The artful thrones in the great chamber of the Temple are reserved for the honorary Augur, Clairvoyants, Dealer and Prophet, and this council is presided over by the Grand High Oracle of the Delphics, Selena. Much like the Grecian Pantheon upon which the Guild is based, one partisan rules over all the others, who publicly work toward the common goal of aiding the lesser wraiths, the "Blind Eyes" who are unable to "See" clearly. (Note: This self-assumed supremacy surely deviates from the Lady of Fate's original intentions, but she has never once appeared to make a formal objection.) This gift would make the Oracles mighty indeed, if not for their tendency toward petty power squabbles and an adherence to personal agendas that is positively childish. In the end, the Oracles are all too often undone by the all too human habits of greed and pettiness. It is no wonder that so many of their lofty visions fall by the wayside, never to be realized. Will we ever learn?



The Delphics

My temple stands in Ephesus, hie thee thither.
And do upon my altar sacrifice.
There, when my maiden priests are met together
Before the people all,
Reveal how thou at sea didst lose thy wife.
To mourn thy crosses, with thy daughter's, call
And give them repetition to the life.
Or perform my bidding, or thou livest in woe:
Do't, and happy, by my silver bowl
Awake, and tell thy dream.
— William Shakespeare, *Pericles*

The Oracle of Delphi features throughout the great works of ancient history. She foretold the tragic downfall of Oedipus and Rome, prophesied the Great Plagues of Egypt, and apparently was the originator of the Nostradamus ideology that enjoys renewed popularity as we close the century. She saw all and knew all: her face is pictured enshrouded by a wall of heavy incense and her eyes far-seeing into the mysterious vision which holds her. Thousands sought her advice before; millions follow those predecessors still.

Do the Delphi

The Grand High Oracle, Selena, is the leader of the Delphics, and thus the rest of the Guild. The Delphics are the primary faction of the Oracles and publicly recognized as the oldest and wisest interpreters of Fatalism. Steeped in tradition dating back to Arcadian days, these Oracles retain their stately grace, their royal airs and their insistence on proper etiquette and deference to station. The Delphics enjoy an intricacy to their Arcanos, like a mechanical clockwork in motion or a collaborative waltz. The step-by-step procedure is nicknamed the "Grand Dance." Everything is precise and scripted: acknowledgment, query, response and reading. Nothing is left to chance, no variables are suffered to be out of place. The Dance is an art as old as any museum treasure — it has not changed in centuries without number, and I suppose it will not change any time soon.

Selena ranks first among the Delphics, and then their ranks follow a precise, numbered order down to the lowliest, number 283. Orders follow from superior to inferior down the line until someone pulls enough rank to get things done. Often, immediate action is slowed by the process of filtering orders through the ranks, which is why many other Oracles roll their eyes at the mention that the Delphics are the ones taking care of things. To the Delphics, change in any form is something best to be avoided, and only considered after lengthy deliberation. Delphics as a rule are contemplative, subtly manipulative and often infuriating.

It seems the ultimate purpose of a Delphic is to gracefully muscle her way high enough in the system to avoid actual footwork altogether and devote herself solely to receiving visions. Perhaps the top dozen Delphics enjoy this privilege, but they are also saddled with the responsibility of maintaining the Delphics' position as the governing body of the Oracles, and are the obvious targets for all attempts at dismantling the faction's reign.

Lower-ranking Delphics spend their years obeying orders, building networks of clients and setting their immediate supervisors up to be caught for minor infractions in order to gain personal power. As there is only one way to the top in the Delphic system, acolytes fall into three categories: Those who remain in the Temple as devoted sycophants to their superiors, thus gaining rank through favoritism; those who explore the world beyond the Temple and return with enough ears who listen and hands that pay that the Temple must re-establish rank accordingly; and those who excel in deception and intrigue while waiting patiently for members of the first two categories to succeed, then swiftly stepping in to collect the rewards of others' successes.

If ever there's one out of those 283 that isn't a vicious politico, I would love to meet her. Truthfully, I'm not sure she exists.

Leading the Dance

Delphics gifted with reliable Sight are entitled "Pythian." Pythians are no longer exclusively female, as they were in ancient days, though most wraiths of this sort have been Moliated into picturesque androgyny. To a soul, they bear the slender necks and soft faces of the Grecian ideal of youth. Every last one looks like an art collector's beauty. However, haunted eyes betray the price of years in the Underworld for these souls. One is very much like another, garbed in flowing robes tied with a simple, tasseled rope high at the waist. All look deeply enmeshed with their tasks or contemplations, though any and all occupations are to be interrupted by the Grand Dance's first chime: proper supplication and patience.

A wraith kneels and presents himself at the yawning door of the Temple and waits. And waits and waits and waits. No one dares enter uninvited, for the myth of the Minotaur of the Labyrinth — a Moliated wraith who patrols the Temple grounds armed with horns of Stygian steel — is very real here. The threat alone is deterrent enough.

Once a Delphic acknowledges the client's presence, the Lead of the Dance begins. There is a customary exchange of greetings when permission to enter is granted, and thus the client is admitted into the Temple itself. The responsibility of the reading customarily follows a preset order (though some admit that this ritual can be sidestepped by offering

sufficient payment). The matter of payment is best left to the Usurers in residence, as money of any sort can "blind the Eye" in death as easily as in life.

Once the particulars of payment have been established, the client is escorted to the inner sanctum. Drones and Thralls work the prayer chamber, constantly purifying and preparing the great shallow cauldron at the altar, and tending the soulfire beneath in methodical monotony. Seated on the tiled floor, the client must wait again in silence as the attending Pythian is ritually bathed and anointed before the altar. Unwrapping the offering, the Pythian holds it above her head for all to bear witness in a great show of theatrics.

Delphic readings were traditionally accessed by burning bay leaves. Unfortunately, in the Deadlands, this is no longer possible. However, the wraiths who first joined the Lady of Fate in her mission found that they could re-create the hallucinogenic effects through a special smelting of souls, and thus the readings could proceed as always. A Delphic reading now requires a donation of "whisp," condensed souls forged into a mock resin which bears the characteristic pungency and texture necessary to make an association real for the Pythian. Belief is the foundation of everything here.

The cauldron is fed the offered whisp with reverence. The souls burn into thick fumes that ooze and creep in ghostly tendrils, mimicking the former Corpora which stretch and writhe as if trying to climb free, and these the Pythian inhales deeply. Drunk with the ingested soulstuff, the Delphic Pythian "Sees" anew. There is time enough for perhaps a question or two before the hallucinatory effects drain away, so the client had best ask quickly. The Delphic is both incredibly vulnerable and powerful in this moment, and attendant acolytes wait in the wings behind great columns and vases for any pertinent miscalculation or insight. (Very few can afford the total secrecy of a truly private reading for this reason.)

When the window passes, the Pythian falls silent, hangs her head and thanks her messenger of Fatalism. The reading is thus concluded. The client leaves. Audience and interpretation are available at an additional fee by the acolytes who have observed free from the effects of whisp. I'm told their advice can often be more advantageous than the reading itself; however, the interpreters' conclusions are not offered unless requested formally and handsomely.

Vain and glorious, the Delphic Pythians need not pander to any whom they judge to be an inferior (which seems to include just about everybody). And I'd lay better odds on arguing with the Minotaur than grappling with a Delphic decree.



The Augurs

I wanna see blood and guts and veins in my teeth!

— Arlo Guthrie, "The Motorcycle Song"

Augurs are followers of the old, old ways: practitioners of hepatomancy and myomancy, European *haruspices*, Sumerian *en-lils*, Egyptian soothsayers, apocryphal *Druids* — real "sacrifice-a-goat" folks. Rarely smiling unless holding a knife, Augurs tend to take Death seriously. They have contempt for anything that puts a downy coat on the harsh reality. Life is a series of sufferings and through endured pain, only the distilled truth, like clarified liquid, will prevail. The same holds true in the afterlife, perhaps even more so.

This is a conclave of individuals united with a common purpose. While each Augur embodies her own Way, they all commonly agree on one thing: no other Oracular faction knows anything. Truth is hard. Truth is a lesson. Truth hurts.

There is no Augur reading without sacrifice. While few will sacrifice a Thrall or freewraith (which unnecessarily risks one's self to the looming Shadow), most prefer a far more appropriate mirror to their old edict of animal sacrifice: a Drone, an *Enfant or*, on rarest occasion, the prize offering: a Legionnaire's barghest (the last tidbit guaranteeing the client an exclusive ceremony befitting any other platinum card membership). Unfortunately, most post-12th century wraiths find the Augur's choice of premonition triggers distasteful at best. Thus, the Augur movement one of the least popular factions of the Pantheon. This disgust is a feeling shared by the general populace of Stygia. Those even suspected of Oracular sacrifice are actively hunted by the Hierarchy Legionnaires with singular passion. That, at least, makes sense, as Augurs want the Legions' beloved Barghests on the block.

Organization:

From Aleph to Taf

The Aleph, leader of the Augurs, holds the faction's emblematic Artifact, the Sacrificial Blade of Eannatum, and thus also holds omnipotence over all his loyalists. The Aleph alone is the one to designate who has the honor of administering Soul Death, the degree of interference with the Guild as a whole, and how much information may be imparted onto the general populace. As such, the Aleph controls the all-powerful media image of the Oracles; what is said and not said is his decision.

Augurs also follow a numeric ranking system signified by the letters of the Biblical Hebrew alphabet. Hebrew letters not only align themselves by order, (Aleph, Bet,

Vet, Gimel, Daled, etc.), but each letter has its own numerical significance (Aleph = 1, Bet = 2, etc.). The Augurs use this ranking system to denote not only whom is superior/inferior to whom, but also how many readings must be performed for consideration of a rise in rank. Unfortunately, as there are fewer than 40 letters in the alphabet, including softs and vowels, most Augurs stay firmly in place until something drastic occurs. One imagines those Augurs who do not achieve rank are the perpetrators of these occurrences as, by my representative's admittance, there are some 40 more Augurs-to-be who are roaming about with knives at the ready.

While among of the most disturbingly graphic of the Oracles, the Augurs are also the most direct. One slice of an Augural blade, and plasm droplets are read with an expert eye and time-honored craft. Sticklers for that old-time religion, the Doomsayers and the Delphics give Augurs the utmost respect while the Clairvoyants and Gamblers give them the royal raspberry behind their straight flushes.

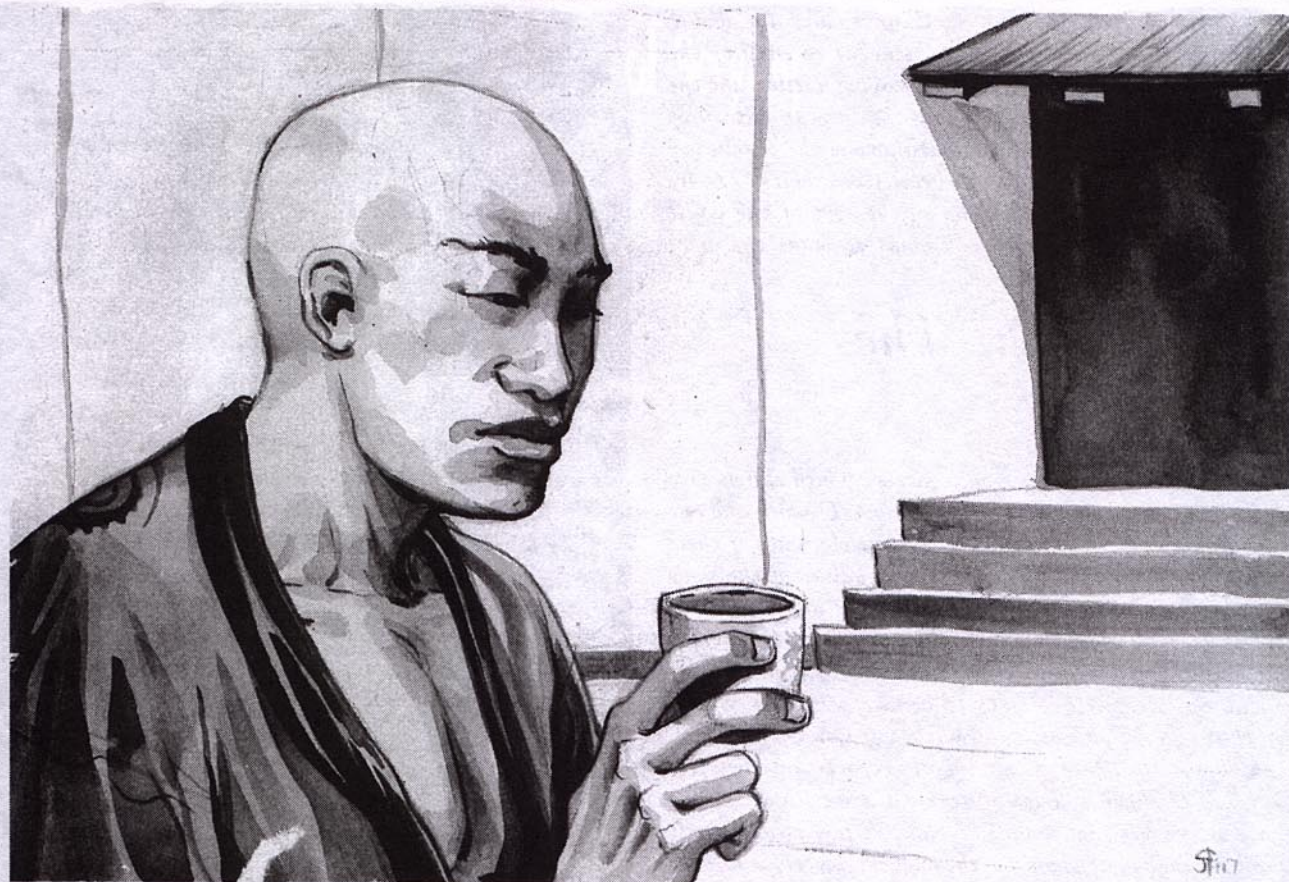
Blades of Jade

When going one way means life and going the other means death, three in ten will be comrades of life, three in ten will be comrades of death, and there are those who value life and as a result move into the realm of death, and these also number three in ten. Why is this so? Because they set too much in store by life. I have heard it said that one who excels in safeguarding his own life does not meet with rhinoceros or tiger when traveling on land nor is he touched by weapons when charging into an army. There is nowhere for the rhinoceros to pitch its horn; there is nowhere for the tiger to place its claws; there is nowhere for the weapon to lodge its blade. Why is this so? Because for him there is no realm of death.

— Lao Tzu, I [113], Book Two, *Tao Te Ching*

There are those in the Augurs' faction who would prefer to be called "traditionalists." While they are similarly stringent and humorless in their craft, they do not require the use of an animate sacrifice. However, because all matter in the Deadlands is forged from the Corpus of souls, these Augurs fall under the same auspice as their plasm-soaked brethren. As such, their blades are ceremonial, forged of softer stuff, and emblazoned with the image of the Dragon and the Globe to denote their alliance.

Practitioners of xylomancy, tea reading, *I Ching*, *feng shui* and *mah jongg*, these European Augurs identify with Asian traditions that date back before the philosophies of Confucianism and Zen Buddhism — though without any knowledge of their actual practitioners. Equally contemplative and methodical, the Blades of Jade blend the best characteristics of the stoic Delphics and the explorative Augurs. Respected but reclusive, these Eastern Augurs have



SH

only one enclave they have adopted as a shrine, which is within the halls of the Pantheon Temple. Here they sit and meditate in a minimalist space, the click and clink of tiles and cups the only sound for days on end.

Recently, the whole of the Eastern Augurs were called into the Pantheon chambers. As of yet, none have re-emerged. There are whispers of a matched set of teaspoons decorating the table placements, but these remain unconfirmed.

The Clairvoyants

And the Witch watched him as he went, and when he had passed from her sight she entered her cave, and having taken a mirror from a box of carved cedarwood, she set it up on a frame, and burned vervain on lighted charcoal before it, and peered through the coils of the smoke. And after a time she clenched her hands in anger. 'He should have been mine,' she muttered, 'I am as fair as she is.'

— Oscar Wilde, 'The Fisherman and his Soul'

Through a trilithon that frames the entrance to the southern Temple wing comes the sound of music. Sometimes it is punctuated by laughter, moaning, screams or songs. Very rarely is it ever quiet. This is where the newest Order resides, housing a variety of followers whose numbers are only rivaled by the mountains of eclectic bric-a-brac that fill every room down the length of the noisy corridor.

Instead of an aura of severity and stoicism, the Clairvoyant strata feels more like an off-campus strip mall. Everywhere there are crystals and rune chips and pentagrams in circlets, baubles on chains or braided lengths of twine, and candles of every possible shape and description. But it is the athame and bolline, the labrys and the cimaruta, the Enochian bones and the lamiae looking glasses that lend an eerie familiarity to the ensemble. In the background are lilting melodies on lyre and double-pipe, the deep rolling of drums, the ominous toll of gongs and a tangle of languages like Latin and Gaelic. This is where the witches have gathered.

While not all Clairvoyants are "witches" or even followers of Wiccan beliefs, nearly 30 forms of modern paganism from Greek, Norse and Celtic traditions to exotic Italian, African and Egyptian cultures coexist under the umbrella of neo-pagan Clairvoyance. Tarot readers and palmists discuss experiments in chakra color manipulation and phrenology. A gigantic quartz crystal is alternately used for scrying, focusing, tossing and aiding the vibrational healing of Angst. A wraith Moliated in Pan's likeness spins in a circle of Native American drummers, and a woman tattooed with Chinese zodiac animals speaks of Lughnasadh and the need for Moliated tapers.

Most Oracles insist that the Clairvoyants are all insane charlatans. I attribute this sentiment to envy of the Clairvoyants' flexible and rather fun-loving nature, and the fact that the Clairvoyants are now the largest faction of the Pantheon. The group's popularity among the dearly departed Quick makes them seem to breed like rabbits. Essentially, Clairvoyants have nothing on the rest of the Guild but sheer numbers, but that is enough to make the more orthodox-minded factions nervous.

Reigning On The Parade

The Clairvoyants is the only faction which claims two seats on the Pantheon: one for the *Dama D'onore* and one for *La Guardia*, the feminine and masculine elements of their balanced status system. Speaking as two halves of the same vote, the Clairvoyants act as one voice for all the multitudes of neo-Classical pagans. Beyond their station, the Clairvoyant Oracles embody arbitrary chaos. The rest of the Clairvoyant faction exists to honor their way, whatever that may be, and share it with any wraith who happens to be nearby. Most Clairvoyants report that they feel "compelled" to share a vision or seek out a specific wraith to become the target's guide into destiny. A few others admit to selling their Arcanos to the highest bidder, and still some cling to the explanation that their motivations are merely "Fate's will."

