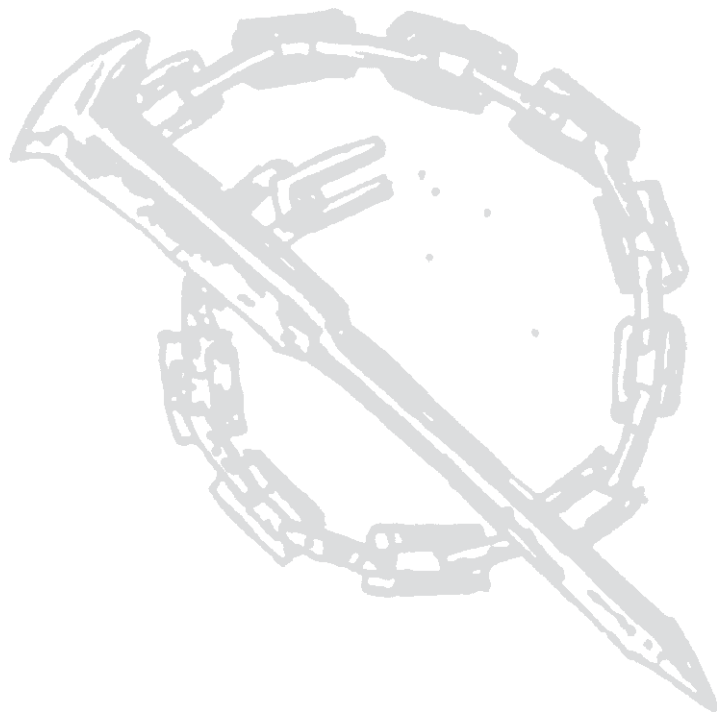




An Antagonist Sourcebook FOR DEMON: THE FALLEN™



EARTHBOUND™



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EARTHBOUND™

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PROLOGUE: A NEW HOME

When I get there, she's been bleeding long enough that her face has gone a queer white color. She still manages to smile at me, though. She would probably hug me, but she's keeping pressure on the wound in her thigh.

That's the thing about gunshot wounds. When I worked in the ER — rather, when Roy worked in the ER — he'd seen a woman who'd shot herself in the temple and only managed to sever her optic nerves. She was blind, but very much alive. And then on the other side of the coin, this lady here took a .22 in the leg, and she's bleeding to death. Guns are funny things sometimes, not at all like they are in the movies.

She smiles at me. It's the kind of smile you get from a bartender who knows your name and your favorite drink. She thinks I've come to help her.

The hardest part is watching her face change when I pull out my gun and thumb the hammer back. I look away before I pull the trigger. I'm not going to miss, not at this range. She doesn't say a word. She's too shocked.

When I look at her again, her face hasn't changed. She just looks sad, because I've betrayed her when she'd thought I was a friend. It's one thing when somebody's pissed before you shoot them. Anger begets anger. But sadness begets sadness, too.

I sit down next to her body. The gun drops from my fingers. I feel sick. I feel like crying, then I hear it.

Blaysiel. It's not a voice. Not really. More like a splinter of ice forcing its way into my head.

Fuck me.

BLAYSIEL.

I ignore it. It's hard, but he's using my Celestial Name rather than my True Name, at least for the moment. I've got a few seconds to rest. He owes me that much.

* * *

The woman I betrayed was named Lita Mann. She took a lot of shit in her life from that name. *Funny, you don't look like a Mann.* Hilarious. She was pretty much inured to it by the time I — or rather Roy — met her. She was a tragic waste of talent. She made beautiful quilts and other crafty stuff, and she sold them in the park. She stuffed envelopes, delivered papers and basically did whatever other work she could find to make ends meet. She had a crappy apartment, but she was *happy*.

Lita wasn't exactly pure, mind you. One of her many sources of income was performing in porn videos. She didn't do it often (the market nowadays is for college girls who look or actually are under 21, and Lita could manage 25 on a good day), but she did, on occasion, get calls from

one producer or another. Mostly filling in for someone who was sick or drugged up or whatever. She was never the girl on the box cover. She'd go in, do the scene and have as much fun as she could with it. We talked about it once or twice. She wasn't embarrassed. It was hard to embarrass Lita.

She was exactly the sort of person I was looking for. Strong, happy, secure, creative. I'd wandered into the park looking for someone with a family. Lita sold me a handmade dream-catcher with an amber crystal set in the center, and later we made a deal. She seemed to be exactly what I needed.

Or rather, exactly what *he* needed.

* * *

BLAYSIEL.

I finally give in. *What?*

IS SHE DEAD?

Of course she is. That's what you wanted, wasn't it?

The voice in my head pauses. He's probably trying to decide whether to smack me down for being rude. I know he could turn me inside-out if he wants to.

RETURN TO ME. I AM NO LONGER SAFE HERE.

I don't respond right away. But I'm already on my feet. I'm out the door and on the stairs before the paranoid fucker nudges me again. *Return to me, Blaysiel!*

On my way, master. I can't exactly break off an invocation. It's not like hanging up a telephone. I have to wait until the master breaks it off, and until then, I can't think freely. I try to keep my mind on what I'm doing. Out the door. Nod to the homeless lady with her shopping cart. Keys in the ignition. Driving to the master.

That way he couldn't sense how much I hated him. Or so I hoped.

* * *

When Lita and I made the deal, all she wanted was for people to buy her stuff. That's not hard for me. She was already talented, so I just crystallized that talent a bit. The next week, she was churning out trinkets and crafts of such surpassing beauty that people just *had* to have them.

I stopped in to see her every few days. That was the plan, see. I had to make it look like we had a normal relationship in every way — normal for a demon and a thrall, anyway. I didn't know why at the time, but I'm starting to think it involves Iturya.

Iturya and I worked together before the war, me creating the paths and her, the destinations. The Shaper of Endless Roads and the Angel of the Blessed Homecoming. Blaysiel and Iturya. When Adam and Eve went hunting, we made sure they had somewhere to go and a means to find their way home. And then Lucifer came down with his brilliant ideas, and the war began... and so on.

When the fighting started, Iturya and I ended up in different places, but we never forgot each other. Then we all got tossed into Hell, and somewhere along the way, someone who knew my True Name found a way out. And then later the gates *really* blew open, and here I am, the Shaper of Endless Roads blasted into the body of an alcoholic little coward who'd crawled into a bottle after five years in the ER and never found his way out. I didn't even spare a thought for Iturya at first. That was probably my biggest mistake.

If I'd had her help, maybe I'd still be the master of my own fate.

* * *

I know the quickest ways across town. I'm halfway to the master's resting-place in the time it would take a regular Joe to get around the corner. Nice thing about having designed the whole concept of roads: You don't have to spend much effort negotiating them. On the other hand, it doesn't give you much time in the car to think.

He broke off the invocation as soon as I turned the radio on. I consider what he wants from me. Lita's dead, and I'm sure he knows I regret having to kill her. Not that he cares what I feel — he knows better than to expect actual loyalty. He knows I follow because I have to, because he'll destroy me utterly if I don't. The only thing I had to hold onto while in the Abyss was my own sense of self. Love of Iturya, love of God, love of humanity, love of my work — all that sustained me for a while. Hatred and rage did it for a little while longer, but you get inured to that kind of thing. At the end, though, I could endure Hell only because I still *was*. And then a big hole opened up, and bang, here I am in the body of Roy Derry.

My mouth still goes dry every time I pass the local bars. It passes pretty quickly, but it's enough to remind me that Roy didn't want to stop *being* either.

I arrive at the master's resting-place. It's pretty nondescript. Some Earthbound, or so I've heard, are nothing short of grandiose. They like their relics to be noticeable — museum exhibits, statues in town squares, that kind of thing. My master is a secretive, paranoid demon who doesn't like anybody to know where his heart truly lies. I don't know much about him because of that. He must have a cult, but I've never seen them. I don't know what House he belongs to. I don't know his name, or more importantly, how he knows mine.

What I do know is that he's got a plan and it involves me, because he sought me out. He found me eking out an existence in the Big Apple, and he snapped me up. At first I thought it was just that he wanted me to help him cope with the maze that the world's become, but pretty soon it became clear that he wanted me for something much more specific. I just don't know what.

* * *

After Lita's work started gaining popularity, my master had me kick it up a notch. I'd pick the quirkiest bits of work she put out — not the most beautiful or best crafted, but the pieces with the most personality — and work a little power into them. Not much — unlike some of my fellow Annunaki, I can't make flaming swords or flying cars — but enough to make a dream-catcher seem soothing. The idea was to get my name and signature out there into the world, like a fishing line for the fallen. My master was using me as bait, just to see who'd come nibbling. I guess today, he got the nibble he was looking for, although strangely, I wasn't there to see it.

I'd like to think that he'll explain this to me, let me in on his plans, but he won't. I'm a worm on a hook to him, and this time, he managed to catch a fish without losing his bait. Nice bonus, I'm sure, but is the fisherman about to drop the worm back in the garden just because it didn't get eaten today? Not likely.

Anyway, Lita quit doing videos and focused on crafts full time. I'd drop by to see her. *Any odd customers, Lita? Oh, you know, odd like me? No? Okay, see you next week. Oh, hey, that's a neat-looking quilt. Let me take a look at that.* But today was different.

I dropped by Lita's usual place in the park, but she wasn't there. I didn't give it too much thought, I just drove to her apartment. Knocked on the door. Her whole door shakes when you so much as touch it. One half-hearted kick would have splintered it. I idly considered making it stronger; it would kind of suck if someone followed Lita home from the park and robbed her.

She didn't answer the door, but I thought I heard something. I tried the knob — the door was unlocked, which was strange, so I wandered in looked around. The place was messy, but that was normal. Lita was an artist, and that meant that the entire place was crammed with supplies, fabric snippings and the occasional needle that would leap up and embed itself in your foot if you were stupid enough to remove your shoes. I called out for her and didn't hear a thing. I was getting anxious now. It wasn't so much out of concern for Lita — honestly, I'm not any kind of humanist anymore — but I knew that if I'd lost her, my master would blame me. He didn't have any idea how dangerous the city was or how hard it is to keep up with one little person in the biomass that is New York.

Imagine working for a boss who's got no idea what year it is or how you do your job, but he wants you to take your job seriously. He wants that so much he's willing to kill you if you fail, just to make a point. You know what that does to morale? It's a great motivator. I wasn't sure what he'd do if I lost Lita, so I started looking around. But Lita hadn't left me a convenient note saying where she was and whether she needed help, so I had to look around in other ways. I grabbed a picture of Lita off the wall and concentrated, looking for where she was. A lot

of us "Malefactors" can't do this kind of thing, but Iturya and I didn't have any secrets between us. I remember what she taught me. And I know a little about locations myself, of course.

I saw a thin, glimmering blue trail stretching from the picture off through the door. I was all set to start following it when my day became a lot worse.

BLAYSIEL.

What? I regretted my tone. Do you have any concept of how hard it is to *think* respectfully? He set my nerves on fire as a sign of his displeasure, but I remained standing. *I'm sorry, master.*

FIND YOUR THRALL AND KILL HER.

And with that, he broke off contact. I just stood there for a minute, leaning on the door recovering from the pain, half in shock. Kill Lita? Why? It seemed so damned senseless. I wasn't getting much out of the pact with her, sure, but *kill* her?

I knew that something was going on way over my head, but I didn't really know what. About the best I could do, I thought, was find Lita and maybe get some answers before I had to kill her. Maybe she knew more than she let on.

I followed the blue line to Lita. I found her under a bridge a few miles away. When I found her, she was bleeding to death... but that's old news.

* * *

There's a guy in a wheelchair sitting next to the steps leading into my master's building. I always figured him for a cultist or at least a watchdog, but after a while I started to think he was just a homeless cripple who liked hanging out here. I don't know what it says about the state of the world that bums feel comfortable less than 30 feet away from something as evil and powerful as my master.

His Knicks cap is tilted down over his face. He doesn't ask me for change today, and it surprises me so much I stop and peer at him.

He's dead. More to the point, his skin is hanging loosely on his body and his flesh is pooling around his hips, squashed against the side of the wheelchair. He doesn't smell any worse than usual yet, but that'll change pretty quickly.

I look up at the door. The doorknob's intact, but I can't tell when it was last used. I try it; it's unlocked. I'm about ready to bolt right now — my master would *never* leave a door unlocked if he had the power to lock it, and I know he does — when the voice returns.

BLAYSIEL.

Yes, master?

I need you to transport me away from here.

He breaks contact. That's weird, too. Normally, he stays with me a couple of minutes. I walk into the building, shut the door behind me and start looking

around. I've never actually *seen* my master's reliquary, after all.

There's a hallway with five doors. Four of them are boarded up, and the fifth one looks damaged. He's got to be behind one of the barricaded doors; the easy one is probably a booby trap. I can't invoke my master, since I don't know his name. I look at the doors, trying to figure out which one it is, when I feel a finger on my mind. It's not really an invocation, more of a psychic "*Hey, you!*" I look up.

There's a crack in the ceiling, and through it I can see metal gleaming. And I know that whatever it is, covered in plaster and rot, it's my master's reliquary.

And the worst part? The unbidden surge of *loyalty* I feel when I see it.

I look around for a footstool or something. I can't reach the ceiling, but I'll need to peel away the plaster to free whatever his makeshift body is. He doesn't make any offer to help.

I kick in one of the boarded-up doors and then roll to the side. Nothing. No traps here, or at least not any that go off when the door opens. I look into the room; it's empty. Windows are boarded up. Some assorted junk on the floor — *that's* probably what's trapped. Nothing I could use to stand on, anyway.

I kick in another door. More of the same. Clothes on the floor, scuffs in the dust, probably from rats. Room seems a little warmer than the other one, for some reason.

The third door is trapped, but I jump to one side before the shotgun blast goes off. I can't be sure, but I think I feel a ripple in between the *click* of the trigger and the *boom* of the gun; maybe my master slowed the trap down enough for me to move. He's not that nice a guy, of course, but if I lose my body, he's not going anywhere.

Finally, I get fed up. "Master," I say aloud, "I can't get you down unless I can reach you. Help me."

My tone of voice is completely wrong for purposes of self-preservation. I sound angry and impatient. When dealing with more powerful demons, you *never* sound angry and impatient. They've had centuries on Earth to get the idea that they're the most powerful and important beings in existence, and they dislike having those notions challenged. I'm on my knees before I realize my mistake. My master grabs my soul like a lump of sculpting clay and forces Roy's mortal coil to assume the remnants of my angelic form.

I can see my hands begin to glow, palms first, just like always. It's a little like watching someone perform surgery on your leg under a local anesthetic, I guess — it's horribly fascinating, and even if it doesn't really hurt, you feel like it should. The light starts in my palms and spreads to my arms, tiny slivers of white light like wires illuminating my — Roy's — flesh. I feel my senses sharpen. I can smell the rot of the building and the

smoke in the air from the gunshot. I can smell Lita's blood on the sole of my shoe, and I can smell the stench of the dead man outside.

I don't know what he's trying to prove at first. Like most of my House, I don't have wings — we Antu *knew* where we were going; we didn't have to fly there, even during the war. But as the pain intensifies, I realize what's happening. The flesh on my fingers and toes splits as glistening, blue-black claws sprout. I don't have claws normally. My soul isn't written that way.

But he knows my Name, you see, and I'm literally putty in his hands.

Panting, I use the claws to climb the wall and scrape the plaster away. The object hidden there is a tarnished silver mask. I have no idea how old it is or what culture produced it, much less how he managed to arrange to have it sealed into the ceiling of a New York tenement. I pull it out and am rewarded with a shower of roaches. I drop to the ground and slump against the wall, my true form melting back into my stolen body. The light from my palms is usually the last thing to go, but today the claws stay a little longer.

My master doesn't invoke me, but having him this close to me, I can feel what he wants. He's anxious. He's pulling up stakes for some reason, but it isn't fear. That means some scheme of his just came to fruition, and he's tying up loose ends. I fully expect his next order to be to torch the building. That's probably why he's giving me time to rest.

As I sit there against the wall, for a split second, I feel comforted. And, paradoxically, that scares the shit out of me. I sit up straight and look around, from the two still-intact doors to the infernal mask in front of me to the buckshot in the wall opposite me. What engendered that feeling? This is the house of my master, the being that holds the keys to my soul. Even if he wasn't, that doesn't change what he is — no one has any right to feel comfort here. But for just a minute, this feels like...

Home.

Oh, no.

I jump to my feet and push the last remaining boards off of the edges of the second door I kicked in. The clothes are still there, and the scuffs in the dust, but those scuffs are fresh. Something happened here today. I grab up the clothes and realize that they've been shredded. They're soaked in blood. Jeans, a sweatshirt...and a scrap of a quilt. I don't recognize the clothes, but I know that quilt. Lita made it. I strengthened it, made it warmer and cozier, just like a quilt should be. And then Lita sold it.

I fall to my knees, because I know what happened to the person who bought that quilt. It was someone who, once upon a time, designed the concepts of "safety" and "home." Someone who, I'm sure, longed for comfort when she escaped the constant horror that is Hell.



Someone who searched for me, and found a patchwork quilt that bore my mystical signature. Someone who taught *me*, the Shaper of Endless Roads, how to search, and so could find the maker of the quilt, the demon who enchanted it, and that wretched demon's master... but not in that order.

What does my paranoid master want? He wants to be safe. What's the best way to find a safe haven? Ask the angel who *first envisioned safety*. But then that angel knows about your safe haven, so the only thing to do is....

Oh, Christ, no.

BLAYSIEL.

I raise my head, still clutching the torn quilt to my face. I don't even notice I'm crying until I see the wet spots on the fabric. My body aches from the changes he wrought on it, but all I can think of is that Iturya is *gone*, her soul devoured... and it's my fault.

BLAYSIEL.

Yes, *master*? I don't "sound" angry. I don't feel angry. I probably will later, but now I just feel whipped and used. I probably have the same look on my face as Lita did before I shot her. I figure he's about to kill me, too.

Take me here. And he fills my mind with an image. And I understand.

He knows where he'll be safe, but not how to get there. He consumed the Angel of the Blessed Homecoming to find a safe place, but he needs me, the Shaper of Endless Roads, to find it.

He doesn't have enough trust or respect for me to apologize, even if it's a lie. He still won't tell me anything about his followers, or why Lita was already dying when I reached her, or how he managed to lure Iturya to him before she found me. I'll probably never know any of that.

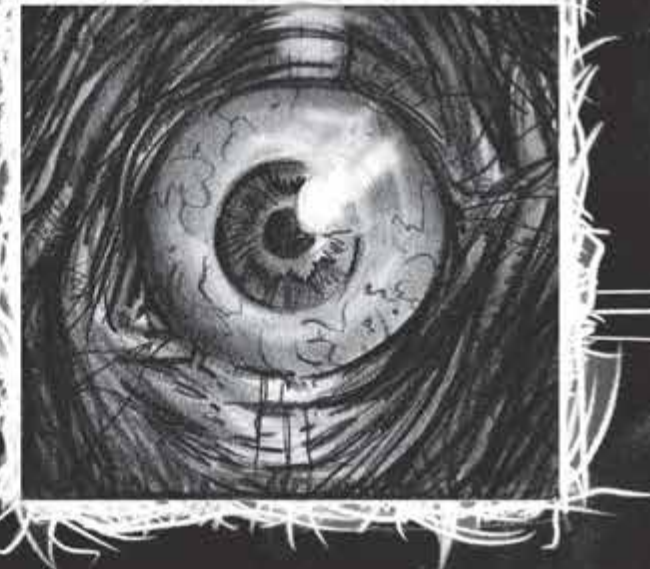
Like a zombie, I walk into the hall, pick up the silver mask and walk out the door, still clutching the quilt. It still *feels* like Iturya—or, more truthfully, like Iturya and I together. How long before that feeling fades?

I tuck the mask into my jacket and set my feet on the path to my master's new lair. I know what will happen once we get there—like Iturya I now know too much for my master's comfort.

When I step out onto the street I see the subway entrance a couple of blocks away. My master doesn't stir as I walk past the car and head for the stairs to the platform. As far as he knows, we're heading home. And in a sense, he's right.

He won't understand about subway trains and the way they work. He won't be curious when I leap off the platform and land on the tracks' third rail. *I* know what will happen; Roy had scraped more than one body off the tracks in his time. I don't know how many volts are running through that rail, but I bet it's enough to melt an ancient silver mask.

We'll be home in no time.





INTRODUCTION

It was fear that first brought gods into the world.

—Petronius Arbiter

Demon: The Earthbound is the definitive sourcebook on the principal adversaries of the game, and it serves to provide a counterpoint to the characters depicted in **Demon: The Fallen**. Where the characters in **Demon** are still ostensibly fallen angels, with equal potential for great good or terrible evil, the Earthbound are utter monsters. They have become so twisted and perverted by centuries of debased worship that they no longer resemble the demons they once were. In a sense, they are mankind's worst nightmares combined with the power and intelligence of an angel; neither human nor fallen, but something infinitely worse than both. The purpose of this book is to provide all the information Storytellers need to create and portray these monsters as unique adversaries for their **Demon** chronicles. Further options presented in the book allow Storytellers to create all-Earthbound chronicles, casting the players as fallen enslaved to an Earthbound master or even assuming the roles of Earthbound demons directly.

THE NATURE OF THE BEAST

The Earthbound are powerful demons freed from the Abyss thousands of years ago by the efforts of human sorcery. Maddened by millennia of torment in the Abyss, these spirits spawned hideous cults and bloody religions across the length and breadth of the ancient world. Their goal, then as now, is the utter desecration of humanity, perverting mankind's collective soul and subjugating it to their will. Even though they were once angels like the rest of the fallen, the Earthbound are now monsters even by a demon's standards, twisted by ages of madness and hate into terrible, Lovecraftian nightmares. Each pursues an inscrutable, alien agenda to remake humanity in its image, and through them the cosmos itself.

Having been reawakened by the return of the fallen, the Earthbound are moving quickly to gather new followers and rebuild their diminished power. Some of them are turning to the descendants of their

former priests and disciples, enacting centuries-old pacts that enthrall them to the Earthbound's service. Others prey on the wounds of modern civilization, empowering the hateful, the ambitious and the mad in return for worship. All of them prey on the newly arrived demons, enslaving them for a variety of purposes to further their individual agendas.

Even in the past, when magic and human Faith was far more potent, no human could contain the full power of even the weakest Earthbound, making physical possession all but impossible. The demons found ways to anchor themselves to specially prepared reliquaries or spiritually resonant sites in remote locales. From there they pursue their goals through the actions of their worshippers, appearing before them in a variety of bizarre and horrific apparitions to make their wishes known. Sometimes these beings go so far as to enter the minds of their followers and control them directly, but only in extraordinary circumstances as the subject rarely survives the experience. Like the fallen, the Earthbound can communicate with their worshippers across vast distances, and their disembodied spirits can travel many miles from their physical anchors depending on their reserves of strength. With the right amount of ritual preparation, followers can also act as direct conduits of their master's power, allowing the Earthbound to affect virtually any part of the globe.

Although the Earthbound are far more powerful individually than the fallen (and more knowledgeable about the modern world), they have one glaring vulnerability: the need for worship. The Earthbound require huge amounts of faith to function, and thousands of years of structured, formalized worship have left them dependent on ritualistic expressions of belief rather than the more flexible means that the fallen employ. They require priests, supplicants, disciples, flowing robes and unspeakable oaths. This makes them potent but cumbersome adversaries, slow to gather power but nearly unstoppable once they build up momentum.

THEME

The themes of **Demon: The Earthbound** are mirror opposites of those presented in **Demon**: enslavement, corruption and ultimately damnation. The Earthbound are terrible foes and grim harbingers of the future for the fallen if the newly freed demons cannot overcome the pull of their Torment. The Dread Kings are devoid of compassion or mercy, existing only to crush the spirit of the human race and use mankind as a fuel to further their nightmarish vision of reality. Their cults offer believers gifts of power and influence beyond their wildest dreams, but the price of that power is the surrender of their identity to the alien mind of the Earthbound. For the fallen, the nature of the relationship to the Dread Kings is even clearer: The

Angels of the Abyss are not partners or allies, but servants, shackled to the Dread Kings by force of will and the power of their True Names.

The Earthbound taint everything they touch. Unlike the fallen, who struggle to contain their darker nature, the Dread Kings wish to infuse their hatred into every aspect of the world. Corruption is a means to an end, creating an environment that allows the Earthbound to pursue their higher agenda — overpowering God and remaking the universe. More than the fallen, they need to bring about Hell on Earth, reshaping the world to support their own horrible vision of reality.

But as grotesque and evil as the Earthbound are, they are products of fallen and man alike. The seeds of their malevolence lie in the souls of every man, woman and demon, and they illustrate the ultimate fate that awaits those who cannot rise above their darker nature. The Earthbound are damnation personified, driven by their hatred to consume all of existence, and dragging everyone around them to oblivion as well. The fallen must stop them, if for no other reason than to prove that such a course *isn't* inevitable for every demon walking the earth.

MOOD

The mood of **Demon: The Earthbound** is a mixture of brooding horror, paranoia and incipient madness. The Earthbound are ancient spirits who taint everything they touch, often in subtle but disturbing ways. They lurk in the shadows, protected and served by secretive cults drawn from every facet of human society. Their servants are everywhere, waiting and watching, ready to leap to their master's bidding. Signs of conspiracies are everywhere, hinting at terrible, alien powers working to enslave the human race. For every encounter with a minion of one of the Earthbound, one feels the sense that the fallen are seeing only one piece of a greater scheme that stretches back for hundreds or even thousands of years. Whether the fallen like it or not, they are part of the conspiracy. If the fallen don't try to confront the Earthbound and stop their schemes, the Dread Kings have their own uses for the newly returned demons. Teams of Earthbound thralls hunt the fallen all over the world, locating and enslaving the weak or the unprepared or banishing them back to the Pit. The Angels of the Abyss can either battle the Earthbound in a grim, secret war for the souls of mankind, or they can submit to the Dread Kings and live as slaves in a nightmare world of madness and corruption.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This book comprises several chapters, each of which is designed to explore and explain a specific area of the game. Remember, though, that the most important

“chapter” in a storytelling game is your imagination. Never let anything in this book become a substitute for your own creativity.

Chapter One: A Stirring Upon the Deep covers the rise and fall of the Dread Kings throughout human history, beginning with the last days of the Age of Wrath and detailing the activities of the Earthbound until their decline into stasis during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

Chapter Two: Carved in Stone is a detailed look at how the Earthbound operate, from their first actions upon awakening to the re-creation and growth of their hidden cults. This chapter also provides tactics that the Dread Kings can employ to protect their worshippers and deal with outside threats (such as the fallen or other Earthbound rivals).

Chapter Three: Raising the Old Gods provides comprehensive rules for creating Earthbound characters for both Storyteller and player use. New Abilities, Backgrounds, Virtues, lore paths and apocalyptic features are included, as well as new systems for empowering Earthbound thralls. Taken together, the material in this chapter provides Storytellers with powerful adversaries for their stories and chronicles, and it adds a new dimension to the game as a whole.

Chapter Four: Forbidden Arcana presents new infernal relics with which Earthbound demons can equip their worshippers or sow corruption among mankind. This chapter also includes new rituals that are exclusive to the Earthbound as well as profiles of Earthbound bastions that Storytellers can use in their chronicles.

Chapter Five: Storytelling provides tips and suggestions for creating and portraying Earthbound characters in any **Demon** chronicle, either as adversaries or as the focus of the chronicle.

Chapter Six: Darkness Rising provides profiles of six sample Earthbound characters, detailing their background, the size and nature of their cults, their infernal servants and their traits, Backgrounds, Virtues and powers. These profiles are intended for Storytellers to draw on for inspiration or use as presented in their stories.

SOURCE MATERIAL

Stories of ancient, evil powers awakening from centuries of slumber to enslave mankind has been a favorite subject of books and movies for many years. The following are just a few examples of stories that show different ways to portray the Earthbound and their activities.

Recommended books include:

The Cthulhu Mythos, by H. P. Lovecraft. The collected short stories and novellas of H. P. Lovecraft are essential reading for Storytellers who want a good grasp of the Earthbound and their horrifying nature. Especially recommended: “At the Mountains of Madness,” “The Dunwich Horror,” “The Festival,” “The Haunter of the Dark” and “The Horror at Red Hook.”

Demons, by John Shirley. John Shirley’s novel depicts big business as a doorway to alien entities inimical to human life. Though not a horror story per se, it’s a chilling look at an inhuman intelligence infiltrating and subverting human existence.

From Hell, by Alan Moore and Eddie Campbell. This story shows the intricate patterns of pagan belief underlying modern structures, and how terrible rituals can be used to maintain their power.

The Haunting of Hill House, by Shirley Jackson. Jackson’s *The Haunting of Hill House* remains the definitive haunted house story because it doesn’t show you the monsters and the horror; it just implies it and leaves you to work out the details.

It, by Stephen King. King’s massive tome about a malevolent entity that slumbers beneath a Maine town and awakens every 30 years to terrorize its residents is a classic example of an Earthbound at work.

Song of Kali, by Dan Simmons. Dan Simmon’s novel is one of the great depictions of a supernatural force (or is it?) that has insinuated itself into modern life, in this case the poverty and brutality of modern-day Calcutta.

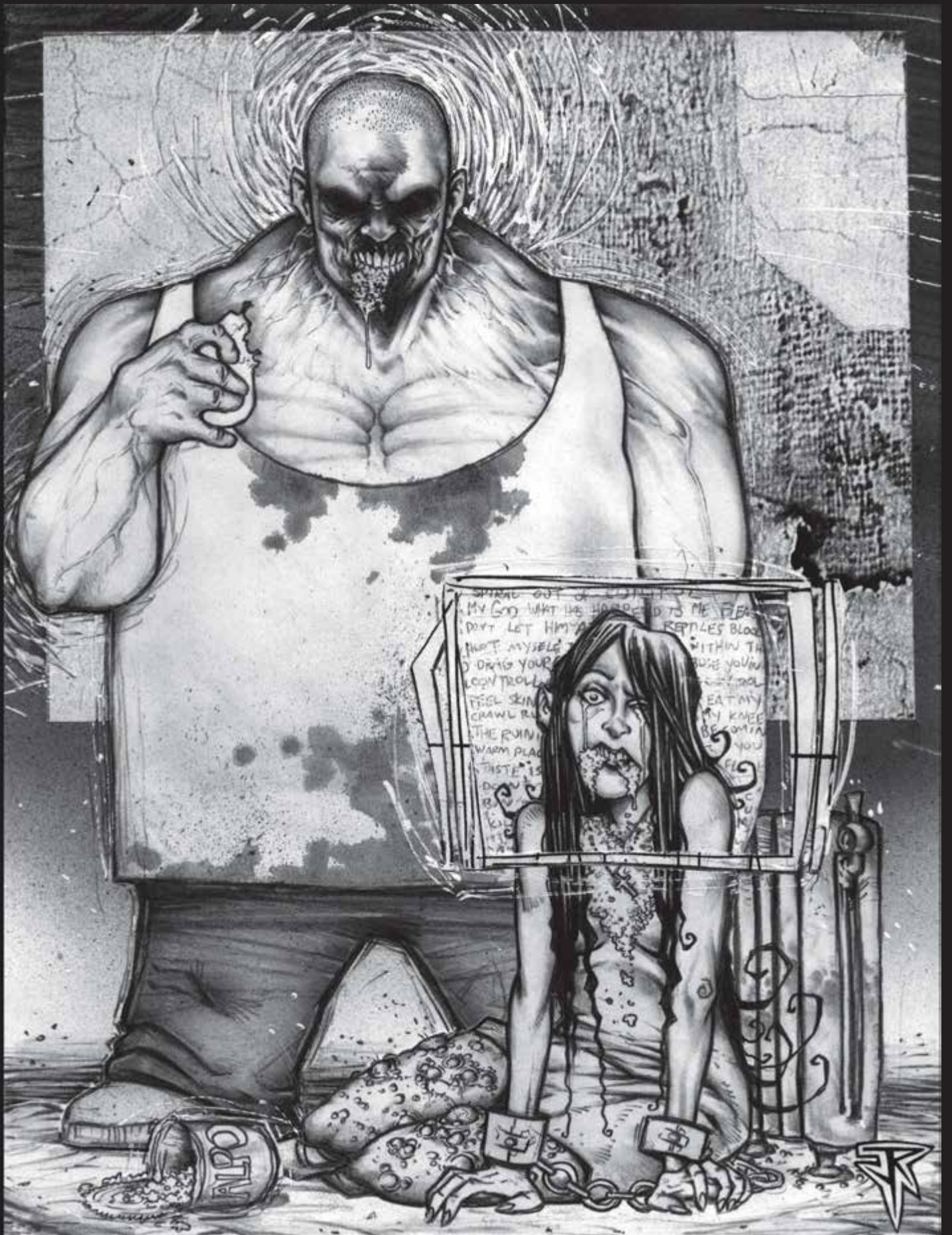
The Swords Trilogy, by Michael Moorcock. For a taste of the visions the Earthbound cherish of a world remade in their image, try these dark fantasy novels about Corum of the Scarlet Robe. The three Sword Rulers are excellent models, and prone to expounding their philosophy.

Recommended movies and television shows include:

Hellraiser and *Hellbound: Hellraiser 2*. Clive Barker’s *Hellraiser* is good, but *Hellraiser 2* is a good source for inspirational material about the Earthbound. It features Leviathan, the hellish, alien god that lacks even a human semblance, and which transforms its servants by granting their darkest wishes.

Millennium. A rough 50% of the TV series *Millennium* is good for direct inspiration, and the overall mood of impending doom and hideous secrets is exactly right. Note any episode with Lucy Butler in it.

To the Devil A Daughter. This Hammer film features Christopher Lee as leader of one of the most revolting cults ever invented. The demon has an ambitious world-remodeling plan for the modern age.



Ga-Gorib admired the white sores lining the girl's thighs. He wanted to taste them, but he decided not to. Instead he threw an open can of Alpo dog food at her chest, and it dumped out onto her already-stained blouse. The girl flinched, pulling at the chains that bound her to the radiator, and she began to cry.

"Cry, cry, cry," Ga-Gorib said, mocking her in a whiny, nasal voice. "Boo-hoo, you fucking snake. Eat the goddamn dog food. That's your dinner."

"Keith," the girl whimpered, "what happened to you? You were always quiet, I don't..." But she couldn't finish. Her words trailed off.

"Not Keith," he said, shrugging. "Keith died in a hit-and-run, bitch. Maybe you should've been nicer to him and his fuckin' birthmark, yeah?" He watched as she struggled to get some of the dog food from her blouse into her mouth. He was going to laugh, but then he realized he was bored. "I'm tired of this. You're like a spoiled infant, or maybe an organ grinder's little monkey. But you're not doing the right dance. I don't know why Keith liked you so much." He curled his yellowed nails in as he made fists, and they bit deep into his palm. Blood ran to the matted carpet.

"Please..." she said.

"Please what?" He saw her crucifix necklace beneath a glob of Alpo. "Why won't you give in? I've hurt you. I've fucked you. I've tied you up and made you watch me do terrible things to other people, other students. So give in, already. Bow your head and say the prayer. He's been giving you dreams, hasn't he? Showing you what he's made of, I bet. He's a major fucking conquistador, no doubt. He show you the Abyss yet? He will. There's a whole lot to know about him. The things he's done. The things the others have done." He snorted. "There's a whole other history to this shit-pile world, and he's a part of it. I've seen things he's done. His people were there when Rome burned."

Keith - no, Ga-Gorib - pulled out a pear from his pocket and bit into it. The juice ran down his chin. "He can do anything. Take this pear for instance. He's jumped into bodies and boiled their brains just so he could taste a fucking pear. Amazing."

"Why... are you..." Again, she couldn't finish. She just bawled, her chin mashing the pet food into her chest.

"I am the Serpent of the Pit. But Abaddon? He's the Lord of the Pit, baby. The cat's meow; the bee's knees. King-fucking-Elvis, you hear? Over time, he'll show you more. He likes you. I think you're wasted meat, but what he wants, he gets. You'll convert once you know what he's all about." This time he laughed for real. "I promise you'll never look back, sister."

He went back to staring at the blisters and sores on her legs. His stomach growled. He decided that he'd have a taste, after all. Why waste a perfectly good meal?



CHAPTER ONE: A STIRRING UPON THE DEEP

“When the stars were right, They could plunge from world to world through the sky; but when the stars were wrong, They could not live. But although They no longer lived, They would never really die.”

—H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu”

The world to which the fallen have returned bears little resemblance to the ruined paradise they once knew. In the absence of the fallen — and, ultimately, the forces of Heaven — mankind spread across the world, seeking new sources of power to explain the many frightening mysteries of life. In time, that quest led a handful of arcane scholars to explore the nether realms of Creation, ultimately locating the very threshold of the Abyss itself. The beings that these sorcerers called out of the great darkness of the Pit were worshipped as gods, rewarding the faithful with terrible power in return for their worship. These demons, known later as the Earthbound, began a dark crusade to reshape the world in their hateful image. Acting from the fire-lit shadows of temples and sacred groves across the globe, these Dread Kings spawned cycles of conquest, glory, tragedy and despair that has shaped human history to the present day. Teetering on the edge of oblivion, the modern World of Darkness is the culmination of a conspiracy that stretches back to the last days of the Age of Wrath.

PARADISE DENIED

The Grand Experiment was betrayed. Lucifer’s plan was simple; exalt the humans and teach them to nurture the divine spark inside until that spark became a conflagration that would consume Heaven. But the archdukes were not so certain. Pride stood in their way. Humans ousting the Creator and becoming divine? Why trade one Heaven for another? Wouldn’t the fallen host be relegated once more to menial slaves? It seemed better to be a wolf of Hell than a lapdog of Heaven, and so it was decided — Lucifer would be deceived. The archdukes would sabotage the Grand Experiment before it could bear its terrible fruit.

It was Asmodeus who spawned the great conspiracy. In his divinations, the Fiend witnessed a vision of the future, and what he saw chilled his heart. In his vision, he watched as humans were crowned with the power of Heaven and the fallen host knelt in supplication. Anger

and fear seethed within Asmodeus. The archduke decided that this must never happen, so he set a plan into motion that would twist the Grand Experiment to serve his purposes.

Asmodeus went first to Archduke Abaddon, knowing that the Devourer had no love for Lucifer's designs. As it evolved, the plan was as follows: Abaddon, who had great mastery over flesh, blood and bone, would begin experimenting on mortals. The purpose was to create a race of mortals that could harness their divine potential but exist as eternal servants for the infernal host. They were to be automatons, living tools existing only for the glory of the archdukes, and they would supplant the children of Adam and Eve. Abaddon relished the charge, and humans began disappearing from the borderlands of their civilization one by one, kidnapped by warriors of the Ebon Legion. The victims were brought to the underground city of Ziusudra, and there the mortals experienced what became known as the "Sixty Miseries." Terrible horrors were visited upon the bodies of man, and finally one of these violations bore fruit. During the course of the experimentation, the female victims were raped, and suddenly their bellies swelled with the offspring of angel and man.

