

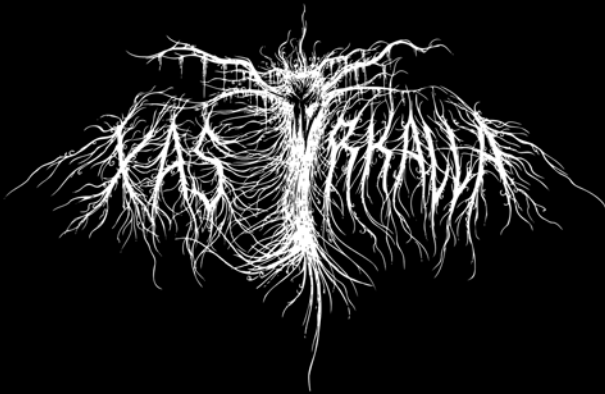
JAMES VAIL

# XAS IRKALLA

## ROLEPLAYING GAME

SUFFER A BLACKENED BIRTH INTO IRKALLA

*Beneath grey skies of falling ashes, corpse-like denizens beckon for scraps of flesh, kneeling in filth and ecstasy before their slumbering god-kings. Wasteland tribes fight against the armies that come to take them as cattle. Witches are hunted and bred to serve as psychic slaves to sorcerers at war, and things of nightmare are birthed from the cracks in the earth, where reality is twisted into surreal labyrinths of intersecting worlds. You are the alien here. Your existence will have to be earned.*



CORE RULEBOOK

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*"To the dark house, the abode of Irkalla,  
To the house which those who enter cannot leave  
To the road from which there is no way back  
To the house in which those who enter yearn for light  
Where soil is their sustenance, clay their food.  
Light they do not see, they dwell in darkness  
Clad like birds with garments of feathers.  
Over the door and the bolt, dust has spread."*

– The Descent of Ishtar



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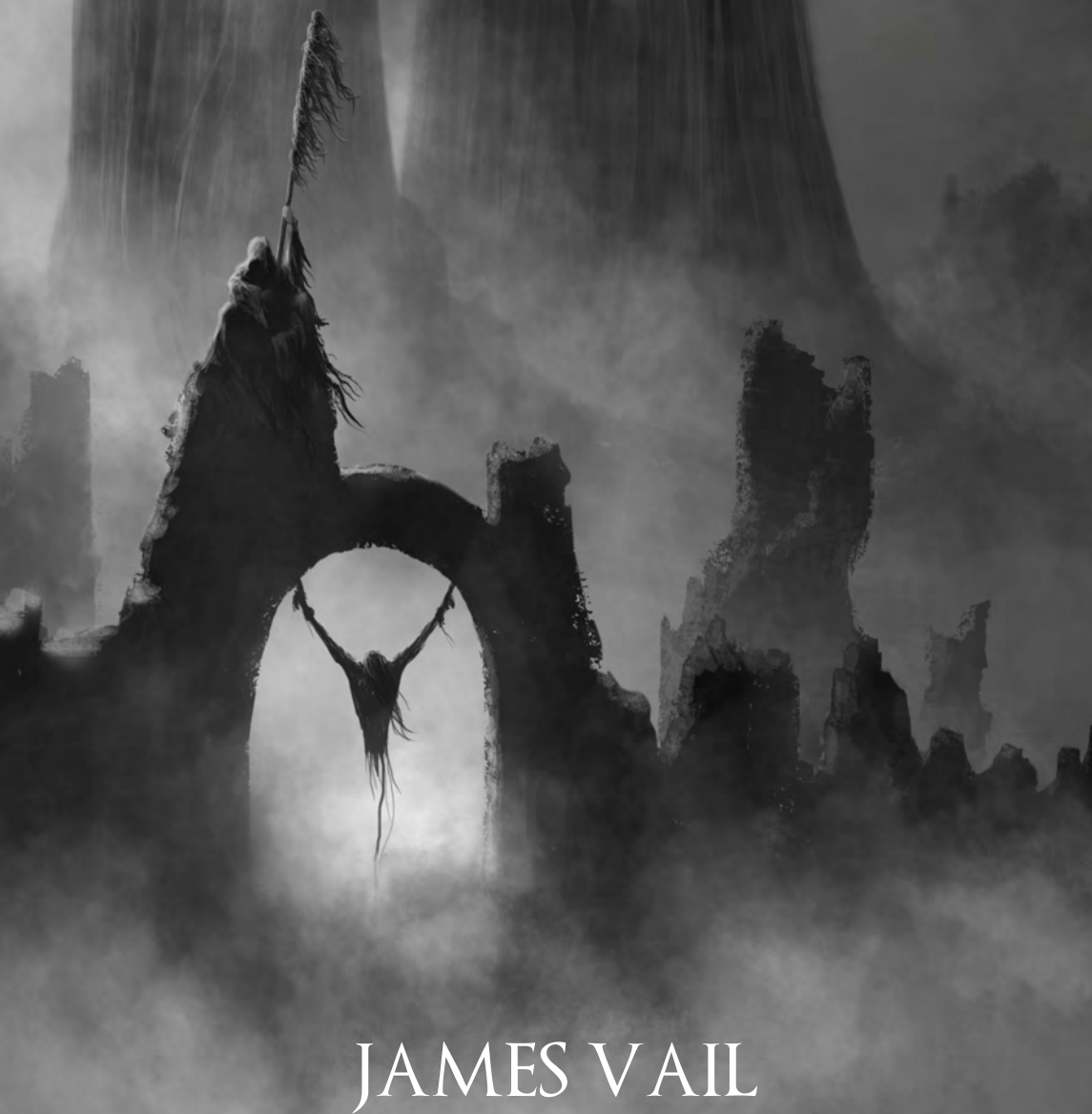
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# XASIRKALLA

## ROLE-PLAYING GAME



JAMES VAIL



# From Chaos They Come



**T**he world shudders like some great beast lanced in the heart. Wounds open in the ground. Serpentine silhouettes strike out from the dark fissures, swallowing reality with each lunge. The sky is torn apart, collapsing like a burst dam, spewing ink from beyond. Every sign of life becomes foam and flotsam in a black acid bath of extinction, until only one being remains. The lone survivor is pulled through the flood and into the abyss. There, in a timeless dimension, strange beings strip him of his belongings, one by one, the tolls they extract to open their gates. At last, cold and naked, he passes through the final gate and emerges into a world of dust and ash. The only epitaph for his former world: the psychic screams of the dead echoing in his head.

Days later...

The wanderer is alone in a shallow cave. He crouches by the fire, though its flames fail to warm his blackened fingers. He takes a sharpened piece of stone in one hand, lifting it above his head, his other hand flat on a rock. With all of the strength remaining in his emaciated form, he slams the shard down. No pain is felt, yet he is repulsed by the sight of his finger still attached by a shred of flesh. Grimacing, he rips the frostbitten finger from his hand. Were his stomach not an empty void, he would see again his last meal, those few scraps of meat for which he had fought off the vultures. Shock starts to take over. In blind desperation, he strikes stone against flesh and bone, again, and again, and again... Now the agony hits him and he reels back clutching his mangled hand. The stone clatters down into the shadows. Everything feels hot, despite the frigid air, and the wanderer becomes reacquainted with his tear-filled eyelids...

The night is filled with the sounds of groaning and howling from some unknown source the wanderer doesn't dare wake to find. For now, the most comfort he can muster is by remaining huddled in the dirt and ashes, wrapped in his tatters of cloth. He sleeps, grinding his teeth through the throbbing pain, dreaming of home in its harsh contrast to this world. Meandering beneath consciousness, his mind is flooded with longing memories of his time traveling between vibrant towns, peddling little sculptures he'd carved. He was alone most of the time—he preferred it that way—but now he is forced to be alone in a land of sadness: ash-laden wastes without color, save for the red that spills throughout, and the black-brown of filth that clings about.

In the twilight of morning, the nearby canyon yawns with a thick grey fog. As the wanderer rises with a dry mouth, he decides that he can't continue following the ledge. He will have to descend into the chasm if he is to find water.

With nothing to bring with him but the rags on his skin, he begins crawling down a crack-ridden cliff. His fingerless hand, though swollen and red, is more use to him than he had thought, as he clamps his thumb and palm together like pincers around the stone. He climbs downward, carefully but confidently, from rock to rock. He lowers himself down onto a narrow ledge that descends a short distance. Here he has no handholds, only balance. With his arms and ribcage embracing the sheer slate, its coating of dust and ash scrapes his cheek as he presses against the wall of stone. He can't move his head to see the ledge, only able to feel it with his bare feet. A cold feeling of weightlessness hits him as the freezing wind cuts through. Panic. His mind races. I'm trapped, he whispers. Fear pins him against the stone. Tremors shiver through his body for several minutes. Finally, he decides he will continue.

A step of trepidation toward the next rock. He finds his footing, and moves to balance himself. He slips. Falling. He reaches for anything, hooking a jutting rock and swinging inward to the cliff. He slams against another rock, and his shoulder is undone, the bone pushing through the skin. Another crash, then tumbling and crunching. Pieces of skin and cloth are left on the rocks as he grinds his way down into the abyss. Blackness.

Three riders on horned and feathered beasts approach the heap that was the wanderer. Half the body is withered away in an acid river, and the legged half is swarming with flies and maggots. The rider with a bone-crested head drops from the beast and inspects the corpse. The rider drags the body from the river, trailing acid onto the malformed stone. The acid sizzles and bubbles. Another of the riders joins the crested one, extending a long tongue that hisses over the body. Saliva drips from the fangs of the crested rider. The tongued one nods to the others, and the two riders begin tearing at the muscles of the corpse. Bring it to me, the tongued one hears in its head. It looks at the third rider, a pale-skinned wretch without eyes. The tongued one obeys, bringing a torn piece of haunch to the eyeless one. Only the bones of the wanderer are left behind as the riders and their beasts continue their search for water.

The canyon leads them on a long journey to its source, a flow of acid from a colossal boulder above. Massive thorns puncture the stone of the boulder like an alien emerging from an egg. Something is causing the acid to flow in odd directions, and an inverted staircase ascends the opposite cliffside. At its base, the world twists. The riders and their beasts



clamor down the staircase, with the canyon floor above them, eventually reaching the top of the canyon, where gravity shifts back.

Not far from the ledge, a temple dominates the survey, with two robed statues flanking the entryway. The architecture seems off, wrung like a wet towel and wrapped around a glowing crematorium. With nightfall at their backs, the light from the temple beckons the riders closer. Low drones shake the earth around the temple. The deep reverberations rattle their skeletons; their stomachs churn and their brains throb. The riders force the beasts onward. The crested one looks back at the darkening horizon, where strange shapes start to writhe in the cold landscape. A choice between hell and nightmare. They dismount, the eyeless one favoring its wounded, worm-infested left thigh as they enter the temple.

Beads of sweat are birthed from the pores of the riders. The stench of burnt hair. The heat of a furnace. A pit of magma forms an altar in the center, surrounded by corpse-like lava formations. Molten coffins line the walls, open. Charred remains are interred within, wrapped in blackened chains, with brittle hair and skin still vaguely intact, cooked eyeballs peering out. The crested rider makes eye contact with one of them.

The eyeless rider falls to the ground, gasping for air. The others are slow to react, now struggling to find their own breath. Staggering. Sweating. Sweltering. With great effort, they drag the eyeless one with them to the portal between worlds. They crawl to the tepid purgatory just outside the temple and collapse. The crested one fights to keep watch as the eyeless and tongued ones fall unconscious. Beyond sight, horrors swell in the absence of light.

Help me, the voice echoes through the crested one's head. Help me, Urtce.

He opens his eyes. The others lay unconscious, as they were before. Horrific sounds travel across the pitch-black nightscape. The eyeshine of scavengers in the penumbra of the temple's glow, their panting breath close enough to smell. He stands up to prevent himself from falling back asleep. The beasts shift uneasily from the movement in the shadows. The voice echoes in Urtce's mind again. Release me, it pleads. Suddenly, a chilling primal dread travels through his spine. Paralyzed. Yet something within submits to the summoning voice. Reluctantly, he steps with a mechanical gait into the temple, as if being controlled by a puppeteer.

Inside, a cacophony of chains fills the chamber, the blackened corpses writhing and craving release, with each of them clad in a grotesque piece of wrought iron formed from their molten chains, fused to their charred membranes, and each of them echoing pleas in Urtce's mind as he is pulled about by some unreckonable energy, removing the pieces of iron from each corpse and placing them on himself, with black smoke rising from his body as each piece is branded onto his skin, and the puppet that was Urtce is commanded to the temple doorway, his consciousness trapped in a body no longer under his control, and when he emerges from the temple the clattering of his chains and iron wakes the eyeless and tongued ones.

Urtce yells at them in a vile language, telling them to run, and though they do not understand the words, the ironclad figure of obscenity before them summons an ancient instinct, causing the tongued one to jump up and the eyeless one to crawl away toward their beasts, with their nervous eyes glancing around at the predators in the darkness, and



the clinking of chains and searing and sizzling flesh right behind them, they mount the beasts and force them onward into the lightless beyond, leaving Urtce behind to wither in misery like the condemned in a baptism by fire not even a god could end.

They travel withershins through pure blackness, the sounds of gnashing teeth, quaking heartbeats, and vomiting orifices the only clues to what exists in the starless murk until, eventually, a dull-grey lantern rises from behind the voidscape of a massive city on the horizon. In the dim light that would stretch their shadows to the horizon, the landscape with its silhouettes of twisting limbs and mutated holes once again becomes a drab, lifeless wasteland, though with a phantasmal maleficence scarred into view like smudges on glass.

City... must have water... the tongued one utters, barely able to finish the words.

They travel across a flat, pyroclast-covered surface, in and out of consciousness. The only landforms here are the skeletons of beasts and travelers, save for the ever-distant cluster of megaliths just faintly visible through the cinereal clouds of dust.

They arrive at the city of mud just before dusk. They ride in unmolested, and drink from a stagnant trough of water, and fall asleep in the filth. Sometime later, they awaken to the spray of liquid on their faces from above, and to their new existence as prisoners at the bottom of a pit with a bone-crafted cage overhead, two men casually urinating into the pit. The stench of sweat, urine, feces, and rotting flesh drips down their throats and chokes their lungs and clings to every membrane.

Every day, for countless days, cadavers are removed from the cages. Like runs in a pack of wolves, the former riders fight for scraps of inscrutable meat tossed into the throng of bodies. Starvation slowly culls the meat from every bone-stalk in the pit of expiring captives. If some sane part of Urtce were to see them now, he would disregard them as corpses in a mass grave; only their vitals would prove otherwise.

Months pass...

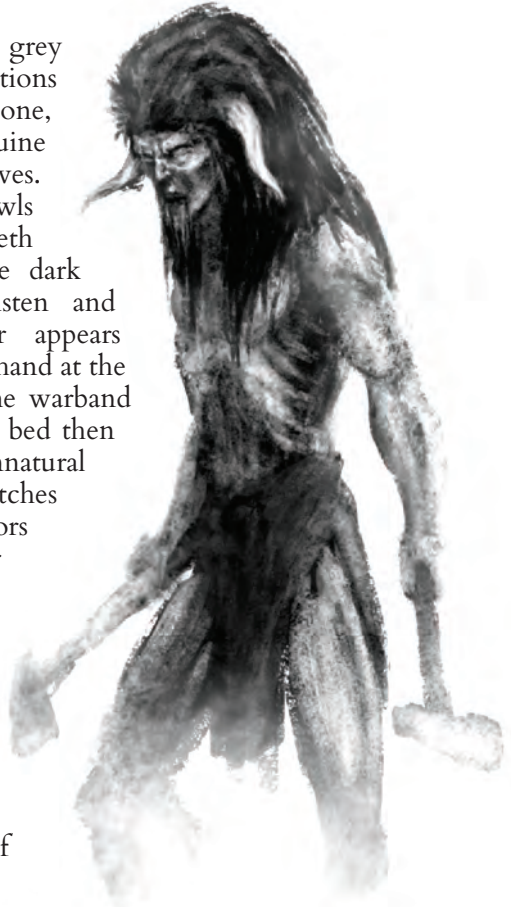
A traveler in layers of hooded black robes purchases a dozen abhuman slaves, among the lot the eyeless and tongued ones. The slaves are bound with leather and placed into a wagon pulled by two familiar beasts. The hooded traveler sits at the front of the wagon, taking up the reins. The turbulence of the wagon cart shakes what little meat remains on the passengers' bones. Through the city, defecating humans shoot stares of scorn and hatred at the outlandish slaves. An elderly man spits at the cart before being prodded onward by a patrol of truncheon-wielding soldiers

in leather masks. The stench of fear fills the spaces between the clay structures that reach into the sky. Tower blocks made of mud, with five or six stories of arrow slits and surrounded by dead-end alleyways stained dark with iron oxide, are decorated with ornately carved statues and bas-reliefs describing some incongruous narrative involving creatures of a chthonic nature. The traveler lashes the beasts of burden forward and out of the choking city streets into the vast wasteland beyond.

Several days later...

A tangled mess of stone can be seen in the distance. Labyrinthine ruins that remind each slave of their blackened birth into this world. The vile nativity of other dimensions that collided with this one. Memories flash before them of the pain they endured, of chambers of death and gore, and of the monstrous creatures that tore away reality and revealed unfathomable dread within their mortal forms, a promise of mental torment with unclean images that cannot be shaken so long as they exist.

As they travel, forms appear in the grey clouds to their left flank. Like apparitions emerging from beyond, warriors in bone, rawhide, and feathers ride on equine creatures toward the wagon of slaves. Their guttural chords and ghastly howls issue forth through maws of filed teeth into the ethereal dome beneath the dark skies, where those within may listen and tremble. Yet the robed wagoner appears undisturbed. He calmly points his left hand at the hundred paces of ground between the warband and the wagon, where the dried lake bed then begins to crack and reveal an unnatural blackness, a bottomless fissure that stretches from horizon to horizon. The warriors are halted, unable to prod their mounts across the suddenly apparent gorge. Then, crawling out from under the traveler's robes like something born of a fevered hallucination, a winged rotting figure steps onto the dry skin of the earth. The foul offspring sniffs the air for a moment before leaping across the gorge, its wingspan of tattered flesh on full display.



The traveler returns his attention to the course ahead of him, commanding the draft beasts forward on their pilgrimage to the ruins, while behind them the chorus of war cries once again echoes between the floating particles of grit, and the thirst of the dirt below is slaked by the spraying of red mist. Which fate would be preferable to the slaves: bound beneath the one whose true nature they have merely glimpsed, or as cattle to those warriors fading in the distance? They themselves can neither know nor decide, clutching only to their endless hunger in this otherworldly slaughterhouse to which they have been damned.

After several hours of travel through the sea of dust, the cart stops near the ruins' entrance, a pit that falls into obscurity, with weird pulsating vines and black scorch marks at the intersection of this realm and that.

Stepping off his perch, the traveler opens two wooden chests, the first: filled with a collection of unusual artifacts covered in mind-numbing symbols—and the second: empty. He gestures to demonstrate its lack of contents, and begins to speak slowly with a raspy hiss and gravel in his throat, though his bizarre words are nothing but awful noises to the ears within range. As he speaks, one by one he drags the starving wretches across the blackened earth and throws them down the pit to be reunited with the depths of the underworld.

The empty chest is thrown down after them, and the sermon of the robbed traveler echoes behind it. What choice do they have? With nowhere else to go, they step into the dark heart of horror, nothing but rags and bones and fear, the distant echoes of rattling chains resounding from deep within...





# Introduction



*"After capture, we were brought to one of the slave cities. They call this a slave city not because of us captives, but because its denizens give themselves to their king as if he were a god. People living in squalor and filth, yet frolicking about in some hallucinated paradise... They took us to a market of depravity. People in cages, watching as their family and friends were butchered, their meat hung from hooks on display for customers. The pretty ones were placed into devices that forced them onto all fours. The young ones were thrown into pens like cattle to be raised as livestock. The strong were forced to lift stones to show their stamina, likely to become laborers. And we, the ones who bore scars and wounds from battle, were forced to fight to the death for their entertainment."*

**U**nder grey skies, an ancient, decayed planet quakes from the effects of sorcery, where at night the land itself becomes a nightmarish death trap, scavengers struggle to survive against abhorrent creatures in surreal labyrinths, wilderness villages of alien species and cannibal tribes fight against the armies that come to take their psychic young, and sorcerers enslave thousands to tend to their bodies while they dream of paradises in dimensions beyond. This is the world of Irkalla, a world of suffering that all its denizens wish to escape. Survival must be earned here, and death can be found at every opportunity.

## THE GAME

*Xas Irkalla* is a brutal game designed to challenge the players in all aspects. As players, you will have to be creative with your characters' skills. Be careful with how you roll the dice, as your characters' stress level and doom score will determine how long they will live. As you play, you will need to choose from double-edged advancement options to build a character that can survive against ever-increasing adversity. Your characters will face blood loss, cauterization, permanent injuries. Find food, water, and shelter. Traverse labyrinths of horror, and face the reality that they might not survive.

## THE STORY

When the story begins, the characters wake up naked in a maze of ruins where the nightmares of dead psychics have collided with reality. The characters will have to escape the ruins, only to then deal with the wasteland world outside. From there, they might become slave gladiators in one of the cities, survivors eking out an existence in the wild, settlers of a village competing over scarce resources, explorers seeking out powerful artifacts, scholars hoping to unlock the secrets of alchemy, mercenaries working for one of the powerful factions, merchants seeking to gain wealth, warriors fighting against the terrors from beyond, or guardians of the tribes who simply wish to survive.



# How to Play



*"Through lucid dreams, I have broken the chains of my mind, the eleven gates that peel away to reveal the truth. There is no law to this reality—anything I can imagine is capable of becoming an entire universe. I exist between two worlds, able to manipulate the fabric of both... My unconscious mind shapes the reality of those who are still bound by the tyrant cosmos, and my conscious mind creates my own reality in the beyond."*

To play *Xas Irkalla*, you will need some pencils, a character sheet for each player, and ten-sided dice (d10s), which these rules refer to simply as "dice."

## Ψ YOUR CHARACTER Ψ

In *Xas Irkalla*, you play as an **Endling**, a survivor from another world, brought into Irkalla by a psychic who died there. This dead psychic, referred to as the **Eye Upon the Throne**, lives on within the Endling's subconscious. At first, your memories are those of the Endling, but some things within Irkalla will be strangely familiar to you as the Eye Upon the Throne recognizes them. Each player character is connected to the others via telepathic bonds, strong enough to share thoughts, emotions, and pain. These bonds were formed by the Eyes Upon the Throne while they were enslaved together, forced to suffer psychic nightmares.

## STRESS AND DOOM

The core states of your character are their Stress and Doom scores.

Your **Stress** is your chance of failure when acting. You start the game with 3 Stress, and you cannot reduce your Stress below 3. Also, you cannot increase your Stress beyond 9. Each Stress point you would gain above 9 instead causes you to gain 5 Doom.

Stress can be recovered by resting (page 38) and advancement (page 23).

Your **Doom** is your percentage chance of dying when you fail in a life-or-death situation. You start the game with 10 Doom, and you cannot reduce your Doom below 10.

Doom can be recovered by advancement (page 23).

## SPECIALTIES

Your character also has various specialties, words that describe them as well as their skills and experiences, and which let them perform better in relevant situations. You start the game with five specialties related to your character's background, which can apply to a broad range of situations but provide very little bonus. As you play the game, you will learn new specialties that provide a greater bonus, but apply to a narrowed range of situations.

Specialties are described more in **Character Creation** (page 18).

## Ψ SKILL TESTS Ψ

Whenever you try to overcome an obstacle, avoid danger, or attempt something dangerous, you must make a skill test:

1. Choose to roll one, two, or three dice.
2. If you roll a 1 on any number of dice, you gain 1 Stress per die you rolled.
3. Your highest rolled die, plus the rank of one relevant specialty (if you decide to use it), is your **result**.

*For example, if you roll 7, 1, and 1, you gain 3 Stress, and 7 is your result.*

The outcome of your action depends on your result:

- **Complete Success:** Result is 10 or more. You succeed and do what you intended.
- **Partial Success:** Result is less than 10, but not below your Stress. You succeed but suffer a minor consequence, determined by the GM.
- **Disaster:** Result is less than your Stress. You fail and suffer a severe consequence, determined by the GM.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS AND GAINING SPECIALTIES

If you roll a 10 on any of the dice without rolling a 1, you get a **critical success**.

Through this experience, you learn a new specialty. It's one rank higher, more specific than the specialty you just used, and related to the action you just performed. For example, if you added Mountains (+1) to your skill test, you might say you gain Mountain Climbing (+2). However, if you did not use a specialty on your skill test, you do not gain a new specialty.

You can learn up to 5 specialties of each rank, up to the maximum rank of +5.

## CRITICAL FAILURE AND DEATH

Whenever you roll a disaster in a life-or-death situation, you get a **critical failure** and must make a **death roll**: roll two dice, one at a time. The first die is the tens digit of the result, and the second is the ones digit.

If the result of your death roll is less than or equal to your Doom, your character dies and you must make a new character.

Upon death, you lose all of your past character's unspent experience points (XP), but all of their spent XP becomes your new character's unspent XP. As described in **Character Advancement** (page 23), XP can only be spent before or after a session, meaning you lose all XP if you die twice in the same session.

In the final moment of your character's death, like an entire lifetime flashing before one's eyes, eons of time exist in another dimension—the dimension of your new character. This new character, also an Endling from another world, feels déjà vu with the memories of the past character, having the same Eye Upon the Throne that connects the character to the group. However, a deep fear of the past character's death is rooted in the Eye Upon the Throne.

Your new character has a **Death Fear** related to the past character's cause of death. Whenever your new character encounters something similar to a death fear, you suffer Disadvantage. Death fears transfer from every past character—after suffering many deaths, the Eye Upon the Throne would have many death fears.

## ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

In situations where success is assured but not without risk, the GM may apply **Advantage** to your skill test. This improves a disaster to a partial success, and improves a partial success to a complete success.

In situations where your action is particularly difficult—such as attacking in complete darkness, or running with an injured leg—you or the GM may apply **Disadvantage** to your skill test. This decreases a partial success to a disaster, and a complete success to a partial success, but you gain 1 XP, bringing you closer to advancing (page 23). However, Disadvantage suffered in combat does not grant XP.



## Ψ PSYCHOSIS Ψ

Each time your Stress would exceed 9, you instead gain 5 Doom and begin to suffer from Psychosis. You can gain multiples of 5 Doom if you gain multiple Stress at once.

While suffering Psychosis, Stress takes twice as long to remove and you lose contact with reality, so you cannot use any of your specialties.

You're only cured of Psychosis if your Stress is reduced to 3 or less.

While your character is suffering from Psychosis, you may choose to spawn horrific delusions into existence. Each time you do, you gain 1 XP. These delusions become reality, so it is in the best interest of the other characters to help you become sane again.

At the GM's discretion, you may gain more XP by tying these delusions to your character's past—for example, a twisted version of a loved one that blames your character for abandoning them, or a tormentor who has come back to inflict more pain.



# Character Creation



*"My people were warriors. My homeworld, a training ground of mazes and traps.*

*My life was solely a practice exercise to become a soldier. An apex predator to dominate any world that my people would conquer. But my people are dead. My world is gone. Swallowed by the black flood that brought me here. For twenty solar revolutions*

*I've survived here. I have hunted beasts, soldiers, aliens, fearsome creatures. I have eaten the worms in the soil, the rotting carcasses of bizarre monstrosities, and the people of the slave cities. I have traversed the labyrinth of juxtaposed worlds. I have searched for a specimen that could impregnate me. I have endured the wastelands where the inhabitants are pale and misshapen. It is clear that I am the prey of this world. I could find safety in the slave cities, but I will not submit to their illusions. I would rather suffer as a wanderer than live in peace as a prisoner to sorcery. I will walk the world as the last of my people. As the relic of planet QVS7."*

**C**haracters are created in three parts: background, details, and aberrant traits. After those three parts, just name and describe your character.

## Ψ PART 1: BACKGROUND Ψ

To determine your character's background, roll one die on each of the following lists. Record each rolled word as a rank-1 specialty on your character sheet.

**Sentiment** represents what your character is passionate about, whether a religious belief, hobby, profession, ideal, or something else.

- 1 Warfare
- 2 Astronomy
- 3 Beasts
- 4 Elements
- 5 Nature
- 6 Ancestors
- 7 Sexuality
- 8 Greed
- 9 Justice
- 10 Wisdom

**Environment** represents where your character is most comfortable, because of upbringing, training, or how their species evolved on their homeworld.

- 1 Wasteland
- 2 Volcanic
- 3 City
- 4 Mountains
- 5 Grassland
- 6 Forest
- 7 Jungle
- 8 Swamp
- 9 Ocean
- 10 Subterranean

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*Some backgrounds may be difficult to conceptualize as specialties, but there is more to it than the word itself. For example, the word "volcanic" might be difficult to conceptualize as a specialty, but the word has a broad meaning, representing the environment where the character is most comfortable and relating to the character's background. Volcanic would certainly apply anytime the character is traversing a volcanic environment, but you could still use a broader application. Say, if your character is facing a source of intense heat, you could describe how your character is accustomed to intense heat.*

---

**Past** describes the most prominent memories that shaped your character's personality.

1 **Brutal:** Your memories are of a harsh past surrounded by violence.

2 **Wretched:** You have been unfortunate in life, and your memories are miserable.

3 **Privileged:** You have been entitled the majority of your life, with little existential struggle.

4 **Disciplined:** Your past was very strict, and you've been confined for the majority of it.

5 **Horrific:** You are haunted by at least one traumatic experience that cannot be forgotten.

6 **Gentle:** You have had a peaceful life of relaxation and tranquility.

7 **Merry:** You have had a lighthearted life filled with festivity and happiness.

8 **Solitary:** You were almost always alone, either by choice or circumstance.

9 **Cultured:** You have explored many cultures, and learned how to interact with strangers.

10 **Adventurous:** Your life has been extreme, and your memories are of thrilling moments.

**People** describes the type of culture or society your character comes from.

1 **Barbaric:** Uncivilized or vulgar

2 **Nomadic:** Travel, trade, herding

3 **Scholarly:** Scientific and studious

4 **Communal:** Helpful of each other

5 **Depraved:** Immoral and abusive

6 **Grim:** Lifeless, melancholic, somber

7 **Desperate:** Determined, struggling, starving

8 **Outcast:** Exiled, despised, bullied, stigmatized

9 **Wild:** Hunting, gathering

10 **Industrious:** Hard-working, productive

**Identity** describes your character's natural calling and role.

1 Merchant, Shopkeeper, Trader, or Salesperson

2 Outlaw, Bandit, Thief, Raider, or Gangster

3 Healer, Physician, Witch Doctor, or Shaman

4 Artisan, Artist, Inventor, or Scientist

5 Soldier, Warrior, Guard, or Knight

6 Spy, Emissary, Agent, or Detective

7 Farmer, Peasant, Horticulturist, or Gatherer

8 Bard, Entertainer, Scribe, or Sage

9 Hunter, Assassin, Naturalist, or Explorer

10 Noble, Ruler, Chieftain, or Aristocrat



## Ψ PART 2: DETAILS Ψ

To flesh out your character's details, roll one die on each of the following lists. These details have no rules implications.

### Physical Feature

- 1 Scar(s)
- 2 Tattoo(s)
- 3 Body Paint
- 4 Deformity
- 5 Intricate Hairstyle
- 6 Jewelry Piercing(s)
- 7 Skin Pattern
- 8 Implant(s)
- 9 Missing Body Part(s)
- 10 Strange Growth(s)

### Fashion Preference

- 1 Concealing
- 2 Seductive
- 3 Offensive
- 4 Simple
- 5 Trendy
- 6 Gaudy
- 7 Form-Fitting
- 8 Regal
- 9 Practical
- 10 Unclad

### Technology

- 1 **Primitive:** Stone Age, Hunter-Gatherer, Tribal Villages
- 2 **Archaic:** Agriculture, Monoliths, Early Civilization
- 3 **Classical:** Bronze, Iron, Crude Machinery, Advanced Architecture
- 4 **Medieval:** Feudalism, Dark Ages, Crusades, Steel
- 5 **Renaissance:** Age of Discovery, Exploration and Colonization, Baroque Art, Crude Firearms
- 6 **Industrial:** Industrial Revolution, Steam Technology, Factories, Airships, Trains, Guns
- 7 **Nuclear:** Fossil Fuel Pollution, Plastics, Radios, Tanks, Jet Aircraft, Automobiles
- 8 **Cyber:** Personal Devices, Advanced Communication Networks, Drones, Robotics
- 9 **Interplanetary:** Orbital Space Stations, Interplanetary Travel, Space Mining, Cryosleep
- 10 **Interstellar:** Wormholes, Warp Drives, Energy Weapons, Capital Ships



## Ψ PART 3: ABERRANT TRAITS Ψ

You can describe your character in any way, from a normal human to an alien abomination, as a humanoid with all of the standard biological needs, though this description does not affect the game rules; it is purely aesthetic.

However, you may also give your character up to 18 aberrant traits, which do affect the rules. For each aberrant trait you give your character, you gain 5 Doom, and your minimum Doom increases by 5.

**Adaptive Resilience:** Gain +1 Resistance. You may take this trait multiple times.

**Bioluminescence:** Your species produces cold light for camouflage, luring prey, attracting mates, distraction, warning, communication, or illumination.

**Bulky:** Gain +1 Armor, and melee weapons you wield gain +1 Weapon Rating. You may take this trait multiple times.

**Enhanced Hearing:** Your species is able to detect sounds that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Enhanced Scent:** Your species is able to detect scents that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Enhanced Taste:** Your species is able to detect toxins that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Eyeshine:** Your species is able to see in low light.

**Fins:** Your species gains Advantage on skill tests involving swimming.

**Gills:** Your species may breathe underwater indefinitely, and may also breathe fresh air.

**Hooves:** Your species gains Advantage on skill tests involving running.

**Natural Armor:** Chitin, bone, keratin, scales, mineral deposits, thick skin, cybernetics, etc. Your species has +2 Armor everywhere. You may take this trait multiple times.

**Natural Weapon:** Gain a natural weapon, such as claws, spiked tail, fangs, horns, antlers, whip-like tongue, thunderous sonar, or bioelectrogenesis. It has a Weapon Rating of 2. You may take this trait multiple times, each time gaining +2 Weapon Rating.

**Poisonous:** If you attack with a natural weapon (claws, horns, fangs, etc.) and get a critical success, your damage bypasses Armor. If your species has spines, your spines deal +1d10 damage.

**Specialized Vibrissae:** Whiskers or hair. Your species is able to detect vibrations that would otherwise go unnoticed.

**Spines:** When touched, your spines deal 1d10 damage that bypasses Armor.

**Tentacles:** Your species has tentacles that may serve as additional limbs for small tasks, but have no effect in combat.

**Wings:** Your species has wings and may glide if carrying a light load or less, meaning you take no falling damage when you can extend and use your wings. Your wingspan is four times your height. You can only fly in thick atmospheres.