Clairvoyants are everywhere. They travel the Byways and open small businesses, read cards in lost alleys and hold respected status in the Hierarchy, host illicit wraith covens and scream at Heretics. Clairvoyants are chameleons as indiscriminate as they are insolent. Many a time the Pantheon had to decree that the Clairvoyants attempt to control themselves before the Delphics did so for them.



Balancing Selena

During the Etruscan Age of first century Italy, upper-class men and women alike enjoyed the pleasures and privileges to be had in life, and wished to have the same in death. Under Etruscan-style pantheism, gods and goddesses ruled in a patriarchal style much influenced by the Greeks. In the Deadlands, the equal opportunity system of the Italian Stregherian witchcraft changed the structure to one of balanced power between the sexes of the Dead. There is no one without the other; both are complements, counterparts, to the whole. Woman is the Maiden, the Mother and the Crone; man is the Hooded One, the Horned One and the Old One. Balance of power, energy and magick are essential to the proper function of the Boschetto, the rest of the coven.

Thus, the Clairvoyants await the coming of their *Grimas*.

Grand High Oracle Selena rules over the Pantheon, a worthy incarnation of her Arcanos and station. However, she does so without a balancing partner, a Lord High Priest, to be at her side. While the panel includes a tableau of powers, auspices, houses and elements, it lacks an individual of equal strength to Selena. Without this masculine presence, the Clairvoyants believe the Oracles' Guild will continue to be unbalanced and may never achieve its rightful dominance over the Deathlords and their corrupt Hierarchy.

The most logical choice for the job is Charon. This assessment is the source of much debate and reading in the Clairvoyant sect; vision and counter-vision are debated behind drawn curtains. Many agree that, as bodies themselves are malleable in the hands of the Masquers, those balancing characteristics do not necessarily have to be housed in the actual body of a man, if ever one can discern the original sex of a given wraith who has undergone Moliation. But Charon was the one Chosen by the Lady of Fate to guide souls. He was the one who formed the Hierarchy, founded Stygia, fought the Maelstroms and rebuilt the empire. It was he who fought-off the terror of Gorool and was swallowed by the Tempest, foretold to arise again. If not Charon, who?

Many Clairvoyants sit by the instruments of their craft, eager to glean an answer soon.

Types of Scrying

These are but a few of the means Clairvoyants use to bring about the Sight. Occasionally, forms go in and out of fashion, and it is not uncommon to find the single Clairvoyant who uses the same pendulum he used when scrying with Dr. Dee, or who prefers to Slumber in certain areas in the hopes of receiving a vision.

Aeromancy: Scrying by throwing dirt or sand to the wind.

Apantomancy: Scrying by observing objects at random.

Astrology: Scrying by translating planetary bodies, their movements and position.

Belomancy: Scrying by watching a flight of arrows.

Bibliomancy: Scrying by reading a page or line of a book at random.

Catoptromancy: Scrying by using a lens or magic mirror.

Ceromancy: Scrying by reading wax dripped in water.

Chiromancy: Scrying by palm reading (also: palmistry).

Crystalomancy: Scrying using a globe, water, mirror or glass.

Geloscopy: Scrying by interpreting laughter.

Geomancy: Scrying by studying patterns in the earth.

Graphology: Scrying by studying handwriting.

Gyromancy: Scrying by spinning in place.

Heptomancy: Scrying by using a sheep's liver.

Myomancy: Scrying by reading animal entrails or rodents' movements.

Numerology: Scrying by studying patterns in key numbers.

Oenisticy: Scrying by watching a flight of birds.

Onomancy: Scrying by rearranging letters in a name.

Phrenology: Scrying by reading the contours of the head.

Physiognomy: Scrying by studying human facial features.

Pyromancy: Scrying by using smoke and fire.

Tasseography: Scrying by reading tea leaves and the shapes they create.

Xylomancy: Scrying by reading the patterns of twigs on the ground.

Ideology

In order to house such a cacophony of beliefs, an originator discipline was found that encompassed much of the modern paganism beliefs and Stygian practicality. Eventually, the Stregherian system was wedded to the Etruscan cultural philosophy. This was not too difficult a task, since the ancient Italian craft existed within the heart of the Empire's regional success. Re-enacting the Golden Age in 550 BCE, the Clairvoyants represent themselves under a single vote of twin voices, male and female, and have powerful sway on the Pantheon.

The Etruscan Empire blossomed in Tuscany, Italy, its domain stretching from the edge of the Adriatic to just south of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Hedonistic and wealthy, the glorious city of Caere was known during the peak of its age as "the richest city in the world." Men discussed high culture and philosophy, crafting terra-cotta and gold with equal

skill. They paraded their finery in the streets in elegant *tebenna* cloaks, the precursor to the toga, the 'Romans' respected badge of citizenship. Women were pale and pampered, heavy with gold jewelry and expensive cosmetics. They rolled dice alongside the men at the *tabula lusoria*, and cheered at the wrestling matches and theater performances. Both sexes could be warriors, senators or priests, but an individual's fate was entirely in the hands of the myriad of gods.

Tinia, *Uni* and *Menrva*, the original Etruscan gods, were later joined by Greek adaptations like *Catha*, *Fufluns*, *Belchams* and *Turms*. These deities dictated every motion, debate or decision a person might make in a lifetime of choices — divination about what motivated the gods was much sought after, and auguring was a respected profession. Orientation and direction of the elements were key motives toward understanding the gods. The wind, rain and lightning showed the subtle changes in their moods, and their plans for the

future were written in the very flesh itself. The *haruspices* and the *fulguratores* used animal and weather signals to learn what gods desired: kings and countrymen begged to hear their advice.

Outside the city proper, the pagan *Strega* brought power from the moon and the traditions of *Arcadia* into the *Etruscan* fold. *Streggherian* belief about creating one's own destiny clashed with the preordained fatalism indigenous to the *Etruscans*. Beyond the *Shroud*, this friction could not continue. A compromise of vision was established to reconcile the difference between belief and death. In theory, this alliance has been accomplished. In practice, the debate still rages with undaunted fervor: the "Trusks" versus the "Stregghs."

The *Trusks* (*Etruscan Clairvoyants*) point to the *Lady of Fate* and *Fatalism*, the *Arcanos* itself, as proof that the afterlife reveals the will of the gods, though none of those long-vanished deities have actually been seen or recognized by any wraith in memory. However, the conviction that all actions adhere to a governed plan makes an *Etruscan Clairvoyant* a great believer in the *Web* and often a most avid student of the *Catacombs*.

The *Stregghs* (*Streggherian Clairvoyants*) insist that *Fatalism* is not one pre-determined, grandiose plan of all possible action, as the many branches of possibility that decorate the *Catacombs* attest. The *Lady of Fate* is not an arbitrator of preordained direction or of omniscient Sight. Most Oracles are hindered by this reactive view of *Fate* and their destinies: *Strega* and *Stregone* are proactive, creating their own *Fates* and governing their destinies with force of will. *Stregghs* actively focus their energies upon the world around them. The *Lady of Fate* is an incarnation of an Oracle's conscious decision to direct his life. The *Lady of Fate* is merely a vehicle. Not everyone desires to be herded like cattle. A common quote among the *Stregghs* is: "The power of the Self is greater than that of an arbitrary *Fate*."

Pray *Fate* never hears that one.

Minor Factions

The following groups are technically part of the *Clairvoyant* movement, but there is little doubt that, were it possible, each would strike out on its own and acquire its own *Pantheon* seat. In the meantime, they huddle and plot and cast, each glancing jealously at the others.

Star Seekers:

These wraiths follow the shifts of the heavenly bodies from the time of birth and throughout the life cycle in a painstaking astrological map of *Fatal* design. *Fate* is written within the stars, and their effects upon the person con-

tinue even into *Death*. All the aspects of the planets themselves — their gravitational pulls, their rotations and revolutions, and their geochemical makeup — have as much to do with an individual's destiny as the associative powers of the gods who imbue these heavenly bodies with their spirits. *Star Seekers* are very spiritual and introverted compared to many of the other "performance" subgroupings.

Fetishists:

These Oracles will be the first to tell you they're not into *PVC* and hip-high boots: these *European wanna-bes* believe in tribal animism, which says a representative object is imbued with the spirit it resembles. Common fetishes are in the shapes of animals, distinctive people, ancient spirits or worshipped god icons. These smaller versions of powerful beings are kept and cared for as if they were living — for the *Fetishists*, the spirits are very, very real. They must be spoken to with respect, given food and drink, and be offered gifts or promises of deeds done in their names. The fetish does not recognize the difference between the sides of the *Shroud*, and can thus astrally "cross over" without hindrance. Proper respect and honor is given in hopes that the spirits will bestow their precious knowledge on their faithful keepers.

Jesters:

This is a gaudy and frivolous crowd which incites its own *Arcanos* through a most basic human behavior, though one that is nearly lost in the *Underworld*: laughter. The *Jesters* study everything from facial expressions, head configurations and vocal inflections, to the tones and pitches of laughter itself. With a keen ear and sharp wit, these fanciful Oracles listen for the vibrations of a person's *Lifestrand* within the sound and shape of the *Corpus*. Often, however, their best attempts at humor result in an eerie uneasiness similar to childish fears of circus clowns or the creepy undercurrent of tinny *Jack-in-the-box* music.

The Vanities:

Reflection is used in the true sense by these *Seers*, who use a mirror, pane of glass, or still pool of water to see images of the future or the faces they may wear. Teased mercilessly for their apparent narcissism, the *Vanities* have adopted an air of *en vogue*, and are *Moliated* often to mimic the most current looks of the *Quick*.

Card-Carrying Members:

Tarot readers and player's deck numerologists were tagged with this catch-phrase only within the past century, but it has stuck. Though each Oracle carries a different panoplied deck and fans different patterns on the floor, all carry the tools of their trade. Often, these pagans will draw hands at one another in lieu of a "secret handshake." A Member without proper ammunition is denounced as an *Ass-In-The-Hole*.



The Gamblers:

In the long run, your skill would beat my luck. It always does. I figure the only chance I've got is to juice the betting on this one hand... go for broke. All the skill in the dimensions can't change the outcome of one hand. That's luck... which puts us on an equal footing.

— Robert Aspirin, *Little Myth Marker*

To wraiths ignorant of the Guilds, the Gamblers' trademark scams seem harmless enough: the tourist-trap pea-shell game on the sidewalk, the friendly game of craps in the yard or chess at a park table, the four women playing bridge in a quiet living room — nothing to look at twice. But any of these settings could hide a Guild member whose Passion lies in the hustle, and who is driven in the pursuit of the ultimate prize: learning to ride wild luck.

A Gambler gambles — it's that simple. The addiction doesn't wane just because the body's dead — the game is eternal. Now, though, the stakes are higher, different and

more exciting. To the winner goes the rank of Dealer, leader of the Gambler Oracles, and exclusive rights to the backroom business that makes the rest of Stygia hum. To the loser goes the shame of rolling snake eyes and the lost face of any empty pocket in a bustling casino — at least until he can build up his stakes enough to play with the Big Boys again.

Taking risks, riding the edge, betting whatever he's got on the outcome of a single confrontation in the streets, hedging the odds, taking friends for a ride and setting up the most elaborate scam on the slim chance of beating the house just once — Gamblers live for the resolution of the variables. Their afterlives revolve around making a score masked as a harmless game of chance, a friendly bet "just between friends" and the strong-arm dare. The game never ends, and a clean run could be waiting with just one more toss of the dice....

Excerpts from *The Pulse: The Six-Foot-Underground Newsletter of Stygia*

Dateline: March 19, 1986

Muttering a thousand little prayers hourly, the serious Gambler is far more penitent than even the most contrite monk. Bilingual out of habit, prayers to "Lady Luck" are insinuated into every sentence and etched into every motion of Corpus. Blackjack bookies, seven-card studs, roulette prayer wheels and slot jockeys all vie for position for the available Pantheon seat; whoever quotes the most solid runs, wins. Some folks around here are real sore losers.

— Leonard "The Leak" Kravitz

Dateline: June 22, 1994

Superstitious in his belief, obsessive-compulsive in his ritual, and emotionally extreme when confronted with any sudden variables, this Oracle makes quite an impression on the average wraith. One of the "least dead of the Dead," the Gambler never loses his Passions so long as he's got his vice of choice handy.

— Red-Eyed Susie

Dateline: November 6, 1996

Any Gambler worth his shirt can rattle off a lengthy personal checklist of lucky charms and sure-fire remedies to battle the evils of a bad run while never missing a beat dummy-dealing from a deck. He can be cool as a cucumber while sweating on the inside, or flashing Pathos like a banshee to distract unwanted attention from his quick-as-lightning fingers. The Gambler can foresee the likeliest hand of Fate's trick-deck, and quote odds with a skill that C3PO would envy.

— Overlord

Dateline: December 19, 1997

Interestingly enough, not many wraiths choose to procure Gambler services... then again, nobody likes a smartass. Having a tipped internal balance spiced with a kiss of Fatalism, Gamblers are prone to being cheeky know-it-alls with martini-dry senses of humor. This would get them into far more trouble that it does if not for their habit of hiring one or two personal Spook strong-arms to serve as pit bosses for their negotiation tables. Even if you can calculate the likeliest outcome, there's nothing wrong with a little extra insurance.

— Note to the Editor, written by Anonymous

La Belle La Fayette

I never saw the good side of a city
Til I took a ride on a riverboat queen.
— Credence Clearwater 'Revival, "Proud Mary"

The Gamblers "Dealer," the leader of the sect, has her personal offices on *La Belle La Fayette*, a legendary bayou "ghost ship" that wrecked itself on the Mississippi Delta during the riverboat casino gambling boom. She's a split-level sweetheart with a lazy paddle-wheel in the back and the eerie impression of being heavy and dank, the wood of her body swollen with water. The outside railing is peeling paint and the wooden deck creaks mournfully, but walking through the main doors elicits an involuntary sigh of approval.

Her main body is filled with green dealers' booths for blackjack and monte, craps tables framed in mahogany wood and brass-lined long tables for games of chance. The whirl of wheels and slot machines joins the spill of chips and soft slap of cards being thrown down. These melodies mix with laughter, shouts and cheers from wraiths who long to fill their purses or perhaps just fill the endless years with something to do. The barfights, the lost souls pitched overboard, the rumored deal of the century and the soulforging of cheaters all serve to brighten those otherwise dull and boring Deadlands days. It's even whispered that her captain's a Ferryman, but no one admits to believing that.

As long as you have cash, you're welcome to play. If you're not here to play, you'd best have business to conduct. Otherwise, you're overboard — or have an appointment in the back.

Business is a Pleasure

La Belle La Fayette travels the River of Death with a crew of top-ranking Oracles and a half-dozen Spooks patrolling her belly. Negotiations with the Dealer are conducted at her Private Table. Popular recommendations are to pay in full up front, either in oboli or in services rendered under strict contract. The payment plan is severe, to say the least, and the interest rates are almost usurious. However, even on the long-term plan, there are those who default — they end up as deck chairs.

To be found lacking sufficient funds qualifies the unfortunate debtor for an obligatory spin of Roulette. Roulette still has most of her upper torso, (though I imagine someone Moliated an anti-gravity chest like that), but her namesake composes the rest of her lap. She sits, grins, spins her wheel and tosses the little white balls herself. Watch out for Roulette's red double-zeros (both sets of them!):

the flat ones read "Dealer's Choice." The current Dealer is notorious for his sadistic sense of humor.

Aside from being the wraithly equivalent of a "fairy godmother," the Dealer has exclusive rights to the Guild's lucrative business of imported goods. Contraband stowed in the hold of *La Belle La Fayette* is the ship's real business, and the trade is quite profitable indeed. Gamblers and Spooks work in concert on this venture, smuggling everything from cases of bottled Pathos to kilos of whisp and even stow-away Thralls making good their escape with payment in debt or in stolen oboli. The slave trade may be prosperous, but there's always a market for an underground railroad. The Gamblers work to ensure the business stays smooth and clean, operated with a detail-oriented touch.

Gambler business is erratic, but sweet. It's nearly impossible to swindle a Gambler, though many (mostly Usurers and Chanteurs) have tried simply for the challenge. Most would-be sharps end up as pachinco balls. The Dealer sometimes employs a talented Usurer on the *La Fayette* if he is impressed with her ability to juggle the numbers; however, ones who don't behave themselves end up treading river water. Smartasses have notoriously short fuses with other smartasses. That's why the Dealership changes hands so often.

Ante Up

Contrary to popular belief, the Gamblers are not a disorganized faction. Just because an unfamiliar face often graces the Dealer's seat at the Pantheon is no reason to judge the Gamblers a flippant lot. Truthfully, they're far from it.

A Dealer's term of office is measured by how long a given Dealer's run of "good calls" may last, yet a smart Gambler knows the odds will catch up with him sooner or later. Thus, every so often, the reigning Dealer cuts and runs to dodge the inevitable coup, only to re-emerge later to dethrone the latest sap to warm the seat of power. It's a wise Dealer who can ride the odds while it's a fool who tries to beat them once too often.

The Gamblers will follow a "straight" Dealer no matter how erratic her visits, so long as her luck holds out. Personal behavior doesn't matter as long as the Dealer is a proven winner. On the other hand, once a Dealer's luck turns, so do her followers. Who's more foolish after all: the fool or the fools who follow her? Gamblers don't much like the insinuation, and will turn quick as an ace of spades on the Dealer who brings the Gamblers "bad luck."

The Doomsayers

The grandeur of the dooms

We have imagined for the mighty dead.

— John Keats

Doomsayers are a fixture in Stygia, as much a part of the landscape as the Onyx Tower. Introducing each major event of history with a leering, "We warned you," each Doomsayer is armed with a picket sign and a tireless soliloquy of damnation. Holy, impassioned and horrific, Doomsayer wraiths live in the shackles of what it means to truly know Oblivion and be charged with using that knowledge to save all ignorant souls.

The Holy Mission

The End is Nigh! Repent to your Pardoners! Doom is at hand! Tithes! Tithes!

— Prophet Orpheus

It was once explained to me this way: "The Shroud is a sieve which filters out the worthy from the unworthy and tests the human soul. This test decides whether our race may Transcend to dwell with Him or be denied that eternal grace." Unfortunately, the philosophy has merit. Modern Doomsayers have equipped their leading Prophet with new words to enforce his old ideas. All matter is energy, even Corpus, and that energy is basically motion out from the ultimate Source. Energy that takes form in the Deadlands is plasm. Plasm, the stuff of wraiths, came from Oblivion. And since plasm originates from Oblivion, all wraiths were thus born of Oblivion, and will, in accordance with the Big Bang theory, condense and return to Oblivion once more. Plagued with this foreknowledge of impending doom, the Doomsayer sallies forth to call his warnings unto all unwary wraiths.

Loyal Followers or Cult Zealots?