Only a few children were born at first; the rest miscarried. Yet the survivors were no ordinary children. Their eyes were black and their bodies perfect. Great power was present in their souls. Abaddon had found the weapon. The nephilim were born. Following the orders of their archduke masters, Devourers and Fiends descended secretly upon sleeping mortals all across the lands of man and seeded their wombs. More nephilim were spawned, and they were brought back to Ziusudra, where the children were indoctrinated in hatred and power.

Then Azrael the Slayer came to the underground city to speak with the two conspiring archdukes. Asmodeus expected the Slayer to confront them, but the reality was quite different. The great Slayer offered to join the conspiracy. He had long since learned from the souls of the dead about the atrocities committed in Ziusudra, and he was willing to assist in the perfection of the nephilim, under one condition: Upon their death, the souls of the nephilim would belong to him alone. Not even Asmodeus could divine what purpose the Slayer intended for the souls of Abaddon's progeny, but the conspirators were not in a position to refuse the Alabaster Lord.

Before long, as the Civilization of Ashes spread its wonders across the world, the conspiracy brought forth its own terrible fruit, and Abaddon sent the first of his creations into the world to move among lesser mortals and become their kings. But Abaddon made his creations *too* well. Along with their great gifts, they also possessed something of their creator's arrogance and disdain for mankind. They were not content to merely rule humankind; they sought to dominate it utterly,

enslaving everyone body and soul. They sought out and slew Lucifer's Watchers, thus rousing the fury of the Morningstar. The Prince of the Fallen and his loyal warriors pursued the nephilim to the ends of the Earth and slew them with fire and sword, ending the great conspiracy and ushering in the final days of the rebellion. The Grand Experiment failed, mankind buckled beneath the weight of its own divinity, and the fallen were left to face the full wrath of Heaven without the Faith they so desperately needed.

For Asmodeus and Abaddon, the defeat of the nephilim was a bitter lesson that the great angels took to heart. Whether Azrael claimed the souls that were his due, and what ultimately became of them, only the Alabaster Lord knows.

IMPRISONMENT

When the demons were banished into the Abyss, they held onto hope as they combed the impenetrable darkness for their prince, Lucifer. Yet they realized over time that the Morningstar wasn't there, and the callous whispers began not long after that. Some held to theories that perhaps the Creator was punishing Lucifer even more harshly than the other angels, and that perhaps the Morningstar was contained in a place even worse than the Abyss. Few believed such whimsy, though. The idea gained momentum that the Lightbringer was nothing but a treacherous cur, and this notion was encouraged by the archdukes, as they felt the absence of Lucifer most of all. They said that he had turned from the Prince of the Angels and had instead become the Prince of Lies. They spread vicious tales that the Morningstar had betrayed them to the Creator, or worse, had been working for the Great Foe all along.

The years were changeless. The angels only darkened, their souls wearing thinner and thinner. The archdukes wielded True Names like weapons, drawing the wills of lesser angels to bear. Angels became demons, fiercely tormented spirits clashing in blind battles of hate and rage, their very souls abused by their infernal superiors. All the while, at the edges of the Pit, the demons could feel humanity stirring and growing out of the Time of Babel and into new epochs. But the memories of the fallen were still present among the humans, and the broken angels watched as Heaven rewrote history in one fell swoop. Unwilling to let any evidence of the fallen angels remain, the Creator called down a storm that choked the world with water. The deluge was a cruel baptism, and the world was born anew. The remaining human tribes were young and ignorant of what had come before them. None held any loyalty toward the rebellious angels. Heaven was content. The fallen were tortured.

The mortal world advanced in technology and philosophy, and once again came out of the caves to build civilizations. Men and women were curious animals, and

they sought new secrets about the world they lived in. They built cities and traded knowledge with local spirits. They huddled together in greater numbers to stave off the cold, hunger and darkness. None remembered the angelic host or the fallen dissenters. In the Pit, the demons raged against humanity, watching mankind with the disdain one reserves for a runaway dog.

The archdukes sat for an eternity, brooding upon the war and their failures. The path to victory had been present then, but they'd foolishly chosen not to take it. They should've *encouraged* Babel, not resisted it. They had the opportunity to take humanity and shape it into any form they wanted, including the form of a powerful weapon that would've allowed them to remove the Creator from the equation altogether. They'd had a chance, but in the Abyss it seemed lost forever. Their despair and regret was ceaseless, and it allowed the Torment inside them to grow exponentially. They began taking out their aggressions on the lesser ranks while they formulated bitter schemes that filtered down through their lunatic minds. They raged against their prison, howling for escape. But would it come, or would they forever be locked away in the shadows outside Creation?

RETURN TO EDEN

Mortals were an innovative lot, and they were capable of anything with the right tools. Through dreams, select humans learned how to harness a small part of the divine spark within them. These humans became priests and sorcerers, and their knowledge developed from there. They learned how to cut through the knots of reality instead of unraveling them, and they learned to summon beings from beyond — even from the Abyss. Five names were granted to them through sleeping dreams and waking visions, and these five names were exalted in their minds. Gods deserving of worship, imprisoned behind walls of darkness. Across the globe, disparate summoners began designing exacting rituals to free these gods from their prison outside of time. But who gave them this knowledge to begin with? Where did the dreams come from? Lucifer was responsible. The Lightbringer didn't know what the Abyss really was, and had no knowledge of how it had obliterated the sanity of his five lieutenants. He wanted them free, under the auspice that they would join him anew to help battle the angelic host. He was wrong.

RELEASE

At five separate locations across the world, summoners who were unaware of one another prepared for the arrival of the great archdukes. Festivals were planned. Sacrifices of livestock and human slaves were made at the points of arrival. Satellite temples, even those that were not directly involved in the invoking of the demons, readied for the coming of the gods with

worship, song and ritual. Kings, queens, emperors and scions came to attend to the summoning ceremonies. The summoners knew that they were about to wrench magnificent spirits from behind the warp and weft of reality's cloth, and that these infernal beings would be weak after coming through the membrane separating worlds. These non-corporeal entities needed bodies, but animal and human bodies would not do. The spirits were so powerful that they would tear the flesh to ribbons, so the summoners commanded the building of great idols to house the souls of the approaching gods.

For each archduke, a reverent idol was built in accordance with the perceived idea of each demon. Abaddon's reliquary was an ancient tree that had been uprooted and was easily 30 feet in height. It was carved with horrific faces and shot through with crimson veins of petrified wood. Asmodeus was given a statue shaped from ebony, run through with flecks of gold, built to appear as a many-armed priest staring heavenward. The relic of Dagon was a massive stone block, a basalt slab engraved with blasphemous prayers. (Over the years, this block would be carved into strange stone machinery, with grinding rock gears and igneous levers.) Azrael's reliquary was a scarecrow effigy built from thousands of bones, the skeletal form draped with gray cloth, the eyes pressed with crooked emeralds. And finally, the Great Beast Belial was given a strange, small home: a portable idol, no bigger than a foot in height that looked like a small half-cephalopod, half-man, curling in upon itself. With the idols built and brought to the summoning, the long rituals began.

It came through into the Abyss like a great key rattling in an iron padlock. Every demon in the Pit heard it, even felt it in their very souls, but none could comprehend what was happening until it had already passed. They saw the barest fracture, a crescent clipping of momentary light, and then... Their greatest in station were gone. Where once there were five archdukes, the highest of Lucifer's lieutenants, there were now glaring absences and nothing more. The demons whispered back and forth. Had Lucifer come for them all, or had the archdukes betrayed them just as the Morningstar had?

First through was Abaddon, the greatest of Lucifer's dissenters. The palace of the Akkadians, home of King Sargon, was prepared by a select group of priestesses known as the Ur-Dalla, or the "Sisterhood of the Needle." The marble floor of the palace was soaked in the blood of animal sacrifices, the carcasses ripe and festering as Abaddon's soul was dragged into the reliquary. Not far from there, in the kingdom of Sumer, Asmodeus was freed by a caste of royal magicians and mathematicians. Most of them died in the process, their flesh rupturing with the entropic energies. Dagon was reborn into the Indus Valley (now modern India), called by the sound of a thousand hammers falling on gore-encrusted bronze bells, a ritual carried out by a mindless cult of insane architects. The necromancer kings of Kush in Africa

were the harbingers of Azrael, drawing his spirit into a temple built from bones and bodies, offering the archduke their very lives for all of eternity. Finally, the court magicians of the Shang Dynasty convened to release Belial with supplications of jade, silk and immolated bodies. The Great Beast was given a thousand gifts and treated better than the emperor himself. The magicians even devoted an entire caste of slaves to go out in the world to do the Beast's bidding.

WORSHIP

As consciousness flared within their idol bodies, the archdukes knew that they had truly escaped from the confines of the Pit and returned to the cradle of Creation. The interminable years of hateful plotting came fully to bear, as here they were once again in the world of men. It was time to enact their grim strategy. It was time to suck the spirit from the marrow of humanity's bones. And when that was done, the archdukes would be in control of that divine spark that was ungraciously granted to mankind but not to the ranks of the angelic host. With that divine spark, the demons could remake the cosmos according to any design. They could destroy it and rebuild it a thousand times over with the power they would wield. But it would take time. And work. They needed small power now to grasp the larger power later. They needed *devotion*.

Each archduke selected a handful of worthy worshippers. Some were chosen for their magical aptitude, others for their obvious physical prowess. Some were chosen because of their potent devotion and little more. These individuals, some capable of magic and others not, were selected to become the prophets and agents of the archdukes. Some were enthralled with the promise of further power beyond the scope of their comprehension. Others had their will secured through manipulation and charisma. The first command was direct. *Bring worshippers*. The Earthbound had expected to sit idly by while adulation came to them, but it was not so simple. They soon realized that they would have to exert their will on the world and take what they wanted through the virtue of conquest in order to gain true belief. These thralls would be the agents of that plan.

Up until now, civilization had worshipped unseen gods or folk spirits, never witnessing true divine might acting upon their lives. They were unprepared to deal with gods who literally lived among them. When the Earthbound used their powers to affect the world, the mortals were awestruck. The demons reveled in their power and made their presence felt in varying ways. They performed simple tricks at first. They made crops produce food quickly and made livestock fat and healthy. They penetrated men's dreams with secret knowledge. In return, they demanded veneration. Some mortals were foolish enough to deny the archdukes, and these men met with poor ends. Their skin burst with sickness.

Their infants were consumed by flies. Some didn't die and were merely struck blind and deaf. These dissenters were examples that few wished to follow.

Over time, the archdukes learned another critical lesson. Giving the people what they wanted and needed harvested modest Faith. Punishing them upped the ante, however, bringing in new worship in droves. The archdukes consciously recognized that it was better to be fickle and keep the populace teetering forever on the edge of chaos. The Faith was far sweeter. Punish them with one hand, pleasure them with another. One village is consumed with riotous ecstasy while a neighboring community is beset by blight and plague-ridden hounds. The mortals were torn between fearing retribution and begging for esoteric secrets. This mindset sealed them to their gods, and the faith grew from embers into a raging fire. The archdukes reveled in their power and even gained enough of it to walk among their people by stealing the flesh of a worshipper. (This time was short, though, for the stolen body could not handle the potent soul of the demon. It would eventually wither and fall to pieces.)

Out of the summoners, worshippers and thralls grew cults. These cults grew quickly as men and women offered themselves to these new deities. They built new temples, held days-long ceremonies praising their idols, and they carved obscene prayers in the walls of their homes or in their own flesh. The archdukes were revered as gods. They were given many names by their worshippers — described a hundred different ways and believed to possess a thousand personalities. They spoke of the archdukes with names that would later find their way into legend and mythology: Marduk, Nergal, Ninurta, Apep, Zohak. Some referred to them as mala'ika or daevas or djinn. Over centuries, the gods' influence grew out from town to city, and new cults were born as the old ones gained ground as full-blown religions. The archdukes assumed duplicitous roles as many gods within a single pantheon. It was easier that way to collect precious Faith.

THE FIRST CULTS

Cults were (and are) the keystone of Earthbound faith. The demons wore many faces and many personas, and this allowed most Earthbound to support more than one cult. Each group, aside from promising Faith, also had different functions in the world. One cult might be a caste of magicians used to control an emperor with tricks of the mind. Another group might be used as assassins against dissenters. As more cults rose in support of the dark gods, the archdukes' radius of influence grew. Ultimately each archduke had one or several groups of worshippers that stood out for extreme devotion, ambition and ability. These cults were born in the earliest times of civilization, and many still exist today (though in somewhat altered forms.)

The **Cult of Kybele** was the favored "religion" of Abaddon. The archduke assumed the mantle of the wild

and lustful goddess Kybele, stamping her image on the minds of potential worshippers. In their heads they saw her skin of porcelain, eyes of gold, hair of night — and of course, the many-faced tree that was Abaddon's reliquary. As Kybele, Abaddon promised worshippers pleasure, success, visions, even skill in battle. The faithful would do anything for but a glimpse of their divine queen — but there was a price, and they would later learn that no matter what, there was *always* a price. The rituals they were asked to perform debased them terribly. Orgiastic festivals were held, celebrations drenched in blood and vomit. Villagers marked their doors with the sigils of the goddess and then marched into the streets where they coupled with beasts, offered parts of their own flesh as food for lions, flayed their own skin and used it as food for their children. They would take young women and place them in cages above the village squares. From below, men would stab upward and let the blood drizzle down upon them. Those who did not partake in the beastly rituals would be taken away by Kybele's own regiment of elite priests, a group of self-inflicted eunuchs called the Galloi. These priests constructed temples made of wood, skin and stone in the dark and unkempt recesses of the wilderness. By the fifth century, the Cult of Kybele grew by leaps and bounds, spreading from Asia Minor into Greece. The cult exists today in various forms, all under the guise of "goddess worship" groups, still practicing some of the grisly rites of yore.

Asmodeus sought to teach his fumbling human children the ways of enlightenment, specifically teaching them how to discern the future through divination. And so **Mithra's Wisdom** was born as a tool to teach Asmodeus's followers the truth written as fate behind all things. Praying to see the "secret path to knowledge," the followers fell in line behind a god called Mithra (secretly Asmodeus), whose image was painted onto cave walls and temple friezes as a warrior-priest who conquered the great bull called Geush Urvan. The people were taught that the entrails of the bull contained esoteric lore when viewed under the light of the moon and stars, and thereafter, it seemed a natural step to include human entrails into the equation. This form of divination, anthropomancy, was often used in conjunction with genethliacs (divination by the stars at one's birth and death). The Mithraic followers spread across the land surrounding the Mediterranean Sea, becoming advisors to kings and empresses, sharing with the rulers the knowledge Mithra granted. The cult spread, and in the Greco-Roman world, the god Mithras was still worshipped. (In fact, that worship stayed alive long into the Middle Ages, when the Mithraic Heresy fostered opposition to the Catholic Church's doctrines.) Small clusters of the cult exist today, from the urban centers of London to the Greek isle of Santorini. (All members of the cult are marked by the horns of the bull branded on their collarbones.)

Dagon went north to the city in the Indus Valley called Mohenjo-Daro. There he called himself "Arumukam the Six-Faced." His own cult, the **Shanmukha**, deified him quickly, for he was initially fast with favor. He showed them how to build sea-faring vessels, how to read and write, and how to build better weapons with iron. The Shanmukha became both exceptional weapon-smiths and assassins alike, and they were known for the metal masks they wore to frighten others. Through this cult, Dagon exerted his influence over the rest of the pre-Indian civilization. Should any of the earlier dynastic rulers defy Dagon, the Shanmukha would appear with strange weapons — oddly curved blades, gloves with razors running from the edges, thin filaments of braided wire that could be used to sever one's head from the shoulders. They used these weapons to encourage fealty to Arumukam. Over time, the Shanmukha began reworking Dagon's reliquary into a bizarre machine with seemingly no purpose and fueled on blood. It's said that the machine had the capability to tear reality asunder once it began its ineluctable churning. Smaller simulacra of the larger machine were eventually built and placed into the world to fall into the hands of unsuspecting mortals. While the cult died out, many of the smaller machines still exist. Some of these items include puzzle boxes, balancing scales, inscrutable timepieces. All are tools of Dagon.

In the African city of Axum, Azrael's single cult began swelling with members. Vast underground labyrinths and cities were built deep within the earth. Stone and dirt were ripped asunder, leaving behind massive channels scoring the landscape while huge black obelisks were erected upon the surface. Why? To commune with the dead. This cult, the **Heitsi-Eibib**, relied upon the "wisdom" of departed spirits to learn new knowledge, an idea championed by Azrael and his most favored servitors. These obelisks (many of which still exist today in Ethiopia) were used both as tools to speak to spirits and to open gateways to the shadowlands. All in all, death and dying became a consuming obsession among the cultists. They were told that they could become teachers and warriors of the spirit world in the afterlife, and Azrael taught them ways to "prepare" themselves. They began practicing rituals of self-mutilation and sensory deprivation. Men endured terrible pain, their bodies crossed with scars. Women butchered their own sexual parts and sliced their tongues into forked ribbons, all in an effort to become the "mothers" of the spirit world. Azrael promised them in dreams that they would become members of a caste of spectral worshippers with free will, but in truth, they died and became little more than lunatic wraiths chained to the soul of their master to serve him in the world of the dead. The cult died out when Judaism and Christianity came to Ethiopia a few millennia later, but the country is still haunted by Azrael's gruesome spectres.

The cults of Belial were multifarious, and no single sect stood out as a tent-pole religion. Belial was mobile (unlike the other archdukes) and his small idol was secreted in and out of many cities. Wherever the archduke went, he collected powerful sorcerers. He taught them arcane secrets from the dawn of time, all in an effort to secure a cadre of potent believers that would help him flush out and destroy his once-commander, Lucifer. He remade himself as the “Great Beast” in the eyes of all of his servitors, claiming that he could hunt and bring down any quarry, even quarry as great as the Morningstar or even the Creator. In ancient Greece he founded the **Deiknymena**, or the “Ministers of Shown Things.” Nearby he collected bloodthirsty wizards to follow him in the **Cult of Molech**. In what’s now modern-day Japan he fostered the **Gaki-Daishi**, a collection of holy teachers bent on building temples in the Beast’s honor. Finally, Belial also presented himself to a group of druids in ancient England as an ageless sorcerer called “Myrddin.” These druids (who called themselves the **Children of Myrddin**), served a purpose that Belial eventually carried to all his cults. That purpose was to unravel the secrets behind the “Dragon Lines.”

Dragon Lines (or ley lines) were a construct of the Iron Legion in the time before the Abyss, but they were never finished. The other archdukes were never privy to the secrets, but Belial believed he understood. He thought that these lines made up a network of energy crisscrossing the earth, which could be used like a spider’s web. By identifying certain mystic vibrations that traveled the lengths of this network, one could have access to a vast reservoir of knowledge about the actions and motions of other entities in the world. Some of the nexus points for this network survived the Creator’s flood, including Stonehenge, the Sphinx and the Nazca lines. When he discovered them, Belial wanted to use them to track his adversary — Lucifer.

Belial couldn’t ever get a firm grip on the nature of the Dragon Lines, however, and every time he translated one

of the “vibrations,” it was always too late to act effectively. Still, it’s said that now that the Great Beast is awake again, he is calling to him the secret descendents of his cults to finally master these inscrutable lines of energy.

INFERNO

The archdukes weren’t like Lucifer remembered. Abaddon was a mad beast, Asmodeus was an alien mind. Azrael, once a puzzling ally, was now a hollow god bent on becoming Death incarnate. And Lucifer’s two most trusted advisors, Dagon and Belial, were now lunatic manipulators thirsting for his blood. Were the other members of the fallen host so broken and dispirited by the Abyss? The Morningstar would soon find out.

Lucifer had taught sorcery to men, and knowledge spread with alarming speed. Summoners passed along their secret rituals, and opportunistic priests soon began looking for other gods beyond the framework of space and time. Some were content to send for nature spirits, but others decided to delve into the Abyss and find new gods within the tenebrous pit. Lucifer watched in horror as men began conjuring more beings from the Abyss, but these beings were angels no more. They were monsters cast into horrific idols of stone, bone and metal. These demons, lesser than the archdukes but powerful nevertheless, began scrabbling for worship among the fledgling civilizations of man. The slow growth of the Earthbound came with the spread of arcane knowledge that began with Lucifer’s gift to man. Seeing this, the Lightbringer wept.

The Earthbound demons began discovering one another’s presence. They reeled with the shock of it. Faith suddenly became a commodity, and each demon’s plan to reshape Creation conflicted with the next. Over the centuries, more and more demons were released from the Abyss and began hacking out their own niches in the world of man. The Malefactor Kaminari, the Empress of Thunder, spoke to the minds of the native Ainu of ancient Japan. Balam-Agag was summoned into the hands of the Anasazi peoples of ancient America and taught them the Scourge secrets of making disease. Leshii the Devourer made a home among the darkest woods of proto-Europe, shepherding a cult of children to protect his mazelike tracts of forest. Lucifer and the archdukes attempted to counteract the influence of these additional demons, but their efforts were for naught. The tide could not be stemmed. More demons were coming with the passing of every season.

LUCIFER’S VISION

Lucifer understood that the archdukes were no longer his generals, advisors or allies. They were foes who would never agree to his strategy regarding humanity, so he decided to seek allies among the other Earthbound. They were clearly angels no longer, but perhaps the weight of the Abyss did not torment them so badly, he thought. He went to one member of each

COLLARING THE KINGS

The Earthbound didn’t need to command the weight of a civilization directly. They didn’t directly control the ancient empires of man, for there was no need to. Here and there, they whispered to the souls of a few unfortunate individuals — sometimes kings, sometimes the advisors of kings. The Earthbound didn’t corrupt an entire army, just a few key figures in an army. They didn’t enthrall prominent figures directly; they merely influenced the *souls* of these powerful individuals, starting in motion a great machine that allowed them to sit back and grow corpulent with Faith. Their cults were the key, and as long as their cults were allowed a place in society and went without persecution, the Earthbound could rest on their laurels while taking in the whole sordid mess.

House, hoping to forge new alliances and have a new team of lieutenants available to him.

The Lightbringer made pleas to Harsis the Scourge, Phaestus the Malefactor, Kaoru-Shinju the Fiend, Dhanavantari the Defiler, Manishtusu the Devourer and Lelwani the Slayer. He offered them all positions by his side. They could help him elevate humanity's power until it rivaled Heaven's own. He came to them in their dreams, showing them his vision of removing Creation from God's chains and returning the world to its Edenic state. But Lucifer didn't find willingness, he found only hatred, pain and wretchedness. The demons rebuked him and reviled him. They made a promise to the Morningstar that he would fail. They replied in turn with *their* vision of the future, which involved bleeding humanity dry of its hope and spirit. Once humanity's collective soul was in chains, the intrinsic power could be used to reshape Creation into an unyielding Hell, and Lucifer would be placed at the center of all that suffering. The Lightbringer fled, recognizing that he was truly the last of his kind, and that he could never ally with such monsters. A new plan had to be found, and quickly.

THE TRIBES OF MEN

The tribes of men that existed now were not like the ones that had come before, Lucifer knew. They still had the spark and had no less potential, but they seemed hollow... as if waiting to be filled up. Lucifer watched from afar as many of these tribes housed cults led by the nascent Earthbound. Many were easily swayed by threat or promise, and they effortlessly assumed the mantle of hatred, hedonism and mindlessness that their infernal masters espoused. Yet the Lightbringer began making moves to counterbalance this tendency. He selected several smaller tribes of men who had gone unnoticed by the Earthbound demons thus far. And from within their own minds, he began teaching them through dreams and hallucinations.

One of these tribes was a small group of nomads that the Earthbound had not touched. The mortals were Semitic in origin, were hardly united, and could barely read or write. In comparison with Babylonian culture, these Hebrews seemed primitive and unworthy of attention. Lucifer moved to influence the tribe, and while he had some success, a surprise lay in wait. These people told stories of the creation of the world — *as it had actually happened*. More so, it was the basis of their very religion. They told of God, the angels, the Allfather and the Allmother. How had this happened? They were as yet too uncultured to have trained sorcerers among them. No Earthbound claimed dominion over them. (In fact, the Earthbound seemed absolutely ignorant of these people.) Lucifer believed he understood. These were the descendants of people before history. Their lineage somehow survived the Flood, and now they retained some racial memory of the time-before-time. While some of their

history was off and varied wildly from the truth, they still had most of it right. The Morningstar decided that this tribe needed his guidance. He wouldn't manipulate them directly, not as he'd done to other mortals. But he would watch and wait and guard them whenever he could. Soon the Earthbound would come for these people, the Lightbringer believed. And he was right.

Abaddon was the first to move against the Jews. He whispered in the ears of the Egyptian Pharaohs and the Assyrian kings, charging both empires to bring their weight down upon the Hebrews, harrying them from the north and south. But they seemed protected by divine providence, and from their ranks emerged a once-Egyptian magician called Moses who orchestrated strange plagues and physical disruptions that allowed the tribe to escape persecution. Belial felt the aura of protection surrounding these mortals, and he moved to establish a series of Babylonian puppet kings in Jerusalem to corrupt and control these spoiled children. The "children," however, didn't agree, and they executed the Babylonian officials. The Great Beast was enraged, and he sent armies into Jerusalem. The city was sacked and burned, and the people were enslaved by the Babylonians.

The Great Beast watched this experiment closely, intending for the Babylonians to corrupt these oddly blessed mortals. He waited for the day when one by one they would fall to their knees and mumble prayer to the maddemons. But it never happened. The exile in Babylon only served to unify and educate the Hebrews. They learned the advancements that had been pioneered by their Babylonian captors, but they didn't succumb to the seductions or threats levied by the Earthbound masters. Whenever their torment seemed too great, they were granted visions of hope and dreams revealing them as the "promised" people. Later, when Cyrus the Great took Babylon in 538 BC, he freed the Hebrews and sent them back to Jerusalem. Over the centuries, the archdukes made several attempts to corrupt and destroy this wayward group, destroying their holy temples and defaming their God with magic and "miracles." It availed them nothing until the Earthbound found an unusual ally in the son of the beloved King David.

SOLOMON THE DECEIVER

For a time, the Earthbound had a collaborator among the Hebrews. Solomon was the legendary king of the nomadic tribe, son and successor to David, and he was hungry for both power and knowledge. He hoped to lead his people into a new era; before that time, the Hebrews were unlearned in most of the ways of architecture, mining, tool-making and trade. Solomon knew these things existed among other peoples, and he sought to uncover this knowledge for himself. Unfortunately, it would not be so simple. Seeking to build a grand temple for Yahweh, he went to the Phoenicians, whose architectural skills were renowned. He hoped to learn from

them, but they asked him, "Why would we teach this knowledge to a fool who believes in only one god?" The Phoenicians pointed to the vast pantheon of gods they served with sacrifice and toil, and they agreed to lend the Hebraic king the knowledge he quested after on one condition: that he accept the shackles of their corrupted gods. Solomon accepted.

And so he took the knowledge and built a temple for the Holiest of Holies (the Ark of the Covenant), but he also secretly went to the forests of Lebanon and the isolated hills north of Jerusalem. There he built heretical temples devoted to the worship of the Phoenicians' demonic pantheon. He built idols to Moloch the Abomination, shrines to Chemash and Malkhart, devoted ritual and prayer to Baal. In return, Solomon drew knowledge from the gods and their followers for his people. He learned how to mine the earth for iron, copper and bronze. He learned how to build naval ships and granaries. It also allowed him access to the flourishing trade routes of the times, and with that access came a bevy of wives and concubines, many of which were inadvertent (or deliberate) servitors of the Earthbound demons. Solomon split his worship between the gods and even allowed his people to do the same when they chose. Legend persists that Solomon sold his soul to 72 individual Earthbound in an effort to propel his people forward, which was a gambit that remains unparalleled throughout history. Solomon's final blasphemous action was to build a single temple deep beneath the earth near Mount Moab, and this temple would serve to deliver prayer and devotionals to all of his strange gods and goddesses (i.e., the Earthbound who were playing tug-of-war with his soul). But a surprising thing happened.

Upon completing the temple, Solomon withdrew parchments written in an ancient Assyrian script, and began an exacting, tiring ritual that would take him most of a single night to perform. Trapped in their reliquaries, the Earthbound didn't feel the disturbance until it was too late. Each demon to whom Solomon had promised his mind, body and spirit suddenly felt its reliquary cracking and splintering, and all 72 of the ancient demons were drawn screaming from their relics and pulled into a small bronze urn that the Hebrew king had ritually prepared. They attempted to lash out, to call to their thralls, but they couldn't. They were trapped inside, locked within this miniature oubliette-version of the Abyss. There was nothing but emptiness inside for the 72 demons, and they wept. Solomon took the urn onto a boat and dropped it into the Dead Sea. Solomon's urn has yet to be discovered.

Nobody ever discovered precisely how Solomon was able to both be owned by so many disparate Earthbound and, at the same time, reject each one in hand. Was he given the secret from afar, or was he the world's most skilled sorcerer, as the rumors suggest? In his books, he wrote of dreams that gave him the providence to defy



THE HEPTAMERON

Some say that Solomon's knowledge of summoning, binding and exorcising demons still exists today. It is suggested that a book called the *Heptameron* was once written by Solomon himself. Some claim that this text holds all of the ancient rituals, prayers and spells designed by the great sorcerer-king during his days as ruler of the Hebrews. Oddly enough, this information wasn't collected until the early 16th century, when an Italian magician named Peter of Abano supposedly spoke to the ghost of King Solomon in his sleep. Peter claimed that after the first conversation with the spectral Solomon, he was able to conjure up the ghost of the king any time he wished. From there he penned the massive collection (said to be over a thousand pages in length and bound in leather that was dyed with a hawk's blood) which detailed the information he learned from Solomon. This book is something along the lines of a "Holy Grail" for many demonologists and dark sorcerers, and it remains a highly sought-after resource.

his many masters — could Lucifer have granted him the strength? The truth might never be known. Solomon died in exile, hunted down by the thralls of the Great Beast Belial, who destroyed him and stole all of his mystical items and scribed knowledge.

YEARS OF EXULTATION

During the classical period, the Earthbound thrived. They were literally the gods among men. Mortals called them by the names they gave them: Loki, Amaterasu, Kronos, Thoth. The collective worship and veneration given by thousands of individuals shaped these demons into mankind's vision of godhood. The sheer force of belief molded the demons as much as (if not more than) the demons were molding humanity. One reaps what one sows, after all. As the demons grew in power, so did the mortals. It was a golden age for the world of men, a time of power, faith and enlightenment. The demons reveled in it, sated with the sweet succor of devotion.

Yet a problem arose, in that the Earthbound were quite literally legion by the start of this period. Hundreds of demons now lived in the world, having appeared over a relatively short period of time. Disorder and chaos were unavoidable. These demons grappled with one another, and this conflict further shaped the myths and legends of every culture. Tales told in whispers and legends scrawled on vellum chronicled scenes of gods and goddesses raging against one another, waging war in the skies above city-states and beneath the waters of

distant seas. It was impossible for the Earthbound not to run into one another, as they numbered so many and their influence was indelibly laid over the world. Whenever they clashed, terror and brutality reigned and much blood was spilled. Mortals raised swords in support of their demon masters, and many died. Despite burgeoning enlightenment, war was impossible to avoid.

WAR AMONG THE GODS

If the archdukes could only have allied with one another, they might have stemmed the tides of newly released demons coming to the world. They were unable to agree on even the smallest of issues, however, and every "meeting" between them ended with the thralls of one archduke gutting the cultists of another, only furthering their hatred and competition. Years of worship without influence from any other made them selfish and greedy. Each archduke wanted it all, unwilling to even *discuss* compromise. War erupted across the civilized world. The founding Greek culture was beset by much conflict. Minoans, Dorians, Etruscans, and later, the Persians all attacked Greece (and one another). All of them were egged on by their archduke puppet-masters, troops stirred up like hornets and sent to attack one another in the name of their mad gods. Other, lesser Earthbound entered the fray, sometimes attempting to hold their own and sometimes actively pursuing a bigger piece of the pie for themselves. The archdukes would not allow this, and were able to put aside their own competition for a time in order to turn their wrath against the upstart demons who were nibbling at their influence.

Whenever possible, the archdukes attempted to bind and command the wayward demons that were infringing upon potential Faith. The archdukes remembered many of the True Names of demons in and out of the Abyss, and they didn't hesitate to use them to enslave these insubordinate fallen. Belial expended great effort (making some small use of the Dragon Lines) to track other Earthbound to their reliquaries, and soon the other archdukes followed suit with their own hunting methods. The archdukes sent thralls to the far corners of the world to bring the errant demons (and their cultists) into line. This tactic worked many times, helping to increase the archdukes' growing power-base (though it also served to intensify their insanities). Sometimes the smaller cults became part of the larger Earthbound "religions."

But many demons resisted and could not be brought under the sway of the archdukes. Some were too far away to be enslaved, and others still had True Names that remained a mystery or had been forgotten over the countless epochs. Whenever this happened, wars broke out in orgiastic battles where men cut apart other men and raped their mistresses and wives. Whole tribes, cities and cults clashed whenever the demons could not be made to follow, scarring the world with strife and suffering. Earthbound destroyed Earthbound, sending people

like game pieces against one another, insensitive to the vast brutality that was performed in their name. Reliquaries were drawn out of their dark catacombs and were crushed to dust by the victorious thralls. Many Earthbound were destroyed by the archdukes. They were either sent screaming back to the Pit or were consumed by their new masters. Some fled instead of fighting, their reliquaries carried away (whenever possible) or simply buried deep in the earth. These demons stayed hidden until they could surface in a different time and place. Some simply remained isolated in unreachable places, sequestered with their own clutches of faithful towns and cities. There was little stability in the world, and much of the bedlam owed itself to the struggles of demon versus demon.

ETERNAL STRUGGLE

In Persepolis, the ceremonial capital of Persia, the cults of a few lesser Earthbound flourished. The dominant cult consisted of a group of cannibals calling themselves the “Skin-Eaters,” and they were lorded over by a demon called Dyubbiel. This demon, a Devil once enamored of Creation and all its inhabitants, was now a debased god-king calling himself “the guardian angel of Persia.” The cult, in accordance with Dyubbiel’s wishes, demanded a specific tribute from the citizens and even the king, Darius. That tribute was a small swatch of fresh skin sliced from each citizen, which leaders of the cult would then

consume. The cultists were feared, and Dyubbiel was a living legend that haunted the dreams of all.

But in a short time, all of that changed. During Darius’s reign as king, strange stories were passed among the lower-class citizens of the city. Beggars and whores whispered tales of a new mythology, wherein an ancient bringer of light goes to battle against the gods of darkness. This good god cannot win, but his power is enough to stop the darkness from prevailing. Soon, the malcontents and castaways began telling more than just stories. In dreams, they had learned what to do to help the good god combat the evil entities. They were taught how to access long-forgotten knowledge inside their own souls and tap into arcane wells of power that they didn’t know existed. They were taught exhausting rituals — ceremonies that helped bind, abjure and banish demonic creatures. Thereafter, this knowledge began moving from person to person like an information virus.

This information was, of course, planted by Lucifer, whose logic was as follows: Once, he had taught men how to conjure demons from the deepest darkness outside of reality, but that strategy miscarried. From the ashes of that mistake, hundreds of deranged demons were allowed freedom. Now he taught the opposite of conjuring — the ability to trap demons and send them screaming back to their shadowy confinement. The Morningstar hoped that this knowledge, too, would

CHINA

The Western world was not the only place plagued by the authority of the Earthbound. China, too, was haunted by mad gods. The massive region was laid low by constant chaos, especially during the Warring States period (481-221 BC), when the entire area was embroiled in violent civil war. Much of it was spawned by the secret aggressions of two different Earthbound cults struggling for prominence. The one, the Red Sect, was marshaled by a militaristic Earthbound called Abromalgia, a disruptive Devourer with a habit for demanding mass killings. The second was the Green Sect, and was lorded over by the Earthbound Fiend, Kaoru-Shinji, a seductive beast who taught his disciples a way to divine the future through bloodletting. Both sects operated behind the scenes, pulling the strings of the unsuspecting while moving their own people into places of leadership.

In 250 BC, however, both groups began suffering sudden (and surprisingly successful) attacks on their followers and holdings. These attacks came seemingly out of nowhere and were performed by monks in white robes who brandished strange fireworks and managed to damage the corrupted with howling prayer. These attacks were coordinated by a blind man called Yin-kui (also called “the White Fan”). He called his group the Many Ancestors. It was composed of convicted

criminals who wished to atone for their deeds and joined Yin-kui’s crusade against the corrupting influences of the Red and Green Sects. It remains unclear as to how Yin-kui was able to identify the hidden demons behind these groups when so many could not, and even more mysterious is *why* he chose to wage war against the secret gods. Legend suggests that Yin-kui’s family was murdered and ancestral shrines despoiled at the hands of the Red Sect, and as a child he was left alive, but blinded by hot ash thrust into his eyes. The truth, it is said, came to him in a dream about the demons, and he devoted his life to destroying them.

He was unable to destroy both sects, but he did manage to track down Abromalgia’s reliquary (a granite statuary depicting a man being eaten by worms) and destroy it toward the end of his life. This helped to end the civil war, but unfortunately the Ch’in Dynasty took hold, led by China’s first emperor, Shi Huangdi. This emperor, who united China under his dynasty and helped to standardize money, trade and government, was also a thrall of the demon Kaoru-Shinji. Shi Huangdi burned any books that spoke against him or portrayed any history that he disapproved of (and this includes any written memory of Yin-kui the demon-hunter). At Kaoru-Shinji’s prodding, he began work on what would become the Great Wall.

spread with the same ease that the summoning lore had enjoyed. While the plan was not nearly as successful (as witnessed by the many Earthbound still existent in the world), the knowledge did survive generation after generation, and was carried beyond Persia into the world at large. It was a small weapon against the Earthbound, but a weapon that allowed a caste of rebellious priests within the borders of Persepolis to cast the “angel” Dyubbiel back to the chains of the Abyss. The Lightbringer would take any triumph he could find.

ANCIENT GREECE

Greece grew from the cradle of the Mycenaean peoples and quickly became one of the first truly civilized realms to come out of the ancient age. It was a diverse culture epitomized by varying city-states such as Athens, Sparta, Thrace and Thebes. This diversity was heightened when several Earthbound cults took hold in the area, literally one next to the other. The Defiler consorts, Ukhat and Sadu, brought their cults of hedonism into the gates of Athens, and the Fiend Bel-Namataru created the mystery cults of Delphi and Eleusis. The Annunaki Demavand infiltrated the military ranks of the Spartan navy, promising them weapons from the very heavens. All the while, the dual archdukes Asmodeus and Abaddon attempted to secure the souls of those aristocrats in charge of the various nations of Greece.

It was the first time the demons had been in such close proximity to one another. It helped create the dynamic mythology of the Greeks, featuring wicked tales of the various gods and goddesses playing in and out of the lives of all Greek citizens while battling one another for dominance. It also helped to foster the rapid growth of the Greek world, despite opposition from Persia. The competition between demons raised the stakes as the people developed new technologies and

philosophies quicker than ever before. Art flourished while the harbors filled with naval vessels. New architectural styles were conceived from the secret language of mathematics. And all the while, the cults of Greece flourished publicly, informing the agendas of the *polis*, the dramatists and the military.