# Character Advancement



*"I am she who reigned over ten thousand slaves. I ruled with fear, forcing illusions of torment upon the people who failed to serve me. For hundreds of years I was worshipped as a goddess, but mind and flesh had departed long before then. From birth, a state of blind consciousness had been imposed upon me. False stories that were merely observations of something too large for our minds to understand, a reality that was limited to a planetary perspective. But then I followed the path of alchemy... After years of studying the sigils and formulas, I learned to manipulate reality with my dreams. Eventually, I opened my eye to the dimension beyond, where I have lived countless lifetimes. And now, even after being murdered, my consciousness still survives. I have become the obscure shadow in the psychic corners of a lone survivor's mind. She is my creation—my throne made of chaos from beyond the cosmos... The perfect host to rediscover the same land I haven't seen in centuries. The only being to arrive unscathed from the collision of worlds upon my death. But now that we've emerged from the labyrinth of fractured realities, how long will she survive in this ash-covered wasteland?"*

**A**t the end of each session, if your character did not die, you earn 5 XP in addition to any you earned during play. The GM may also award you XP for reaching a milestone in the story or for achieving significant goals.

Before or after a session, you may spend your XP in the following ways:

- (1 XP) Remove 1 Doom, to a minimum of 10
- (5 XP) Remove 1 Stress, to a minimum of 3
- (5 XP) Remove 1d10 Doom, to a minimum of 10
- (5 XP) Increase your load ranges by 3
- (5 XP) Increase your exsanguination limit by 2
- (5 XP) Increase the Weapon Rating of one weapon type you wield (axes, maces, staves, swords, rifles, pistols, bows, spears, shields, etc.) by 1
- (5–50 XP) Gain an Ascendancy level (page 24)
- (10 XP) Gain +2 Armor everywhere
- (10 XP) Gain an Inner Power (page 26)
- (20 XP) Gain a Mastery (page 28)
- (50 XP) In combat, increase the maximum size of your dice pool by 1

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*When determining the effects of conflicting abilities, negative effects always override positive ones.*

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## Ψ ASCENDANCIES Ψ

You may spend XP to gain an Ascendancy level, choosing to advance Durability, Precision, Recovery, Expertise, or Magick. You must advance each one separately, meaning a character with rank-5 Durability might decide at Ascendancy level 6 to gain a rank in Precision, making them have rank-5 Durability and rank-1 Precision (costing 30 XP, as shown below).

You can gain a maximum total of 10 ranks across all Ascendancies, meaning you could get rank 5 in one and rank 5 in another, and you couldn't get any more.

The Ascendancy levels each cost the following amounts (costing a total of 275 XP to reach Level 10):

- Level 1: 5 XP
- Level 2: 10 XP
- Level 3: 15 XP
- Level 4: 20 XP
- Level 5: 25 XP
- Level 6: 30 XP
- Level 7: 35 XP
- Level 8: 40 XP
- Level 9: 45 XP
- Level 10: 50 XP

### DURABILITY

- Rank 1:** Whenever you gain Doom, you gain 1 Doom less
- Rank 2:** Once per session, re-roll a disastrous defend test
- Rank 3:** As rank 1, but 2 Doom
- Rank 4:** Worn armor cannot be broken
- Rank 5:** As rank 1, but 3 Doom
- Rank 6:** Once per session, ignore damage
- Rank 7:** As rank 1, but 4 Doom
- Rank 8:** Gain Advantage on all defend tests
- Rank 9:** As rank 1, but 5 Doom
- Rank 10:** You do not gain Stress in combat



### PRECISION

- Rank 1:** On attacks, complete success on 9+
- Rank 2:** Once per session, re-roll a disastrous attack
- Rank 3:** On attacks, complete success on 8+
- Rank 4:** Wielded weapons cannot be broken
- Rank 5:** On attacks, complete success on 7+
- Rank 6:** Once per session, you can choose to critically succeed on an attack without rolling, dealing damage as if you rolled your entire dice pool
- Rank 7:** On attacks, complete success on 6+
- Rank 8:** Gain Advantage on all attacks
- Rank 9:** On attacks, complete success on 5+
- Rank 10:** On attacks, critical successes deal double damage

## RECOVERY

**Rank 1:** Whenever you remove Stress from any character, you also remove 1 Doom from any character

**Rank 2:** When resting, you only roll one die

**Rank 3:** As rank 1, but remove 2 Doom

**Rank 4:** Once per session, you can re-roll any character's disastrous death roll

**Rank 5:** As rank 1, but remove 3 Doom

**Rank 6:** When resting, remove +1 Stress from any character

**Rank 7:** As rank 1, but remove 4 Doom

**Rank 8:** Whenever you roll a critical success, you also remove 1 Stress from any character

**Rank 9:** As rank 1, but remove 5 Doom

**Rank 10:** Once per session, you can prevent any character with a disastrous death roll from dying

## EXPERTISE

**Rank 1:** Gain a specialty slot of any rank

**Rank 2:** When you roll a 10 on a skill test, ignore any 1s you roll

**Rank 3:** Gain a specialty slot of any rank

**Rank 4:** Add +1 to the highest rolled die on any skill tests where you use an item

**Rank 5:** Gain a specialty slot of any rank

**Rank 6:** Whenever you gain Stress, you gain one less Stress, to a minimum of 1

**Rank 7:** Gain a specialty slot of any rank

**Rank 8:** You can roll another die on skill tests

**Rank 9:** Gain a specialty slot of any rank

**Rank 10:** Add +1 to the highest rolled die on all skill tests

## MAGICK

**Rank 1:** Before rolling on any skill test where you use an artifact, you can gain 1d10 Doom to add +1 to the highest rolled die

**Rank 2:** Once per session, you can declare that all allies gain Advantage against a chosen enemy until the end of the combat

**Rank 3:** As rank 1, but add +2

**Rank 4:** Once per session, you can spawn an item into an enemy's possession that grants Advantage to anyone using it (including the enemy), but the item will only last until the end of the scene

**Rank 5:** As rank 1, but add +3

**Rank 6:** When facing multiple enemies, cause one enemy to be incapable of performing any actions. At least one enemy must always be able to perform actions

**Rank 7:** As rank 1, but add +4

**Rank 8:** You can use any once-per-session abilities twice per session

**Rank 9:** As rank 1, but add +5

**Rank 10:** Items you craft are considered artifacts. Roll for their imbuements (page 52)

## Ψ INNER POWERS Ψ

Inner Powers are abilities that characters gain from subconscious shifts in how they interact with reality. They are not quite psychic abilities, but they alter the reality for the character. Each costs 10 XP.

**A Feast of Souls:** Slain enemies are stored as souls, carry up to a maximum of 6 souls. You can consume a soul to deal +10 damage on a successful attack, remove a major injury, or roll an extra die on a skill test. However, decrease the maximum size of your dice pool in combat by 2.

**Acrobatics:** Once per turn, you can re-roll a skill test related to mobility. However, each piece of your equipment weighs +2 Bulk.

**Battlecry:** In combat, you can spend 3 dice and gain 3 Stress to shout an intimidating war cry that stuns a nearby enemy, making them lose their next turn.

**Berserk:** Whenever you succeed on a melee attack, you can choose to have it affect all enemies within range of your attack, but you gain 1 Stress for each enemy that you hit in this manner.

**Black Blood:** Whenever you take damage, you also deal that damage (reduced by Armor) as poison damage to all nearby enemies. However, you no longer remove injuries with medical treatment.

**Bloodletting:** Whenever you suffer an injury in combat, you remove 1 Stress. However, you can no longer recover Stress by resting, and injuries now cause double blood loss.

**Bombardment:** In combat, you can attack twice with ranged weapons during an offense turn, regaining all dice spent on the first attack. However, you do not add rolled dice to your damage with ranged attacks.

**Carnage:** All of your attacks deal damage as if you had rolled a critical success, but you suffer Disadvantage on all skill tests in combat.

**Commander:** In combat, increase the maximum size of your dice pool by 2. Allies can use dice from your dice pool. However, you can only spend 1 die per turn in combat.

**Corruption:** Gain +1 on attack and defend tests. However, you gain double Stress when you roll a 1 in combat.

**Claw Grip:** When grappling an opponent, your attacks deal +20 damage. However, you deal -20 damage whenever you attack with a wielded weapon, regardless of whether you are grappling or not.

**Cursed Touch:** When you succeed on an attack, your target suffers Vulnerability (takes double damage) until your next turn. However, you cannot deal weapon damage.

**Dark Hunger:** Whenever you roll a critical success on an attack, remove your least important injury. However, you cannot heal injuries by resting or receiving medical treatment.

**Determination:** Your attacks always deal weapon damage, including when you roll a disaster. However, you do not add rolled dice to your damage.

**Execution:** When attacking, deal +10 damage on complete successes and critical successes, but deal no damage on partial successes.

**Ghost Dance:** You gain +1 on all defend tests, but your equipment no longer gives you an Armor Rating.

**Hulking:** Your completely successful attacks deal damage from rolled dice as if you had rolled a critical success, but you do not add rolled dice to your damage on any other result.

**Mountain:** Double your Armor Rating everywhere. However, you cannot make defend tests.

**Multiple Strikes:** In combat, increase the maximum size of your dice pool by 1, and you can make another attack action on the offense turn. However, you never add rolled dice to your damage.

**Provocation:** You can make a provoking attack test against an enemy, and if you succeed, that enemy ignores your allies and focuses their attention on you, but you suffer Vulnerability (receiving double damage). This effect lasts until the start of your next turn.

**Regeneration:** You recover from injuries at accelerated speed. When removing an injury, you remove an additional injury of any severity from any body part. However, you permanently suffer Vulnerability (taking double damage).

**Running of Blood:** Whenever you deal damage, you deal additional damage equal to your blood loss. However, you can no longer remove blood loss in combat.

**Shield Wall:** While wielding a shield, add its Weapon Rating as an Armor Rating on all armor slots. However, you suffer Disadvantage on defend tests.

**Vile Sacrifice:** At the start of the offense turn, you may gain 1d10 Doom to regain an extra die in your dice pool.

**Warlord:** When surrounded by at least three opponents in close range, you may make two more attack actions, regaining all dice spent from your pool after each attack, but you suffer Disadvantage on all skill tests while surrounded.

**Weapon Master:** Deal double weapon damage on completely successful attacks, and triple weapon damage on critical successes. However, you do not add rolled dice to your damage.

## Ψ MASTERIES Ψ

Masteries are the natural talents characters unlock. Each costs 20 XP.

**Adrenaline Surge:** Whenever you suffer an injury, you gain Advantage on your next skill test related to mobility.

**Ambusher:** When you successfully attack a target unaware of you or distracted from you, you deal double damage.

**Armed to the Teeth:** Each weapon you carry that weighs at least 1 bulk grants +1 to your armor everywhere.

**Armorcrafter:** Armor pieces you craft have +3 Armor.

**Beast of Burden:** Your load limit increases by 15. This does not affect your light, medium, or heavy load ranges.

**Bone Collector:** You wear the skulls and bones of your victims, granting 1 Armor to the body parts on which you wear them. Each skull or bone set weighs 1 Bulk.

**Bloodbath:** Each time you make an attack test, increase your damage by +1. This damage modifier lasts until the end of combat.

**Call of the Wretched Sea:** You cannot suffer Disadvantage when fighting in deep bodies of water.

**Calloused Heart:** Reduce your minimum Stress to 2.

**Charge:** When you run, leap, or otherwise move quickly toward an enemy, you deal +10 damage on your next successful attack against that enemy.

**Duelist:** You gain Advantage when fighting one-on-one.

**Dust and Bones:** You appear old, withered, leathery, and skeletal. Whenever you suffer blood loss, you suffer one less point of it.

**Earth Warrior:** When using only equipment crafted from organic materials, increase their respective Weapon and Armor Ratings each by 1.

**Feral Senses:** Gain +1 to skill tests involving the wilderness.

**Frenzy:** During Psychosis, gain +10 Armor everywhere.

**Gore and Grit:** Body parts with mortal injuries gain +10 Armor.

**Horns and Hide:** Double the Armor and Weapon Ratings of equipment you craft from leather, hide, and bone.

**Malodor:** You are shrouded by an incredibly foul stench, and enemies are likely to keep their distance. Only two enemies can damage you per defense turn.

**Metalcrafter:** Add +10 Armor or Weapon Rating to pieces of equipment you craft from metal.

**Mud Skin:** You gain Advantage on skill tests to hide in the wilderness.

**Old Rags:** Pieces of clothing grant +1 Armor. You can only wear one piece of clothing per armor slot. Can be worn underneath light and heavy armor.

**Quick Draw:** Your first attack in combat deals +10 damage.

**Shield Master:** Gain +1 to skill tests involving blocking with a shield.

**Surgeon:** Through expert knowledge of anatomy, you cannot cause injuries when performing medical treatment.

**Viper Strike:** While carrying a medium load or less, your successful attacks deal +10 damage, subtracted by your weapon's Bulk.

**Weaponcrafter:** Add +5 Weapon Rating to weapons you craft, including shields.

**Weighted Swing:** Whenever you wield a melee weapon other than a shield, add its Bulk to its Weapon Rating.

**Wildcrafter:** Double the Armor and Weapon Ratings of equipment you craft from plant materials.

**Wrestler:** Gain Advantage when grappling, and ignore any Disadvantage imposed by grappling.



*"The slaughter was swift and simple, and King Atu was executed by Melema's Etlu soldiers... But shortly after the king was killed, I saw a foul black tar boil up from the earth. The tar then burned a thick black smoke into the air, so thick that it became impossible for me to see even my nose. I could hear the screams of men and animals alike. Stone scraped against stone, metal against metal. It was as if the earth groaned. A horrible noise filled the air. As the smoke cleared, the land had changed. It was obvious that another world had entered ours. The limbs of alien creatures stuck out from the ground. Metal ruins from some other civilization were melded into the stone architecture of King Atu's temple. The land had cracked. Soldiers that I had marched with were now abominations, missing limbs, or trapped in structures that were not there before. It then became apparent what terrified Atu's soldiers, as I could see grotesque creatures of absolute horror all around. Something unnatural had happened. With primal instinct, I quickly left the screams and nightmares behind me. I was one of the few who escaped to the comfort of Melema's gardens. I would do anything to keep this tranquil world alive, to keep Queen Melema alive."*



# Combat



*"The first nightmare was on the night my family was killed. I was a young girl. In my dream, a plague of insects attacked our village. I awoke screaming to find that everyone I knew had torn their own skin off. My family was dead. My village was dead. Everyone was dead except for the old witch. The witch who then captured me. For years I believed that she had done this to me and my family, and I was too terrified to challenge her. She never uttered a word to me. Only in rituals did she speak at all. But now that I sit in her pool of ruin, I realize that she was trying to help me. I was the one that killed my family, just as I have now killed her. I'm all alone now... And I'm afraid to sleep... Through the years of nightmares, the images of my family have become faceless. But now I see that every time I dream, my nightmares become a waking reality."*

**W**hen any player character is attacked, combat begins. Each round of combat is broken down into an offense turn and a defense turn, starting with the offense turn.

You begin combat with a dice pool of 3 dice. Each time you make a skill test in combat, you must spend dice from your dice pool, rolling only the spent dice on your skill test. You regain 1 die at the start of the defense turn, and 1 die at the start of the offense turn.

Your dice pool cannot grow beyond 3 dice, except through advancement (page 23).

**On the offense turn**, you and the other players may attempt any actions in any order, as long as you still have dice, though each player is limited to one attack with each weapon wielded. The offense turn ends when all the players have no dice or decide not to roll any more.

**On the defense turn**, each enemy may perform a move action and an attack action. You and the other players may only perform defend actions, prompted by an enemy's attack action.

## Ψ ACTION TYPES Ψ

### MOVE

Unless you're moving through an area where an enemy is ready to attack, movement typically does not require a skill test, but you must spend dice as if you were rolling a skill test, just to represent the time it takes to perform the action. Distance is undefined.

### ATTACK

You can attack once with each weapon you wield per offense turn. Shields count as weapons. An attack is a skill test.

You deal damage as follows:

- **Critical Success:** Total damage =  $10 \times$  number of dice rolled + Weapon Rating
- **Complete Success:** Total damage = all rolled dice + Weapon Rating
- **Partial Success:** Total damage = highest rolled die + Weapon Rating
- **Disaster:** No damage

## DEFEND

When an enemy attacks you, you make a skill test to defend, whether to dodge, block, parry, use cover, or avoid damage by any other means. Enemies do not roll skill tests, you receive damage based on your defend test result, as follows:

- **Complete Success:** No damage
- **Partial Success:** Total damage = GM rolls 1 die + damage
- **Disaster:** Total damage = GM rolls 2 dice + damage

If you cannot or choose not to roll to defend, you are undefended.

- **Undefended:** Total damage = GM rolls 3 dice + enemy damage

*Each enemy has a base damage defined by the GM, as described more in Enemies (page 81).*

## Ψ INJURIES Ψ

When an enemy deals damage to you, the GM rolls a die on this chart (also located on your character sheet) to determine where your character is injured. Enemies do not have an injury chart.

The damage you take is reduced by your Armor Rating, if any, on that body part.

The severity of the injury depends on the amount of damage you take:

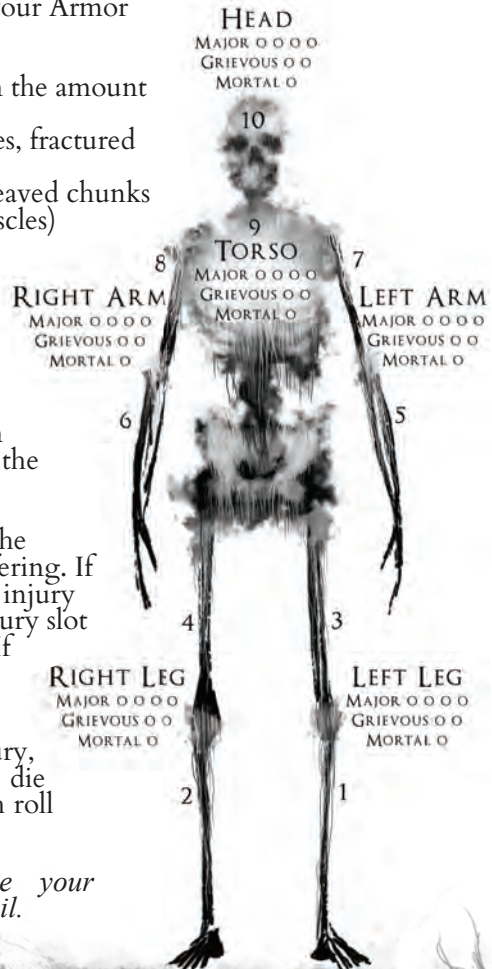
- **10–19 damage:** major injury (gashes, fractured bones, sprained ligaments)
- **20–29 damage:** grievous injury (cleaved chunks of flesh, protruding bones, torn muscles)
- **30–39 damage:** mortal injury (dismembered body parts, shattered bones, ruptured organs)
- **40+ damage:** fatality (decapitation, turned to giblets, crushed)

Though 1–9 damage doesn't cause an injury, you may still wish to describe the cuts and bruises you receive.

On the appropriate body part, fill in the injury slot of the severity you are suffering. If that body part does not have an open injury slot of that severity, fill in an open injury slot of higher severity on that body part. If there are none available, the injury kills you.

Whenever you suffer a mortal injury, you also gain Doom equal to a new die roll, and then you must make a death roll (page 16).

*You are encouraged to describe your character's injuries in gruesome detail.*



## Ψ BLOOD LOSS Ψ

If your injury would puncture skin, you also suffer 1 blood loss per 10 damage you took.

If your blood loss reaches or exceeds your exsanguination limit, which begins at 10, you fall unconscious and begin bleeding out.

While bleeding out, you must make a death roll whenever another player character makes a skill test. Continue making death rolls until your blood loss is reduced below your exsanguination limit. If you didn't die, you will then return to consciousness.

Blood loss can be reduced by bandaging or cauterizing, whether by yourself or by another player character:

- **Bandaging** requires a tourniquet or packing a wound. Roll one die and remove the result from blood loss, but the character being bandaged gains 1 Stress. Bandaging does not remove blood loss if you are bleeding out.
- **Cauterizing** requires fire or extreme heat, and a skill test from whoever administers it. If successful, it removes all blood loss, but causes your most severe injury on any body part to become permanent. Fill in this injury slot with ink. If your most severe injury is already permanent, pick the next most severe injury.

## GRAPPLING

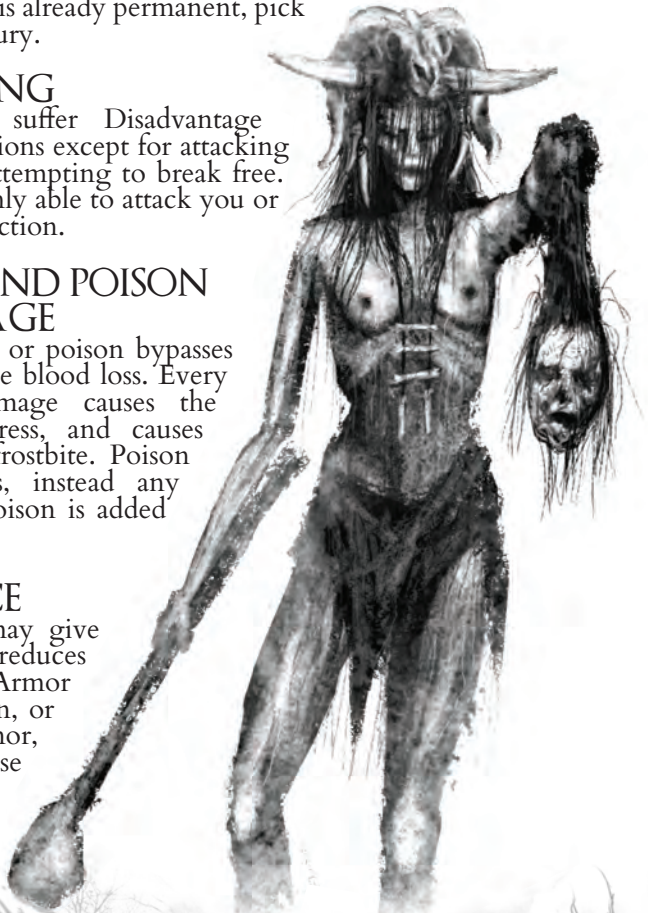
When grappling, you suffer Disadvantage when performing any actions except for attacking the grappled enemy or attempting to break free. The grappled enemy is only able to attack you or break free as their attack action.

## HEAT, COLD, AND POISON DAMAGE

Damage from heat, cold, or poison bypasses Armor, but does not cause blood loss. Every 10 points of cold damage causes the character to gain 1 Stress, and causes injuries in the form of frostbite. Poison does not cause injuries, instead any damage received from Poison is added to the character's Doom.

## RESISTANCE

Some traits and items may give Resistance, which reduces damage that bypasses Armor (such as heat, cold, poison, or falling) as if it were Armor, but does not otherwise count as Armor.



## Ψ RULES-LIGHT VARIANT Ψ

The injuries and equipment rules add detail to the core system, which enables more advancement options and allows for tactical combat, but also adds complexity. If you wish, you can instead use these basic rules.

### ITEMS

Items are rated only with a Quality of 1 to 5, without any more details. Additionally, detailed Bulk and Load ratings are ignored, instead only reasonable estimates will determine your current load.

### INJURIES

As a consequence from a skill test, the GM may decide that you take an injury, requiring you to roll a die and add its result to your Doom.

If you suffer a mortal injury by rolling a disaster on a skill test, you must also make a death roll after adding to your Doom. Describe your injuries as gruesomely as possible, and write them down. If you have an injury that is relevant to a skill test, you suffer Disadvantage.

Characters with specialties that imply medical or curative abilities could help treat injuries, such as by splinting broken legs, cauterizing bleeding wounds, or neutralizing poison. This can remove Disadvantage, but this does not remove Doom.

### ARMOR

When wearing armor, the amount of Doom you gain from an injury is reduced by the armor's Quality, as long as it makes sense in the situation.

### ADVANCEMENT

Characters are limited to only using abilities that don't mention anything regarding armor, damage, resistance, bulk, loads, or blood loss.

### ENEMIES

Enemies do not have statistics. Instead, they have a starting Doom based on their difficulty. An enemy gains 1d10 Doom when characters successfully attack them, and makes a death roll when a character attacks them with complete success.

- **Normal:** 70 Doom
- **Challenging:** 50 Doom
- **Hard:** 25 Doom
- **Deadly:** 10 Doom
- **Extreme:** 5 Doom

*"I have known pain. From the age when blood first drained from my womb, I was taken to the temple of life. This temple that has been my prison for fifty-three pregnancies. I have been chained here to this bed with the others, drowned in the poison of the white fruit. But the pain goes much deeper than a phallus can reach. Thirty-six of my children have known life. The others, I mourn for. And one child, that lives, will never know life.*

*He is a prisoner like me.*

*He was taken from me. But there is a birth cord between us that cannot be severed. In my dreams, I receive visions of my son. He is asleep in the tomb of the queen. There are others just like him, dreaming in stone sarcophagi. They are the ones that never wake, but never die. He begs me to help wake him. But I cannot wake him. I am bridled here until death."*





# Survival



*"Today marks three days since the convergence. Again this morning, the overcast sky prevented any rays of light from reaching my bed of dry leaves. Instead, I awoke startled to a shriek from the bone-dry branches above, where an avian creature with black plumage perched. This was not a species of bird I'd seen before, not that I am any particular student of birds—indeed, my only knowledge comes from illustrated exploration journals—but my suspicions about this place being a lost world are not put to rest by sighting this strange creature. The most comfort I can find from this is knowing that there is at least wildlife here.*

*The silhouette of a humanoid figure appeared on the ridgeline just moments ago. I would like to believe that it is a survivor from the convergence, but I am doubtful. Such an unsettling sight—an emaciated figure in a state nearly skeletal, a misshapen head, and elongated limbs. I couldn't help but feel terror. More logically, though, the figure likely showed itself to let me know it is here. Whether that means I am trespassing or welcome, I do not know. I would like to believe that the figure has observed me enough to know that I pose no threat, but my gut instinct tells me that any contact will not be peaceful.*

*Either the sight of the long-emaciated figure has caused me to start seeing things in the corner of my eyes, or I am being stalked by pale figures in the forest. I gathered as many branches as I could, but it won't be enough for even a modest fire to last the night. It is getting dark now and I should keep my eyes trained to the shadows. Admittedly, it was probably nothing, but I can't get the abhorrent image of that figure from my mind.*

*Wretched. Putrid. Horrifying."*

**T**his world is harsh and unforgiving. The characters are mundane survivors, struggling the same way to find food, water, and shelter as any other creature would. The characters all have an unnatural hunger within them—no matter what they eat, they still feel like they are starving. The typical character appears with tattered pieces of rawhide or cloth, bandages wrapped around wounds, missing fingers from frostbite, blood stains around their mouth, ashes and filth coating every inch, starving and emaciated... generally just a haggard scavenger.

There are no special rules for survival, as the rules for Stress and Doom are the correct framework for survival stories. There are, however, some guidelines for survival scenarios:

- Resources and materials are always in limited supply.
- Any sort of comfort is temporary, and there is always something that needs attention as problems continue to pile on.
- Nearly every action requires a skill test, as so many things can go wrong.
- Everything you possess is constantly threatened. The food supply, the shelter, the materials, your body temperature, your injuries.

## DAMAGE FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental hazards such as frigid winds, fire or radiation, and poisonous plants deal  $3d10 + 15$  damage of the appropriate type (heat, cold, or poison) to all affected body parts.

Falling from a dangerous height also results in  $3d10 + 15$  damage that bypasses armor, rolled separately on three random body parts. Falling from an extreme height results in death.

## RESTING

When you're in a safe area, you and the other characters may choose to rest and recover. You're encouraged to only roll the dice after roleplaying for a bit. Anyone who chooses to rest must roll one die, but anyone who chooses not to rest this time must roll three dice the next time they choose to rest.

**If nobody rolls a 1**, the area remains safe. Each player who rolled chooses one of the following:

- Remove 1 Stress (or a half Stress if suffering Psychosis) if you recently consumed food and water
- Remove an injury of the lowest severity (remove a second if you're receiving medical treatment)
- Gain 1 Progress on a personal project

A character suffering Psychosis must remove Stress a second time in order to remove 1 Stress—they cannot simply remove half a Stress point.

**If anyone rolls a 1**, the situation becomes significantly worse. You could suffer food poisoning after eating a meal, become weakened from deadly spores in the air, get discovered by a horrific threat, or experience some other awful event.

## PROJECTS AND PROGRESS

Projects that take time—whether crafting, building, learning a language, or reading a grimoire—are measured in Progress.

Progress is measured from 1 to 10, and every project starts at 0 Progress. A project is completed when its Progress reaches its Progress goal, assigned by the GM. The higher the Progress goal, the longer the time it represents.

Progress	Time Frame
1	Minutes
2	Half Hours
3	Hours
4	Days
5	Weeks
6	Fortnights
7	Months
8	Seasons
9	Years
10	Decades



# Settlements



*"The boy's limbs are held to the tree with wolf sinew. The tree of the gods, the only one in our land to yield fruit, will receive another sacrifice. Just as it is every time the Erimha arrive to take our young, our tribe will eat the boy to absorb his courage. Chief Enuruk will feast upon the boy's heart, the source of life. His wives will drink the blood, to reincarnate the boy in their wombs. The warriors will eat the flesh and muscles, to remain strong. The rest of the boy will be burned. His ashes will rise to join our ancestors in the smoke cloud above.*

*The ritual begins. We chant to the gods, the women ululate with trilling tongues, the beating of drums becomes more furious. Enuruk pushes a whale-bone dagger through the boy's throat. Young Seher's life is drained into clay vessels for the chieftain's wives. The lamentations of Seher's mother are nearly drowned out by our chants. Seher is consumed by the warriors of the tribe, including his older sister.*

*After the ritual is complete, it is my place to gather Seher's carcass and place it onto the pyre. As the boy's flesh burns and his smoke rises into the grey sky, I am reminded of how my ancestors are there, always watching over me. We are the Ditallu tribe, the people of ash. If our bodies are not turned to ash, we will never join our family in death.*

*The watcher shouts to us that the Erimha draw near. We cover ourselves in mud, bone, wood, and sinew. Some of us wear the burnt blood from the stones, taken from the last arrival of the Erimha. Each of us wears Seher's ashes. Elder Nlonka warns that the Erimha feel no pain, as they are poisoned by their sleeping god. Though they are men in form, they must be seen as animals to be hunted. The boy's spirit is within us; we go to hunt the takers of our young. I, the One of Fire, cannot allow my tribe to die without a funeral pyre."*

**W**herever the characters build shelter is considered a settlement. Over time, the characters can build up the settlement, eventually allowing other survivors to find their way there.

## Ψ FOCUS Ψ

A settlement starts with 1 Focus point, which the players choose how to spend as follows:

- **Military:** Each point spent grants +1 on all Combat tests.
- **Production:** Each point spent grants +1 on all Progress tests.
- **Language:** Each point spent grants +1 on all Communication and Culture tests.
- **Commerce:** Each point spent grants +1 on all Extraction and Trade tests.

The settlement gains another Focus point each time its population grows by a multiple of ten (10, 100, 1000), not counting the player characters.

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*The players' characters are assumed to be the leaders of the settlement, overseeing its events, though this is not a requirement.*

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## Ψ SOURCES AND STOCKPILES Ψ

If the settlement wishes to build something, the players describe what they want to build, what materials they will use to build it, and an estimate of how long it will take, represented by a Progress goal.

To build something, the settlement needs access to the relevant materials in a **Stockpile**. During play, the characters can find material Stockpiles, or the settlement can get Stockpiles through Extraction tests.

## Ψ POPULATION Ψ

Population is effectively the life score of the settlement against invasions. Without a population, the settlement is undefended, and the characters must face any invading threat alone. Death of the population can come from many sources, such as warfare, severe weather, disease, or lack of food. If the Settlement does not have any Food or Water, it cannot make Culture tests.

The results of some Settlement tests depend on the settlement's population, as follows:

Current Population	Multiplier
0 to 99	×1
100 to 999	×10
1,000 to 9999	×100
10,000 to 99,999	×1000

## Ψ SETTLEMENT TESTS Ψ

While in the settlement, the players may choose to do any of the following as many times as they like:

- Make a **Progress test** to further progress on buildings.
- Make an **Extraction test** to stockpile resources.
- Make a **Culture test** to increase the population.
- Hold a ritual or festivity to decrease Unrest, rolling as if resting (page 38). The players describe the event.
- Look for opportunities. The GM presents several scenarios to choose from.

Whenever a Settlement makes a test, each player rolls a die, and the highest rolled die is the result. The settlement has an **Unrest** score, which functions as its Stress on settlement tests. Unrest increases by 1 whenever a player rolls a 1 during a Settlement test. The settlement starts with 3 Unrest, and the settlement cannot reduce its Unrest below 3. The maximum amount of Unrest is 9.

Each time the settlement's Unrest would exceed 9, an **uprising** occurs. This causes half the population (rounded down) to join an enemy army that has a population of  $10 \times 1d10$  (multiplied by population chart after split), and this army attacks the settlement's remaining population.

## PROGRESS TESTS

If the settlement has the relevant materials available in a Stockpile, and is able to work on a building—either by building it themselves, or by having workers do it—the settlement can make a Progress test.

- **Complete Success:** The settlement gains +2 Progress on one building.
- **Partial Success:** The settlement gains +1 Progress on one building, but loses a Stockpile of the used material.
- **Disaster:** The settlement gains no Progress and loses all Stockpiles of the used material.

## EXTRACTION TESTS

If the settlement has a Source of materials, the settlement can make an Extraction test to take the material from its Source and make a Stockpile.

- **Complete Success:** The settlement gains +2 Stockpiles of the material.
- **Partial Success:** The settlement gains +1 Stockpile of the material, but loses 1d10 Population (multiplied by chart).
- **Disaster:** The settlement loses the Source of the material.

## CULTURE TESTS

As long as the settlement has a water source and food stockpiled, the settlement can make a Culture test to allow its presence to be discovered in some manner.

- **Complete Success:** The settlement gains 2d10 population (multiplied by chart).
- **Partial Success:** The settlement gains 1d10 population (multiplied by chart), but loses a food Stockpile.
- **Disaster:** The settlement gains no population and becomes under attack by an enemy army with a population of 10 x 1d10 (multiplied by chart).

## COMBAT TESTS

When your settlement is under attack or attacking an enemy army, the settlement makes a Combat test.

- **Complete Success:** Enemy loses 2d10 population (multiplied by chart).
- **Partial Success:** Enemy loses 1d10 population (multiplied by chart), but your settlement loses 1d10 population (multiplied by chart).
- **Disaster:** Your settlement loses 2d10 population (multiplied by chart).

When attacking an enemy settlement, the players designate a number of warriors to leave the settlement to act as the Population for the attack.

If the characters must face an enemy army alone, each enemy warrior has the statistics of a normal enemy (page 82).

## Ψ DIPLOMATIC SKILL TESTS Ψ

Sometimes, the players will want to make diplomatic skill tests on their own as representatives of their settlement, as follows.