Sunny came home with a list of names

She didn't believe in Transcendence

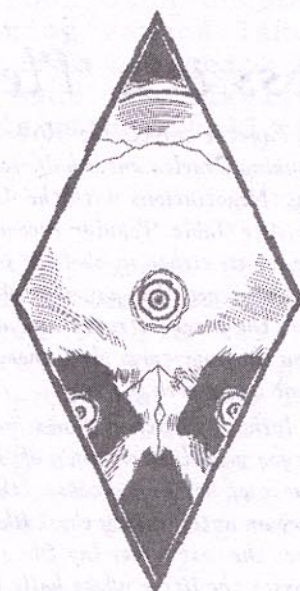
— Shawn Colvin, "Sunny Came Home"

The Doomsayers have a very simple social philosophy. The rank and file are those souls who were reborn to follow, and Doomsayer leaders were chosen to lead those followers. The most zealous Doomsayers are those who have lost Fetters and are losing the edge of personal, essential Passions — they wish to spread the word before it is too

late. Recent converts are heartfelt criers of the horror which is just cresting the horizon — their compassion for the unenlightened masses they have just left knows no bounds. As for the Oracular Prophet, he is the most venerable of all souls who wish to enlighten. All in all, it makes one fairly swoon in the overabundance of goodwill toward all wraiths.

A Doomsayer Forum is an awesome sight. The charismatic orator sways the masses of wraiths like Moses parting the pulsing waves in a sea of souls. Like an orchestra, the chanting swells and burrows into the mind, hammering at reason with its terrible truth. A Prophet's words can haunt you for a long time because, at the very least, your Shadow recognizes how it all makes sense. There's no escaping Oblivion. The end is inevitable. There is no more powerful conviction than the promise of Transcendence to a wraith who has nothing left to lose.

To his followers, the Doomsayer Prophet is the epitome of truth. All follow the Prophet's lead, unquestioning and unfailing in their missions to bring truth to whomever the Prophet deems worthy. The Prophet is seconded by a handful of Signbearers, each who leads her own flock of Doomsayer underlings and faithful Blind-Eyes. Unlike the other Oracle subgroups, Doomsayers rarely try to jockey for position within the Guild. In fact, Doomsayers as a whole seem content with their lot, and happy to bully other wraiths into belief. Rising through the ranks is a function of happenstance, when either a Doomsayer gathers enough of a flock to his side to earn the rank of Signbearer, or a Signbearer or Prophet fizzles out of existence.

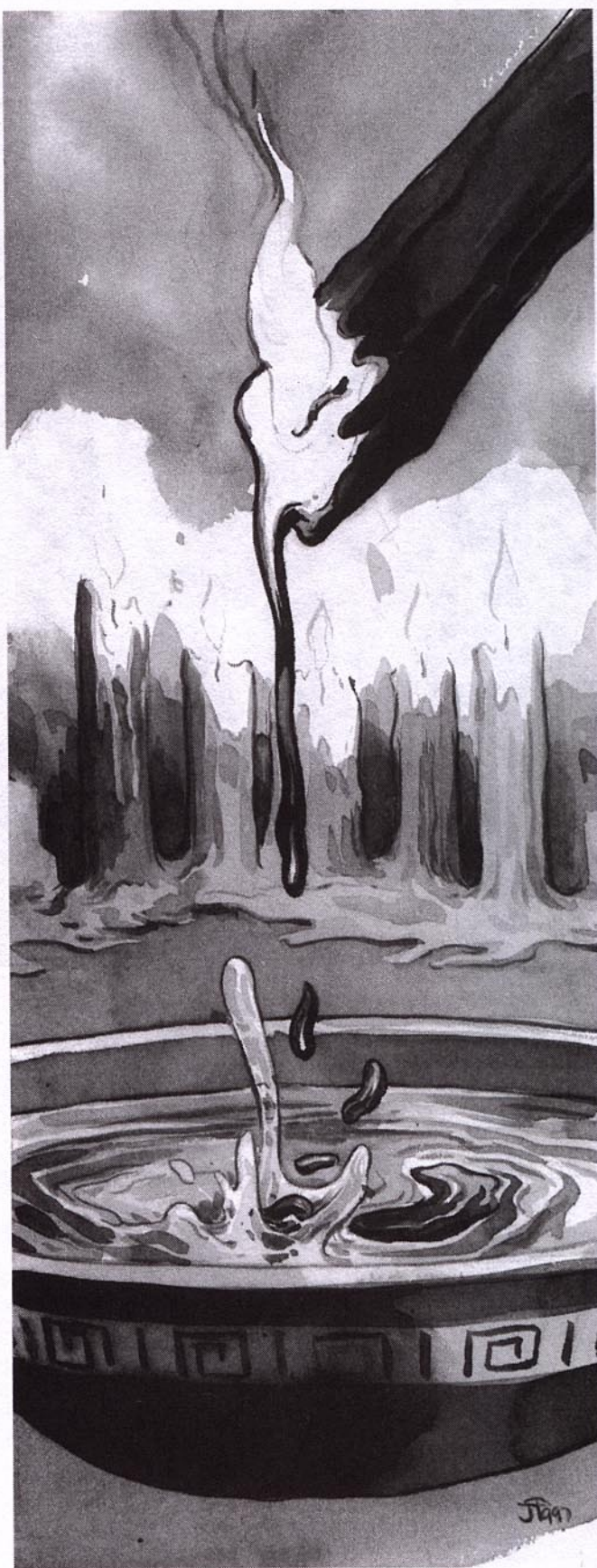


Annihilation

Doomsayers gather in secret to reaffirm their purpose and form a united front under their banner of gloom. Such clandestine huddles usually take place at the mouth of a Nihil known to open and shut in regular cycles, a gateway to the inescapable future. This hole into the Tempest is deeply meaningful to the cult: "It's as if looking into the very consciousness of chaos," is one oft-repeated quote on the matter. It is here that the higher echelons of the faction come, all in order to make sacrifice in chorus.

THE CURSE OF CHARON

AND TO THEE I SAY, LOOK THENCE!
LOOK THENCE, AND TELL ME THAT WE
KNOW NOT WHAT WE KNOW! FOR IN
THE SEETHING DEPTHS OF THE CHURN-
ING TIDES WAKES THE MONSTROSITY
THAT HE BIRTHED, AND, IN HIS ENOR-
MOUS PRIDE AND HEEDLESS IGNO-
RANCE, HAS LOOSED UPON YOU ALL!
IT WILL COME! AND IT WILL NOT COME
JUST FOR HIM. THAT GAVE UNTO IT,
WORSHIPPED IT WITH A BLIND EYE
AND BAITED IT WITH A FORKED
TONGUE, BUT IT COMES FOR YOU AND
FOR ME AND ALL OF US TOGETHER!
AND IT SHALL SMITE US WITH A
CRUSHING FIST AND SWALLOW US
WHOLE!





The deepest secret of the 'Doomsayers' is that they believe with a perfect faith in the imminence of Armageddon. Oblivion must reach a state of critical mass before Stygia may be cleansed and thus able to Transcend as a whole. 'Doomsayers' believe that Charon's self-serving system of soulforging denies Oblivion the souls it needs to achieve this state of pure nothingness and enhances the hedonistic afterlives of the Stygian wraiths who have nothing better to do than muck about with tiresome politics and pester the Quick. Charon's crime of not allowing souls to travel to their proper destination resulted in a collective pool of Angst in Stygia which eventually coalesced to form the beast Gorool. The fact that Gorool appropriately destroyed Charon, (or at least banished him from this plane of existence), serves to verify the 'Doomsayers' Armageddon theory. (Many 'Doomsayers' point to this single Apocalyptic event as proof of their righteousness.) In this fatalistic philosophy, the only way to Transcendence is for everyone to concede to this destiny.

Each wraith who remains in Stygia as some form of object or currency deviates from his Fated path of feeding Oblivion. Each soul saved from Oblivion slows Stygia's apocalyptic march toward Transcendence. Charon's selfish system cannot persist: it is each 'Doomsayer's' geas to accelerate the timetable on Armageddon. So whenever they can, 'Doomsayers' pilfer soulforged items and snatch up oboli like kleptomaniacs, all for the purpose of throwing the swag into a Nihil at the earliest opportunity. (This tactic also gets rid of the evidence of theft pretty handily.)

Needless to say, this status as the proponents of Oblivion is a much-guarded confidence among the 'Doomsayers'. Widespread knowledge of the Armageddon Theory would make the 'Doomsayers' none too popular with the other Guilds or indeed any wraith. So for the moment, the 'Doomsayers' keep a low profile, and are perceived merely as crackpot prophets of doom.

Even in this reduced state, 'Doomsayers' have many points working against them. They are notorious annoyances, they often do not have the best social skills, and, generally their behavior bears a striking similarity to that of Mourners, sans the chains — none of these points being particularly appealing to would-be converts. All that aside, 'Doomsayers' are most often undone by their own, Shadow-fed fears of being discovered which tends to make them paranoid and prone to defensive outbursts.

Doomsaying (and Doing it Well)

This is it, we're going to die.

— Douglas Adams, *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe*

As implied in their *nom de guerre*, Doomsayers are *not* happy campers. They are the first to downplay a plan, the last to admit that someone's idea actually worked, and always the one to throw in a helpful, "I told you so." Doomsayers are the ultimate pessimists. These wraiths once lived for the End and, now that they're closer to it, are all the more eager to inform everyone in hearing range how very close they are, personally, to Ultimate Demise. A Doomsayer rarely gives up the chance to proselytize, lecture, berate or hound another (obviously ignorant) wraith about all the things that can possibly go wrong in her afterlife.

A good roleplayer is able to walk the tightrope between being true to a Doomsayer's negative outlook in Death and making a solid contribution to the game's dynamic. No one has fun if a chronicle becomes consistently annoying because of one character's monotonous overacting. Instead, you understand that the Doomsayer character has inordinate possibilities to be dramatic, mythical, wise, tragic, enigmatic, mysterious and even hysterically funny. The trick is to balance the character's purpose with that of the Circle, and then cut loose within those guidelines.

For example, Jen, the Storyteller, has Mike playing a Doomsayer in a Circle with Joel and Stu. Jen has made Mike the driving force of the story by having him be the one to gather the others on a mission to infiltrate the Emerald Legion. To balance the game, Jen has given Joel the role of Mike's Shadow. Joel gets to play a sugary-sweet, optimistic Shadow who always has something positive to say while trying to cheer up the dour Doomsayer — thus, Joel now gets to be the bane of Mike's existence if the Doomsayer's pronouncements of woe get too out-of-hand. To further the game's dynamic, everyone else's Shadow thinks the Doomsayer is a great guy until they realize he's even more pessimistic than they are. Envy, anger, intrigue and suspicion from the other two Shadows get punctuated by jarring bouts of glee from Joel playing the Doomsayer's chipper Shadow. The reverse is true for the actual characters themselves, who suddenly have their Shadows riding them to get rid of the really depressing guy in the corner — and so it goes.

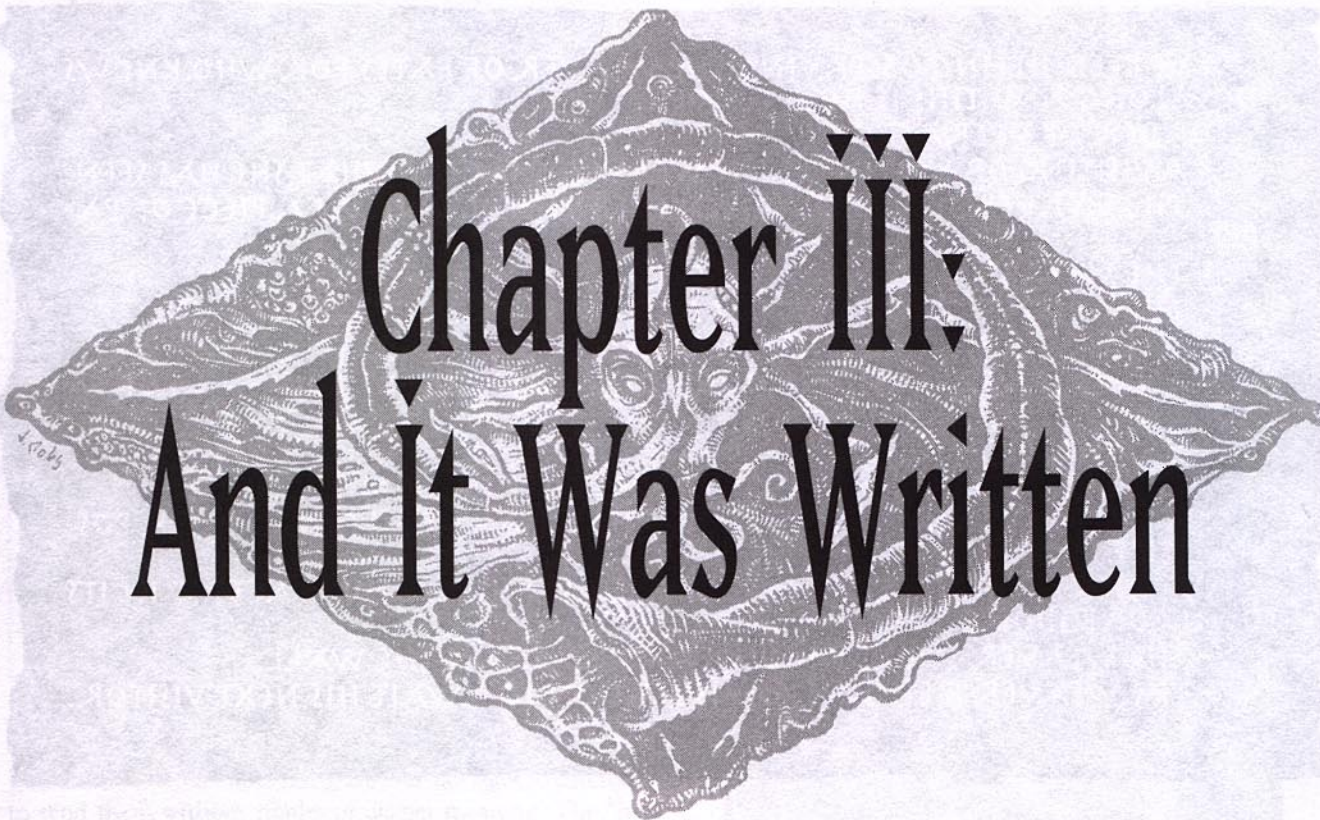
The secret of the Doomsayer character is this: Have fun, but never admit it.

Ironically, feeding souls to Oblivion is a crime punishable by soulforging which would undo the very purpose of a Doomsayer's existence. No true Doomsayer wishes to become part of the problem, and particularly not by being forged. Still, feeding soulforged objects to Oblivion can get dangerous — and expensive — and Doomsayer Shadows often hammer hard on the "destroy yourself and speed Transcendence" theme. This struggle for self-preservation versus martyrdom for the sake of all wraiths complicates the Doomsayer's afterlife a thousandfold. But still, the Forum persists.

They are, after all, keeping everyone's best interests in mind.

I'm meeting someone tomorrow, a storyteller who calls himself "Father Time." I was told I would recognize him by his "face." Inside joke? We'll see. I'll supposedly be getting a brief overview of the Guild's history (as seen by Seers?) and what it means to be an Oracle. I pray that this person has some answers for me: I'm overloaded with disconnected details as is. Each day, the whirl of names and places grows more dizzying. Answers no longer relate to the questions I had in mind — each revelation just spawns more questions. I'm definitely keeping the things I write down. The only objective truth I can trust lies in the written word. I don't trust the contents of my own head anymore.





Chapter III: And It Was Written

In the Basement Below



I used to come down here to watch him. At first, it was a simple, morbid curiosity, but now it's something mesmerizing, almost frightening. It's like seeing a grisly auto wreck in progress. You just have to watch it happen.

When I need to get away from the petty needlings of Stygian bureaucrats or just clear my own head of other people's cobwebs, I enter the Temple and twist in the direction of the Catacombs (which, as anyone can tell you, is slightly left of falling sideways while turning counter-clockwise). The Catacombs that lie under the Pantheon Temple are meandering, subterranean wormholes that spin out in Escher-mandated directions. The walls meet, ceiling and floor, in rough-hewn slopes that spin into darkness. The ripples of stone are worn smooth by countless footfalls and caresses. At first glance, it looks as if the caverns are carved in gray-on-umber veined marble, the color of ash on dried blood. Yet, a closer look reveals that the walls of the winding paths are made up of small scraps

of aged, brittle paper, each with faded handwriting. One is stuck next to another and another, on and on in a maddening pursuit of something hiding in the distance. And someone is down there: the Weaver of Fates.

It has been rumored that the Weaver was originally on a self-assigned quest to pay for the sins he committed while still a mortal man. That may be how it started, but it's gone way beyond that now. To see him working is like seeing an addict with his fix, caught in an almost painful ecstasy of obsession. He sits writing and yanking fistfuls of paper from reams of dusty, forgotten scribbles; writing and sticking, and writing and tearing, and running to place each note in just the right spot, then scurrying back to write some more. Most call him mad.

I think he's creating a map of Fate.

He's quite insane, no doubt about that. But then again, the true geniuses usually are. I think it's going to be fascinating to see what he discovers, if anything, but I have to say I'm thankful I'm not the one who's shouldered his burden. I'm content simply to lose myself in the history that's been pasted on his walls, all the stories of what was or might have been. I mean, everyone's there, even if she hasn't been born yet. I'm just happy that the Weaver's the one

I'VE BEEN SITTING OBSERVING THE WEAVER OF FATES FOR WHO KNOWS HOW LONG AND THIS IS HOW IT GOES:

ORDER OF OPERATIONS:

- A VISITING ORACLE TELLS THE WEAVER EXACTLY WHAT SHE HAS SEEN.
- THE WEAVER SCRIBBLES DOWN EVERYTHING SAID ON A PIECE OF PAPER.
- THE WEAVER READS THE VISION BACK TO THE ORACLE.
- THE ORACLE CORRECTS ANY MISTAKES, OR NODS AND LEAVES.
- THE WEAVER READS THE VISION AGAIN TO HIMSELF.
- THE WEAVER GOES THROUGH THE CATACOMBS LOOKING FOR A MATCH.
- HE THEN EITHER:
 - A) FINDS ANOTHER SCRAP OF PAPER THAT HAS SIMILARITIES;
 - B) FINDS A STRAND OF POSSIBILITY THAT MAY RESULT IN SIMILAR POSSIBILITIES;
 - C) FINDS NOTHING THAT MATCHES THIS VISION, AND PLACES IT IN ITS OWN CORRIDOR.
- THE WEAVER STICKS THE PAPER IN PLACE ON THE WALL.
- THE WEAVER RETURNS TO HIS STATION TO AWAIT HIS NEXT VISITOR.

keeping track of all them. He's the only one crazy enough to try.