The two archdukes, Abaddon and Asmodeus, were not pleased. While they made great strides in swaying the dissimilar city-states of Greece, there was too much competition. Worship was a desperate commodity, spread out among countless Earthbound, and that was simply unacceptable. Once again, Asmodeus had a plan. If Abaddon and he could align as they once had, they could ensure the collapse of Greece which would diminish the cults that claimed dominance. From the ashes, the two archdukes could rebuild the civilization in their own image, and this nation could serve as a microcosm for the eventual transformation of all Creation. Both found rare moments of sanity and agreed on the necessity of the alliance, so they forged a deal to steer the city-states into the ground. This pact, called the “Eleusinian Accord” (named after the temple at Eleusis where the pact was forged by the thralls of the two Earthbound), guaranteed that Abaddon and Asmodeus would stand together until Greece fell. Then they watched and waited for the opportunity they needed.

THE YEARS OF KINGSHIP

Rome began as an inauspicious collection of villages populated by criminals and slaves. It was ruled by kings until 510 BC, at which point King Tarquin the Proud was deposed and the culture began moving under the banner of a republic. For the next half-century, the

NEW WORLD ORDER

Many Earthbound demons were mentally unable to break rank and file. The archdukes remained at the top of the infernal chain, and the fell knights bowed and scraped at the bottom. It didn't *need* to be this way, however. Rank was somewhat ingrained in the very being of the fallen angel, true, but their reemergence into the world of men left the pecking order significantly less defined. As such, some demons took advantage of this new potential and attempted to ascend higher in rank through dark diligence and hellborn ingenuity. *Other* demons, however, simply claimed a new title and left it at that. Perhaps the best known example of this latter concept is the Earthbound Baal.

Baal was never an archduke during the War of Wrath. The fallen angel was a narcissistic rogue Devourer with the rank of fell knight. Baal led a band of mercenary demons that eventually performed work for

the Lightbringer himself—particularly during the Grand Experiment. Once reawakened, however, Baal asserted that he was the greatest among the archdukes, and he demanded fealty from many lesser demons, including Enshagkushanna. Why did he do this? Primarily because the five legitimate archdukes created something of an impenetrable power base. These five demons were sustained by some of the largest and most influential cults in the classical period, and thus the greatest share of Faith went to a very small minority of demons. Baal helped to change that, somewhat. By calling himself an “archduke” and organizing a power bloc from his palace in the ruined city of Ugarit, he was able to subvert some of the influence of the five authentic archdukes. Over time, however, Baal came to believe that he had truly been one of Lucifer's favored lieutenants during the War of Wrath as his feelings of megalomania and narcissism intensified.

AFRICA

By this time, Azrael had fostered the birth of a new African empire, the Nok. These people worshipped the cycle of death and rebirth, and they celebrated it with rituals of mutilation and murder. Azrael's rule was all-encompassing, taking the peoples of East Africa and demanding their Faith through promises of righteousness after death. Three other Earthbound made their way into this land, however, summoned from the skies by a dissident group of priestesses who sought to topple the vicious Nok society. These women did not know what they were conjuring, unfortunately, and they summoned three Earthbound Scourges calling themselves the Triumvirate. These three — Ghede, Gawama and Gorgias — formed an unusual alliance right out of the gate, as they had been self-appointed "brothers" during the Age of Babel. These three instantly enthralled the unwilling priestesses and went to war with Azrael and the Nok. Eventually, the priestesses did get their wish. By AD 200, the Nok culture had been entirely deposed, and the archduke's necromantic empire was forever weakened. Even today, the war between Azrael's servitors and the frenzied slaves of the Triumvirate continued unabated.

Romans were ruled by a Senate (which was in turn ruled by consuls), and existed largely under the radar of the archdukes. Other Earthbound had hands in the Roman republic, but none so strong as to command the weight of the growing civilization.

But around 400 BC, the two archdukes conspiring against the Greek civilization began to notice this burgeoning republic. These people, having come from such vulgar origins, were making great strides independently of the Earthbound. Their military skills grew in leaps and bounds while their artistic culture was also gaining sudden footholds. One of Asmodeus's Earthbound servitors, a Fiend duchess called Lethe, predicted great things for this growing culture, saying that they would one day command "all of the Children of Dust and poison every corner of the world with perversion." Opportunity, it seemed, was knocking, and both Asmodeus and Abaddon decided to make a play for this once-insignificant republic. Greece had to fall, and this republic would rise in its wake. The two orchestrated the Peloponnesian Wars, twisting Athens and Sparta against one another.

Eventually, Sparta defeated Athens. Asmodeus then whispered in the ears of the Macedonians, who invaded Greece and defeated the Spartans in a bloody coup. Greece had collapsed, and quickly the dual archdukes inspired the politicians of the Roman republic to assume control. The plan worked. The leviathan of Rome was born.

PAX ROMANA

By 50 BC, Rome had conquered most of the lands around the Mediterranean and had assumed dominance over Greece and Macedonia — all with little help from the two Earthbound archdukes. Both demons found the Roman people surprisingly resilient to their influence, despite their worship of the old Grecian gods. Therefore, the two conspired to topple this republic, for commanding Rome would be far easier if it were ruled by one instead of many. The two instilled doubt and treachery in the generals, senators and consuls of the republic, and it wasn't long before the Rome fell into great civil war. The republic collapsed, and in 27 BC the puppet Octavian, son of Julius Caesar, became the first official Roman emperor.

Over time, Rome became a model of near perfection — at least according to the designs of the Earthbound. The empire was a celestial object falling quickly, gaining momentum as it sank deeper into its own blessed defilement. Rome was a political monster. Any village, city or nation that stood in its way was either made a part of the empire or was discarded and destroyed. As the boundaries of Rome widened, new people were assimilated into its citizenry. Gauls, Africans, Syrians, Illyrians. It didn't matter who, only that they became part of the body and were made to worship the secret gods that directed the empire's fate. With every new citizen came more money and more labor. Lesser Earthbound began existing on the fringes, escaping the notice of the two ruling archdukes. More demons meant more cults. New innovations arose, including concrete and the aqueduct. Roads spread out from the capital city like arteries pumping blood back to the heart, and those roads were the beckoning call to more Faith, drawing more demons and more worshippers to the empire.

Men and women built little altars in their homes, shelves with tiny carved versions of Earthbound reliquaries. When they chose not to worship at home, they could instead go out and pay homage to the dark gods with many names. Slaves, philosophers and senators could worship at any of these, offering their blood and belief in the name of Rome and its spiritual "protectors." Anyone could worship at any of the gardens or temples scattered throughout the empire. They were encouraged to leave behind moral trappings and engage in acts that would have seemed egregious in the past. Pain and pleasure became closely tied to the veneration they presented to the Earthbound gods.

The archdukes knew by now of the other Earthbound who were infiltrating their empire, but it didn't matter. Asmodeus and Abaddon were in control of many prominent souls which helped them steer Rome in whatever direction they desired. Belief in the dark gods became the official religion of the empire, and people from across the world fell to their knees in profane prayer. From Britain, Africa and the Middle

INDIA

Early India oscillated between periods of stability and periods of upheaval. Stability came because the people of that culture were stratified over time, placed in specific social castes and told that they could never leave, not through death or rebirth. Dharma held them to their respective stations. Upheaval occurred because (at least up until 250 BC or so) men could not agree on leaders and war grew from this argument. On top of that, the land became known as the “land of a million gods,” as there were constantly new cults rising out of the people to worship some new face of some new god. Many of these faces were merely masks worn by Archduke Dagon.

Over the centuries, Dagon became dozens of gods and goddesses, creating an exacting charade to help control the people and wring as much Faith from them as possible. He himself was a whole part of the pantheon. Disobey one, and you disobeyed all. As Rahu the Demon King, he burned living bodies with his breath of fire. As Vasuki the Serpent, he poisoned those who opposed him with slow-killing venom. As Daksha the Ram-Headed he had his thralls (dressed as frightening beasts) decapitate challengers with unholy *kukri* blades. Dagon’s influence spread from city to city, teaching the human herds scattered bits of architecture, weapons-forging, tool-making.

His mind was like an exacting machine, and it changed him. The other archdukes were given over to ardent, passionate hatred of all things, but Dagon moved away from that, and instead became a cold, distant consciousness detesting all living things. The rituals he demanded were infinitely complex, and he even commanded his servitors to build him maze-like temple compounds and bizarre pseudo-machines to further “serve” him (though no purpose could be discerned for these alien objects). When the lesser Earthbound entered the picture, Dagon brought as many of the Annunaki to him as he could find, and

there he made them serve him in turn. These demons soon became like the archduke himself, invested with the contrasting characteristics of extreme rationality and unhinged insanity. Dagon’s power built steadily upward, his people excelling in both mathematics and mayhem, until Buddhism took hold in later years and the entire climate of India changed.

Dagon held India for many centuries, relishing the conflict and pain the people inflicted upon one another. The archduke enjoyed his worship, feeding on the Faith supplied by hundreds of deranged cults. These cults unknowingly granted Dagon massive power; power he intended to use to wipe the identities from all of humanity, making mankind a mindless, mechanical body. The archduke thrived on the atrocity. Daughters were burned alive in pits. Shadowy sects kidnapped men at night and broke their spirits through torture, invoking the names of Kali or Durga Syn. Enigmatic relics were built and passed around to the unsuspecting populace to further enthrall them. Among them were puzzle boxes that stole people’s souls, idols that would come alive at night to torture their owners and clockwork goblins that demanded the sweet-bread meats of children. One of Dagon’s greatest puppets was the Mauryan ruler, Asoka, who decimated the Kalinga peoples of eastern India through horrid bloodshed. But Dagon’s influence was turned suddenly against him as Asoka claimed to have “seen the light” of the Buddha, and became ashamed of his brutal ways. Asoka cited a mysterious visitor who came to him nightly and taught him the true ways of the Buddha. The ruler began publicly humbling himself before his people and later helped to usher in the Golden Age of India. Dagon was inexplicably defeated, and was forced to subsist on the Faith granted to him by the rebellious splinter sects that went against the Mauryan and Shunga Dynasties.

East, people were subverted and embraced by Rome, and infernal souls swelled with devotion.

By the first century AD, at least 100 other Earthbound held cults in Rome, and these demons nursed at Rome’s hind-tits, sucking at the dregs the dual archdukes left behind. The infernal hierarchy expanded. At the top were the archdukes, and beneath them existed a stratified ladder of other Earthbound who acted in accordance with the wishes of their superiors. The demons all fell in line and existed in a tense harmony for much of the empire’s duration. There seemed little reason to revolt against one another directly, because the benefits of *not* rocking the boat were too good to give up. Lesser demons plotted and schemed against one another inside the empire, as they could not deny their

nature, but the empire’s heart was too strong to be damaged by such petty conspiracies.

Danger would come from outside. Other Earthbound, even the other archdukes, were not so pleased at Rome’s exponential growth. Belial’s reliquary, at this time, was placed in the elaborate sepulchers of the Sassanid Persian empire, and that empire attempted to war directly against Rome and its holdings. Belial, still able to muster some logic out of his madness, was able to enforce long periods of stability in the Persian world, thus allowing him great advantage over Rome. Yet Rome was simply too overwhelming of a monster, and the Great Beast gave up such a direct route in later centuries. Other demons attempted attack from outside, as well. Some Earthbound controlled disparate clusters of barbarians from the north,

and other demons held court over the city-states of Parthia. Both were thorns in Rome's side, but little more. Some of the mad gods were required to defend themselves when their people fell beneath the steamroller effect of the empire. Azrael, his influence already waning, was forced to guard his many cults from Rome's subversive nature as the empire came to Africa. The Angel of Death retreated into the deserts, a procession of followers carrying his reliquary into the desolate heart of Africa.

Wherever Rome went, it consumed. The two archdukes relished the monster they had nurtured to life, watching as mortals *and* their wayward gods (i.e., other Earthbound) fell under the "sponsorship" of the Roman Empire. Abaddon and Asmodeus believed that they were in control of an unstoppable beast. Rome was a vision of the future. They had leashed a large part of humanity's collective soul already, and it wouldn't take much effort to capture the rest. From there they could take the power and cleave all of the cosmos in twain, ruining any of the designs laid bare by the conspiracy of the Creator and the Morningstar. Victory was imminent. Nothing, the two archdukes decided, could stand in their way.

CHRISTIANITY

A great blasphemy to the Earthbound rose out of Palestine not long after the Roman Empire had crawled from the remains of the republic. It began small and went unnoticed. It grew from the heart of the persecuted Hebrews, untouched by Earthbound hands, and for many years, it remained nothing more than a fringe religion worthy of disdain and dismissal. But one day, a man named Saul was struck on the road to Damascus by a bright and shining light, and in that moment, he found insight in his temporary blindness. Saul — now calling himself Paul — believed that he had been struck by divine providence, and he saw visions of a man who had been born and murdered to save the withering soul of mankind. Paul was converted, and from this one man, the world would change.

Paul's conversion gave life to this nascent belief, and even in its embryonic stages it began growing rapidly. The Earthbound were appalled at the promise this spiritual foundling carried with it. This would do them no good. Not only did it demand worship of a single god much as the Hebrews had done, but it ascribed a divine connection through man — through a *single* man, actually, the one known as Yeshua ben Josef, who would be called Jesus Christ in later years. Men were not meant to believe in themselves, the Earthbound decided, nor should they waste their belief on a single, asinine Creator. The Earthbound were present and powerful, and they demanded that this upstart religion be put in its proper place — into the ground. Yet it was not so easy. Every attempt to crush it in one place would cause it to reappear in another. "Churches" and "tabernacles" emerged within little towns like weed

patches. Its devotees were surprisingly resilient to corruption, self-righteous against the wages of sin.

The Earthbound had encountered this phenomenon only once before, among the Hebrews — and given the connection between the two groups, it deserved investigation. Belial was the architect of that investigation, and it didn't take long for him to uncover the truth. The minds of the Christian faithful were stamped with an indelible fingerprint — that of the Morningstar. Somehow, Lucifer had escaped notice long enough to shepherd these heretics into being. This was not an unfortunate coincidence, it was gross serendipity. The Earthbound knew that this struggling infant religion could not continue.

THE GOSPEL OF THE CONSOLER

Also known as the "Gospel of Menahem," this apocryphal text supposedly tells the story of Jesus' temptation in the desert by the Devil, Satan. The book features two crucial distinctions, however. The first is that the Devil isn't tempting Jesus; he is *enlightening* him to the "secret history" of the world. The second twist is that the gospel is written from the perspective of Satan himself, who calls himself "Menahem the Consoler." The book details only that period during the 40 days that Jesus spent in self-exile out in the desert and wilderness. In it, Satan/Menahem explains to Jesus that the world is under the control of "evil kings" who rule outside of the Creator, and that these beings can only be defeated through exorcism rites that Menahem offers to teach to Christ.

The book reads: "*The Consoler said, 'Lamb of God, your Father has left you and left the world. / Only you carry the Word that may besiege the evil kings / With wisdom and knowledge.'*" (Gospel of the Consoler, 4:22.) Menahem goes on later to explain that Christ and his people will always be shepherded by the "Son of the Morning," thought by some to be a reference to Lucifer. Some Cryptic scholars even believe that Menahem (or Satan) in this non-canonical text is actually the Lightbringer himself. The debate continues among some fallen as to whether or not the "evil kings" refer to the Roman emperors or the Earthbound themselves.

No complete copies of this book exist today. A few scattered fragments were supposedly found at Nag Hammadi and others at Qumran with the Dead Sea Scrolls. Still other pieces were discovered in an underground labyrinth below the obelisks at Axum in Ethiopia. A small sub-sect of Luciferan fallen (calling themselves the Sons of Morning) have devoted their new lives to searching for the full text of the gospel. They believe that it contains the lost history of the Lightbringer and might provide answers on how to defeat the Earthbound.

BREAD AND CIRCUSES

Abaddon and Asmodeus shepherded Rome to greater heights, pushing the boundaries of the empire to every feasible corner of the world. Other Earthbound attempted to erode the influence of Rome, some marshalling waves of maddened barbarians from the North, others attempting corruption from within the empire itself. When the Romans breached the borders of what would become the British Isles, they were met with the sorcerers of Belial and clans of shapeshifting wildmen. But Rome would not be stopped. It assimilated or destroyed everything in its path. Rome appeared indestructible. The people grew fat and happy, knowing that the “gods” were looking after them. And these gods, through their mouthpiece emperors, gave the people circuses of perversion and sadism, encouraging the citizenry to engage in any immoral act they desired. The people watched gladiators hack each other to bits, they practiced every sexual peccadillo conceived of, and they gorged themselves on the plentiful food and drink that seemed handed down from the heavens.

Once Christianity reared its head, the allied archdukes turned the weight of their political machine against the Christians *and* the Hebrews, persecuting both with extreme prejudice. They brought Christians and Jews into the arenas and had lions or bears tear the believers apart. They tortured and raped their victims in public forums and humiliated them on stage in between dramatic performances. Many died; others were bound into

slavery. And the *vox populi* swallowed it whole, chanting for the destruction of these infidels, demanding their blood as one living, breathing entity. Meanwhile the god-minded emperors encouraged this behavior, thirsty for lust, blood and bile. Gaius Caligula was a human monster, sating himself on every sadistic whim and vile perversion that came to mind. His nephew, Emperor Nero, was even more insidious and insane. After murdering his own mother, he went on to assassinate his wife and kick his mistress to death. He castrated men in an effort to make them women. He staked the heads of Christians and Jews, lighting them on fire to illuminate his twisted garden parties. He would even dress up as strange men at night to rape and murder unwitting passersby. Both of these emperors were dutiful devotees of the archdukes, their palaces filled with altars made of bone and flesh. But even the backing of the archdukes was not enough to stop the emperors from overextending themselves and making enemies. Caligula was assassinated in his bed, his throat slit and a star pattern engraved upon his forehead. Nero, too, was assassinated, a terrible poison dripped in his ear while he lay drunk and supine in one of Rome’s alleyways. The same star was etched upon his forehead. The archdukes never discovered the identity of the assassin, nor uncovered how such a killer succeeded at all.

CONVERSION OF CONSTANTINE

In AD 310, the Eleusinian Accord that bound the two archdukes with one another was broken. At the



time, Rome was ruled by a tetrarchy, a government of four emperors. Asmodeus, under the guise of Mithra, wanted one of his key thralls (and one of the four emperors), Constantine, to assume the mantle of emperor without the rule of the other three. Abaddon was scheming for the same thing, but with one of *his* own thralls, a man named Maxentius.

Constantine was sent away to Britain by the other three emperors, which enraged Asmodeus. There, he focused much propaganda through his cults based in and around York to convince Constantine to usurp the rule of Rome. From this effort, a civil war grew and overtook the tetrarchy. Maxentius helped to oust the other two emperors, Severus and Galerius, but soon this act brought him and Constantine to war against one another. Abaddon held the city of Rome as Constantine battled outside the walls in an effort to breach the capital and claim the throne. Constantine's men were weak, beaten and sick, and no matter how many prayers, sacrifices or libations the man made, the army remained badly outnumbered. Asmodeus granted several of Constantine's warriors a great thirst for blood and imbued many of the emperor's strategists with divinatory powers, but it still wasn't enough.

Then one night, a dream came to the emperor, and in it he saw a single cross made of light burning in the sky, and a voice whispered to him: *In hoc signo vinces*, or "In this sign thou shalt conquer." Constantine took this as a portent that his current god had abandoned him in this time of need, and that the upstart god of the Christians would aid him should he redirect his worship. Come morning, Constantine had all of his men paint the sign of the cross upon their shields, and he marked it upon his forehead with black ash. They raged once more into battle, and this time they won, ousting (and murdering) Maxentius and assuming the raiment of emperor.

Constantine dismantled the tetrarchy (by assassinating the other three emperors) and announced that the new official religion of the Roman Empire was Christianity. It was disaster for the Earthbound, a terrible turn of the screw. Everyone, from slave to senator, turned away from the old "gods" in accordance with the new conversion demanded by Constantine. Altars in homes were dismantled, as men couldn't legally give fealty to the dispossessed demons. Those who went against the law of Constantine were found over time. They were made to convert or were imprisoned. Everything had turned. Christianity, once a blasphemy against the empire, had suddenly *become* part of the empire. The two archdukes and their "pecking order" of lesser demons were stunned as their worship began dwindling overnight.

Rome was arguably the culmination of much of what the Earthbound had cultivated over the millennia of their freedom, but the entire world suddenly turns on its heel and rips the worship away from these mad gods and into the hands of a single illusory being? How could

this have happened? Was the Morningstar behind it all, or had paranoia gotten the best of them? Constantine's dream could've been a phantasm invoked by Lucifer. Or had the efforts of Asmodeus and Abaddon to turn the brunt of Rome's persecutions against the Christians come back as a harbinger of their eventual demise?

HOUSE OF CARDS

Rome's primary perceived strength — its single-mindedness — became a major weakness for the Earthbound. Not all of them would feel it at first, but its ramifications would become disturbingly clear over time. Constantine turned every black piece onto the board into a white one, ruining mass potential in a single, rash maneuver. The future looked bleak, not just Abaddon and Asmodeus (who had a lot at stake in Rome), but for all the Earthbound demons that had a hand in the hierarchy of Faith that Rome provided. Even unassociated demons would come to feel the impact of this conversion to Christianity, because it would squeeze the pipeline of Faith tighter and tighter over the years, until little was left for any demon. Once brimming with succulent Faith, the well was suddenly running dry.

THE FALL OF THE DREAD KINGS

It was approximately AD 476 when the Roman Empire collapsed. Some say that the empire merely overextended itself, wearing thinner with every mile of the earth it overtook until eventually it could no longer support its own weight. It didn't help that the Goths were able to sack the capital or that the Huns were successful in many of their military excursions against Roman legions. Some in-the-know fallen speculate that Rome toppled because it was a political body built in the hollows of the Earthbound world, and when the power was stolen away from them, it was stolen away from Rome as well. Regardless, the western half of the empire fell, and later the eastern Byzantine Empire would tumble as well (though technically not until the 15th century). With Rome gone, a great vacuum appeared in the world, devoid of culture, government or power. This absence set Western civilization back many steps, and a world of light was plunged into bloody darkness.

THE DARK AGES

The world devolved in short order. Rome had once provided stable ground to stand on, but now the Western Empire collapsed and left nothing but bleak uncertainty in its wake. A few pockets of civilization remained, specifically within the growing Byzantine Empire, but everywhere else there was little more than discord.

The Earthbound were desperate and angry. Very few demons held onto steady worship. Entire Earthbound

cults went missing; some starved, some died, some betrayed their dark masters and were driven mad or destroyed. How could this have happened? The Roman Empire had been a wide table of food, stretching from one corner of the world to the next, but suddenly it was gone, and the demons were ravenous.

Many lesser Earthbound rushed in and grabbed at whatever potential Faith existed. New cults were born out of blood and fire in the dark woods of Europe. Many lasted only a little while before they self-destructed, leaving demons once again hungry for belief. Many demons were forced to fight over the same meager villages, sending thralls and cults against one another until most of the populace was left dead or dying, their potential worship wasted.

Europe became an unconnected collection of barbarian kingdoms occupied by the brutal Germanic people. These isolated kingdoms defaulted to tribal rule and the personal ascendancy of brutal men. Some Earthbound extended their influence over these disparate barbarian towns and established minor cults, but the demons quickly overextended themselves. Instead of ruling with subtlety and acting behind the scenes, they opted to operate more directly. They possessed human bodies, and as the flesh of the victims wilted and burst at the seams, the demons enacted their terrible lore powers on the unbelievers. They sent thralls empowered with grisly abilities to destroy nay-sayers while they slept, torturing them as their screams carried across the entire village. Some even attempted to impregnate mortal women as once they had done to shatter the Grand Experiment, but the seeded wombs wouldn't bear fruit; only horrid miscarriages of clotted blood and tissue resulted.

The Earthbound repeated this mistake everywhere. Their anger and torment pushed them to make rash decisions, causing them to make desperate plays for people's worship. The demon Dazhbog, a murderous Scourge, settled his cult among the Bulgar barbarians and impressed his anger upon the tribe. Terribly enraged, the people enacted cruel justice upon one another for the smallest of crimes (mutilation, flaying, torture). Zu, a lunatic Devourer who commanded an army of bloodthirsty raptor birds, carried several of his cults into the Turkish Empire, where he sent them against the khans in a bloody coup for no discernable reason. Many villages and cities were separate from one another and were no longer held together by the embrace of the Roman Empire. These places were ruled with malice and spite by the Earthbound demons.

It was a time of blood and terror. Those who were not affected by the demons still believed wholeheartedly in the monsters, for the stories were passed from person to person. They heard tales of horror, of "tribal gods" coming and stealing mothers and raping daughters. Men whispered stories of secret demons wearing the flesh of once-fair rulers, and legends were uttered

about the coming end of the world. It was a dark age in the outside world, true, but even worse was the darkness inside the minds of men. Humanity had grown afraid. Men and women dared not leave their houses at night, for what demons might come and pilfer their souls? Mankind was desperate for hope.

NEW LIGHT

Mankind got its wish. There was a new light — Rome *had* survived, after all. Its body had been destroyed, but its spirit lived on, entering the corpus of the church — the Roman Catholic institution. The leadership of Saint Leo the Great helped establish the Church as the savior out of imperial disintegration. The end of the empire did not have to mean the end of the Latin Church... or of civilization. The Earthbound reeled. The demons had hoped, at the very least, that the demise of Rome meant the demise of the Church, but it was not to be so. The Earthbound failed to pick up the disparate pieces of the crumbled empire, but the Latin Church did not. Worse was the rumor that Leo the Great had been meeting with a secret advisor in the Vatican. This advisor was said to be the Lightbringer himself, masquerading as a counseling *episkopos*.

Then came another telling blow in the seventh century. Another sacrilegious creature rose out of Arabia to oppose the mad gods. Muhammad, an Arab merchant, began preaching his own religion in which a *single* Creator was worshipped. The lunatic demons once again had not a single hand in the creation of this so-called blasphemy. This religion rose with alarming prominence alongside Christianity, with the third religion, Judaism, taking up the remainder of the Faith. The world's worship seemed suddenly parceled out between these three beasts. Even worse, these emerging religions spoke of the Earthbound themselves, if in expressly ambiguous terms. The mythology of the three was a similar (though distorted) look at the creation of the angels, the world and mankind. The legends spoke of angels who rebelled against their creator and fell, just as the Earthbound had done. And these creatures were vilified, summed up as seductive imps who were brought to heel beneath the trampling feet of Yahweh, Christ and Allah. These new faiths were not only stealing much-needed belief from the Earthbound, but they were slandering the mad gods in an unforeseen twist of the knife. The demons raged.

SOLUTIONS

Some pockets of the world still remained untouched by the foul taint of these three nascent beliefs, and the Earthbound sought to pick up the pieces wherever they could. The alien gods remained strangely optimistic. After all, hadn't they turned the primitive Rome from a scampering rat to a beast of war? The archdukes had lost the arrow that they would fire into the center of God's

eye, but they vowed to regain it. There were many cultures outside of the Roman and Arabian influence that could be yoked and transformed.

Abaddon and some of his enthralled demons went north and assumed control over dissident Germanic barbarians. Even further north were the Norsemen, brash Vikings who had already established splinter settlements across the Atlantic and had been only marginally touched by lesser Earthbound. Abaddon destroyed most of these petty demons, consuming their souls (or in a few cases, enslaving them to his ill purposes) and then began offering great power to these hard and savage men. The archduke taught them new ways to make war and carve a swath across their enemies' lands. Over the next centuries, the Viking invaders attacked countless towns, from Scandinavia all the way to England, sacking settlement after settlement. The war bands were led by some of the archduke's most precious thralls, men learned in the ways of violence and terror.

Dagon continued to whisper in the ears of cult leaders in India, whereas Azrael's reliquary was placed aboard a boat and sent abroad to the foundling Americas. There he taught the native peoples the proper ways of sacrifice, establishing three empires (Aztec, Inca, Maya) that gave fealty to the mad god's grim idol through countless bloody sacrifices. Asmodeus went into the East, shepherding pleasure cults into existence throughout the Khmer Empire and even into China, helping to teach the men how to draw visions and pleasure from the poppy flower.

Belial was not so hurt by the three-fold blows of Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The Great Beast held ancient priesthoods all over the world, and only a few of them suffered when Rome wilted on the vine. The archduke did not make the mistake that the other four had; those demons intimately tied their influx of Faith to the public population. When the public world was strong, so was the Faith that came to the demons. And when it was weak, the Earthbound suffered. But Belial was more insidious, and his reverence came from clandestine temples everywhere, all of which existed outside the public eye. The Great Beast commanded hundreds of small cults, priesthoods and unholy sects, and in them he cultivated subservient sorcerers and seers to aid him in his quest to find and punish the Betrayer.

His reliquary was moved often, and at each location, he leapt from body to body, possessing thralls and wearing their bodies until the vessel's flesh collapsed. He looked everywhere for the Betrayer, but every effort was unsuccessful. His rage was barely contained. Wherever Belial's reliquary was taken, the mantle of the earth buckled, and the tides poured red upon stinking beaches. Other Earthbound felt the reverberations of the Great Beast's fury, and the lesser demons felt their own minds spoiling like meat. And then, near to the turn of the

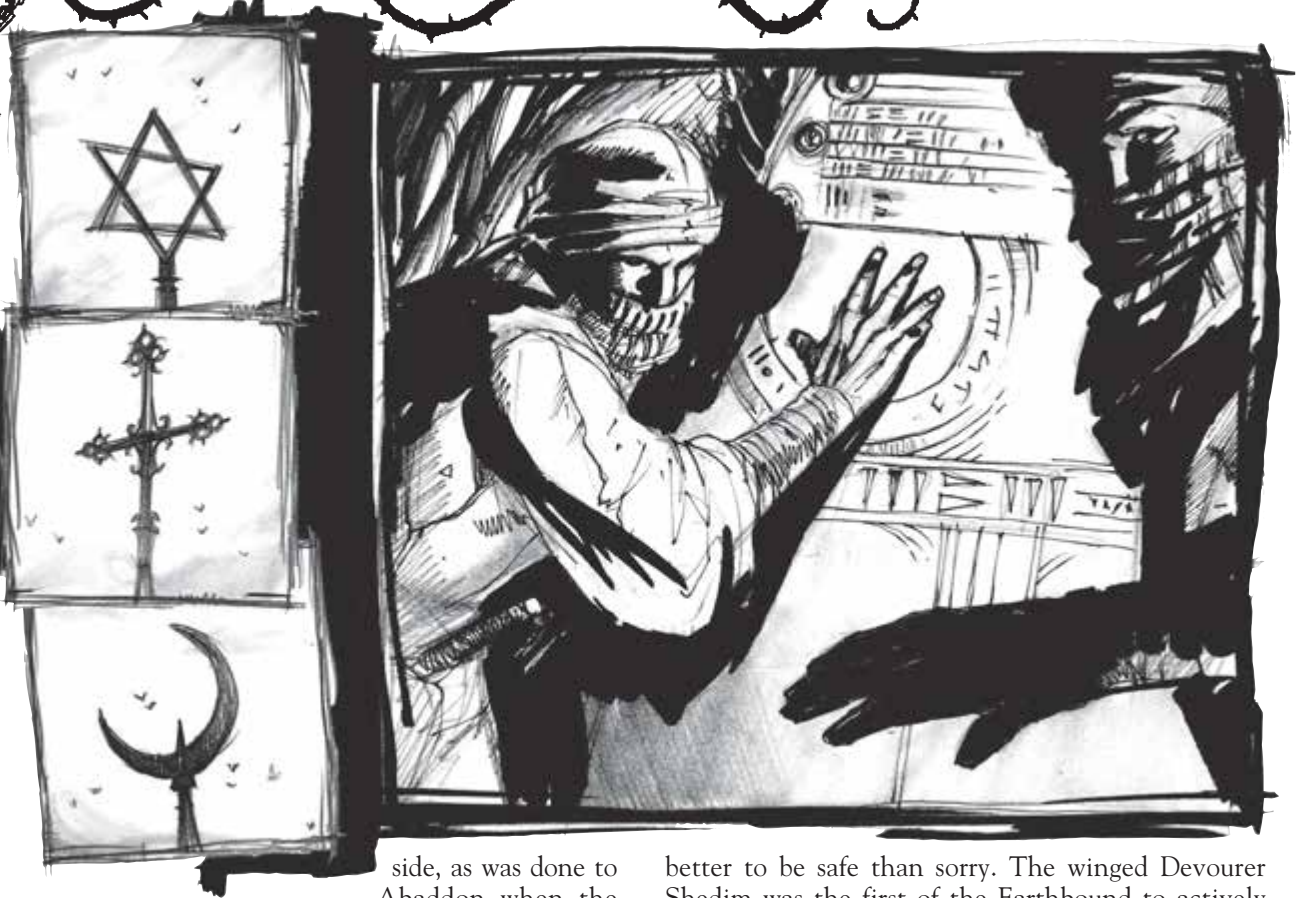
millennium, came the faintest tug on one of Belial's Dragon Lines, and the Great Beast could taste the acrid tang of Lucifer's "light" across the mystical boundary. The archduke had found the Morningstar. And so the demon, once Lucifer's second, had his unholy monks and priestesses carry him across the fundament, and into Lucifer's hiding place — the city of Jerusalem.

MORNET'S NEST

Jerusalem was already a hotly contested place. It was arguably the nexus point for the three major religions, each one claiming some holy significance and domain over the city. The Great Beast could sense the tension, taut as piano wire, and he had his followers carry his idol down deep into the catacombs beneath the Temple Mount, and there they sealed him away like an ancient Pharaoh, buried with infant sacrifices and great treasures. From here, Belial could clothe himself in the skin of his thralls, moving out into the city to witness the turmoil that grew. The Great Beast saw a powder keg waiting to explode. If the Morningstar was truly present in Jerusalem shepherding belief, then Belial would take what the Betrayer had built and send him screaming into the Pit.

The plan was partially successful. Christian and Muslim armies began fighting for control of the area, including its trade, for almost two hundred years. The Jews were caught in the middle, vulnerable to the two clashing armies but unwilling to leave this holiest of places. In 1095, the Muslim Turks claimed dominance of the city and banned all Christian pilgrims from its borders. Both the Western church in Rome and the Eastern church in Constantinople were furious at this persecution, and they encouraged all of the faithful to take up arms against the Islamic heathen and "free" the city from their impious grasp. Pope Urban II called the First Crusade (or the "War of the Cross"), and the Christians overtook Jerusalem in 1099. Over the next three centuries, eight more crusades would rend the Middle East, pitting Christian crusader against Muslim cleric in a gruesome battle for dominance. Many Earthbound saw the gambit and rose out of anonymity to help foment this war, thrilled that the "One True God" inspired such bloody handiwork. Belial hoped that this violence done in the name of these religions would cause them to self-destruct.

Then the plan backfired. The frenzy over the Holy Land only served to electrify people's beliefs, further cementing their faith in their "version" of the Creator. On top of that, there was little room for pagan cults or heathen tribes, most of which were seen as even less than the Muslims. The Church imprisoned and executed heretics at every turn. Many Earthbound felt their Faith crushed beneath the bootheel of the Holy Roman Empire as their followers were put to the torch. Worse was when their servitors were turned to the other



side, as was done to Abaddon when the Vikings gave up their demon-gods and converted to Christianity in the 12th century. Many lesser Earthbound had little left to thrive upon. Any power they once claimed was rapidly diminishing, the Faith disappearing as if it had never existed in the first place.

THE FALL OF NIGHT

The first Earthbound that succumbed to stasis didn't understand what was happening. Demons such as the Earthbound Scourge Hosono-Kami or the Defiler Lord Lidorsk suddenly lost touch with their storehouses of Faith as their cults were executed as heretics. The sudden absence of belief gave them no ground to stand on, and their conscious minds plunged into a somnolent state. Other Earthbound watched as these unsuspecting demons fell into slumber, and could only wonder if the same could that happen to them. The demons that first fell into sleep had no contingency plans. They were cast away into a comatose consciousness, perhaps never to emerge. Something had to be done to ensure a legacy, to prepare for the possibility that their weakened state would allow for no other options than a temporary state of somnolence.

Some Earthbound demons began making preparations. Some intended to force sleep with the hope that the world would change during their time slumbering and they would awaken during a better age. Others knew that sleep would come regardless and it was

better to be safe than sorry. The winged Devourer Shedim was the first of the Earthbound to actively choose slumber. Shedim gathered his cult of wild men together from their separate villages and demanded a great promise from them. The Rabisu asked that his servitors pledge their blood descendants to him, no matter the time or the place. Should he awaken, their blood would sing with his presence and they would be called to serve. Shedim also asked that his reliquary, a massive horned statue made from animal bones and skins, be carried to the sea by boat and dropped into its depths. When the time came for Shedim to wake, his new priesthood would draw his idol from the darkness of the ocean. Trusting that he would awaken during another time, Shedim relinquished his grip on his cult and slipped into stasis.

A few Earthbound discovered what Shedim had done. Some did the same, securing pacts with their priests and sorcerers and secreting their reliquaries to the dark corners of the world. Many engaged in complex procedures to make sure that their idols would stay hidden. Some had their inanimate bodies dismantled and carried to different countries. Others had entire catacombs built beneath the ground, their reliquaries placed in the center (while the solution to the maze was burned into the very DNA of the faithful cultists). One Earthbound, a Slayer called Abatwa had his idol (an ossuary box made of the finger bones of dead children) dismantled into 100 pieces. Abatwa's caste of conjurers, the *okomfo*, carried these pieces and placed them in

various locations across the Ahaggar Mountains in the Sahara Desert. Hints about the locations of each finger bone were then scattered throughout the African continent, in sacred texts, inscribed on fetish relics and painted on the walls of ancient caves.

Not many Earthbound chose slumber at this time, but all saw what was happening and knew that some of their number opted to meet this fate head-on in the hope of securing their future. Some prepared for the possibility, while others ignored it altogether, but it was cause for great worry nevertheless.

ACTS OF DESPERATION

The Earthbound made scabbling attempts to regain power. Still capable of some rationality, some Earthbound realized that it might still be possible to suborn whole cultures through judicious use and placement of slaves. After all, the Catholic Church was still essentially centrally ruled, wasn't it? The Holy Roman Empire was controlled by an emperor *and* a pope, and if either could be "converted," perhaps the tide could once again be turned to favor the dark gods.

The demons attempted to corrupt and enthrall barons, archbishops, even emperors and popes. They met with some success, and many of the demons actually expected the empire to fall in line with infernal ideals. The demon-goddess Ala actually managed to control the papacy for a short time by making Pope John XII a thrall in AD 955. The pope was already a man addicted to wine and women, and he had already succumbed to moral decay long before the demon entered the picture. Once firmly placed on the Chair of Peter in Rome, Pope John led a decade's worth of debauchery in the Church. Those who opposed him were either brought in for torture or were simply executed in the tunnels beneath Rome. Many claimed that Pope John had metaphorically turned the Vatican into a "great brothel," as he literally held orgies within its walls. In his own private chambers he built altars to the demon Ala, swearing that he would soon have Mother Church kneeling in supplication, but it wasn't to be. The pope didn't have the influence to turn the faithful away from their Christian ideals. In 960 he was brought up on charges by a council of bishops who declared him a murderous, incestuous traitor to the Church. He escaped and later reclaimed the papacy through bloodshed in 964, mutilating his dissenters in the Church by cutting off their hands and noses, then wrenching their tongues from their mouths. But it didn't matter. Later that year he was assassinated by unknown hands, and once again the Earthbound Ala was left without a grip on the Church.