### COMMUNICATION

When attempting to communicate with another tribe or civilization, make a skill test, as normal. If your settlement has any Focus points in Language, add its bonus to your highest rolled die.

- **Complete Success:** You communicate effectively.
- **Partial Success:** You communicate your point, but disrespect their culture.
- **Disaster:** You show extreme disrespect to their culture.

### COMMERCE

When attempting to make a trade for your settlement, make a skill test, as normal. If your Settlement has any Focus points in Commerce, add its bonus to your highest rolled die. This is used in place of Wealth.

- **Complete Success:** Lose 1 Stockpile to gain 1 Stockpile.
- **Partial Success:** Lose 2 Stockpiles to gain 1 Stockpile.
- **Disaster:** No deal.







# Equipment



*"O Crown of the Tomb! O Dreamer of the Infinite!  
Kur-Gaahl, Immortal One, Father  
Lord of the World Beneath the Earth  
Whose Veins have grown into the Stone like Roots  
We gathered for thee eleven of the heretics  
Children whose dreams carry visions of horror  
From the Vile Nativity of False Formulae  
Accept this Offering of Slaves from the Pool of the Usurpers  
Sodomize these Heretics with thy roots and Cast out thy nightmares  
Rid thyself of thine Enemy's Curses, drain them into these Children  
Ancient One! Dream again of Paradise!  
Impart thy joyful visions upon us once over, God of Wonder  
O Kur-Gaahl! King of Irkalla!  
We shall Tear out the Heart of any King or Queen who Dares Disturb thy Slumber  
This molestation of thy sacred throne will not go unpunished!  
We shall rise as bringers of war before whom the earth trembles  
To rend the flesh from thine enemy and drown this land in an ocean of blood  
Such is the fate of thy foe, he has been given to us and he shall not be taken from us"*

**T**he fundamental statistic of any item is its **Quality** of 1 to 5, determined by the GM, where 1 is poor and 5 is legendary.

When rolling a skill test, you can use a relevant item to add +1 to your highest rolled die. If you are not adding a specialty, you can instead add the item's Quality to your highest rolled die, but critical success on this test will not earn you a new specialty.

## AMMUNITION, FOOD, AND WATER

Instead of tracking ammunition, food, and water, you are treated at a given time as simply having some or none. You might run out of one of these resources as a serious consequence.

## BUYING EQUIPMENT

Currency varies throughout the world, ranging from hides, beads, and teeth among the wasteland tribes, to gemstones and precious metals among the civilizations. Bartering slaves, livestock, and supplies are also possibilities. To represent general currency, the characters have a **Wealth** rating from 0 to 5, with 0 being destitute and 5 being extremely wealthy, rivaling an emperor or empress. Characters gain Wealth by collecting treasures and various forms of currency.

When you wish to purchase something, your Wealth must match or exceed the item's Quality. This means a destitute character could not afford anything at all, and a character with 1 Wealth could not afford anything above poor Quality. To purchase an item, make a skill test and add your Wealth in place of a specialty.

- **Complete Success:** You purchase the item.
- **Partial Success:** You purchase the item, but lose 1 Wealth.
- **Disaster:** You cannot purchase the item.

## BULK AND LOAD

An item has **Bulk** if it is large, heavy, awkward to use, or listed in the rules with Bulk. If it is small and weighs very little, then it has no Bulk, unless you have a large quantity of it. Otherwise, the specifics are left to the group's judgment.

The combined Bulk of all carried items affects how well your character can perform skill tests related to running, climbing, swimming, jumping, dodging, etc., as follows:

- **0–5 Bulk:** *Light Load.* You gain +1 to skill tests involving mobility.
- **6–10 Bulk:** *Medium Load.* You perform skill tests involving mobility as normal.
- **11–15 Bulk:** *Heavy Load.* On skill tests involving mobility, you cannot add a specialty.
- **16–20 Bulk:** *Extreme Load.* On skill tests involving mobility, you suffer Disadvantage and cannot add a specialty.

At the start of the game, you cannot carry more than 20 Bulk. This is your **load limit**.

As your character advances, you can increase their load range (page 23). For example, by raising the load range by 1, light load improves to 0–6 Bulk, medium becomes 7–11 Bulk, heavy becomes 12–16 Bulk, extreme becomes 17–21, and the limit becomes 21.

## BREAKAGE AND REPAIR

Weapons, armor, and shields all break eventually. A Disaster roll could cause equipment to break and become useless until repaired. Repairing requires the correct tools and materials, and gets a Progress goal (page 38) assigned by the GM.

## CRAFTING EQUIPMENT

Crafting a piece of equipment simply requires materials of a relevant type (such as bones for a bone weapon), any tool that would be necessary (such as a forge, hammer and anvil), and some time to create the item, represented by a Progress goal (page 38). The aesthetic design of the item is for you to decide, though you should account for your character's background.



## Ψ EXAMPLE EQUIPMENT Ψ

### IMPROVISED PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Stone Shard:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Small Stone:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Rock:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Heavy Rock:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 5, Quality: 1

### CLUNKY PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Carcass Patchwork:** Light, Armor Rating: 1, Bulk: 2, Quality: 1  
**Sinew-Threaded Stone:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 4, Quality: 1

### POOR PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Stone Dagger:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Sinew Sling:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Stone-Tipped Spear:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 3, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Heavy Club:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 6, Bulk: 5, Quality: 1  
**Stone Maul:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 8, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 1

### POOR PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Stitched Fur:** Light, Armor Rating: 1, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Wood-Ribbed Clay:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 2, Quality: 1

### NORMAL PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Jaw-Bone Hatchet:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 3, Bulk: 0, Quality: 2  
**Blood-Stained Wooden Staff:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Bone-and-Sinew Bow:** Two-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Wooden Mallet:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 7, Bulk: 5, Quality: 2  
**Giant Stone Axe:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 9, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 2

### NORMAL PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Rawhide Scale:** Light, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Wooden Splint:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 3, Bulk: 2, Quality: 2

### HIGH-QUALITY PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Ceremonial Obsidian Dagger:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 0, Quality: 3  
**Carved Antler Tomahawk:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 0, Quality: 3  
**Horned Shaman Fetish:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 1, Quality: 3  
**Carved Bone Battle Axe:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 8, Bulk: 5, Quality: 3  
**Ornate Totemic Staff:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 10, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 3

### HIGH-QUALITY PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Woven Leather Sinew:** Light, Armor Rating: 3, Bulk: 1, Quality: 3  
**Banded Antler and Tooth:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 4, Bulk: 2, Quality: 3

## Ψ CUSTOM EQUIPMENT Ψ

You can figure out the statistics of an item based on its set of descriptors, as follows.

### WEAPONS

The Weapon Rating and Bulk of the item is based on the following descriptors. Starting with a base of 0 Weapon Rating and 0 Bulk, choose the appropriate descriptors from each category.

#### DESIGN

**Improvised Weapon:** +0 Weapon Rating

**Martial Weapon:** +1 Weapon Rating

Any item that can be reasonably used as a weapon is considered an **improvised weapon**, such as a wooden log or a mining pickaxe. Any item that is specifically designed to be a weapon is considered a **martial weapon**.

#### QUALITY

**Poor:** +0 Weapon Rating

**Normal:** +1 Weapon Rating

**High:** +2 Weapon Rating

**Master:** +3 Weapon Rating

**Legendary:** +4 Weapon Rating

#### DESCRIPTORS

**Light:** +0 Weapon Rating, +0 Bulk

**Medium (at least one-handed):** +1 Weapon Rating, +1 Bulk

**Heavy (requires two hands):** +4 Weapon Rating, +5 Bulk

**Medium Top-Heavy (at least one-handed, melee only):** +3 Weapon Rating, +4 Bulk, -3 to attack tests

**Large Top-Heavy (requires two hands, melee only):** +6 Weapon Rating, +9 Bulk, -2 to attack tests

**Explosive:** +1 to 30 Weapon Rating and Bulk, destroyed upon use

**Small Shield:** +1 Block, +2 Bulk

**Medium Shield:** +2 Block, +4 Bulk

**Large Shield:** +3 Block, +6 Bulk

#### PRIMARY MATERIAL

**Organics (wood, leather, hemp, bone, hide):** +1 Weapon Rating

**Soft Metals (brass, wrought iron):** +2 Weapon Rating, +2 Bulk

**Hard Metals (steel, bronze):** +3 Weapon Rating, +2 Bulk

**Nanomaterials (graphene, silica foam):** +4 Weapon Rating

**Energy (particles, plasma, laser, fire):** +5 Weapon Rating

**Other (unique):** +1 to 6 Weapon Rating

### SHIELDS

Shields do not count as armor. Shields are considered weapons that give bonuses to defense tests when blocking with the shield, even when you add a specialty. As such, shields have Weapon Ratings as described above.

Only one shield can be wielded for its blocking bonus. Characters can wield light weapons in the same hand as the shield, but cannot use that hand to grapple.

## ARMOR

Each piece of armor can be worn on one of six armor locations: head, shoulders, hands, chest, legs, or feet. The Armor Rating from a piece of armor only applies to the location it is worn. Heavy armor can be worn on top of light armor.

The Armor Rating and Bulk of the item is based on the following descriptors. Starting with a base of 0 Armor Rating and 0 Bulk, choose the appropriate descriptors from each category.

### DESIGN

**Light:** +0 Armor Rating, 1 Bulk

or

**Heavy:** +1 Armor Rating, 2 Bulk

### PRIMARY MATERIAL

**Organics (wood, leather, hemp, bone):** +1 Armor Rating

**Soft Metals (brass, wrought iron):** +2 Armor Rating, ×2 Bulk

**Hard Metals (steel, bronze):** +3 Armor Rating, ×2 Bulk

**Nanomaterials (graphene, silica foam):** +4 Armor Rating

**Energy (particles, plasma, laser, fire):** +5 Armor Rating

**Other (unique):** +1 to 6 Armor Rating

### QUALITY

**Clunky:** +0 Armor Rating, ×2 Bulk

**Poor:** +0 Armor Rating

**Normal:** +1 Armor Rating

**High:** +2 Armor Rating

**Master:** +3 Armor Rating

**Legendary:** +4 Armor Rating



## RESISTANT CLOTHING

Resistant Clothing is made from organic materials, and takes up an armor slot when worn. Resistance (page 33) gained from each piece applies to all body parts, but each piece may only protect against one type of damage: either Cold or Heat.

### DESIGN

**Light:** +0 Cold or Heat Resistance, 1 Bulk

or

**Heavy:** +1 Cold or Heat Resistance, 2 Bulk

### DESCRIPTORS

**Thick:** +1 Armor Rating, +1 Bulk

### QUALITY

**Poor:** +1 Cold or Heat Resistance

**Normal:** +2 Cold or Heat Resistance

**High:** +3 Cold or Heat Resistance

**Master:** +4 Cold or Heat Resistance

**Legendary:** +5 Cold or Heat Resistance





# Artifacts



"Since reading that dark book, in my mind, they visit me. The ancient manifestations of our collective primeval fears. Hulking, tendriled, black forms. Worshipped at their flesh obelisks of slithering darkness. By who? Myself? Do I worship these ancient horrors? ...No, it must be the shadow of my mind. The shadow that now lurks. It knows I am thinking about it. It sees me. I must escape. My safe place. My sanctuary. My fortress. The tranquil garden. A soothing pond, blossoming flora, stars shining through the blue skies. I am here in calmness. This is home. Reality seems so distant. Like an imaginary place. Perhaps this is reality. I am already here, with solid stone. Megalithic stone walls. I can feel them with my hand. This must be reality. Where does this passage lead? The sky is turning grey. Is that the other world? What is behind me? They claw at the corners of the walls. The walls are breaking. Everything is breaking. The folds of the stone become passages in every direction... To beyond. Beyond is here, I can feel its presence. If I just peel away this stone... Yes, the infinite maelstrom. Can't you see it in the darkness? It comes forth. Everything I have known. The shadow comes with it. They come. Those massive beasts, with long hair that writhes in the dark water. Is it dark? No, it is light. Black Light. The true reality. It comes for me. Come, then. Bring your serpentine tendrils upon me. Embrace me! ...I am awake. A world of illusory dreams lay before me. Beautiful, yet false... The water cannot be swallowed. This savory feast leaves my stomach empty... Ah yes, the real world. This world is Hunger. Welcome back, it says to me. My stomach. It speaks... And moves... The black worms. They are coming... I vomit. A black liquid spews from my mouth onto the ground. It burns away the soil like acid. There it is again. Beyond..."

**A**rtifacts are powerful items that can be in the form of armor, weapons, jewelry, clothing, books, or tools. The GM may decide to award artifacts as extremely rare treasure.

A character can use up to seven artifacts at a time. If an item is not already in mind, roll on these lists to get an idea.

Type	Material	Appearance
1 Chest Armor	1 Stone	1 Eye(s)
2 Leg Armor	2 Flesh	2 Warts, Growths, Cysts, Wounds
3 Boots	3 Iron	3 Hair or Cilia
4 Gloves	4 Wood	4 Eggs or Parasites
5 Shoulder Armor	5 Mud	5 Limb(s)
6 Helmet	6 Bronze	6 Fragments of the Night Sky
7 Necklace	7 Coral	7 Mechanical Parts
8 Ring	8 Bone	8 Spikes, Thorns, or Barbs
9 Belt	9 Synthetic	9 Impossible Angles
10 Weapon	10 Fungus	10 Mouth(s)

To determine the Weapon or Armor Rating of an artifact, roll 3d10. Its Bulk is half its Armor or Weapon Rating (round down). Alternatively, use the custom equipment rules (page 48).

## Ψ IMBUEMENTS Ψ

When found, an artifact has at least one random **imbue**ment. Roll 3d10 to determine if it has more than one—each roll of 10 adds one imbuement. Then, remove any 10s from the pool, and re-roll the pool, adding one imbuement for each 10, as before. If no 10s are rolled, there are no additional imbuements.

After determining how many imbuements the artifact has, roll on the following list to find out the effect of each imbuement. If the artifact has duplicate imbuements, add together the bonuses of the imbuements. Imbuements are immutable and permanent.

d10	Imbuement
1–2	<b>Resolute</b> : Exsanguination limit +1d2
3–4	<b>Bolstered</b> : Load ranges +1d2
5–6	<b>Honed</b> : Weapon or Armor +1d5
7–8	<b>Reinforced</b> : Resistance +1d5
9–10	<b>Determined</b> : Death roll +1d2 × 5

## Ψ ENCHANTMENTS Ψ

Though extremely rare, any artifact that has three or more imbuements also has an enchantment. Roll once on the following table.

d10	Enchantment
1–2	<b>of Summoning</b> : Create one unintelligent normal enemy that obeys you. If it dies, you may create another several hours later. Only one may exist at a time per Summoning enchantment you have.
3–4	<b>of Decay</b> : Deal +1d2 × 5 poison damage with your attacks.
5–6	<b>of Telekinesis</b> : You can move objects in sight of Bulk 1 or lower. Bulk is increased by every Telekinesis enchantment the character has.
7–8	<b>of Striking</b> : You can perform another attack each offense turn.
9–10	<b>of Haste</b> : In combat, the maximum size of your dice pool increases by 1.

## Ψ ARTIFACTS OF THE DARK GODS Ψ

These are some of the most powerful artifacts in the world. A character in possession of even just one such artifact would be feared. However, gaining such an artifact requires a number of other artifacts to be combined in some sort of ritual. The details of these artifacts and rituals are left indescript to allow for unique campaigns and designs.

### TZEREQ'S REAPER

A melee weapon of some shape that can make unlimited attacks per turn, automatically kills with a critical success, and regains a die in your dice pool with each kill.

REQUIRES...

The Heart of a Psychic Fetus  
 The Sheath of an Architect's Flesh  
 The Staff of a Slave Master  
 A Sacred Sacrificial Dagger

## ISHGUROR'S HARP

A ranged weapon of some shape that cannot miss and always rolls critical successes.

### REQUIRES...

The Leathered Sinew of a Colossal Pterosaur  
The Scrimshaw Baleen of a Colossal Leviathan  
The Dissolved Secretion of a Colossal Hive Queen  
The Woven Hair of a Colossal Ungulate

## SYIARAUTH'S PHYLACTERY

A black hole that contains the character's consciousness. Anyone who holds the phylactery becomes possessed by the character.

### REQUIRES...

The Elixir of Life  
The Philosopher's Stone  
The Magnum Opus  
A Bar of Transmuted Gold

## VAUROKOR'S LODGE

An extra-dimensional palace, accessed through a curtain that can be placed on any solid surface.

### REQUIRES...

The Third Eye of a Dead Dreamer  
The Funeral Wrappings of the Mouth of the King  
The Tesseract of the Squared Circle

## BAELPHIEL'S SARCOPHAGUS

A suit of armor that cannot be penetrated by physical attacks, nor can it be removed from the wearer.

### REQUIRES...

The Molten Blood of One Thousand Victims  
The Armor of a Warlord  
Armor Mold Made of Lava  
The Black Flame

*"One cannot know the origin of exsistence; the only answer one will find is that the causal dymension was formed in the acausal outer darkness, Sitra Ahra. The chaos that surrounds our universe is lawless, timeless, and infinite. The manifestations of this outer darkness within our dymension is without definitive form. In truth, everything in exsistence appears as an emanation of the boundless power from Sitra Ahra. However, if one were to tear away reality, the tyrannical laws of our universe would attempt to dictate the volatile chaos. When the cosmic waters mix with the outer darkness, the chaos becomes a black liquid, gas, or solid. This black substance, the Absu, has always surrounded us. However, the Absu is not accessible until it is transmuted from the outcast of ancient metals, iron. Already I have delayed death for a century by channeling the Absu to flow through my veins as blood. Furthermore, by meditating to channel the Absu into the mind, one could form neural connections in the shape of the sacred angles of the Qliphoth. Within the mind, one could unlock the eleven gates to Sitra Ahra, breaking free from cosmic restraints."*







# Irkalla



**WARNING:** *THE INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE REMAINDER OF THE BOOK IS INTENDED SOLELY FOR THE GAME MASTER. PLAYERS SHOULD NOT READ BEYOND THIS POINT. IDEALLY, PLAYERS WILL LEARN ABOUT THE SETTING BY PLAYING THE GAME AND PIECING CLUES TOGETHER.*

**I**rkalla, the world of dust and ash. Barren, gray, foggy, cold, and decaying—even the living appear corpse-like here. If there existed a reason for its being, it would be the equivalent of a netherworld for the multiverse: a labyrinthine graveyard of dead worlds, a plane of death. But to understand Irkalla, one must understand the cosmology that surrounds it.

## COSMOS

Every creature, planet, solar system, galaxy, and universe is part of the cosmos. The cosmos has patterns and laws that govern what is possible within it, and despite it being a causal dimension, the existence of the cosmos is acausal—there is no cause and effect that created the cosmos; it simply exists, like a mote of dust in an infinite sea of chaos that always was.

Where cosmos meets chaos, an amorphous black substance known as Absu tears reality apart. This matterless voidspace is a transitive force that acts like acid to an outside viewer. A limb that is consumed by Absu appears to be burned away, but that limb is actually transported to another dimension. Absu cannot be classified as any known phase of matter—it is none of them, but appears as all of them, and ignores almost every law of reality. In Irkalla, the boundaries between dimensions are thin, and Absu bleeds through the cracks in the world like water through a dam about to burst.

Beyond the cosmos is the primordial chaos known as Sitra Ahra, a formless plane of infinite space dimensions and non-linear time. Every imaginable universe exists within the chaos, and unlike the predictability of the cosmos, chaos is lawless. It is impossible for a mind born of the cosmos to truly comprehend Sitra Ahra, and if one were to gaze into the chaos, it would appear darker than pure black. Thus, Sitra Ahra is also called the Black Light, the Outer Darkness, and, in reference to it being beyond reality, the Other Side.

## THE AZERATE

Spawned from Sitra Ahra, the Azerate are eleven anti-cosmic forces that are formless, yet when they are viewed by a mortal, the mind creates horrific images in order to make some sense of them, and may be considered archetypal demons or gods. It is possible for aspects of the Azerate to manifest into the cosmos through specific gateways, but if any of these forces were to completely enter the cosmos, their presence alone would tear apart reality and return it to chaos. Even the smallest fragment of the Azerate drawn upon by occultists creates extreme anomalies in reality.

## QLIPHOTH

The Qliphoth are the eleven metaphysical gateways within the mind that may be unlocked to access the reality-shaping powers of the Azerate. Written and carved into ancient artifacts of unknown origin, the anti-cosmic symbols of the Qliphoth are mind-numbing enough to cause a sane viewer to gouge out their eyes and claw at their face. Only a natural born psychic, or someone suffering from psychosis could possibly understand the Qliphothic symbols.

## ARCHITECTS

Those who master the secrets of the Qliphoth can become powerful sorcerers known as Architects. The Architects meditate on their thrones, perpetually dreaming of other universes. They cannot wake from their meditation, else their bodies will be ripped apart to become portals to Sitra Ahra. So, they exist between worlds, acting as demiurges for their own paradise dimensions while resting like entombed royals, their physical forms trapped and vulnerable in Irkalla.

The wretched people of Irkalla continue to become servants to the Architects, protecting their comatose bodies out of fear or wonder. Using psychic abilities the Architects manipulate thousands, rewarding the loyal with beautiful illusions and punishing the disobedient with visions of terror. Irkallans worship the Architects like gods, and it is this theocratic structure that supports the archaic civilizations of Irkalla.

Tensions between the Architects inevitably lead them to psychic warfare, sending nightmares into each other's dreams. To counter this, they seek out natural-born psychics to serve as slaves who will absorb the nightmares. Some Architects use selective breeding among their servants to fill this need, while others take the young from the wasteland tribes. Eventually, sometimes after years of torment, one side is weakened enough that armies are sent to destroy the sleeping Architect. When this happens, the world is changed forever...

## LABYRINTHS

Upon the death of an Architect, reality is torn apart at the site of regicide. The visions of the Architect and their psychic slaves are fused into reality, creating a maze of intersecting universes known as a labyrinth.



Labyrinths break the rules of reality, even beyond the surreal features found elsewhere in Irkalla. Each contains manifested fragments of the Architect's mind: their mortal past, their infinite dreams, their nightmares, their illusions. Mental fragments of their psychic slaves also manifest: their torment, their capture, their former life, the nightmares forced upon them. As the labyrinth is an extradimensional place, it might have archaic stone ruins next to interstellar starships, and it may be so expansive that it contains multiple worlds. These are places of absolute terror.

## WITCHES

Some inhabitants of Irkalla are born with Absu in their blood. Their minds are naturally gifted with psychic powers, though they rarely have any control over these powers. These naturally born psychics, called

witches, are usually found in the wild living as loners, as they have experienced tragedies brought about by their own minds.

Psychic powers come from the subconscious, so anytime the subconscious is tapped into, reality is afflicted. Nowhere is this more apparent than when a latent psychic suffers a nightmare, spawning horror into reality. An entire tribe may be decimated by a single nightmare suffered by a witch in the village. In some slave cities, the Architects use selective breeding in special chambers to birth witches, while others send soldiers to raid wasteland tribes, telepathically guiding them to identify and capture young witches.

## PLAGUE GODS

For witches not captured as psychic slaves, their psychic subconscious may overpower their ego and manifest into reality. Most latent psychics experience this phenomenon when they suffer a nightmare, but the Plague Gods suffer this constantly. Once the psychic subconscious of a Plague God is awakened, their physical form becomes a manifestation of horror, and the world around it is shaped by their psyche, causing reality and unreality to intersect.

Not forced to wither in a meditative trance like an Architect, the Plague God may roam the world, infecting it with a dimension of fear. The dead may rise, the earth may burn, the flesh may peel—any matter of nightmare can happen in the hellscapes surrounding a Plague God. Some have created their own fortresses similar to labyrinths, though the Plague God's subconscious actively manipulates these death traps, granting them a sort of sentience. There are no treasures to be found in such places; only a fool with the righteous hope to destroy a Plague God would dare enter.

## DARK GODS

After thousands of years of anguish, five Plague Gods—Tzereq the Harvester, Ishguror the Hunter, Syiarauth the Alchemist, Vaukor the Wanderer, and Baelphiel the Blacksmith—became part of Irkalla, to serve the planet as if it were the incarnation of Torment and they were its instruments. All that remains of each is their consciousness; their physical forms have become the dark corners of the world itself. They became the Dark Gods, sentient forces of nature that set the land aflame and bring forth the dark ash clouds.

The Dark Gods prefer that the inhabitants of Irkalla suffer instead of die: They believe themselves to be the shapers of the cosmos, which they accomplish by perpetuating misery in Irkalla. Were it not for the inhabitants' desire to escape this horrific reality, they would have little reason to become psychic Architects and create other universes. To the Dark Gods, pain is the requirement of creation, and so they demand sacrifice.

## ECHOES

With the death of an Architect, the cataclysms reshaping the world may sometimes trap the memories of sentient creatures. These ghastly figures, called echoes, become part of the world, each consciousness bound to a particular location to eternally suffer a dull existence.

Echoes are one of the few signs of life in Irkalla that pose no threat. They may offer information or companionship, they may seek conversation, but they are undoubtedly miserable. They yearn for food, for pleasure, for any sort of stimulation that offers momentary reprieve from their hollow lives. Some echoes desperately attempt to convince travelers to stay with them, but they are often bound within or near labyrinths. Despite this, cults following these echoes sometimes form, small enclaves of survivors that carve out shelters near their presence.

## CIVILIZATIONS

The empires formed by the Architects are the largest of the civilizations throughout Irkalla. Thousands of civilizations exist in Irkalla, though the great distances between them would make it seem that there are only a few. Most Irkallan civilizations appear archaic, with stone pyramids, ziggurats, theaters, pillared temples, and other megalithic architectures. Despite these impressive displays, towering above them are the largest of all civilizations in Irkalla: the grand empires ruled by the Architects.

Where the various lesser civilizations differ drastically in practices, the civilizations ruled by the Architects all have similar social structures: At the top is the Architect, worshipped as a theocratic god. Next are the caretakers and clergy who tend to the Architects and their psychic slaves, ensuring they are nourished while comatose, while also ruling the empire from seats of power. Beneath the caretakers are the soldiers, who defend the empire and seek out natural-born psychics to offer to the Architect as psychic slaves. Then there are the traders, who run the economy with crafts, slavery, commodity, and entertainment. And on the bottom there are the laborers and slaves, who are exploited by every class above them to build, farm, harvest, and mine, to serve as breeders and cattle, or to fight to the death for entertainment.

The Architects' cities are called slave cities, even where slavery is not practiced, since their inhabitants are slaves to the Architect's illusions. Often these cities are filled with public sexual expression, bestiality, pedophilia, and multiorgasmic sexuality. The Architects' illusions mean their people believe they live in ceaseless paradise, even though their actual surroundings are miserable and filthy. Cannibalism is commonplace, with captured people serving as livestock to be butchered in public slaughterhouses, or else thrown into the gladiator pits for a display of gore.

Some Architects rule by fear, imparting horrific illusions upon their people to ensure that they labor and serve. These civilizations are generally more impressive in their true architecture and appearance, since

the people have no delusions about their situation and try to make the best of it. In these places the fear of the outside world is palpable, with the Architect creating illusions of terror to prevent desertion, though in truth the wastelands beyond civilization are almost as terrible as these Architects would have their people believe.

## WASTELANDS

Lake beds of cracked and dried mud, webs of dead plant roots, soils of decomposing carcasses, acid-scarred deserts of salt, brown steppes and plains of frostbitten grass, forests of charred limbs, bogs of poisonous water, all covered in ash and dirt, shrouded by fog and smoke and dust clouds, overcast by a dark storm heavy with rain that rarely falls. Death and decay everywhere, in skeletal and rotting figures that adorn the vast lands of sprawling emptiness, and massive chasms that descend into nothingness separating this land from that.

These lands are dead, hungry, thirsty, poisoned, and rotting. Only in the other worlds that bleed through would a sight be seen that isn't subject to Irkalla's funereal nature, and even then it would only be fleeting, as the overwhelming doom of this place would soon overtake its defiance of the grey law and twist it into ruination. The wastelands of Irkalla are loath to offer anything other than extinction.

## WASTELAND TRIBES

For thousands of years, what few survivors struggled through the misery and melancholia in the wastelands have formed primitive tribes. They eat worms, insects, and the flesh of their enemies. There are countless tribes throughout the world, rarely peaceful, as the wastelands breed hardiness, wariness, and primal hostility.

To a wasteland survivor, the concept of the human race as a whole is lost. A familial psychology of the few versus the world rules the minds of most people in Irkalla, most prominently among the wasteland tribes who constantly war with each other. Any alliances that may form are usually short-lived, as resources are too scarce to permit cooperation. Even the wisest of tribal rulers are bound to die, and it is rare that their successors maintain any peace established. It is a constant struggle for food in the wastelands, and competition for this basic need is the catalyst of most warfare, especially when another tribe may itself be the source of food.

The most common feature shared among the tribes is ancestor worship, though there are many different mythologies, each with its own etiquette. At times, a tribe may dubiously accept outsiders, but they must be careful not to accidentally disrespect any traditions, else they will suffer hostility at the least. Communication also poses a problem, with hundreds of different Irkallan languages and dialects.

Punishments for cultural offenses are known to be extremely torturous, an example being the encasement of a body in a wooden coffin, with sap

rubbed over the body to attract insects that eat away at its flesh, while the head remains outside of the coffin, exposed to the elements. Another example involves a feast and offering of gifts to the offender as a subtle display of dominance, then burning and beating the offender, cutting off their fingers and toes, then force-feeding them the meat from their own body parts as nourishment for continued torture the next day.

## LANDSCAPE

The world is always shifting with the influx of other dimensions, and traversing it is always a challenge, with its chasms and mountains, labyrinths and caverns, canyons and narrow bridges, oceans and wastelands. If one does manage to travel Irkalla, though, they will see that the land changes from one visit to the next. For this reason, it is impossible to map the landscape. Any map that could be created would have to focus on a small area, with its borders and passages to elsewhere constantly being redrawn.

A desert may be vast, but what lies to the east may be a forest across a chasm; and what lies to the north may be a civilization over a mountain range too tall to climb, with a cave system as the only passage, and what lies to the west may be an ocean that only a ship could cross, and what lies to the south may be a swamp separated by a labyrinth. And all of this may change, as an alien landscape merges with the chasm, or a bottomless pit drains the ocean, or an earthquake parts the mountain range. Absu still mutates the world, and will do so forever, creating an endless plane of multiple worlds fused together.

Even cities are not bound to single locations—a city that was once at one's back might now rest before them. Jungles, oases, canyons, caverns, swamps, volcanoes, oceans—any biome may bleed into Irkalla. Such places may have been lush in their original dimension, but under the overcast skies that rain ash they become decrepit and haunting. Most of Irkalla is a dark wilderness, fragmented by the other dimensions that have bled through.





# Civilizations



## Ψ SETHERMERU Ψ

The people of Sethermeru are well educated with a hieroglyphic writing system, wealthy, artistic, and devoted to Tzereq, the God of the Harvest. They live along the banks of the Serpent River, using the river's black mud as soil for their crops planted on raised terraces. Their Architect, Queen Isaura the Scaled, conquered this land and placed its defeated lords in shackles as psychic slaves. Isaura received her title not only from the reptilian motifs that decorate her banner and gilded tomb, but also because her political maneuvering was likened to that of a snake. Once a psychic slave, she killed her master and made alliances with the kingdom of Aurimea. Isaura was a powerful telepath, able to remotely and subtly communicate with Tyraedes, the king of Aurimea, even while she was under psychic control. Her soldiers wear bronze helmets, leather lamellar armor, hide-covered wooden shields, and wield curved iron swords.

Sethermeru architecture, with its pyramid ziggurats with tiered buildings, makes for cities that look like mountain ranges, designed to withstand the floods common to this land. Most of Sethermeru is a dust-covered dried lakebed, subject to violent floods that form dry wash canyons and mud swamps. The high concentrations of iron, salt, and sulfur in the ground make these floodwaters highly acidic, causing chemical burns to those caught in the water. The dust clouds of iron oxide merge with storm clouds, so they appear to rain blood. The glass lakes, their molten sand formed by volcanic activity, are one of the natural wonders of Sethermeru, the others being the various hot springs and petrified forests. In the desert, the tombs of fallen kingdoms have become labyrinths of other worlds.

During the cold months, the people of Sethermeru mourn the loss of Tzereq, and as the temperature warms they practice necromantic rituals to resurrect him. This cycle of life, death, and resurrection informs many aspects of culture in this agricultural society. In the Sethermeru spiritual view, people are resurrected into plants. Each seed is planted along with a body part of a dead person. The plants that produce crops are then thought to contain the spirits of the dead, which will live on through the people who consume the crop. The aristocracy practice necromancy, and the populace honor their dead by constantly visiting the Necropolis Gardens. Relics, jewelry, and trinkets are kept and worn as sentimental mementos of the deceased.

## UNIQUE LOCALE: TEMPLE OF THE DRAGON

The powerful priests of this temple worship the massive crocodiles of the Serpent River, revering them as dragons and adorning them with gold and armor. The priests themselves are bestial warriors, embracing their lizard brains and tapping into latent psychic abilities. These priests bow to no Architect and in fact demand payment from the queen of Sethermeru in the form of human slaves to be sacrificed to their dragons. The priest-king, Enk-fn-sobhu, has become less man than dragon, and rules the temple like a demigod.

## ADVENTURE SEED: ISaura's NIGHTMARES

King Anku, likely working with Enk-fn-sobhu, has been imparting nightmares upon Isaura to weaken her. Isaura is not able to combat these nightmares with psychic slaves, since the Temple of the Dragon has been demanding witches as sacrifices to their dragons, else their hunger will drive them to destroy Sethermeru. Thus the people of Sethermeru suffer, as nightmares bleed into their reality, and Sethermeru is on the brink of unrest as armies march across the land to find witches for both Isaura and the Temple of the Dragon.

## Ψ REMESIS Ψ

The people of Remesis are cannibalistic, illiterate, and unruly. In Remesis, slavery and human trafficking are commonplace. People are butchered for their meat. Slaves are forced to fight to the death for entertainment. The land is poor in natural resources, so Remesians have relied on warfare to sustain themselves.

Soldiers in the Remesian army wear masks made of leather, hide, and hair crafted to appear horrific, and they bear iron-scaled war dresses and a range of bone, sinew, and iron weapons. Their soldiers pride themselves on being able to withstand torture, toughening their skin with intricate scarification designs. The art of scarification is a pervasive cultural practice among all members of society, but Remesian soldiers make efforts to scar every inch of flesh.

King Anku, the ruler of Remesis, was the last Architect of Sethermeru. Too powerful a psychic to be murdered or captured after being defeated by Queen Isaura's army, he was carried in a procession from Sethermeru to Remesis. Since then, Anku has brought together the cannibal tribes of Remesis to rebuild his civilization. He rules with honor, but his land is plagued with depravity. With political savvy Anku secures alliances with other Architects, and defends his kingdom against Isaura's armies along the Sethermeru border. The Remesian population is mostly pirates, raiders, and slavers, and King Anku provides a paradise dream for his followers, furthering their vulgar excesses in the consumption of flesh, drugs, and violence.