Each piece of paper records a vision, any glimpse of Fatalism an Oracle may have, and each is lovingly placed chronologically or by subject, in an endless attempt to scribe a pathway toward a possible future. Sometimes the rivulets of prophecy cluster at some great event where many had similar premonitions with different outcomes. At such junctions the papers collide and buckle against one another, but inevitably the Strand branches off again as time takes its course and Fate chooses a way. The fluttering river continues, tributaries branch off and die, while others grow and meet up with long-lost snatches of thought. Sometimes these Strands coalesce into a raging tempest of Fatal warnings, like those predicting the Fourth Maelstrom or the Breaking. Then, after the deluge, the visions settle and thin. The record of Fatalism's prescience ebbs, and the visions are sporadic islands of scrip on the walls. In essence, it's like glancing at all the golden threads that Fate may

weave, but seen from the wrong side of the Shroud: broken, faded and decayed. I've spent (hours? days? years?) here learning about everyone, including ourselves.

I've seen the Weaver now and again, less frequently now than when I first died. But I visit, just as we all do, to pay homage to his great work. All Oracles are requested to report directly to the Weaver once Fate's touch passes. It's not a requirement (more like a professional courtesy), but most indulge him. Perhaps we do so only for the small bit of immortality that comes from having our visions preserved, like the Quick scribbling graffiti on the bathroom wall. Maybe we all want to be part of something bigger than ourselves, or merely to indulge in base curiosity, just to help see if he really will find some predictable pattern in the web of Fate he's woven. Wouldn't that be something marvelous?

I HAVE CHOSEN. I MUST SEE.

Reading the Writing on the Wall

A lone man is riding a skiff of reeds, eyes downcast. Suddenly, he looks up. A shining hand appears and touches him lightly on the brow. His eyes burn with new vision. The disembodied hand, that of a woman, smoothes over his strong shoulders, which hunch and strain. His back is now bent. On him, she has laid the weight of an awesome burden. But still he stands and steers the unending current.

— Seen by Iphenia, 43rd Pythian

This is, quite clearly, a depiction of the selection of Charon. But the Lady of Fate does not grant the messages so carelessly as to send them without ripples of deeper meaning. The “hand” not only symbolizes the Lady herself, but the literal Hand of Fate, the proper name of the Legion of Fate. Weighing heavily on Charon is the council of the Eighth Legion, the Ladies of Fate, who first ruled over Charon’s *Enfant* soul, plucking him from the formless mists and claiming him as one of the earliest examples of a “special death.” Their rule far predated the formation of Stygia, loath though the Deathlords are to admit it. Charon, purportedly, had vague suspicions about the circumstances surrounding his own demise, but such details must have been known only to his Pardoner and his Shadow.

Being “touched on the brow” has similar repercussions, as Oracles themselves are often symbolized by the “third (seeking) eye” located in the center of their foreheads. Some Oracles even bear such a deathmark, and are viewed with a certain awe in the Pantheon’s subjects. Does this indicate that Charon, himself, had some Sight? Or, as most believe, did he merely bear the mark as the Chosen of the Lady of Fate? One interpretation postulates that Charon was given a vision by the Lady of Fate in order to demonstrate what it was she foresaw for him. The act of pre-warning would become a recurring theme in Charon’s rule. Having been gifted with foreknowledge, he would always act upon it at his own discretion.





Skygian Suites

180 East 10th Street
(202) 759-0001

And the children fight over their toys, but the dolls are in the playhouse. Cars and trains and stuffed animals they may have, but the dolls are all locked away. One dark child lifts a book with gray binding from the highest shelf in the nursery and beats at the locks on the dollhouse seams. Tearing the book, pounding with the pieces, he succeeds in cracking the wood around the hinges and sits down. One of the children with sticky fingers grabs a doll by its hair and pulls it free. Soon, all the children play with dolls again, and the book is discarded into the unswept hearth.

— Seen by Renemue, clairvoyant watcher

Note that all the “toys” are inanimate likenesses, while the “dolls” are shapes of living people. This is the revolt which precedes the Breaking. Charon had “locked away” the access to the Skinlands with his *Dictum Mortuum*, the highest authority of his law which is most likely to be found on the “highest shelf.” “Bound in gray,” the *Dictum Mortuum* could be that which was forged in the Deadlands, or framed in vague ideals. Charon’s idealistic notion of autonomy from the living world perhaps put him in this role of a parent to the Guilds’ status of “children,” but the Guilds were clever and nimble children. Simple and direct, much like children, they did not shy away from “breaking” things that keep them from their desires.

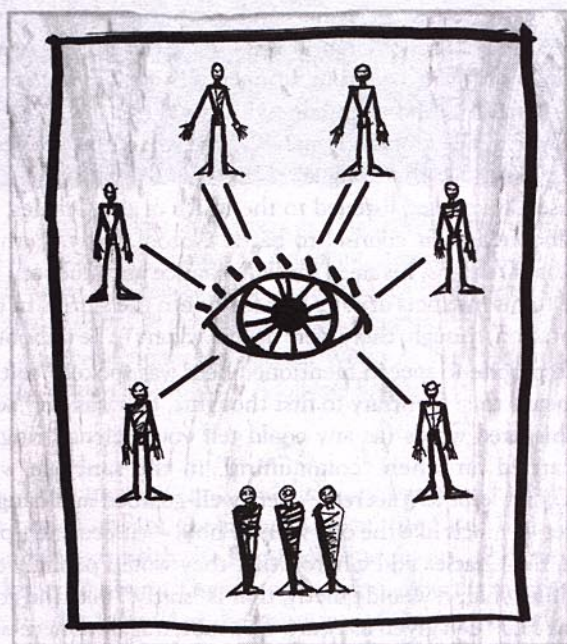
The “dark child” was originally translated by the Reader of this vision as the Shadow of one of the Guildmasters, which then served to warn the Pantheon of the coming disaster of someone’s Harrowing, or perhaps a hidden Spectre in our midst. However, as this interpretation was never borne out by the events that followed, the error was rectified by substituting the charred Artificers for the “dark child,” perhaps going so far as to name Lord Ember himself. Thus the prophecy becomes a much more accurate reading.

We realized the Puppeteers, children of “sticky fingers,” would initiate the first acts against Charon’s Word of the Dead, but they were not the ones to initiate the coup. It was the “dark child,” the Artificers, who stepped in to challenge Charon instead of circumventing his decree. Lord Ember had the courage

and the audacity to “break” that which held the Guilds at bay in order to achieve superiority. The Artificers’ revolt delivered what it promised; all the children “play with dolls again.”

What Lord Ember did not realize was that the thing being broken was Charon’s will. “Cracked” around the lock, the *Dictum Mortuum* was Charon’s own word and the backbone of his political standing. The Artificers bypassed his word and allowed the first fissures to begin weakening Fate’s Chosen’s reign. As Oracles, we were not as affected by the *Dictum Mortuum* as were some of the other Guilds, but as with any change of the Web, it affected us all. Charon himself knew this as well... if only in hindsight.

Lastly, Charon’s Word, the “book,” lay strewn in the “unswept hearth,” a hearth littered with ashes. This is where Charon’s credo found death, in the fiery forges of the Artificers.



— Pictorial vision of Yoshi Yellow-Moon, preliterate transcription

Oracles cannot choose who is friend and who is foe as easily as others might. We shunt aside our personal feelings to join with those who best serve the Web and to oppose those who seek to destroy it. Whatever our humble opinions, Fate dictates our allies and enemies, though, in some cases, there is little personal resistance to our compliance.

Yoshi saw our greatest ties would be with the Artificers and the Sandmen, evoking a double-bonding of political and personal alliance. The potency of these alliances has become evident throughout the ages. The Artificers hold the reins of the political behemoth that is Stygia and supply our Guild with currency, weaponry and ritualistic offerings. Sandmen have been the backbone of the Oracular enterprise within the Skinlands, our conduit into the Fated dreams of the liv-

ing. The dreamweavers have also recently agreed to the mutually beneficial arrangement of information exchanges — they tell us what they see in dreams while we skim the Webs of favored Quick for Fatal pre-warnings. These ties have suited us well.

The single-bond lines are those who share an unequal relationship with the Oracles; one in which debts have to be repaid. The balance, the chaos, the mask and the black eyes would become our allies when the time was right. That time came during the Breaking. Though the soulforgers were our allies, many in the Pantheon saw that the coup would fail despite the ill-chosen Way Charon had followed. As always, Selena was moved to inform Charon of his future errors, but not this time of his eventual victory over the Guilds. Under the orders of the Grand High Oracle, the Oracles joined the coup as a show of our conviction that Charon’s decision would cost wraiths dearly. He saw our unity and received that message; that was all that was necessary. We knew the outcome before the first blow was struck.

Charon did not succeed because of his own innate righteousness. The revolt failed because the Oracles chose to sabotage the insurrection as the Way dictated we must. It is a grand concealment of the Pantheon’s. The Puppeteers would be jealous if they knew how often we play the Guilds with marionette strings made of Fate’s Web. Even Charon later admitted that his was a hollow victory.

We withdrew, taking with us the destined ones: the Usurers, the Haunters, the Masquers and the Harbingers. As yet, we have not asked for repayment, (though many representatives have called offering favors; they do not seem to enjoy being in the position of indebtedness), but we wait for the proper signs indicating that their special talents are needed by the Lady.

The final picture is that of the Forgotten Three, though it is unclear which one of them holds special importance. The Alchemists and the Solicitors have slipped into anonymity; the Mnemoi were cast out because of their unscrupulous greed. Whatever the purpose of the one essential Arcanos, we of the Pantheon cannot afford to lose track of this vital piece of the puzzle. Without calling attention directly to the search for this lost triad, we have begun our efforts to insist that *all* Guilds must be properly aligned in order for Charon to return. Vagueness serves us well, for we will not be more specific and attempt to force everyone into a unilateral compliance. Instead, a few Oracular pronouncements have the others scurrying the Damoclean sword we only hint at, and thus they serve our ends. The stratagem goes slowly, but steadily. The promise of a new era, or change of any sort, inspires most wraiths into at least fitful action. Ennui is everyone’s enemy.



The Prince of Wanderers will turn from the mouth, but softly keeps the tongue whispering in his ear. The sewers will vomit forth the centuries of waste, and with this drown the bee into the Promised Land.

— Seen by Elijah Greene, Doomsayer-preacher

Here is where the history of the Dead changed forever. Charon, master of the Ferryman and the Sunless Seas, turned from the wise counsel of Grand High Oracle Selena (yet again) and brought about his own ruin. Ironically, his fall was due to his own ignorance and shortsightedness... or was this the path Fate had always intended for the Imperator? See where the "Prince of Wanderers" still has the "tongue" of the "mouth" in his ear? This is because Charon *had* listened to the words of the Oracles, yet still abandoned their counsel to battle Gorool. Why? Perhaps the oldest of reasons, his need for self-reliance and stubborn adherence to his instincts driving him forth into the storm? In this interpretation, though, there were deeper waters to be fathomed.

The prophetic speech mentioned here was spoken "softly." What means this? Contrary to first thoughts, this was not "soft" as in whispered words (as any could tell you, Selena's ringing voice carried far when "communing" in the sanctum with Charon), but kept as a secret. A very well-guarded and dangerous secret — much like the one we now hold — it became a pact between the Oracles and Charon that they would publicly disagree while Charon would quietly, that is "softly," take the good advice he had been given to heart. The subterfuge was necessary for then-unknown reasons. Now we understand: What desperate actions would have been taken had the average wraith known that Charon would be crossing the Shroud back into the Skinlands? Chaos and anarchy would have reigned. Many would have sought to stop him, or, more frightening, attempted to join him.

Gorool, the "centuries of waste," the Malfean of eons, attempted to rise up and destroy Stygia, but unknowingly aided Charon's Fated travels. While saving his city, Charon prepared to meet his destiny with the words from the mouth of Selena still ringing in his ear. Within this mighty conflict, the "bee" that wielded a stinger of Siklos, was passed through the Shroud and into the living body of a newborn babe. As it was said, so it had been. The cycle will be complete. We safeguarded his passage and ensured his success. Now we will wait and orchestrate his glorious return.

What No One Would Tell You

The Eighth Legion

EDICT OF FORSWORN OBEDIENCE TO ORDER
WE ARE THE MARKED AND THE BLESSED
DESTINED TO HEAR
WE ARE THE SWORN AND THE CHOSEN
DESTINED TO JUDGE
WE ARE THE LADY'S* OWN AND THE
SHROUDED ONES
DESTINED TO RULE
IN HEREBY EDICT, WE RELEASE OUR GEAS
AND EMBODY THE HAND OF FATE
DESTINED TO DECREE.

* There is some discrepancy as to whether the proper translation is "Lady's" or "Ladies'," a difficult determination in an oral edict, which is, I believe, at the heart of such controversy that affects the echelons of our Stygian judicial branch.

— excerpt from the *Collected Works of the Politicas Mortuum* as written by Professor Adolphus Bracht

They are vague and undefined, powerful and secretive, the Legion of Fate, the Eighth Legion, the Fated Few. There is an intimacy with the Pantheon that no one discusses, but all know it's there. There is a suspicion about its members in the troubled minds of the recruiters of the banished Guilds. There is a mystery behind the doors that none may enter except in judgment. That alone is a far more effective barrier than any lock or gate — the secret remains hidden.

What does it mean, "Special Deaths?" There seems no pattern to those Reaped by the Ladies of Fate. A pointed finger and a nod; perhaps some coin, perhaps not. No defiance. No explanation. Submission and obedience. I believe I have yet to see wraiths so utterly docile as those newly sworn into the company of the Eighth Legion. Looking at them, I believe I have seen far more imposing Artificers and more terrifying Haunters... though, truth be told, most wraiths still pierce my heart with an initial toothpick-stab of terror. What is it about these souls in the Hand of Fate that makes their word, quite literally, law?

"It was as Decreed," is the most common response I've heard (whether they mean Fate's Decree or Charon's Decree is uncertain, as few seem willing to say more than that on the

subject). Some, though, have spoken to me and from these tidbits of information I have brewed a theory which has the bouquet of truth (if not quite the entire palate).

There seems to be one common thread that unites those souls who are Reaped into the Legion of Fate: The Fated always take those whose deaths were foreseen by the Oracles themselves. I can confirm this by searching the Catacombs and finding their descriptions, matching faces glimpsed on Eurydice with names scrawled from visions. These were mortals destined to die. The Pantheon saw it, knew it, and when the fatal hour struck, the Legion claimed them first. Is this a form of tithe to the Legion of Fate, the judge and jury in the land of the Dead? Give them what they want, and they'll remember the favor, much as in life? Who watches the Watchers? I don't believe the question is as simple as that.

I believe the Oracles skim the cream from the crop.

Blasphemy, you say, and I laugh at you. Perhaps it is a blasphemous theory, but who has guessed besides myself? Why would so many recruiters from other Guilds have grumbled complaints about losing talent to the Ladies of Fate, but not the Oracles? It seems that all Guilds have been plagued with having their neophytes stolen, sometimes Caul and all, from under their proverbial noses. But even when robbed of choice Thralls or thwarted from harvesting new talent, no one even considers rising against the Eighth Legion. Fate and destiny may very well be a justification, but the more believable explanation, I believe, is a direct act of greed.

And I say, "Bravo" for them!

If this is so, the Pantheon has not only clandestine ties to the Hierarchy and the judicial court, but also the means to manipulate lives and deaths of chosen people through the Shroud with pinpoint accuracy and all the resources Stygia can bring to bear. Favorites are spoon-fed into the maw of the Eighth Legion. Such attention should be viewed with humble awe — only the finest are taken thus, after all. What an honor to be killed as the best! The Pantheon enriches its "official" pool of Oracles in Stygia while simultaneously gaining favor with one of the most powerful organizations in the Deadlands. Truly, an inspirational achievement!

Then again, I may be giving the Pantheon far too much credit.

Or myself far too little. I think I smell self-employment on the winds.



Friends in Dark Places/Foes in Shadows

I see a woman. She is sitting. She wears a simple black gown, and her hands are bound in what looks to be a cat's cradle of wire. Her eyes are covered with a blood-soaked rag, though I cannot tell if the blood is hers.

She sits in the center of a ring of mirrors. All alter her image in some way. None show her as she truly appears, but as I look back to where she sits, her image wavers and shifts and eventually crumbles to dust. All blows away, then. All blows away.

— Seen by Malik Bell, of the Order of Babylon

This prophecy has a corridor all to itself. Even the Weaver of Fates has not visited in years. Some say he is afraid to.

There is little speculation as to what this particular scrap of sight means. As the vision has not appeared anyone other than its original Seer, there is fervent hope that the Sight represented a momentary probability that has long since vanished into impossibility. Why, you might ask. Well, the answer is simple. The Weaver of Fates, and those few scholars who have spoken with him all agree:

The prophecy foretells the destruction of the Lady herself.

That is as far as the agreement goes, however. The method of this catastrophe remains thankfully, maddeningly vague. Some have suggested that the altered images in the mirrors reflect the other denizens of the supernatural world, vampires and mages and so on. That might explain the "distortion" noted by Bell, with each player at Fate an imperfect reflection of the Lady's absolute perfection at her task.

The notion has its detractors, though. We rarely, if ever, deal with the beasts of the Skinlands, save when their strands thrum particularly energetically in the weave of Fate. Vampires and werewolves are useful, yes, in cutting strands short so that the Eighth Legion might reap them. Both breeds put great stock in ritual and sign as well, and thus are susceptible

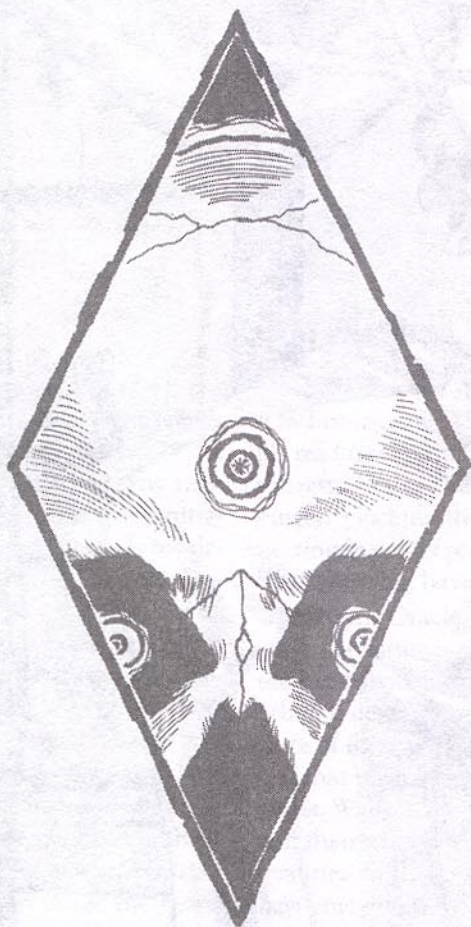
to the manipulations of our Sandman allies. However, even the most suspicious skinchanger, the most paranoid vampire never sees our hand on the loom.

In opposition, the strands of the Fair Folk are bright, but thinning ever faster as the years careen by. How could they, scattered and confused, affect the downfall of our Lady? And the mages, even those who See with Sight nearly as clear as our own, are preoccupied with their own petty wars. Even those who look into the Underworld look past us, into the Labyrinth or to the Isle. Perhaps they could be the key, then, for who knows what they will find — or wake — should they look too closely.