Other attempts were made to influence others outside of Europe. The demon Drugaskan seduced the

THE ARRASIAN HERESY

In the year 1191, in the French town of Arras, a group of aldermen from the Shearer's Guild began espousing a rather odd theory about God, Christ and Christianity. They believed that yes, Jesus Christ was indeed God, but when Man murdered Jesus on the cross, Man *also* murdered God. Hence, in their minds, the world had been without the Creator since (approximately) AD 33. These aldermen spread the word to the rest of the town, and much of the populace began to adopt this belief. Soon this belief spread throughout much of France, and even into England and Italy. The followers of this heresy considered themselves "free," as there was no God to punish them, and hence their actions could be supremely self-serving without spiritual consequence. This radical notion led the heretics to engage in secret practices of debauchery and violence, as they believed that no judgment could be levied against them.

They were wrong, of course. The Inquisition began hunting these heretics in the mid-to-late 13th century, branding them traitors to the Church and executing them as criminals against God. The inquisitors traced the heresy to its source, eventually tracking it back to the aldermen of the Shearer's Guild in Arras. The inquisitors there found a graven altar soaked in bile and decorated with internal organs. They found idols and grimoires dedicated to the Archduke Asmodeus. The heresy was rooted out and destroyed, but many of its relics and books found their way into the hands of individuals even up until the modern age. (Recently the heresy has surfaced again, this time as a cult-of-personality frequented by celebrities and producers in Hollywood.)

magician and counselor of the Caliph Harun al-Rashid in an effort to turn the Islamic Empire away from Allah. And while it served to create a small core of blasphemous thralls nestled within the Muslim faith, the belief in Drugaskan did not spread as the Earthbound had hoped. Oludumare, another Earthbound, attempted to sway the queen of Ethiopia, but it only reinforced the African Christianity that took root there. Many attempts were made by many demons. Some were almost successful, but the insurgency never spread, for the disease was always contained. Few were willing to go against the religious institutions that ruled their lives. Turning against the Church meant heresy in life and punishment in death. Going against Allah and the Prophet Muhammad resulted in life-long imprisonment. While some Earthbound eked out meager existences nestled in the secret safety of the major religions, most failed at any effort to turn these colossal faiths toward them.

IN THE THROES OF DEATH

The Church was gaining power, and itself had an empire similar to that of Rome (even claiming its name), but this time it was without Earthbound authority. All across Europe and the Middle East, the fires were burning out the remaining nests of demon-worshippers. This situation only worsened with the birth of the Inquisition, and the more insidious shadow Inquisition, meant to secretly hunt the supernatural. Once the Earthbound commanded the greatest feast of Faith, but now even the archdukes were confronting a famine of belief. It only furthered their madness. Dreams of their once-faithful slaves still haunted their minds, alongside nightmare images of man murdering man, of the Creator's rebukes, of the blasted black nothingness that the Abyss forever imprinted upon them. All of these phantasms were empty and hollow memories of a past that became tangled up in an ever-increasing jumble of alien logic. This was the final nail in the coffin. The Earthbound might not have known it outright, but each one could sense an imminent demise as more and more of them yielded to the torpid inertia.

Their rage was without equal. The remaining Earthbound lashed out. The physical world felt their brutal frustration as volcanoes erupted out in the dead center of the ocean. Earthquakes rippled across the crust of the earth, swallowing whole towns without warning. The very molecules and cells of the world twitched and twisted in the

grip of Earthbound rage — and these cells became diseases like none ever seen. New plagues reared their heads — men's guts vomited from their orifices, limbs rotted and dropped off, lungs lined with terrible sores.

The mortal world, too, suffered the demonic wrath. The demons expended foolish amounts of Faith to pervert men's minds once more. Atrocity reigned. Genghis Khan and his Mongol armies swept through the towns of Nishapur, Samarkand and others, slaughtering almost two million and leaving behind towering piles of rotting limbs and massacred livestock. The Muslim Sultans of the 13th century brought genocide down on the heads of their enemies. Muhammed bin Tughlak executed tens of thousands of Hindus to exert his authority, while Kutub-din-Aibak insanely slaughtered his own people. Christians, too, were affected by the Earthbound horror. Albigensian Crusaders took countless towns and hundreds of soldiers, gouging out eyes and slicing off lips, noses and ears — then they paraded these mutilated captives into the next town to show their future victims what lay in wait. Jews were persecuted as being “demons” who were “poisoning the water” to create the Black Plague. Muslims were accused of casting black magic spells against the Christian empire. Popes held orgies in the Vatican while bishops and priests slaked their repressed lust on children. The Earthbound pulled the strings of their remaining followers to achieve such ghastly results. Their lore powers, amplified by torment and age, created an atmosphere of alien evil that tainted the minds of many men.



But it was all for naught. Their lunatic rages did nothing to gain them new worship. In fact, it only served to further entrench people's beliefs in their one true God. Many Earthbound hoped to encourage apostasy among the Europeans to turn them away from the Roman Catholic Church. Any of the key figures who considered turning away from the Church had dreams similar to that of Constantine, and in their sleep they saw crosses made of light and a bright star watching them from the night-time sky, and most remained faithful to the Church. Others, too, were granted such dreams, and many became Inquisitors, who felt they were "called" to the profession of enforcing the Church's will upon heretics and pagans. Was this the power of the Lightbringer? Was his hand still helping to guide the Church as a mysterious protector, or were these dreams little more than coincidental visions?

THE YEARS OF INTERREGNUM

By 1484, heresy (which included associations with witchcraft and sorcery) was a major enemy of the Church. The Inquisition swept across Europe, putting all of Mother Church's opponents to torture or death. Witches, astrologers, alchemists, even doctors were "put to the

BUDDHISM

The triumvirate of Christianity, Judaism and Islam helped diminish the Earthbound considerably. In the East, Buddhism was a major factor in crushing demonic influence, as well.

The philosophy of Buddhism encourages moderation and in some cases, extreme asceticism that helped mortals to deny demonic corruption. This "middle path" manner of living didn't allow for the hedonistic or violent practices of the Earthbound demons. Not to say that followers of Buddha or monks were immune to the depredations of the infernal, but typically the entire philosophy behind Buddhism simply didn't leave an open door for the Earthbound corruptions.

On top of that, many Buddhist legends contained propaganda against demonic influence and even went so far as to feature many hero characters that took up the task of hunting demons. Some actually took up the task of demon-hunting to imitate those born of legend. One of these groups still exists today. The *bhiksu* (translation: "the laymen") are hunters who expend most of their effort counteracting the teachings of the Earthbound and "deprogramming" cultists to turn them away from their masters. Should thralls or the demon become directly involved, the *bhiksu* are well armed with binding rituals and magical daggers to help exorcise maleficent spirits.

question." The Earthbound cultists were forced to hide like rats in the shadows, begging here and there for a little providence, a place to stay or scraps of food. But the Inquisition was diligent and ubiquitous, and few thralls escaped persecution. The Earthbound that *did* manage to escape the Church's strengthening grip were often felled by other misfortunes such as plague or war. Confined to their reliquaries, the demons found the world closing in on them, and the sinking pit of sleep pulled more in with every passing year. Worse still was the fact that the spread of summoning sorcery seemed to be on the rise. As one demon would drop into slumber, an occultist would summon another demon into a makeshift reliquary elsewhere in the world. Even the archdukes, while still powerful, were pressed for belief.

It wasn't long, however, before the humanist Renaissance came riding into history, illuminating the dark corners of civilization once more. Yet this enlivening of spirit was only for the mortal world, and the Earthbound were not afforded any more chances to regain lost Faith. In fact, it only guaranteed their rapidly approaching demise, sounding the end of their demented sovereignty like a clarion call.

DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

During the Renaissance, man's faith began to shift dramatically, moving from an external sphere to an internal one. While still firmly coupled with the Church (or the other two key religions), Faith was drifting away from cosmic intervention and began focusing upon humanity's own individual potential. Thus originated humanism, as man and woman began having faith in themselves. Man began throwing off his shackles, often rejecting the notion of angels, demons and spirits as mere superstition. Feudal society declined. Mortals wondered if they truly needed the intermediary class of clergy to speak to the Heavens — couldn't they communicate with the divine themselves?

Several ironies existed regarding this newfound perspective. The first was that humanism caused man to look back at his origins. As scholarship increased, people looked backward and began embracing classical ideas. They turned to philosophy, mythology and theater, all from classical Greece and Rome. Even more ironic, this classical resurgence also caused a swell of occultism. Earthbound servitors made desperate pleas to harness this growing interest, and while some success was managed, it was largely for naught. The new curiosity about classical ideals was a meal empty of sustenance for the mad gods. The one element people chose *not* to import was the worship of old gods. They told tales about them, but Christianity was too firmly entrenched in their upbringing to be shaken. Even the occultists stayed away from summoning demons or offering prayers to forgotten deities. They instead chose to operate with more "vanilla" offerings, such as divination through

cards or astrology. Humanism bled into these occult practices, as man didn't feel that they needed powerful chthonic spirits to translate the fate of the world. Mortals began believing that they themselves could be the prophets of destiny.

The concept of destiny was another idea that hobbled Earthbound intervention. Predestination claimed that each man's fate was sealed. He either had a seat in Heaven, or he would forever be mired in sin. (This idea would figure prominently in the Protestant Reformation, but by the time that happened, the majority of Earthbound had already disappeared into stasis.) This fatalism made it very hard to offer bargains to people in power. The demonic deals often presented opportunities to individuals to "escape" God's grip, but if one's destiny was already written and it was impossible to ever truly turn from God, what good was it to sign an infernal contract?

Humanism and predestination provided a one-two punch to Earthbound influence. The concepts of "demons" and "devils" became more associated with metaphor—or worse, bedtime stories. Demons were no longer thought to be physical manifestations that worked against man and god. They were ascribed little more significance than fairy tales or morality plays. The few occultists who still dabbled in demonology even lost their awe of the infernal. Demons were now "imps" or "hobgoblins," not the eldritch gods of might and madness. Science was the new order of the day, shepherded by such men as da Vinci, Copernicus and Cardano. There was no room for phantoms or superstition.

The final irony of the Renaissance was this: Once upon a time, the fallen angels rebelled against the Creator's wishes, hoping to enlighten mankind and drag them from ignorance. The fallen host saw themselves as shepherds of this fumbling flock... but then there was the war, and following that, imprisonment. The Earthbound, twisted by the years in the Pit, saw a chance again to shepherd the idiot children, but over time, the unthinkable happened. The sheep learned to think for themselves. They no longer needed their shepherds. Humanity was finally becoming enlightened, and the Earthbound wept.

STASIS

By the 1600s, the eldest of the Earthbound toppled into a dreamlike state. Their power dwindled, and each demon's number of worshippers declined drastically. The mad gods could feel their cessation of thought, draining like a weakened battery, and some of the oldest managed to invoke pacts with the greatest of their thralls and cults. The very bloodlines were poisoned with the promise of future Faith, and with that being done, the Earthbound slipped into a somnolent condition. Their lingering servitors took their reliquaries and stole them away to the unseen parts of the world. Some were dropped into the depths of the ocean, others taken to the highest

THE SLEEPLESS

Europe's Renaissance was ultimately the final nail in the coffin for many Earthbound, but Europe was only one part of the global climate in the 15th and 16th centuries. Did all the Earthbound fall into slumber?

No. The majority did, true, but some existed in parts of the world largely untouched by the major religions, and as such, they could still cling to the belief of native cultures. Esmodai (one-time consort of Asmodeus) was a Fiend who was able to remain awake for most of the remaining years, existing on the steady belief of a cannibal tribe deep in the Congo. Taphtharoth the Eyesore was a grotesque Defiler who began by ruling over the native shamans of Korea and later went on to lord over several splinter cults in the drug-traffic "Golden Triangle" of Burma and Thailand. Even the self-proclaimed Archduke Baal managed to fluctuate between periods of sleeplessness and slumber. Most of the Earthbound still remaining were "lesser" demons, since the greater demons required far larger supplies of belief to sustain themselves.

peaks or buried far below the ground in gore-spattered tombs. Dagon's clockwork machine was dismantled, its pieces dragged to the far corners of the Earth. (Later his followers would circulate the rumor that his reliquary had been dropped into the Atlantic.) Azrael's effigy was drawn deep into the bowels of the earth below the African plains, and the statuary of Asmodeus was dropped into the Red Sea. The reliquary of Archduke Abaddon was hidden away deep in the rainforest basin of Brazil, and Belial's reliquary was hidden deep within the earth beneath Asia Minor.

The Earthbound were gone from the world of men, their influence shucked like molted skin. It would no longer rain blood, worshippers wouldn't chant their names during vomit-drenched rituals. The demons were asleep. Their cults waned as the worshippers believed that their infernal god-kings were gone for good. They were wrong.

YEARS OF SORROW

Over the next century, man began to exert his newfound enlightenment in various ways. Religion was still strong, but science soon came to share that strength. People looked at the stars and the sea and at new lands, all as opportunities to expound upon their human potential. Inventions and philosophies helped advance civilization to new heights. Many explorers, inventors, scientists and philosophers arose, some simply reaching into their own brains for the developments that would help all of humanity. A few, however, said quite simply that their innovations came to them in dreams. Dreams of light. Dreams of hope.

But it was not all perfect. While enlightenment had taken hold of the hearts of mankind, a lingering cruelty still lived there, too. War happened, people starved, disease spread, and men continued to enforce their dominance over other men. There were no demons behind the callous actions. The Earthbound were trapped in somnolent states. A scant few remained awake during this time, ministering to minor sects in the hidden corners of civilization. These rare few demons were unable to do much more than remain awake and take what guttering worship they were able to demand. The rest slept, unable to awake.

But the Dread Kings could not sleep forever.

THE MODERN WORLD

Recently the spiritual world and the physical world alike shuddered with the tremors of a terrible cataclysm. From these tremors a storm was loosed, and this Maelstrom tore across the metaphysical matter of the universe, tattering the edges of creation's grand tapestry. This storm signaled the End Times and battered the very foundations of reality, fracturing the walls that held all the disparate realms apart. The spectral walls that made up the Abyssal prison ran with hairline cracks, and many of the fallen angels trapped within were suddenly free and clawing their ways into human hosts. These demons were emancipated, given a reprieve from the hatred that plagued their souls. Across the globe, humanity began to cling to its inner light once more, clutching at the Faith within like people hadn't done for centuries.

The slumbering gods felt this faint stirring, and their souls awakened to this flickering of Faith. They knew that their time would be brief, and each one made a desperate grab for even the most minuscule amount of worship, lashing out with nightmares, seductions and alien covenants to reinforce their hold on the meager crumbs of Faith that once existed in the world. They called out to the descendents of their dark priesthoods and enforced their infernal authority on weak fallen who had recently escaped. They quickly moved to cultivate new worshippers before they were forced to succumb to the inertia of slumber to which they had fallen prey 500 years previously. Many made great strides to adjust to the new world, plundering their followers' minds for information about this strange new period. Some were more sane than others and managed to attune themselves, and they reached out to grasp power in government, the media and business. Others had lost cohesion in their sleep, their minds shattered from the plague of nightmares that assailed them during their time in slumber. These lunatic gods reached out to destroy, corrupt and crush the hearts of humanity while barely hanging onto consciousness. It didn't hurt that

humankind had left behind quite a grim legacy while the Earthbound slept. Man and woman alike independently fostered a history of genocide, slavery, rape and murder. In the time of their absence, millions were slaughtered in the Holocaust, in both World Wars, in the acts of slavery waged by the Western world. The 20th century alone was a buffet table of atrocity waiting to be savored. The Earthbound could taste this cruelty within the minds of every mortal, and they knew that this was a world they could command and crush.

Now they exist, awake and rooted in the world, their reliquaries brought once again from their dark places of protection so they may rape the Faith from the world. They seek reverence, power, wickedness and oblivion. Many of these Earthbound act upon the world with an endless stable of blind worshippers and thralls, managing wave after wave of madmen and cultists. Others prefer to keep a small-but-loyal cadre of faithful serving them with the utmost of dark devotion. And all of them have their eyes set upon the new fallen dropping out of the Abyss like fruits ripe from the vine. These fallen are either delicious morsels to be savored and consumed, or they are obstructions on the road to supremacy that need to be eliminated. One way or another, the Earthbound intend to have their rule. They are not content to wait.

SUMMONERS OF DEMONS

The knowledge required to summon demons slept much like the Earthbound gods themselves slept, hidden away from the mortal world for a span of millennia. The secret knowledge had once been all but stamped out (ironically by the summoned demons), but the dark wisdom still existed in books buried in primeval tombs or scrawled on the walls of impious sanctuaries that had fallen out of human remembrance. But now that the Earthbound have awakened anew, so has the knowledge to summon new demons from the Abyss. Many of the Earthbound who had been banished back to the Pit (instead of slumbering) are suddenly making new appearances in the physical world, new reliquaries having been prepared for their transcendent evil. How did this knowledge find its way into the hands of mortals once more? Were new techniques forged in this modern age by the neoteric sorcerers who exist today, or had the knowledge somehow been fetched from behind the curtain and placed in the hands of contemporary magicians? Nobody knows how it's happening, only that it is. The other Earthbound are displeased. It might be time again to hunt these delinquent sorcerers.



"Everyone agrees that you are the world authority on Ugaritic cuneiform script, Dr. Soueid."

Dr. Lilah el Soueid studied the tablet with knotted brows, her right hand moving aimlessly about in search of a pen or cigarette. "Good grief," she muttered, "will you *look* at that thing."

"We believe it represents Dagon, who was patron god of the city."

"It's certainly Dagon. Text looks like a pretty standard devotional. I'll go through it, of course. But you have to wonder, don't you? Half human, holding ears of corn, half fish."

"My own theory is that it represents the food supply, over which Dagon had total control."

"And the severed heads?"

"He also granted victory in war, Dr. Soueid."

"He's sure a cheery-looking fellow."

"Of course, no interpretation we make today can really tell us what the ancient people believed."

"Of course." Dr. Soueid's eyes lingered over the script. "Never fear, Mr. Feldham," she said at last, "I'll have the world's most authoritative translation for you in the morning."

Once Feldham was gone, she got up off the uncomfortable stool and wandered round until she found some coffee. Guy gave her the creeps. Then again, anyone with that kind of money who'd use it to sponsor a dig in the backwoods of Syria and fly in experts like her would have to be just a little creepy.

Like all really ancient things, the tablet seemed somehow incredibly *real* to her. It had lain deep in the earth for three millennia. *We can't even make buildings that hold together for more than a decade*, she thought. The tablet lay against the white laminated surface, surrounded by all the accoutrements of modern archaeology. Truth be told, it was the face that disturbed her. Eyes, mouth and nose distorted into a grimace that seemed so... miserable, yet glad at the same time. Glad he could share his suffering. It was a superb piece of craftsmanship.

But the little chisel marks below the sculpture held the real story.

"Dagon, creator of life and bringer of death," she read. "Spare us that we may serve thee." Yeah, pretty standard for the whole region pre-Christianity. They believed human beings had been created as slaves for the gods. "We bow to you and cut our hands to you and bring unto you our parents and children, the old and the young, and - *who's there?*"

She spun around, nearly tipping herself over, but the room was empty. She had been absolutely certain that Feldham was behind her, repeating her words in the faintest whisper. But the door was closed, the room empty. After an uneasy couple of moments, she turned back to the idol.

"You who salt the water, making it... undrinkable, you who salt the fields, making them barren—"

She *was* hearing something. Maybe a whisper of air through the ducting or the rasp of her clothes because it seemed close. If it had been Feldham, he'd have to be pressed against her, whispering as he leaned over her shoulder staring at the hideous idol, whispering.

Dagon, who—

A chill raced down her spine. She could hear the voice in her head. For the first time in three thousand years a mortal was hearing one of the lost tongues of Mesopotamia, and she somehow understood each and every word.

Lord of thy life and thy death. Bow to me and cut thy hands to me and bleed to me—

Without thinking, she reached a trembling hand for her coffee mug, but her fingers, directed by a will not her own, closed on the diamond sate instead.



CHAPTER TWO: CARVED IN STONE

It is demons which produce famine, unfruitfulness, corruptions of the air, pestilences; they hover concealed in the clouds in the lower atmosphere, and are attracted by the blood and incense which the heathen offer to them as gods.

—Origen

Although the occult world is rife with legends and rumors, the true history of the Earthbound is known to very few. As the monster-gods rise once more, humans and fallen alike find themselves facing powerful beings whose history is inextricably intertwined with the human race. In many ways, the world to which the fallen have returned is a place shaped by the Dread Kings themselves.

This chapter deals with the Earthbound as a force in the contemporary world. From their first attempts to empower themselves after awakening, through the establishment of cults and their efforts to expand their influence across the whole of society, the actions of the Earthbound echo the horrors of the past. These entities are even now exploring what advantages the modern age can provide them in their timeless struggle to conquer humanity — and one other.

THE DREAD KINGS OF THE EARTH

Although the Earthbound were initially no different from their fallen kin, the circumstances that brought them back from the Abyss and the cumulative influence of thousands of human worshippers have transformed these former angels into beings that are not quite demon and not quite human. They are terrible hybrids of both, at once familiar and yet undeniably alien to the fallen.

The fallen are minor demons, those weak and small enough to escape through the cracks in the Abyssal wall. By contrast, most Earthbound were mighty spirits drawn out of their prison by the focused power of human sorcery, somehow wrenched free by manipulation of their True Names and sheer mortal

will. As a result, these potent spirits command a greater breadth of knowledge, memories and aptitude than the most powerful fallen possess. Many Earthbound claim high rank in the infernal hierarchy and possess fearsome reputations from their exploits in the war, though few care about such trivial matters in the modern age. To be an Earthbound is to be a law unto oneself, irrespective of Heaven or Hell.

Many fallen, even those who have been on Earth for some time, are confused. Anchored to a human body, plagued with the partial memories of both a human and a demon and having to fill in the gaps from a welter of mythology and suspect informants. Even fallen who succumb to their Torment might not truly understand what they are. Not so the Earthbound. The Earthbound know. They came from the Abyss into consecrated vessels of stone, metal and stranger materials, and they know that they were rebel angels who fought for Lucifer until his wisdom failed and humanity betrayed them. They know that they have suffered for untold aeons, and they know that they owe nothing to anything in the universe save their vengeance. If these perceptions have been colored over time by the forms they have taken on Earth and the worship they have received, they are unaware of it. Each Earthbound is at heart the rightful ruler of Creation and knows no doubt, nor pity nor love. Neither faction nor House holds meaning for them any longer.

Even the “youngest” Earthbound has been on Earth for centuries, though possibly in stasis within its reliquary for a portion of that time. That is certainly time enough to establish its earthly bearings and develop powers that were unknown even at the height of the war. Upon reawakening, the Earthbound might initially be at a loss, confronted with cars and international telecommunications. It soon makes up whatever advantage the fragmentary memories of the fallen grants, however, and its understanding is purely tactical, untainted by sentimentality or emotion. This outsider’s perspective applies to their every interaction with humans. A Faustian pact such as the fallen make is incomprehensible to them.

The Earthbound cannot reap Faith as fallen do or accept offered Faith as the fallen can from their thralls. Centuries spent as a focus of human worship has shaped them, and even now, they cannot gain Faith through any other means than the rite of worship. In the modern world an Earthbound must somehow revive the ancient ceremonies over which it once presided, down to the original language used. The Faith from these rites is the only Faith it can receive; even in extremis the demons cannot ravage a thrall for more. An Earthbound can do something that not even the most Tormented or ruthless fallen can achieve, though.

The Dread King can create independent human agents who are loyal puppets, complete extensions of her will.

Finally, fallen can walk the streets of cities across the globe in their host bodies. Even when they deal with each other, it is usually in human form. Earthbound do not walk the streets. They do not eat or sleep or conduct their dealings face to face. Even the majority of their worshippers never see them. Earthbound can manifest the apocalyptic form of their primary lore, but only for a limited time and at great cost. Beyond that, in any accepted sense, they have no bodies at all.

RELIQUARIES

What the Earthbound have are their reliquaries, the touchstone of an Earthbound existence. If these reliquaries are ever destroyed, the Earthbound become helpless spirits exposed to the pull of the Abyss.

The Earthbound cannot enter human bodies as the fallen do, due to their sheer infernal power. Instead of animating a body and repressing the bulk of its memories, the presence of an Earthbound destroys human identity and consumes human flesh. The decay begins the moment the Earthbound takes possession, often manifesting as a slow fire or steady deliquescence. The maximum time a human body can hold an Earthbound is around 48 hours, although the relative potency of the demon and the strength of the powers it manifests can shorten this period drastically. Once this time has expired, the body is destroyed, whether the demon possessed the mortal shell for the full 48 hours or for only 10 seconds.

The Earthbound enter physical objects, such as hammered steel or quarried stone instead, but their essence cannot anchor itself on just any piece of rock or metal. A reliquary must be an object that holds meaning for the human beings who created or use it. It must be, if not an actual object of worship, something about which tales are told and which is coveted for more than its physical properties. In short, it must be something believed to hold power. Many ancient religions centered on the devout belief that a god could enter her image, and it was such a religion that Lucifer cultivated for each of his five lieutenants to call them back to Earth. But what of the anvil of a smith in the days when metalwork was considered a magical practice? A harp thought to have once belonged to a legendary musician? A huge and flawless gem, believed to bring disaster to its possessors? The Earthbound Manishtusu is said to be bound into a sword that once belonged to a Mongolian chieftain — a sword passed down from his forebears and believed to embody the warlike soul of the tribe.

The form and substance of the reliquary always bears some relevance to the entity it contains. For instance, Belial’s statue is formed of blue marble, and



inlaid with pearl, while a sword is a fitting vessel for Manishtusu, Lord of Murder. Another Earthbound might rest in a casket of silver filigree and blown glass or a featherwork wall-hanging from an Aztec temple. The strength of the material is irrelevant, as all reliquaries are tremendously, unnaturally durable by virtue of the demon's will. Generally, the older and more powerful the Earthbound is, the larger and more solid the reliquary will be. Some Earthbound, such as the five archdukes, were offered their reliquaries by the humans who summoned them. Other demons, such as those who escaped from the efforts of sorcerers to bind them, had to settle on the most appropriate item to hand, leading to a broad assortment of unlikely looking repositories for the dark gods.

An Earthbound can assume apocalyptic form only within a limited range of its reliquary. The demon is "present" in that location. From there, it can influence the world around it to the extent that its powers permit. Their reach can be very great with thralls to act as their eyes and hands, and most Earthbound have their reliquaries moved only when they are directly endangered. The ancient Earthbound were worshipped in many countries, and simulacra of their reliquaries stood in for their actual presence. Rituals that are performed before the reliquary tend to generate more Faith, and some rituals that empower the Earthbound in unusual ways (such as providing a temporary body) must be performed with her "participation." Otherwise there is no reason for the reliquary to be even on the same continent as the demon's worshippers. Therefore, many Earthbound have gone to incredible lengths to hide their reliquaries. Dagon is rumored to have sunk his reliquary in the Atlantic Ocean, relying completely upon its simulacra and remote-controlled slaves. Many secured their temples under tons of earth or lava flows. Those Earthbound who had fewer resources did the best they could when they were forced into sleep; often having the reliquary buried or entrusted to the keeping of a human lineage. Human cupidity and the emergent science of archaeology have undone some of these precautions, though, and Earthbound have emerged in some surprising places.

Not all Earthbound, however, are bound to reliquaries.

UNHALLOWED GROUND

Instead of images, some ancient cults held caves, groves or the tops of mountains to be a god's dwelling place. Offerings were left at the threshold of the sacred area and any human who intruded could expect death at best. Many such places were considered unlucky or haunted by the local population up to the Middle Ages and even beyond.

Those demons who took advantage of such sites are the literal Earthbound. They have the same ability to affect people and events beyond their immediate

location, but they cannot be represented through simulacra, and are therefore much more likely to have ceremonies conducted in their actual presence. They can never be moved or hidden, but by the same token, they are much more difficult to destroy. No matter what changes time brings, whether the site is built over or declared a historical landmark, the entity remains in that place and affects everything that happens there. Indeed, any building work was probably to her exact specifications.

The only way to dispel a literal Earthbound is to utterly change the nature of the site. Erecting a church on top won't do it, but dynamiting the cave, draining the swamp or nuking the entire area might. Even then, it is hard to be sure that the Earthbound has not managed to linger on in an undiscovered cavern.

THE AWAKENING

After centuries of stasis in a faithless world, only a spiritual upheaval as potent as the Maelstrom could have stirred the Earthbound from their slumber. Even sheltered by their reliquaries, each Earthbound is a spirit that rightfully belongs in Hell, and when the fallen began to claw their way through the Spirit Realm, the Earthbound could feel it. As the fallen descended upon the Earth, the stirring monsters felt what they had been waiting for these many centuries, a faint rekindling of Faith.

They dipped into their last reserves of power. They extended their perceptions into the world to see what they could find.

First and foremost, they found that the world had changed. The languages they had been familiar with were no longer spoken. But the Earthbound had always communicated most effectively with humans through direct images and sensations.

Those Earthbound who had the potency to do so had prepared the way for their resurrections. Before the last and most faithful of their servitors buried their masters or cast their idols into the sea, the demons bestowed one last blessing upon them. Each such Earthbound grafted its power to its followers' bloodline. These servitors received advantages that would help them prosper in human society, and they would pass these advantages on to their heirs. They were gifted with great strength and resistance to disease, with charisma and intelligence and, of course, fertility. But this gift was also a psychic marker that remained even after the family had forgotten its ancient beliefs. When the Earthbound awoke, they reached out and found the current generation of servitors — their legacy thralls.

The world today is good terrain for those gifted with charisma and intelligence, and strength and stamina were enough to raise families to the ranks of nobility in times past. A wholly disproportionate

number of legacy thralls have wealth, rank and influence. Some possess outright political power; some are internationally famous entertainers or athletes. All have seen strange rituals in their dreams and felt a presence both frightening and at the same time deeply familiar, calling to them and offering to make their most secret desires a reality. Offering them the purpose of their lives. Commanding them to come to a certain place and do certain things.

Not all obeyed, but of those who resisted, most committed suicide, some after killing as many members of their family as they could. Some sought help from religious and occult orders. Some were hunted down by other distant relatives and brought forcibly into the demon's fold.

Those Earthbound who were not capable of producing legacy thralls or whose favored were lost to the accidents of history had a lot of ground to make up. They still had the power to reach out from their reliquaries to a certain range, so they sought the minds of the weak-willed, the impressionable and the sensitive. The Earthbound approached these vulnerable souls in dreams, making offers, showing the rites that must be performed, until finally the targets were convinced to act.

Without at least one living worshipper, an Earthbound is powerless to act, starved of the Faith the demon desperately needs. The elder Earthbound developed a massive capacity to store Faith over the centuries, but they entered stasis because they no longer had sources of living Faith left to empower their attempts to defend themselves against their enemies. A newly awakened Earthbound, old or young, is very weak and only able to perform the least of its evocations. Yet whether the demon awakes with no worshippers or with a small army ready and waiting to do its bidding, the Earthbound wants and needs *more*.

CULTS AND RITUALS

A cult of worshippers is absolutely necessary to the Earthbound, for as mentioned previously, the demon can gain Faith no other way. The Earthbound presented themselves as gods in their first years on Earth, and in the days when every tribe had its patron deity, the benefits were obvious. Even in later centuries, after the establishment of Christianity and Islam, the pattern continued. Samiel, Satan and Iblis are all the Celestial Names of individual demons. They are also among the names by which God's Adversary has been venerated over the years by various human cults.

A ritual of worship incites the participants into a frenzy of belief. The Earthbound reaps this Faith in one, massive stroke and then channels or stores it as the demon requires. The problem is that these rites take a significant amount of time — the shortest rites

can often last for several hours. These rites can also be complicated affairs, with the use of dead languages and symbolic gestures. If the performance is faulty in any way, the transfer of Faith does not take place. It takes time to train a group of potential worshippers to the point where they can be of use. But the Earthbound, locked into the forms of the gods they pretended to be, no longer have any choice but to keep the “old ways” alive.

These rituals fulfill the demands of the individual Earthbound and are appropriate to the demon’s nature, but the rites are also human interpretations of the god’s nature. Therefore, the Earthbound have themselves been shaped thus by centuries of human belief. The acts that make up rituals are meant to inspire awe and devotion but also to make sense to human beings, and they usually take place on a human scale. The sacrifice of a human life does little to benefit the Earthbound in itself, but for her worshippers, it might be the ultimate expression of devotion. Therefore, certain Earthbound have come to expect the human sacrifice as part of their rituals over the years. Other common ritual elements include prayers, hymns and dances, special costumes, the burning of incense, the destruction of animals and material goods, the taking of drugs to expand the worshipper’s perception of the deity, sexual congress, self-mutilation and feats of endurance.

Like so many things, the minimum number of participants, the duration and the complexity of a worship rite mirrors the age and power of the Earthbound. Three worshippers consuming hallucinogens, chanting for an hour in a red-painted circle and then having sex might be able to sustain a young, weak Earthbound. The ancient and powerful Earthbound — those who were the gods of entire theocratic nations — are much more demanding. Once their festivals were inscribed in the holy calendar, the life of entire cities stopped for them and the resources of the kingdom’s treasury were at their disposal. Reawakened, these ancient gods are faced with replicating the same ritual, down to the language spoken, the date and possibly even the place. As can be seen, a young, weak Earthbound, with a portable reliquary and comparatively simple ritual demands might be able to compensate for her lack of raw power and gain substantial territory over her elder rivals — at least in the short term.

POWERS AND RESOURCES

The Earthbound started out with the same basic powers and immunities as the fallen; again, on a scale appropriate to their original rank. Having had centuries of freedom on Earth with substantial supplies of Faith, they have further been able to improve their capacities in lore and ritual knowledge to a level resembling their power during the War of Wrath.

Earthbound can use only the high-Torment versions of their lore; unlike the fallen, the Dread Kings long ago lost any connection to their angelic nature. Their demonic rituals — as distinct from the rites that give them Faith — are likewise corrupted. They lack the power to truly heal, to purify or to work in harmony with the forces of the earth. Everything they touch becomes tainted, twisted and corrupted by the force of their hate. Like their fallen counterparts the Earthbound possess a wide variety of infernal relics and rituals, many of which take advantage of lore paths unknown to the infernal host. Earthbound almost never perform rituals in conjunction with other Earthbound. They rely upon empowered thralls and enslaved fallen to make up the numbers instead. They also must always have a thrall stand in for them as the leader of a ritual, through whom they can direct the ritual’s effects and fuel its power with their stores of Faith. This is largely for purposes of security, as few Earthbound are trusting enough to allow any but a handful of their most fanatical servants into the presence of their reliquary.

All Earthbound have, of necessity, developed means of increasing the range of their evocations. They also have developed means of enslaving human beings that go far beyond any Faustian pact or the higher levels of the Lore of Radiance. In fact, more than one fallen faction would secretly be very, very interested to know how an Earthbound can break a person’s will and sanity and still gain his Faith.

However impressive the Earthbound’s lore and rituals are, though, most of the dark gods prefer to develop subtler means of influencing the mortal world. For one thing, Earthbound are affected just as badly as the fallen by human disbelief, which can disrupt vulnerable rites and expensive demonstrations of power. For another, every ritual and evocation they perform consumes hard-to-replace reserves of Faith. Therefore, the Earthbound make every effort to employ mortal technology and resources to give them the advantage over their enemies. A cult headquarters might have computerized security systems with encrypted locks. Their hit squads might carry tasers and fast-acting tranquilizers. They might identify the human form of a fallen from security videos and trace her through global databases or by employing contacts at local or federal police agencies. Some Earthbound are even developing entirely new lore paths based on the technological changes to the world, that might enable them to sidestep the issue of disbelief altogether.

Most Earthbound are patient, careful plotters who try to control every possible element of their plans. Given the restrictions on how they gain Faith, they do not like to improvise. They make poor decisions under pressure; striking out with disproportionate force or reacting with paranoid caution. They prefer to proceed slowly, inciting hatred, greed and fear, and

tempting potential servants with promises of influence, wealth and power. They prefer to defeat their enemies from within, leading them into one corrupting situation after another until they have sold their souls for a series of hollow victories. Sacrificing a thousand pawns to draw out and destroy a well-entrenched foe is nothing to the Earthbound. The world contains six *billion* potential tools waiting to be used, with more arriving every day.

THE EARTHBOUND CULT

The notion of secretive, demon-worshipping cults seems far-fetched in a modern era dominated by science and technology, but the lure that draws most individuals into such a group is based more on emotion than intellect. Human vices such as greed, envy, hatred and fear are all powerful tools to motivate and seduce otherwise rational and skeptical individuals. Human insecurities, including the need to belong or the need for self-worth can turn intelligent people into fanatics. The greater the need is, the more passionate the individual's devotion grows when he is presented with an organization that can meet that need. This is a maxim that the Earthbound understand very well, and they have had hundreds of years to refine their recruitment techniques. In many cases the rank-and-file members of a cult is kept entirely ignorant of the full truth behind their devotions. As long as their individual insecurities are met, most don't think to question any further, leaving only the cult's inner circle privy to the awful truth. Indeed, some Earthbound cults bear little overt resemblance to a mystical cult at all, instead cloaking the ancient rites of veneration behind seemingly innocuous fraternal orders and academic societies. The members wear variations of robes that clothed blood-soaked priests in ancient days, and they recite words that lost their true meanings centuries past, then adjourn to well-stocked libraries for brandy and cigars, never realizing the true benefactor of their supplications. It is enough that they believe in what they are doing, and that the proper traditions are maintained, and none but the high priest and perhaps a handful of followers have to know the Dread King whom they serve.

Despite their mystical origins, a cult is a human institution, constructed on a human scale. A cult is first and foremost an effective means of controlling a group of people, by manipulating their behavior until those people become dependant upon the cult for all their emotional needs. Intellectual and material dependence follows after. Therefore, cults are viewed with extreme suspicion by most governments and dominant religions. Constructing and maintaining a cult is not a straightforward matter in the modern world, even for a genuine supernatural entity.

THE INNER CIRCLE

The very first worshippers an individual Earthbound gained in ancient times were usually those who summoned it from the Abyss — or at least the survivors. Rebuilding its cult in the modern world, the Earthbound starts with its legacy thralls or that first person the demon persuades to enact its wishes.