The largest city in Remesis is Varrashe—despite the stench of death, sweat, and filth, the city appears as a pristine jewel because of Anku's psychic influence. The architecture of Remesis is ornately carved from sandstone, with statues and bas-reliefs, but marred with hanging bodies and death trinkets. Any Remesidian will recite the phrase "A life without killing is a life without pleasure," a testament to the culture's savagery.

The land of Remesis is a savannah of dry grass and trees that bursts into flames at the slightest spark, creating massive brush fires that rage for months. What little rain the land receives is enough for the sparse flora to regrow in the burned regions, and for the few watering holes to fill for a few months. Remesis maintains its dry heat all year, and its seasons are defined by its sporadic rainfall.

The strategic location of Remesis is irrelevant in military terms, but it is excellent for trade, acting as a halfway point for routes across the desert. In particular, the city of Nabatu, despite its barbaric reputation, has become the primary marketplace of the region. There are very few labyrinths in Remesis, since the land was untamed up until the arrival of King Anku. However, its brutal cities can be just as dangerous as any labyrinth, and nearly as expansive.

### UNIQUE LOCALE: NGA-NGA-DZO WATERING HOLE

The only lake in the region to consistently remain full, the Nga-Nga-Dzo watering hole is one of the deadliest locations in Remesis. Creatures, tribes, and wanderers are all drawn to this mist-covered swamp that might as well be a desert oasis. To drink from the lake is no easy task, as countless predators have made the lake their hunting ground. Elephantine beasts, herds of feathered equines, colossal serpents, and carnivorous plants form a unique ecosystem that hosts more life than anywhere else in Irkalla. The desert wastelands that stretch hundreds of miles beyond Nga-Nga-Dzo make it a difficult choice to leave the watering hole, even though to stay there is to be surrounded by death.

### ADVENTURE SEED: NABATU'S INSTABILITY

Nabatu is a sand-carved city, accessed through a narrow gorge, that serves as the largest bazaar in the world. With so much trade, though, theft and crime are just as commonplace. The former ruler of Nabatu, Lord Jierdan, lived in excess with a large harem and palace. He refused to acknowledge King Anku as ruler of Remesis, so Anku had him assassinated. Now, various factions vie for control of Nabatu. King Tyraedes of Aurimea has taken an interest in bringing stability to the only consistent trade route not interrupted by the extradimensional bleed, so he has sent a portion of his military to enforce martial law. Tensions between King Tyraedes and King Anku have been increasing, since Anku refuses to help Tyraedes quell the unrest in Nabatu until a puppet ruler is placed there in service to Anku.

## Ψ AURIMEA Ψ

The grand cities of Aurimea are sights to behold—white stone and polished marble, ornate sculptures and bronze statues—and pride themselves to be without any illusion. Dried leaves hang onto the empty limbs of massive trees, and barren brown vines wrap around the stonework and wrought iron gates.

Aurimea has a disciplined army of men and women raised as soldiers from an early age. Each soldier wears a bronze breastplate, a steel helmet, and a bronze shield, and carries several steel weapons such as a spear, sword, and dagger. Archery is frowned upon in Aurimea, seen as a dishonorable practice, but the military still maintains several archery-trained regiments for strategic purposes.

King Tyraedes, ruler of Aurimea, is a master alchemist, able to transmute lesser metals through chrysopoeia into gold. The people of Aurimea are driven by family and greed, with a currency-based economy that promotes exploitation. Slavery is outlawed, yet there remains a population of underpaid laborers that are hardly able to survive. Regardless, the economy of Aurimea is one of the strongest in the world.

The landscape of Aurimea is haunting, with tangled trees and thorned brambles covering the hillsides. Black roses may sometimes be found growing in the brier thickets. The air is damp and there is almost always snow or rain, making the ground a thick sludge of mud and rotten vegetation.

### UNIQUE LOCALE: THE FOUNTAIN OF ETERNITY

Honor is all-important in Aurimea. Families have been known to sentence their own members to death or exile for dishonoring their house. In a pillared temple above the king's tomb, surrounded by gilded human statues in poses of agony and misery, the Fountain of Eternity flows with quicksilver. Any imbibor of the fountain will suffer a painful death; those who drink of their own volition will find their body transmuted to gold, while all others will simply die of mercury poisoning. This suicide for transgressions against their family's honor is seen as a noble act, and being turned to a golden statue is a way for family disappointment to be forgiven in death. Legend tells of these statues serving as animated puppets for King Tyraedes, functioning as tomb wardens.

### ADVENTURE SEED: THE ALCHEMICAL MUTAGEN

Having created a formula that mutates people and gives them superhuman abilities, the alchemist Malivici captures people, experiments on them, and then releases them to the world outside. Several weeks after release, his subjects go berserk, attacking anyone nearby or, if there is nobody nearby, ripping themselves apart in agony. There have been several dozen deaths, and many questions. The alchemist continues his work, covering his tracks as best as possible. The source of the mutations is unknown to anyone in the city—there are plenty of superstitious theories and scholarly guesses, but finding Malivici will require some detailed investigation.

## Ψ THORNE Ψ

The people of this mountainous region are wretched and miserable, standing a high chance of falling victim to the plague. Those who succumb to this fate add to the carcasses covering the land, feasted upon by the large population of crows living here.

Thorne is a feudal land, with ancient lords and vassals who war eternally in a contest for the favor of the crown. The lords are imperfect practitioners of alchemy, able to perform psychic meditation but lacking the ability to create their own paradise dimensions. Instead, they rely on psychic slaves in order to dream of other worlds, though these are laden with nightmares. Still, the lords of Thorne are able to survive like any other Architect, with immortal physical forms imbued with blackened blood. They are not confined to dream chambers like most Architects, and shamle forth like the walking dead with vampiric appearances, pulling their psychic slaves with them on chains of black umbilical cords.

Despite being hundreds of years old, Queen Lehrankh, the crown of Thorne, maintains her incredible beauty by being constantly bathed in the blood of psychic slaves, and in attempts to gain her favor, her vassals supply her with an endless quantity of bodies to be bled. By siphoning the psychic energy of her vassals, the queen prevents them from ever maintaining their own dimensions, but she rewards her most loyal servants with an intoxicating dream that fulfills every emotional aspect of the dreamer with absolute ecstasy.

Anyone in the queen's favor experiences an emotional embrace like nothing else in the world. It is said to be the most beautiful experience anyone could dream of. Above this, earning the queen's favor is the most profound way for a noble house to be protected from the hostile political climate, in which alliance and betrayal are often used in the same sentence.

The soldiers of Thorne wear heavy iron armor and carry heavy iron weapons. The most elite soldiers ride horned equine beasts into combat. Most Thornish soldiers are unskilled, though, and rely on the craftsmanship of their weapons and armor to survive the theaters of war.

A tangle of plant roots sprawls across the ground of Thorne, like veins of the earth. The soil of the region is rich enough to grow crops, allowing small farming villages to exist, albeit with emaciated livestock and sickly populations. The ground crawls with worms, the staple of the Thornish diet. Because of plague and the presence of other food sources, cannibalism is not practiced here. Instead, the dead are burned on massive funeral pyres. Though Thorne is incredibly cold, it sees little snow or rainfall—instead, bitter dry winds sweep through the region, causing the hollows and groves to wilt and wither. The ash dust blowing about coats nearly everything, causing even the people to appear grey.





## UNIQUE LOCALE: LYTCHREST, ESTATE OF TORTURE

Ever since he was a child, Count Mateus Misfaern was obsessed with torture and murder. At first he slowly killed animals, and as he aged he began to murder random people of his estate, and created elaborate torture devices for his own amusement. He built an underground maze filled with devious traps, and would throw subjects into it to see how far they would make it. None survived. Over time, his entire province became a quagmire of traps, with pits leading to his underground theater of death. Nobody lives in or travels to Lytchrest, yet Misfaern lives on as a Plague God, his psychic latency perpetually manifesting a land of torture.

## ADVENTURE SEED: WAR FOR THE IRON SHRINE

Three Thornish houses compete for the Iron Shrine, a site where Baelphiel is said to imbue iron weapons and armor. House Blackstone has owned the Iron Shrine for generations, but Lord Blackstone was killed under mysterious circumstances, leaving a child as the lord of their small fortress estate. Count Bellamort, Blackstone's closest neighbor, wants to use the Iron Shrine to imbue his house's arms, but excessive use of the Iron Shrine will spawn Baelphiel's malcreations, and Blackstone would be the first to fall—though only the Blackstones believe this story. Finally, House Redgrave, a large and powerful family, seeks to employ both House Bellamort and House Blackstone as vassals, providing protection in exchange for hundreds of imbued weapons. This leaves the two lesser houses as rivals, with the greater house ready to command the victor to provide so many imbued weapons that a portal to Baelphiel's labyrinth might as well be opened.







# Absallu



*Absallu functions like its own dimension that moves throughout the world, able to be encountered at any time, even multiple times in a single journey.*

**A**bsallu is a kingdom of towering black stone megaliths, each several hundred feet tall, jutting from layers of rotten vegetation, all surrounded by a labyrinthine garden of dead trees. The kingdom is essentially a large city, with each megalith serving as the temple of a given district. Absallu is in the middle of nowhere and is generally only stumbled upon, yet it is almost as if travelers are constantly drawn to this place. There is no shortage of outsiders who end up here. It is possible the kingdom itself travels across Irkalla and holds no true position. The city acts like a trap for travelers, drawing them into the Foreign District with trade and entertainment, demanding religious conversion, and slowly twisting their minds into becoming servants to King Arrashraghk.

## THE MOUTH OF THE KING

A corpse, possessed by the sleeping king, sits dormant on the throne. Powerful commands issue forth from the corpse, words from the Architect. Though the corpse is frail, embalmed and wrapped in cloth ribbons to preserve the flesh, it acts as a psychic conduit for the Architect, who is able to manipulate nearly all aspects of reality without need for meditation. It is the highest honor in the clergy to become the corpse that serves as the Mouth of the King.

## THE TOMB OF THE KING

The actual resting place of the Architect is locked away in an elaborately trapped tomb. Only the most devout of the Architect's followers are permitted into the tomb to bring offerings of psychic slaves. The king's resting chamber is guarded by dead nightmare creatures, spawned from the nightmares of his psychic slaves. Keeping a host of corpses at his disposal, the king can possess them at will to keep his sleeping body nourished and preserved.

## THE VASSALS

Incapable of surviving against powerful empires, the Vassals are Architects who willingly became psychic slaves, contributing their own power to King Arrashraghk. In return, they are given corpses to possess and are treated as royalty. Vassals are more powerful than other psychic slaves and could pose a threat to the king, but would be unlikely to succeed in any treachery.

## THE CHAMBERS OF WAR

This central megalith of the kingdom's military is filled with illusions of horror, haunted by nightmares, and structured like a maze to ensure that soldiers are trained to traverse the surreal world beyond. The Chambers of War hold portals to other worlds, those worlds the Architect and psychic slaves dream of. The warlords, meditating on their thrones, constantly monitor those worlds for signs of nightmare, protecting the dreamers by sending their forces through the gateways to defeat the horrors within. The soldiers, exposed to mutilation and gore, are killing machines. They have no fear of battle, disciplined to the point of fighting to the death as long as their body permits, even if missing limbs.

## THE CLERGY

Thousands of responsibilities and duties are assigned to servants in order to keep the kingdom operating, and the clergy are the caste of servants who oversee these operations. They are the authority of Absallu, yet they are beholden to a different illusion of reality than other servants. Though it is beautiful to them, this illusion amplifies the negative aspects of reality, showing the clergy where improvements are needed, but also causing them to accept a horrific reality as mundane. The clergy are apathetic toward any form of suffering and seem to derive pleasure from all forms of slavery.

## THE GARDEN OF THE HARVESTERS

The Harvesters are a monastic order of scribes who study alchemical formulae and, after years of discipline, meditate to dream up a world of lush vegetation and bountiful crops. Even though at that point they are capable of becoming Architects themselves, they have been disciplined their entire lives to willingly sacrifice themselves for the people of the kingdom.

When a Harvester dies, this causes a death cataclysm that spawns aspects of their dream world into existence, creating a tangled garden of fruit and vegetables. However, this also spawns surreal aspects of their subconscious, turning parts of the garden into mires of horror. The king is cautious about who becomes a Harvester, and limits the honor to a secluded caste of servants selected at birth to study in the garden monastery.

## THE HOLE

In order to provide water for the people of Absallu, a colossal well descends through the vegetation into the stone caves thousands of feet below. King Arrashraghk has manipulated the gravity in this location, causing the water at the bottom of the well to trickle upwards. However, horrors crawl from the depths of the Hole as well. Legend says that these horrors are people who fell down the Hole and were trapped by the anomalous gravity, twisted and pulled into tormented monstrosities that wish for death.

## THE TEMPLE OF LIFE

The concept of family is alien to the people of this kingdom. Although sex and pleasure are commonplace, pregnancy outside of the Temple of Life almost always results in death. The Temple of Life is a pit of sexual reproduction, where women and girls are enslaved to do nothing but be impregnated and give birth. Their infants, taken at birth, are weaned and raised by life-tenders, members of the clergy. They are raised in the environments of their future castes, and observed for signs of latent psychic abilities, so they might serve as psychic slaves in the tomb of the king.

## THE PURITANS

Clad in religious robes, torture devices, and trophies of their victims, the Puritans are part of an ecclesiastical inquisition seeking out heretics throughout the kingdom. They are exclusively servants born with natural telepathy, but who lack the psychic prowess to be of use to the king as psychic slaves. They can read the minds of any living beings nearby, making it practically impossible for one to survive with blasphemous thoughts in their presence. Outsiders entering the kingdom will find a group of Puritans waiting by the statue of the king, and feel the telepathic command to kneel before the statue and swear loyalty to the king.

## THE BEAUTIFUL ILLUSION

As outsiders spend more time in the kingdom, the oppressive religious atmosphere makes them susceptible to the illusion of the king. The foul stench that plagues the kingdom becomes appealing, the squalor and filth appears beautiful, the commanding words spoken by the priests sound like music. It starts to feel preferable to labor for the king than survive in the wild.

## THE RED THEATRE

The high society of Absallu consists of the Tir'zhuul slavers, the Vassals, and the part of the clergy in positions of command, known as the Exarchs. The estates of high society are monolithic palaces with an excess of servants, but servants quickly grow boring—there is little pleasure to be had with creatures that obey every command. For entertainment, the nobles go to the Red Theatre, a place where heretical outsiders are brought to serve as victims. The nobles will psychologically torment these victims, forcing them to commit acts of sexual perversion, self-mutilation, self-cannibalism, murder, and any number of other horrific acts. Any pleasure these nobles get is solely from forcing outsiders to commit acts that make them uneasy.

## THE FOREIGN DISTRICT

The kingdom is organized like a factory, with each district fulfilling a different purpose. The most eclectic of these districts is the Foreign District, the only place in the kingdom where one will see aberrants and people who are not entranced by the illusions of the king. Slave traders, wanderers, merchants, and all sorts of outsiders are permitted here, albeit under strict religious laws. Refusing to acknowledge the king as God, or

even the slightest hint of disrespect, is considered heresy or blasphemy, which results in capture, torture, enslavement, and any other sort of heinous punishment.

Outsiders are not permitted outside the Foreign District, and its people will take it upon themselves to enforce this law with an intense hatred, leaving nothing left of the violator but pulpy bits of gore. It is not uncommon to see mangled corpses displayed in the Foreign District as a warning.

## THE SKULLTAKER GANG

A group of thugs that prey on newcomers, using lures to ambush and enslave unsuspecting victims. The clergy does nothing about this violence, since the Skulltakers thoroughly demonstrate absolute loyalty to the king, and no group of outsiders has been powerful enough to challenge the several-hundred-strong gang.

## WIDOWER'S DUMP

A pleasure den filled with drugs, sex, and entertainment. The owner, a mysterious woman known as the Widow, has links to the Skulltaker gang, clearly acting as a channel for the slave trade of captured victims. The place has a repugnant stench so strong that outsiders cannot maintain consciousness.

## MARKET STALLS

Down a long walkway between two massive stone walls, this cluttered mess of dingy wooden boards forms a mercantile shopping center. Beggars, thieves, and con artists snake their way through the crowds of outsiders. The only law enforced here is that of whatever hired guards the merchants employ, who are usually criminals themselves. The most successful merchants are the most cutthroat. The merchants have formed clans in order to pay for decent protection for their stalls, though their protection is also used to intimidate other businesses, creating a sort of faction war between the Herandus House, the Prosperity Conglomerate, and the Omni Emporium.

Herandus House is typically allied with the clergy, bribing them for sanctioned favors and to shut down the competition. The Prosperity Conglomerate employs gangsters and thugs to sabotage the other factions. The Omni Emporium maximizes its efficiency by using slaves and selling stolen merchandise in ramshackle stalls, but their shops are never safe, as the merchants themselves are cutthroat swindlers.

## THE STADIUM OF BONE

A massive arena in the Foreign District, built entirely of the corpses of gladiators. Because of the constant influx of travelers, there is hardly ever a shortage of victims to be thrown into the near-constant melee. Every evening, at least a dozen gladiatorial events are held at the stadium. Slavers send victims to the slaughter in the hope that they will survive long enough to make them a pile of treasure.

## THE TIR'ZHUUL ESTATES

The underground slave trade doesn't bother hiding from the clergy—the practice is perfectly legal. Instead, black-market slave traders must avoid the Tir'zhuul, a powerful organization that runs the slave trade across the world. The Tir'zhuul are the wealthiest of all people, having more capital than every civilization combined, given special privileges that other people cannot even hope for. Without the Architects, the Tir'zhuul would be the most powerful empire in the world, and there is no doubt they have a hidden agenda that includes such a future.

In Absallu, the Tir'zhuul estates are massive and elaborate mansions of water, rare metals, and all manner of excess. Surrounding those mansions are all manner of artifact galleries and auction houses, decadent performance halls, surgeons, libraries, tailors, perfumers, and jewelers, for those wealthy enough to enjoy life in Irkalla itself. Naturally, such places are completely off-limits to the riff-raff. However, the Tir'zhuul are not xenophobic, and have been known to bypass laws for aberrant guests they deem worthy.

The Tir'zhuul and their high-end locales are not an uncommon sight in trade cities, except in Aurimea, where King Tyraedes outlawed slavery specifically to inhibit the economic power of the Tir'zhuul. As Absallu is impossible to attack with military force, due to its ever-changing location, the city serves as the Tir'zhuul's seat of power.





# Enemies



As most of Irkalla lacks a natural ecosystem, the creatures of nightmares and other worlds are the primary inhabitants here, either starving like everything else or requiring some other form of sustenance, such as the pain they inflict. What beasts exist are akin to the mutated monstrosities an irradiated wasteland would twist into being. Those ursine, equine, bovine, canine, and lupine creatures that would seem familiar with horn, hide, claws, and teeth, but perverted by the essence of Irkalla to exist as fearless predators capable of massacres.

Desperate scavengers stalk and circle the dead or dying. These rodents, vultures, beetles, flies, and maggots all form the baseline of the ecosystem, since edible plants are extremely rare. Carnivorous fungi and plants with the occasional hint of sentience also serve as enemies found in the natural ecology. Beyond nature, spawned from nightmares are abstract abominations with metal body parts, geometric shapes lacking anatomy, with all manner of horrific descriptions symbolizing some personal emotion, especially those related to abuse and guilt. These abhorrent enemies follow no physical rules other than to represent the collective shadow of psychic energy. Even parts of the environment itself may become nightmarish enemies. Despite the hostile world, humanoids still survive and can be encountered in various stages of existence. From feral hunters to regal murderers, humanoids can always become enemies.

## COMBAT WITH ENEMIES

As described in **Combat** (page 31), enemies do not have dice pools of their own, and they do not make skill tests. Instead, the targeted player rolls to defend. During each defense turn, each enemy can perform one move action and one attack action, in either order.

## ENEMY ATTRIBUTES

Here are some statistics templates for enemies. Equipment does not affect the statistics of the enemy, but equipment should be used as part of the description of how dangerous an enemy is. Easier enemies generally have few pieces of low-quality equipment, and harder enemies have extremely high-quality equipment. Each enemy template has three attributes:

- Its **level** depends on the number of sessions that have elapsed in the campaign, starting at level 1 in the first session. After each session, all enemies increase by 1 level as Irkalla itself feeds on the psychic energy of the Eyes Upon the Throne.
- Its estimated **difficulty** (normal, challenging, hard, deadly, or extreme) is separate from its level.
- Its estimated **size** (small, medium, large, massive, or colossal) has an associated difficulty, but this is only a guideline. An enemy of a given size can be of any difficulty.

**Normal (Small)**

**Damage:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(0 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $10 \times \text{level}$

**Challenging (Medium)**

**Damage:**  $(4 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $20 \times \text{level}$

**Hard (Large)**

**Damage:**  $(10 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(3 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $50 \times \text{level}$

**Deadly (Massive)**

**Damage:**  $(18 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(5 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $75 \times \text{level}$

**Extreme (Colossal)**

**Damage:**  $(23 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(10 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $100 \times \text{level}$

Enemies outside the scope of the templates above should be handled as obstacles without need for combat, either because the enemy poses no actual threat, or because the enemy is too powerful to fight.

Ψ **ENEMY CREATION** Ψ

Roll on each following table as you desire. Of course, you may re-roll any of the results if they're difficult to conceptualize.

**Form**

- 1 Jellyfish
- 2 Amorphous
- 3 Serpentine
- 4 Fishlike
- 5 Plant
- 6 Insectoid
- 7 Quadruped
- 8 Avian or Saurian
- 9 Slug or Snail
- 10 Humanoid

**Movement**

- 1 Fly or Glide
- 2 Swim or Burrow
- 3 Float or Levitate
- 4 Tumble
- 5 Swing or Climb
- 6 Jump or Hop
- 7 Sprint or Run
- 8 Gallop
- 9 Slither
- 10 Teleport

**Flesh**

- 1 Feathers
- 2 Fungal
- 3 Slimy
- 4 Spines
- 5 Carapace
- 6 Scales
- 7 Fur
- 8 Transparent
- 9 Cilia
- 10 Humanlike

**Head**

- 1 Fangs or Tusks
- 2 Jagged Teeth
- 3 Trunk, Long Tongue, or Tentacles
- 4 Eye Stalks
- 5 Multiple Eyes or No Eyes
- 6 Horns or Antlers
- 7 Antennae or Bristles
- 8 Crest or Hood
- 9 Pincerlike Mouth
- 10 No Head

**Aberration**

- 1 Parasites
- 2 Talons or Claws
- 3 Fins or Gills
- 4 Bone Spurs
- 5 Tail
- 6 Wings
- 7 Hooves
- 8 Bioluminescence
- 9 Multiple Limbs
- 10 Tentacles or Pseudopods

**Damage Delivery**

- 1 Organic Projectile
- 2 Bioelectricity
- 3 Miasma
- 4 Sonic Blast
- 5 Constrict
- 6 Pierce
- 7 Slash
- 8 Slam
- 9 Environment
- 10 Psychic

**Size**

- |      |          |
|------|----------|
| 1–2  | Small    |
| 3–4  | Medium   |
| 5–6  | Large    |
| 7–8  | Massive  |
| 9–10 | Colossal |

**Special (Optional)**

- 1 **Create Minion:** The enemy can create a normal enemy each turn.
- 2 **Venomous or Poisonous:** The enemy deals poison damage and/or cannot be eaten (causes death).
- 3 **Telepathic:** The enemy can communicate with other beings despite language or species barriers.
- 4 **Multiple Attacks:** The enemy can perform an extra attack each turn.
- 5 **Invisibility:** The enemy can turn invisible in some manner.
- 6 **Escape:** The enemy can remove itself from combat in some manner.
- 7 **Become Impenetrable:** The enemy can become impenetrable in some manner, but also becomes unable to perform actions.
- 8 **Regeneration:** The enemy can heal to maximum life at the start of each turn.
- 9 **Undead or Skeletal:** Vital body parts are no longer vital. The enemy can't be damaged by cold or poison damage.
- 10 **Possession:** The enemy can control another creature, performing one action each turn.

## ABILITIES FOR MASSIVE AND COLOSSAL CREATURES

**Grab:** As a move action, the enemy can grab a target, limiting its movement. The target suffers the effects of being grappled, but the grabber does not.

**Knockback:** On a successful attack, the enemy sends the target flying backwards into another object. If that object is hard, the target takes a major injury to a random body part.

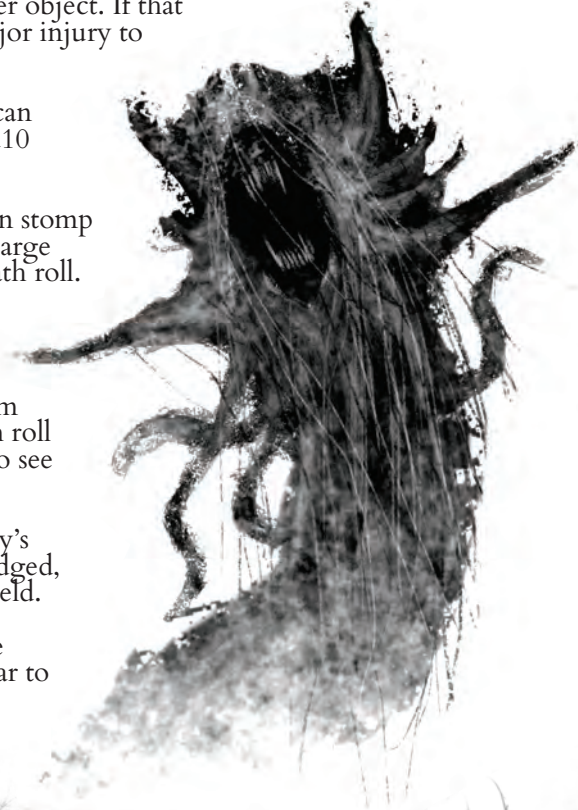
**Squeeze:** As an attack, the enemy can crush a grabbed target, dealing +3d10 damage.

**Stomp:** As an attack, the enemy can stomp on an undefended target like it's a large rodent, the target must make a Death roll.

**Swallow Whole:** As an attack, the enemy swallows an undefended target whole. Swallowed creatures cannot perform any actions and must make a Death roll when removed from the stomach to see if they survived the digestive acids.

**Unblockable (Passive):** The enemy's attacks cannot be blocked, only dodged, negating the effect of a wielded shield.

**Wide Swing:** With one attack, the enemy can hit up to five targets near to each other.





# Qliphothic Dimensions



**I**n the deepest corners of Irkalla's horrific labyrinths, one might manage to find one of the ancient grimoires of the Qliphoth. Such items are so highly sought after, so incredibly valuable, that if one were sold at auction, its price could easily buy the seller a lavish palace and private army. Though re-creations of these grimoires have been made, they are of no use, lacking any actual power. Only the Qliphothic grimoires spawned from Chaos itself have any power. These massive volumes of strange symbols can take years to decipher, and even longer to master. Once they are mastered, however, the symbols teach an elaborate ritual that includes the destruction of the book itself.

The grimoires of the Qliphoth are meant to be very rare rewards to the players, though the first book, the Umbral Script, may find its way to the player characters by means of its own maleficent sentence, the other grimoires might each require the completion of a long story arc to receive. To demonstrate the challenge associated with earning just one of these books, purchasing one would require Wealth 5, access to an auction among the most powerful individuals of Irkalla, dangerous manipulations of those individuals in an intrigue-filled social environment, and the ability to defend against agents that would all attempt to steal the book for their masters by any means necessary, including outright military strength.

## READING A GRIMOIRE

If the characters do manage to come into possession of a Qliphothic grimoire, they can read it to learn how to perform a ritual that opens a portal to a particular mindscape. There are five mindscapes, but they can only be accessed in the following sequence:

1. The Negative Plane, by reading the Umbral Script
2. The Anima Plane, by reading the Tome of Flesh
3. The Astral Plane, by reading the Book of the Dead
4. The Elder Plane, by reading the Elder Text
5. The Chaos Plane, by reading the Liber Azerate

Reading such a book requires 10 Progress (page 38). Once it's read, the character can open a portal, with the help of the other characters, by performing a ritual and ceremonial sacrifice of the grimoire. The players can describe the details of the ritual, since each ritual is meant to be personal. This ritual is an effort of psychic concentration that physically shifts the neural connections of the brain into the forms of the symbols from the grimoire.

Once the ritual is complete, all of the player characters can enter the grimoire's mindscape. One can only understand the next grimoire after entering and completing the mindscape from the previous book.

## UNLOCKING QLIPHOTHIC SPHERES

At the end of each mindscape, each player may choose to unlock the Qliphothic sphere or spheres associated with that mindscape. Unlocking a Qliphothic sphere brings with it a consequence, as follows:

- **Nahemoth:** In the Negative Plane, the character embraces their shadow, and can no longer remove Stress by any means other than by killing an innocent (any humanoid that is not an enemy in combat) for -1d10 Stress.
- **Gamaliel, Samael, Harab Serapel:** In the Anima Plane, the character destroys their soul, losing their ability to remove Doom.
- **Gha'agsheblah, Golachab, and Thagirion:** In the Astral Plane, the character decides to become the Eye Upon the Throne, permanently losing access to all specialties.
- **Daath:** In the Elder Plane, the character drinks the Philosopher's Stone, suffering Disadvantage on all physical-based skill tests.
- **Sathariel, Ghagiel, and Thaumiel:** In the Chaos Plane, the character becomes an immortal servant of Irkalla, but can no longer be nourished by food and water, and instead must survive by consuming pain and suffering.

Characters that have read the grimoire for the current mindscape do not suffer the negative effects of unlocking the Qliphothic sphere(s) from that mindscape. The decision to unlock a Qliphothic sphere is bound to the Eye Upon the Throne—death does not remove a character's Qliphothic spheres or their consequences. Choosing whether or not to unlock a Qliphothic sphere is intended to be a permanent decision. However, if a player deeply regrets their decision, they can change one decision, either by unlocking a sphere and its consequence that they had declined, or by removing a sphere and its cost that they had accepted. Each player can only ever change one decision about unlocking Qliphothic spheres.

## Ψ QLIPHOTHIC ABILITIES Ψ

Each sphere has an ability associated with it. Upon unlocking a sphere, you can use its ability as described. Using a Qliphothic ability does not require a skill test.

When you use a Qliphothic ability for the first time, write down the details of your first usage in the matching sphere on the Qliphothic Tree. This first usage becomes the only way that you can use that Qliphothic ability going forward, with the immutable details denoted with □ in the ability.

For example, if you use the Nahemoth ability the first time to cause a target to experience a beautiful dream in a tranquil landscape of bright colors, then whenever you use Nahemoth again, you can only cause a target to experience a similar dream. This is because [specific dream] is denoted as immutable in the ability's text.

The only way to change the immutable details of a Qliphothic ability is to remove the details from your mind by spending 50 XP.

**Nahemoth (nightmares):** While you are meditating or sleeping, cause a target to experience a [specific dream]. Only one target may be affected at a time.

**Gamaliel (obscenity):** Give birth to a [horrific creature] of your design that obeys you. Only one may exist at a time. This creature has the stats of a challenging enemy.

**Samael (poison):** Spawn a black cord that extends several feet from your body and into a nearby psychic, causing them to serve you for a [specific purpose] within their own capability.

**Harab Serapel (dispersion):** While you are meditating or sleeping, create a [hallucination] that affects anyone who regards you as one of their gods.

**Golachab (arson):** Manipulate an existing source of fire into a [specific shape and size].

**Thagirion (haggle):** Create a [spoken contract] between two willing parties. Failure to follow the contract traps the offender eternally in the abyss.

**Gha'agsheblah (breakage):** Shatter a [lifeless object] within sight that is smaller than you and neither worn nor wielded.

**Daath (portal):** Perform an hour-long ritual that opens a portal to [specific, known location]. Anyone who travels through this portal must make a death roll. This portal lasts for one hour.

**Sathariel (conceal):** Change the appearance of [something into something else].

**Ghagiel (hinder):** Cause [an inanimate object] to become impossible to lift.

**Thaumiel (duality):** While you are meditating or sleeping, possess and animate [an inanimate object] that remains within audible range of you.

## BECOMING AN ARCHITECT

If a character gains a Qliphothic ability in each sphere of the Qliphothic Tree, they will be able to become an Architect, creating their own universe in their mind. However, doing so means they fall asleep in Irkalla and cannot wake up. From then on, they can only interact with Irkalla through the use of Qliphothic abilities.

Becoming an Architect normally ends the story of exploring Irkalla, but it doesn't have to be the end of the story of survival. A campaign at this level would be about fighting against rival Architects, gathering psychic slaves to absorb their nightmares and increase in psychic power. The other characters could become Architects as well, or could serve and protect the lone Architect, acting as rulers of the civilization. Alternatively, the Architect could sacrifice their paradise to create a clone of another character's species for procreation. The story would then be about guaranteeing the survival of that species, beginning a story that spans several generations.

## Ψ THE PLANES Ψ

The mindscapes are portals into various psychological and philosophical concepts. They are based on medieval alchemy, regarding the theosophical quest for immortality through self-enlightenment; analytical psychological concepts such as archetypes and the shadow, the anima/animus, and the self; left-hand path philosophy with the concept of the mind containing portals to the chaos beyond the universe; and ancient religions that provide the Ur examples of demonic figures. These concepts could not adequately be explained in their entirety in this book, and though esoteric knowledge is not necessary, personal research into any of these concepts may reveal a host of inspiration for psychological horror stories.

### THE NEGATIVE PLANE

A dimension of perpetual night, filled with the reanimated dead from the character's homeworld. These are not mindless undead—they are monstrous versions of their former selves, filled with hatred for the character. The shadow represents the negative aspects of the character's psyche, and the Negative Plane is the manifestation of survivor's guilt from the character's subconscious.

The landscape is of gothic horror, a necropolis of mausoleums and crypts. The Nocturnal Garden, a manifestation of the Azerate, exists within the Negative Plane. At the climax of the Negative Plane, the character must face their shadow, a massive demon of the player's design. The character may choose to either embrace their shadow or fight against it.

Embracing the shadow gives the character access to the Nahemoth sphere, but at the cost of becoming the incarnation of the negative subconscious. The character can no longer remove Stress by any means other than by killing an innocent (any humanoid that is not an adversary in combat) for -1d10 Stress.

### THE NOCTURNAL GARDEN

Seven obese witches perform a ritual under the night sky in the center of this garden of corpses arranged to look like plants and trees. Naamah, a beautiful goddess, tends this garden. She loves the dead, and those she loves become the dead. Characters periodically gain 10 Doom while in her presence. A kiss from Naamah is instant death. The guardian of Naamah is Uridimmu, the mad lion, a humanoid that crawls on all fours,

with the head of a blood-soaked and diseased lion. Uridimmu wears Lamashtu's Adornments, an artifact of the Azerate.