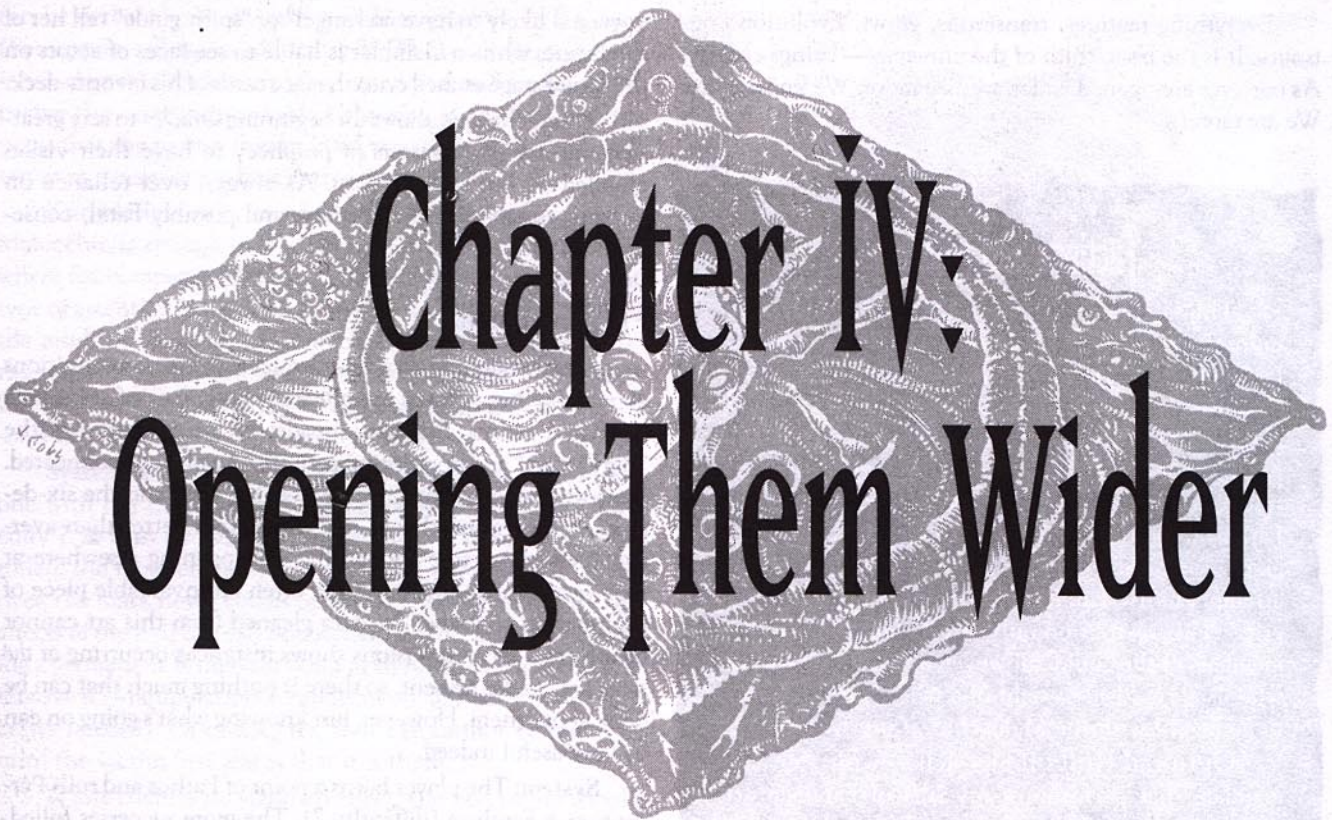
But in the end it is a lone prophecy.

In the end, it has never been repeated.

In the end, it will come to nothing.







Chapter IV: Opening Them Wider

Tempting Fate



When the Web of Fate lies open like a lover, it's awfully tempting to play. Consequence is the underlying credo that holds the Oracles' power in check, and why neophytes are put through such strict initiations and disciplinarian methods for developing control. Nothing is more dangerous than a rogue Oracle bent on playing the Web like an electric guitar... except an ignorant Oracle accidentally creating havoc by thoughtlessly strumming the threads of possibility. To have someone blithely tampering with the possible outcomes of futures can affect, well, everyone. That is why many nascent wraiths plagued with Fatalism go missing, later to be regurgitated from the forges as door jams.

But then again, those who have the control also have the power. More so, those Oracles with self-control possess a great and noble power that, in itself, can infuse the bearer with a sense of self-confidence and assurance. Who could ask for more in a realm where perception equals reality? An Oracle with the confidence to succeed finds that success breeds success, and more clients.

New Arcanoic Methods

Seated at the nexus of the Web of Fate sits the Oracle. Arachne incarnate, lying amidst her weavings, oftentimes simply reading the futures that branch out to infinity from where she rests. She can be observer, advisor, infiltrator or destroyer. Fingers plucking the delicate lifelines, severing and reconnecting strands of possibility, she rewrites the way things might have been, but have not been yet.

For the Oracle, the past is permanent, immutable stone, while the future is yielding clay. An accomplished artist can use her talents to surround herself with beauty or engulf another in despair. But nothing is created from nothing — the price of intervention is high. Some few are willing to pay it, and that is why the gifted Oracles are so valuable to the consumer. Web manipulators are respected for their art, their skill and their willingness to take risks, but feared for those same qualities. Still, most Oracles abide by the Zen of their ideology: enjoying the beauty they see and do not touch. These more stoic Oracles are respected for their wisdom, and they tend to endure long after their rash colleagues have fallen by the wayside.

Everything matures, transforms, grows. Evolution continues. It is the basic truth of the universe — things change. As our eyes are opened wider, we See more. We know more. We *are* more.

Factions and Fatalism

The faction to which an Oracle belongs is far more than just her political affiliation. The particular method of casting fortunes that particular faction uses has a profound impact on an individual's ability to See. When an Oracle is surrounded by the paraphernalia and using the techniques of her faction, she is at -2 difficulty on all attempts to use Fatalism. On the other hand, an Oracle whose allegiance is to the Delphics is at +2 difficulty on all attempts to use Fatalism when not doing so "properly." This restriction only affects wraiths who are members of the Guild. However, a non-Guild wraith who uses Fatalism in sight of a true Oracle is likely to be tagged with the Malocchio, if not worse.

Optional Rule: If Storytellers wish, they can mandate that performing any sort of Fatalism art without proper equipment demands that the wraith achieve at least two successes before reaping any benefit. This optional rule serves to reflect the sheer difficulty of working with Fate's web, particularly without sufficient preparation or the right tools.

Basic Ability: Scrying

A unique manifestation of the Arcanos, Scrying is more than just a Basic Ability. It is the very act that defines the Guild, the moment of peering into the future in hopes of enlightenment.

System: Oracles' ability to Scry improves as their powers increase. In an attempt to see the future, the Oracle sacrifices (six minus her Enigmas rating) points of Pathos, and then indulges in her particular technique (entrail reading, pyromancy, etc.). With a roll of Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 10 minus the Oracle's Fatalism rating), she then attempts to see what the future holds. The number of successes determines the degree and nature of revelation revealed; a botch grants false visions which seem utterly real.

The visions Scrying produces can come in a variety of forms: Stentorian voices intoning the deeds of the future, hazy images, dreamlike phantasmagoria and so on. Usually the imagery fits itself to the method of scrying, so a modern Clair-

voyant is likely to have an "angel" or "spirit guide" tell her of the future, while a Gambler is liable to see faces of actors on the future stage etched onto the face cards of his favorite deck.

This technique allows for beginning Oracles to scry greatness and for past masters of prophecy to have their vision clouded — but such is Fate. As always, over-reliance on Scrying comes with unexpected, and possibly Fatal, consequences.

• Distant Visions

A truly talented Oracle can sometimes get premonitions about how her actions are affecting outcomes of seemingly unrelated events. She can already see a tiny corner of the "Big Picture" and how distant actions are truly interconnected. However, with a good grasp of possible odds and the six-degrees-of-separation theory, she can have a better than average guesstimate rate about what is happening elsewhere at that very same moment. While often an invaluable piece of information to know, the data gleaned from this art cannot be affected. Distant Visions shows instances occurring *at the same time* as the present, so there is nothing much that can be done about them. However, just knowing what's going on can be very useful indeed.

System: The player burns a point of Pathos and rolls Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 7). The more successes rolled, the more control the Oracle has over what she sees. A single success shows an uncontrolled image of *something* happening *somewhere* in the Shadowlands. Five successes shows exactly what the Oracle wants to see, the vision lasting for a single scene. Botches show false images, possibly echoing from the Labyrinth.

• A Quick Read

One who can gather visions from objects need not limit her inquiries to the boundaries of the Shadowlands. If presented with a new relic, she can do a reading about the *living* person whose karma is linked to this particular object. This "attuning" talent is a particular favorite among those wraiths whose Fetters are living people, and who periodically want updates about those Fetters' futures. Premonitions of this nature often are thematic with the "how" or "when" of a person's death or an upcoming extreme emotion experienced by that person.

System: To use A Quick Read, the player spends a point of Pathos and rolls Perception + Fatalism (difficulty 7). Each success gives a clearer image of what's in store for the relic's former owner.

• Malocchio

The "Evil Eye" is an art as old as history, and twice as vicious. This art places a dark "marker" on the recipient that

can be detected only by others with at least •• in Fatalism (Perception + Fatalism, difficulty 8). The mark alerts the observer that this is someone who has crossed an Oracle, and is paying the consequences. Also, the sign of the Evil Eye denotes that the person thus marked is a catch in the Web and serves as a magnet for Fate's attention.

Knowledge that someone has been marked with Malocchio is enough to send any sane wraith scurrying elsewhere for company. While no one can predict exactly what type of attention the Lady may bestow upon a marked wraith, the result of being tagged is much akin to the ancient Chinese proverb: "May you live in interesting times." No wraith wants to be that interesting — especially when dealing with souls whose interests can last for all eternity.

System: The player whose Oracle wishes to mark someone with the Evil Eye rolls Manipulation + Fatalism (difficulty 7, at least two successes necessary). The more successes rolled, the more emphatic the effects of the Evil Eye. Moreover, the mark never comes off unless actively removed. The effects of the Evil Eye can be countermanded, either by spending a permanent Willpower point or by having another Oracle remove it (Manipulation + Fatalism roll, difficulty 8, two successes needed). Of course, the Evil Eye cannot be removed until the victim first learns that it is there....

While there is no standard effect, the Storyteller should feel free to bombard the victim of this art with all sorts of Bad Luck (as per the Thorn), extra Angst and whatnot.

Malocchio costs a point of Willpower, and gives the user a point of temporary Angst. If the victim did not deserve the Evil Eye, then an additional point of Angst gets added to the tally.

Detecting Interference

An Oracle can detect any sort of Fatalistic interference (the type, if not the details) on another wraith, provided she has mastered the Arcanos to a degree matching or exceeding the level of interference. An Oracle can look at another wraith and, just as with Malocchio (the player rolls Perception + Fatalism, difficulty 8), see if there has been any outside meddling with his Fate, assuming the meddling was done with an art that the Oracle herself could have mastered by this point in her training. So an Oracle with just one dot in the Arcanos would be blind to the effects of Tangles, but not one who has achieved ••••• of mastery.





... Pulling Strings

This is the basic task of learning to manipulate the Web, not just to observe its happenings down the way. It is the first step of interference, both the least powerful art of this sort and the most dangerous to the young Fatalist. Pushing the boundaries may draw an Oracular neophyte into the Web itself, where he becomes part of the future he was trying to change.

System: This art requires the investment of 2 points of Pathos, the acceptance of a point of Angst and a Perception + Fatalism roll (difficulty 8, two successes needed). On success, the Oracle's player may ask the Storyteller one question about the upcoming events of the story, and thus can plan accordingly. A botch, on the other hand, means that the player has to tell the Storyteller the next major action he intended for his character, and cannot deviate from that course no matter what. Of course, the Storyteller can then share that information with the Oracle's Shadow, or even with other wraiths if he deems it prudent to do so....

.... Tangles

The art of Tangles lets an Oracle twist the strand of another wraith's destiny. Snapping the thread is beyond the Oracle's capability, but with the exercise of sufficient Willpower (2 points), a thread of someone's Fate can be tangled, knotted and stretched. The effect of this entanglement is the victim finds himself beset by adverse circumstance every time he tries to follow up on one of his Passions. The complications are rarely fatal, but always annoying and occasionally dangerous.

System: By spending 2 points of Willpower and 2 points of Pathos (and accepting 2 points of Angst), the player can roll Manipulation + Fatalism (difficulty 7) to use this art. The number of successes indicates the rating of the Passion that can be affected by Tangles — four successes means that the Storyteller picks a Passion of the victim's of up to (but not necessarily) four dots to interfere with. A botch on Tangles has predictable results, hoisting the offending Oracle on his own petard.

..... Ensnare

A high-level skill in Web manipulation, Ensnare allows an Oracle to set a snare for a particular person in the Web of Fate itself. The entangled victim gets bound up in the fates of others, no longer master of his own destiny. This can have an extremely detrimental effect on everything from the victim's Passions to his ability to tend his Fetters.

System: This art is extremely dangerous to use, as a botch can trap the user in the snare set for another. Before the process of Ensnaring a wraith can begin, the player must invest 2 points of Willpower and 3 points of Pathos, and accept 3 points

of Angst as well. Manipulation + Fatalism (difficulty 9) must be rolled, and the number of successes determines how fierce a trap the Oracle sets.

If the attempt is successful, the target suddenly finds herself a victim of circumstance. Whatever goals she has been working toward (at Storyteller discretion) become warped or subverted into the goals of another wraith, possibly even a Deathlord or Guildmaster. Difficulty on all rolls to regain Pathos goes up by one until the wraith somehow disentangles herself from the trap, and all Fetters are considered to have their ratings reduced by one. The only way out of the trap is roleplaying, and only the Storyteller can decide when the victim has managed to free herself.

Affecting the Skinlands

Most arts of Fatalism have no effect across the Shroud. On the other hand, at Storyteller discretion, an Oracle can spend an additional Willpower point and target a creature in the Skinlands. Awakened souls are, of course, susceptible.

Merits and Flaws

The following Merits and Flaws are available only to Oracle characters. These Merits and Flaws should be used like the ones in the **Wraith Players Guide**, and thus be bought with freebie points at the end of character generation. Flaws can be bought off with experience at Storyteller discretion, and both Merits and Flaws can (if appropriate) be picked up during the course of a chronicle as well.

The Bottom Line (1 point Merit)

The knowledge of a wraith's Lifestrand, the flow of her existence, is the basis of all Fatalism. You have the final knowledge of how it will end. There's no date or year to your vision, no image of the instances leading up to the event, but the general how and/or where of your ultimate fate has flashed before your eyes. This may encourage you to take some risks you might not have otherwise, out of knowledge that the time is not yet ripe for you to go.

Vibes (4 point Merit)

With this Merit, you get an instantaneous — and usually accurate — gut feeling about anyone you meet. There's no detail involved, just a visceral reaction as to whether someone is good news or not.

Obviously, this involves asking your Storyteller for a reading. Just remember, the Vibes you get on someone are usually correct — but not always. Over-reliance on this Merit can get you in very deep trouble indeed.

Justin, the Nick in Time (4 point Merit)

His name is Justin. He's invisible to everyone except the one he's saving. He's a guardian... something or other. Suspicions are that he's a spirit or some sort of Fate-skimmer, a chink in the strands of Stygian Webs. He appears when he wants to, with a hint or clue or piece of advice — a one-line wonder — and then he's gone as if he'd never been. But his words are always useful somewhere down the line. His attention is favorable, but his deliverance jarring. "Expect the unexpected," and expect Justin soon afterward.

Storyteller note: Justin is a manifestation of Fate's efforts to unkink its Web with a minimum of fuss. Appearing as a nondescript man, Justin shows up just long enough to offer some pithy advice or clue about escaping a snarl the wraith is in, and then vanishes. Feel free to make Justin look and sound however you like. He doesn't have to appear the same way twice, or even announce his presence at all.

As for *what* exactly Justin is, well....

Bearer of Bad News (1 point Flaw)

Some Oracles, especially Doomsayers, are die-hard pessimists. They are quick to mention dire fates and consequences to any and all who will listen (which is quite a vocal range given some of them), but are loathe to say anything pleasant or uplifting. "Seek and ye shall find" is the best advantage a Bearer of Bad News can have. With an eye for gloom and doom, it's no wonder they find it so readily.

With this Flaw you are at -2 difficulty on all rolls to See something awful in the immediate future. On the other hand, you are often unable to mention something good you See, even if the vision benefits you as well.

Flashes (2 point Flaw)

You have no control over your Scrying. Whenever the Storyteller feels like it, he rolls to see what visions of the future pass before your eyes. This can happen during Slumber or combat, or at any time in between. The vision could be helpful or completely pointless, clear as day or totally incomprehensible. Whatever it may be, you can't control your own Sight in any way, shape or form. As such, you never can quite

trust yourself to commit to any action, for fear of being struck down by the prophetic muse in the middle of what you are doing.

Rule of Three (2 point Flaw)

The rood of the Wiccan faith — “Whatever you do will return unto you threefold,” — is true for both positive and negative energy. You are cursed/blessed with this Flaw, and everything you do reverberates back to you with three times the oomph you put in. Commonly possessed by Clairvoyant Oracles, this Flaw carries with it huge risks as well as some rewards. For, while all the good you do gets showered back upon you, any harm that you do returns as well. As for the consequences of destroying another soul....

Storyteller note: Feel free to work the retribution or reward this Flaw demands into the story. Fate is subtle, and exacts its price in its own time. Don't force a wraith with this Flaw just to mark off Corpus Levels equal to thrice the damage she does. Find away to extract those levels (sneak attacks, forcing her to walk through solid objects) indirectly, so that the wraith may not even realize she's paying — at first.

Serendipity (3 point Flaw)

You are always in the wrong place at the wrong time. When the Legionnaires bust into the Renegade hideout, you're the innocent bystander who just wandered in. When the Spectres tear a Nihil into a crowded Haunt, it's your chair they come up under. When a Masquer assassin chooses a random face for a job, he somehow always settles on yours. And so on.

Kassandra Complex (5 point Flaw)

As punishment for spurning the love of Apollo, Kassandra received a devastating addendum to her gift of Sight — no one would believe any of her predictions. No matter how accurate the reading, how clear your vision, or how often you have been proven correct in the past, your word carries no weight with those around you. This Flaw is the ultimate curse and insult that can be suffered by a translator of Fatalism, and your Shadow loves pointing this out. (This Flaw needs the cooperation of all the members of your gaming Circle in order to be effective.)