If the demon has legacy thralls, the hierarchy of the cult might already be in place, with a descendant of the high priest available to take on his hereditary duty of leading the humans in their worship. If any human on Earth knows the true location of the reliquary, it is the cult's high priest. He conveys the doctrine and the decisions of the Earthbound to the congregation. He could also be instrumental in translating human affairs into terms the Earthbound can understand and bringing mundane but important matters to its attention. The most vital qualification for the high priesthood is the link between him and the Earthbound, and most high priests are enslaved (see "Building the Cult"). It helps for him to be charismatic with a talent for leadership and intimidation, and able to demonstrate the power of the god in his own right — qualities that the Earthbound often enhances. The high priest might be the literal Voice of God, enunciating the instructions fed into his mind, or he might designate a specific Oracle — in cases where mental contact with the Earthbound often drives the recipient hopelessly insane.

Priests enact the decisions of the high priest and lead congregations of the cult in their own right. They are responsible for teaching their flocks and maintaining discipline. They are also likely to be enslaved; if not, they will certainly be thralls (a condition different from being the thrall of a fallen). If the cult is large, a layered hierarchy of subordinate priests might form, with members of each layer having fewer powers and less information concerning the Earthbound's location and plans.

Enforcers guard the priesthood and protect the congregation from outside threats. An elite group of troubleshooters (who can be sent where they are required to silence internal power struggles or punish backsliders) might also be attached to the high priest. These enforcers are usually thralls themselves, their bodies enhanced to near-superhuman levels and equipped with mundane and infernal tools.

Knowledge of the cult's inner circle and the role each individual member fills is strictly on a need-to-know basis. As a rule, only the most senior priests know the high priest and are able to contact him directly. The mundane identity of a priest might be hidden by ritual costume from his own congregation. Most certainly the worshippers of one congregation know nothing of any other congregation. If contact between

congregations is required—for instance, for especially large rites—masks and darkness are used to maintain anonymity. All these precautions are necessary to ensure that the Earthbound will still have secure sources of Faith elsewhere if disaster strikes one congregation.

The first commandment of any congregation is to faithfully perform the prescribed rites of worship. The second is to gain more worshippers.

BUILDING THE CULT

For the most part, an Earthbound attracts potential worshippers by promising to fulfill their every desire. In times past, an Earthbound could blackmail entire cities into devotion by choking off their food supply, but even such vile creatures recognize the value of rewarding faithful service, most often in ways that bring the recipients closer to the Earthbound's own twisted ideals. The facade an Earthbound presents is partially the demon's own concept of what will effectively motivate humans and partially the expectations of its original worshippers. Humans faced with uncontrollable forces have always attempted to appease them, and a god who was actually a rampaging monster might have once been addressed as a beneficent mother and protector in the hope of placating its persecutions. Over time this became part of the Earthbound's identity.

An Earthbound might offer security against death, civil chaos or personal mediocrity. It might offer revenge and victory over enemies. It might offer pleasure beyond all human bounds. Raw power is something attractive to humans that the Earthbound understands perfectly, so that invariably plays a part. The demon's initial lure, however, is the opportunity to do something secret and exciting. Something of which parents, church leaders and other authority figures would disapprove. After all, aren't they the corrupt ones, who have been driving the country into the ground these last decades? Whatever the potential worshipper sees as the problem, the Earthbound can present the solution.

The greatest good fortune for an Earthbound is to discover an existing cult or occult practice that has grown weak enough for her to infiltrate. A coven of bored Satanists, for instance, or a group of immigrants that still keeps the festivals that were celebrated in the old country, but only out of respect for tradition. Some actual Faith might exist in these communities, and it is probably what attracts the Earthbound in the first place, but the power is diffuse and very weak. By subverting the rituals with a few key converts, the demon can very quickly restore its power base.

Of course, such potential is not common. It is more likely that the Earthbound will have to start from scratch. The following are some techniques for setting up cults in places where the inhabitants' only exposure

to ritual worship comes from old horror films, and the Earthbound must proceed with caution.

- **The Club Scene:** Sex. Drugs. Chanting nonsensical words while dancing to a rhythmic beat. These are things that happen every Saturday night in almost every city of the world. All the Earthbound needs to do is provide a guiding hand, channeling these impulses to a useful purpose. Once the club has been set up and gained a clientele, rumors begin to spread about the inner circle who meet in the back room to taste more exotic pleasures. The would-be initiate just has to be willing to prove himself. An exclusive club can appear out of nowhere and sing its siren song, although having worshippers who are already among the beautiful people can only assist.

- **Front Companies:** Another possibility appears first as advertisements for seminars on the secret of business success. Or it might be a bona fide business, a telemarketer or a mobile network services provider, seeking enthusiastic employees. The latter is particularly cruel, as young people desperate for a job and forty-year-olds recently made redundant find their pay checks dependent upon obeying the "working practices" of the firm. In both cases, the talk is all about belonging to something larger and contributing 110%, and at some point during the psych-session, getting up from around the table and clapping, dancing and shouting responses is mandatory. Alternated with the hypnotic boredom of a routine job, the effect can be very powerful. As the seminars or the business year proceeds, the bonding activities become more and more outlandish, and finally graduation or promotion requires a special display of commitment.

- **Universities:** A frat house is such an obvious cover that the canny Earthbound avoids it. But infiltrating, say, the History Society while the (conventionally) hell-raising Alpha-whatevers draw fire down the other end of campus could work well. A new professor might join the staff, catching attention with his stories of Middle Eastern digs and radical ideas of experimental archaeology—that is, attempting to understand why the ancient peoples did things in particular ways by re-creating them. Historical Society membership soars. The meetings are held in the faculty building containing access to the steam tunnels underneath.

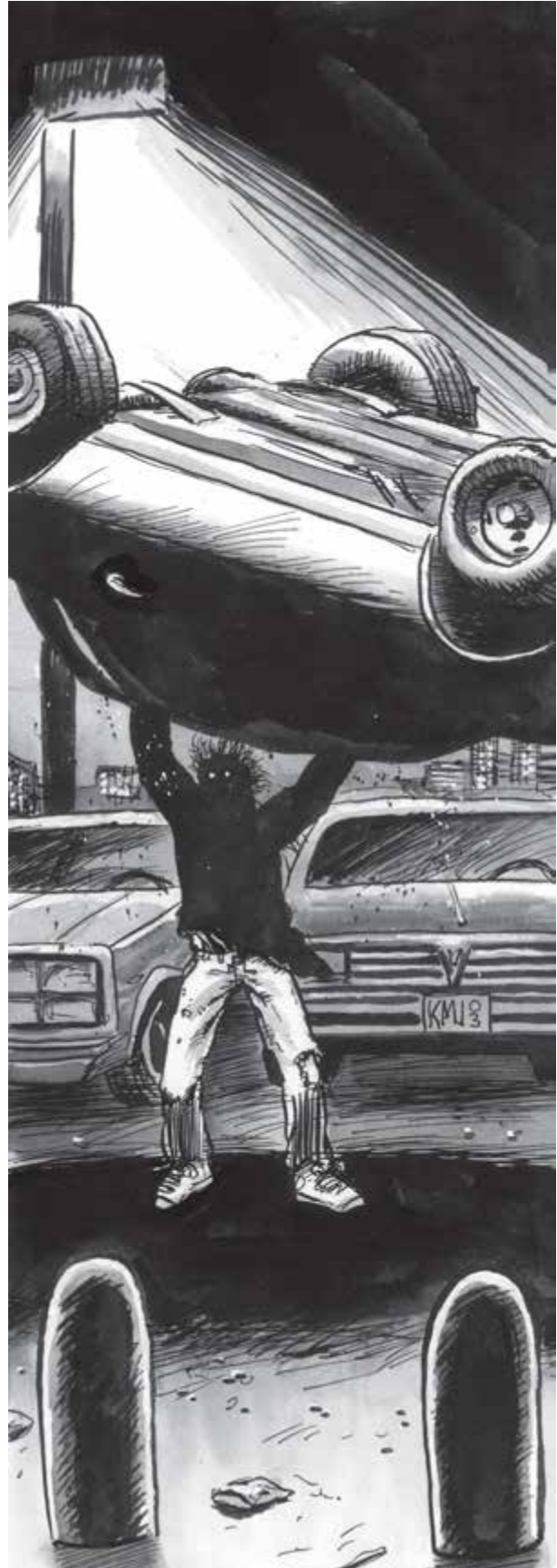
- **Small Towns:** Whether in middle America or the islands of Indonesia, the same dynamics apply. Here the Earthbound's entry is tradition; getting back to the original values of the community, preserving the things that give it its character. The demon's agents might revive the old men's lodge, or the odd little sporting event that used to be a test of the fitness of the town's youth. The revelation that these traditions were the half-hearted recollection of yet older and darker traditions can come in time. This form of infiltration

really requires the Earthbound to first gain a local as a servant and then operate through him. It works particularly well for the literal Earthbound, possibly residing in a nearby hill or cavern about which folk stories are still told.

- **Prison or Detention Center:** Where boredom and desperation have already eroded the outer layers of credulity, the Earthbound has a very promising field of operation. If she can insinuate just one missionary, perhaps in the guise of a social worker or more legitimate form of priest, some of the inmates will listen. The problem is that worshippers are no use unless they can worship, and any signs of unusual activity among the inmates will be immediately opposed. Rituals within a prison can only take place disguised as some other activity, such as a prayer meeting, organized sport or work detail in the cellar. Having worshippers among the guards eases the situation, although they will have to be rigorously corrupt to gain the inmates' trust. Of course, if the Earthbound can gain control over the entire prison, it's a different matter altogether.

- **Military Bases:** As in prison, the difficulty here is the close scrutiny of the personnel and the limits on their free time. Military bases are designed to prevent infiltration, by dangerous ideas as much as anything else. But they too have their traditions, their symbols and patrons. Their little ceremonies designed to toughen new recruits. It isn't as overt as it once was, at least in most Western services, but as long as a precedent exists and some ranking officers are involved, darkened gyms and aircraft hangers can witness some disturbing things. This kind of indoctrination comes to the fore when the forces are actually committed to battle, and luck and death are on everyone's mind. That's when the suggestion that the corps performs a real ritual, with real victims, seems acceptable. If the luck afterward is good, the practice continues; perhaps long after the corps is disbanded.

None of these methods will work overnight. An actual, Faith-providing cult is likely to remain small for some time, until the first of the new recruits have been sufficiently indoctrinated. What the Earthbound has then are *worshippers*. Worshippers supply Faith to the Earthbound by performing the correct rituals and this is their sole value. They must believe in the Earthbound for their worship to be effective, but that belief does not need to include any real apprehension of what their deity is or expectation that it might one day actually appear. Confronted with such claims, a typical worshipper might laugh and explain how Erishkrigal actually symbolizes the dark principle of female power. He need not actually understand the meaning of the ritual; he might not even be aware that the words he is chanting are an ancient Babylonian dialect. He just needs to do it in the god's name. The



relationship between the Earthbound and its low-level worshippers is far from personal.

Participation in an Earthbound cult never elevates an individual, however powerful or enlightened the upper ranks seem. The acts of worship and the environment fostered by the cult are always degrading. Indoctrination often starts with conditions or challenges by which potential new members can prove themselves. After the initial thrill of stealing, violence or illicit sex, they are taught the first veneration ritual. Newcomers often have to take on special roles in the ceremony by way of initiation, again to prove that they are worthy of their new status. After this, the new member has not only the secret of the cult's existence to keep, but of whatever acts he performed to gain admittance. He has already taken one step away from his normal life toward dependence upon the cult. Should he attempt to back out passively, by just not showing up, his "brothers" pursue him to work, school or home and point out the error of his ways. Should he actually confess what he did and knows, he is marked for death. Someone who tells the police might actually be able to damage the cult; unless, of course, the Earthbound has servants in the force. Someone who tells the local catholic priest or his parents has probably just created more victims.

But for those who are loyal, there are rewards.

Thralls are worshippers who have been gifted by the Earthbound. Whatever the worshipper might believe, this is always because the Earthbound needs a customized servitor for some special job and has little to do with the strength of his devotion or ambitions, although of necessity only the loyal are selected. The Earthbound observes her worshippers during the rituals or through the eyes of her priests. The chosen one is told that he has been selected to move forward in the god's service, and there will be a ceremony to introduce him to her presence. More than likely, this is the first time he faces the reality of what he believes.

If strings are attached — if say, a gift of inhuman strength and stamina comes at the price of physical malformation and a monstrous appetite — the thrall probably won't be warned up front. He must accept the offer freely and agree to perform the sacrifice his god demands as proof of faith. If he accepts, a special ritual is prepared. If he does not, his life could be forfeit. If the Earthbound truly needs him, he will be spared but have to undergo a special penance and education to address his lack of faith — the fate of all who balk at doing the god's will.

The ritual lasts an entire night and culminates in a sacrifice. It must be personal and costly; the candidate must destroy something that has real meaning for him. Cutting off his own nose and ears, murdering his family, burning down the business he

has built up or the stable with his race horses inside. These are all possibilities, as long as the sacrifice doesn't hinder the candidate's ability to provide the service the Earthbound needs. If he fails to complete the sacrifice, the cult is commanded to kill him. If he succeeds, he becomes a thrall. Not only has he been empowered, but he has given over a part of his will to the Earthbound.

The thrall is truly dependent upon the cult. He might have destroyed his livelihood or committed a capital crime, but more damningly he knows the *truth*. He has glimpsed his master's real nature. Now he might even receive direct instructions from the demon or receive instructions buried in disturbing dreams. His will has been weakened. To break the bond between demon and mortal is all but impossible. A thrall who is too horrified to face what he has become might try to kill himself, only to find that his master has taken steps specifically to protect her investment. A thrall who tries to hang himself might awaken in a hospital, having been saved in the nick of time by an anonymous call to the police. Later, after he is released into the waiting arms of the cult, he will begin an excruciating penance designed to ensure that he will never insult the god's favor again.

Along with the usual gifts that enhance a thralls' physical and mental abilities, or powers such as flight, a thrall might receive the ability to perform an evocation that allows him to participate in his master's rituals as Mudu, or to be her host as Ankida. (For more information on infernal rituals and how they work, see Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide**.) Participating in a ritual is inherently dangerous for a human, and a strong will is a factor of both success and survival. A thrall could be created solely for the performance of a ritual he is not expected to survive.

After his initial enthrallment, a thrall might receive further gifts, but he loses more of his will each time. After three such ceremonies, the thrall is enslaved. Once he is, he is an extension of the will of the Earthbound, providing the knowledge and abilities for which he was chosen but unable to even dream of disobeying. It does not matter if he is insane; indeed, after a short space of time he is almost guaranteed to be. He never takes any action that could bring his master harm, and he lays down his life without hesitation for her benefit. His condition is irredeemable. Should his master be banished back to the Abyss, he will continue to serve in the best way he can, often providing the vehicle for the god's return to earth.

Legacy thralls are not initially enslaved to their Earthbound master, as the bond forged between the demon and the thrall's bloodline is fairly diffuse. The link is strong enough, however, that the demon can make the thrall's life a literal hell until he succumbs to

its will. For the Earthbound, sanity in a follower is optional; obedience is the only absolute requirement.

MAINTAINING THE CULT

The cult starts affecting its surroundings while it is still quite small — maybe 10 or fewer devoted members who meet regularly, at least once a week. Even if the ritual of worship can be performed only under a full moon, it's hard to maintain devotion without regular meetings. Each worshipper might be expected to perform small rituals or prayers on his own that do not generate Faith but assist in indoctrination. The meeting place must be private and ideally have a space that might be consecrated permanently as a temple. Clearly, this kind of set-up requires capital and an income. There are also many sundry services that the modern cult requires to thrive.

The cult's initial source of income is the worshippers, whether through the fortunes of the legacy thralls or the assets of its first members, liquidated at the Earthbound's command. Donations by worshippers continue to play an important part in financing the cult, as well as being a means of shackling them to it. An Earthbound might also have access to buried or sunken treasure, the offerings of past generations, which she might direct her new worshippers to retrieve. A locational Earthbound is especially likely to have treasure stored within her domain.

These funds are used to establish the meeting place and build the temple. Fallen who suspect that an Earthbound has set up in their home town could do worse than check the suppliers of incense and obscure fabrics, and artists who work in bronze and stone.

If the cult is operating under cover of a nightclub or legitimate business, then it should already be generating an income. Of course, a manager who can keep the books in order and the local city council satisfied, and a good accountant, are both necessary. They might be among the first people specifically targeted by the cult for recruitment, because sooner or later those books are going to need cooking, the local council will need fooling and substantial amounts of income will need to be hidden from the tax office. The cult must be able to trust its financial managers. But it creates an interesting twist if these people do not, in fact, know the cult's true nature and think that they are working for organized crime figures.

Cults that do not set themselves up primarily as businesses can still generate funds from the prostitution of members or illegal events such as dogfights as long as the events are appropriate to the god. Such operations make good recruiting grounds, although they involve all the usual risks of illegal activity. But in the modern world, any cult with ambition needs an investment portfolio and investment brokers among its members. Again, such

people are specifically targeted with whatever promises and displays of power prove necessary.

The cult isn't going to play fair on the stock market either, especially in these depressed times. A rival company might suffer a series of arson attacks at the same time as compromising photos of the director appear on the Internet. A new drug that a company is researching might apparently cause miracle cures, and stocks soar in consequence. For an Earthbound, the options for maximizing investment potential are many.

Most of the funds so raised are channeled into the Earthbound's dark crusade, but as the cult develops into a genuine establishment, its expenses increase. For a start, not all rewards for loyal service are supernatural. Priests and enforcers deserve a little material luxury, and the specialists brought into the cult for their skills were almost certainly promised it. Of course, these things are really assets that the cult can and will liquidate as required, but in the interim, they reassure even the neophytes that they are doing the right thing, that this is the route to power and success.

Dependent worshippers — those who have given up everything to serve the cult full time — must be fed, clothed and housed, and if all goes well, they will breed. If the children aren't sacrificed, they can be brought up as worshippers. This is the ideal situation for the Earthbound. Even in the early days of the cult, the Earthbound can start preparing an enclave where, hidden from interfering governments, a group of its elect can live as her worshippers should live, knowing only the world that she shows them and breeding generation after generation of zealots.

The cult needs another set of specialist members, recruited either from among organized crime or government bodies. These members are record keepers, who can alter listings of birth and death, who can arrange for passports and alternate identities. A doctor who can issue death certificates as required, or the local coroner, can avert a whole lot of potential trouble. Best of all are those people who can interfere with the process of policing and licensing legitimately, such as city mayors, district attorneys or chiefs of police. The moment the cult involves people in public positions — perhaps from the first moment a legacy thrall is called — a whole new level of care must be taken with its public profile because these people must retain an appearance of respectability. They are already being watched, and they do have rivals and enemies who would rejoice to find them corrupt. That, of course, might be the very lever the cult requires to bring them over.

THE DARK CRUSADE

For all its importance, the cult is only the foundation of the Earthbound's long-term goal of rebuilding the theocratic empire the demon once enjoyed, or

certainly coveted. The Earthbound strives to create a future in which it will rule again as it once did, bending nations to its will. To achieve this goal, and to build up the Faith it will require, the demon must explore the society it finds itself in and learn how best to harness its broader potential.

Each Earthbound is an individual entity with its own preferences as to how human beings should be utilized. All the Dread Kings generally find some of the following tasks necessary, however:

- **Gathering Intelligence:** Although the networking base provided by its worshippers might be enough to locate a good accountant, the Earthbound obviously has deeper work to be done. Worshippers can be sent on fact-gathering missions, to report back on who runs the crime in a neighborhood or on the daily movements of a company director. The more specialized or sensitive the information is, the more carefully the demon selects its agents, employing thralls or demonic servants for the most sensitive tasks. It is also possible that perfectly ordinary private eyes and experts in obscure topics can be hired to complete tasks without any introduction to the cult at all. In the same vein, some Earthbound have been known to use mortal intermediaries to employ other fallen for sensitive information-gathering duties. These jobs are part camouflage for the Earthbound and part audition for potential servitors should the demons prove that they are powerful and capable of tackling formidable challenges.

Many also have an especial interest in the relics and sites of their original cults and hunt down anything that might give their enemies clues as to their actual identities. Above all, an Earthbound needs to track the location and movement of fallen and of other Earthbound as widely and accurately as possible.

- **Destroying Potential Opposition:** When an Earthbound decides to move into an area, pre-emptive strikes might be necessary against those who could cause problems in the future. If a powerful and vibrant local religion is generating real Faith, the careful corruption and public exposure of its leaders can pay handsome dividends later. If the problem is an occult group that might identify the Earthbound before it is ready to reveal itself, the community can be turned against that group; with some appropriate rhetoric and planting of evidence, it could be blamed for the cult's activities for years to come! This type of work is best performed by ordinary worshippers, or again, by people with no knowledge of the cult, carefully manipulated into doing what the Earthbound requires. The vital thing is for the Earthbound to not reveal her presence and trigger the fight the demon is trying to avoid.

- **Experimentation:** A newly awakened Earthbound has spent the last 400 years sleeping somewhere

under the earth or water. Before this, it interacted with the world as a disembodied spirit or the temporary possessor of a disintegrating body. For such a creature, comprehending the actual, material world takes a special effort. Some experiments, such as attempts to interact with new technology, require only the exercise of its powers, but must take place in the presence of her reliquary. Others can take place anywhere the demon has servants to enact its instructions and report on the results. The baffling aspect of many of these experiments is that they are necessary from the Earthbound's perspective but might not make sense to anyone else. Worshippers might find themselves attempting to enact metaphors, conducting a test on outrageous categories of mixed objects and living creatures or repeating the same apparently failed experiment over and over again until the demon is satisfied with the results.

The field of experimentation naturally includes the Earthbound's worshippers themselves. The development of new lore paths or rituals requires both Faith and a steady supply of test subjects. Often these test subjects are cult members in need of penance for displeasing the Dread King in some way.

- **Infiltrating Organizations:** Distinct from efforts that support the cult directly comes the placement of cultists as agents in organizations whose strategic importance might be obvious — the police, the government, the IMF — or which fit in with some long-term plan — a large record company, an observatory, a humanitarian aid program. They are being moved into position to perform an act that will bring the Earthbound power some day. It is unlikely the organization will benefit from it.

Such a deep agent is certainly a thrall, his natural attributes increased to make him the ideal recruit. He may cut off all contact with his congregation, thus contributing no Faith but enhancing his cover. It all depends on how important his master considers the infiltration to be. Letting a thrall run free like this, immersed in a new identity, has its risks, but the occasional dream or omen should be enough to see he does not stray from the path.

- **Preparing the Way:** New religions are always suspect — especially to old religions. It is all but certain that the cult will initially hide its nature, perhaps in one of the ways described thus far. Moving from an organization whose appeal is based on the hidden to one that openly confronts society is a big step, but sooner or later, the revelation is necessary. It might lie a long way in the cult's future, or it could prove possible and advantageous quite soon.

The cult will not be revealing its actual nature, of course. It is necessary to provide the public with something palatable, so that the cult will be allowed

to expand openly and important names and dates start to become familiar right across society. The first step might be some kind of spokesperson, a visionary who speaks and writes of his insight. Claiming to represent the ancient spirituality of some minority group is another good tactic. Even an activity as seemingly harmless as a parade on the date of a festival that raises money for the local children's hospital is a start — as long as the god likes the idea of cutting up children, of course.

AN EXAMPLE OF AN EARTHBOUND'S OPERATIONS

Urughanna is a young Earthbound whose reliquary is a wooden tablet recording the ancestors of an old Chinese family. She awoke in the collection of a retired Australian diplomat who has since become her enslaved high priest. After a few years of effort, her cult has two congregations; one comprising principally Chinese-Australian business people who meet at the high priest's Sydney mansion — the location of her reliquary. Three thralls enhanced into martial arts combat machines are on permanent guard duty. The other congregation, run by the high priest's rebellious grandson, masquerades as a traveling rave party that caters for Asian students studying in Sydney.

She has enthralled an official in the Sydney Customs service, and her worshippers are up to their necks in smuggling (principally gemstones, currency and black market medicinal items such as rhino horn). The proceeds are going into lobbying state politicians, and fitting out a boarding house for Asian students with a permanent temple in the cellar.

She had a fourth enthralled guard, but he was arrested after murdering a personal enemy of one of the more valuable worshippers. She allowed her thrall to be arrested and imprisoned, while communicating with him and promising him greater rewards. She hopes that in prison he will make contacts with the Asian gangs in Australia. She plans to stage a massive prison break-out, with the wholesale slaughter of guards and every kind of crime visited upon the nearest township to spread fear and enhance the cause of the conservative hard-liner who is presently being lobbied by the cult. He aims to introduce new policing measures to combat organized crime. If he succeeds, she will use the contacts her thrall has made to offer protection to the gangs that agree to ally with her. From there, taking them over is only a matter of years.

She is currently investigating the students involved in the cult and aims to place a suitable agent in the World Heritage Organization. She believes that this point will be the perfect vantage from which to track Earthbound and fallen activity.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

A cult is generally an effective and resilient type of organization. Initially offering freedom from the constraints of everyday life, it becomes a trap with its own set of constraints, harsher and more restrictive than anything the worshipper knew before. Its members watch each other for breaches of doctrine and urge each other on to new depths. This is not to say that it can't be attacked, though.

The most obvious weak point is provable crime. If a murder can be pinned on cult members by the police, then those people will be arrested and placed on trial. If a worshipper is embezzling from his company to feed the cult and he goes a little too far, then the investigators will more than likely find the money trail. These people are only human after all.

As said, a well-placed thrall can solve many problems by tampering with evidence and compromising members of the investigation. The culprits could be back at the temple in no time, smugly convinced that they are untouchable. Even if an Earthbound doesn't actually have influence over the police and judiciary, it might lead its worshippers to believe it does. This belief will keep them from talking in that crucial interval between their arrest and whatever action the demon takes to deal with the potential leak. If the Earthbound has established the cult's cover carefully, the authorities will have no idea at the point of arrest that they are dealing with a religious conspiracy. They have caught members of a gang or political activists or a bunch of stupid kids. What the Earthbound needs to do is ensure that nothing more is uncovered.

Ordinary worshippers who have been arrested are in grave danger of simply being killed. One member of the group might go berserk, murder the others and then kill himself. Other deaths might be made to look like accidents or undiagnosed diseases. Mass deaths cannot happen too often, though, especially in the same general area, without raising suspicions all their own. Sometimes it is better to promise the worshippers power and advancement for their silence, as in the example of Urughanna given in the sidebar.

If the removal or imprisonment of the worshipper is not enough to end the investigation — if, for example, a money trail leads right to the High Priest's mansion — some extra effort is called for. Instead of involvement with the cult, the worshipper's dirty secret can be disguised as a gambling addiction or pedophilia; something obvious that the law and media can latch onto. It might be necessary to sacrifice a few more members and maybe a small part of the cult's money-raising operations.

If, despite precautions, somebody does start talking, the best thing to do is usually to show him a little more of the god's power than he was previously aware

of. If his behavior becomes obviously unbalanced — if, for example, he starts insisting that he can see apparitions floating through the walls or that the cockroaches are talking to him — his captors will take everything he said previously with healthy skepticism. This is also an excellent tactic to take with any journalists or occultists who might be on the right track. Again, it is much easier to have people die unremarkably in mental health care.

In short, if the Earthbound's security can be preserved by the sacrifice of an individual or small group, even if this means losing enthralled servants or a useful specialist, the sacrifice shall be made. But sometimes that might not be enough.

If the true nature of the cult has been uncovered or if some large infraction (such as arms smuggling or the production of biological weapons) can be laid at its door, the cult can find itself marked as an illegal organization and have the resources of the state brought to bear against it. This means armed raids, seizure of assets and nation- or even worldwide exposure.

At the right juncture, worldwide exposure could be good for the Earthbound's plans. As explained previously, it is eventually necessary. The trick is calculating the moment at which the demon is strong enough to withstand the backlash. If the Earthbound isn't ready, then it might have no choice but to shut down that congregation. At this stage, it doesn't matter whether the worshippers talk about the cult. As long as the Earthbound has enforced the separation of congregations, one congregation cannot betray the Earthbound's remaining strongholds. What matters is that whatever force is opposing the Earthbound believes that there are no further strongholds to be eradicated. Enough priests must be sacrificed, whether they fight to the death or allow themselves to be captured (to spread the god's word through their interrogation and trial) to convince the authorities to look no further.

The cult's ultimate priority is the preservation of the demon's reliquary. The majority of worshippers might not understand the precise connection between the god and its icon, or have ever actually seen it, but they understand that the unbelievers must be prevented from violating the inner sanctum. The reliquaries of the Earthbound are the subject of rumor and the deepest occult lore, and it is hard for any opponents to be sure just what it is they are looking for. Even if they do know, will they be able to detect the difference between a simulacrum and the real thing in the seconds before the high priest triggers the explosives that bury the chamber and everything in it under tons of rubble? If the reliquary is threatened, any sacrifice is justified, and there is always a contingency plan, always a means to get it safely away (even if that means storing a fork-lift in the inner

sanctum). The Earthbound always have some bolt-hole prepared, although it is in moments of stress that they are most likely to revert to their basic natures, attempting to return to their original place of worship, or to the sea, the fire or whatever is appropriate.

If it is traced back to its home ground, a locational Earthbound cannot run. If its enemies do not know this, the demon can provide them with a mock-reliquary to chase around the globe while she prepares her defenses. Once they finally figure it out, they are faced with the difficulties discussed in "Unhallowed Ground" (p. 44).

As long as an Earthbound still has an anchor in the world, the demon can always begin anew. If the demon were to genuinely lose all Faith — if it had no worshippers and had exhausted all its stored Faith — the Earthbound would be helpless. Therefore, the demon never spends its total store. Exactly as the Earthbound did hundreds of years before, it keeps enough in reserve to start again, once the demon has lain low for a while and its enemies have passed on to other concerns or become corrupt and weak.

BATTLING THE FALLEN

It was the escape of the fallen that first woke the Earthbound. The Earthbound knew immediately where the fallen came from and what they were. They soon realized three other important things. First, the fallen were not automatically inclined to obey them and were, initially, not even aware of their existence. Second, the fallen had demonic powers *and* physical bodies; they could move and perceive as and even pass for human. Third, they could gain Faith from humans much more flexibly than the Earthbound could. An Earthbound who can enslave one or more of the fallen can exercise these abilities for its own benefit. By the same token, an Earthbound who consumes the essence of a fallen can at least gain a portion of his lore and other knowledge.

The Earthbound want the fallen on their side. They represent a huge advantage, exceeding that of mortal worshippers or even thralls. But the potential danger is likewise far greater. It is unlikely that any single fallen, even the most powerful on Earth today, could stand against a single Earthbound, but a group of fallen with a variety of lore at their disposal and all their natural immunities could prove a serious challenge. An infernal court in the Earthbound's territory poses an even greater threat, for the courts are organized bodies much like cults, competing with the Earthbound for human devotion and capable of mounting an organized effort to deal with emerging threats. As a result, the Earthbound devote a substantial portion of their resources toward identifying, tracking and dealing with any fallen that enter their territory.

Ideally, most Earthbound prefer to capture and enslave any fallen they discover, and many of the Dread Kings have created specialized teams of demon-hunters, armed with a powerful mixture of modern technology and enchanted relics. These capture teams generally try to subdue and bind a fallen themselves rather than drag an imprisoned demon into the Earthbound's presence, though some of the Dread Kings prefer to enslave their weaker kin personally.

If a demon proves too wily or powerful to capture, the Earthbound will not hesitate to order its destruction. In most cases, this involves a carefully timed ambush designed to destroy the demon's host body and banish the spirit back into the Abyss. Sometimes, however, a particularly hateful or ambitious Earthbound will attempt to consume a demon and gain its power. In such a case, a capture team will attack and weaken the victim until it is unable to resist, then drag the hapless fallen into the presence of the Earthbound for consumption.

Next to another Earthbound, the Dread Kings know no greater threat to their power than the existence of an infernal court within their domain. Ideally, the Earthbound will attempt to overwhelm and scatter the court with a brutal assault if it deems that the organization is weak enough. Otherwise the Earthbound will lie low, attempting to avoid detection while it attempts to undermine and divide the court from

within. Even though the Earthbound are very different from their fallen kin, they are still adept at the arts of intrigue, politics and diplomacy, having played human empires against one another for most of recorded history. They will attempt to split the court through internal dissent, rivalry and personal ambitions, then wait for a vulnerable moment to strike.

INFERNAL SERVANTS

As demons, fallen have a weakness with which the Earthbound are only too familiar. If their Celestial Name can be determined, they can be summoned and bound to service. Given their prior rank in the infernal host, many Earthbound remember the True Names of those demons that served under them so long ago.

With their dependence on ritual, it would have been foolish for the Earthbound to omit learning all they could about the human rites that freed them from Hell. Most have an excellent working knowledge of summoning and binding techniques, although they suffer from the same restrictions as the fallen (see page 256 of the **Demon** rulebook for details). That is, they must have the right kind of ritual to summon the demon in question, the right protective circle and ritual assemblage prepared.

The Earthbound cannot use this knowledge to just summon their old servants from the Abyss and enslave them directly. No demon alone could ever



achieve this; the rituals require highly skilled human sorcerers who can also generate sufficient Faith to fuel the task. This is Faith that does *not* feed the Earthbound. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the humans involved can do something the Earthbound cannot. That they have some power independent of or possibly even over her is not something any god wants her worshippers to realize.

Earthbound can perform summonings of demons that are already loose upon the earth. But neither is it likely that any will just sit there performing summonings on the off chance that some old servants are in range. It is a matter of sheer economics; of expending time and effort on a possibility when there are so many concrete needs.

More often thralls must be engaged to hunt down what they have been taught is one of their master's enemies, or perhaps some kind of lesser, natural spirit that the Dread King wishes to make into a useful servant. To capture a fallen, a party of thralls will be needed, displaying such gifts as inhuman strength, stamina and athletic ability, enhanced perception to see through illusions and immunities to mental control. Thralls have weakened wills by default, so it is also necessary that those sent to hunt fallen have been toughened by exposure to supernatural sights and can resist the effects of revelation. Equipment helps even the odds. Armor to soak damage and protections against heat and cold may be useful, and the hunters will be well-armed with a variety of weapons, including non-lethal options such as tranquilizer darts. Unlike an Earthbound, a fallen can be physically damaged, and enough damage might even subdue her.

Above all, such hunting parties need real tactical ability. Attacking a fallen means ambushing her alone and quickly, things that are not necessarily easy to achieve. Subterfuge such as masquerading as police might prove necessary to get her to lower her guard or bring her to the right place. The most crucial part of the hunters' armory is the binding ritual, and this can't be performed just anywhere. Just like the summoning ritual, it requires a pre-prepared site. One way or another, the fallen must be brought inside the prepared circle and kept there as the ritual is conducted.

The fallen may also be attacked through their source of strength — by tracking down and threatening their thralls. The Earthbound might not appreciate the actual nature of the pact between a fallen and her thralls, but it knows that killing the demon's thralls weakens the fallen — although killing all of them seriously impairs her usefulness as a slave. Then again, the fallen can always be directed to find more.

The thralls who are taught the binding ritual are taught it solely as a means of channeling their master's

power; it is the Earthbound who will gain control over the fallen, not the thrall. At the height of the ceremony, the Earthbound links to the thrall as it does in all rituals, and the actual contest is the Earthbound's will against that of the fallen. As always, such direct contact is liable to be catastrophic to the thrall caught in the middle.

If a binding is not possible (or if it fails), the captured fallen must be retained if at all possible and brought to the presence of the reliquary before destroying her host body. The Earthbound must be "present" in order to devour the fallen's essence. Or, if the right lore is available, the fallen's essence can be bound to an object.

If the binding is successful, the fallen must obey the Earthbound. A human sorcerer, using essentially the same ritual, can bind a demon for only a limited time and a limited number of commands, during which the demon cannot act directly against him. The Earthbound's infernal nature allows it to extend this period for much longer than any human could achieve, and the fallen is at its mercy during this time. Yet although she is bound, her essence is still free. It is only through the Earthbound's possession of the fallen's True Name that she becomes a true infernal servant.

Infernal servants are the most valuable of the Earthbound's slaves, the ones that it might expend energy to protect and whose feelings it might possibly consider on occasion. An infernal servant can participate reliably in the demon's rituals; the Earthbound might even teach its servant the necessary lore to do so. It is the infernal servant who is responsible for guarding and moving the reliquary. The servant knows its true location, kills where the Earthbound desires sudden death, carries messages between congregations and leads the battle against other Earthbound and the infernal courts.

The infernal servant is perfectly aware of her situation. Her nature, intellect and abilities all remain her own, but she cannot disobey her master. No matter what her original state of mind is, her Torment inevitably increases through the acts she is forced to perform. Only two things can truly save her. The first is the destruction of her master. Banishing the Earthbound to the Abyss can provide a temporary respite, at least until the Dread King is summoned back to Earth. The second is for the demon's own nature to change so much that her True Name changes as a result. Although effecting such a change is an extraordinarily difficult task while the fallen is enslaved to an Earthbound, a patient and determined demon might bide her time and look for opportunities to redeem herself in the hopes that doing so will separate her from the mistakes of her past.

OTHER INHUMAN SERVITORS

The spirits of dead thralls cannot provide Faith — indeed, they consume it — but there are still some good reasons for keeping them around in one form or another. First, nothing impresses a mortal worshipper like proof of an afterlife. It also demonstrates that death is no escape. Second, ghosts and the walking dead have their own powers (as described on page 55 of the **Demon Storytellers Companion**) and can make for an effective line of defense, especially against human foes. Third, having ghosts working for them is a way for the Earthbound to retain and retrieve knowledge that would otherwise be lost.

If the so-called Children of Caine become acquainted with an Earthbound, the possibilities are horrendous. Some vampires are rumored to have worshipped demons for centuries. They do not provide Faith, but they are more powerful than anything other than an infernal servant, and there is the chance that lore and memories from the war itself have been passed down incalculable ages through their bloodlines, to be available to the Earthbound today.

EARTHBOUND RIVALRIES

When the Earthbound awoke, the one thing that was completely familiar to them was the threat of other Earthbound.

An Earthbound might be able to tolerate the presence of a few fallen in her territory, economically milking Faith from their thralls, even if they aren't her slaves. Any influence they gain can be factored into her plans and will make their eventual enslavement all the more rewarding. But the presence of another Earthbound, as a rule, means war. Another Earthbound means another cult and, even if they follow different tactics such as one operating through clubs while another uses a front company, they are still in competition for essentially the same resources.

As Earthbound can devour fallen, so too can they devour other Earthbound. The fact that most Earthbound the fallen encounter today are stronger than they are is partly because of plain old survival of the fittest. It is also fair to say that no modern Earthbound knows the True Name of any other Earthbound. Earthbound understand each other's weaknesses, and their battles are marked by the mass destruction of worshippers and concerted attempts to discover the opponent's reliquary.

The history of the Earthbound demonstrates that alliances (or at least truces) are possible between Earthbound of roughly equal strength, such as Abaddon and Asmodeus. They joined forces in

pursuit of a common vision which two could defend against any one of the remaining archdukes. At the other end of the scale, two or three young Earthbound might form an alliance against an elder who would certainly destroy them all singly. Only in the most exceptional circumstances would an alliance exist between the weaker and the stronger; the weaker would have to have something to offer that could not be gained by devouring her. But for the most part, the Earthbound only tolerated the presence of those whom they did not dare attack. The world in the Earthbound's heyday was constructed of more or less stable territories constantly skirmishing to discover each other weaknesses.