## LAMASHTU'S ADORNMENTS

*Eyeballs, ears, scalps, and hair are fashioned together on thorned vines to create a grotesque, knotted collection of trophies.*

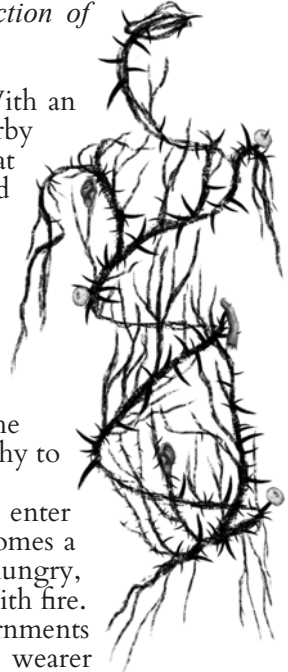
### Abilities

**Torture:** The thorned vines are a melee weapon. With an attack test, they can animate and wrap around a nearby target, dealing Weapon and Attack Damage that bypasses Armor. Their Weapon Rating is determined by its number of trophies, as described below.

**Trophy:** The artifact starts with 6 trophies (granting Weapon Rating: 6). If the Torture ability kills a target, the artifact takes a trophy and gains +1 Weapon Rating. If the vines have no trophies, the vines deal no weapon damage, but can still make Torture attacks.

**Thorns:** When taking damage from an attack, the wearer of Lamashtu's Adornments can sacrifice a trophy to deal identical damage to the attacker.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If Lamashtu's Adornments enter Irkalla, the area from the wearer to the horizon becomes a land of undeath. The dead become animated, hungry, hostile to every form of life, and can only be killed with fire. The undead do not return to death when the Adornments fall out of range. The curse will only end if the wearer spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE ANIMA PLANE

A dimension of biological material. The world's crust is a pallid flesh, with hair sticking out like trees and foliage. Rivers run with blood and pus, the sky is illuminated like a blood red sunset, bones press up against the flesh from underground, creating mountains and canyons adorned with eyeballs, leading to orifices lined with teeth and flaps of skin.

Survivors from the character's homeworld are here, the most attractive ones ever witnessed, all looking to the character as their hero and trying to help the character as best they can. The Anima Plane is stalked by horrific constructs made of rusted and patinaed metals—they cause the land to bleed, they tear apart the living. The Anima represents the soul of the character, and the Anima Plane is the manifestation of the character's biological genealogy.

The Anima Plane is home to three manifestations of the Azerate: the Eternal Womb, the Poisonous Path, and the Preserver of Life. At the climax of the Anima Plane, the character must face their soul, a genderless version of themselves that wants nothing more than to survive. The character can choose to destroy their soul, losing their ability to remove Doom, but unlocking the Gamaliel, Samael, and Harab Serapel spheres.

## THE POISONOUS PATH

A path through a forest of poisonous fungus, with venomous intestine-snakes, acid rivers, and a thick, disorienting miasma. In the center of the forest is a ruined library with torches so blindingly bright they cause headaches. Guarding the library is Basmu, a seven-headed venomous dragon without wings. Nabu the Scribe sits in the library, writing away endlessly on a tablet with Nabu's Stylus, an artifact of the Azerate.

### NABU'S STYLUS

*A void black dagger that can cut through any material.*

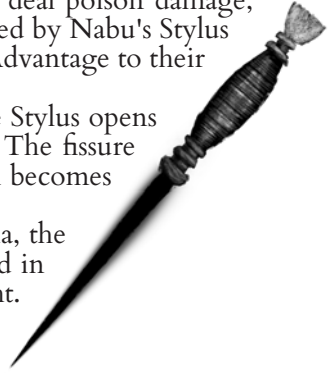
One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 37, Bulk: 0, Quality: 5

#### Abilities

**Blinding Poison:** All attacks using Nabu's Stylus deal poison damage, bypassing Armor. Additionally, any enemy damaged by Nabu's Stylus becomes blind until the end of combat, granting Advantage to their targets and attackers.

**Dark Fissure:** When stabbed into the ground, the Stylus opens a fissure the size of a wagon in front of the user. The fissure leads into an endless void, and anyone who falls in becomes trapped in the void forever.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If Nabu's Stylus enters Irkalla, the area from the user to the horizon becomes covered in clouds, causing the land to become as dark as night. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE ETERNAL WOMB

A series of flesh chutes and chambers that represent internal organs, eventually leading to a phallic and egg-shaped chamber. This chamber hosts a cacophonous orgy of demonic humanoids copulating and torturing each other, overseen by Kusarikku, a humanoid male with the head of a bull made of patinaed bronze. Kusarikku wields the Lashes of Su'en, an artifact of the Azerate.

### LASHES OF SU'EN

*A clawed, multi-tailed whip of throbbing flesh.*

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 39, Bulk: 1, Quality: 5

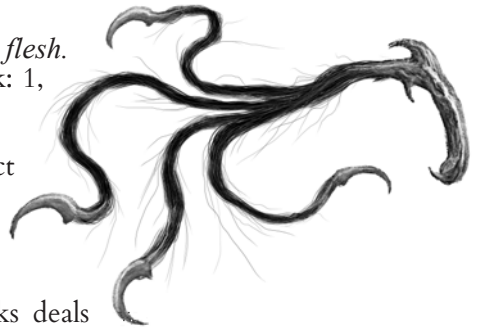
#### Abilities

**Self-Flagellation:** The bearer can inflict 1d2 grievous injuries on one of their body parts to remove 1d10 Stress.

**Clawed Tails:** The bearer can latch onto a target and pull them in.

**Nine Tails:** Each of the bearer's attacks deals damage to up to 9 nearby enemies.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If the Lashes of Su'en enter Irkalla, crops and animals grow and reproduce in hours, then die shortly afterwards. Irkalla becomes overgrown by weeds, vermin, disease, and viruses. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned.



## THE PRESERVER OF LIFE

Through a hatch, a ladder leads down to a doomsday shelter made of lead, steel, and concrete. The shelter is expansive, with generators, fuel chambers, chemical stations, water pumps, and dozens of vaults. The faceless corpses of plague victims litter the vaults, and each vault contains a catalogue of synthetic eggs of various species. In the deepest part of the vault, in what seems like a sewer, Harab Serapel festers in the darkness, a diseased humanoid dressed in a filthy cloak. Harab Serapel wears the Cloak of Dispersion, an artifact of the Azerate.

## THE CLOAK OF DISPERSION

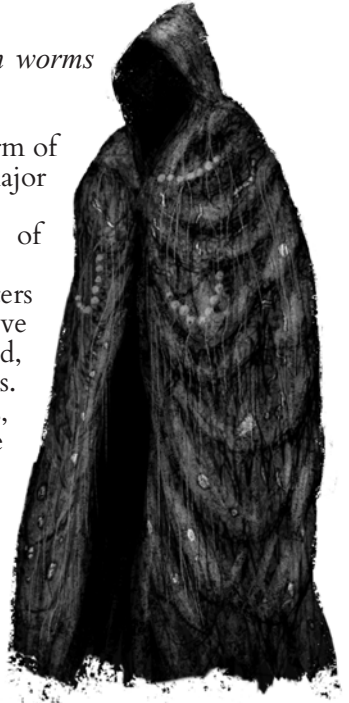
*A filthy cloak covered in mud, dust, and ash, with worms and insects crawling throughout it.*

### Abilities

**Shapeshifter:** The wearer can shapeshift into a swarm of ravens, rats, spiders, or worms at will, but takes a major injury each time.

**Swarmcaller:** The wearer can summon swarms of insects.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If the Cloak of Dispersion enters Irkalla, creatures become covered with cysts that give birth to swarms of insects. Flesh becomes mutated, and people grow additional limbs, mouths, and eyes. Irkalla becomes flooded by an infestation of insects, parasitic possession, and extreme mutations. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE ASTRAL PLANE

The Astral Plane is the gallery of the collective fears from sentient beings. Apparitions, demons, spirits, wraiths, all reside in the Astral Plane—if it has been feared, it exists here.

The Astral Plane is aphotic, with spectral cobwebs that form a cave-like structure, only illuminated by the light cast by astral travelers. The denizens of the Astral Plane are drawn to the light, though they do not feed off the death of the traveler, they feed off the fear.

The ghosts of all past characters can be found here. Mundane equipment has no effect in the Astral Plane; only artifacts are of any use here.

At the end of the Astral Plane, the character faces the Eye Upon the Throne, an obscure, faceless being that is shrouded in dark robes. This confrontation forces the character to choose who remains in control of their physical body: the psychic or the Endling. The character must choose to either remain as they are or become the Eye Upon the Throne. Choosing to become the Eye Upon the Throne causes the character to permanently lose access to all specialties, but unlocks the Gha'agsheblah, Golachab, and Thagirion spheres on the Qliphothic Tree.

## THE ASHEN CITY

A city that was burned alive in a volcanic eruption, with all its inhabitants turned into pyroclastic statues, their tormented spirits wandering the ruins. Also wandering the ruins is a lone survivor, Ugallu the Beast, a lion-headed man with talons for feet, who wears protective amulets, figurines, and warding marks of yellow clay that he believes give him good luck. He wields a mace and a dagger and wears Nergal's Mask, an artifact of the Azerate.

### NERGAL'S MASK

*A mask of a roaring lion, with a voidspace behind its mouth.*

Weapon Rating: 33, Bulk: 4, Quality: 5

#### Abilities

**Belch Fire:** Creates a stream of fire, smoke, or ash from the lion's mouth, treating the mask like a weapon that deals fire damage.

**Fire Immunity:** The wearer of Nergal's Mask is immune to fire and heat.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If Nergal's Mask enters Irkalla, the area from the wearer to the horizon becomes volcanic. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE LIVING CAVES

A cave with a forest of fungus, made from the spectral cobwebs that form the structure of the Astral Plane. The rocks and the fungus of the plane bubble and boil, bursting and exploding with ghostly spores. In the center of the cave is a lake of dead fish, with the colossal demonic dragon Asag sitting in the center of it, so hideous that anyone who looks at it must make a death roll. Asag does not wield an artifact of the Azerate, but is already in battle with the mythological mace: Sar'ur. The mace cannot defeat Asag alone, but may telepathically communicate with the characters so they might.

### SAR'UR

*The destroyer of thousands. A gilded one-handed mace with several ornate demonic faces that form the heavy head.*

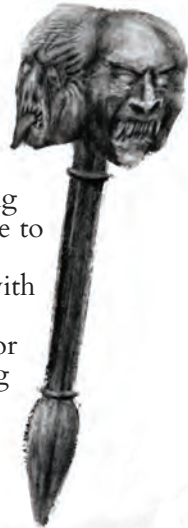
One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 43, Bulk: 4, Quality: 5

#### Abilities

**Ghost Wielder:** Sar'ur may fly on its own, as if being wielded by an invisible warrior. The owner does not have to carry or hold Sar'ur, ignoring its Bulk.

**Communicate:** Sar'ur may communicate telepathically with its owner(s).

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If Sar'ur enters Irkalla, it thirsts for destruction, and will attack anything nearby, including the owner. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE GREAT MOUNTAIN-PYRAMID

Across the waters of death that only a ferryman can navigate, beneath the thunderstorm ash cloud erupting from the great mountain-pyramid. The tomb of Atrahasis can be found deep in the volcanic chambers of the mountain-pyramid. Atrahasis's mummified remains are hollow. He possesses a pale corpse in a molten suit of armor, and wields Imhullu, an artifact of the Azerate.

### IMHULLU

*An amorphous weapon that appears to be made of blackened, shifting, and dripping lava.*

#### Abilities

**Reshape:** Imhullu can be transformed into any melee weapon shape, using these stats:

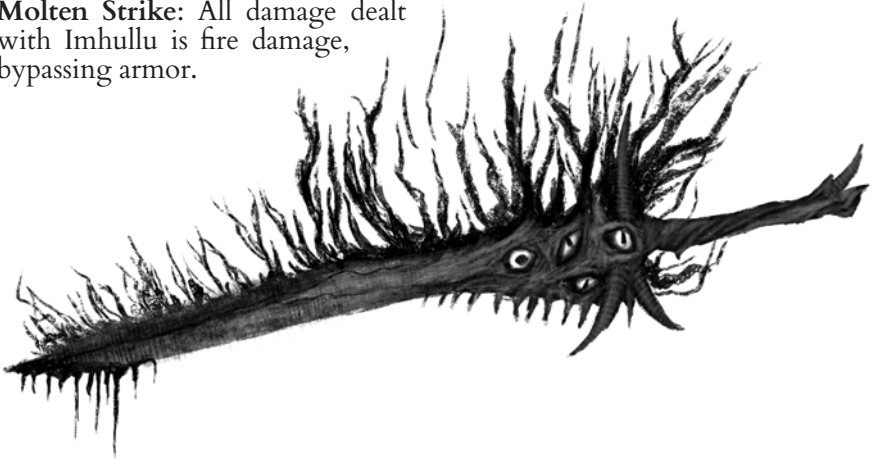
**One-Handed—Bulk:** 10, Weapon Rating: 50, Quality: 5

**Two-Handed—Bulk:** 10, Weapon Rating: 65, Quality: 5

**Wind Blast:** As an attack, create a blast of wind that blows the target in a direction and to a distance of your choice.

**Dimensional Attack:** The wielder can attack from any distance, so long as the target is visible.

**Molten Strike:** All damage dealt with Imhullu is fire damage, bypassing armor.



## THE ELDER PLANE

A dimension of emptiness. The wastes—an empty silver sky, a flat grey silver surface. The Elder Plane is endless; it takes a lifetime to travel to the horizon, but another horizon exists beyond that. The denizens of the Elder Plane are generally colossal, elephantine creatures that travel on some unfathomable pilgrimage, entirely indifferent to the presence of humanoid characters. This plane is lifeless, dull, melancholic, and boring. The only thing of interest is the other travelers, each bound to travel in one direction different from those of the other pilgrims. It is impossible to turn left or right, and it is impossible to go backwards, as if gravity prevents it. Any pilgrim that crosses paths would gladly stop to talk for a while about existential concepts, musings about time and space, or any other philosophical, intellectual, reality-questioning topic.

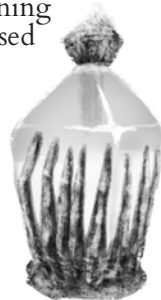
The Elder Plane ends when the character has traveled to extremely old age. Having wandered the wastes for many lifetimes, the character has become elderly in form, ancient in mind. And at the end of the journey is the fountain of youth. Sitting by the fountain is the dark god Belial, a wretched being of worthlessness, offering very little in terms of advice. All he can say is that this is the fountain of youth, and this is the Philosopher's Stone, revealing a pure decanter. He does not know what these things mean, he only knows their names. The character must choose to either drink from the fountain of youth (returning to their normal state) or drink the Philosopher's Stone (remaining ancient in form, suffering Disadvantage on all physical-based skill tests, and unlocking the Daath sphere).

### THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

*A decanter of pure white luminous liquid.*

#### Abilities

**Transmutation:** The wielder can gain 1 Stress to place 5 imbuelements and an enchantment on an item. This Stress is permanent carries over from character to character.



### THE CHAOS PLANE

An amorphous dimension of gravitational anomalies, floating islands, an endless space of demonic eyes and mouths with wormholes and portals that can only be seen from certain angles, and horrific entities in the distance that could swallow planets whole. Staircases, walkways, chasms, and other passages lead through the chaos, though the characters can travel in any direction, and may change anything about themselves. They are unbound from the laws of the cosmos. Were it not for this true freedom, they would be destroyed in every imaginable fashion.

They may find the ruling trinity of the Azerate here, in the planet Nibiru, the Flooded Depths, and the Black Hole. Ultimately, characters will face Ereshkigal, the archetypal goddess that rules over Irkalla, in her drab tomb of lifelessness. When facing Ereshkigal, the characters may choose to become part of Irkalla by pledging allegiance to her, becoming immortal and gaining access to the Sathariel, Ghagiel, and Thaumiel spheres, but they can no longer be nourished by food and water, and instead must survive by consuming pain and suffering.

### THE BLACK LABYRINTH

A massive labyrinth of five dungeons. The dungeon suppresses any sources of light, so the characters are essentially blind. Lucifuge, the furtive ruler of the Black Labyrinth, hides in a secret chamber wearing Adaru's Veil. Acting as guardian of Lucifuge is Lahamu, a hermaphroditic goat-headed humanoid covered in long and tendriled black hair.

## ADARU'S VEIL

*A funeral shroud that conceals the identity of the wearer, with dozens of eyes seen beneath the veil, and goat horns emerging from the top.*

### Abilities

**True Vision:** With the dozens of eyeballs underneath the funeral shroud, the wearer is immune to blindness and can see in all directions, see invisibility, and see in darkness.

**Anti-Cosmic Curse:** If Adaru's Veil enters Irkalla, the night sky becomes visible in the area above the wearer. The sky is strange, however, as the stars seem to look back at their gazers. Astronomical events such as meteor showers, planetary impacts, solar flares, supernovae, and gamma rays start to impact Irkalla. The curse will only end if the character spends 100 XP to become attuned to the artifact.



## THE FLOODED DEPTHS

Out in the darkest areas of the Chaos Plane, aphotic ruins similar to the abyss of the deep ocean form the flooded depths. Large creatures swim through the murk. Absu sits upon his throne, holding the Thaumielitan Trident. The Thaumielitan Trident may only be wielded by the weakest of the player characters (the one who has died the most, or has the least XP).

### THAUMIELITAN TRIDENT

*A blackened metal trident wrapped in black snakes, burning with black flame.*

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 53, Bulk: 7, Quality: 5

#### Abilities

**Deluge of Delusional Dreams:** Cutting through reality causes the world to suffer a death cataclysm, as Absu bleeds into the world and leaves traces of another universe in its wake. The details of this other universe are of the bearer's design, or of a nightmare dimension.

**Black Fire:** All damage dealt with the Thaumielitan Trident is fire damage, bypassing armor.



## THE BLACK HOLE

Through the event horizon, Tiamat, the mother of all chaos, swims in the infinite sea. She will only grant the Thaumielitan Crown to the Architect who has displayed the most immorality.

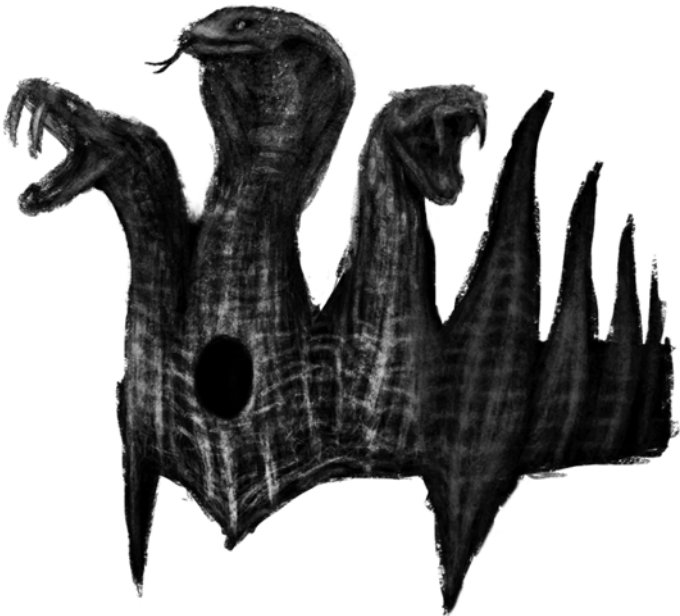
### THAUMIELITAN CROWN

*A blackened metal crown of three dragons, with a black gem of Absu on display.*

#### Abilities

**Legions of the Black Light:** At night, the bearer can summon an army of the dead that is several hundred strong (d10 x 100). The army will only last until dawn.

**Black Hole:** The bearer can open a gravitational anomaly that pulls nearby targets into it. The targets must make great effort to escape the gravitational pull.





# Game Master's Guide



**A**s the Game Master (GM), you are the portal for the players into the fictional world of the game. Your words represent the feedback from this world. You'll show the world by describing what the characters perceive. If there is one thing to know, it is that you are the world of Xas Irkalla. The players will only experience it through you. To fulfill your role effectively though, there are a number of important elements you'll have to learn.

## Ψ THE ESSENTIALS Ψ

### **Speak to the players as equals**

You are the Game Master, which means you are the master of the game world, but the facilitator to the players. Be fair and courteous to them, but also decisive. You'll have the final say over anything in the game. You will give challenges to the players and their characters, but you are not their adversary.

### **Play the game everyone wants to play**

Be straightforward with your players about what this game is before you start playing. If everyone is onboard, begin the game as you explained it. Stay as true to that description as possible, but pay careful attention to which things the players do not enjoy. Not everything is for everyone. But remember, as much as it is your responsibility to make the game fun for the players, the game must also be fun for you. Try to find a balance between what you enjoy and what your players enjoy.

### **Understand your players**

Try to understand a player's intentions when they ask questions or want their character to act. If their intentions are not obvious, don't be afraid to ask. It's very important not to assume, since unclear actions could lead to a character doing something that they did not intend.

### **Listen to your players**

Not only should you listen to your players to be courteous, but also to get ideas. You will have to be creative yourself, but the players are creative too, and are great for ready inspiration. When they make comments about what they think, consider how you can add their ideas into the game without them knowing it. Pretend as if it were always that way.

### **Don't script the story, let the game tell it**

Don't construct a rigid plotline that must advance a certain way. You might predict where the players will go, but you can't actually know until they choose. It is a good idea to plan ahead, but be willing to expect the unexpected. Remember this: nothing actually exists in the game until the characters experience it. You can save your ideas and use them at any

point where they fit. Even if you have a plotline, you must allow the players to interrupt your plans. Your job is not to decide the fate of the characters, but to give them challenges and let the players decide their own fate.

### **Present true choices**

Speaking as a character is acting, and sometimes this can help you get into the mindset of a character, but the truth about roleplaying is that choices define who someone is. Characters must be presented with choices that have consequences. Actions speak louder than words. Ultimately, you want to provide the players with scenarios that let them make decisions for their characters. You do not have to consider all of the options, but you'll always want to have at least one solution that the characters can accomplish. If a player does not have any decisions to make, or if their only choices have obvious decisions, then the scene must change to give the players more or better decisions.

### **Give three details in a description**

Since you are the only proxy the players have into the world, you must describe the world. Give these details to the players through the eyes of their characters, addressing each player as their character, and allow them to imagine the world from their character's perspective. To do this, you must visualize the scene. It is important to include at least three descriptive words. Three details is enough to give an image of the scene, and anything beyond that reshapes the player's mental image, which you should allow the players to influence any time they ask a question about the scene.

### **Say yes, or call for judgement**

A good way to keep players engaged is to let them take ownership of the game. If a player wants to do or try something that makes sense, allow it! If you're not sure, ask the other players what they think. This lets the players decide what type of game they want to play. However, keep in mind that this game is intended to have dark and gritty themes, and if the players want to play a very different sort of game, this system might not fit.

### **Ask questions**

The most common question you will ask is "What do you do?" But you are not limited to that. Once you've established the themes of the game and the players have a strong grasp on the world, then asking questions about the world and inviting the players to share their creativity will help them feel connected to the game. For example, "You have finally reached the top of the mountain. As you gaze upon the horizon, what do you see?" "The streets of the market are busy and loud—is there anything in particular that you overhear?" Don't force them to contribute, but always leave the option open.

### **Encourage soliloquy**

A good way to increase immersion is to ask a player to narrate their character's internal talk, thoughts, and feelings. Try to ask this when it is the player's turn in the spotlight, and allow them to narrate their soliloquy as they succeed or fail on an important action.

### **Only roll the dice when necessary**

When a player describes an action their character would like to attempt, consider whether or not a dice roll will be necessary. If the action is possible but might be disastrous, a dice roll should determine the outcome. If there's no risk of disaster, then the action should automatically succeed. If the action is impossible, then the action should fail.

### **Make failure and defeat an option**

If a character suffers a Disaster, it is important to follow through with the threat of danger. You must not be afraid to deal out consequences if the player made an educated decision based on plenty of clues. Disaster should tell a story about failure or defeat and place the character in a much worse situation than before.

### **Telegraph all risks**

Anytime a character suffers a consequence, it should be the direct result of their player's decision. Give many obvious clues about risks, so the players can make actual decisions. If a player does not know the risks involved in an action, then you're tricking them, and any consequence their character may suffer is your fault, not theirs.

### **Make resources available but risky**

Similar to telegraphing, you should always provide the characters with the option to attain resources with a known risk. Otherwise, you've trapped them. When you give the offer, be sure to provide clues of both the possibility and the risk involved. If it's easy to get a resource, then do not bother asking the players to keep track of it.

### **Demonstrate the world through actions**

As writers say: "Show, don't tell." Do not give a speech about the details of the world. Instead, let the players discover these details naturally. You can show them the world by having it act on the characters. For example, instead of telling the players that there is a sorcerer cult living on the mountainside, let the players find this out over time as they explore and come across clues.

### **Give clues freely**

Make sure you give players the clues they need to solve a puzzle or mystery. A puzzle is not about finding the clues, but about figuring out what the clues mean. Never hide a clue from the characters, and always allow them to uncover clues without risk of missing them. However, feel free to provide false clues every once in a while.

### **Make the world move without the characters**

Even though nothing actually exists until the players experience it, you can still provide depth to the game by having the world continue to operate even while the characters aren't interacting with it. You should consider what is happening beyond what is around the characters. Something in the distance could really affect the world.

### **Consider the characters' impact**

In the same way that the world should impact the characters, the characters may impact the world. Imagine how the world has been and could be influenced by the characters. This can be of any magnitude, and sometimes a small action can cause a massive change.

### Splitting the party

If players decide to take their characters on different routes, think about how comfortable you are with consistently providing decision points to multiple groups at the same time. Try not to spend more time on one group than the other, and never let a player go uninvolved for more than five to ten minutes. If this seems too difficult, then politely explain that they may choose to split up, but that you have realistic limitations as a human being and might not be able to provide them all with much of a game.

## Ψ THE SKILLS OF THE GM Ψ

As a GM, the success of the game rests on your shoulders. You'll have to utilize many skills to be a good GM, and there are plenty of books with advice on Game Mastery. Here you will find overviews of the three most important skills that I believe a GM should have: narration, handling skill tests, and pacing.

### THE ART OF NARRATION

As the GM, you will have to narrate and describe scenes. There are four types of narration—description, resolution, transition, and argumentation.

**Description** relates to narration of the scenery, obstacles, and objects. When you narrate a scene to the players, Description is your opportunity to immerse the players in the scene. Visualize the scene in your head the best you can so you can give details, but try to condense your description down to the three details that communicate the most about the scene. After three details, the human mind already starts imagining things on its own, so the next few details will likely be ignored. The art of Description comes from using powerful adjectives such as crumbling, megalithic, overgrown, and pristine.

**Resolution** is the narration of outcomes, generally the outcomes of skill tests, so as the GM, this is also the Art of Skill Tests. When narrating Resolution, keep in mind the logical consequences of a given outcome. A good practice is to communicate cause and effect—for example, “The creature’s massive limb crashes into a stalactite, which crumbles and sends debris flying.”

**Transition** is the movement from scene to scene. Generally, Transitions are used for movement from location to location, or for the passage of time, but it can apply whenever a scene is ending. Narrating a Transition simply requires you to recognize the end of a scene, and for you to transition to the next one, providing any important details about how the characters arrive at the next scene.

**Argumentation** is what many people call roleplaying. This type of narration is entirely in dialogue and interaction. The key for you to remember here is to think of how people and creatures realistically act. There is a tendency to treat characters and creatures as plot devices, but to provide a deep and engaging game, you must really consider the motivations of any creature the player characters encounter, and act realistically from those motivations. You don’t have to speak in a different voice when acting as a character, but this is the type of narration that allows it if you decide to do so.

## THE ART OF SKILL TESTS

The most important lesson for handling skill tests is to only roll the dice when a consequence is possible. Imagine if a player attempts an action that doesn't have a consequence and you make them roll the dice... What happens if they roll a disaster? If there's no consequence, then the entire roll was a waste of time. The character should have been able to succeed at the action without bothering to roll any dice.

The second most important lesson is to only allow skill tests when the players all think an action could succeed. If the action isn't possible in the first place, then there shouldn't be a dice roll. This becomes a bit trickier, though, since what is and isn't possible relies on the collective judgment of the players at the table. In other games, it may be realistic for a character to fly to the moon or break through a wall, but this game is intended to be gritty and relies on everyone to keep it that way. First decide if you think an action is realistically possible. If you don't think it's possible, ask the players if they think it is. Allow the players to have their say. Listen to your players and keep an open mind, but ultimately you have the final say.

### A NOTE ON THE SKILL SYSTEM

*The last matter of skill tests is to allow players to use rank-1 specialties both as independent words and as descriptions of their characters' backgrounds. For example, a character that came from a Desperate people can use Desperate (+1) in any situation that the word applies to, such as Desperately avoiding an attack. And perhaps those Desperate people farmed and harvested in rotten conditions, allowing the character to use Desperate for farming or harvesting. It could even represent a state of mind, allowing the character to deal with despair since they are used to being in Desperate situations. Rank 1 specialties only give small bonuses, so allow the players to be creative with them.*

Your job as GM is not to decide the fate of the characters, but to create obstacles and let the players and their dice rolls decide the fate of their characters. An obstacle could be an environment, a person, a creature, a trap, a puzzle, or anything else you can think of. Between obstacles, where players won't be interacting or making any meaningful decisions, narrate and get them to the next obstacle.

You should, however, think about the consequences that the players will face from their decisions. Here are some examples.

#### Examples of minor consequences:

- Adversary performs an action
- Environment becomes more dangerous
- Take an injury
- Weapon requires attention (reload, unjam, gets stuck in environment, etc.)
- Damage equipment, lowering its Quality by 1

#### Examples of severe consequences:

- Take a mortal injury
- Get separated from the group
- Run out of ammo
- Break or lose an item
- Alert the enemy

When a player asks if something exists in a scene, pause and consider if it fits. Try to include it, but feel free to add a downside. If it doesn't fit, try to offer an alternative that does.

## THE ART OF PACING AND TENSION

Pacing is the speed at which events happen in the story. When the pace is fast, there is action after action. When the pace is slow, there might not be any action. Your skill in managing pace comes from knowing how much detail to impart at a given time, and knowing how to fluctuate the pace from slow to fast and back again.

In fast-paced scenes, you should speak fast, with urgency, with only important details, and move things along quickly by asking each player what they do. If they don't answer quickly, move on to the next player. I try to think of this mode as hyper mode.

In slow-paced scenes, you get an opportunity to really immerse the players by giving plenty of details and allowing each player to describe their character's internal monologue, exposing portions of the story.

It is important to fluctuate the pace, as keeping things slow will make things very boring, but keeping things fast will exhaust the players and yourself. Balance the slow scenes with fast scenes, and put some medium-paced scenes in there as well. To do this, you'll have to recognize the different tension levels of your scenes.

Tension is the measurement of risk in a scene. The higher the risk, the higher the tension. In a slow-paced scene, the tension should be low, so there should be very little risk. In a fast-paced scene, the tension should be high, so there should be plenty of risk. Medium-paced scenes are a little more tricky, as they require high risk to create tension, but there should not be more than one or two risks.

Pacing and tension are linked and should be fluctuated similarly. Generally, the story should gradually rise from a slow pace to a climax with a fast pace and high tension, and then release the tension and transition to a slow-paced scene. However, there is no strict narrative structure to follow, and you can create your own flow of pace and tension as you see fit. As a suggestion, though, the Hero's Quest, or Monomyth, has been the most popular narrative structure throughout history.

You'll find more advice for creating scenes to modulate tension in **Creating Locations** (page 108).

## Ψ HORROR Ψ

Similar to pacing and tension, horror requires fluctuation and moderation, though horror is directly linked to a gradual build-up of tension and pace. This section describes the suggested method for creating horror scenarios.

### **Start with a normal setting**

Describe a scenario that is grounded in reality, generally with low tension. Picture the location in your mind's eye with as much detail as possible, as if it is a real place and you are in virtual reality, able to describe it to the players so they might picture something similar.

### **Create strange details**

As the players explore, allow them to notice strange details. Things that make the scene's normalcy become weird. These oddities should hint at the nature of the horror, but they may be abstract and don't necessarily have to make sense—it is fine for a weird detail to remain unexplained.

### **Foreshadow**

Once the players have seen at least one strange detail, you can start giving clues about the horror that are a bit more heavy-handed. Foreshadow the threat by demonstrating how this threat has impacted the world. This should confirm the players' suspicions that something is wrong and there is in fact a danger nearby. It can be in the environment, in the actions of creatures or people, or in the perception of the characters.

### **Hidden danger**

The threat is real and it is coming right now. It is clawing at the barricade, it is crawling toward you, it is coming... But you can't see all of its details. The hidden danger is a very real, active threat, and it is clear that it is coming, but the players do not know what exactly it is yet.

### **Revelation**

This is the crescendo of horror, where the tension reaches its critical point and climaxes as the horror is revealed. The players will now face the source of the horror. Keep the descriptions visceral, focused on sensory details. Instead of describing everything, highlight disturbing aspects of the horror to imply its true nature. Never describe the full picture, always imply.

## TYPES OF HORROR

The wastelands are host to the horrors of a malevolent universe, and of people reduced to their bestial impulses. In the slave cities it is either the same as a den of drug addicts that have lost their frontal lobe and have no moral compass, or the same as a tyrannical holocaustic death camp filled with propaganda to make the laborers more afraid of the outside world than of their current situation. In the labyrinths, the horror draws upon the surreal, but also the thematic fears of the Architect, manifesting those fears into personifications, among the most repulsive that come to mind.

## THEMES OF SURVIVAL HORROR

**Helplessness:** The characters are not as powerful as in other games. There is no guarantee that enemies can be defeated. The characters may be able to defend themselves, but there is no guarantee that they can defeat their enemies. A weapon that may be sufficient to cut down a horde of enemies in another genre is only strong enough to kill one or two enemies.

**Desperation:** There must be some shred of hope that the characters can latch onto. Though the setting may exude hopelessness and futility, if there is absolutely no hope, then there is no point in continuing. The character's survival determines whether their species goes extinct or not, and the possibility must always exist that the character can find a way to save their species.

**Isolation:** Being alone is typically scary. The characters have nobody left alive from their world, and when they do encounter other people from their world, they are only ghosts. The people of Irkalla view the characters as aliens, often with hostility. The only real sense of community comes from the other characters, and working with them as a group will be the most efficient way to survive. Any character that goes off alone should feel their chance of survival severely diminish, as danger surrounds the lone character and makes them vulnerable.

**Tension:** The primary source of tension in any scene is the amount of risk associated with it. The other source of tension comes from managing Stress and Doom, as well as measuring how many dice to roll, and deciding what skill tests are worthwhile. The risk of something terrible happening is generally the driving force of tension, though this cannot be sustained forever. It must be removed and slowly built up again, or else players will become overwhelmed.

**Uncertainty:** The horror is never completely revealed, the picture left unclear. Darkness itself is not scary—it is what could be in the darkness that is scary. Characters only get glimpses of the horror, even when facing it head-on. The appearance of a wolf is not described; the howls in the distance are heard, then there are the many glowing eyes, then the bared rows of bloodied teeth, the smell of wet fur, the ear-deafening barking, the putrid stench of breath and the sound of teeth slamming against teeth. Never are they called their names, they are called things, its, creatures... The truth is never revealed, only implied.