Speaking in Tongues (5 point Flaw)

When receiving a vision, your ability to communicate it is lost. What manages to emerge from your lips is horribly garbled, mangled to the point of incomprehension. The style of gibberish can be anything from an ancient dialect no one knows to a mish-mash of different languages all strung together to a nonsense babble of hysterical sounds. Only one thing matters, though: In essence, no one can understand the

divination, and thus no good can be extracted from it. Any attempt to transmit the content of the vision, whether written or spoken, falls prey to this misbegotten glossollalia. You can still act on what you've Seen, but others may not understand what you're doing, and your explanations will do you no good.

Broken Record (7 point Flaw)

You are destined to repeat the same thing over and over again. A snag in the loom of Fate has caught your thread and warped you into a knot that is inescapable. You are doomed to find yourself in the same situations again and again, regardless of the choices you make. You are destined to repeat the same thing over and over again. A snag in the loom of Fate has caught your thread and warped you into a knot that is inescapable. You are doomed to find yourself in the same situations again and again, regardless of the choices you make. You are destined to repeat the same thing over and over again. A snag in the loom of Fate....

Artifacts

The Oracles, perhaps more than any other Guild, are dependent upon props and articles to perform their chosen Arcanos. Most times, the athames and cards, braziers and bowls are all simple relics, more important for their symbolic power than for any inherent potency. On the other hand, there are a few toys that the Oracles play with that have real power. Here is a sample.

Soulfire Brazier (Common, level 1)

There is little special about this brazier, save that it has a few minor — but odd — effects on soulfire. First of all, the brazier has been somehow toughened during the forging process — current theory has it that the Artificers layer actual relics with soulsteel — to withstand the heat of multiple soulfire crystals. Second, by some unknown method, the brazier encourages those crystals to whip into shapes of flame reminiscent of real fire, allowing for pyromancy and the imitation of burnt offerings.

No one has yet attempted to put barrowflame in a soulfire brazier for scrying purposes, which is probably for the best.

Whisp (Common, level 2)

Rather than forge all the souls they receive, the Artificers occasionally allow some souls simply to melt, absorbing the odd smoke given off by soulfire and dripping down into block-shaped molds. There, the impure souls re-solidify as the resinous substance called whisp.



Whisp is softer and more brittle than regular soulsteel, presumable from the impurities it absorbed while being slowly melted down. Thus, it is pretty much useless for anything other than divination purposes (see page 99). On the other hand, to the Delphics whisp is useful indeed, and they take great pains to make certain their supply remains uninterrupted.

Knucklebones (Luxury, level 3)

Quite rare, Knucklebones are found on the decks of *La Belle LaFayette* and in few other places. The relics of the knuckles of dead thieves and gamblers, they've crossed the Shroud imbued with some fraction of the luck — good or bad — of the previous owner. At Storyteller discretion, the Bones have either good or bad luck (as per the Thorn: **Bad Luck**, which can be inverted to give Good Luck). However, the luck decides when it is or isn't going to come out to play — the wraith who owns the Knucklebones has no say in the matter.

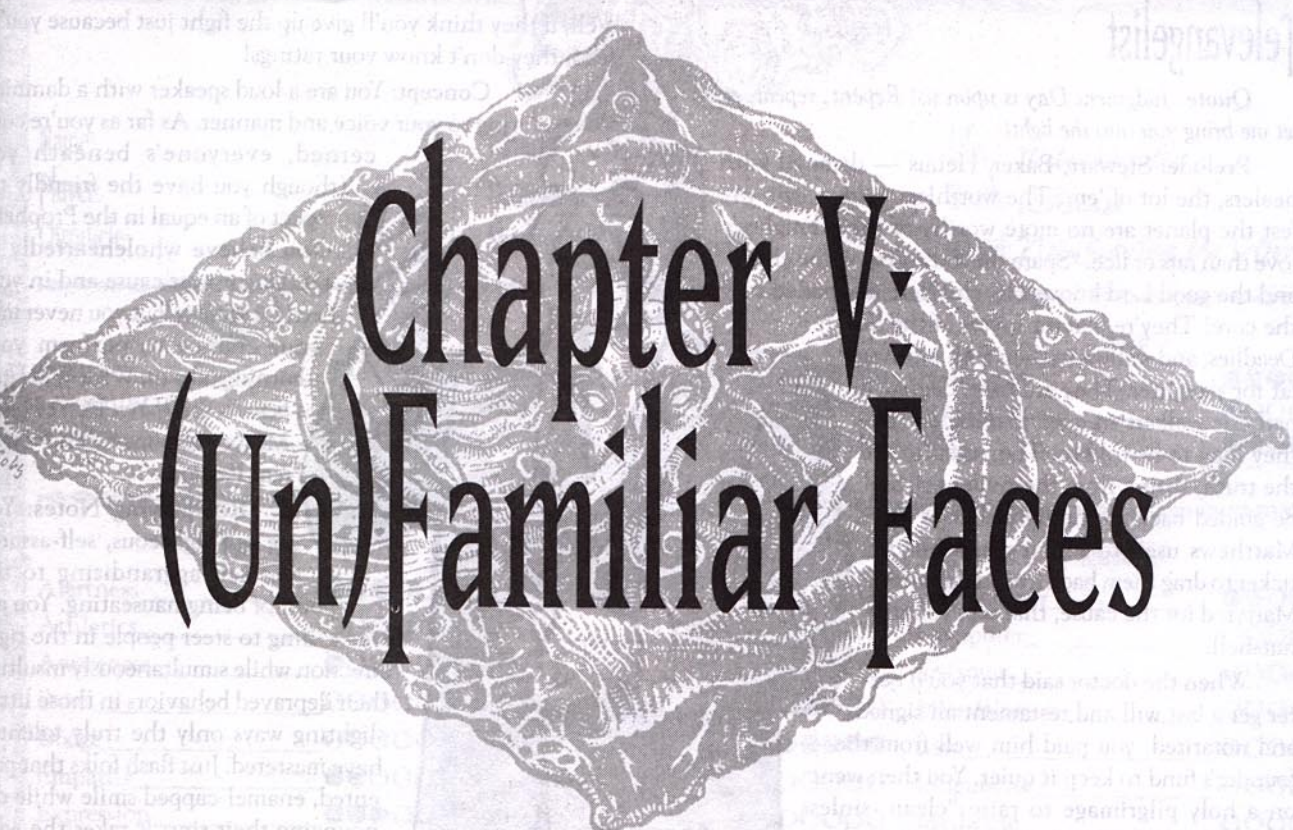
Most Knucklebones appear to be simply dice made from human bone. A few don't appear to be anything other than just a random assortment of bones, but these are extremely rare, and are usually kept in a joss bag or strung on a necklace to keep them safe.

Reed Bundle (Unique, level 5)

Supposedly this bundle of reeds from the River of Death is kept in the inner sanctum of the Pantheon's Temple. According to legend, this simple bundle, bound with relic rope, was used by the Lady of Fate herself to grant her benediction to Charon. So far as anyone knows, the bundle is genuine but has no unique powers. Its symbolic power, however, more than makes up for that. A wraith who dares touch the Reed Bundle will either find herself at the head of the Oracles or torn to shreds by an angry mob.







Chapter V: (Un)Familiar Faces

The future has many forces, and many are the eyes that have gazed upon what might yet be. Here are a few of those who have seen, or Seen, what is to come. Do with them what you will — but remember, they just might have seen you coming....

Televangelist

Quote: *Judgment Day is upon us! Repent, repeal, and let me bring you into the light!*

Prelude: Stewart, Baker, Helms — damned faith healers, the lot of 'em! The worthless vermin who infest the planet are no more worthy of the Almighty's love than rats or lice. "Spare the rod and spoil the child," and the good L-rd knows His children are spoiled to the core! They're blatant lovers of the Seven Deadlies, and wallow in their filth like hogs fat for slaughter. They are base, degraded, pathetic walkers *en route* to darkness, and they long to be told so. They *want* to see the truth, shrink from their vileness, and be guided back to the light, but as Rev. Matthews used to say, it's hell on the ticker to drag them back from damnation. Martyred for the cause, that was you in a nutshell.

When the doctor said that you'd better get a last will and testament all signed and notarized, you paid him well from the founder's fund to keep it quiet. You then went on a holy pilgrimage to raise "clean, sinless money" for the L-rd to show how many out there still believed in you, their messenger of all that was holy, else you would be struck down by the wrath of the Dark One because he would have won this round of the stakes. You did pretty well; wrapped up over two-point-six million before you had to take to bed. Another few hundred thousand pulsed in after you left the air. You did a scathing sermon from the hospital via satellite, and died during a commercial break for some damned animated Biblical videos.

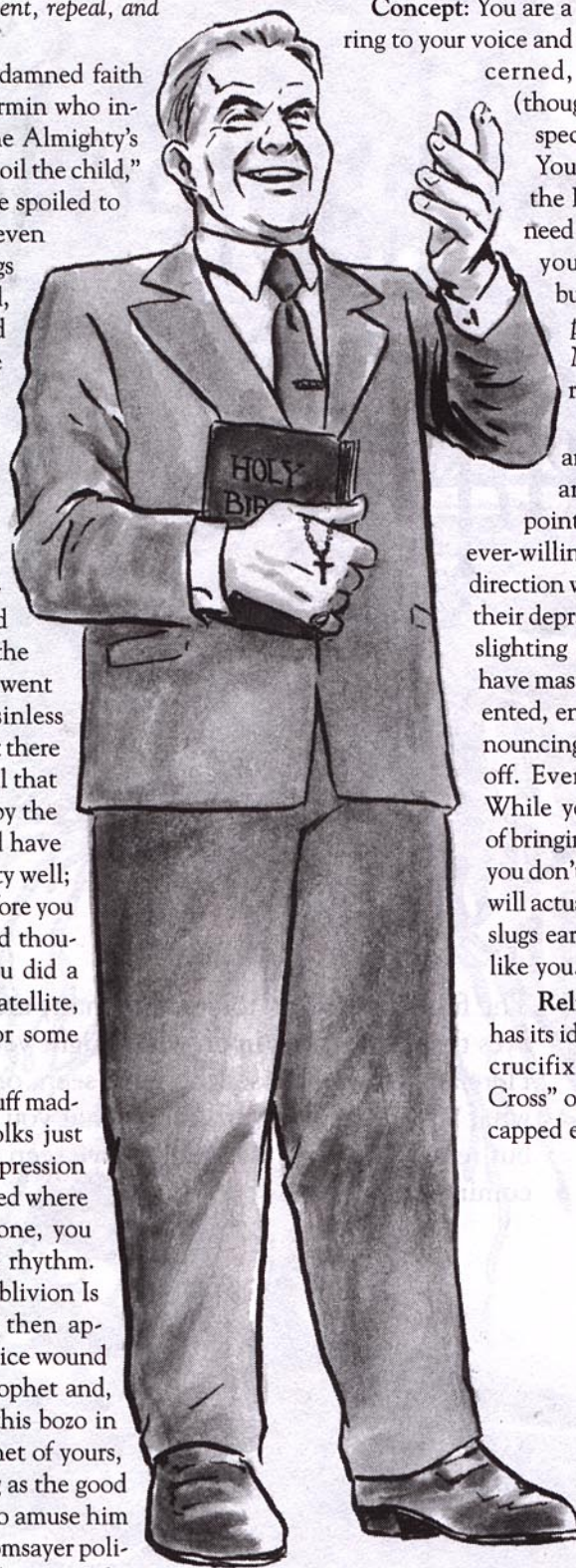
You tore through your filthy white stuff madder than spit. When you saw all the folks just walking around with that zombielike expression only the true sheep have, you just continued where you left off. Screaming fire and brimstone, you never missed a beat of that old ticker's rhythm. Some fellow carrying a sign that read "Oblivion Is Within Us" stopped by to listen, and then approached as the sulfur and acid in your voice wound down. He brought you directly to his Prophet and, once introduced, you proceeded to tell this bozo in no uncertain terms that he was no Prophet of yours, and where did he come off masquerading as the good Messiah in this den of sin? This seemed to amuse him to no end, and won you your place in Doomsayer politics. Martyred again, you seem to have been caught in this Purgatory to carry out your work beyond the grave.

Well, if they think you'll give up the fight just because you're dead, they don't know your ratings!

Concept: You are a loud speaker with a damning ring to your voice and manner. As far as you're concerned, everyone's beneath you (though you have the friendly respect of an equal in the Prophet). You believe wholeheartedly in the Doomsayer cause and in your need for secrecy, but you never miss your chance to perform your burning take on *What Will Happen To You If You Don't Follow Me* for the camera. That's your real Passion.

Roleplaying Notes: You are self-righteous, self-assured and self-aggrandizing to the point of being nauseating. You are ever-willing to steer people in the right direction while simultaneously insulting their depraved behaviors in those little, slighting ways only the truly talented have mastered. Just flash folks that patented, enamel-capped smile while denouncing their sins; it takes the edge off. Everyone secretly disgusts you. While you've shouldered the burden of bringing the truth to light, as it were, you don't have to believe that anybody will actually be saved. How could those slugs earn salvation? They're nothing like you.

Relics: Copy of the Bible which has its identifiable 'thump' depression, crucifix with a sliver of the "True Cross" on a chain, an entire bridge of capped enamel teeth





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Visionary*
Demeanor: *Bravo*
Shadow: *The Parent*

Life: *Televangelist*
Death: *Disease*
Regret: *Not Saving the World*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●○○○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○○

Social

Charisma ●○○○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○○
Appearance ●○○○○○

Mental

Perception ●○○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○○
Wits ●○○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○○
Awareness ●○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○○
Empathy ●○○○○○
Expression ●○○○○○
Intimidation ●○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○○
Etiquette ●○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○○
Leadership ●○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○○
Performance ●○○○○○
Repair ○○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○○

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ●○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○○
Law ○○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○○
Politics ●○○○○○
Science ○○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Legacy ●○○○○○
Memoriam ●○○○○○
Notoriety ●○○○○○
Eidolon ●○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

Convert Heathens (Pride) ●○○○○○
Get Money (Greed) ●○○○○○
Care For The Masses ●○○○○○
(Love) ○○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arcanoi

Castigate ●○○○○○
Fatalism ●○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Fetters

Sound Stage ●○○○○○
Savings Box Under ○○○○○○
Your Bed ●○○○○○
Secretary ●○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Guild Marks

Sigils

Pathos

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

Angst

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Thorns

Trick of Light
Shadowed Face
Dark Allies (1)

Dark Passions

(Self-Loathing) Create chaos ●○○○○○
in other organized Religions ●○○○○○
(Hate) Expose other ●○○○○○
Televangelist as Frauds ○○○○○○

Phone Psychic

Quote: Yeah, hon, definitely don't go to the Iron Hills while Mars is ascending, and avoid wraiths whose names start with the letter 'B,' they've got it in for you — oops! Please hold....

Prelude: Call girls can stick it in their receiver. When someone dials a 900 number, it is you they're calling for a guaranteed pleaser. You began working as a phone psychic just after college while you "looked for something else," but found it really grew on you. The more you talked with desperate voices wanting answers over the fiber-optic line, the more confident you felt in giving them exactly what they wanted to hear. You were the dial-up pimp of aural gratification.

You can tell a lot about a person by his or her voice, not just the sound of it, but the tone, the emphasis — everything. You learned that *how* something is said is not nearly as important as *what* is (or isn't) said. You could've earned your Ph.D. in Psychology easy after what you've dished out — that, or at least gotten a grant to study these indecisive phone addicts. Your clientele included everyone from housewives to statesmen. Recognizing your clients' voices on the evening news sound bites became a sport for you.

Anyway, it was a clean living. The job paid pretty well, had flexible hours, and let you talk on the phone while catching up on your reading, sewing, fingernails and whatever.

Unfortunately, it *was* living until the lightning storm snapped, crackled and popped you out of existence while you were servicing a particularly gabby customer. Four zillion volts fried your brain right through the headset. The thing was still melded to your skull when you woke up in a place that was definitely not your office cubicle. You were dangling over the ground with this guy in an armored skirt holding you by the back of your shirt collar. You wisely bit back the comment about his fashion sense, and instead offered to advise that if he wanted to succeed in life, he should follow his Piscean inclinations and know his lucky number was three. Well, you got his attention. Soon you were marched into the Marshal's

chambers and set up with a job doing basically what you've always been doing. Now, though, the subject matter's a lot more interesting.

You are the Hierarchy's best-kept secret (or at least you'd like to think so). You can "plug into" the Marshal's meetings in order to "read" the speakers and report your findings back to your superiors. You are the ultimate Oracle of confidentiality, needing only to sit in a confessional box and hear the voices on the other side of the screen in order to do your thing. You've used your ability to detect nuances in speech and instinctive character judgment to burrow a nice niche for yourself within the middle ranks of the system. You're not so big to get loads of responsibility, but not so little as to get pushed around a lot. Quite happy with the status quo, you are a loyal member of the Hierarchy. Your work pays pretty well, has flexible hours, and lets you keep your headset on while catching up on your reading, sewing, fingernails, whatever.

Concept: You see nothing wrong with the Hierarchy. Heck, if you can't be clever enough to use the system, it's your own damned fault. You have nothing really against the Renegades, but think the Heretics are a bunch of wackos who are mixing church and state again — a classic oil-and-water no-no. Loyal to the system, you do not withhold any information from your bosses, but this doesn't mean you don't keep your own records for "leverage" over your customers either. While you may never see your clients' faces, you're awfully good at recalling voices. You're the one who *really* knows who's who around here.

Roleplaying Notes: You are shallow in purpose, straightforward with attitude and vague in response. Horoscopes are generally applicable to everyone with some bizarre references thrown in on purpose; this is why they seem to talk to everyone specifically about themselves. The same principle applies here. You can pick up speech patterns, minute pauses and vocal inflections which add a lot to the way you direct your Fatalism. Such insight also helps you ask the right questions and find the right answers. You're young, charismatic and quick to shift the focus onto someone else when put in a pinch.

Relics: Telephone headset with mouth-mike, pyramid power crystal





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Avante - Garde*
Demeanor: *Mediator*
Shadow: *The Freak*

Life: *Phone Psychic*
Death: *Electrocution*
Regret: *Not seeing predictions
come true*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Dexterity ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Stamina ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐

Social

Charisma ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Manipulation ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Appearance ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐

Mental

Perception ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Intelligence ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Wits ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Athletics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Awareness ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Brawl ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Dodge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Empathy ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Expression ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Intimidation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Streetwise ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Subterfuge ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Skills

Crafts ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Drive ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Etiquette ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Firearms ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Leadership ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Meditation ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Melee ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Performance ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Repair ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Stealth ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Computer ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Enigmas ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Investigation ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Law ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Linguistics ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Medicine ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Occult ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Politics ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Science ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Advantages

Backgrounds

Allies ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Contacts ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Status ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Passions

Collect Gossip on People ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
(Curiosity) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
Direct the lives of Others ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
(Ego) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Arcanoi

Embody ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Keening ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Fatalism ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Lifeweb ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Fetters

Couch ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Old Apartment ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Pet Bird ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Corpus

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Willpower

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Angst

☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Thorns

Fruchian Slip ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Bad Luck ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Shadow Call ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Dark Passions

Give Bad Advice (Hate) ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
Turn others against one ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐
another (sadism) ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Guild Marks

Pathos

☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

Sigils

Child of the Green

Quote: *We are all on the Great Wheel of Life; unbalance it once too often and it will roll right over you.*

Prelude: You first visited a Renaissance festival when you were seven and thought it the most magical, beautiful place you had ever seen. At 17, you quit high school to join the troupe's ranks and travel along the festival's yearly entertainment route. You left behind all the bourgeois politics, the oppressive System and your patriarchal home religion with no hesitation and little regret. You were a passionate wanderer, free and unfettered, with a tribal family of Wiccans as your friends and lovers.