It is still too soon after the Earthbound's reawakening to tell whether this same pattern will reassert itself. For the most part, the territories are still too small, and the human population base is vast. There is also the new element of the fallen and their courts. But at least one city has proven attractive enough for Earthbound to skirmish over, and Los Angeles is suspected to be the current location of at least two Earthbound, with rumors of the appearance of the archdukes. The Earthbound's traditional rivalry will never fade, but sheer expediency will likely see alliances form in the immediate future.

An Earthbound generally shelters her worshippers from any knowledge of the other Earthbound for as long as possible. Seeing one's god as one of a set of entities with similar powers gives rise to the possibility of at least choosing between them, which is another thing no god wants a worshipper to be thinking about. As individuals progress in the god's service, they are given knowledge of her rivals, only as it will enable them to mount a more effective opposition.

Could a rival Earthbound help the thrall of another escape its power? It is possible, if the Earthbound were to expend the power to remake the thrall to all intents and purposes into a new being — a tremendous investment of resources that would only be expended on an individual of considerable value. But it is also possible that the thrall of one Earthbound could become enslaved to another, canceling the previous connection (and damning him irredeemably, of course). But in truth, it is unlikely that an Earthbound would find any individual human interesting or potentially valuable enough to make the effort. What is more likely is for the Earthbound to indeed protect the fugitive — certainly the demons would conceal his whereabouts from his master — and beguile him with promises until it has extracted every last detail of his master's operations that he can provide. He is then given over to the demon's own worshippers to be tortured as an enemy, or used as sacrificial bait.

ENDURING AS THE MOUNTAINS, PATIENT AS THE SEA

The Earthbound, all of them, are making war on the consciousness of humanity. On all those ideas of self-determination and mastery of the planet that, although in the absence of any higher faith are part responsible for the degeneracy of the modern world, contribute to the dignity of humankind. They are the legacy of Eve and Adam taking leave of Lucifer and determining to inherit the Earth on their own merits. To the Earthbound, humans exist to feed their grand designs. All any human being really needs to do is believe, blindly and utterly. The Earthbound wish to revive Faith in the world, but to destroy human individuality in the process.

Many of the Earthbound's long-term plans involve finding points in human society at which they can apply pressure to damage its institutions. To make people afraid and uncertain. To prepare them all to believe. The government is obviously a target, as the less faith the people place in their existing rulers, the more easily they will accept an alternative, even seek it out. The police, army and the apparatus of law — all the ways society regulates and protects itself — must likewise be stripped of whatever credibility they retain in the World of Darkness. But the project extends far beyond that. It is for this reason the Earthbound place thralls in deep cover and target people and organizations which offer no actual threat, for corruption or destruction. It is for this reason that an Earthbound might craft a serial killer, not even indoctrinating him into the cult but selecting an individual, driving him mad and turning him loose. The well-timed suicide of a popular singer, the collapse of a school building on its inmates, the contamination of wells dug to save the population of a drought-stricken province. All these things feed the idea that maybe, humanity has no intrinsic value, that life and consciousness are not sacrosanct, that the universe simply doesn't care. Once humanity has lost itself to depravity and despair, the Earthbound will build an empire over its back, harnessing its fear to an engine that will remake the entire cosmos in the Dread Kings' image.

At one time, an empire could only mean troops defending occupied territory, radiating from the central hub of the city where the god resided. Most Earthbound still envisage their power in this way, although some are starting to consider possibilities that only the modern world provides. Television, for instance, can broadcast into the physical territory of a nation that would resist troops from the signal's point of origin, but a television program might be welcomed and gather a following of fans. Then there is the fascinating concept of brand names: products that circulate freely throughout the world markets, creating loyalty among consumers and assembling a

single identity from out of factories, shops and administration that might be scattered across continents. Many of the Earthbound value land as their early worshippers did, but the truth is that the Earthbound themselves have no need of it — unless, of course, it forms their anchorage. The key to an Earthbound's goals is influence.

What are those goals? To build an empire with citizens who feed the demon Faith. To best the Earthbound's rivals, to make itself secure. All perfectly reasonable, even human goals. But of course, the Earthbound aren't human. Some are so immersed in their god-roles that they do not consciously consider anything more, but everything these Earthbound do leaves them strangely dissatisfied. Under everything lies the memories of the Age of Atrocities, when the Faith of worshippers enabled angels to shape the world. Beyond that is the dim recollection of an angel, a minister of creation. That is the demon's ultimate goal. But the entity that has these memories cannot even conceive of an Eden, a return to a lost paradise. The world it would create is something as ghastly and incomprehensible as itself. The demon would erase the image of God and replace it with its own, stamped into every living thing. Then its vengeance would be complete.

It is the demon's cult that suffers the first intimations of this ambition. The demon's thralls and worshippers might develop a recognizable look as similar deformities accompany the demon's gifts: the mark of the chosen. Its tendency to give the same kind of gifts might also create a sub-culture, a body of people who can eat, sleep or take their pleasure only in the same peculiar way. This is all in addition to what perversions are contained in the rites; these are things that only develop over the course of time as the cult continues to operate. They are more telling in a way. The rituals must remain sacred, but these other things can become a way of life that even the ordinary worshippers emulate. Certain types of insanity, especially paranoia and hysteria, spread like contagion under these conditions, becoming another characteristic. In time, who knows what the Earthbound will be able to demand of its worshippers, or what changes in their bodies and mentalities their Faith might be turned to? Plenty of rumors abound from the ancient days of monstrous sub-races, or races of giants and winged beings who served the gods.

One final difference between the Earthbound and the fallen is that the Earthbound have no real perception of human time. Although they are aware of the possibility of destruction, they remain eternal beings. An Earthbound is aware that time has passed since it fell into slumber, but its concept of that time is hazy at best. The demon might not be aware that the high priest that serves it now is a different person

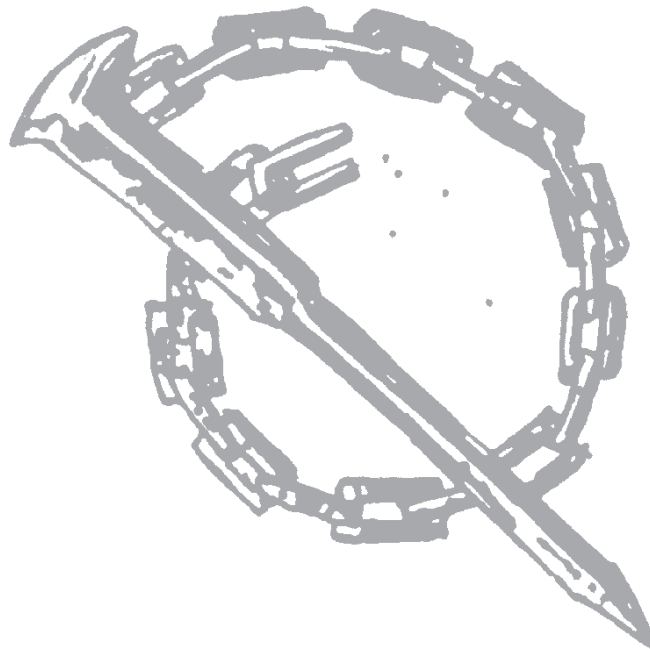
than his distant ancestor; it is unlikely the demon cares in any case. The only intervals of time the demon is really familiar with are those between its festivals, and these are or should be an endless, rolling cycle. An Earthbound can conceive and sustain plans that will take centuries to enact, since the demon is used to working against other Earthbound in struggles that span hundreds of years. This longevity can lead to little mistakes, however, such as deep-cover agents dying of old age before they are activated — underscoring the importance of inherited positions within the cult. The demons might also have completely unreasonable ideas of how much time things like the development of technology might take. If communication with the other side of the world can happen instantaneously, why can't the cancer vaccine be ready tomorrow? If an Earthbound has investigated a particular technology, it is a different matter. The demon will not expect it just to be or not be, although it might still be frustrated by the slowness or caught off-guard by the speed with which innovations come.

In spite of its nature, an Earthbound is not static. As time passes, as it enforces change in its worshippers, change can also come to it. The demon's worshippers shaped it in its first age of dominance, and slowly, infinitesimally, the same process is even now at work. No Earthbound would ever acknowledge the idea that the visions that writhe through its essence could have anything to do with the miserable insects that feed it. But they do. The demon's worshippers still have the same, age-old human fears, but

some of them are now embodied as microbes and asteroids. In time, the Earthbound will absorb this. Perhaps in less time than might be imagined.

Perhaps the most dangerous and unpredictable aspect of the current era is the fact that the human beings who have lived through the end of the 20th century, who are now succumbing to the Earthbound in increasing numbers, are familiar with sweeping change. Personal computers and DVDs were unheard of 20 years ago. Ten years ago there were no clones, mapping the human genome was a lab-bound speculation, and mobile phones were not an essential part of Western life. Where once innovation on any scale would take centuries, current generations have come to all but demand it, and of these generations, it is the ones who are looking for something new, now, that answer the Earthbound's call. Who can say what effect this desire might have when combined with Earthbound ambition?

It is this phenomenon that all who are aware of the danger of the Earthbound must strive to prevent. They can attack the demons' cults, destroy or free their enhanced and inhuman servitors, try to deduce the nature of their reliquaries and discover their True Names. Only they must be careful that in all this activity, they are not simply serving the cause of another Earthbound that is waiting out of sight in the shadows. They can attempt to warn humanity at large of the danger. Yet will doing so only serve the cause of all the Earthbound, hastening the time when they can abandon their secrecy and rise, in their true majesty and terror, upon the face of the world?





When Dominic Ellington went hunting for Belial, he prepared himself well.

He spent not just days, but *months* in the Black Library of the Star Catchers, learning every word of lore his order had ever assembled on the demon archduke. He ransacked the notes and grimoires of the black magician Gilles de Rais, who had summoned Belial centuries before. He interrogated the pitiful, tattered wrecks of the demons the order had enslaved, and he gleaned every bit of their knowledge. He left no trail, exposed no weakness in his search; his fellow Preceptors knew nothing of his plans.

Let them waste time with imps and phantasms, he told himself. I will enslave a demon prince to my will, and the Star Catchers shall march in lockstep to my commands.

When Dominic Ellington came to the hidden church of Belial, he prepared himself well. His silk shirt was lined with passages from the Dead Sea Scrolls, bound with rituals and protections against Belial, the "Angel of Hostility." His shoes and cane were rimmed with thrice-blessed silver and white gold, their mystical light proof against the demon's powers over darkness. Holy water in a vial at his belt; an iron crucifix stolen from the Vatican treasury at his throat; a .45 magnum loaded with sanctified ammunition in his jacket.

Weighed down with wards and weapons, safeguards and security, Ellington knew himself to be a match for any demon. He felt no fear as the creature's blank-faced servant admitted him into the buried cloister. He felt no fear as he smelled the blood drying on the floor. He felt no fear as he saw the deceptively small stone idol, old before the age of Atlantis.

Then Belial materialized before him, and Ellington knew fear – fear and worse.

As the Great Beast's body knitted itself together from darkness and blood and screams, Ellington felt his bowels and his sanity liquefy, tasted shit and bile in his mouth as he fell to his knees. The chthonian form of the archduke towered over him, oozing tar and blood, as the diabolist gibbered madly in his own waste. A tendril matted with filth and ichor snaked toward him, *into him*, down his throat and spreading into his mind.

As the last remnants of Ellington's sanity trickled down his fouled legs, he realized that he had been as prepared for this as any human being could be. Yet it was so far from sufficient as to be laughable. Raising any human defenses against an archduke of Hell was like raising an umbrella to ward off a hurricane.

The black tongue of Belial slithered horribly, sensuously, into Ellington's brain, and as it ripped his soul to pieces, he heard the unspeakable voice of his new master.

YOUR KIND WOULD HUNT DEMONS.

BRING YOUR ALLIES TO THIS PLACE.

YOU WILL FIND THE LIGHTBRINGER FOR ME.



CHAPTER THREE: RAISING THE OLD GODS

*Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
In a strange city lying alone
Far down within the dim West,
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
Have gone to their eternal rest.
There shrines and palaces and towers
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
Resemble nothing that is ours.
Around, by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.
—Edgar Allen Poe, “The City Beneath the Sea”*

The Earthbound are more than simply powerful, evil demons. Each is something profoundly *alien* — a creature that has never known human emotions, that thinks and perceives in a way completely different from anything else in Creation, and that has been warped and reshaped by the beliefs of its worshippers and the constraints of its reliquary.

But while these abhorrent beings are not just bigger demons, they *are* still demons — or rather, they *were* demons at one time, just as a vampire that drinks blood to survive was once a normal human being. The differences between the Earthbound and the other demons that are loose on Earth is just as great as the difference between a

human and a vampire. A great deal of common ground exists as well, though, and *any* demon could become an Earthbound horror under the right circumstances.

In game terms, the Earthbound can be defined and created like any other character. Like any **Demon** character, the Earthbound have Attributes, Abilities, Backgrounds and other traits. Many of these traits are the same as those that other **Demon** characters possess, while others are unique to the Earthbound. As well as possessing different traits, the Earthbound also have different supernatural abilities — and different weaknesses — than other characters. This chapter describes how to create an Earthbound character and gives details

on those traits and characteristics that are unique to the Dread Kings of the Earth.

CRAFTING THE ABOMINATION

Earthbound characters are largely created in the same way as normal **Demon** characters, using the rules and methods on pages 120-128 of the **Demon** rulebook. A few changes must be made in the process, though, reflecting the different abilities and limitations of the Earthbound.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

CONCEPT

Base Earthbound characters have almost as many concept choices as normal **Demon** characters do. Some Earthbound are brutal destroyers, while others are subtle manipulators; some operate through vast networks of worshippers and surround themselves with thralls, while others maintain a small number of thralls and keep their cult small and controllable. Some have achieved great power; others have lost much during their long sleep and must fight desperately to regain their former might.

Remember that every Earthbound horror started as a normal demon, confined to the Abyss with all the rest. When coming up with your character concept, ask yourself how the demon became what it is in the modern World of Darkness. When was it summoned to Earth? What kind of cult sprang up around it? How did the beliefs and desires of its worshippers warp it into its current form?

The characters created in this system are comparatively minor Earthbound. While they are more powerful than most demons, they pale beside the infernal might of the archdukes and the greater Earth-

ELDER GODS

Storytellers who want to create profiles for the greatest of the Earthbound — the terrible archdukes or potent upstarts such as the Earthbound demon Baal — can use the system in this chapter as a basic template taken together with the guidelines for greater demons provided in Chapter Three of the **Demon Storytellers Companion**. Optionally, Storytellers are encouraged to paint such powerful characters in much broader strokes. Earthbound such as Abaddon or Belial are near-demigods, capable of possessing virtually any trait level or power they desire. Rather than limit them through a mechanical character-creation process, the Storyteller should assign these characters whatever capabilities she feels would best serve the needs of her chronicle.

bound. Such characters might be comparatively young Earthbound, bound into reliquaries in the Dark Ages and having only a short time to amass power before sinking into a Faithless sleep. Alternatively, the character might have been summoned earlier in human history but lost power during the inter-Earthbound struggles of bygone millennia.

HOUSE

Just like other demons, every Earthbound was once a member of an infernal House. Earthbound are less defined by their House than other demons are, however. The alterations enforced on them by human Faith do much to change what the demon once was and warp it away from the being that God created. No longer do the Earthbound share the views and methods of their former fellows or feel loyalty toward onetime brethren. Each abomination is a law, a House, onto itself. Select a House for your character as normal, but don't feel too constrained by it in terms of powers, perspectives or the like.

FACTION

Almost every Earthbound is a faction of one, as its only loyalty is to itself, so infernal politics mean little to it. Most Earthbound characters aren't aligned with any faction. Some Earthbound do claim a degree of allegiance to a specific faction, though — usually interpreting that faction's desires and goals in a horrific, twisted light.

Most aligned Earthbound are essentially Faustians. They know firsthand the power of human worship, and they crave nothing but the enslavement and worship of all humanity. Many others are Raveners, seeking to gorge their appetite for pain and suffering through destruction and atrocity. A rare few are Cryptics, and even fewer are Luciferans and Reconcilers. The aims and methods of these factions have little appeal for horrors like the Earthbound.

NATURE AND Demeanor

Most Earthbound possess the same Archetype for both Nature and Demeanor. Hiding one's true nature behind a mask is a human vanity, one difficult for most Earthbound to comprehend. They act on every desire and care nothing for how others perceive them to be. Some Earthbound, however, have learned the value of manipulation and deception — of misleading enemies and fooling erstwhile allies — and these creatures have different Natures than their Demeanors imply.

Earthbound characters may *not* have the following Natures — Bon Vivant, Caregiver, Child, Conformist, Gallant, Martyr, Penitent or Thrill-Seeker. These Archetypes are all based on human desires and motivations — compassion and desire, the need for adrenaline or belief in a higher purpose — and they are totally alien to the inhuman personality of an Earthbound.

For personality Archetypes that are perfectly suited to the horrific urges of the Earthbound, see page 71.

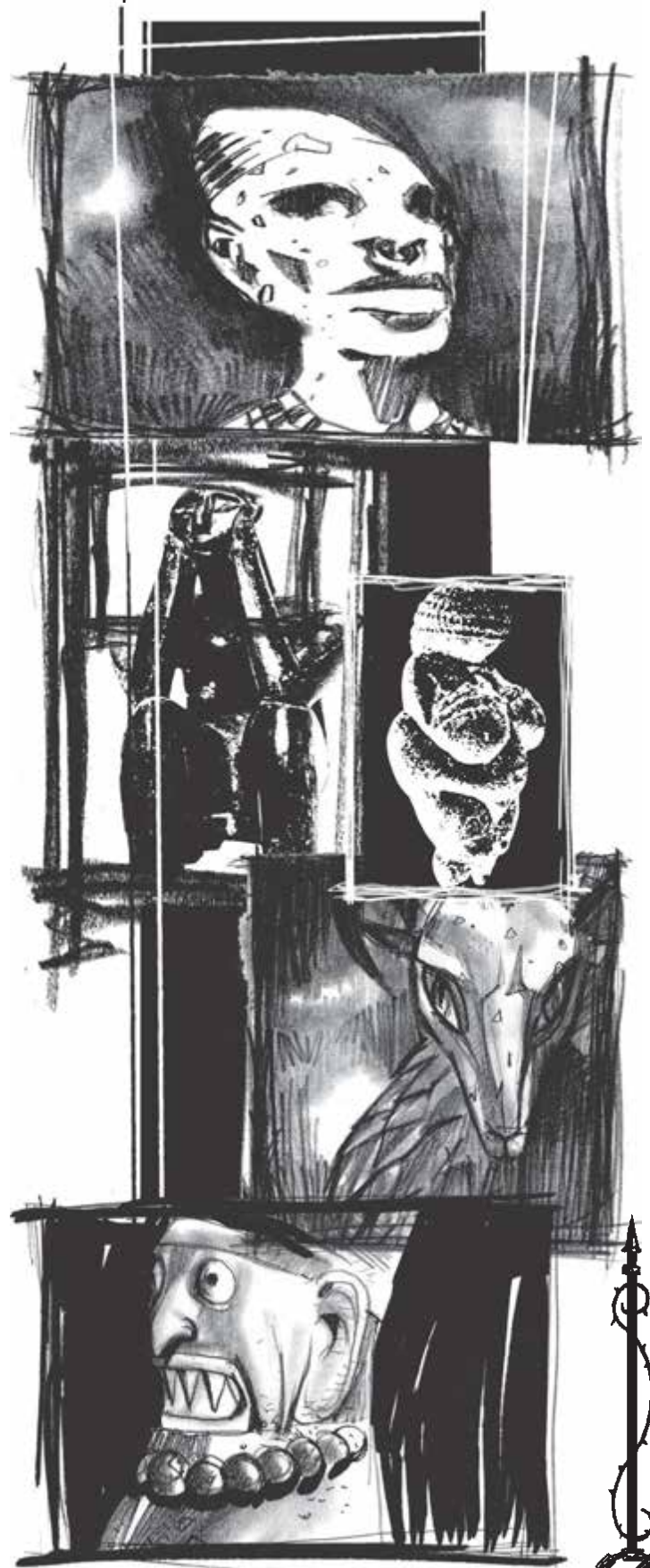
RELIQUARY

The first major point of difference between Earthbound and fallen characters is the need to design the creature's reliquary — the physical object that the Earthbound inhabits. Three different kinds of reliquary exist, each with different strength and weaknesses, and the Earthbound stays bound to that object until it (the demon or the object) is destroyed.

Perfect reliquaries are the most common reliquaries — objects that were specially crafted and prepared by mortals to house the Earthbound's spirit. Mortals normally build a reliquary as part of the summoning process to draw demons out of Hell. Each such reliquary is mystically attuned to the True Name and spiritual shape of the specific demon that inhabits it. Perfect reliquaries tend to be made from high-quality materials, such as precious metals, jewels and marble — and they usually have some kind of affinity with the Earthbound inside. Earthbound demons who are bound to a perfect reliquary tend to be the most powerful, as the high quality of the reliquary allows them full access to all of their demonic capabilities. On the downside, such reliquaries tend to be more obviously unusual or special, due to their age or fine craftsmanship, and they might be easier for enemies to track down.

Improvised reliquaries are much less common, and are generally the hallmarks of minor Earthbound. Rather than being bound into a prepared object by worshippers or supplicants, demons bind *themselves* into improvised objects. This normally happens when a demon is driven from a human body and must attach itself to an object to avoid being drawn back into Hell. (This process is described on page 259 of the **Demon** rulebook.) It can also occur if a demon is summoned by mortals who haven't prepared a suitable reliquary — rather than return to Hell, the demon must bind itself to a convenient object. Improvised reliquaries are much more difficult for the Earthbound to work through. The object can barely contain the demon's spirit, and it doesn't provide the advantages of a prepared reliquary. An Earthbound inside an improvised reliquary does have one advantage, however. It's much easier for the creature to manifest its visage than it is for a demon inside a prepared reliquary.

Some reliquaries are not objects at all, but rather locations. In truth, such places are a variation on a perfect reliquary — rather than attune an object for the demon to inhabit, the mortal summoners bind the Earthbound into a sacred cave, grove of trees, blasphemous temple or similar. Those rare Earthbound who inhabit a location enjoy the same benefits and powers as those inhabiting perfect reliquaries. Furthermore, the demon can spread its awareness and



power throughout the location, controlling all that occurs within its boundaries. On the downside, locations are stationary — if your enemies learn of the place you inhabit, you cannot order your minions to move you away to a safer hiding place.

Choose one of these reliquary types — perfect, improvised or location — for your Earthbound character. The full mechanical details of each type are described in the “Reliquary Traits” section on page 69.

STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Like all characters, the Earthbound have nine Attributes, but at first glance, this might seem a little strange — even impossible. How can a being that inhabits an immobile stone statue have a Dexterity rating? How can a creature without eyes or any sense organs have a Perception rating? How can a bodiless, invisible spirit have an Appearance rating?

The Attributes of the Earthbound do not reflect the strengths and weakness of a physical body or brain. Instead, they show the *potential* power of the Earthbound, and the strengths of its malformed spirit. Once this being had a body formed of Faith and celestial energy, and the potential to manifest that body still exists within the corrupt soul of the Earthbound. So while the Earthbound can't move or act in its current vessel, its soul still carries the potential for movement and has all the Attributes it bore in ages past.

Earthbound tend to have great potential power, more than normal demons have, but they can manifest

THE FACE OF HORROR

Without exception, the Earthbound are hideous beyond compare. They are creatures of blasphemous deformity so grotesque as to shock mortal minds into madness. Some are able to summon up the illusion of beauty, but illusion is all they can manage. Behind the mask remains an image of appalling horror.

Despite this extreme hideousness, Earthbound characters may have Appearance ratings from 1 to 5 and anywhere in between. For these characters, the Appearance Attribute represents just how ugly the character is — or, more accurately, the degree to which the character can influence others with its physical appearance. An Earthbound with Appearance 1 is hideous, but not so much so that mortals panic at the sight of it. A character with Appearance 5 is so mind-numbingly hideous that a mere glimpse of its face can destroy a human's sanity. However your character looks, the Appearance Attribute is used as normal, adding to appropriate Ability rolls and playing a part in evocation rolls.

that power only in limited ways, since they can't act physically or interact with other beings without using supernatural powers. Earthbound characters have better Attributes than other demons, but they can use those Attributes only when they manifest their visages, or as part of their lore evocations.

As with a standard **Demon** character, you need to prioritize the Physical, Mental and Social Attributes of your Earthbound character. Each Attribute starts at a base of one dot. Divide eight dots among the primary Attributes, six dots among the secondary Attributes, and four dots among the tertiary Attributes. Attributes can be raised to a maximum of five dots each.

STEP THREE: CHOOSE ABILITIES

Like other characters, the Earthbound possess various Abilities — Talents, Skills and Knowledges. Decide which Ability group is the primary one for your character, which is secondary and which is tertiary. You can spend 17 dots on your character's primary Abilities, 12 dots on its secondary Abilities and seven dots on its tertiary Abilities. None of the Abilities can be raised above three dots at this point.

Of course, that might not seem like a lot of Abilities for a being who's thousands of years old. Unfortunately, the Earthbound don't learn Abilities as fast as mortals or other demons do, because they can't *use* them. A being who's trapped inside a statue can't paint, ride a horse, make a sword or fire a gun. The only way an Earthbound learns a new Ability is by possessing a mortal thrall who has that Ability and pulling the knowledge out of the mortal's disintegrating memories. While the Earthbound can develop purely mental Abilities (such as most Knowledges) while it is immobile in its reliquary, it can hone and practice its physical and social Abilities only while it is manifest in the world — either by possessing another thrall or by manifesting its apocalyptic body. What's more, it can do so only for short periods. So the Earthbound develops its Abilities slowly and finds it hard to develop many different Abilities. It's more likely to hone a small selection of Abilities to very high levels.

Abilities are still very useful for Earthbound characters, even though they don't get to use them often. When possessing a mortal host, the Earthbound may use its own Ability ratings in place of the mortal's if those ratings are higher. The Earthbound's Ability ratings also play a major part in evocation rolls.

As well as the standard Abilities in the **Demon** rulebook, the Earthbound may also learn a number of other Abilities. See page 72 for details.

STEP FOUR: ADVANTAGES

BACKGROUNDS

Over their millennia-long existence, the Earthbound have amassed great networks of worshippers and spread their tentacles of influence throughout mortal society. Many of these power bases have withered and vanished during the long slumber of the Earthbound, but the Dread Kings have wasted little time in reviving their long-dead cults and have begun reestablishing their secret empires. This power means that Earthbound characters have significantly more Backgrounds than other demons do. You can divide 10 dots among the various Backgrounds available to your character.

You may *not* give your character a rating in Contacts, Fame, Followers or Mentor. These traits reflect a character's standing within mortal society, and the Earthbound exist outside that society. The thralls of the Earthbound may have these Backgrounds, of course, and clever Earthbound make sure to enslave thralls who can influence mortal society.

The Legacy and Pacts Backgrounds are also unsuitable for Earthbound characters. The Earthbound do not have the same loss of detailed memory that demons in human hosts suffer from, so the Legacy Background is useless to them. They also do not form pacts with mortals for Faith. Instead, the Earthbound gain Faith from the worship rituals of their cultists.

To replace these “lost” Backgrounds, the Earthbound have a variety of new Backgrounds. See page 75 for details. Earthbound may also possess the Ritual Knowledge Background presented in the **Demon Players Guide** (p. 179).

LORE

More than anything else, the Earthbound are rightly feared for their immense power over the lore of Creation. Because the Earthbound cannot affect the world physically, they have honed their evocations and lore to immense heights, the better to take control of Creation and enslave all of humanity. Other demons, though, can overcome their darker impulses and summon their old angelic strength. This is not an option for the Earthbound, who are irredeemably corrupted. They can evoke *only* the destructive, Tormented versions of their lore.

Divide 10 dots among the lore available to your character — the three bodies of lore native to its House and the two common bodies of lore. As with other **Demon** characters, you may not increase any of the Earthbound's non-primary lore to a level higher than its primary lore.

As well as the lore available to all demons, the Earthbound have developed their own bodies of secret, blasphemous lore — powers designed not by God but by His abhorrent enemies. These new lore paths

can be bought with freebie points, along with dots in the lore of other Houses. See “Black Knowledge” (p. 87) for details.

URGES

Demons who incarnate in human hosts have Virtues — human emotions and ethics that forestall the descent into Torment. The Earthbound have already fallen to the bottom of that downward spiral, and for most there is no coming back. Therefore, Earthbound characters do not possess the three Virtues that other **Demon** characters do.

In fact, rather than wanting to hold back the mad passions of Torment, the Earthbound seek to *indulge* them. Uncomfortable in their stationary prisons, all Earthbound long for the pleasures of physical substance — a body and mind that they can control to satisfy their desires. This need for physicality manifests as three Urges, twisted appetites for the pleasures and powers only a mobile body can provide. The Urge of Flesh measures an Earthbound's lust for physical sensation — to eat, to feel pain or to crush the skulls of enemies. The Urge of Thought determines the creature's desire for intellectual stimulation — to appreciate the screams of the innocent or to flay open a living body to examine its muscles. The Urge of Emotion measures the character's desire to feel emotions and to manipulate the emotions of others — to break hearts, destroy hope and subvert the wills of mortals.

Your character starts with one dot in each Urge, and you can spread another three dots among them at this point. During the chronicle, Urges come into play whenever your character possesses a mortal thrall or manifests its apocalyptic form, increasing the body's Attributes to exceptional or even superhuman levels. For full details on Urges and how they work, see p. 78.

STEP FIVE: FINISHING TOUCHES

FAITH

Earthbound characters begin with a permanent Faith rating of 4, which can be increased as normal with freebie points.

As well as the permanent Faith rating, Earthbound characters have an additional pool of temporary Faith points provided by their reliquaries. Their reliquaries serve somewhat like batteries, allowing the Earthbound to store far greater quantities of spiritual energy than their half-mortal cousins. An Earthbound reliquary is capable of storing up to 10 Faith points in addition to the demon's own Faith pool. Therefore, an Earthbound with a Faith rating of 4 would actually have 14 Faith points available to spend on evocations, healing damage and the like. These extra Faith points do not apply when determining the range of the demon's

inherent powers, evocation effects that are dependent on the demon's Faith score or determining the number of dice used in a Faith roll. When an Earthbound character spends Faith points for any reason, they are drawn from the reliquary pool first, then from the demon's own Faith pool. The storage capacity of an Earthbound's reliquary can be increased even further with the Hoard Background (p. 76).

While the Earthbound can draw upon far more Faith at one time than normal demons can, they gain Faith only slowly. While a normal demon gains several points of Faith each day, an Earthbound might gain Faith only every week or month. This is because the Earthbound cannot gain Faith directly from its worshippers or from reaping. It receives Faith only when its followers perform complex rituals of worship. Normally an Earthbound receives Faith only once per month from its worshippers, but the frequency may be increased through the Cult Background (p. 75).

TORMENT

The great weakness of the Earthbound, compared to demons in human hosts, is that every last one of them is so consumed by pain, anger and Torment that they can never redeem themselves. All Earthbound characters start play with a permanent Torment rating of 10, and this rating cannot be reduced by spending experience. The Earthbound are unspeakable monsters, and none of them can hope to mimic the untainted evocations they once performed at the dawn of Creation. Earthbound characters can perform only the high-Torment version of evocations, regardless of the difficulty of the roll or the successes obtained.

APOCALYPTIC FORM

Normal demons — those bound into human bodies — have a visage for their revelatory form based on their primary lore. While there is some variation between the visages of demons with the same primary lore, most demons with a given primary lore look fairly similar in their apocalyptic forms. (Each demon of the Kishar visage, for instance, appears roughly similar to other Kishar in their revelatory form.)

Every Earthbound, however, has a unique apocalyptic form, one that usually bears no resemblance to those of other demons with the same primary lore. The fears and beliefs of mortal worshippers warp and deform an Earthbound's visage, as does the strain of inhabiting so unsuitable and alien a vessel as a reliquary. The apocalyptic forms of the Earthbound are indescribably hideous, so malformed and horrific as to make the high-Torment visage of a normal demon seem benign and innocuous.

Rather than take a standard visage for the character, you need to design its apocalyptic form from the ground up. You do so by selecting eight features — advantages that the demon gains while in its apocalyptic form. You

also need to select eight grotesqueries — hideous deformities and monstrous body modifications that make up the Earthbound's visage. A selection of features and grotesqueries, along with rules on selecting and applying them, can be found on page 93.

WILLPOWER

Your Earthbound character has an initial Willpower rating equal to the sum of its two highest Urges. If you increase the character's Urges with freebie points, its Willpower rating increases as well; Willpower can also be increased on its own with freebie points.

FREEBIE POINTS

After assigning all your dots, you can now spend 21 freebie points on improving the Earthbound character's traits. Rather than using the chart in the **Demon** rulebook, consult this table to see how many freebie points it costs to improve the character's traits.

Trait	Cost
Attribute	6 per dot
Ability	2 per dot
Lore	5 per dot
Background	1 per dot
Faith	5 per dot
Urge	3 per dot
Willpower	1 per dot

BECOMING THE ENEMY

With the preceding process, you can create a character that enters play as an Earthbound abomination, but it's also possible for a demon within a mortal vessel to become one of the Earthbound during the course of the chronicle. This usually happens when a demon's mortal host is slain and the character must bind itself into a convenient object to withstand the black gravity of Hell. A character might also become bound into an object if she is summoned by mortal summoners, who could then bind her spirit into a reliquary or location. For more information on how fallen become Earthbound, see page 259 of the **Demon** core rulebook.

INITIAL CHANGES

If your existing **Demon** character becomes one of the Earthbound during the chronicle, don't use the preceding system to re-create the character. Instead, work with your Storyteller to make the following simple changes to the character.

Choose an appropriate reliquary (improvised, perfect or location) for the character, depending on what object she is now bound into.

- The character's Attributes, Abilities, Lore, Faith and Willpower remain unchanged.

EXPERIENCE COSTS

The Earthbound improve and learn in ways different from mortals and other demons, and this difference is reflected in the costs to improve traits with experience points. Use the following table to calculate experience point costs for Earthbound characters, rather than the table in the **Demon** rulebook.

Trait	Cost
New Ability	4
New Lore	6 (8 if from a House other than the Earthbound's)
Attribute	current rating x 5
Ability	current rating x 3
Lore	current rating x 4
Background	current rating x 4
Urge	current rating x 2*
Willpower	current rating
Faith	current rating x 6

* Increasing an Urge does not increase Willpower after character creation.

You *cannot* decrease the character's permanent Torment rating with experience points.

- Nature and Demeanor remain the same — at first. Over time, the character might drift over to a more malevolent Nature and Demeanor, affected by the stresses and temptations of its new existence.

- The character's Virtue ratings all fall to 0, no matter how strong they were originally, and they cannot be increased with experience points. Without the guidance of human emotions and human memories to guide it, your character cannot hold back the darkness.

- The character's permanent Torment rating doesn't change *yet*. Without Virtue ratings, however, the character cannot avoid gaining Torment for any sinful actions, nor can she lower her Torment through positive actions. Inevitably, her Torment will grow and consume her.

- The character gains one dot in each of the three Urges, and she now possesses the special characteristics of the Earthbound (see page 79).

THE PROCESS OF DEGENERATION

While the character is now *technically* Earthbound, it hasn't yet degenerated into a complete monster. It still retains all the memories of mortal life — albeit untainted by human emotions and sentimentality — and remains in contact with those allies and friends it once knew. The demands of its new existence all but guarantee an inevitable slide into horror, though. It no longer has any semblance of humanity, no emotional buffer to hold back the degeneration of Torment. The demon retains any existing pacts with thralls (for the

moment), but it cannot establish new pacts or create new thralls. Doing so requires an affinity with mortals that the demon no longer possesses. Worse still, existing pacts will soon begin to disintegrate as the demon becomes too powerful and inhuman to maintain the spiritual relationships it has with its thralls. Soon, the demon will be able to gain Faith only through the worship of mortals, as many mortals as possible. The new Earthbound will need to amass a cult of followers, by any means necessary — and it will be changed and warped, in turn, by that worship. The character's Torment will continue to increase, no matter how much it tries to hold back the corruption. In the end, the former angel will become a monster so evil as to make demons tremble.

While the character's permanent Torment rating is less than 10, the character hasn't yet succumbed fully to the horrors of its new existence — it's no longer a normal demon, but not *quite* a blasphemous horror. During this period, you can spend experience points on increasing the character's Urge ratings, on new traits and Backgrounds, and on gaining dots in the secret lore of the Earthbound (using the experience chart). The character's visage and apocalyptic form changes normally as the character's Torment rating increases. Those Backgrounds that the Earthbound cannot possess (such as Contacts) remain in play for the moment, but they cannot be increased with experience points.

As the character gains Torment, it becomes increasingly inhuman and monstrous, and its capabilities and nature change. Each time the character gains a dot of *permanent* Torment, the following occurs:

- One of the character's existing pacts is broken and cannot be reestablished. The demon no longer gains Faith from its former thrall, and the thrall loses any special powers or benefits it gained from the pact. The player decides which pact is broken.

- If the character possesses dots in the Contacts, Fame, Followers or Mentor Backgrounds, it loses one dot from one of these Backgrounds. The increasing inhumanity of the demon makes it impossible to retain its former contacts and status in mortal society. The player decides which Background decreases.

- The character gains a dot in the Cult, Hoard, Mastery or Worship Backgrounds, as it grows into its new powers and capabilities. The Storyteller decides which of these Backgrounds improves.

During this twilight time — no longer a demon, not yet an Earthbound — the character *might* still be redeemed. If her reliquary is broken, the character will become incorporeal once more, and she might be able to bind herself into a soulless mortal body again. Once she has returned to the joys and sorrows of mortal existence, the character can begin to regain her old personality and powers. The character loses any Urge

ratings and dots in the Earthbound-specific Backgrounds, and she regains one dot in each of the three Virtues. She can create new pacts and gain new thralls as she used to, but she loses any Faith she might have gained from her cult and from worship rituals.

FINAL DAMNATION

When the character's permanent Torment rating reaches 10, the demon finally becomes a true Earthbound monster and will remain so for all time. It can *never* inhabit a mortal shell again without destroying it, and it will always be an alien and abhorrent creature to other demons. Redesign the character's visage and apocalyptic form at this point, as the demon's form finally mutates and degenerates. All existing pacts are finally broken, never to be renewed. Any remaining dots in Backgrounds that are inappropriate to the Earthbound are lost or changed into more appropriate Backgrounds at the Storyteller's discretion.

BLASPHEMOUS SECRETS: NEW TRAITS

As well as simply being stronger than other demons, the Earthbound also have access to new and terrifying powers, capabilities and lore, the likes of which demons in mortal form cannot hope to mimic. A variety of new traits and capabilities that are unique to the Earthbound can be granted to the monster during character creation or obtained over the course of the chronicle.