**Psychology:** The story explores the nature of horror and existence. Morality and the instinct to survive are constantly at odds, causing the characters to face the possibility that they are also monsters, or to sympathize with the beings they kill. A deeper, existential meaning in the story can be a lingering source of horror that frightens the players just as they think about it.

**Confusion:** The characters and the players are not sure why things are happening. They will have to explore and piece together clues to find the truth—though, as per the rule of uncertainty, the truth will never be completely revealed, only implied.

**Claustrophobia:** The characters are stuck in their situation, but never forced into it. There seems to be the constant presence of something oppressive, and even if they confront it, they will then feel the pressure of some other force. This presence may ebb and flow depending on the tension, and should dissipate when the characters are given breaks from the tension and horror. It's being confined to the light of a campfire because of what moves in the darkness, or being unable to travel far due to a lack of vessels for carrying water.

## Ψ KNOWING YOUR PLAYERS Ψ

As the GM, you need to know how to facilitate. You can do this by gradually identifying the things that the players enjoy. Most players are not aware of what they like, and it might take some guessing and trial-and-error to figure it out. Recognize that some players like to engage with the game, and some players like to watch. There is no wrong way for someone to play, as long as they are having fun (and aren't ruining anyone else's fun).

## Ψ REWARDING THE CHARACTERS Ψ

You can reward characters with various items, XP, or other beneficial things, and balancing rewards is a very important aspect of the longevity of a game. If you give too many rewards too quickly, the players won't have much to work toward. If you give too few rewards, the players will become discouraged.

You can balance the rate of reward by asking yourself several questions: Did the player work hard or put their character at risk to get this reward? Do you want the player to keep behaving like they did? Can they look forward to more rewards, better than this, that this reward hints at? Consider how long you want your campaign to be, as you should try to leave something for the players to strive for until the end of the campaign.

## Ψ CREATING ADVENTURES Ψ

As a GM, you are partially a game designer. You create scenarios for the characters to face. And essentially, an adventure is a series of scenes linked together with a narrative structure, and a campaign is a series of adventures linked together.

So to build an adventure, you need to know how to create a scene. Ask yourself: What is the point of this scene? Is it to challenge the players with a puzzle? Is it to tell the players details about the world? Is it to see if the characters survive? If you can answer that, then you can identify what to put in the scene. A puzzle, a map, a monster, a trap, an old traveler, etc.

## THE CAMPAIGN ARC

The characters begin in a labyrinth of unrelenting horror brought about by the nightmares of the Architect and their psychic slaves. They will have to survive and escape this labyrinth to face the wasteland outside. There, in the wasteland, they will have to search for water and scavenge for resources, find or build shelter, and survive in the face of the unforgiving landscape.

Once they have established shelter, they might attract other survivors to form a settlement, or they might continue to travel the world. If they form a settlement, they might build workshops to make items that will prepare them for longer journeys. Someone traveling the world without proper supplies will be in a constant struggle to survive, and may end up starving to death or expiring from thirst or exposure.

Exploring the world will inevitably lead to encounters with wasteland tribes and slave cities. Eventually, the characters may gather enough clues about their situation to learn the truth: that they are the only survivors from their world, that this is not a dream, and that there can be no return to their past lives.

In the default campaign, the ultimate goal of the characters is to find a way to save their species, explore other dimensions to unlock the secrets of the Qliphoth, and become Architects. A campaign is meant to last several months of real time, but may even last several years. The story is also meant to be of epic length, with the characters perhaps even dying of old age and passing on their knowledge. More likely, however, the characters will die of other causes before old age can take them. Even so, any occult knowledge is maintained from one character to the next, as the psychic in the subconscious continues to exist.

## ALTERING THE MOOD

A powerful tool for creating horror is starting a location at low or medium tension and then increasing the tension by blackening the atmosphere. The wood peels, the ground starts to bleed, the sounds of gnashing teeth and screams fill the air, the people twist and convulse, the shadows form into void-like entities. The lovable hermit stumbles into the village holding his entrails, begs for help, then collapses into the mud, and a faint slurping sound comes from his body as his intestines start to slither their way out from under him, snaking toward a child lying wounded on the ground nearby.

## Ψ CREATING LOCATIONS Ψ

A location should be designed to meet a purpose in the narrative, and this purpose relates to the amount of tension required. Moving between low, medium, and high tension throughout a campaign is necessary to achieve balance. Too much of one intensity would eliminate the tension as the players adjust to what seems normal. The key to building tension is making the game's intensity unpredictable.

At **low tension**, a location should be relatively safe, with non-hostile NPCs. The primary low-tension location in Irkalla is the wasteland during the day. Vast and lifeless, this place is meant to bring forward the feeling of bleak hopelessness.

At **medium tension**, a location should be precarious, with danger in the periphery. Typically these locations have adversaries nearby, posing the possibility of injury or death. Perhaps there is a pit with howls coming from it or an abattoir of swinging meat hooks with a flickering light and something moving in the shadows. The primary medium-tension locations in Irkalla are the labyrinths.

At **high tension**, a location should be blatantly dangerous, demonstrating a direct threat of injury or death. These locations are typically places of horror, gore, and displays of revulsion, with some adversary or the environment trying to kill the characters. The primary high-tension locations of Irkalla are the darkness at night and the nightmares of witches.

## NATURAL OBSTACLES

At **low tension**, natural obstacles should be flat, wide-open wastelands, large bodies of water, long roads, deserts, mazes, and other vast or difficult landscapes.

At **medium tension**, natural obstacles should be places of possible disaster such as swamps or wetlands, narrow canyons or ledges.

At **high tension**, natural obstacles should be places of extreme danger such as volcanic craters, frozen peaks, passes with hazardous winds, seismic chasms, flooding caves, or spiked pits with icicles, stalactites, or even teeth, among other natural places twisted into the surreal, such as a forest of living trees or a mountain of living rock formations.

## WASTELAND TRIBES

At **low tension**, tribes should be peaceful, have access to food, and be centered on arts and crafts.

At **medium tension**, tribes should not be immediately hostile to the player characters, but may resort to violence. Generally they'll have a dark side, such as cannibalism or harsh consequences for transgressions, or may be facing a hardship that will affect the player characters, such as raids from Architect soldiers, war with rival tribes, or the nightmares of a witch.

At **high tension**, tribes should be vile and extremely violent, with sacrifices and cannibalism, powerful witches, and warfare.

Consider the tribe's available resources to determine what types of buildings and clothing and items they have. Typically, their items are made of bone, rawhide, leathered hide, spun hair, twigs, stone, leathered sinew, teeth, ears, scalps, fingers, shrunk heads, skulls, wood, horns, and antlers.

Likewise, consider their environment to determine their mythology—for example, an oceanic tribe would generally have aquatic gods, while a forest tribe would have woodland gods.

## SLAVE CITIES

At **low tension**, slave cities should have a benevolent Architect that provides illusions of paradise to the people. Though the people may be disturbing in their public display of pleasure and their generally unkempt appearances, they are unlikely to be very threatening or xenophobic.

At **medium tension**, slave cities shouldn't necessarily be xenophobic, but there should be a catch. The people might be ruled by an Architect who demands fealty, or the Architect suffers from nightmares that trickle down into the population, or the Architect is tyrannical and the city has strict laws, or there is some horrific threat that consumes the population. These cities should not be paradise, but they should not be hell either.

At **high tension**, slave cities should be xenophobic, with outright hatred for outsiders, militaristic discipline, frightened and downtrodden populations, illusions and imagery of horror to inflict fear upon its people and others, and absolutely impressive architecture that makes use of disturbing materials such as corpses, biomatter, or living creatures.

Consider the technology and signature architecture of the civilization, such as pyramids, ziggurats, cave or cliff dwellings, dams and aqueducts, pillars and archways, castles and fortresses, stone megaliths, and statues or bas-reliefs. Consider also their military, armor and weaponry, clothing, currency, food, and culture.

## LABYRINTHS

At **low tension**, labyrinths should be filled with surreal puzzles and echoes (page 61), which may provide intrigue or exposition without tangible threat, only their ghastly desire to convince the living to stay within reach.

At **medium tension**, labyrinths should be filled with a variety of both natural and surreal obstacles such as zero gravity, voidscapes, non-Euclidean geometries, and alien architectures.

At **high tension**, labyrinths should be filled with death and doom, with dangers everywhere—acid lakes, deadly traps, horrific monsters, demon-infested hellscapes, living torture chambers, and any other nightmare imaginable.

Consider the life and dreams of the psychics who died and birthed these places. Use imagery from their past to tell a story of their psyche, especially with archetypal events such as birth, childhood, adulthood, marriage, separation, old age, death; archetypal figures such as the hero, the mentor, the guardian, the innocent, the demon, the lover; and archetypal motifs such as the hero's journey, the journey to the underworld, the deluge, or the slaying of the monster. An adventure through a labyrinth may be its own story, irrespective to the world of Irkalla—a labyrinth may contain its own world.

## Ψ THEMES Ψ

The lore of Xas Irkalla provides a backdrop for dark locations. Use the themes of Irkalla to create the proper atmosphere, or use the opposite to contrast it in a dream or illusion.

- Bleak, hopeless landscape
- Grey, foggy atmosphere
- Untold horrors lurking in the darkness
- People have become animalistic for survival
- Cannibalism and sacrifices are normal
- Slavery is common, people are treated like cattle
- Wildlife is scarce, humans are dangerous and xenophobic
- Most materials come from living beings, such as leather hide and bone
- Witches are feared and hunted
- Ruling malevolently creates disciplined beauty, while ruling benevolently creates hedonism and sloppiness
- Labyrinths are surreal and do not have to obey the rules of the universe
- Irkalla itself is alive and wants to perpetuate the suffering of its inhabitants

## Ψ TELLING A SURVIVAL STORY Ψ

Building a Fire is an archetypal survival story, which can serve as a great example of a plot framework in an effective survival story. Use skill tests to create a survival story by constantly considering how things could go wrong, as described in the example story below.

*Start with a Lingering Problem*

It is extremely cold in the mountains.

*Add an Immediate Threat*

He falls into water up to his shins. His feet begin to suffer frostbite.

*Provide a Temporary Solution*

He needs to build a fire, and he finds fallen branches nearby. He starts a fire.

*Destroy the Solution*

As he unties his shoes, the snow on the tree limb above falls and extinguishes the fire.

*Pressure Resources*

He needs to build another fire, but cannot find much kindling. He uses all of his matches to no avail.

*Force a Final Attempt*

Frostbite is no longer the issue, and he now faces death. He tries to run onward, but eventually collapses from exhaustion and dies.

## Ψ WHAT HAPPENS AT NIGHT Ψ

As the characters witness their first nightfall in Irkalla, there should be some form of shelter nearby, such as a cave or a hut. But as the night goes on, the environment outside their shelter will begin to shift. Here are some examples of events at night:

- Apparitions dance through the darkness on gusts of wind, attempting to extinguish sources of light so they might cause frostbite with their cold embraces.
- Beasts attempt to drag away someone to have as a meal.
- Nightmare hordes march throughout the landscape, murdering and destroying anything in their path.
- Toxic fog rolls across the world, causing Doom to all it touches, blocked only with complete shelter.
- Sentient fungus emerges from the ground strategically, growing at extreme rates to overtake and envelop sleeping characters so as to absorb their nutrients.
- Insect or rodent swarms tear away at flesh or transmit diseases.

It is important to also have uneventful nights to maintain the players' uncertainty. Use varying degrees of tension at night, and allow for disastrous Resting rolls to increase the severity of events.



# Adventure Generation



**H**ere you will find a series of tables designed to help you create an adventure in the world of Xas Irkalla. These are useful if you need to present scenarios to players looking for opportunities, especially looking for materials. These tables do not generate a complete adventure—you will have to create the details—but these should give you some ideas to work from.

Included below are a scenario generator, a location generator (weird objects, ruins, wilderness, civilization), a map generator, and an obstacle generator. These can be used independently, but are designed to be used together.

## Ψ SCENARIO GENERATOR Ψ

### Type

- 1 **Investigate:** You find a mysterious location
- 2 **Hunt:** You find fresh tracks
- 3 **Sabotage:** You find an opportunity to sabotage an enemy
- 4 **Steal:** You find materials that are heavily guarded (Stockpile)
- 5 **Exploit:** You find a way that you might access a material in abundance (Source)
- 6 **Raid:** You find an opportunity to attack and loot an enemy settlement
- 7 **Delve:** You find the entrance to a labyrinth
- 8 **Defend:** You find out about an approaching threat
- 9 **Contact:** You find a settlement that could be an ally
- 10 **Trade:** You find an opportunity to negotiate a trade

### Location

- 1 Weird Object
- 2–5 Ruins
- 6–9 Wilderness
- 10 Civilization

### Potential Material

- 1 Bone
- 2 Wood
- 3 Stone
- 4 Copper
- 5 Tin
- 6 Iron
- 7 Animals (Livestock, Mounts, Guards)
- 8 Plants (Edible, Medicinal, or Poisonous)
- 9 Fresh Water
- 10 Other (allow the players to describe it)

### Complication

- 1 Difficult Terrain
- 2 Severe Weather
- 3 Become Weakened
- 4 Become Lost
- 5 Hunted
- 6 Trapped
- 7 Ambushed
- 8 Lost Supplies
- 9 Earthquake
- 10 Point of No Return

# Ψ LOCATION GENERATOR Ψ

## Location

- 1 Weird Object
- 2-5 Ruins
- 6-9 Wilderness
- 10 Civilization

*Once you have rolled a location type, reference the matching section.*

## WEIRD OBJECT

### Adjective

- 1 Writhing
- 2 Flowing
- 3 Vomiting
- 4 Devouring
- 5 Crawling
- 6 Smoking
- 7 Groaning
- 8 Howling
- 9 Leaning
- 10 Floating

### Object

- 1 Shrine
- 2 Tower
- 3 Chasm
- 4 Derelict Ship
- 5 Cave
- 6 Tree
- 7 Garden
- 8 Rock Formation
- 9 Tomb
- 10 Stairs

### Material

- 1 Stone or Brick
- 2 Flesh or Fur
- 3 Iron
- 4 Wood
- 5 Mud or Soil
- 6 Corpse(s)
- 7 Coral
- 8 Bone
- 9 Feces
- 10 Fungus

### Odd Feature

- 1 Eye(s)
- 2 Warts, Growths, Cysts, Wounds
- 3 Hair or Cilia
- 4 Eggs or Parasites
- 5 Limb(s)
- 6 Fragments of the Night Sky
- 7 Mechanical Parts
- 8 Spikes, Thorns, or Barbs
- 9 Impossible Angles
- 10 Mouth(s)

### Hazard

- 1 Acid
- 2 Electrical Surges
- 3 Radioactivity
- 4 Vacuum
- 5 Poisonous Fumes
- 6 Gravitational Anomalies
- 7 Chemical Flood
- 8 Explosives
- 9 Extreme Temperatures
- 10 Creature

## RUINS / CIVILIZATION

### Site

- 1-2 Village
- 3-4 Town
- 5-6 City
- 7-8 Metropolis
- 9-10 Megacity

### Technology Level

- 1-2 Primitive
- 3-4 Archaic
- 5-6 Classical
- 7-8 Medieval
- 9-10 Alien

### Culture

- 1 **Raider:** Cosmopolitan, items from various cultures, slave pens
- 2 **Trader:** Markets, bazaars, roads or channels, shops
- 3 **Scholarly:** Observatories, libraries, laboratories, academies
- 4 **Religious:** Temples, shrines, ritual artifacts, offerings of resources or sacrifices
- 5 **Decadent:** Torture chambers, drug dens, arena pits, harems, brothels
- 6 **Agricultural:** Aqueducts, terraces, sunlight
- 7 **Noble:** Wealthy and ornate architecture, artwork and statues, massive buildings
- 8 **Gang:** Graffiti, unique culture, secret passages, hidden areas
- 9 **Warrior:** Armories, barracks, training grounds, obstacle courses, defenses
- 10 **Capital:** Seat of the government, palaces, oratory chambers, monuments

**Apocalypse / Hardship**

Past tense for ruins, present tense for civilizations

- 1 **Invasion:** Destroyed by another civilization by means of disease or warfare
- 2 **Unrest:** The population tore itself apart, leaving very few survivors
- 3 **Natural Disaster:** A natural disaster rendered the society unable to rebuild itself
- 4 **Contagion:** A disease or virus devastated the population
- 5 **Economic:** Trade routes changed or resources dwindled
- 6 **Warfare:** Divided factions throughout the city constantly warred
- 7 **Terrorism:** An individual or faction destroyed the city
- 8 **Infertility:** Lack of procreation shrank the population
- 9 **Famine:** The lack of food forced the population to leave or die
- 10 **Nightmare:** The population became haunted by nightmares and died in horror

**WILDERNESS****Environment**

- 1 Wasteland
- 2 Volcanic
- 3 Forest
- 4 Mountainous
- 5 Grassland
- 6 Forest
- 7 Jungle
- 8 Swamp
- 9 Ocean
- 10 Subterranean

**Hazard**

- 1 Harsh Temperatures
- 2 Extreme Weather
- 3 Seismic Activity
- 4 Swarms
- 5 Thick Atmosphere
- 6 Radioactivity
- 7 Acidity
- 8 Static Electricity
- 9 Gravitational Anomalies
- 10 Creature

**Landmark**

- 1 Vantage Point
- 2 Lair
- 3 Resource Wellspring
- 4 Natural Formation
- 5 Marker
- 6 Trade Route
- 7 Campsite
- 8 Monument
- 9 Sacred Grounds
- 10 Battlefield

**Ψ OBSTACLE GENERATOR Ψ****Obstacle Type**

- 1-2 Athletic
- 3-4 Expertise
- 5-6 Opportunity
- 7-8 Dilemma
- 9-10 Quagmire

Once you have rolled an obstacle type, reference the matching section. Always consider providing at least two obstacle types in each scene, using a "would you rather" mentality.

**ATHLETIC OBSTACLES**

Requires a skill test involving mobility to overcome, such as climbing, swimming, jumping, running, balancing, swinging, flying, gliding, or falling. These obstacles utilize physical space, such as chasms, pits, platforms, ropes, walkways, and ledges.

**d10 Athletic Obstacle**

- 1-2 Deep chasm or tall wall
- 3-4 Series of ropes over deadly or dangerous ground or pit
- 5-6 Series of platforms over deadly or dangerous ground or pit
- 7-8 Narrow ledge over deadly or dangerous ground or pit
- 9-10 Walkway with an avoidable but constant danger

## EXPERTISE OBSTACLES

Overcoming these obstacles involves building, crafting, disassembling, manipulating mechanical parts, exploiting a structural weakness, solving a puzzle, or using an item. These obstacles include security devices, locked doors, and heavy objects blocking a path. They are generally less deadly than others but can diminish resources such as items or time.

### d10 Expertise Obstacle

- 1–2 Locked door with an apparent deadly or dangerous trap
- 3–4 Blocked passage unable to be opened by hand, but tools are available nearby to do so
- 5–6 Materials available to craft a solution to another obstacle, but with a threat approaching
- 7–8 Deadly or dangerous trap that can be disabled or disassembled
- 9–10 Hints of a structural weakness that, if worked at, would reveal another passage

## OPPORTUNITY OBSTACLES

Overcoming these obstacles involves dealing with an unavoidable hazard, such as extreme temperatures, spinning blades, poisonous fog, or falling debris. Once someone bypasses this obstacle, a complete solution is available, meaning only one or two characters need to overcome the obstacle in order to allow the others to cross safely.

### d10 Opportunity Obstacle

- 1–2 Multiple pressure plates on the opposite side of a deadly fog that reduce the fog
- 3–4 Damaging area with protective items sporadically located throughout it that reduce the damage caused
- 5–6 Passageway of deadly traps, with a switch on the other side that disables the traps
- 7–8 Dangerous environment with beacons of safety that must be activated, such as unlit bonfires in a frigid pass
- 9–10 A collapsing walkway to a platform and a rope tether point on the platform

## DILEMMA OBSTACLES

These obstacles require the players to make a decision that causes a loss or a gain. This can be choosing to gain one thing but lose another, choosing to lose one thing rather than another, or choosing to gain only one thing from a limited selection.

### d10 Dilemma Obstacle

- 1–2 A strange being offers useful information in exchange for one of your best items
- 3–4 A powerful adversary will allow passage, but requires the last of your food and water
- 5–6 An undefended traveling peddler asks for an escort, offering payment upon safe arrival—the payment is worth more than the goods he carries
- 7–8 In exchange for a self-mutilation ritual, a dark entity opens a portal
- 9–10 A statue has five different artifacts, but choosing one of them causes the statue and the other artifacts to crumble

## QUAGMIRE OBSTACLES

These obstacles are a drain on resources, either because items need to be consumed or because the obstacle is hazardous to items or characters.

- d10 Quagmire Obstacle
- 1–2 Traversing causes injuries, such as those caused by trauma, acid, or fire
  - 3–4 Traversing causes Doom, from hazards such as poison or radioactivity
  - 5–6 Traversing causes Stress, from difficulties like extreme cold or a series of skill tests
  - 7–8 Traversing consumes an item, such as drinking water needed to cross a desert
  - 9–10 Traversing damages an item, such as salt water damaging metal

## Ψ MAP GENERATOR Ψ

To create a map, start by choosing an even number of areas, ideally four to twelve, and write the numbers of these areas in random places on a piece of paper. You might randomize these locations by throwing some dice or other small objects onto the paper. For example, for a map with six areas, write down the numbers 1 through 6 in random locations.

Starting with area 1, roll 1d2 to determine how many **access points** the area has. (1d2 can be any die with its result halved, with odd results being 1, and even results being 2.) For example, a roll of 2 means the area has two access points.

Then, to determine where each access point leads, roll 1dX, where X is number of areas on the map. Represent these paths by drawing lines. For example, if you rolled a 6 for area 1, you would draw a line from area 1 to area 6. If the roll is the current area or overlaps an existing access point, ignore it and do not re-roll.

Repeat this process for each area. After you've done this for all areas, some areas might have no access points. Remove those areas from the map.

Next, make a **locked area** and a place that has the **key** to unlock it, by rolling 1dX for the locked area and 1dX for the area with the key. Re-roll if key is in the locked area. Locks and keys do not have to be literal—for example, a large pool of acid could be the “lock” and a drain lever could be the “key.”

Determine the starting area and the details of the passageways. Remember, access points may be vertical (such as chutes, cliffs, pits, etc.), horizontal (such as doorways, ledges, hallways, etc.), internal (such as when a large environment contains a smaller area), or external (such as portals or figurative access). However, a generated map does not have to be a physical location. Instead, the map can abstractly represent a series of connected scenes that create an adventure.

Finally, as you arrange the map, create obstacles. A suggested structure is to have the first areas act as introductory scenes with social interactions or puzzles; the next areas as challenges with creatures, traps, or difficult terrain; and the later areas as climactic events with high tension.



# Adventure One: Nightmares of the Dead Dreamers



This is an opening adventure that focuses on themes of survival horror. In it, the player characters wake up in a surreal labyrinth that they must escape. As a GM, it is important for you to read through the adventure beforehand, since there are several secrets for the players to find, and so you know about the different paths they can take. This adventure is structured to challenge the players more than the characters, exemplifying a key element of Xas Irkalla. There are many puzzles spread throughout, and in order to traverse the labyrinth safely, the players will have to succeed at a memory game. Combat can be avoided, but the environment still poses a risk of death.

In this adventure, the characters are the reincarnations of the psychic slaves that were killed by **The Hunter**. Each character has two sets of memories: those of the Endling (the last living member of their species) and those of the Eye Upon the Throne (the psychic slave). Having spent years together as psychic slaves, the characters can communicate telepathically with each other, and have formed psychic bonds that cause them to feel each other's emotions. Upon the death of their slaver, the Architect, and their own subsequent deaths, the labyrinth of this scenario was formed from the ensuing collision of worlds. Most of the labyrinth relates to the subconscious of the Architect, though the GM may allow the player characters to find pieces of their homeworld.

## Ψ PART 1: AWAKENING Ψ

*You wake up in complete darkness, lying naked on your back on a flat stone surface.*

The characters all wake up nude inside stone sarcophagi. The only way out is to lift or slide off the stone slab covering each sarcophagus. Roll a skill test.

- Complete Success: Lift or slide the stone slab
- Partial Success: Lift or slide the stone slab, but pull a muscle (major injury without blood loss)
- Disaster: Fail to lift the stone slab off, and tear a muscle (grievous injury without blood loss)

The characters will tend to emerge from their sarcophagi at the same time. They see that they are in a stone tomb, illuminated by several torches on a central stone **monolith**. The tomb seems vaguely familiar—the psychics within the characters were entombed here during their time in slavery. The sarcophagi are arranged in a circle around this massive stone. There are three times as many sarcophagi as there are player characters, and the other sarcophagi are closed. Opening a sarcophagus reveals a dead child wrapped in black vines that have grown into every orifice.

At some point, a large stone slab in an archway slides away, leading to the darkness outside of the tomb.

## THE MONOLITH

On the monolith there are eleven sockets, four empty and seven containing black jewels.

Each time a character touches a black jewel, the character hears an ululating scream in their head, taking 1 Stress.

Each time a character steals a black jewel, the scream grows even louder, causing a major head injury, and then falls silent.

The four black jewels missing from these sockets can be found as follows:

- Fused to the chest of the Red Woman (page 123)
- By completing the Rites of the Harvest (page 130)
- At the flesh shrine in the throne room (page 132)
- By completing the final puzzle (page 134)

## THE CONVERGENCE

Outside of the tomb, dim shafts of light peek through crumbling megalithic ruins above, illuminating ancient cyclopean stonework that is angled in impossible dimensions, forming a labyrinthine structure. Where at first glance an angle seems to go in one direction, further inspection reveals another direction, yet both seem plausible, and it is impossible to decide which is true.

The corpses of humanoid species lie on the walls, ground, above, all over. They seem to be stuck in the stone, as if it were magnetic. The corpses appear to have chunks of flesh ripped from them as if by the maws of beasts.

A withered hooded figure huddles by a fire, somehow constantly obscured by the smoke from the fire, yet still revealing the occasional glimpse of shriveled, raw skin. If approached or spoken to, the thing speaks in raspy whispers: "So the Endlings are vomited into Irkalla. You may wish to return home...but all of that was a lie anyway. Your worlds were merely the hallucinations of my psychic slaves. Your dimension is gone, and you are all that remains of it. For you, this is the land of no return..." The hooded figure answers no questions and quickly disintegrates, like a sand sculpture being blown away.

Searching for weapons can yield any one of the following:

### Stone Shard

Improvised

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1

### Small Stone

Improvised

One-Handed, Ranged, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1

### Rock

Improvised

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1

### Heavy Rock

Improvised

Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 5, Quality: 1

## THE HOUNDS

Stalking the area are several hairless canine creatures with thin white skin, nearly translucent, revealing the muscles and veins beneath. Each wears a harness. Their eyeshine can be seen reflecting the light from the fire, but it is hard for the characters to see the creatures clearly, unless a character has eyeshine. Eventually, the largest of them will come close enough to be illuminated by the light from the fire, and lets out a howl. The others rush in to attack. (There are three more than the number of characters in the party.)

No matter how many wolves they kill, there always seems to be more. For every two wolves killed, another one joins the fight, until One-Eye dies. Once One-Eye dies, the remaining wolves become skittish and non-hostile.

The characters can run from the wolves, but the wolves will chase them through the labyrinth, and if the characters get lost in the labyrinth, they will have to face the wolves at a dead end. If they make it through the labyrinth to the Red Woman (page 123), the wolves will stop following them.

### “One-Eye” the Rabid Alpha Wolf

*The alpha wolf of the pack, almost the size of a horse, missing an eye, with a battle-scarred body.*

**Damage:** 15

**Armor:** 12

**Life:** 20

**Abilities**

**Diseased:** If One-Eye attacks an undefended target, the target becomes diseased for 1d5 days. While Diseased, you gain double Stress whenever you roll a 1.

**Knock Down:** As a move, One-Eye can knock down a character, dealing no damage but causing the character to become grappled.

**Tear at the Flesh:** Whenever a wolf attacks a character being grappled by One-Eye, that wolf deals +1d10 damage.

### Rabid Wolf

*A canine creature the size of a Great Dane, with pointed and elongated ears, crazed eyes, and a maw foaming with saliva.*

**Damage:** 9

**Armor:** 4

**Life:** 10

**Abilities**

**Pack Mentality:** If the wolf attacks a character who was attacked by another wolf on the same turn, it deals +1d10 damage.

**Diseased:** If the wolf attacks an undefended target, the target becomes diseased for 1d5 days. While Diseased, you gain double Stress whenever you roll a 1.



## THE HUNTER

The Hunter, a manifestation of the soldier who killed the Eyes Upon the Throne, stalks the characters confidently, allowing itself to be seen. It uses the tactics of a wolf, waiting for the characters to weaken before attacking. The Hunter is patient and will stalk the characters for days if necessary.

The Hunter wears a rusted iron helmet with a single hole in the front that looks like an empty eye socket. From under the helmet, long black hair hangs below its waist. Chains wrap around a full suit of rusted iron armor that covers every inch of its massive body, and it wields a two-handed warhammer.

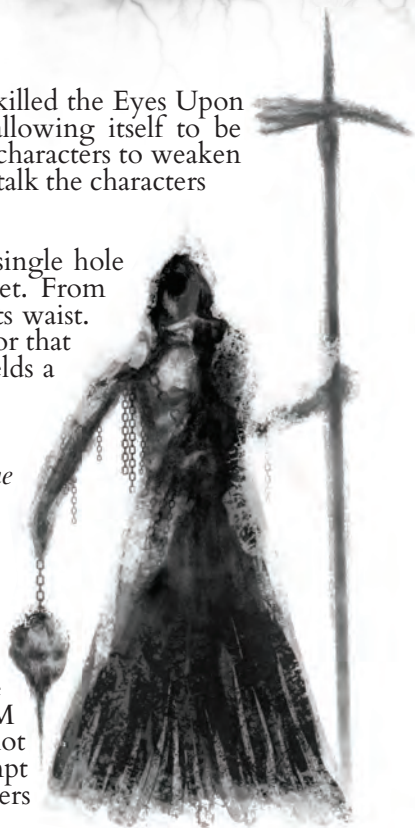
### The Hunter

*A soldier clad in rusted armor, red like blood, with the heads of his victims hanging from chains.*

**Damage:** 33

**Armor:** 16

**Life:** 50



## Ψ PART 2: LABYRINTH Ψ

Traversing the labyrinth safely requires the players to succeed at a memory game. The GM keeps track of the answers, but the players cannot write down their answers. Read each prompt aloud, as well as whichever choice the players made.

### 1. Choose up or down

- If you chose up, the path travels left.
- If you chose down, the path travels right.

### 2. Choose up or down

- If you chose up, the path travels right.
- If you chose down, the path travels left.

### 3. Choose left or right

- If you chose left, the path travels up.
- If you chose right, the path travels down.

### 4. Choose left or right

- If you chose left, the path travels the opposite direction of the first intersection.
- If you chose right, the path travels the opposite direction of the first intersection.

### 5. Choose left or right

- If you chose left, the path travels the same direction you chose at the third intersection.
- If you chose right, the path travels the opposite direction you chose at the third intersection.

### 6. Choose up or down

- If you chose up, the path travels the same direction you chose at the fourth intersection.
- If you chose down, the path travels the opposite direction you chose at the fourth intersection.

### 7. Recall each direction you traveled.

If the characters recall each direction correctly, go to **Scene 1: The Red Woman**.

If the characters do not, they must face the wolves (if fleeing from them) or a group of small scavengers. The scavengers do not fight to the death—they run away once injured. They carry no loot. The group of small scavengers has one more scavenger than the number of players. After the characters face the wolves or scavengers, go to **Scene 1: The Red Woman**.

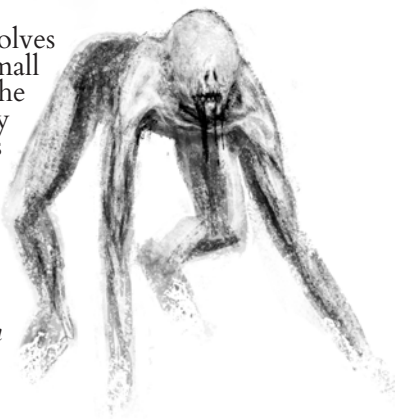
### Small Scavengers

*Hairless, pale, emaciated humanoids that crawl on all fours, with no facial features save for two nostrils and a lipless mouth.*

**Damage:** 9

**Armor:** 4

**Life:** 10



## SCENE 1: THE RED WOMAN

*An emaciated woman, wearing a red dress covered in filth, approaches you. You see a black jewel protruding from her chest, caked in dried blood. As you look more closely, you see that her skin is rotten, and as she gets closer, you can smell the reeking stench of decay. The woman is clearly dead, yet stands upright and walks like a puppet. The soft song of a woman's voice echoes through the torchlit hallway, though it does not come from this woman.*



If the players don't determine it on their own, the characters start to get the sense that the black jewel is animating her body.

If the characters pull the jewel out, the woman's chest rips open, spilling a mixture of organs and black tendrils. She collapses to the floor, landing in her mess of ruin.

If the characters move on without pulling the jewel out, the woman continues to walk in the other direction, eventually stopping to scream and cry, then pacing back toward the red harem.

## THE RED HAREM

Following the woman's song leads to a lavish harem of beautiful women all dressed in the same red dress as the woman in the hallway. They dance seductively and hum an entrancing song. Their beauty and grace are remarkable, the best you've ever seen. Their perfect performance just beckons you to worship them.

- These women are actually corpses, masked by illusion.
- Each woman smells strongly of mold and dust.
- Looking closely at a woman unveils the corpse illusion.
- All of the women have their tongues cut out.

## THE QUEEN'S CHAMBER

Beyond the harem lies the queen's chamber, an ornate room of red fabric and mahogany wood, with intricately carved gold catching the candlelight from a wrought iron chandelier. The bed is concealed by red curtains.

- There is an intense feeling of sadness in this chamber.
- On the bed is a mummified woman wearing a red dress and a golden crown. A silver dagger is stuck in her chest. A strange dark energy seems to come from the silver dagger.
- Pulling out the dagger causes a gasp of air to release from the wound.

There are obvious signs of a secret passageway through one of the chamber's walls, as there are scuff marks and patterns of displaced dust on the floor. Opening the secret passageway requires searching the room for its mechanism (no skill test necessary). Several objects of interest in the room are a mirror, a jewelry box (looting grants +1 Wealth), an armoire with rags that were once regal clothes, blackened paintings, and a heavy chair with rotting cushions. The chair is bolted down, and the mechanism to open the passageway is beneath its seat cushion.

The secret passage reveals an area from a character's homeworld containing a sentimental item without practical use, allowing willing players to describe part of their character's past. Ultimately, the area ends in a stone hallway that leads to **Scene 2: The Chasm**. Leaving the harem and going back into the labyrinth also leads to **Scene 2: The Chasm**.