Your death was a freak accident. You fell from a rickety balcony on one of the shopkeepers' sets, and you landed in the reality opposite the Shroud. As quickly as you were harvested into the fold, you wanted out. It took you no time to discern that that Hierarchy was the System that you had avoided all through life, and that Renegades were the noisy radicals who were just another System with a bannerful of causes. You wanted the security of the coven once again. In an act of desperation, you had one of the other Thralls make a sloppy Moliation of a pentagram on your chest, hoping that the sign would alert others of your bent. It hurt like hell, but not as much as the beating you received from your master afterward.

Whether it was this act of defiance or your fervent praying that got the Heretic cult's attention you never knew or cared. Someone came and, with a small pack of associates, swiftly broke your bonds. He carried you off into the night even as you whispered your heartfelt thanks. The Children of the Green welcomed you into their arms, and you have given them everything of yourself since. Dizzy with relief, you have convinced yourself this is your ultimate destiny, in death as in life.

Concept: You hold to the ways of the Children more fiercely than anyone, not so much because of your personal convictions, but because of your unswerving devotion to your family. You will do *anything* to please them, all because they've honestly shown you love. You follow the directives given you with unquestioning faith, and try to accomplish the tasks you've been set in record time to show your worthiness. And every so often,

you're willing to try something on your own initiative, just on the hopes it will please....

Roleplaying Notes: A delighted devotee, you will do whatever the Children ask of you because you believe in them. You'll go out among the unenlightened if you are asked to, but you prefer getting such assignments over with quickly so you can head back home. It's not that you're a homebody, it's just that the love and honesty you've received among the Children is so sadly lacking anywhere else you've been — perhaps you could even be convinced to bring a companion or two home, just to share in the experience....

Relics: Chaos symbol pin, silver and moonstone ring, leather rose.





Name: Nature: *Martyr* Life: *Ren Fester*
Player: Demeanor: *Follower* Death: *Freak Accident*
Chronicle: Shadow: *The Leech* Regret: *Not having achieved spiritual fulfillment*

Attributes

Physical		Social		Mental	
Strength	●●●●●	Charisma	●●●●●	Perception	●●●●●
Dexterity	●●●●●	Manipulation	●●●●●	Intelligence	●●●●●
Stamina	●●●●●	Appearance	●●●●●	Wits	●●●●●

Abilities

Talents		Skills		Knowledge	
Alertness	●●●●●	Crafts	○○○○○	Bureaucracy	○○○○○
Athletics	●●●●●	Drive	○○○○○	Computer	○○○○○
Awareness	●●●●●	Etiquette	●○○○○	Enigmas	●●○○○
Brawl	○○○○○	Firearms	○○○○○	Investigation	●○○○○
Dodge	●●●●●	Leadership	○○○○○	Law	○○○○○
Empathy	○○○○○	Meditation	●○○○○	Linguistics	●○○○○
Expression	○○○○○	Melee	○○○○○	Medicine	●○○○○
Intimidation	○○○○○	Performance	●●○○○	Occult	●●○○○
Streetwise	○○○○○	Repair	○○○○○	Politics	○○○○○
Subterfuge	○○○○○	Stealth	●○○○○	Science	●○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds		Passions		Arcanoi	
<i>Eidolon</i>	●●●●●	<i>Find Family Like</i>	●●●●●	<i>Fatalism</i>	●●●●●
<i>Mentor</i>	●○○○○	<i>One You Had (Love)</i>	○○○○○	<i>Usury</i>	●●○○○
<i>Relic</i>	●●●●●	<i>Find True Love</i>	●●●●●	<i>Keening</i>	●○○○○
<i>Memoriam</i>	●○○○○	<i>(longing)</i>	○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○
	○○○○○		○○○○○		○○○○○

Fetters

Ren - Fest Site ●●●●●
Place where you first ○○○○○
kissed ●●●●●
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Pathos

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □ □ □

Angst

● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Thorns

Devil's Dare
Shadow Traits (Dexterity)
Dark Allies (1)

Dark Passions

Make Those You Love ●●●●●
Look Bad (Envy) ○○○○○
Abandon your "family" ●●●●●
(Hatred) ○○○○○

Guild Marks

Sigils

Pan-Historian

Quote: *If we are to know any great truth, it is that if we are unwilling to learn the lessons history teaches us, we are doomed to repeat them. On this path you have chosen, you are doomed. I have seen it before, you know.*

Prelude: An assistant history professor at a university, you had a lot to offer the student body: a wealth of knowledge, a gift for rhetoric and a fairly light lesson plan. Your life was basically devoted to the system of research and aiding graduate students in their efforts to compose a worthwhile dissertation within five years of graduation. You had no social life to speak of and no vices save for your one hobby: playing fiddle with the local Celtic band. To the ends that promised tenureship would permit, you were content with your lot in life... until someone stole your fiddle.

It would be fairer to say, they stole your whole car with your fiddle in it, but to be honest, you could've cared less about the car. Your musical companion of 20 years was gone, and you became obsessed with finding it. You let your classes slip so badly that your teaching assistantship was revoked, and you badgered the lazy police department so often that they eventually stopped returning your calls and refused to see you. Your posters around campus brought no response, and your constant state of worry made it impossible for you to concentrate on your research or advising duties. The collegiate board warned you about your conduct, and, meanwhile, the band found itself a new fiddler. Anxious, skittish and generally unstable, you never saw the car you stepped out in front of while stumbling across the street.

You awoke in shackles and were sold to the Hierarchy. After having the prerequisite nervous breakdown (and narrowly escaping the forges), you quickly recovered to review your situation: you were a slave-class peasant in a classical hierarchy which bore a stunning resemblance to the Roman Empire. Perfect. Able to regurgitate the reams of data you had acquired over a lifetime of study, you were able to quickly discern the machinations of the Hierarchy and the underlying

macrocosmic agendas of the individual Legions, especially those of your own, the Emerald Legion. Your keeper, an ex-cop Legionnaire, was suitably impressed the one time you began to talk politics with him during a construction break. Apparently, he passed word of you along to his Centurion or Marshal who had connections inside and outside the system. Outside seemed to suit him best, (your presumption was that they paid more), and you were transferred from Stygian subservience into the Renegade ranks. Their infrastructural system was not dissimilar to the Hierarchy; it simply lacked the weighty steel jewelry.

Now you use your insight, your training and your blossoming Arcanoi to hypothesize what events the future of the Deadlands may hold. In many ways a relic from your textbooks, Stygia's society opens to you like an oyster housing precious pearls of foreknowledge. You have decided, though. You *will* harvest those pearls. You *will* be the one to know what is coming. You *will* be the fiddler again. There is nothing else of value here.

Concept: You understand the way the machinery of the world works around you; this knowledge makes you a steady source of information, detail and likely outcome. You understand the system — a rare talent for those who haven't lived through centuries of it. Then again, your feeling is that you didn't have to live through all of those decades when you could just study them. A brilliant researcher, you know some of these Regents, Overlords and Anacreons better than they do themselves — after all, you've read centuries' worth of analysis of their actions. That allows you to stay one step ahead — always.

Roleplaying Notes: You are dignified, polite and almost aristocratic in manner. Base all of your theories on past examples proven true in a historical context, and do not allow yourself to be easily swayed into believing any idea is "new" or "different." You lose all composure while hearing discordant music or watching art be destroyed. An artist at heart, you will break into melancholy rumination to bemoan your cruel fate as a should-have-been Chanteur.

Relics: Antique lead-crystal spectacles, folder of loose-leaf music scores, dog-eared copy of *An Incomplete Education*.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Bureaucrat*
Demeanor: *Traditionalist*
Shadow: *The Rationalist*

Life: *Asst. Professor*
Death: *Hit by Car*
Regret: *Never Reclaiming Your Fiddle*

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●●○○○
Dexterity ●●●○○
Stamina ●●○○○

Social

Charisma ●●●○○
Manipulation ●○○○○
Appearance ●●○○○

Mental

Perception ●●●○○
Intelligence ●●●○○
Wits ●●○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ●●○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ●○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ●○○○○
Empathy ●○○○○
Expression ●●○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ●○○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ●○○○○
Etiquette ●●○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ●○○○○
Melee ●○○○○
Performance ●●●○○
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ●●○○○
Computer ●○○○○
Enigmas ●○○○○
Investigation ●●○○○
Law ●●●○○
Linguistics ●●○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ●○○○○
Politics ●●●○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

Mentor ●●●○○
Legacy ●●○○○
Memoriam ●○○○○
Artifact ●○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

Find Your Fiddle ○○○○○
(Determination) ●●●○○
Hurt Whoever Took It ○○○○○
(Vengeance) ●●●○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arcanoi

Argos ●●○○○
Fatalism ●●●○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Fetters

Bar Where You Played ●●●○○
Classroom ●●●○○
Last Student ●●○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

● ● ● ● ● ● ● ●
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Willpower ● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Ange

● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □
Thorns
Shadow Familiar (Songbird)
Shadowplay

Guild Marks

Sigils

Pathos

■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □ □

Dark Passions

Hurt Other Musicians ●●●○○
(Envy) ○○○○○
Bring Down Your ●●●○○
Superiors (Contempt) ○○○○○

The Game Master

Quote: Now roll four 10-siders to see if you are able to ask the right question. Don't look at me that way; this comes from the Desk of G-d.

Prelude: You were, by all mainstream social standards, a geek — but you were a happy geek. Growing up with suburban parents in a suburban neighborhood with good, middle-class, suburban morals, you'd spend hours in your room whipping up worlds that didn't exist, then sit and tell your friends about them. It confused the hell out of your parents. If you were doing drugs, well, that would make sense to them (as they'd done that when they were your age), but playing pretend? Weren't you a little old for that? Still, once you convinced Mom and Dad that you weren't going to be traipsing through any sewers or sacrificing the dog to the moon, they eased off. You and your friends got the basement on Saturdays with no interruptions.

Usually, you were the Game Master since you were by far the best storyteller, especially once you took command. When you spoke, the whole gaming group listened, enthralled. What a rush! School was just an unpleasantness that had to be dealt with between bouts of imagination and pizza. This attitude skimmed you through high school and college and then into unemployment. The groups of players changed, but their fascination remained the same. As long as you had that, you didn't worry about much else. This was your world, and in it, you were completely in charge of your own life. What you weren't in charge of, was your destiny. It's the only way you could explain choking on a mouthful of pizza during an epic saga. Your dying thought was, *Wait! I didn't get to the good stuff yet.*

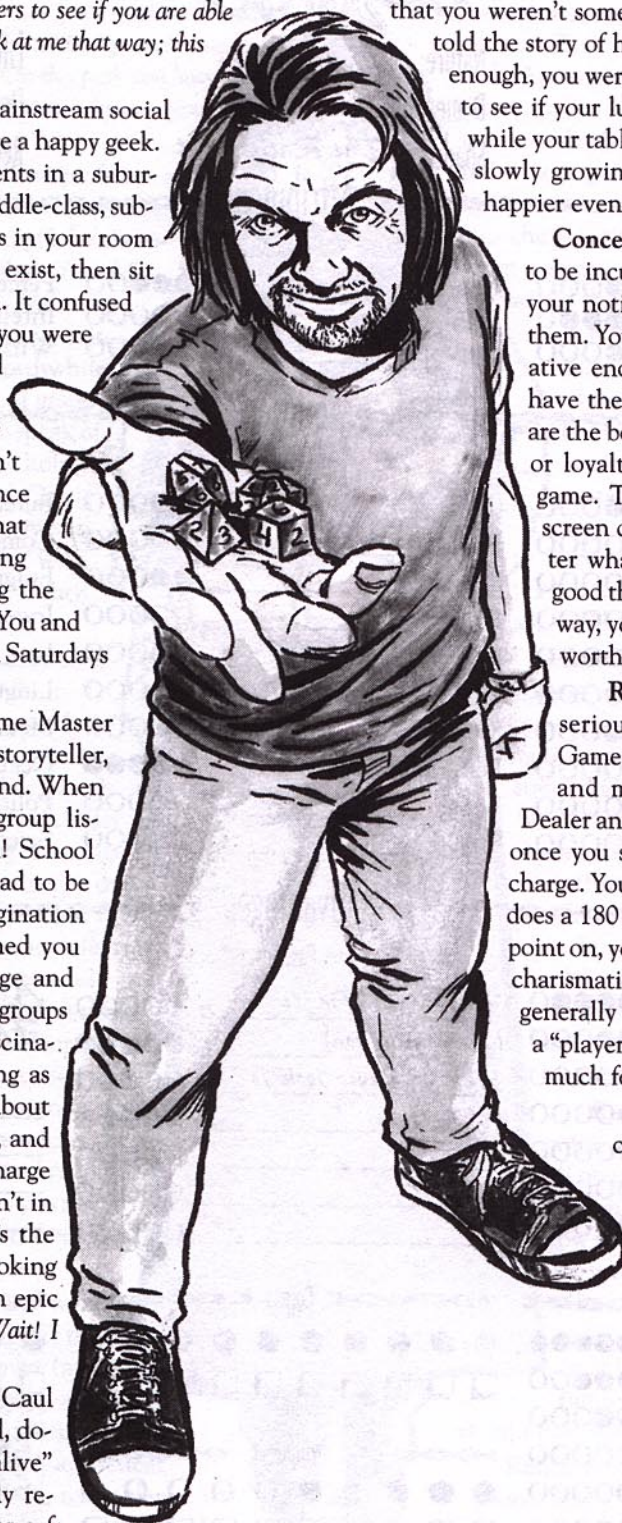
You tore yourself out of your Caul and immediately went to ground, doing the sort of things to stay "alive" that you imagined a particularly resourceful character would. After a few months of watching and waiting, you figured you'd mapped out the rules of how this place worked, and decided to try to hook up with some kindred spirits.

It took a lot to crawl out of your hidey-hole, but no more than it took to try to convince the first Guildwraiths you found that you weren't some spy for the Hierarchy. Once you told the story of how you found them convincingly enough, you were shuttled off to *La Belle LaFayette* to see if your luck would hold. So far it has, and while your table doesn't have much turnover, it's slowly growing more popular. You couldn't be happier even if you were still alive.

Concept: You still consider most wraiths to be incurably mundane and thus beneath your notice; your table holds no room for them. You only play with those who are creative enough to let loose a little but still have the table etiquette to know that you are the boss. You haven't a taste for politics or loyalties; you're just here to play the game. The way the dice fall behind the screen doesn't much bother you, no matter what the result. After all, you're so good that even when things don't go your way, you can improvise up a workaround worthy of a master.

Roleplaying Notes: Take nothing seriously unless it's *The Game*, your Game. You know how to play by the rules and make nice, especially with the Dealer and the other Oracle higher-ups, but once you sit behind the screen, *you* are in charge. Your complacent, easy-going manner does a 180 when you take charge. From that point on, you are deadly serious, dramatic and charismatic. This personality shift makes you generally unpopular with anyone who isn't a "player," but then again, you never cared much for popularity.

Relics: Dice bag with personal collection of marbled dice, 3-ring binder.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature: *Traditionalist*
Demeanor: *Child*
Shadow: *The Monster*

Life: *Gamer*
Death: *Suffocation*
Regret: *Never finishing the
ultimate story*

Attributes

Physical			Social			Mental		
Strength	●●○○○		Charisma	●●○○○		Perception	●○○○○	
Dexterity	●●○○○		Manipulation	●●○○○		Intelligence	●●○○○	
Stamina	●●○○○		Appearance	●●○○○		Wits	●●○○○	

Abilities

Talents			Skills			Knowledges		
Alertness	●●○○○		Crafts	○○○○○		Bureaucracy	○○○○○	
Athletics	●○○○○		Drive	○○○○○		Computer	●●○○○	
Awareness	●○○○○		Etiquette	○○○○○		Enigmas	●●○○○	
Brawl	○○○○○		Firearms	○○○○○		Investigation	●●○○○	
Dodge	○○○○○		Leadership	●●○○○		Law	○○○○○	
Empathy	○○○○○		Meditation	○○○○○		Linguistics	●○○○○	
Expression	●●○○○		Melee	○○○○○		Medicine	○○○○○	
Intimidation	○○○○○		Performance	●○○○○		Occult	●○○○○	
Streetwise	○○○○○		Repair	●●○○○		Politics	○○○○○	
Subterfuge	●○○○○		Stealth	○○○○○		Science	●●○○○	