RELIQUARY TRAITS

Each Earthbound resides inside a reliquary, a physical object. The nature of the reliquary forces different strengths and weaknesses onto the demon, just as a mortal body forces strengths and weaknesses onto the demon possessing it. In a sense, the reliquary is the body of the Earthbound, as well as being the focus through which it channels its dark powers. If the vessel is flawed, the creature is the weaker for it. Three different kinds of reliquary exist, and each has different features that apply to the Earthbound living within.

All reliquaries allow the Earthbound a maximum Faith score of 10 unless the Hoard Background (p. 76) increases it.

PERFECT RELIQUARIES

A perfect reliquary is one specifically crafted by mortal summoners (perhaps even with infernal assistance) to house and protect the spirit of the Earthbound. Such reliquaries are normally made

from precious or rare materials, as well as materials with an affinity for the demon for whom it's designed. A reliquary made for a corrupt Nusku might contain rubies, volcanic stone and other materials with an affinity for fire. A vessel for a Ninurtu might be a statue carved from petrified wood. In the process of creating the reliquary, the item's spiritual properties are mystically altered to make it an ideal vessel for the possessing demon, who can then focus its powers and senses through the object with ease.

The following features apply to perfect reliquaries:

- **Great Durability:** The reliquary is impossibly tough, able to withstand fire, explosions and the claws of its enemies. The soak rating of the reliquary is equal to the Earthbound's permanent Willpower rating. This soak pool is not rolled; instead, it automatically reduces the damage of any attack, just as if every die in the pool had come up as a success! The reliquary also has a number of health levels equal to the Earthbound's

CREATING PERFECT RELIQUARIES

Creating a perfect reliquary requires time, resources and (above all) ritual worship. A minimum Resources of 5 is required to obtain raw materials of the proper quality to create a perfect relic, though multiple individuals can "pool" their Resource Backgrounds to achieve the necessary level. Once the raw materials have been assembled, the reliquary must be constructed during a lengthy ceremony of craftsmanship and veneration.

Constructing the reliquary requires an extended Dexterity + Crafts roll (difficulty 8), with a number of successes equal to the demon's Faith rating. One roll may be made for every 12 hours of labor. A group of worshippers surrounds the artisan during the construction process, performing rituals of veneration that are intended to attune the reliquary to the demon's spirit. The individuals performing these rites of veneration must provide a number of *permanent* Willpower points equal to the demon's Faith rating to properly attune the reliquary. Once the object is properly constructed and the required number of Willpower points has been spent, the reliquary is ready to be inhabited by the demon.

Alternatively, demons who possess the evocation Anchor the Soul (Lore of the Spirit ●●●●) can create and bind demons into reliquaries without the need for expensive materials or veneration rituals. If the evocation is successful, the physical object that the demon is bound into becomes a perfect reliquary. For a more detailed set of optional rules regarding demonic relics, see Chapter Five of the *Demon Players Guide*.

permanent Faith rating. If the Earthbound's Willpower increases over the course of the chronicle, the durability of the reliquary increases as well.

- **Great Regeneration:** The Earthbound can slowly repair any damage its reliquary suffers. The demon can spend a point of Faith once per week to “heal” one health level of damage inflicted on its reliquary.

- **Manifestation:** With great effort, the Earthbound can manifest its apocalyptic form without needing to possess a mortal first. Doing so costs the Earthbound two points of temporary Faith per turn. See “That Hideous Strength” (page 79) for full details.

IMPROVISED RELIQUARIES

An improvised reliquary is one to which the Earthbound has attached itself out of desperation — binding itself into any convenient item to avoid being drawn back into the Abyss. Improvised reliquaries can take any form — from statues to pianos, computers to cars. Such reliquaries are clumsy, limited things compared to perfect reliquaries, because the spiritual properties of the improvised reliquary have not been altered to meet the needs of the Earthbound. Instead, the demon has altered its own spiritual nature to fit inside the object — the equivalent of cutting off your fingers so your hand will fit inside a glove.

Improvised reliquaries possess the following features:

- **Minor Durability:** The reliquary is tough, but not as impervious to damage as a perfect reliquary. The

soak rating of the reliquary to all attacks is equal to the Earthbound's *temporary* Willpower rating — so it will drop as the character spends Willpower — and this pool is rolled as normal. The reliquary also has a number of health levels equal to the Earthbound's permanent Faith rating.

- **Minor Regeneration:** The Earthbound can repair damage its reliquary suffers, but only very slowly. The demon can spend a point of Faith once per month to “heal” one health level of damage inflicted on its reliquary.

- **Limited Hoard:** An Earthbound character in an improvised reliquary cannot have more than three dots in the Hoard Background. Due to the limitations of the vessel, it simply cannot hold the great wealth of Faith that a perfect reliquary can contain.

- **Easy Manifestation:** While an improvised reliquary has many drawbacks, the Earthbound within has one advantage over its rivals. Because the demon has changed *itself* to fit the reliquary, it understands its true form and nature better than a demon within a perfect reliquary, who must grapple with mutations forced upon it from without. Therefore, the Earthbound in the improvised reliquary finds it easier to assume its apocalyptic body, and it can maintain this shape longer. It needs to spend only one point of temporary Faith each turn to assume its visage.



LOCATION

A rare few Earthbound dwell within not a single discrete object, but a location — a place sanctified, prepared and spiritually attuned by mortal summoners, just as such worshippers would create a perfect reliquary. The demon's essence suffuses the entire structure — be it a man-made place like a temple, or a natural structure like a cave or grove of trees. Like a perfect reliquary, the location probably bears some affinity to the Earthbound it houses. A corrupt Kishar might reside within a blasphemous temple of obsidian and jade, while an Earthbound Adad might possess a bottomless pool of water.

Earthbound who inhabit a given location gain the following features:

- **Durability:** A location is not as resistant to injury as a perfect reliquary is, but it can sustain far more damage. The vast majority of the entire location must be damaged or destroyed before the Earthbound is torn from its shelter. The demon's enemies will probably have to resort to explosives or other massive attacks to truly injure the Earthbound. The location has a soak pool equal to the demon's permanent Willpower rating, rolled as normal against any attacks. The location also has a number of health levels equal to the Earthbound's permanent Faith plus permanent Willpower ratings, doubled [or (Faith + Willpower) x 2]. Depending on the location, each health level might be equivalent to a specific feature — a pillar in the temple, a standing stone or a twisted tree — that is destroyed or broken by successful attacks.

- **Great Regeneration:** The Earthbound can slowly repair any damage its reliquary suffers. The demon can spend a point of Faith once per week to “heal” one health level of damage inflicted on the location. Again,

if the location's health levels correspond to physical features, each level healed equates to a feature being repaired — a wall reassembles, a tree grows in the space of a week. Note that mundane repair attempts cannot be used to heal the demon's reliquary in this fashion. If a cultist repairs a broken wall, the health level of damage the broken wall represents remains until removed by an expenditure of Faith.

- **Manifestation:** With effort, the Earthbound can manifest its apocalyptic body without needing to possess a mortal first. Doing so costs the Earthbound two points of temporary Faith per turn. The Earthbound can manifest its form at any point within the location, and move within the location at will, but it can move only a number of yards equal to its permanent Faith rating outside of the location. See “That Hideous Strength” (page 79) for full details.

- **Pervasiveness:** The Earthbound's spiritual essence expands to fit its enormous new body, and it is omnipresent within the location. The demon can sense every event that occurs within the location, regardless of impediment — it can see a meeting in a locked room while simultaneously listening to a whispered conversation on the other side of the location. Outside of the location, its senses reach only the normal distance.

- **Huge Size:** Due to the vast size of the reliquary, the Earthbound's spiritual form swells to fit. All Earthbound within a location gain the Huge Size feature in their apocalyptic form, in addition to the normal eight features and grotesqueries of their visage.

- **Immobility:** The great drawback of inhabiting a location, of course, is that the reliquary is completely immobile. If the Earthbound's enemies learn the location of its great reliquary, they can strike at will — and if the demon's defenses are not strong enough, its reliquary *will* be destroyed. Earthbound within locations must take great care in keeping the details of the reliquary secret, and they should invest in extensive defenses, both magical and mundane.

ANU PORT IN A STORM

When a discarnate demon binds itself into an object, it's desperate and doesn't have much choice about what item becomes its improvised reliquary. That's fine for the character, but the player should still have the option to decide on what vessel her character inhabits, just as she chose what mortal host the demon originally inhabited.

The Storyteller should decide on what items might be appropriate for the demon to inhabit, given the circumstances of its binding and the time period in which it happened, and let the player choose from a short list of possibilities. This choice will have little in-game effect, but it gives the player more control over the feel and style of her character.

When a demon binds itself into an item in play, the Storyteller decides on what items are available for the attempt, while the player decides which item the demon will attempt to inhabit.

NEW ARCHETYPES

The following Archetypes are available for all Earthbound characters to take as Natures or Demeanors. Normal **Demon** characters can also have these Archetypes, but beware the risks involved. Indulging these extreme personalities can lead to corruption, rage and rapid accumulation of Torment.

DESTROYER

The mere existence of this world is an affront, a mocking gesture from a Creator who thinks Himself your superior. Well, if God loves His creation so much, let's see what He think when you burn it to ashes. Nothing pleases your twisted soul as much as the mindless act of destruction — except for the deliberate

DEFINING BOUNDARIES

There is no minimum size for a location reliquary — after all, a mighty Earthbound can inhabit a relic the size of a crown or mirror, so it wouldn't have any problem fitting into a small house or ring of stones. Inhabiting a large location is more difficult, however, so only a powerful Earthbound can expand its awareness enough to inhabit and control every aspect of a large building or wide expanse of land.

No hard-and-fast system determines how large a location a character can inhabit, but in general, the larger the location is, the higher the Earthbound's permanent Faith rating must be. A character with a Faith of 3-5 could inhabit a small pond, a one-story building or a small ring of standing stones. An Earthbound with a Faith of 6-8 could inhabit a large structure like a Gothic church or apartment block, or a large space such as a copse of trees or a swamp. A powerful Earthbound with a Faith of 9 or 10 could possess an entire skyscraper, forest or massive lake.

The Storyteller and player should work together to decide what size would be appropriate for the character's reliquary, based on the character's Faith, the needs of the chronicle and the style and abilities of the Earthbound.

destruction of something precious to another being. Seeing the loss in the soul of another makes the carnage you wreak that much more exquisite.

— Regain Willpower when you completely destroy a precious or useful thing, be it a priceless artifact or a loving relationship.

ENSLAVER

Other beings are no more than illusions, puppets that exist solely to dance to your whim. If they resist your commands, it just makes their eventual enslavement all the sweeter. Seeing the dying flicker of free will and rebellion in the eyes of another is the closest you come to joy. You surround yourself with mortal servitors, but even demons and other supernatural beings will submit to your will soon enough.

— Regain Willpower when you subvert another's will to your own.

SADIST

The screams of the damned and the dying is the sweetest music your tormented soul can imagine. To inflict pain on others, and to see them writhe in agony, is all you live for, all that makes your corrupted existence meaningful. You kill without a second thought if necessary, but you prefer to let your victims live so that they can heal — then you can hurt them all over again.

— Regain Willpower whenever you deliberately cause great pain to another being — be it physical or spiritual, mental or emotional.

TIRANT

There are fools in this world who oppose your will, and they must be destroyed. All that matters to you is the unstoppable advance of your plans and the dominance of your will. Other beings exist only to serve you without question or to act as obstacles — and all obstacles must be crushed without mercy. Your word is Law. All shall obey.

— Regain Willpower whenever you destroy an obstacle to your will.

VIVISECTIONIST

Nothing in this world is as important as knowledge and the gathering of information — certainly not the lives of others or the foolishness of morality and ethics. How can you know the intricacies of the human nervous system if you don't flay open an experimental subject and tinker with her muscles? How can you learn the limits of human Faith without pushing a human past those limits — and recording the way in which he died? Experiments require subjects, and if those subjects suffer for your knowledge, that's not so inconvenient.

— Regain Willpower whenever your twisted experiments grant you new and meaningful information.

NEW ABILITIES

The following Abilities are available for all Earthbound characters to take during character creation, or to learn over the course of the chronicle. Some of these Abilities are appropriate for normal **Demon** characters, while others are not. These restricted Abilities are too closely related to the unique nature of the Earthbound to be mimicked by other demons.

INDOCTRINATION

This Skill represents the capability to change the heartfelt convictions and attitudes of others through brainwashing and psychological conditioning. More than simply lying or persuading another, Indoctrination allows the practitioner to permanently alter another person's personality, loyalty and beliefs. The Skill involves knowledge of effective psychological techniques, as well as familiarity with the medications, drugs and equipment useful to the brainwashing process. Using this Skill on a subject requires an extended roll. The player must gain more successes than the subject's Willpower score to successfully indoctrinate her with a new set of beliefs. The frequency of the Indoctrination rolls depends on the circumstances. If the indoctrinator can isolate the subject from outside influences and work on her 24 hours a day, the Storyteller may allow a roll once per day. If the indoctrinator

is forced to take a more subtle approach and can work on her subject for only an hour or so per day, the Storyteller may allow an Indoctrination roll only once per week. The difficulty of the roll depends on how isolated the subject is from outside influences that could reinforce her normal beliefs. Complete isolation (the subject is locked in a cell) would present a difficulty of 6. Partial isolation (the subject is removed from her normal surroundings and subjected to a culture sympathetic to the indoctrinator) would present a difficulty of 7. Limited isolation (the indoctrinator can only isolate the subject for brief periods of time) would present a difficulty of 8 or higher. Willpower points can be spent to gain automatic successes on this roll.

Once a subject has been successfully indoctrinated, her beliefs will remain altered until she can be de-programmed — using the Indoctrination process again to restore her prior beliefs.

- **Novice:** You can sometimes encourage others to fall in with the party line.
- **Practiced:** You usually have no problem convincing others to accept your version of “truth.”
- **Competent:** You can turn friend against friend, husband against wife, or brother against brother with enough time.
- **Expert:** You can easily mold others’ emotions, ideas and faith into whatever form you desire.
- **Master:** What label do you prefer — Big Brother or God?

Possessed by: Cult Leaders, Deprogrammers, Earthbound, Generals, Psychological Warfare Experts, Psychologists

Specialties: Chemical Aids, Harsh Methods, Hate, Love, Worship

RECALL

This Talent is available *only* to the Earthbound who escaped to Earth before the breaking of the Abyss; recently Earthbound demons may not possess it. Ancient Earthbound do not suffer from the same clouding of memory that other demons have, so their memories of the Fall and the Age of Wrath are detailed and full. What’s more problematic, though, is remembering the details of the Earthbound’s time in Creation after being summoned from Hell. The Earthbound do not perceive time the same way mortals do, they occasionally ignore meaningless events like wars and the rise of civilization, and they spend time in dreaming stasis when they run low on Faith. Therefore, the memory of an Earthbound can be patchy — not hazy like that of a normal demon, but simply unfocused.

The Recall Talent measures how extensive and focused the Earthbound’s memories are on a particular subject or topic relating to mortal history. Roll Intelligence or Wits (Storyteller’s choice) + Recall against a

difficulty of 6. Remembering simple facts requires only one success; obscure details or hidden secrets require more. Once it’s determined that the Earthbound does know about a specific fact, the player doesn’t need to make further Recall rolls to revisit the topic.

It’s important to note that Recall is not the same as the Legacy Background. Legacy measures how well a demon remembers the Time of Babel, the Time of Atrocities and other periods leading up to its imprisonment in Hell. The Earthbound remember this time clearly, though. Their memories are not clouded by the limitations of a mortal host’s brain, so they have no need of the Legacy Background. Recall, on the other hand, measures the character’s memories and experiences of life and mortal society *after* it was summoned from Hell. A low rating in Recall does not imply amnesia or a clouded memory — rather, it means that the Earthbound paid little attention to the mortal world and focused primarily on its own cult and plans.

- **Novice:** The lives of insects mean nothing to you, so you paid little attention to the events of the mortal world.
- **Practiced:** You possess sound recollection of human history — at least for those periods you found interesting.
- **Competent:** You kept a careful eye on mortal society throughout your existence, wary for signs of rivals and enemies.
- **Expert:** Human history is an open book to you, and few details have ever slipped your memory or evaded your notice.
- **Master:** No detail has ever escaped your unblinking eye. No fact has ever fled your memory. No secret has ever been hidden from your sight.

Possessed by: Earthbound

Specialties: Cults, Empires, Lost Cities, Rivals, Wars

TACTICS

The Earthbound have witnessed countless wars and millennia of conflict, and they have learned the secrets of battle. Tactics is a Skill measuring the character’s grasp of military strategy and the best way to fight a battle, regardless of the odds. A skilled tactician can hold back an army with a dozen soldiers or pierce a stronghold’s defenses with perfectly timed attacks. Tactics is useless for a lone warrior, though, who survives only through raw skill and power. Tactics is based on leadership and teamwork, and it requires the character to command a group of warriors or followers.

Successful Intelligence or Wits + Tactics rolls allow the player to ask the Storyteller questions about the forces opposing her followers before the battle begins. Each success yields a piece of information that the player can use to form battle plans. Alternatively,

the Storyteller might award the player a pool of automatic successes equal to the successes of the Tactics roll. These successes can be applied to any roll or rolls made in the ensuing battle, representing the planning and teamwork employed by the Earthbound's forces. Once used, these automatic successes are lost. Only one Tactics roll may be made per scene.

- **Novice:** "Be careful out there, okay."
- **Practiced:** "Protect your flank, and watch out for automatic fire."
- **Competent:** "Jackson, you take point. Henderson, you're on overwatch, and remember to stick to controlled bursts."
- **Expert:** "There's a high chance that their commander will call for a pincer movement — in which case, you need to..."
- **Master:** "Execute maneuver #46 after precisely 127 seconds have elapsed, which will remove their tertiary fire support..."

Possessed by: Earthbound, Generals, Mercenaries, Military Historians, Soldiers

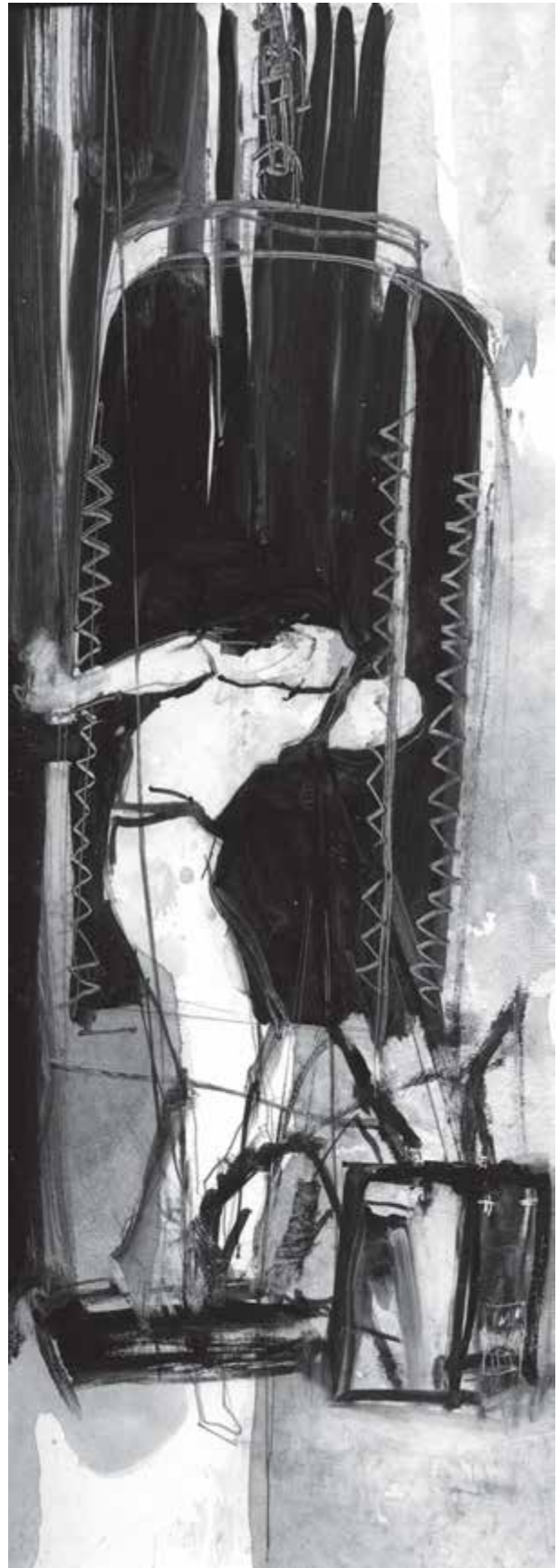
Specialties: Defense, First Strikes, Offense, Teamwork, Weapons

TORTURE

Torture is a dark and hideous Skill, made all the more insidious because the Earthbound learned it from their mortal followers. It took a mortal to invent murder, and it took a mortal to invent the notion of hurting someone until that someone cooperates. Torture allows the character to wrest information from an unwilling victim, usually through physical means — beatings, red-hot pokers, drops of water falling constantly on the victim's skull. Psychological torture can also be effective, using methods such as sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation and constant questioning that leaves the victim on the edge of madness.

Torturing a victim requires an extended, resisted roll. Roll Manipulation + Torture versus the victim's Willpower — the difficulty for both rolls is 7. If the Torture roll wins, the victim suffers one health level of lethal damage (for physical torture) or loses one point of temporary Willpower (for psychological torture). Once the torturer accumulates successes equal to the victim's permanent Willpower, the victim breaks and tells the torturer what she wants. If the victim's resistance roll botches, the character loses a point of permanent Willpower; if the Torture roll botches, the victim resists all further attempts at interrogation. Note that the victim can cease resistance at any time to spare further damage or loss of Willpower and confess what she knows.

- **Novice:** You're prepared to beat an answer out of someone.
- **Practiced:** With the right tools and a few weeks, you can coax answers out of most people.



- **Competent:** You mix a strong grasp of psychology with an inhuman gift for causing pain, and you can apply these skills to the strongest spy.
- **Expert:** You could break saints and martyrs into screaming pieces, given enough time.
- **Master:** Nothing that lives can withstand your clinical, brutal interrogation.

Possessed by: Black Ops Agents, Earthbound, “Military Advisors,” Serial Killers

Specialties: Improvised, Physical, Psychological, Rapid, Resisting Torture

NEW BACKGROUNDS

These Backgrounds are available for all Earthbound characters, both at character generation and through spending experience points. Normal **Demon** characters cannot take these Backgrounds unless they become Earthbound over the course of a chronicle. These advantages and powers are unique to the Dread Kings.

CODEx

Over the course of centuries and millennia, the Earthbound have sought desperately after two invaluable commodities. The first is, of course, a cult of worshippers to do the monster’s bidding and provide it with Faith. The second is the Celestial and True Names of other demons — not just those of Earthbound who oppose the character, but those of demons who are still in Hell. With the True Name of another demon, the Earthbound can have it summoned from Hell, enslave it or destroy it and devour its soul.

The Codex Background determines how successful the Earthbound has been in learning the True or Celestial Names of other demons. When the character encounters another demon — one who is Earthbound or inhabiting a mortal body — the player may make an Intelligence + Codex roll (difficulty 8). With two successes, the Earthbound knows the Celestial Name of the demon, gaining a slight advantage. With four or more successes, the Earthbound knows the True Name of the demon and can use it against this new rival or potential slave. Only one Codex roll can be made for any demon the Earthbound encounters. If the roll doesn’t receive enough successes, the Earthbound has simply never learned the spiritual identity of the newcomer.

A Codex roll can only be made when the Earthbound is in the presence of another demon. The Earthbound cannot simply sit around in its reliquary, trying to remember True Names and setting its worshippers off to summon demons. There are simply too many demons in Hell and on Earth, and the risks are too great to try contacting and controlling a random demon for no reason.

Note: Fallen who become Earthbound over the course of a chronicle cannot purchase this Background. Codex represents an accumulation of knowledge gained over hundreds of years of scrutiny — a luxury not available to newly formed Earthbound.

- X You have never paid attention to others of your kind, so you have learned a scant handful of True Names over the millennia of your existence.
 - You’re aware of the Names of a few of your former brethren, but you haven’t actively sought out further Names.
 - Your agents and slaves have searched Creation for clues and information on other demons, and you know the Names of a significant number of them.
 - Finding out the True Names of other demons has been an important priority for you, and you know the spiritual identities of hundreds of them.
 - You know the True Names of perhaps thousands of demons, and you can identify and control almost any demon you encounter.
 - Legends tell of a great book, older than any mortal can imagine, that records the True Name of every demon and angel. You are its author.

CULT

There is power in worship, power both mundane and mystical. Every Earthbound strives to amass a thriving cult of worshippers, and each actively seeks new members and believers for two reasons. First, dedicated worshippers provide the Earthbound with a horde of agents who are able to perform the tasks that it cannot while trapped inside its reliquary. Secondly, the size of the Earthbound’s cult determines how often its disciples can meet and perform their black masses. You gain Faith only when your worshippers perform a worship ritual, and such a ritual normally occurs on one of the specific days that is unholy to your cult. See the Worship Background (p. 77) to determine how much Faith you gain with each ritual.

Fallen characters who become Earthbound may purchase this Background with experience points as normal, but the Storyteller should require that any increase be justified by active recruitment efforts during play. Characters must actively work to increase their cults before additional dots can be purchased in this Background.

- X You have no worshippers, or perhaps just a handful of dedicated thralls. You have no source of Faith to draw upon, and you risk falling into stasis.
 - You have a small cult — perhaps three or four priests and a few dozen worshippers. The group is able to perform a ritual in your service only once a month.

- Your cult is not large, but it is of a manageable and controllable size — perhaps 10 priests and 20 or 30 followers. The cult is able to perform rituals in your honor twice a month.
- Your cult is large and probably has branches in several different cities, with more than 100 members. The cult is large enough so that a ritual is performed in your name once a week.
- Your cult is huge, with tentacles of control in several different countries. Several hundred mortals obey your every whim. A ritual is performed for you twice a week.
- Your followers are everywhere, and temples to your unholy power are hidden in almost every nation. More than 1,000 mortals live and die for your name, and black rituals are performed for your glory almost every day. Not a day goes by without your worshippers performing rituals, and you gain Faith thus once per day.

HOARD

Mortals bodies can hold only so much divine (or infernal) power, and they can channel only a small amount of spiritual energy. Inanimate objects have the capacity to hold much more Faith in reserve, giving even minor Earthbound a vast wellspring of Faith to draw upon for evocations and black miracles.

The character's Hoard Background measures how much temporary Faith its reliquary can hold at any one time. The higher the reliquary's quality is, the more attuned it is to the Earthbound's spirit, and the larger the reliquary is, the more Faith it can contain. Small reliquaries of highly valuable or appropriate materials can hold a great deal of Faith, as can large reliquaries,

and those few vessels that are both large and of high quality can hold enormous amounts. Due to their spiritually unattuned nature, improvised reliquaries are poor vessels for Faith. Characters who are bound to improvised reliquaries cannot have more than three dots in Hoard.

- X Your reliquary is small and particularly shoddy, and you have not honed its spiritual properties. You can hold a maximum of 10 points of temporary Faith.
- Your reliquary is small, and formed of simple materials, such as iron, stone, glass or plastic. You can hold a maximum of 15 points of temporary Faith.
- Your reliquary is larger, perhaps the size of a chest or casket. It is made from fine but not exceptional materials with only minor affinities to your nature — perhaps crude crystals, steel, marble and obsidian. You can hold a maximum of 20 points of temporary Faith.
- Your reliquary is either quite large, made of particularly fine materials or composed of material well attuned to your nature — perhaps rubies and volcanic stone to align with your mastery of fire. You can hold a maximum of 25 points of temporary Faith. This is the maximum Hoard rating possible for Earthbound in improvised reliquaries.
- Your reliquary is both large and valuable, a finely crafted object of precious and appropriate materials nearly the size of a man. You can hold a maximum of 30 points of temporary Faith.
- Enormous and jaw-droppingly valuable, a king's ransom of precious materials have gone into making your reliquary, an object larger than a man that is worth a fortune in its own right. You can hold a maximum of 35 points of temporary Faith.

CULT AND WORSHIP

Two Backgrounds govern the character's flow of Faith. Cult determines how often the character receives Faith, and Worship determines how much Faith it receives on each occasion.

It's possible for an Earthbound to have a cult, but not receive Faith from it — such a group has no organized rituals to channel and focus the Faith of its members. In game terms, this would be represented by having dots in Cult but none in Worship. The opposite case, however — having dots in Worship but not in Cult — is not possible. You can't have followers enacting worship rituals if you don't *have* any followers in the first place.

Earthbound characters *cannot* have dots in Worship if they do not have at least one dot in Cult as well. Likewise, a demon who has become Earthbound must gain at least one dot in Cult before it can develop any dots in Worship.

MASTERY

The Earthbound are perhaps the greatest masters of lore that Creation has ever seen — even though their lore is a twisted and corrupt thing that can only destroy. While the evocations of other demons are often limited in power and range, the evocations of the Earthbound — powered by staggering expenditures of Faith — can reach across a continent, strike down dozens of victims or set a city afire. The Mastery Background measures how much extra Faith the character can spend on enhancing its evocations. For full details of how the Earthbound enhance their evocations, see “That Hideous Strength” (p. 79).

- X Your character has not mastered his lore, so he cannot spend any Faith on enhancing evocations.

- You can spend one point of extra Faith to enhance an aspect of an evocation.
- You can spend two points of extra Faith to enhance an aspect of an evocation.
- You can spend three points of extra Faith to enhance an aspect of an evocation.
- You can spend four points of extra Faith to enhance an aspect of an evocation.
- You can spend five points of extra Faith to enhance an aspect of an evocation.

THRALLS

As well as the devoted followers that worship them, the Earthbound also have need of stronger, more capable agents — ones who are still loyal unto death to their dark master. These thralls might be mortals who have accepted the black gift of the Earthbound's power, or they could be infernal slaves, demons bound to the Earthbound through its knowledge of their True Names. With Storyteller permission, you might even have other supernatural beings as thralls (for more information on the effects of thralldom on other supernatural beings, see the **Demon Storytellers Companion**).

The Thralls Background replaces the Followers Background, which is available to normal **Demon** characters. It functions in a very similar way, but while the agents of the Followers Background are normal mortals, those provided by the Thralls Background are much more competent and powerful. They are still insects compared to the power of their Earthbound master, but they are a match for any skilled mortal or even for the average demon. The Storyteller and player should work together to decide on the capabilities of the character's Thralls. Infernal slaves are roughly equal to a starting **Demon** character, while empowered mortals are skilled examples of their kind. See "Damned Souls" (p. 98) for more details.

- X You have no thralls, mortal or supernatural, and you can work only through normal agents and followers.
- You have one thrall.
 - You have two thralls.
 - You have three thralls.
 - You have four thralls.
 - You have five thralls.

WORSHIP

It's not enough to merely have a cult of followers and servants. Such pawns might be useful, but they don't provide the Earthbound with what it desperately needs — Faith. The Earthbound gains Faith only if its followers perform a long, complex and symbolic worship ritual, which culminates in the Earthbound gaining Faith equal to the number of participants. The Worship Background determines how many worshippers of the

Earthbound participate in each ritual. Other members might be involved, but only on the periphery, and their Faith does not flow to the demon.

Worship also measures how powerful the veneration rituals of the cult are — the shorter, less powerful rites that can grant the Earthbound's player extra dice for evocation rolls. For more details on veneration rituals, see page 69.

- X Your followers have yet to create any worship or veneration rituals, and they cannot offer their Faith to you or assist your evocations.
- Two followers at a time perform private, relatively short rituals. You gain two points of Faith from each ritual. Veneration rituals can last up to two hours and provide up to two extra dice.
 - Four cultists perform a longer ritual that last several hours. You gain four points of Faith from each ritual. Veneration rituals can last up to four hours and provide up to four extra dice.
 - Six cultists form the core of a ritual that lasts many hours. You gain six points of Faith from each ritual. Veneration rituals can last up to six hours and provide up to six extra dice.
 - Eight cultists take turns performing complex rites over the course of more than a day. You gain eight points of Faith from each ritual. Veneration rituals can last up to eight hours and provide up to eight extra dice.
 - Ten supplicants engage in a long, incredibly complex ritual that goes on for many days. You gain 10 points of Faith from each ritual. Veneration rituals can last up to 10 hours and provide up to 10 extra dice.

ALTERED BACKGROUNDS

As well as new Backgrounds, the Earthbound have slightly altered versions of some existing Backgrounds. Most **Demon** Backgrounds are designed to be applied to demons in mortal bodies, who can interact normally with mortal society. The Earthbound can still take advantage of these Backgrounds, but in their own way, which requires some minor alterations.

- **Allies:** The allies of normal **Demon** characters are of similar competence to the character — either another demon or a mortal with special skills and abilities. Such characters are hardly the equals of the Earthbound, who see these beings as far less than allies; these characters are better represented by the Thralls Background. If an Earthbound has the Allies Background, its allies are of similar power — other Earthbound, extremely powerful and corrupt demons in mortal bodies or supernatural horrors of another kind. The Earthbound rarely have strong allies, since they are almost all fiercely territorial and power-hungry. The allies of this Background are

much less loyal and friendly than usual. Most Earthbound think of allies as “associates,” and they won’t hesitate to betray those associates if such an act becomes useful.

- **Influence:** While normal **Demon** characters can wield personal influence, through rising in mortal society or possessing the body of an established powerbroker, that option is denied the Earthbound. For these characters, the Influence Background allows for only indirect influence, such as commanding mortal thralls in positions of social or political power. The result is the same — the character can pull strings throughout mortal society — but the Earthbound can do so only at a remove. If the right thralls or worshippers are neutralized by its enemies, your character’s Influence might fall despite your best efforts.

- **Resources:** Similar to Influence, the Earthbound cannot directly control whatever fortune it might have amassed over the centuries. If it possesses worldly wealth, it must place that wealth into the hands of mortals before it can be used. A well-placed assassination attempt or computer hacking strike can remove the Earthbound’s control over its fortune, and it might not be able to fight back. Money means nothing to the Earthbound, of course, but they recognize the use it has in influencing mortal society and controlling human pawns.

URGES

All Earthbound feel the pull of the physical world deep inside their shattered souls. Their bodiless existence, chained to an inanimate object, is profoundly unnatural, which is part of the reason that the Earthbound become tormented and twisted monsters. The Earthbound yearn to be free from their prisons, to walk the blood-soaked earth and soar through smoke-filled skies. They long to taste the flesh of their enemies and hear the adoring prayers of their worshipping armies.

This desire to wear a physical form — and to control and dominate the physical world — manifests in the Earthbound as three Urges. Each Urge is a trait with a range of one to five dots, measuring the character’s desire and need for a particular kind of gratification and stimulus.

The Urges of the Earthbound are more than simple desires; they are sources of power. When the Earthbound does assume a physical form — either through possessing a mortal host or directly manifesting its apocalyptic body — its Urges become sources of strength, motivating the creature and pushing it beyond the bounds of mortal possibility. In a mortal body, the Urges of the Earthbound elevate the Attributes of the host, even to superhuman levels.

Whenever your character takes a physical form — temporarily possessing a mortal body or assuming apocalyptic form — you can divide the dots of each Urge among the Attributes of the appropriate type. Each Urge dot increases a specific Attribute by one dot, and you can push the body’s Attributes to 6 dots or even higher. When in a mortal host, the bonus dots from Urges are applied to the mortal’s Attributes. When manifesting your character’s apocalyptic body directly, without possessing a mortal first, the bonus dots are applied to your *character’s* Attributes.

The bonus Attribute dots supplied by the Urges can be applied any way you like, and they don’t have to be applied the same way twice. You might just enhance the Strength of your current host, then improve the Dexterity and Stamina of the next one instead. The Attribute increase is applied as long as you stay in that form, but it is set at the time you take on that form. You can’t enhance the Wits of your host for the first hour of possession, then shift the bonus dots to Perception afterward.

FLESH

The Urge of Flesh is an overwhelming desire for physical sensation, and to perform physical acts. A character with a high Urge wants to run, to eat and to feel pain. Such a character also wants to inflict pain on others, smell their fear and taste their blood. When possessing mortal forms, Earthbound with a high Urge rating can become rampaging monsters, gluttons, sexual predators or frenzied whirlwinds of physical action. The bonus dots from the Urge of Flesh are applied to the Physical Attributes: Strength, Dexterity and Stamina.

- Ascetic
- Hungry
- Lusty
- Addicted
- Frenzied

THOUGHT

The Urge of Thought is a craving for intellectual stimulation, taken to fetishistic extremes. Earthbound *think*, of course, but in alien ways that hold no satisfaction. They long to experience linear time, to interpret beauty and horror through a physical brain and to ferret out the answers that elude them in their inanimate cages. Earthbound with a strong Urge of Thought exhibit overwhelming curiosity about things, asking questions and demanding immediate answers. They might be found watching seven televisions at once or vivisectioning a living subject to study her anatomy and listen to her screams. The bonus dots from the Urge of Thought apply to the Mental Attributes: Perception, Intelligence and Wits.

- Disinterested
- Curious
- Intrigued
- Compelled
- Obsessed

EMOTION

While the Earthbound feel emotions of a sort — dark feelings like rage, hatred and a lust for destruction — these emotions are cold and hollow things, more like political positions than true feelings. A character with a high Urge of Emotion wants to really experience these feelings and to manipulate the feelings and passions of others, playing with their emotions like toys. In a mortal body, Earthbound with a strong Urge can become heartbreakers, thundering demagogues, whispering betrayers or sadistic torturers. The bonus dots from the Urge of Emotion apply to the Social Attributes: Appearance, Manipulation and Charisma.

- Distant
- Desirous
- Passionate
- Enflamed
- Consumed

THAT HIDEOUS STRENGTH

Like their half-mortal brethren, the Earthbound have a number of supernatural abilities. In fact, one could say that the Earthbound have *only* supernatural abilities, since they lack a mortal body that can do such simple, natural things as walk, talk and breathe. Some of the powers of the Earthbound are identical to those of other demons, while others are variations or amplifications of those powers. Many are unique to the Dread Kings.

FAITH

Faith is life itself to the fallen, and it's even more important to the Earthbound. Without Faith, the Earthbound is just a helpless spirit trapped inside an object for eternity, a fate no better than being locked within the Abyss. With the life-giving power of mortal Faith, the Earthbound can perform blasphemous miracles greater than any demon could imagine, but this power comes with a corresponding cost in spiritual energy. Earthbound are constantly greedy for Faith, needing more and more to remain active and to further their plans, and it's far harder for the Dread Kings to gather Faith than it is for their fallen cousins.

WORSHIP AND FAITH

The fallen can gather Faith from individual mortals, focusing the Faith of one mortal into themselves

through an agreed-upon pact or an act of ravaging. Both of these options are impossible for the Earthbound, who require far more concentrated and focused Faith than any one mortal can provide.

Instead, the Earthbound gain Faith through the deliberate worship of their mortal followers. When a group of human followers performs a ritual act of worship for their dark master, the Earthbound receives Faith — one point for every mortal involved in the ritual.