### Silver Dagger

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 0, Quality: 3

**Guilt:** Wielding the dagger causes you to feel intense guilt, loneliness, and sadness. Your heart feels empty. If you cannot deal with these intense feelings (roll a skill test), you feel like you will plunge the dagger into your heart (suffer a mortal wound).

## SCENE 2: THE CHASM

*The stone passageway eventually reaches a pit, about twenty feet across, that descends into darkness. On this side of the pit, there is a stone monolith about fifteen feet tall, overgrown with thick black vines. On the opposite side of the pit, about ten feet lower, there is a stalactite-covered cave. About forty feet below that is another ledge, an outcropping of earth. The walls of the pit have adequate handholds for climbing. On the two flanks of the pit, there is about ten feet of narrow collapsing stonework, as if the stone hallway had collapsed there.*

Testing the depth of the chasm by dropping an object would reveal it to have water about two hundred feet below. The bottom of the pit is a subterranean ocean of black liquid, home to a leviathan that gets uncomfortably close to the characters, but does not attack unless provoked.

Falling to the ledge below or to the bottom of the pit results in 3d10 + 15 damage that bypasses armor, rolled separately on three random body parts.

Both the cave and the outcropping lead to the **Belly of the Beast** (page 126).



### **Leviathan**

*Thick grey flesh, the size of a siege tower, thunderous sonar from a large forehead, a long maw with sharp teeth. Aberrant descendant of the sperm whale.*

**Damage:** 57<sup>3</sup> (thunderous sonar)

**Armor:** 24

**Life:** 75

#### **Abilities**

**Swallow Whole:** As an attack, the leviathan swallows an undefended target whole. Swallowed creatures cannot perform any actions and must make a death roll when removed from the stomach to see if they survived the digestive acids.

**Thunderous Sonar:** The leviathan sends out a concussive sonic blast that is loud enough in the liquid to crack bones. When it attacks, it deals damage to all targets in front of it.

## THE BELLY OF THE BEAST

Without a torch, it is pitch black here.

*A cave system opens before you, with stone columns formed by web-like growths. Angled stalactites drip a white ooze in odd directions, and stalagmites jut from the ground like massive teeth. The ground shakes like the pulse of a heartbeat.*

*Many levels, each one appearing as an organically web-shaped ledge, are connected with overlapping webs of black veins. The veins, with each pulsing tremor, pump mass amounts of liquid. Atop the webwork of tangled black veins there is a dim flickering light shining through a passageway. The cries of an infant can be heard coming from somewhere nearby.*

Following the infant's cries leads to **The Hatchery**.

Reaching the passageway requires climbing the black veins. The passageway above leads to the **Central Nervous System**. (The light is coming from electrical currents.)

A sphincter at the bottom of the chamber leads to **The Flesh Chute** (page 128).

## THE HATCHERY

Upon arriving, a hole in the ground reveals an acorn-shaped chamber, where the hole in the ground is in the place where the stem would be. The bottom of the chamber is about forty feet below, and there seems to be a red glow that is coming from behind the chamber's flesh-like walls. There are black eggs that cover the entirety of the chamber, one of which has cracked open to reveal an alien infant (of none of the characters' species). Mucus covers everything.

Opening any of the other eggs reveals a fetus that has not yet developed.

## CENTRAL NERVOUS SYSTEM

This chamber is the size of a stadium, with light shining in from cracks above. Black veins float in the air like barren tree branches. At the tip of each, electrical currents arc like lightning. The walls of this complex are covered in milky bubbles, each one with a black vein dangling from it.

In the center of this complex is a hideous, sluglike monstrosity manipulating the electrical currents methodically, pulling black veins toward itself and spewing out black liquid. It pauses for a moment, as if it has noticed you, and the electrical currents of the veins all start to crackle. The milky bubbles lining the walls all turn to gaze at you with frightened pupils. The structure quakes with the pulse of a racing heart.

The immense sluglike creature wears no flesh, displaying its raw muscle and strange organ structure. Built into its biology is a slew of membranous canisters, each containing a bubbling fluid flowing through black veins. The front of its body appears as a giant maw dripping with saliva. Its mutated face seems to have stretched human features, and it has four humanoid arms, each one attaching black veins from the chamber to various parts of its body.



### **Slug Creature**

*Nightmare's incarnate breeder of psychic slaves, the twisted form of a pregnant concubine.*

**Damage:** 15 (black vomit)

**Armor:** 12

**Life:** 20

#### **Abilities**

**Vomit Forth the Black Ones:** When the slug creature attacks, it also spews black vomit from which a black one emerges.

### **Black One**

*A humanoid made of black liquid.*

**Damage:** 9

**Armor:** 4

**Life:** 10



## THE FLESH CHUTE

*The tube is slimy and bends and turns on its own, causing you to slip and then slide down the tube. The tube twists and turns and eventually becomes a near-vertical shaft. Then the tube suddenly ends, shredded apart with long strands of flesh dangling from it for several dozen feet. You grab onto these flesh strands by instinct, and shortly thereafter you see, by the flickering light from above, that you are suspended in the middle of a massive cave, its floor riddled with stalagmites, stone spikes that would impale any who fall onto them.*

The flesh strands do not extend to the floor of the cave, dangling about thirty feet above the stalagmites. Dropping from here would be very risky, imposing Disadvantage on any skill test to do so, and a disastrous roll would prompt a death roll. There is a ledge about ten feet above the characters' position, though about twenty feet away horizontally.

Beneath the ledge is a slanted wall filled with stalactites, too wet with some slimy substance to grab onto. However, on the ledge the characters can see their loved ones, if they have any, alive but crucified upon trees. Each tree has a rope that extends down about forty feet below the ledge, but the rope is attached by a hook to the loved one's sternum. There's only about three feet of slack between the hook and the anchor point to the tree.

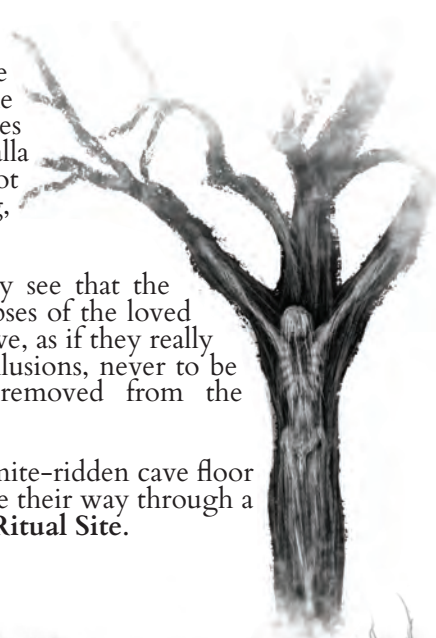
If a character were to climb using this rope, their weight would pull the hook down the loved one's chest, ripping their innards out and causing them to die painfully, but the rope would remain anchored to the tree.

*Standing on the ledge is an imposing cloaked figure leaning on a staff, who calls to the characters in a whispering, creaking voice that echoes through the cave as if a god were speaking. "I don't want you to die... I don't want you to die... Come, take my offerings to you, so you may grant these offerings to me." He gestures to the ropes.*

The figure does not disappear and would converse with the characters as they climb, if they wished to. The figure possesses the disposition of the dark god Vaurokor the Wanderer. His manifestation sometimes decides to help inhabitants of Irkalla overcome deadly environments, but not without the cost of causing suffering, which he speaks of longingly.

As the characters come to the ledge, they see that the figure was just a rock formation. The corpses of the loved ones are as real as the characters can perceive, as if they really were alive—though in actuality they are illusions, never to be revealed as anything but real unless removed from the labyrinth.

If the players either go below to the stalagmite-ridden cave floor or to the ledge above, they eventually make their way through a stone passageway, going to **Scene 3: The Ritual Site**.



### SCENE 3: THE RITUAL SITE

In the center of this chamber, totems of flesh and bone have been erected in gruesome display, with skulls, bones, leathery skin, and hundreds of candles made from human fat. There is an open doorway at the opposite end (which leads to Part 3: The Throne Room).

The withered hooded figure stands in the center of a sigil drawn with blood. He produces a scroll from his robes and leaves it in the center of the sigil. He says, "Let drawn blood remain untouched, but offer your own to the idols of dark gods if you wish to receive their gifts. Be warned of its permanence, however." Then he fades from existence.

If a character disturbs the blood of the sigil in any way, they become cursed, immediately breaking out in boils, sores, and pustules that ooze blood, suffering 1d10 blood loss.

It is possible to retrieve the scroll from the center of the sigil by carefully stepping in the spaces between the lines of blood (requires a skill test).

#### THE TOTEMS

Each gruesome totem has a basin before it. If a totem is given a blood sacrifice (-1 exsanguination limit), the pool of blood turns into a dimensional rift, from which an item emerges. Each character may only receive one item.

- **The Blacksmith**, represented by a totem with iron chains, offers an iron pickaxe.
- **The Alchemist**, represented by a totem with mineral growths, offers the Hand of Glory. The Hand of Glory is the embalmed left hand of a human, with a wick of human hair. It will burn forever, but only the holder can see this light.
- **The Harvester**, represented by a totem with rotting fruits, offers a sackcloth bag filled with 10 doses of medicinal herbs that let off a soothing smell. Consuming a dose of the herb is equivalent to receiving a completely successful medical treatment. Smoking a dose of the herb removes 1 Stress.
- **The Hunter**, represented by a totem with antlers, offers a hunting spear.
- **The Wanderer**, represented by a totem with tattered cloth, offers a heavy fur cloak.

#### Iron Pickaxe

Improvised

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 9, Bulk: 8, -3 to attack tests, Quality: 4

#### Hunting Spear

Martial

One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 6, Bulk: 1, Quality: 4

#### Heavy Fur Cloak

+1 Armor Rating (shoulders), Bulk: 3, Quality: 4, +5 Cold Resistance

## THE SCROLL

Once obtained, the scroll reads as follows:

---

Rites of the Harvest to Manifest the Qliphoth

*Pluck from the Harvester, the least amount of fruit necessary to perform this ritual.*

*Leave offerings of fruit in equal amounts to the Blacksmith, the Hunter, and the Wanderer.*

*After making an offering, you must display to the Alchemist how much plucked fruit is left, so that he may double that amount.*

*After all offerings have been made, no plucked fruit shall be left anywhere but the offering basins to the Blacksmith, Hunter, or Wanderer.*

*Suffer your fate if you falter from this formula, or attempt to use deception in any way.*

---

The solution to the scroll's ritual: seven fruit must be harvested from the Harvester totem, and four pieces of fruit must be offered to each the Blacksmith, Hunter, and Wanderer totems.

When the ritual is completed, the sigil of blood collapses upon itself, leaving a feast of fresh fruit with a black jewel on top.



Cheating or failing at this ritual causes the totems to collapse and fade from reality, and summons the Demon of the Harvest, a humanoid creature with a mouth resembling a lamprey, filled with jagged teeth and an elongated black tongue writhing like a tentacle. Barbed thorns push out of its flesh, causing blood and gore to pour from the creature like a fountain. Each hand is shaped as a curved, scythe-like sword. A black jewel is embedded in its forehead.

**Demon of the Harvest**

*Scythe-armed culler of flesh from unworthy bone stalks. Dark creation of Tzereq the Harvester.*

**Damage:** 57

**Armor:** 24

**Life:** 75



## Ψ PART 3: THE THRONE ROOM Ψ

This gothic throne room is filled with blazing sconces and crimson tapestries of flesh. The withered hooded figure sits on a throne of gore and heaps of bone, which is draped in flesh and adorned with candles. Atop the throne sits a grotesque, one-eyed idol, with a black jewel serving as its eye.

The hooded figure explains: “You may call me the Eye Upon the Throne. I am the ruler of this labyrinth. But this throne is your reality. The one who sits on it controls the mind’s eye. Do you think you are in control of your own reality? Are you the one that sits on the throne? Or are you the throne itself? My throne can be held back no longer... For that, I am sorry.”

The hooded figure struggles against it, but violently transforms into a massive humanoid creature of feminine form, about twenty feet tall, with the head of a vulture, with black raw muscle and innards displayed as if its skin was torn off, with several dozen eyes in various places, and writhing tentacles protruding from its back in the shape of wings.

### **Apkallu, the Carrion Crow**

*Manifestation of the Architect’s shadow from the Negative Plane, the reflection of his guilt for murdering his wife and exploitation of captive girls.*

**Damage:** 33

**Armor:** 16

**Life:** 50

#### **Abilities**

**Knockback:** On a successful attack, Apkallu sends the target flying backwards into another object. If that object is hard, the target takes a major injury to a random body part.

**Grab:** Apkallu can grab a target as a move action, limiting its movement. The target suffers the effects of being grappled, but Apkallu does not.

**Squeeze:** As an attack, Apkallu can crush a grabbed target, dealing +3d10 damage.

**Unblockable:** Apkallu’s attacks cannot be blocked, only dodged, negating the effect of a wielded shield.

#### **Loot**

Knife of the Apkallu

#### **Knife of the Apkallu**

*A giant sword, with a jagged and chipped iron blade, quite rusted, with a crossguard and pommel decorated with black horns, teeth, and tattered ribbons of flesh.*

**Martial**

Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 14, Bulk: 18, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 5



## THE THRONE

Removing the black jewel from the throne causes it to animate into a mass of flesh, bone, and blood.

On the defend turn, the throne regenerates and grows in size, unless it was reduced to 0 life.

### Throne (Stage 1)

Damage: 9

Armor: 4

Life: 10

### Throne (Stage 2)

Damage: 15

Armor: 12

Life: 20

### Throne (Stage 3)

Damage: 33

Armor: 16

Life: 50

## EXITING THE THRONE ROOM

If the characters try to go back the way they came, it is now two passages instead of one. One passage is full of flesh and gore being minced about by deadly spinning blades. The other is a stone hallway filled with a miasma too thick to see how far the passage leads.

If Apkallu was not killed, the characters are attacked by Apkallu every few seconds of real-time as they decide which passage to take.

The spinning blades cause no damage, as they are only an illusion. The miasma, however, is an acidic fog that causes 3d10 + 15 poison damage to every body part. At the other end of the gas chamber is a small hole that, if a hand is placed into, dispels the illusion of the spinning blades, revealing an empty stone hallway. Both passageways lead to The Seals.

## Ψ PART 4: THE SEALS Ψ

If the players have 3 black jewels, present them with the staircase and the black portal below, otherwise only the staircase exists.

*At the end of the stone hallway, you come to a dizzying staircase that winds upward and into a bright grey light, which appears to be an overcast sky. However, at the base of the staircase there is a black portal. The disembodied voice of the withered hooded figure echoes: "Through this portal, a series of wards seal away the last black jewel that will release the screams of my silent wives. You may leave now or attempt to make your way past these fragments of my subconscious. However, know this: you have only one chance to choose the correct path, else it will collapse and fade from your reality forever."*

Through the black portal is a series of puzzles, created by the Architect's subconscious to lock away the Shill of Tongues, an artifact made from the tongues of the captive girls in the harem. If the players choose to enter the black portal, present the players with the puzzles on the next page. Each puzzle is in its own stone chamber.

If the players get the wrong answer on any puzzle, the puzzles all fade from existence, and the characters will find that their only path leads out of the labyrinth to Part 5: Emergence (page 135).

### PUZZLE 1

There are two doors in this chamber, one iron and one stone, with an inscription on each.

The inscription on the iron door reads: "The inscription on the stone door is true, and the way forward is through the iron door."

The inscription on the stone door reads: "The inscription on the iron door is false, and the way forward is through the iron door."

**Answer:** The stone door.

### PUZZLE 2

There are three doors in this chamber. One is bronze, one is iron, and one is stone. On the walls, beneath three torches, there are three inscriptions.

One inscription reads: "The way forward is not through stone."

Another inscription reads: "The way forward could be through either iron or bronze."

The last inscription reads: "The way forward is through iron."

A monolith in the center of the chamber has an inscription that reads: "Of those beneath the torches, at least one inscription is true, and one inscription is false."

**Answer:** The bronze door.

### FINAL PUZZLE

This candle-lit chamber has four figures:

- A massive black sphere (large size)
- A small beating heart dripping with blood (small size)
- Humanoid twins (medium size)—one is completely black, and the other is mangled and dripping with blood

The two figures and the black sphere have black umbilical cords attached to the beating heart, and the black sphere has black tentacles wrapped around the mangled humanoid.

An inscription on the floor reads:

"Two of these figures are Corrupted, and one figure is Pure.

"If the Pure is black, then the Corrupted must be attached to the Pure.

"If the Pure is smaller than the Corrupted, then the Pure and the Corrupted must not be attached.

"If the Corrupted is bleeding, then the Pure must also be bleeding.

Destroy the Pure to open the passage."

**Answer:** The mangled humanoid is Pure. The heart and the blackened humanoid are Corrupted. The black sphere is neither Pure nor Corrupted.

If the players succeed, the large black sphere turns into a small black jewel, and the beating heart turns into a portal that leads to the monolith in the tomb from **Part 1: Awakening** (page 119). At the monolith, the characters can unlock the Qliphothic arrangement by socketing all eleven black jewels into the monolith—if they do, go to **Unlockable Scene: Black Hole from the Cenotaph**.

## UNLOCKABLE SCENE: THE BLACK HOLE FROM THE CENOTAPH

*As the last black jewel is socketed into the cenotaph, the arrangement of jewels collapses into a black hole. The black hole creates a shrill noise that grows louder with each passing second until it is deafening. Instinctively you cover your ears... but as you do so, you see beyond the event horizon. A dark artifact lies waiting to be grabbed, a grotesque staff covered by embalmed tongues, stitched together and pinned to the staff with crude rusted nails. However, grabbing the staff would mean uncovering at least one of your ears.*

The screaming ends when the staff, the Shill of Tongues, is grabbed. Uncovering an ear causes deafness in that ear. Even with covered ears, the screaming is so loud that a character takes a major head injury every ten seconds of real-world time spent within a hundred feet of the black hole. As the characters back away from the black hole, it starts to close, if the characters leave, it is gone forever.

A character who is deaf in one ear suffers Disadvantage on skill tests that involve hearing. A character who is deaf in both ears always rolls disasters on skill tests that involve hearing, and suffers Disadvantage on many other skill tests, such as those related to balance, as well as defense tests.

### Shill of Tongues

*A staff made of dozens of writhing tongues all stitched together.*

Martial

One-Handed, Ranged, Weapon Rating: 22, Bulk: 2, Quality: 5

**Deafening Ululation:** The staff can be used as a one-handed melee weapon or ranged weapon. It can deal ranged damage by creating a deafening scream, which also affects allies and the wielder if their ears aren't covered. Both attacks use the same Weapon Rating.

**Imbuements:** Since the staff is an artifact, roll for its imbuements (page 52).

## Ψ PART 5: EMERGENCE Ψ

*At last, you emerge from the labyrinth, its twisted mass of stone behind you. Before you, you see only a grim, grey wasteland under a dark overcast sky, covered by an impenetrable fog. The cold, damp air clings to your skin, carrying with it the stench of death and decay. Beneath you is a wet black soil writhing with worms, and a webwork of dead plant roots sprawls throughout it. What few plants or trees you see are grey and rotten, and even grass seems loath to grow in this barren place. A sense of sadness comes to you.*

*Ash falls from the overcast sky, and the fog begins to darken as smoke chokes the air. You can taste the foulness of disease, and the lingering smoke carries the smell of burning hair and flesh. You hear the screams and howls of people and animals in agony. Through the smoke you see wretched sufferers convulsing in the ashen soil, their bodies covered in boils that burst with black liquid. Mourners smeared with ash weep as they carry the dead onto massive funeral pyres.*

The characters have emerged from the labyrinth, and now they must focus on exploring and surviving in an unfamiliar world. The characters will have to balance between getting necessary resources such as wood and food, building shelter and fire, crafting clothing and tools, and continuing their journey through treacherous terrain.

The mourners are terrified of abhumans, and speak a language that the characters don't understand. They will try to run away if the characters approach, and will fight if cornered.

As the characters explore, you may use **Adventure Generation** (page 113) and the following points of interest as you wish. The adventure assumes that the characters are in the land of Thorne. You can use the **Carcass-Clad Being** and ravens to lead the characters to various adventure locations and eventually to the Makana village, which begins the next adventure, **The Throne of the Plague God** (page 141).

## THE CARCASS-CLAD BEING

*A ghastly figure—formed of black smoke and clad in the carcasses of small animals stitched together—comes into existence before you. It speaks in a strange but familiar language:*

*“My lost children, you have returned to me. You are a long way from home, but if you can make it here, we can speak. The ravens will show you the way.” The carcass-clad being disappears in the blink of an eye, as if it were never there.*

## THE ASHEN FOREST

**Entrance:** The ground here still smolders from a fire that ravaged the area. Charred tree limbs with burning coals create wisps of smoke that stream up from the ground. Ash falls from the sky, coating the landscape in a bleak grey dust.

**Hazard:** There are still burning embers beneath the ash and coal. Touching it causes a major injury to the affected body part (usually the feet). The only way to avoid the hazard is to douse the area with water, clear out the coal, or use a tool to find the embers and safe passage.

**Decision:** The charred remains of a tribal village tell of the firestorm that left dozens of blackened corpses in its wake. There are two children, twin girls, who managed to survive, albeit badly burned. Unbeknownst to them, they are witches. They meant no harm, but suffer from psychic nightmares that caused the fire.

**Challenge:** A group of five Knights of Thorne search the area, looking for the source of the psychic disturbance, the twin girls.

**Natural Resources:** Ashes and coal

**Knight of Thorne**

**Damage:**  $(4 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $20 \times \text{level}$

## THE VALE OF WIND

**Entrance:** This mountainous area is littered with massive tree limbs. The wind is so strong here that it even moves boulders. The trunks of these trees are so thick, however, that the winds shake only the limbs.

**Hazard:** The winds are so strong that being hit by an object swept by the wind is like being hit by a bullet. Characters carrying less than 15 Bulk are at risk of being picked up by the winds and thrown down the mountain if they do not anchor themselves.

**Challenge:** Rock formations on the mountains are actually sleeping giants. If the characters cause any rockslides or tremors, the giants will awaken and hunt the characters.

**Decision:** A watchtower can be seen on one of the peaks. Reaching it would grant a survey of the landscape, revealing any landmarks in the region. However, the watchtower is guarded by three soldiers of Thorne (specifically in former service to Lord Wyrkhuul, who was the player characters' Architect). These knights are apprehensive, but watched their kingdom get destroyed from a distance, and now have no lord or home aside from this watchtower. They are drunk and have gorged themselves on their food supply, and would be willing to trade weapons or tools for food, but there is nothing stopping the characters from killing the soldiers and taking their supplies.

**Supplies:** A wagon (capable of carrying 30 Bulk), a small cache of iron armor and weapons (poor Quality) of various designs (enough for the characters to fully equip themselves), woodsplitters, lumber axes, and hammers.

If the characters talk with the soldiers, they might gain information about Lord Wyrkhuul. The soldiers can explain that he murdered his wife and then spent years capturing women that resembled her, keeping them in a harem. He tried to breed witches by impregnating them, but it's unclear if he succeeded. Several months ago, he defied Queen Lehrankh and entered a deep sleep with the psychic slaves he had captured from a coastal village years ago, so it is likely she ordered her vassals to kill him for his disobedience.

### Stone Giant

**Damage:**  $(18 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(5 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $75 \times \text{level}$

### Abilities

**Knockback:** On a successful attack, the stone giant sends the target flying backwards into another object. If that object is hard, the target takes a major injury to a random body part.

**Grab:** The stone giant can grab a target, limiting its movement. The target suffers the effects of being grappled, but the grabber does not.

**Stomp:** As an attack, the stone giant can stomp on an undefended target like it's a large rodent, the target must make a Death roll.

**Squeeze:** As an attack, the stone giant can crush a grabbed target, dealing +3d10 damage.

**Unblockable:** The stone giant's attacks cannot be blocked, only dodged, negating the effect of a wielded shield.

**Wide Swing:** The stone giant can attack up to five targets nearby each other.

## THE SWAMP CEMETERY

**Entrance:** In this bog of muddy water, the rotting corpses of creatures who got stuck serve as a warning to those who may wish to traverse it.

**Hazard:** Mosquitoes swarm over the bog and will bite any character not carrying a torch. This causes discomfort and brings a chance of infection with a deadly disease. Roll 1d10, a 1 means the character gets infected. The disease will cause the character to suffer the symptoms of influenza. Once the disease is at its worst stage (in about three days), the character must make a death roll.

**Challenge:** A massive snake can be seen lurking about in the water, but it will only attack the characters if they make sudden movements that disturb the thick water.

**Decision:** Stone ruins of a flooded cemetery can be seen, but silhouettes of strange figures stand watch over the graveyard. These figures are the resurrected corpses of an alien race. Even as the characters draw near, the undead creatures are not hostile—they simply watch the characters. They will not interact in any way, even if provoked or attacked. Atop a mausoleum with collapsed walls, there is a corpse in the center of a ritualistic circle. The corpse appears to be a suicide victim, and a dark tome covered in flies sits nearby. Something about the tome incites a primal fear deep inside anyone who looks at it.

Picking up the book causes the undead to become hostile. Waves of 1d10+6 undead will attack the characters. Every six undead that are killed reveals another wave of undead that have risen to attack. There is no end to the waves. The mud bog makes escape difficult, and setting down the dark tome does not stop the undead from attacking. If the characters make sudden movements in the thick water, they must also deal with the massive snake.

**Reward:** The Dark Tome. By reading this book, the character gains 1d10 Doom but unlocks the potential of the item. When wielded, the Dark Tome can be used to summon a Swarm of Flies (+1) on skill tests.

### Undead

**Damage:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(0 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $10 \times \text{level}$

**Undead or Skeletal:** Vital body parts are no longer vital. The undead can't be damaged by cold or poison damage.

### Massive Snake

**Damage:**  $(18 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(5 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $75 \times \text{level}$

### Abilities

**Grab:** The massive snake can grab a target, limiting its movement. The target suffers the effects of being grappled, but the grabber does not.

**Squeeze:** As an attack, the massive snake can crush a grabbed target, dealing +3d10 damage.

**Unblockable:** The massive snake's attacks cannot be blocked, only dodged, negating the effect of a wielded shield.

## THE CAIRN OF KINGS

**Entrance:** Rocky hills with stone towers overlook a fog-shrouded valley filled with the corpses of hundreds of fallen soldiers.

**Hazard:** Murders of crows feast on the corpses of the fallen soldiers. The crows are territorial and will swarm anyone that gets too close.

**Challenge:** The ghastly psychic echoes of soldiers haunt the valley. Anyone who attempts to loot the bodies will be attacked by the psychic ghost of the disturbed corpse.

**Decision:** A survivor is crawling from the battlefield, cursed with necromantic magic that prevents him from dying, despite having no lower body and mangled arms. He begs for death, to be burned on a funeral pyre, but it is clear that he carries some sort of plague, with the festering black boils all over his body. If the characters touch him, they contract the plague. (An infected character must make a death roll every day for two weeks.)

### Ghost of a Soldier

**Damage:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 3$  cold

**Aarmor:**  $(0 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $10 \times \text{level}$

**Undead or Skeletal:** Vital body parts are no longer vital. The ghost can't be damaged by cold or poison damage.

## OTHER ENCOUNTERS

### THE TREE OF IMMORTALITY

A man crucified on a gnarled tree. He is still alive, but the tree has started to grow around him, becoming one with him. The man wishes to be freed, but harming the tree harms him, as the sap of the tree is the blood of the man. The bark from the tree has magical properties, and the local wise woman harvests the bark to create healing mixtures.

### THE ANGEL OF GORE

A preserved corpse of a woman. It appears she pulled her own skin apart from her sternum, stretching it outwards like wings, her ribcage wide open and her guts removed. Beneath her ribcage, her womb contains something that squirms. It is a colony of parasitic worms that communicate through telepathy.

### THE TORSO ON THE ANTLERS

A tribal man hanging on the corpse of a massive creature. He is held to the beast's antlers by leather sinew tied around his wrists. The man's lower half has been removed and cauterized. The black coals of a bonfire sit on the ground beneath him. A castrated penis lies in front of the coals, covered in flies. He was a hunter or warrior, placed here by the chief for sexual misconduct. He possesses expert knowledge of the area. He begs to be released.



## Adventure Two: Throne of the Plague God



**T**his adventure takes the characters through three locations: the Makana village, the pits below the city of Asthinapura, and the nightmare version of Asthinapura. You can use each location as a foundation for creating other adventures, as this provides some premises, but they are also linked together into an overarching plot as follows.

In this adventure, the oracle of the Makana tribe uses her psychic powers to hide the Makana village with illusion magick. Knowing that she is old and will die, she has given birth to a psychic child whom she raises in secrecy, in the hope that when she dies this child will protect the village. However, the psychic child suffers a nightmare and the oracle, among others, is killed. The village, no longer hidden with illusion, is massacred by warriors searching for the child, in service to their Architect.

If the players are either captured or knocked unconscious and bleeding out in the attack, they are placed into slavery and forced to fight as gladiators in the city of Asthinapura. The child becomes a psychic slave to the Architect-queen of Asthinapura. If the characters prove themselves in the arena, they are placed into service to the Architect-queen and sent to the caves below the city to search for her lost lover, who has become a plague god.

Once the characters find this plague god, he exacts his vengeance upon the Architect-queen, killing her and her psychic slaves, turning Asthinapura into a nightmare labyrinth. To escape the labyrinth, the characters will have to build up an army of survivors and fight their way through the hordes of nightmares, ultimately facing the psychic remnants of the Architect-queen, the plague god, and the psychic child, killing them to end the nightmare.

### Ψ ACT 1: THE MAKANA Ψ

#### LANDS OF CASCATHIA

In these mountains lining a blue-grey ocean, mists blow gently between incredibly tall, ancient trees that rise from a continental stone. The entire region seems formed of a single boulder, weathered away to create the many mountains, valleys, and caves, leaving stone with the texture of leather underfoot. Rivers run from the near-constant rain, and every surface of the forest is adorned with carnivorous plants, poisonous mushrooms and mosses, and thorned ferns and vines.

#### THE MAKANA VILLAGE

Hidden away—accessed through a cave that would have been missed if not for the ravens leading the characters to it—the Makana village aches beneath the dark Irkallan skies. This is a coastal village of carved and

painted lodges, made of massive bleached bones, that could easily house several dozen people each. Totem poles of winged and horned creatures guard each lodge like gargoyles, and firepits spew smoke and ash into the spaces between the tall trees.

Here, the tribespeople whittle away at intricate shell and bone carvings, weave baskets and clothes made of hair, and tell stories to their children of their ancestors and of the gods—of how the gods known as the Abgal came from the dark waters and taught them to hunt the great beasts of the sea—particularly the goddess Karawa, who is described as having talons, feathers, and wings, but with feminine features. Karawa saw that the Makana people were starving, so she went into the ocean—a place the Makana did not go—to kill a great beast with her talons, and brought it back for the Makana to eat. Her lesson is to open your mind and use what is available.

Another god, Rakamoi the Horned, ignited the fires in the bellies of the hunters, and went with them in their canoes of carved bones in the greatest hunt ever known, and after killing many beasts on that hunt, the hunters were all swallowed by a single beast. His lesson is to not take on more than is necessary.

The third god, a skeletal figure known as Telhua, was the best hunter the Makana had ever known, but he was ugly, mean, and nobody liked him, so he was cast out and made to hunt for everyone else until he starved to death. This brought great sadness to the Makana. His lesson is to care for everyone in the tribe.

The stories told of the gods seem to have taught the Makana to view aberrants, with their strange mutations, as if they were gods—and in truth, the gods of their stories were indeed aberrants.

Every three months before a hunt, in ritual preparation for the hunters, nobody is to eat for a week. The fasting is to make the hunters feel that their tribe's survival rests on their shoulders as they row out in their canoes to kill sea creatures so massive that they could swallow each canoe whole. The ritual ceremony before a hunt is a spiritual invocation of Karawa, and Seer Matah'weh will bless a single spear out of eight. That spear is said to be the only one that can penetrate the heart of the sea beast.

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*The Makana village is designed to be less horrific than other places in Irkalla. This is to give the characters a break from the relentless horror, and to let them form relationships with the Makana people. If they are able to truly connect with a few villagers, then it will hit harder when the Haori come to murder, torture, defile, and enslave the Makana.*

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## SEER MATAH'WEH

This old woman claims to be the mother of the psychic slaves within the characters' minds, the Eyes Upon the Throne. The psychic slaves were taken from her as children. She has spent the rest of her life protecting this village from raids like the one that took her children from her. Each character has a different father, though it is unclear who they might be or where they are. Finding their fathers could be the premise for a future adventure.

Matah'weh speaks in a language that is strangely familiar, the language of the Makana, which the characters know in their psychic subconscious:

"I have lived for many generations in this village. Normally, you would not have found this village if I had not guided you here. I keep this place hidden from the horrors of the outside world, but my mind has started to suffer. I believe I may be dying, and this village will no longer be safe when I am gone. There is an island the Makana's ancestors spoke of, the land where they came from known as Awaiki. If I am dead, the Makana people will need to go there to stay safe..."

Matah'weh knows much about the world outside this sanctuary, which is why she keeps it hidden. She does not appear in the village very often, traveling there only for dances, rituals, and other events, but otherwise she stays a short distance away in a mountain cave. Wherever she goes, an old boar comes along to protect her.

Sometimes, Matah'weh uses illusions to lure men to her in the middle of the night, so they might impregnate her. She has given birth to many children, though she discarded the infants that did not display signs of psychic powers. She has one child, a boy of age eleven, still breast-fed and kept hidden in her cave. This child, Etu, suffers psychic nightmares, a fact which Matah'weh tries to keep hidden from the tribe and the characters.

## THE RAVENS

In Makana culture, ravens are viewed as messengers of the gods. Ravens guide the hunters to their prey, and they guide travelers to distant islands. Ravens are carved and painted everywhere, and Karawa is considered the goddess of ravens.

## EVENT: THE HUNT

A survivor from the most recent hunt is carried into the village. This is the only survivor of forty hunters that have been sent out recently. The tribe began fasting the week prior to the first hunt—it has now been a month since anyone has eaten. The survivor, bleeding badly from deep gashes, tells a broken story of a woman waiting for them in the deep water outside the bay.

All the tribe know this creature from legend—they call her Taniwha, the deep creature. Taniwha is a tentacled leviathan that uses illusions to lure its prey. If the characters manage to kill Taniwha, the tribe will celebrate and honor the hunters, perhaps rewarding each with an artifact (page 51).

## EVENT: THE LEGEND OF THE BASKET-WOMAN

The older children tell stories of a large woman who captures children and carries them in a basket back to her cave to cook and eat them. It is not an unknown story—many villagers have heard it. Children do go missing from time to time, and the Basket-Woman is blamed for it but there is never any trace of her. The characters may be able to find her in her mountain cave, after three children that were camping by the river go missing.

## EVENT: THE HAUNT IN THE FOREST

It is not safe to travel into the forest. There is something alive out there that should not exist. The forest itself seems to bend to this being's will—the trees rearrange themselves, making it very easy for someone to get lost.