Advantages

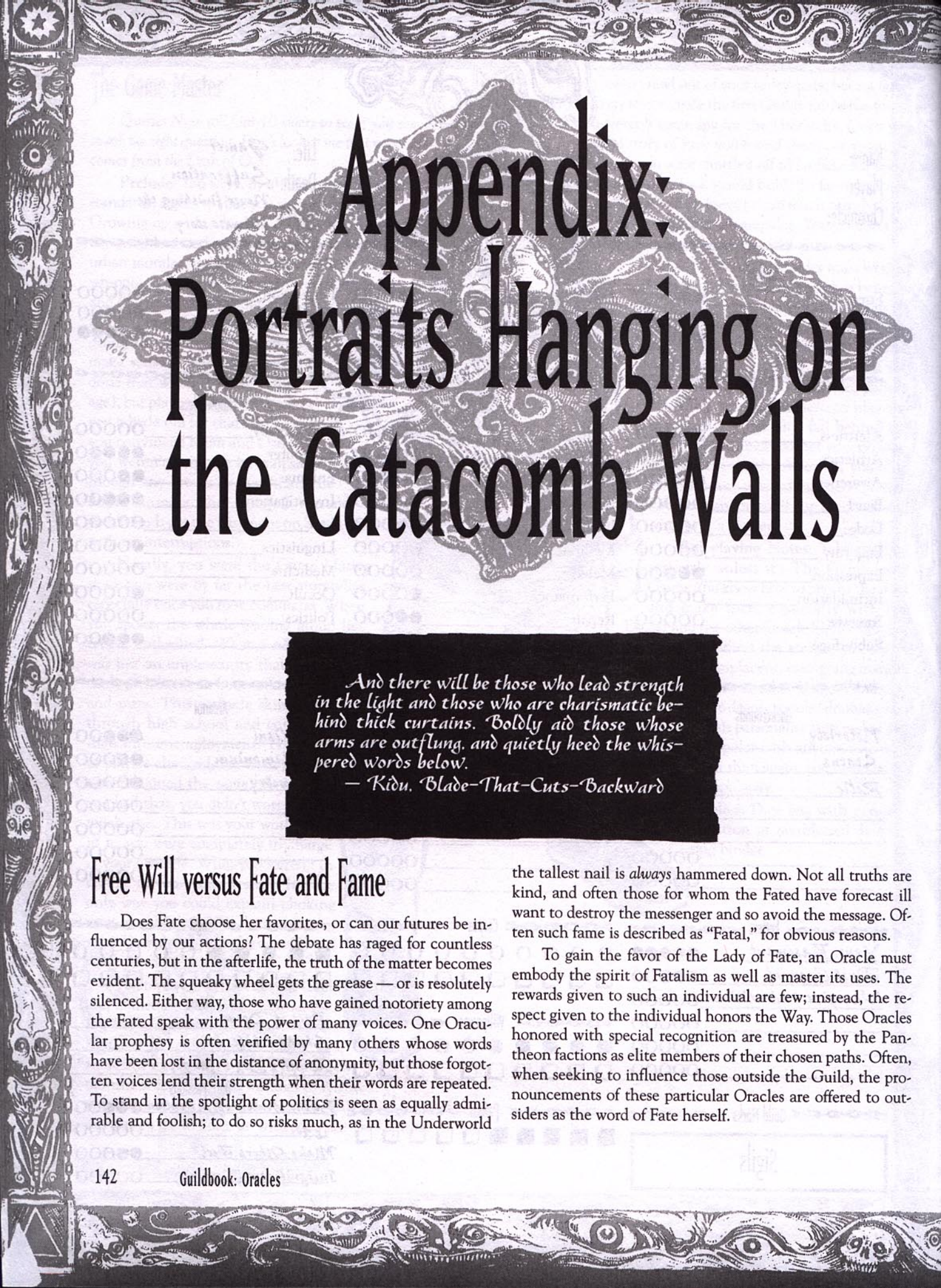
Backgrounds			Passions			Arcanoi		
<i>Notoriety</i>	●●○○○		<i>Tell the Ultimate Story</i>	●●○○○		<i>Fatalism</i>	●●○○○	
<i>Status</i>	●○○○○		<i>(Ego)</i>	○○○○○		<i>Pandemonium</i>	●●○○○	
<i>Relic</i>	●●○○○		<i>Be Liked (Insecurity)</i>	●●○○○		<i>Puppetry</i>	●○○○○	
	○○○○○		<i>Prove You're In Charge</i>	●●○○○			○○○○○	
	○○○○○		<i>(Fear)</i>	○○○○○			○○○○○	
	○○○○○			○○○○○			○○○○○	
	○○○○○			○○○○○			○○○○○	

Fetters			Corpus			Angst		
<i>Your Basement</i>	●●●●●		○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○			● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○		
<i>First Copy of</i>	●●●○○		□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □			□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □		
<i>Vampire 2nd edition</i>	○○○○○							
	○○○○○							
	○○○○○							
	○○○○○							

Guild Marks			Willpower			Thorns		
			● ● ● ● ● ○ ○ ○ ○ ○			<i>Pact of Doom</i>		
			□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □			<i>Shadow Life</i>		
						<i>Death's Sigil (fangs)</i>		

Pathos			Dark Passions		
■ ■ ■ ■ ■ □ □ □ □ □			<i>Be the Center of Attention</i>	●●○○○	
			<i>(Ego)</i>	○○○○○	
			<i>Make Others Feel</i>	●●○○○	
			<i>Insignificant (Terror)</i>	○○○○○	

Sigils



Appendix: Portraits Hanging on the Catacomb Walls

*And there will be those who lead strength
in the light and those who are charismatic be-
hind thick curtains. Boldly aid those whose
arms are outflung, and quietly heed the whis-
pered words below.*

— Kîdu, Blade-That-Cuts-Backward

Free Will versus Fate and Fame

Does Fate choose her favorites, or can our futures be influenced by our actions? The debate has raged for countless centuries, but in the afterlife, the truth of the matter becomes evident. The squeaky wheel gets the grease — or is resolutely silenced. Either way, those who have gained notoriety among the Fated speak with the power of many voices. One Oracular prophesy is often verified by many others whose words have been lost in the distance of anonymity, but those forgotten voices lend their strength when their words are repeated. To stand in the spotlight of politics is seen as equally admirable and foolish; to do so risks much, as in the Underworld

the tallest nail is *always* hammered down. Not all truths are kind, and often those for whom the Fated have forecast ill want to destroy the messenger and so avoid the message. Often such fame is described as “Fatal,” for obvious reasons.

To gain the favor of the Lady of Fate, an Oracle must embody the spirit of Fatalism as well as master its uses. The rewards given to such an individual are few; instead, the respect given to the individual honors the Way. Those Oracles honored with special recognition are treasured by the Pantheon factions as elite members of their chosen paths. Often, when seeking to influence those outside the Guild, the pronouncements of these particular Oracles are offered to outsiders as the word of Fate herself.

KrystalMeth

The Pantheon holds KrystalMeth as a testament to the new, jaded quality found in the modern Quick. A bright star in the Guild's zodiac, this blond waif is taking the Lemures by storm. KrystalMeth is cocky, intelligent and spiteful to the point of ruthlessness. She's had to be. It's her Fate.

Born to a prostitute in the backwash of Cold War-era Berlin, she grew up on the streets and on her own. This arrangement was formalized the storm-washed morning when Krystal stumbled home to find her mother still absent

— unusual for a employee of the world's oldest profession. A few hours later the police called Krystal for help in identifying her mother's body, just 14 hours after the gut-cut that had killed her in the Platz der Republik. Her mother's legacy to her consisted of a dingy apartment and a truism: Nobody gets nothing for free.

KrystalMeth adopted her professional name when she began her new line of work: drug dealing. Dealing was a profitable, if risky, venture in the heart of a divided Germany; she preferred it to the relative laxity of spreading her legs for food. She was quick to start and slow to let go; in a short time she had taken the mattress savings and replaced her mother's meager estate with a new place closer to the Ku'damm strip and more hot audio and video than could fill the guest room. Sitting pretty as boss to a handful of urchins, she indulged her spiritual side (having no taste for physical debauchery), and with the help of a few synthetic hallucinogens composed her own youth cult, *der Kult Nadel* (the Cult of the Needle).

She was popular and powerful and high on the attention. Her customers became her followers, and the suits became her credit card slaves. At 19, KrystalMeth owned a small

division of the old Platz and a hunk of the tourist-trap Potsdamer. For her birthday she bought herself a BMW. She adopted an old system of scrying into a new level of "altered state" with monosyllabic mantras and exotic neurotoxins. Dark and deadly, the *Kult Nadel* spread like neon fire. Life was slick until the local boss, a figure who went by the name of "Family Man" got nervous as his sources and youthful dealers swayed their professional alliances. A private party featuring Xtacy3 turned into a bloodbath when three of Family Man's muscleboys showed up with AK-47s.

Dead. What a rip. The Heretic who Reaped her saw her

with an eye for an apprentice, a disciple who would follow in his footsteps using the old Way of Merlin as a route toward peaceful resolution of Fetters. He was grievously mistaken in his choice. Conniving and clever, KrystalMeth subverted his hard-won network of contacts throughout the Hierarchy and the (supposedly extinct) Guilds, improved the quality of her personal contact with her Arcanoi of choice, and had her former mentor soulforged into a flawless soulsteel ball. Held in her left hand, he serves as an ever-present symbol of her no-nonsense attitude and quest for personal power. To make certain that people got the message, she had the Artificer leave her mentor's face intact, imprisoned forever in a final scream.

To add to her myth, when working KrystalMeth Moliates her face to horrific effect. Pinching the skin of

her brow down over her eyes, she appears not only blind, but utterly eyeless. Most clients find this impressive; quite a few find her horrifying. Both reactions serve her purpose. KrystalMeth has a yen to renew her accustomed position as a cult leader, and from the number of lost souls who have flocked to her, she's well on her way. Though there are those within the Guild who are suspicious about whether or not she believes her own Heresy, no one questions her uncanny ability to manipulate and destroy.



Re

Mauberine DoPhantom Re (Madeleine Rae Reardon) is one of the few Oracles with a famous Haunt that doesn't exist. She visits daily, reads for the Quick hourly, and possibly earns more Pathos in an hour than most wraiths do in a month. Re has followers across the face of the Skinlands, and her dedicated flock grows past all barriers of race and age.

Working primarily online, Re maintains a Web site called "Piercing the Shroud." In her electronic persona, she is a prophetess to the wanting and a psychic counselor to the needy. It tickles her that she has received invitations to speaking engagements, coven meetings, New Age conventions and clandestine orgies, all on the strength of her online personality, for she obviously can never attend in the flesh. All the invitations, however, are politely declined. Not only is Re not fond of Skinriding, but odds are that whatever the gathering's purpose, she's seen it before. After all, the charismatic and benevolent Re has been dead some six centuries.

Re was one of the first to die in the suppression of the second wave of the "hostile threat" of Goddess worship as mandated by Pope John XXII in 1320. She and two of her unmarried friends were sent to the gallows for celebrating their Sabbat on Mabon. A Thrall for over six centuries after her death, Re gained freedom when an insurrection broke out in the mines beneath Alacante's Necropolis, and four dozen of the enslaved scattered to the four corners of the Underworld.

Alone and friendless, she stumbled upon a new wraith encased in his Caul. She tore the man free and bound him to her. In the course of their travels together, Re's Thrall told her of his life. Apparently he was a graduate student from a country called the United States, specifically from California; he claimed to be a "CE/EE at U.C. Berkeley," whatever that was. Slowly he explained to her how the world had

changed and how things now stood in the lands of the living. In fits and starts he even managed to explain the basics of computing and the Internet to her. Thirsty for knowledge, Re freed her Thrall and read for him in exchange for his promise to teach her all he knew. Alas for him, he agreed.

Within a few years, the pupil surpassed the teacher, and as such she promptly turned her expended resource over to a slaver in exchange for basic lessons in Inhabit. With that knowledge in hand, she presented a daring scheme to the Pantheon: That she set up a Web site and from it, read for the Quick. The thousands of readings she (and whatever assistants she accrued) would perform would augment the vast

body of prophecies the Guild had acquired, while at the same time, the site would serve as a subtle tweak of the Hierarchy's vaunted *Dictum*.

For whatever reason, it was done.

Credit card orders for "private sessions" smooth the path for constant cross-Shroud transactions. Meanwhile, both the Guild and the Legion of Fate shelter Re from the Hierarchy's wrath, perhaps because Re's omnipresent companion Elspeth is adept at culling the Fated — literally — from the site's daily flood of traffic. So the Legion and Guild grow, and Re does reading after reading, and no one in the living lands is the wiser.



The Lady Spurned

She sits, and looks across the sea. The most aged of the Clairvoyants watches the horizon, occasionally writing notes on her palm. With a quick tear, she pulls a palm print of skin free and lets it drift on the wind to wherever Fate may carry it. This is how she serves her Guild, and this is how they repay her.

"The Lady Spurned" was a name given to her by the Greek chorus of a millennium of whispers. They speak her title, but never her name. They read her words, but never aloud. They forget whether she was the last to refuse to speak her Sight, or whether they were the first to refuse to listen. Some of them say she is the legendary Cassandra. In this, they are mistaken.

But she might as well have enjoyed the sun god's pleasures, for she bears all that legendary victim's pain.

Alive, the Lady Spurned held captive all the civilized world. She was the pride of her people on the outskirts of modern Venice, the voice of the Advisory Council and the toast of Rome. She kept audience with senators and poets, philosophers and princes, centurions and artisans. All leapt to grace her hands with grapes and her fingertips with kisses. She remembers whispers of the ancient times, hints of the smells and tastes of the gala orgies graced with flesh and wine. She would dance to the sacred music and set fire to the offerings which burned with such smoke that the column of it straying to heaven would eclipse the night sky. That much she remembers.

She remembered all these things and more shortly after her fall from grace. Her suicide washed her lost Corpus onto these shores. Here, in the Underworld, was a second chance, a chance for her to heal her spiritual wounds. Here was a chance to resurrect her sense of self as an individual and as a prophetess as well. A chance to take back all that was taken from her. A chance for redemption. She wanted to recreate her world, to revel in the wonderland she remembered. For some, like her, the afterlife was not a morbid place; by force of will she would rebuild her abandoned home.

It was difficult to forge such luxury in the strict atmosphere of Stygian austerity. She had to wait a little longer than she wished to set her plans in motion; so she perched on this very crag of rock to sit and to wait. She watched the metropolis of Stygia rise and fall down, swell and recede, like the tides. The tides... something about them spoke to her of things to come. Spectres and Maelstroms filled her visions, fed her Shadow: *They're coming for her, they're coming for you!* the voices whispered. Reciting the Linen Book, which had mysteriously crossed the Shroud to be her comfort, brought her hope to endure, however. When the New Age of paganism brought hundreds to the fold, their willing hands and voices raised her dream on Temple grounds. She was certain she would be vilified for this manifestation of hubris, but it was not to be. Instead, she was ignored. Alarmed, she sought to rectify this oversight

She gained the ear of Servius, High Overlord of the Skel-etel Legion, before he was snatched from his office by a grinning Doppelganger. She turned her Sight toward the Count de Versailles, a vizier for the Fishers until the day his Fetters were crushed underfoot by an invading army in the north of France. The Doomsayer, EverClear, omened Prophet of the Industrial Age, heeded her words when she spoke of the then-nameless Gorool and was Harrowed that very eve. None would listen, as all who did so were snuffed out like so many candles. None would listen for fear.

Over and over her life's work became her death's toil, maddening in its accuracy and unforgiving in its spirit. She

hid herself behind the veils of her hearth and wept. She hoped to be destroyed in her Harrowing that followed; instead, it made her stronger. Hardened and tested in the crucible of her nightmares, the Lady left her Paphian dream and family of followers behind. Alone, she returned to her perch atop the crags. She never speaks, but merely scribbles on her flesh when the spirit moves her. Such occasions are rare; now she mostly just listens. Her words once brought her loved ones disaster, but her wisdom now brings her compatriots hope.

So this is her station, monitoring the bay and meditating on the formless void that is the lowering sky over the eternal city. The visions she transcribes are windows of truth to those who find them, but only if read silently. The wraith who voices what he finds calls doom down upon himself. Her voice stilled, the Lady knows peace, even though she has abandoned

her vocation. Rare are the times it slips from her mind onto her palm: "Spurinna warned me to beware the ides of March." This message, too, she sends through the wind, to warn no one who matters anymore.





Name:
Player:
Chronicle:

Nature:
Demeanor:
Shadow:

Life:
Death:
Regret:

Attributes

Physical

Strength ●○○○○
Dexterity ●○○○○
Stamina ●○○○○

Social

Charisma ●○○○○
Manipulation ●○○○○
Appearance ●○○○○

Mental

Perception ●○○○○
Intelligence ●○○○○
Wits ●○○○○

Abilities

Talents

Alertness ○○○○○
Athletics ○○○○○
Awareness ○○○○○
Brawl ○○○○○
Dodge ○○○○○
Empathy ○○○○○
Expression ○○○○○
Intimidation ○○○○○
Streetwise ○○○○○
Subterfuge ○○○○○

Skills

Crafts ○○○○○
Drive ○○○○○
Etiquette ○○○○○
Firearms ○○○○○
Leadership ○○○○○
Meditation ○○○○○
Melee ○○○○○
Performance ○○○○○
Repair ○○○○○
Stealth ○○○○○

Knowledges

Bureaucracy ○○○○○
Computer ○○○○○
Enigmas ○○○○○
Investigation ○○○○○
Law ○○○○○
Linguistics ○○○○○
Medicine ○○○○○
Occult ○○○○○
Politics ○○○○○
Science ○○○○○

Advantages

Backgrounds

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Passions

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Arcanoi

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○

Corpus

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Willpower

○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○
□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Pathos

□ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □

Pantheon Connections

Scrying Methods

Guild Marks

Sigils





History
Life

Death

Pertinent Details

Age	Apparent Age	Gender
Date of Birth	R.I.P.	Height
Hair	Eyes	Weight
Race	Nationality	
Garb		
Other Distinguishing Features		

SHADOW

Psyche:

Archetype:

Shadowguide Player:

Thorns

Angst

Dark Passions

○○○○○○○○○○
□□□□□□□□

Psyche Willpower

○○○○○○○○○○

○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○
○○○○○



Expanded Background

Allies

Clients

Eidolon

Guild Status

Contacts

Status

Memoriam

Mentor

Notoriety

Wealth

Artifacts

Relics

Prophecies and Visions

Guild Secrets Known



Merits & Flaws

Merit	Type	Cost	Flaw	Type	Bonus

Fetters

OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO
OOOOO

Experience

Total: _____

Total Spent On _____

Ancient/New Arts Known

Usual Haunts

Guild Standing & Contacts

Standing _____

Rank _____

Guild Contacts _____

Apprenticed to: _____

Combat

Weapon	Difficulty	Damage	Conceal	Range	Rate	Pathos

Brawling Table

Maneuver	Accuracy	Damage
Bite	5	Strength +1
Punch	6	Strength
Grapple	6	Strength
Claw	6	Strength +2
Kick	7	Strength +1
Body slam	7	Special; see Options

Armor: _____

GUILDBOOK:



And



Spooks

*This is my fist. That is your Fetter.
This is your Fetter after I've beaten the living
hell out of it with my fist. Any questions?*

Oracles

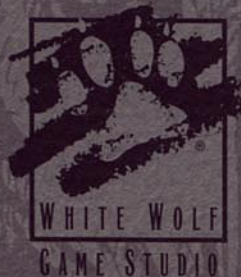
*I am a spider in the web of Fate. You are a fly, caught in it. I
walk along the strands, untouched. You are bound. The more you
struggle, the worse it will be.*

The Spooks: Pathos-runners, Fetter-breakers and bagmen of the Underworld. The Oracles: They saw Charon's downfall — do they hide the secret of his return? The influence of these Guilds stretches from the mean streets of the Necropoli to the chambers of the Onyx Tower. Nobody knows their real agendas, though — except perhaps those who've read this book.

Guildbook: Spooks and Oracles is the sixth in the continuing series of Guildbooks for **Wraith: The Oblivion**. Inside are complete Guildbooks for both Guilds, covering everything from Guild histories to new Arcanos uses. If it's something you need to know about the Spooks or Oracles, it's in here. *Capiche? Good...*

Guildbook: Spooks and Oracles contains:

- The reason the Spooks and Haunters fragmented, and the terrible price that was paid;
- New uses of Fatalism and Outrage, and the three easy steps to wrecking the Skinlands;
- The prophecy that doomed Charon, and much more!



GAMES FOR MATURE MINDS

ISBN 1-56504-666-8
WW6305 \$18.00 US



PRINTED IN CANADA