Unknown even to Matah'weh, this sentence is a byproduct of the psychic energy used to protect the Makana village. The forest is essentially a maze, since Matah'weh attempts to prevent access to the Makana village, and strange forces stalk that maze. Something lurks in the forest—a humanoid creature that would appear to be another Abgal, a Makana god, with pitch-black skin, raven wings, and the head of a goat. This being seduces villagers into the forest with inexplicable powers, and the truth of their fate remains a mystery.

## EVENT: THE VISITORS AND THE STORM

A tribe of similar culture, the Pauakama, comes from the sea with items for trade, exchanging blankets as a shared currency. After one day and one night of trading and sharing stories, the visiting tribe leaves, and it is revealed shortly thereafter that they stole many goods from the Makana. The Makana are quick to get into their canoes to chase the thieves.

The characters may assist in reclaiming the stolen items and capturing the thieves. However, while at sea the waters turn violent, and both the Pauakama and the Makana must face a sudden storm. The currents carry any survivors to awaken in a sea cave, which houses creatures with human upper halves and tentacled lower halves. The characters must journey through caves to return to the village, facing plenty of claustrophobic swimming and underwater horrors.

## EVENT: SPIRIT DANCE

The Makana dance to chase away negativity. When they are sad, when they are facing adversity, when they are hurt, they believe that demons are grabbing them and preventing them from being happy, so they must dance to break free. Despite this superstition, the dancing truly does help the Makana tribe stay positive. The Spirit Dance is a series of dances with drums, sex, and hallucinatory herbs, which lasts late into the night and continues the next. Anyone in the tribe can choose to lead a dance, declaring what the dance is meant to bring or chase away.

## EVENT: THE NIGHTMARE

Prior to this event, the characters should sometimes hear babies crying in odd locations, find preserved corpses of fetuses, and hear strange noises that might resemble those of bestiality.

Now it is the middle of the night, and awful sounds can be heard in the forest. The sound of crying babies echoes throughout. The sounds of a woman in ecstasy and animalistic grunts and snorts—pig squeals. Shadows stalk the village. A bloodcurdling scream comes from Matah'weh's cave. It is her voice—it sounds as if she is being murdered.

Her cave is the source of all the horrific sounds, with infants crawling in alien, hostile fashion, and shadowed pigmen goring Matah'weh's orgasmically twitching corpse with their tusks. Matah'weh's son, Etu, is suffering a seizure in the middle of the cave. If Etu is helped, the nightmare ends—but Matah'weh remains dead, and the little corpses of infants remain as evidence of what has happened. If Etu is killed, it means the Haori find another psychic child during their attack.

## CLIMACTIC EVENT: THE HAORI ATTACK

Matah'weh has died, and the tribe honors her with a ceremonial burial at the sacred site outside the village, a burial ground with a grim totem. But now that the village is unprotected, the Haori attack at an opportune moment.

Several dozen warriors storm the Makana village with militaristic strategy. It is a horrific attack—the bodies, the captives, the frightful Haori: warriors in human-skin leather and masks made of their victims' faces, wielding large curved weapons made of carved stone, and bleeding from ritualistic wounds in sigil-like patterns.

There is no escape. The Haori have come onto land from the sea and surrounded the village. The characters are either captured or killed (the Haori would rather capture than kill). In particular, Etu is captured by the Haori's elite soldiers. The Makana village is left burning as all the survivors in shackles are thrown onto the Haori ships and brought to Asthinapura.

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*The next two parts of the adventure rely on the characters going to Asthinapura. If the players manage to avoid being killed or captured, they should have formed relationships with some of the Makana people, possibly love interests. Try to compel them to follow the remaining Makana, either for vengeance or to save their loved ones. If the players absolutely do not want to follow, then do not force them—abandon the adventure and do what the players want. You can probably find another way to have them come across Asthinapura later on, anyway.*

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## Ψ ACT 2: THE PITS Ψ

After the Haori attack, the captured Makana villagers and the prized Etu—perhaps along with the characters—are brought across the sea to the Haori city, Asthinapura. If the players followed of their own accord, allow them to approach however they like, but try to lead them to become gladiators, either by choice or by capture. As outsiders, they will be treated with hostility in the city.

### ASTHINAPURA, THE CITY OF BONES

This stone city rests in a swampland floodplain, with an interlocking system of canals and aqueducts that dump excess water into massive underground cave systems. The water level is kept in a delicate balance just above ground level, dammed with precisely carved stones. The dominant motif is that of a temple atop a mountain—indeed, one must climb to the top as if climbing a mountain, with stairs that ascend at seventy degrees. Bas-relief galleries decorate every inch of exposed wall, haut-reliefs are carved from the blind doors and windows, statues stand guard with stone swords and demonic faces, and decorative patterns abound on colonettes that serve no purpose other than monumental appearance.

This motif comes from their god-queen, Saayadevi, who sleeps in her tomb atop Mount Hikanaka, which overlooks Asthinapura. The interior of each structure serves as a catacomb, with ancestral bones arranged in extravagant patterns. These catacombs earn Asthinapura its namesake: the City of Bones.

The Haori people of Asthinapura are downtrodden and miserable, living in wooden shacks and tents. They are constantly threatened by the horrors that haunt the surrounding swamps. They view non-humans as inferior creatures, only worthy to be slaves and ritual sacrifices. The streets run parallel to canals, providing running water for bathing and drinking. Asthinapura is an impressive city, clearly intended to be a monument, and its people are careful with its upkeep. Though not immediately apparent, the people are superstitious and hold deep respect for water snakes. They believe, correctly, that the snakes will punish them for any actions that Saayadevi would not approve of. Saayadevi has created illusions of massive snakes, known as naga, that serve as her whips to keep the population strictly disciplined. Existence in Asthinapura is a fight to earn religious favor, as those in Saayadevi's favor are granted feasts and pleasures in the deepest recesses of the temples.

Beneath the city, the Haori are building deep into a massive cave system, where the majority of slaves are brought to continue creating vaults, libraries, laboratories, and workshops. Before Saayadevi became an Architect, her small tribe forbid traveling into these caves below. For many months, she and her lover would travel into the caves to hide from their disapproving families, but during one journey they were separated by a flash flood.

Groping through the darkness, Saayadevi eventually found shelter. As she recovered there, she discovered the walls were covered in intricate carvings, which she studied with her hands. These carvings were what opened her mind to the Qliphothic dimensions, leading her on the path to become an Architect. Hundreds of years later, she receives visions of her lover trapped in the depths below, and she intends to find the source of those visions.

## TRANSITIONAL EVENT: BROUGHT TO THE SLAVE MARKET

After several days of being forced to row as galley slaves chained belowdecks, suffering pruning and ulcerations of the feet, the characters are brought to a slave market where they must prove themselves physically, or else face the butcher's block to serve as meat and leather. The characters become gladiators, entertainers, forced to fight in duels against slaves from other parts of Irkalla. If they rise to fame in the arena, they are brought to one of the grand temples as an exalted offering to Saayadevi, and as part of a massive ritual they are thrown down a pit. The fall is not long enough to outright kill them, typically only enough to break several bones.

## THE BOTTOM OF THE PIT

Down the pit is an elaborate expanse of ensconced and vaulted catacombs, with millions of bones arranged in an artistic display, which lead the characters downward on steep, torchlit staircases and bridges over massive chasms. Aside from odd shapes and shadows, no living things are found down here at first. Eventually, though, the characters find themselves in the complex cave system below Asthinapura, among the slaves that chip away at the stone from narrow wooden beams overlooking bottomless chasms. There are no overlords commanding these slaves, yet they act as if oppressed by some invisible force.

That force soon becomes known, a whisper in the characters' heads that echoes commands. This whisper is the voice of Saayadevi, the queen, who will periodically act as a guide. She was impressed by the characters' skill in the arena, and though they can never earn freedom from slavery, they can serve her by exploring the caves. She is looking for something, but she will only hint that she seeks Yaatana, her lover from long ago.

## THE ENDLESS DESCENT

The cave always leads down. The deeper one goes, the more dangerous it becomes. Safety can be found above, but horror is always found below. Light sources are required—equipment and food can be found at the slave camps, made from strange materials such as fungus, body parts, and stones. It's easy to fall, and the fear of such should be ever-present. Falling may not result in death, but it may remove their ability to backtrack using the same passageway. As they go deeper, the characters' minds will play tricks on them—they find themselves in twisted, dark versions of places from their past or from elsewhere, even from anachronistic places in time.

## THE DROWNED

Deep down, at the lowest point of the caves, they find an entity that calls itself the Drowned. It is the twisted form of Yaatana, the queen's lover from hundreds of years ago, now a plague god with an irrational hatred toward Saayadevi for leading him to his death.

This bloated, water-tortured corpse, covered in seaweed and barnacles, attempts to crawl up toward the surface, gargling words about being lost, yet keeps its hatred toward Saayadevi hidden. The characters may help this being find the upper levels, or it may chase or follow them, depending on how the characters interact with it. Once near the top, the Drowned becomes a plague god as its psychic subconscious manifests into reality, flooding the cave. The water level rises, allowing the slaves to swim to passages leading to the surface, and as they emerge they find the surface world suffering from an apocalyptic deluge of horror.

## THE MONSTROUS DELUGE

As the ocean swallows Asthinapura, sea monsters swallow the Haori. The world is twisted into a dark dimension surrounded by a massive whirlpool in an ocean of blood. Black tentacles, alien barnacles, and thousands of black fish eggs the size of boulders cover the City of Bones as if it were an underwater ruin. The creature known as the Drowned climbs to the temple atop the mountain.

The characters may attempt to stop the Drowned, but it will ultimately be of no use. Saayadevi will not even fight the Drowned—she embraces her death at the hands of her lover. Even if they are at a distance, the characters will hear the psychic death throes of Saayadevi, knocking them unconscious. Shortly thereafter, the world enters another reality. The city of Asthinapura becomes hell incarnate, a labyrinth of caves formed of the subconscious dimensions of Saayadevi and her psychic slaves, Etu among them, fused with Yaatana's nightmares.

## Ψ ACT 3: THE UNDERWORLD Ψ

After being telepathically knocked unconscious by the murder of Saayadevi, the characters wake up some days later in a large cavern with a number of shacks and barricades. The people here would normally view the abhuman characters as slaves, and some of them still hold that prejudice, but this intense situation means they are mostly communal, and if any of the gladiator Endlings still live, they would start off with a positive reputation.

### THE CAVE WORLD

The sky over Asthinapura has become solid stone, though it would be nearly impossible to tell that it is anything other than darkness were it not for daylight seeping in through the cavern chimneys above, at least during the day. The few survivors of Asthinapura cower by small fires in ramshackle shelters. The temples of the City of Bones have become necromantic dungeons, with the bones from their catacombs animated into legions that serve foul forces. The canals have become fissures that lead into nothingness, with cascades of blood falling down them.

One can no longer travel the city by roads, as now the cavernous passages that were once below have fused with the structures above, creating a labyrinthine cave-city. The people are forced to stay hunkered down and hidden from the various horrors that lurk the structure. Corpses can be found throughout, some with Haori weapons and armor, others with odd trinkets and supplies. The world appears waterlogged, with flooded passages, pools of water, coral growths, and hints of sea monsters. Fish have therefore become the primary source of food for the survivors. Mixed in with all this is the appearance of a black jungle or swamp, also fused with the city, with pitch-black vines, dense trees, and tangled vegetation.

Here, the characters could form a settlement (page 39). It's most likely the characters will build an army to fight through the legions of nightmares. It is possible for them to find an alternate path, but mass combat—narrated as an epic backdrop while the characters remain the focus—serves as a climax.

### EVENT: THE KRASUE

Aside from the horrors that stalk around their shelter, there are creatures that find their way into the shelter at night known as the Krasue. The legend surrounding these creatures is that each has the head of a beautiful woman, with the spine and intestines hanging below like tentacles. Beneath the temple of life, women were bound as breeders, with dozens of pregnancies at any given moment. The truth now is that the fetuses in the wombs of these dead breeders are now undead that sneak out at night to feed, and the tentacles are the detached umbilical cords.

### EVENT: THE LEGION OF BONES

Dark forces have reanimated the skeletons from the catacombs. Though they are easily defeated, they can inflict serious damage. At a climactic moment, you can reveal an army of skeletons marching through the cave world, dressing themselves in gore as they slaughter survivors. Everywhere the characters go, they will find skeletons and skulls and bones. The characters should never feel safe, even if a skull is just sitting there, staring at them. The Legion of Bones has a population of 5000.

## THE TEMPLE DUNGEONS

Artifacts can be found in the vaults of the corrupted temples, and could serve as the Concept for countless dungeon crawls.

## HIKANAKA'S ASCENT

Getting to Saayadevi requires an organized military effort to fight through the undead legions, and then an ascent of the volcanic caves inside Mount Hikanaka. In contrast to Asthinapura itself, the mountain caves always travels upward, with safety found below by taking cover. The caves and jungles and temples and ruins all lead up, eventually to a volcanic area, the internal organs of Mount Hikanaka.

There, a fleshscape of intestines and organic chambers is juxtaposed with the orange glow of magma, with charred skeletons and some unreckonable alien creatures both skeletal and of molten metal. There are no survivors here—Hikanaka's ascent is purely hostile. Only the psychic echoes of the dead may provide sentiment.

## SAAYADEVI'S NIGHTMARE

The lava of Hikanaka bubbles and blackens, and charred Haori corpses emerge from the lava vomiting black liquid like some cross between drowning and burn victims. Fire-breathing black serpents seep disgusting liquids from their many wounds onto the poorly cut cyclopean stone ruins of the mountain-temple.

## THE THRONE OF THE PLAGUE GOD

The Eye Upon the Throne of Saayadevi is an incarnation of Irkalla herself who calls herself Kalaratri. Her skin is pitch black, and she has four arms, wielding a sword and a decapitated head. She is naked except for a garland of skulls and a skirt of severed arms. Her left foot is forward, standing on the burnt corpse of the Drowned.

Kalaratri is large, about ten feet tall, and has the stats of a deadly enemy. She does not move from her position willingly. She uses her sword against any targets that come close enough. She commands the fire-breathing serpents to attack ranged targets, and summons eruptions of black lava from below to control the battlefield.

Once Kalaratri is killed, she staggers and stumbles off the corpse of the Drowned. Now, Yaatana the Drowned, not being stood upon, mutates into a massive heaving form of tongued coral and odd appendages. The temple floods violently with a rush of briny water, the fire-breathing serpents become ink-spewing tentacles, and the temple is submerged underwater.

Yaatana the Drowned has the stats of a massive enemy, and the characters must fight him underwater, likely requiring them to go to the top of the temple chamber to take breaths of air. Upon the death of Yaatana, the water drains from the temple, revealing a passage to Etu's tomb.

### **Mundamala, Garland of Skulls**

*When worn, it becomes clear to the wearer that everything that comes into existence must come to an end, and the world that one seeks is ever-changing and transient—forever out of reach. Each skull on this artifact represents a cosmos that has died.*

**Dominion of Death:** The wearer and allies can re-roll disastrous death rolls, but must accept the re-rolled result.

### Skirt of Severed Arms

*The severed arms of this skirt represent causality and punishment.*

**Demonic Ward:** The wearer cannot be grappled or grabbed by anyone.

### Kalaratri's Sword of Illumination

*A curved steel sword that may flash with blinding light.*

Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 27, Bulk: 10, Quality: 5

**Blinding Light:** On a critically successful attack, the sword blinds all enemies in visible range until the wielder's next turn.

**Imbuements:** Since each of these items are artifacts, roll for their imbuements (page 52).

## ETU'S TOMB

Suspended in a nightmare, Etu twitches and turns in his sleep. The tomb is filled with nightmare versions of the Makana tribe, shadows and silhouettes spawned by Etu's subconscious. The Eye Upon the Throne of Etu is a demonic hooded figure with a pig face. His mother, Matah'weh, has also taken on a demonic form, a multi-breasted queen with dozens of undead fetuses attached to umbilical cords coming out of her womb like writhing tentacles, just like the Krasue. She is surrounded by tormented and trapped shadow Makana manservants. It is possible to kill nightmare-Matah'weh and the demon pig, but the nightmare will only end by killing Etu. A new beginning can be formed from the ashes...



# Dark Artifacts & Character Sketches



**T**hese artifacts may be used at any point in a campaign, found in any location you deem appropriate. They are each powerful, and some carry curses with them, so be aware of their implications when introducing them to the game. As such, they emanate a powerful dark energy that the characters can all sense, a warning of their inherent corruption.

## EYE OF THE SOOTHSAYER

A human eye socket, still warm as if ripped from a living victim moments before, with eyelids that occasionally blink, a melancholy sentence in the eyeball itself, and a gentle flow of blood seeping from the tear duct.

The eye belonged to an oracle from a small nomadic tribe. She would see threats before they could harm anyone, and the tribe allowed her to guide them onward. She led them to a hidden paradise, and after some time of adjustment, they made this their new home. The oracle made many predictions that turned out to be wrong, and when she predicted the tribe's destruction if they didn't move on, they ignored her. She continued for years, preaching her visions of an attack, and eventually—on the day she said the attack would arrive—a young male from the tribe took it upon himself to cut out her eye socket and "see for himself," mockingly holding her eye to his. As he did, he saw the vision, but it was too late. The attack was already upon them. The tribe was looted, raped, and slaughtered, and what few survivors remained were placed into chains. The Eye of the Soothsayer is all that remains of the tribe.

**Vision of Horror:** When one looks into the pupil of the eye, it penetrates the viewer's mind and begins to weep tears of blood. The viewer describes a horrific vision of a future event. When the predicted event happens, the viewer gains Advantage on all skill tests related to it. If the same viewer looks into the eye again, the vision changes, so they will not gain Advantage on skill tests related to the previous vision. The vision cannot be about something that is already obviously about to happen.

## ADINKRA CONFIGURATION

A dull black sphere, extremely heavy, that emits a static-like sound when held facing certain directions. The sound loudens as the sphere gets closer to any of nine ritual sites throughout the world. At each ritual site, a black flame present there causes symbols in the sphere to glow dimly. As the sphere gets closer to the black flame, the symbols grow brighter. If the sphere is placed in the flame, its symbols activate, the black flame disappears, and a star reveals itself in the sky, even through the dark clouds. Activated symbols on the sphere can be moved around by touching.

Each time the sphere is placed into a black flame, a new symbol is revealed, and a new star shines through the clouds, until all nine symbols and stars are visible. If the symbols are rearranged to match the constellation, the sphere explodes like a supernova and becomes a black-hole portal to the Kingdom of Torment—a black planet of blood rivers, obsidian mountains, non-Euclidean geometries, endless screams, and gods of madness with ever-changing faces and dissonant voices that want nothing more than to cause insanity.

**Portal to the Kingdom of Torment:** Once its nine symbols are activated and arranged correctly, the Adrinka Configuration creates a massive supernova of dark energy, destroying everything in a large area except the characters. It also causes the Kingdom of Torment to fuse with ground zero, creating a labyrinth of void-black horrors that the characters must escape. While in the Kingdom of Torment, the characters gain double Stress from rolls as the gods of madness seek to drive them insane. The sphere cannot be activated while in the Kingdom of Torment.

### THAUMIEL'S OFFER

This black coin, hammered with the Qliphothic seals of Thaumiel, shows Thaumiel's dual forces, eternally opposing each other yet belonging to the same entity. Heads represents child sacrifice, and tails represents adversaries. Flipping the coin causes the two sides of the coin to contend with each other, each trying to influence reality, and whichever lands on display is the victor.

**Contending Forces:** Flip a coin. On heads, you must kill a child, or else the Eye Upon the Throne will die when you die. On tails, the next enemy you encounter becomes your servant. The coin cannot be flipped again until its effect resolves fully.

### SEVEN DOORS OF DEATH

This ornate mirror is a gateway into an endless horizon of corpses, and those who touch it become trapped in the dimension on the other side. While trapped there, their reflection exists in Irkalla, though they experience an Irkalla that is even darker. Trying to escape this dimension requires passage through the Seven Doors of Death, which can only be entered by fulfilling certain requirements.

**Dark Reflection:** Upon touching the mirror, the bearer's reality becomes even worse. This curse is bound to the Eye Upon the Throne. The bearer takes double damage, deals half damage, and gains double Stress, double Doom, and double blood loss. The bearer also suffers permanent psychosis. Finally, the bearer gains double XP, but cannot spend XP until they break through the Seven Doors of Death and return to reality. The Seven Doors can only be broken through by destroying seven artifacts. Each time the bearer destroys an artifact, it breaks one of the doors, so the wearer can remove one of the seven effects of the curse.

### TOTEMS OF ANG UL-MAK

In service to their god, warrior tribes have erected massive totems made from the corpses of those they slaughtered in battle. Serving as the closest thing Ang Ul-Mak has to temples, these monuments also stand as mass grave markers and continue to receive sacrificial offerings. Those butchered before the totem have their souls trapped inside, twisted into serving as warrior-slaves when called upon.

**Spiritual Slavery:** Anyone sacrificed to Ang Ul-Mak before such a totem is stored as a soul inside it. A totem can carry up to six souls. The murderer can call upon a soul in their totem to deal +10 damage on a successful attack, remove a major injury, or roll an extra die on a skill test.

## SHROUD OF THE BLACK ROSE

This ancient shroud, dyed dark with the black roses of Aurimea, allows its wearer to speak the ancient dead languages, those of the Azerate, and to decipher even the most cryptic of codes, but it comes at the cost of insanity, hunger, and possibly death.

**Insatiable Knowledge:** The wearer can understand the Qliphoth, reducing the Progress required to read a Qliphothic grimoire to 5. However, the wearer cannot remove Stress while resting—they perceive this world to be synonymous with hunger, and so no matter how much food they eat, they cannot end their hunger. Simply removing the shroud is not enough to remove this curse. To remove the curse, the wearer must remove the shroud and then reduce their Stress to 3. Even once the wearer has removed the curse, wearing the shroud again curses them again.

## CEPHALIC BLACKFIRE

This polished bronze skull appears to the bearer in the shape of their species' skull, marked with intricate symbols, and shrouded in an illusory black flame. The artifact is pristine, no matter what, as if it were spawned from beyond existence. Through this skull, the bearer can telepathically communicate with the collective consciousness of their species, and as long as the collective consciousness is pleased, the bearer can summon parts of their dead homeworld into Irkalla.

**Summoning of the Shadow:** To please the collective consciousness, the bearer of the Cephalic Blackfire must be suffering psychosis, allowing the bearer to manifest their dead species into reality. When doing so, the dead are spawned as nightmares, which have the stats of deadly enemies and regard the bearer with hostility, attempting to make the bearer join them in death. Each of these nightmares will carry an artifact from the bearer's homeworld. However, these artifacts cease to exist when the bearer is cured of psychosis or loses possession of the skull.

## MACIE'S YEARNING

This intangible artifact fuses with the physical form of the bearer, having no appearance other than black cracks in the owner's flesh. The owner of Macie's Yearning is protected from death, but is haunted by the image of a female spirit that exudes deep sadness and anger. This spirit becomes more and more furious each time the bearer survives an encounter with death, and eventually the bearer will no longer be able to avoid death. The spirit wishes nothing more than to be free, continuously demanding that the bearer commit suicide.

**Avoid Death:** Whenever the bearer of Macie's Yearning must make a death roll, they may choose to succeed at it, without rolling. However, each time they do, the bearer suffers a dark scar that eats away at their psyche, suffering a permanent -1 penalty to all dice rolled on skill tests. When the character reaches a -5 penalty, their next death roll is always disastrous. If this death roll means the bearer is murdered, the artifact falls into the possession of the murderer. If the character is killed in any other manner, the artifact ceases to exist.

## ORACLE OF THE DAMNED

This ancient locust tree sprouted from the blood of a horrific battle. The fear contained in the blood of the dying imbued the tree with a spirit of terrible power. Now, the tree siphons knowledge from the countless bodies skewered on its vicious thorns, keeping its victims alive through some unreckonable dark energy. The tree is willing to grant knowledge to petitioners in exchange for a living sacrifice.

**Dark Knowledge:** By skewering a living being on the tree's thorns, the tree will share some of its knowledge, granting the petitioner an honest though sometimes cryptic answer to any question.

## MALMSTURM'S CHAIR

This wheelchair appears in many different styles, ranging from low-tech to high-tech. The chair is inhabited by an entity called Malmsturm, and this word appears written somewhere on the chair, no matter what appearance the chair takes on. The chair can manifest organic-robotic tentacles that serve as limbs, allowing the user to climb. Over time, the user starts to absentmindedly refer to themselves as Malmsturm, as the entity starts to possess them.

**Phantom Limbs:** Anyone who has lost, or lost use of, at least one limb can sit in the chair. Once seated, the user gains the Tentacles (+3) specialty, as the wheelchair manifests four tentacles, which can be used to climb, attack as natural weapons, grapple, or do anything else that the user's missing limb would be capable of. However, the user becomes one with the chair, unable to be removed unless killed.

## ABSU CHISEL

This bone chisel bleeds black liquid Absu, and tattoos made with it grant the bearer dark powers related to the meaning of the tattoo. This chisel is made of the shinbone of a monk who chose not to enter his destined self-sacrificial dreamstate, and instead used his own body as a channel for Absu to craft with. By doing so he did provide for his people, but the Absu flowing through him ultimately poisoned his blood, and he died painfully. The other monks of his monastery continued the practice, stabbing themselves with his bones so they could craft with the Absu imparted. However, they too started to die from the poison, and so the bones were found to be cursed and destroyed in fire—all but this chisel, which had been stolen from the monastery.

**Black Scars:** The bearer can use the chisel to tattoo up to seven dark images. They can tattoo on their own body or another's, and completing each tattoo requires 3 Progress. Each tattoo is treated as an artifact with imbuelements. However, all injuries that the bearer suffers to tattooed body parts are permanent.

## NIPPLES OF DUALITY

This cluster of grapes forever produces the fruit as if it were still on the vine. Any grape taken from the cluster grows again within minutes. As such, the cluster may serve as a source of sustenance. However, each grape contains various levels of the essence of either chaos or purity, indiscernible until swallowed.

**Essence of Pure Chaos:** After swallowing one of the grapes, roll 1d10 to determine what happens.

d10	Effect
1	<b>Chaos:</b> Begin suffering psychosis.
2–4	<b>Emotions (chaos):</b> Remove 5 Doom, but gain 1 Stress.
6–9	<b>Reason (purity):</b> Remove 1 Stress, but gain 5 Doom.
10	<b>Purity:</b> Make a death roll.

## WHISTLED LAMENTATION

This jaunty whistled song echoes through the heads of all those nearby. It is an intricate series of notes, not quite a melody, first formed in the mind of a witch who was trying to drown out the sound of her family's bones being crushed by a torturer. The witch, unaware of her power, caused the torturer to begin whistling the song. Since then the song has spread throughout Irkalla, but only to those who put in the effort to learn it.

**Subconscious Song:** After hearing the song, the bearer may choose to learn the song, which requires 2 Progress. Once learned, the notes of the song play through the bearer's head indefinitely while in combat. The bearer does not gain Stress in combat, but they cannot hear anything else, suffering Disadvantage on all defend tests, and they cannot listen, even telepathically, to allies. The bearer can only remove the song from their head by torturing and killing a family while whistling the song.

## TRANQUIL FATHOMS

This beautiful amulet, a fossilized blue conch shell on a woven-hair string of pearls, was once worn by a warlord who fought ceaselessly in a thousand wars for his Architect's glory. The Architect crafted this amulet to grant the warlord calming thoughts of paradise, even after being exposed for decades to the horrors of psychic warfare.

**Cerulean Comfort:** The wearer of Tranquil Fathoms removes one more Stress each time they remove Stress, as long as they revere an Architect as their god. If the wearer does not worship an Architect, the wearer cannot remove Stress.

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Eye of the Soothsayer: First Doyle  
 Adinkra Configuration: Lorgar, the first avatar of khaos and frontman of Forneus  
 Thaumiel's Offer: Charles Pugsley  
 Seven Doors of Death: Jeff "Sage" Trisoliere  
 Totems of Ang Ul-Mak: Austin Wolfe  
 Shroud of the Black Rose: Micha Michelle Cole  
 Cephalic Blackfire: Dominick Geronimo  
 Macie's Yearning: Adam Burgess  
 Oracle of the Damned: Adam Alexander  
 Malmsturm's Chair: Werner Hartmann  
 Absu Chisel: Tristan Wolfe  
 Nipples of Duality: Benedikt Simon  
 Whistled Lamentation: William Ables  
 Tranquil Fathoms: John Bowlin

# THE WRETCHED ONES



KYRA (DRAMIRA™)  
Intellectual Property of Mina Korzan



GOD OF MISCHIEF  
for Charles Pugsley



EMBODIMENT OF NIHILISM  
for Benedikt Simon



SILVARA  
IP of Micha Michelle Cole

# THAT DWELL IN IRKALLA



ULFR THE FRENZIED  
IP of Austin Wolfe



QREKZOK THE HELLWEAVER  
IP of Jeff "Sage" Trisoliere



ERAVANDER  
IP of Dominick Geronimo



KONRAD KARDINAL  
IP of Werner Hartmann

## ATTACKING

You can attack once with each weapon you wield per offense turn. Shields count as weapons. An attack is a skill test. You deal damage as follows:

- **Critical Success:** Total damage =  $10 \times \text{number of dice rolled} + \text{Weapon Rating}$
- **Complete Success:** Total damage = all rolled dice + Weapon Rating
- **Partial Success:** Total damage = highest rolled die + Weapon Rating
- **Disaster:** No damage

## DEFENDING

When an enemy attacks you, you make a skill test to defend, whether to dodge, block, parry, use cover, or avoid damage by any other means. Enemies do not roll skill tests, you receive damage based on your defend test result, as follows:

- **Complete Success:** No damage
- **Partial Success:** Total damage = GM rolls 1 die + damage
- **Disaster:** Total damage = GM rolls 2 dice + damage
- **Undefended:** Total damage = GM rolls 3 dice + enemy damage

## INJURIES

The severity of the injury depends on the amount of damage you take:

- **10–19 damage:** major injury (gashes, fractured bones, sprained ligaments)
- **20–29 damage:** grievous injury (cleaved chunks of flesh, protruding bones, torn muscles)
- **30–39 damage:** mortal injury (dismembered body parts, shattered bones, ruptured organs)
- **40+ damage:** fatality (decapitation, turned to giblets, crushed)

## ENEMY ATTRIBUTES

### Normal (Small)

**Damage:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(0 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $10 \times \text{level}$

### Challenging (Medium)

**Damage:**  $(4 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(2 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $20 \times \text{level}$

### Hard (Large)

**Damage:**  $(10 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(3 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $50 \times \text{level}$

### Deadly (Massive)

**Damage:**  $(18 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(5 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $75 \times \text{level}$

### Extreme (Colossal)

**Damage:**  $(23 + \text{level}) \times 3$

**Armor:**  $(10 + \text{level}) \times 4$

**Life:**  $100 \times \text{level}$

## ABILITIES FOR MASSIVE AND COLOSSAL CREATURES

**Grab:** As a move action, the enemy can grab a target, limiting its movement. The target suffers the effects of being grappled, but the grabber does not.

**Knockback:** On a successful attack, the enemy sends the target flying backwards into another object. If that object is hard, the target takes a major injury to a random body part.

**Squeeze:** As an attack, the enemy can crush a grabbed target, dealing +3d10 damage.

**Stomp:** As an attack, the enemy can stomp on an undefended target like it's a large rodent, the target must make a Death roll.

**Swallow Whole:** As an attack, the enemy swallows an undefended target whole. Swallowed creatures cannot perform any actions and must make a Death roll when removed from the stomach to see if they survived the digestive acids.

**Unblockable (Passive):** The enemy's attacks cannot be blocked, only dodged, negating the effect of a wielded shield.

**Wide Swing:** With one attack, the enemy can hit up to five targets near to each other.

## DAMAGE FROM THE ENVIRONMENT

Environmental hazards such as frigid winds, fire or radiation, and poisonous plants deal 3d10 + 15 damage of the appropriate type (heat, cold, or poison) to all affected body parts.

Falling from a dangerous height also results in 3d10 + 15 damage that bypasses armor, rolled separately on three random body parts. Falling from an extreme height results in death.

## RESTING

When you're in a safe area, you and the other characters may choose to rest and recover. You're encouraged to only roll the dice after roleplaying for a bit. Anyone who chooses to rest must roll one die, but anyone who chooses not to rest this time must roll three dice the next time they choose to rest.

**If nobody rolls a 1,** the area remains safe. Each player who rolled chooses one of the following:

- Remove 1 Stress (or a half Stress if suffering Psychosis) if you recently consumed food and water
- Remove an injury of the lowest severity (remove a second if you're receiving medical treatment)
- Gain 1 Progress on a personal project (page 38)

A character suffering Psychosis must remove Stress a second time in order to remove 1 Stress—they cannot simply remove half a Stress point.

**If anyone rolls a 1,** the situation becomes significantly worse. You could suffer food poisoning after eating a meal, become weakened from deadly spores in the air, get discovered by a horrific threat, or experience some other awful event.

## Ψ EXAMPLE EQUIPMENT Ψ

### IMPROVISED PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Stone Shard:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Small Stone:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 1, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Rock:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Heavy Rock:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 5, Quality: 1

### CLUNKY PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Carcass Patchwork:** Light, Armor Rating: 1, Bulk: 2, Quality: 1  
**Sinew-Threaded Stone:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 4, Quality: 1

### POOR PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Stone Dagger:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Sinew Sling:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 2, Bulk: 0, Quality: 1  
**Stone-Tipped Spear:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 3, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Heavy Club:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 6, Bulk: 5, Quality: 1  
**Stone Maul:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 8, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 1

### POOR PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Stitched Fur:** Light, Armor Rating: 1, Bulk: 1, Quality: 1  
**Wood-Ribbed Clay:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 2, Quality: 1

### NORMAL PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Jaw-Bone Hatcher:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 3, Bulk: 0, Quality: 2  
**Blood-Stained Wooden Staff:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Bone-and-Sinew Bow:** Two-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Wooden Mallet:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 7, Bulk: 5, Quality: 2  
**Giant Stone Axe:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 9, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 2

### NORMAL PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Rawhide Scale:** Light, Armor Rating: 2, Bulk: 1, Quality: 2  
**Wooden Splint:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 3, Bulk: 2, Quality: 2

### HIGH-QUALITY PRIMITIVE WEAPONS

- Ceremonial Obsidian Dagger:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 0, Quality: 3  
**Carved Antler Tomahawk:** One-Handed Ranged, Weapon Rating: 4, Bulk: 0, Quality: 3  
**Horned Shaman Fetish:** One-Handed, Weapon Rating: 5, Bulk: 1, Quality: 3  
**Carved Bone Battle Axe:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 8, Bulk: 5, Quality: 3  
**Ornate Totemic Staff:** Two-Handed, Weapon Rating: 10, Bulk: 9, -2 to attack tests, Quality: 3

### HIGH-QUALITY PRIMITIVE ARMOR

- Woven Leather Sinew:** Light, Armor Rating: 3, Bulk: 1, Quality: 3  
**Banded Antler and Tooth:** Heavy, Armor Rating: 4, Bulk: 2, Quality: 3

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