Obviously, the Earthbound would prefer it if their followers performed rituals every day, even every hour, with hundreds of participants. Unfortunately, it's not the ritual itself that grants the Faith, it's the belief of the mortals involved. Mortals *need* long, involved rituals, full of sacrifices and self-flagellation, that can only be performed on certain days and in certain places. By making the ritual so important and so difficult, the mortals focus all their will and emotional strength into worship. Only such a high level of devotion could justify all the difficulty and time involved. It's this devotion to worship that concentrates the mortal's Faith and allows the Earthbound to channel that Faith to itself through the ritual. Similarly, rituals need to stay fairly small, even for a large cult with many members, in order for the participants to feel as if they have a personal connection to the Earthbound. That feeling of closeness, of intimacy, puts the worshipper in the right mental and spiritual state to offer his Faith to his master. Characters with a high Cult Background gain Faith more often, because there are simply more rituals being performed more often by separate cabals and covens of worshippers. Characters with a high Worship Background gain more Faith from each ritual, because the rites are longer and involve more participants. Each Earthbound has a unique set of rituals, designed by mortal priests ancient and modern.

The player and Storyteller need to work together to determine just when rituals are performed to supply the Earthbound with Faith. The Cult Background shows how *often* the rites are performed, but not the day, time or circumstances. Most rituals are performed at times that are meaningful to the character's worshippers: the first day of the month, the first night of the new moon, at the stroke of midnight and so on. Other factors might also determine the details of the ritual. Perhaps it must be performed in a certain location that is accessible only at certain times. The player and Storyteller should work out the details, pinning down which specific days the Earthbound receives its Faith and at what times. Note that the Earthbound receives this offer of Faith only upon the *completion* of a worship ritual. If the ritual is stopped before the process is completed, the offered Faith is lost.

Example: *Martha is playing an Earthbound character in Greg's chronicle. Her character is an Earthbound*



Neberu of the Ninsun visage, and the two of them feel that it makes sense for her character's cult to adhere to astrological rules and patterns. With a Cult Background of 2 and Worship Background of 3, Martha's character receives six points of Faith twice a month. Together, Martha and Greg decide that her character's followers perform their rites on the sixth and 16th day of each month — a time when a special, blasphemous constellation of stars appears on the horizon. The rites are timed so that they end at midnight, which is when Martha's character will receive its Faith. Greg also rules that the rituals must always be performed outdoors and away from the city's bright lights, so that the cultists can watch the stars throughout the rite.

VENERATION RITUALS

As well as major worship rituals, which generate Faith for the Earthbound, there are also minor veneration rituals which give a smaller boost to the character. The Earthbound cannot ravage thralls for bonus evocation dice as the fallen do, but they can gain extra dice for their evocations from veneration rituals, which provide a small amount of diffuse Faith that aids in evoking their twisted lore. A veneration ritual requires a group of worshippers, but it takes only hours to perform rather than days. At the end of the ritual, the Earthbound receives bonus dice equal to the hours taken performing the ritual, up to a limit of

the character's permanent Faith. These bonus dice must immediately be used to perform an evocation, or they are lost as the mortal Faith (already tenuous) simply dissipates uselessly. The Earthbound knows when a veneration ritual is being performed and can plan to use the bonus dice when it concludes.

The character's Worship Background determines just how many hours a veneration ritual can last, and the maximum number of extra dice that can be gained from the ritual. The character's Faith rating is still a maximum cap on the amount of extra dice that can be gained. If the ritual lasts 10 hours and your character has a Faith of 6, you still gain only six bonus dice.

Unlike worship rituals, veneration rituals aren't performed regularly. Your character will need to arrange for the ritual to be performed at the appropriate hour so that it can benefit from it. If the ritual is disrupted before it ends — perhaps by the machinations of the character's enemies — you gain no bonus dice, even if the ritual lasted several hours before its premature end. Depending on circumstances, the Storyteller may rule that a veneration needs to be performed at a specific location, must incorporate specific equipment or materials, or have other elements that complicate the ritual (and lead to more story possibilities).

Example: *The cultists that worship Martha's character can also perform veneration rituals lasting up to six hours to provide her with extra evocation dice. Greg suggests that, like the worship rituals, these veneration rituals must also be performed at night, away from overpowering natural lights. Martha's not crazy on that; it puts a pretty severe limit on when she can get the extra dice for evocations. She suggests that instead, the cultists perform veneration rituals by mimicking constellations — standing in specific patterns and arrangements that must slowly move in specific ways over the course of the rite — but that the ritual can be performed at any time. Greg thinks it over and agrees. The extra flexibility is balanced by the increased danger of error or disruption to the precise, highly structured ritual.*

STASIS

Without Faith, a fallen demon is simply a mortal with the potential for power. Without Faith, an Earthbound is nothing; it almost ceases to exist. An Earthbound character without a point of temporary Faith in its pool risks falling into a state of stasis — a timeless hibernation where the character can do little but dream of rising again. Each day the Earthbound is without any temporary Faith, it must spend a point of temporary Willpower, and it cannot recover Willpower by fulfilling its Nature. When the character runs out of temporary Willpower, it falls into stasis and is helpless and asleep within its reliquary.

To recover from stasis, the Earthbound needs Faith. Even a single point of Faith will rouse it from its slumber and allow it to perform evocations and enthrall mortals. Of course, to receive Faith, the Earthbound needs followers, and if its cult has withered away during its sleep, the creature might never return from stasis. Perhaps there are still powerful Earthbound sleeping beneath the earth, their reliquaries buried or standing in museums, waiting for a desperate mortal to take up a forgotten faith and supply it with worship once more.

FAITH AS A WEAPON

Like the fallen, the Earthbound need mortal Faith as a source of power, but mortals can use Faith against them as a weapon. The Earthbound are just as vulnerable to mortal Faith as the fallen, if not more so. While their reliquaries aren't as easy to damage as a mortal host's body, an Earthbound cannot defend itself against the power of Faith without using its servants or powers.

If an Earthbound finds itself on holy ground — a place with a Faith potential, such as a church or shrine — it is assaulted and damaged by the burning power of that Faith. If the demon is in a physical body — possessing a mortal host or manifesting its apocalyptic body — then it suffers a number of health levels of lethal damage equal to the site's

Faith potential each turn, which can be soaked as normal. A Willpower roll (difficulty 7) must be made for the Earthbound each turn to remain on the holy ground while suffering damage.

If the Earthbound's reliquary is placed on holy ground, the danger is much greater, as the mortal Faith rips apart the binding magic and spiritual protection of the object. The Earthbound takes the same damage as before: a number of health levels of lethal damage equal to the site's Faith potential each turn. This damage cannot be soaked, and the damage is applied to the reliquary's health levels, not the character's. As a last-ditch defense to hold its reliquary together, the Earthbound can spend Faith to temporarily negate the damage. Each point of temporary Faith it spends negates one health level of lethal damage for that turn. Eventually, though, even the strongest Earthbound will run out of Faith, and its reliquary will be destroyed, casting the creature back into the Abyss (see "Death of the Undying"). To prevent this outcome, the Earthbound must get its reliquary out of the holy ground. Its thralls may do so, or the demon might have to manifest its apocalyptic body and carry the reliquary out in person. If it does so, the Earthbound will start to suffer damage as described previously.

Holy items also have the potential to do harm to the Earthbound, or to its reliquary, in much the same way as holy ground does. If an item with a Faith potential is held against the skin of an Earthbound in physical form — a mortal host or an apocalyptic body — then the character suffers a number of lethal damage levels equal to the item's Faith potential, although this damage can be soaked. If the item is held against the character's reliquary, then the object takes the damage and it cannot be soaked, although the Earthbound can spend Faith to temporarily negate the damage.

Mortal prayers can also be used against the Earthbound — indeed, mortals developed their prayers as a defense against the predations of these creatures when they first returned to Creation. For the most part, prayers affect the Earthbound just as they affect the fallen, with the following changes:

- **Banishment:** The demon cannot enter the area whence it has been banished, whether in its apocalyptic body or in a mortal host. If the character's reliquary lies within that area, the Earthbound's mind remains within the object, and it can perform evocations and invocations as normal, but it cannot manifest its apocalyptic body within that area until the prayer's effects fade.
- **Abjuration:** The Earthbound cannot enter the area under its own power. If someone else brings the character's reliquary into the area, it can operate from

the area as normal, but it cannot manifest an apocalyptic body until the prayer fades.

- **Binding:** If a prayer of binding is performed against the Earthbound while the demon is in a physical body, it is trapped as normal, although it always has the option of withdrawing its consciousness back into its reliquary. If the prayer is performed on the reliquary, the Earthbound is trapped within the item, and it cannot possess a mortal host or manifest an apocalyptic form for the prayer's duration. It can fight back with evocations, though.

- **Exorcism:** If performed on an Earthbound possessing a mortal host, this prayer forces the character out of the mortal's body and casts it back into its reliquary. The mortal is still doomed to die, of course, burnt out by the character's awful power. This prayer has no effect upon the Earthbound's reliquary. The spiritual reshaping of the reliquary is a power stronger than mortal Faith, and no amount of prayer can sever the link between the Earthbound and its nonliving body.

INNATE POWERS

As well as the powers of their Faith and evocations, the Earthbound also possess inherent powers, which can be used as long as the character has at least one point of temporary Faith in its pool. For abilities that require a Faith roll, the player always rolls a pool equal to the character's permanent Faith rating, not its temporary Faith.

IMMUNITY TO MIND-CONTROL

Like all demons, the Earthbound are immune to any form of mind-control or supernaturally induced fear.

IMMUNITY TO POSSESSION

The Earthbound cannot be possessed. Furthermore, while a fallen demon can be forced from her mortal host if she's out of temporary Faith, this cannot happen to the Earthbound. Once it has established an existence within its reliquary, no other demon or spirit can oust it from that object and move in.

RESISTANCE TO ILLUSION

The Earthbound have an even greater capability to see through illusions than other demons do since their senses rely on supernatural perception and not mortal sense organs (unless they're possessing a mortal body). Roll Perception + Alertness to see through illusions, just as other demons do (**Demon** p. 171), but the difficulty of this roll decreases by one if the Earthbound is residing within its reliquary at the time.

RESISTANCE TO LETHAL DAMAGE

When in its apocalyptic form — whether manifesting it from raw Faith or channeling its power over

a mortal host — the Earthbound can use its Stamina to soak lethal damage.

The reliquaries of the Earthbound also have great resistance to physical damage. See p. 69, for details.

HEALING PHYSICAL DAMAGE

The Earthbound are bodiless spirits, but those spirits can still be injured or destroyed. Like the fallen, the spirit of an Earthbound has eight health levels, though they can usually only be injured while manifesting an apocalyptic body. When possessing a mortal host, the Earthbound uses the mortal's health levels in place of its own.

The Earthbound do not heal naturally; their injuries heal only through the expenditure of Faith. By spending one Faith point, the Earthbound can heal all bashing damage it has suffered or one health level of lethal damage. By spending *three* points of Faith, it can heal one health level of aggravated damage. The Earthbound can heal injuries to its own spirit or to the body of a mortal it's possessing, but it must heal these bodies separately. If both its spirit and vessel are injured, it must heal each with separate expenditures of Faith.

The Earthbound can also repair damage inflicted on its reliquary, but doing so is a much slower process. See p. 70 for details.

INVOCATIONS AND ENSLAVEMENT

Like the fallen, the Earthbound can communicate with demons or with their mortal thralls no matter how far apart they are. Earthbound use the same system for doing so as other demons do (see pages 171-172 of the **Demon** core rules for details), with the minor change that the character does not need to physically speak or whisper to use this power. It can simply direct its thoughts out while within its reliquary.

The Earthbound can use invocations in a way the fallen cannot, though — to *enslave* other demons. By throwing the vast spiritual weight of its misshapen soul and unstoppable will onto one of the fallen (but *not* another Earthbound), the Earthbound can force that demon to obey its commands, ensuring obedience — but not loyalty — through use of the demon's True Name. The Earthbound can attempt to enslave a demon only if it knows the target's True Name; her Celestial Name is not potent enough to be useful.

Enslaving another demon is a long, slow process that requires the assistance of the Earthbound's followers, who channel their Faith into boosting the will of their master. The cultists engage in a variant form of a normal veneration roll, for which the Earthbound must be present (in its reliquary). The cultists must perform the ritual for at least a number of hours equal to the target's Faith rating; if the ritual ends early, the

enslavement attempt fails. Note that there's no way for the Earthbound to know the Faith rating of its target since that's a game mechanic that can't be known or measured by characters. It simply has to estimate how much time is needed, based on its knowledge of the target demon. If the Earthbound's Worship rating won't permit a long enough ritual, then the Earthbound cannot enslave that target until its Worship rating increases.

When the ritual is completed, the Earthbound must invoke the target demon's True Name and make strong contact, requiring at least three successes on a Faith roll. Once this initial contact has been made, the Earthbound can attempt to overwhelm the demon's will, yoking her into service with her True Name. The demon must be relatively nearby, within a number of miles equal to the Earthbound's Faith rating. While invocations are not normally limited by range, an enslavement attempt requires close proximity, lest the binding energy of the ritual dissipate. The player spends a point of temporary Willpower and makes a Faith roll (difficulty 8); the target resists with a Willpower roll. (The player can spend a Faith point for an automatic success, and the target can spend Willpower in the same way.) The player of the Earthbound does *not* get any bonus dice from the veneration ritual; it merely provides the opportunity to make the roll in the first place, rather than assisting in the attempt. Similarly, the Earthbound cannot arrange for another veneration ritual to be performed simultaneously to provide bonus dice.

If the Earthbound gains more successes than the demon does, it smashes through her resistance and enslaves her. A failed attempt means that the demon is not affected but is warned about the Earthbound's attempt to control her. Further enslavement attempts can be made, but the demon will receive bonus dice equal to her Faith on any subsequent attempts as her spirit erects subconscious defenses to keep the Earthbound away. If the Earthbound player botches the roll, the character can *never* attempt to enslave that demon again. If the roll for the fallen demon botches, that character loses a point of permanent Willpower.

Once the Earthbound has enslaved the demon, it can give her orders via invocation. The demon must obey these orders, even against her will. The use of her True Name makes her soul and body obey even as her mind cries out in rebellion. If she tries to resist, the Earthbound player makes a Faith roll, while the demon player resists with a Willpower roll (and can spend Willpower for an automatic success). If the demon gains more successes, she can stop herself from following that specific command, though she still remains bound. If the Earthbound player botches the roll, the demon target gains a

point of temporary Willpower. If the demon fails, she loses a point of *permanent* Willpower.

The only way to escape this domination is for the demon to alter her True Name. Doing so is difficult (usually involving a major change in nature), and it rarely happens through deliberate action. Changing physical hosts or a major change of Nature might do the trick, however. Legends persist of lost rituals that change the True Name of demons, albeit at great cost.

SUPERNATURAL AWARENESS

Like the fallen, the Earthbound can sense supernatural energies at work within a large area. This ability works in exactly the same way as it does for the fallen (*Demon*, p. 172).

LORE MASTERY

The Earthbound are the twisted masters of lore. Denied physical bodies, the Dread Kings compensated by learning new and more powerful ways to directly control Creation through their evocations. They have learned to evoke effects of incredible intensity and power, but doing so can cost massive amounts of Faith.

As well as performing evocations as normal, you can choose to enhance an evocation after successfully rolling for its effect. Only characters with at least one dot in the Mastery Background can enhance evocations in this fashion.

To enhance an evocation, increasing its range, area of affect, number of targets or other such variables, the player spends Faith after making a successful evocation roll. Each point of Faith spent increases a specific aspect of the evocation tenfold: 10 times the range, affecting up to 10 targets instead of one, etc. Spending two points increases the aspect 100 times, spending three points increases it 1,000 times and so on. If multiple aspects of the evocation could be enhanced, each must be enhanced with Faith points separately. Only those aspects that affect the parameters of the evocation can be affected; aspects relating to the power of the evocation cannot be improved. Therefore, you could affect the range of a combat-related evocation by spending Faith, but not the damage it inflicts. The amount of Faith you may spend on an aspect is determined by the Mastery Background. You can spend Faith equal to the rating in the Background in each aspect of the evocation. So with a Mastery rating of 2, you could spend two points of Faith to increase the duration and two more points to increase the range, but you could not spend three or more points on either aspect. The duration of evocations that last for an entire scene may not be increased in this fashion.

Example: *Belial possesses the Lore of Storms and Mastery 4, and he wishes to lash Los Angeles with a hurricane. Performing Invoke the Storm, the Earthbound receives nine successes, so Belial can direct winds that*

have a Strength pool of nine dice, and lightning bolts that inflict 10 dice of lethal damage pepper the area of effect. The storm has a radius in yards equal to Belial's Faith, and it lasts for a number of turns equal to the Faith rating as well. With a Faith of 8, this means the storm has a radius of eight yards and lasts eight turns. Each point of Faith Belial spends increases the radius or the duration tenfold. By spending four points of Faith, Belial increases the radius to 80,000 yards, for a storm about 91 miles wide; with another 4 Faith, the storm lasts 80,000 turns, or approximately two and three quarter days. Belial cannot spend Faith to increase the Strength of the wind or the damage of the lightning bolts — just the duration and area of the storm.

BODILESS IMMORTALITY

As bodiless spirits, the Earthbound have a number of advantages over mortals and the fallen. They do not need to sleep or eat, and their bodies do not age. They are not affected by temperature extremes, disease, poison or any other environmental hazard that would not damage an inanimate object.

Within its reliquary, an Earthbound can sense its immediate vicinity, despite a lack of sensory organs. The Earthbound can see and hear around its reliquary within a radius equal to its Faith in yards. The character has 360° vision — it can look in every direction around itself simultaneously — and it can perceive perfectly clearly even in total darkness. Walls, smoke and other obstacles block its sight, however.

Within a mortal host, the Earthbound can be affected by environmental hazards (*Demon*, pp. 262-263), but it has some protection against them, just like any other demon does. It uses the sight and hearing of its host while in this form, and it suffers the limitations of such, but it also gains the other senses of the host.

FORCING WORSHIP

Few sane mortals would willingly serve — let alone venerate — a monstrous spirit that seeks to enslave the human race. Yet hundreds, even thousands of mortals around the world worship the Earthbound with fanatical devotion. Some of these debased souls have willingly embraced enslavement to the Earthbound, thanks to madness or an insatiable greed for power. Others, though, worship because they have no choice. Their Earthbound masters have forced a sort of veneration onto these unfortunate souls.

When an Earthbound encounters a mortal (or group of mortals), it can attempt to break their wills, overwhelming their souls with horror in much the same way as a high-Torment fallen might attempt to horrify mortals and reap Faith from them. Rather than giving up Faith, though, those mortals confronted by the Earthbound might come to worship it as a god, a figure of overwhelming evil and power that they cannot help but venerate with fear and prayers.

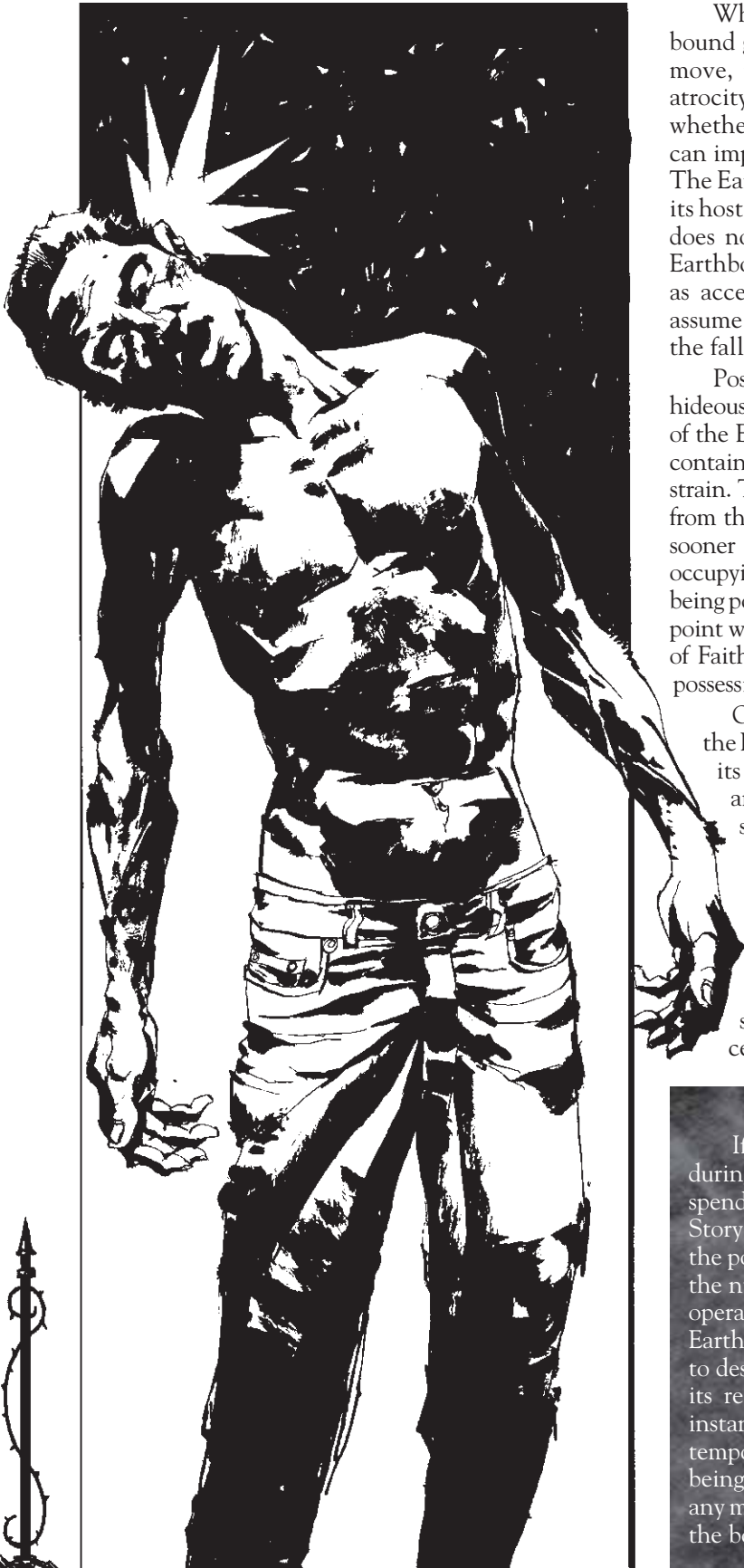
To forcibly convert a mortal to its worship, the Earthbound must reveal its corrupt power to its victim. Doing so might entail a display of infernal power, a mind-snapping evocation or simply revealing its apocalyptic form. The player then makes a Faith roll (difficulty 7) in a resisted roll against the mortal's Willpower. Willpower points may be spent to generate automatic successes for either roll. If the Earthbound gains more successes, the mortal is overwhelmed by the power of the monster and is filled with the need to worship and placate the awful being. If the roll for the Earthbound botches, the mortal is not affected, and he can never be converted in the future. If the roll for the mortal botches, the mortal loses a point of permanent Willpower and gains a temporary derangement (*Demon*, p. 260) at the Storyteller's discretion. Once forcibly converted to the demon's worship, the hapless mortal remains loyal to his new master unless he is de-programmed through a process of Indoctrination (p. 72).

Those mortals forcibly converted to the Earthbound's service are simply normal human beings, as are those who willingly take up the monster's cause. They do not gain any supernatural abilities, nor does the Earthbound gain any specific affinity with them. These forced converts cannot be contacted via invocation, nor do they provide Faith if they are involved in a worship or veneration ritual. Aside from gaining a loyal follower, there is one important way in which the Earthbound can use its new servant, though. It can attempt to possess him entirely, taking full control of his body and mind for a short time.

POSSESSION

The great weakness of the Earthbound is their immobility. They are trapped within inanimate objects, unable to move or interact with the outside world without using evocations. To achieve its goals, the Earthbound must use mortal slaves and worshippers as proxies and agents, but such creatures are weak and fallible, and they could fall to the character's enemies. When the Earthbound needs to take a direct role in a venture, it has the option of possessing one of its worshippers for a short time, at the cost of that mortal's inevitable death.

Possession is a fairly simple process, but it can be performed only upon one of its converts: a servant of the Earthbound prepared to sacrifice her life for her monstrous lord. The worshipper must touch the Earthbound's reliquary and allow the creature's essence to flow into her body. Doing so requires a Faith roll for the Earthbound; if the roll is successful, the Earthbound possesses the worshipper's body completely. A failed roll can be attempted again in the next turn. A botch means that the Earthbound can never possess that particular worshipper.



When possessing a worshipper's body, the Earthbound gains all the benefits of a mortal form. It can move, talk, eat, fight and indulge all its tastes for atrocity. The Earthbound uses the mortal's Attributes, whether they are higher or lower than its own, but it can improve those Attributes with its Urges (p. 78). The Earthbound can also access all of the Abilities of its host and use them even if they are ones the demon does not possess or possesses at a lower level. The Earthbound retains all of its normal Abilities, as well as access to its Hoard of Faith points, and it can assume its apocalyptic form with a Faith roll, just as the fallen do.

Possessing a mortal comes with a cost, though—the hideous and inevitable death of the mortal. The power of the Earthbound is too much for any mortal body to contain, and the body will soon fall apart under the strain. The life span of the mortal is measured in hours from the moment of possession, and she will die even sooner if the Earthbound exercises its power while occupying her form. The mortal will die 48 hours after being possessed. This life span can be extended past this point with a successful Faith roll each hour. Each point of Faith spent by the Earthbound over the course of possession reduces the mortal's life span by an hour.

Once this life span is reached, the body dies and the Earthbound's consciousness returns instantly to its reliquary. The mortal's body always expires in an obvious and often grotesque fashion, consumed by her master's power. This consumption usually occurs in a manner congruent with the Earthbound's primary lore. A mortal possessed by a Nusku might erupt into flames, while one possessed by a Kishar might turn to stone. A mortal possessed by an Aruru might burst apart with poisoned tumors, while one possessed by a Namtar could simply crumble into centuries-old dust.

POSSESSION AND COMBAT

If the possessed character's life span runs out during combat — perhaps due to the character spending Faith on an offensive evocation — the Storyteller should secretly make a Stamina roll for the possessed character (difficulty 8). The result is the number of turns left for the possessed body to operate, after which it will die. This means that the Earthbound doesn't know if it has enough time left to destroy its enemies before being pulled back to its reliquary. If the roll botches, the body dies instantly, and the Earthbound loses a point of temporary Willpower from the disorientation of being pulled from its host. If the Earthbound spends any more Faith in this period, or makes a Faith roll, the body dies instantly.

If the Earthbound leaves its mortal host before it has to, the mortal is still doomed, and she will die when her time is up, no matter what mundane or supernatural medicines and treatments are applied. Some worshippers might still remain loyal to their master, eagerly looking forward to their impending destruction; others might be shocked out of their brainwashing, and attempt to turn against their master in the few hours they have remaining.

EMPOWERING THRALLS

The fallen enter into pacts with their thralls, granting the wishes of a chosen mortal in return for service and Faith. This option isn't available to the Earthbound, who can't gain Faith from a single mortal. In any case, the Earthbound have no interest in giving humans what they want. The Earthbound have thralls, of course, many with supernatural abilities, but the mortal receives those gifts that the Earthbound *wants* to grant, and he has no say or control over what his dark master does to him.

The thralls of the Earthbound are often more powerful than those of the fallen, but that power is mitigated by a slow crumbling of the mortal's sanity and will, as he becomes nothing but an extension of the Earthbound's will. For full details on how to empower thralls, and the powers that they can possess, see page 98.

THE APOCALYPTIC BODY

Like all demons, the Earthbound have an apocalyptic form. In fact, this is the normal form of the Earthbound's spirit that lies bound within the reliquary. And like the fallen, the Earthbound can manifest this apocalyptic form when they wish, in one of two ways.

If the Earthbound is possessing a mortal host, it's a simple process to assume the apocalyptic form: The Earthbound simply makes a Faith roll. If successful, the character's apocalyptic form coalesces around its mortal host and remains active for the duration of the scene (or until the character dissolves it). Any improvements to Attributes from the apocalyptic form are applied to the mortal host's Attributes, in addition to any Attribute increases provided by the Earthbound's Urges. Any damage sustained while in the apocalyptic form is inflicted on the mortal host's body, not the Earthbound. If the mortal dies, the Earthbound's spirit returns unharmed to its reliquary.

Sometimes, though, an Earthbound needs to manifest its apocalyptic form without anchoring its power in a mortal host. This might occur in an emergency, such as an attack on its reliquary, or it could be necessary for enthralling a group of mortals. In such desperate straits, the Earthbound can create an *apocalyptic body* from pure Faith, concentrated into

physical form, but doing so is a tremendous drain on the character's energy.

When the Earthbound creates an apocalyptic body, its new form simply appears near its reliquary, drawn together from raw Faith and the spiritual matter of the Earthbound. This body has the character's normal Attributes, modified by its Urges and any features of its visage. The body can act normally, and it has all the powers and abilities of the Earthbound. It cannot, however, move far from the reliquary, because it needs to stay close to the source of its Faith. It can move only a number of yards from the reliquary equal to five times its Faith (so a character with a Faith of 6 can move up to 30 yards from its reliquary). If it moves beyond that point, the body dissolves into raw Faith and the Earthbound's consciousness returns to its reliquary.

Manifesting the apocalyptic body is a simple task — no Faith roll is required. It is, however, a taxing and dangerous process, and not something the character should do lightly. It costs an immense amount of Faith to create and maintain the apocalyptic body — two points of Faith each turn that the body exists. Earthbound in improvised reliquaries find it a little easier to create an apocalyptic body — it costs only one point of Faith each turn for them to maintain the body — but even these characters will eventually run out of spiritual power.

The other great risk of assuming the apocalyptic form is the possible destruction of the Earthbound. The apocalyptic body is a solid manifestation of the character's spirit, and any wounds it suffers in this state are wounds to its own soul. The character has the normal eight health levels in this body, and it suffers penalties as normal if it is severely injured. If the Earthbound is killed in this form, its tie to its reliquary is permanently severed. The reliquary is destroyed and the Earthbound's spirit is drawn back into the Abyss. If it is injured, but not to the point of death, the Earthbound can heal its wounds only by spending Faith points (p. 79).

For full details on the powers and features of the character's apocalyptic form, see page 93.

DEATH OF THE UNDUING

Lacking bodies, the Earthbound are difficult to kill or even injure — but they can still die or be destroyed.

The main vulnerability of an Earthbound character is its reliquary. The object is more than a prison, it is the character's body — one of the few objects strong enough to hold its terrible power. The reliquary is supernaturally resistant to damage, but it isn't indestructible, and it can be destroyed. If this occurs, the Earthbound's spirit erupts from the broken reliquary, visible to mortal and demon alike.

One turn later, the Earthbound plummets back to the Abyss, drawn back by Hell's spiritual gravity. The Earthbound doesn't have the opportunity that the fallen have of finding a new host for their spirit; the character is simply too spiritually massive to fit into any mortal body or an object that hasn't been prepared as a reliquary. The Earthbound can return to Creation, if summoned again by mortal worshippers who have prepared a new reliquary, but it loses all of the temporary Faith stored in its original reliquary.

During the single turn in which the Earthbound's spirit hovers between Creation and Hell, it is vulnerable to attack, and it can be consumed by another demon, as described on p. 260 of the **Demon** rulebook. Consuming the corrupt and warped spirit of the Earthbound is a dangerous act, though, that can infect the devouring demon with the tainted energy of the creature. The Storyteller should make a secret roll, using the Torment rating of the Earthbound (which is always 10) as the dice pool. The difficulty is 8, and the roll cannot botch. Each success on this roll inflicts a point of permanent Torment on the consuming demon.

Discarnate Earthbound can alternately be bound into a soul trap, harnessed to a demonic item (see pages 160 of the **Demon Players Guide** for details) or bound into a new reliquary if such objects are available and the individuals present possess the appropriate lore or ritual knowledge.

BLACK KNOWLEDGE

Without legs to carry them or hands to control the world around them, the Earthbound have concentrated their attentions on the tools that are available to them: their lore and the power to directly manipulate the forces of Creation.

Over millennia, the Earthbound have developed new bodies of lore, blasphemous powers that allow them to control Creation in ways that God never intended. These secret bodies of lore are crude, destructive forces, that cannot be used in positive or subtle ways. Nonetheless, they are extremely effective powers, and they provide the Earthbound powerful weapons to use against their rivals, mortals and the forces of Hell.

LORE OF CHAOS

There are worlds beyond this one, levels of reality crafted by the Elohim as a home for mortal spirits that have met their death. And beyond those worlds, beyond the spirit realms known to the fallen, there is

TOOLS OF THE ENEMY

It's unlikely that the fallen will ever learn the secret lore of the Earthbound. The Dread Kings are not about to teach their secret knowledge to their rivals or enemies. It's not impossible, however, for the fallen to learn such things. Perhaps an infernal slave of the Earthbound was entrusted with secret lore, then managed to escape her slavery by changing her True Name. Or perhaps an Earthbound who was pulled back to Hell has escaped, much weaker than before, into a mortal body, and it still remembers the details of its secret lore.

Even if a fallen character does manage to learn the Earthbound lore, it's a dangerous tool to wield. No low-Torment version of any evocation of these lore paths exists — they can only be used in negative, destructive ways. A non-Earthbound character automatically gains a point of temporary Torment each time she evokes one of these bodies of lore.

something else, worlds that the Creator's hand never crafted. These chaotic realms came into existence after the Fall, and the prisoners of Hell never learned of their existence or how to control them until the Earthbound came back to Creation. The Dread Kings have found out how to control these wild realities and how to force the chaotic power of these worlds onto the fabric of Creation with terrible results.

• REALITY TREMORS

This evocation causes the unpredictable, chaotic energies of the spirit realms to bleed into Creation. Doing so causes a variety of strange effects, events that violate the laws of nature and cause and effect — fish fall from the sky, blood oozes from a house's walls, reflections bare their teeth and threaten their maker. These events are real, not illusory, but they fade away after a short period, as reality reinforces its power over the area.

System: Roll Manipulation + Occult. If the roll succeeds, an area within the demon's line of sight with a radius in yards equal to the character's Faith becomes the site of unnatural phenomena — a cosmetic, non-harmful, but still unsettling violation of the laws of nature and common sense. The Storyteller decides what kind of event manifests in the area. The evocation allows the chaos realms to bleed into this world, but it doesn't dictate how they do so. The result is always disturbing and *wrong*, though, and it can seriously spook and distract witnesses. Unless a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7) generates more successes than the evocation roll, each mortal or non-Earthbound demon in the area of effect suffers a +1 difficulty penalty for all actions. The penalty is removed once the victim leaves the affected area. A

botched Willpower roll made on a mortal's behalf also causes a temporary derangement at the Storyteller's discretion. The strangeness persists for a scene, after which it fades out of existence.

•• SPHERE OF CHAOS

This evocation infects reality with the shifting, unpredictable laws of the chaos realms, worlds where nothing works the same way twice. Within the area affected by the evocation, probability breaks apart, and nothing works as it should. Even the simplest tasks might fall prey to sudden shifts in reality and fluctuations in cause and effect.

System: Roll Wits + Expression (difficulty 8). The evocation affects an area within the character's line of site and has a radius equal to the demon's Faith score in yards. The affected area is the site of a breakdown in normal causality, where nothing works as it should. Within this area, *all* actions and dice rolls — except for evocation and Faith rolls — have their difficulty increased by a value equal to the successes generated by the evocation roll (so with three successes, the difficulty of all rolls increase by three). When actions fail due to the increased difficulty, they fail because of fluctuations in probability and natural law. A bullet falls apart before reaching its target, gravity suddenly increases under a jumping athlete, a computer suddenly starts displaying gibberish and obscene messages, et cetera. The Earthbound suffers the same effects as everyone else if it is within the area affected. The effects last for a number of turns equal to the successes on the evocation roll.

••• WAVE OF MUTILATION

As the Earthbound's control over the chaos realms grows, it can project the energies of the realms into living tissue. Living bodies are affected by this energy in random — but always painful and dangerous — ways. Neurons misfire, lungs spasm, joints collapse, hormones and adrenaline flood the body, and thoughts ricochet wildly through the brain. Mortals and demons alike are left confused and injured as their muscles and nervous systems turn against them.

System: Roll Strength + Medicine. If the roll succeeds, an invisible wave of chaotic energy permeates the area surrounding the Earthbound, out to a radius equal to the character's Faith in yards. Any living being in that area (except for the Earthbound itself) is affected by the energy unless a successful Stamina roll is made. If the roll fails, the victim's body and mind are sent into spasms and seizures, while her organs shudder randomly and hormones flood her body. She suffers a number of health levels of bashing damage equal to the successes generated by the evocation roll. This damage cannot be soaked. The victim's player must also make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) and gain more successes than the evocation roll to keep the character from panicking, flying into

a rage, collapsing into catatonia or similar reactions (determined by the Storyteller), as her brain and nervous system misfire. Injuries caused by this power manifest as subcutaneous bleeding and bruising, and possibly even hernias, sprains and broken bones.

Demons are affected by this power since it isn't mind-control, but rather a physical effect that affects their host's brain. Demons suffer the bashing damage as normal with no extra protection.

While this evocation lasts for only an instant, the effects continue to ravage victims for some time before their bodies regain equilibrium. Affected characters will not recover their senses, for a number of minutes equal to the successes of the evocation roll, and they suffer +1 difficulty penalties to all rolls (except evocations) until the end of the scene.

•••• SUMMON OUTSIDER

The Earthbound can rip open a small portal between Creation and the chaos realms and pull something through — a creature too bizarre and dangerous to exist in this reality. The creatures summoned by this evocation are always dangerous monstrosities with terrible killing powers and a desire for destruction. The Earthbound cannot control the creature, but it can watch from afar as the outsider strikes down its enemies with claws and supernatural powers.

System: Spend one Faith point and roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 7). Success means that a supernatural creature suddenly materializes within a number of yards equal to the Earthbound's Faith rating. The Storyteller decides on the traits and appearance of the creature, while the Earthbound character's player determines any special powers the being has. The outsider gains a pool of "form points" equal to the successes of the evocation roll, which the Earthbound player can spend on granting visage features to the creature as if it were an Earthbound (p. 93). None of the creature's base traits may be higher than the number of successes rolled for the evocation (unless improved by visage features). The creature is controlled by the Storyteller, and it might turn on the Earthbound or its minions if they cross its path. The monster rampages for a number of turns equal to the successes on the evocation roll, after which it returns to the chaos realms.

••••• MELLON EARTH

This evocation smashes open the barrier between Creation and the chaos realms, allowing otherworldly madness and dangers to rampage into the real world. Reality cracks apart and falls into splinters over a wide area — the skies turn red, stones bleed and float through the sky, and tentacled horrors writhe beneath the skin of babies. Wounds spontaneously open on the bodies of those within the area, and almost every action has disastrous consequences. When the evocation fades and the barrier between worlds re-

turns, reality snaps back to normal, but the changes caused by the reality breakdown remain. This can have grave consequences — such as when a floating, screaming pillar of stone suddenly plummets to the ground as gravity reasserts itself.

System: Spend one Faith point and roll Stamina + Occult (difficulty 7). If the roll succeeds, an area around the Earthbound with a radius in yards equal to 10 times the character's Faith rating suffers a massive reality breakdown. Uncontrollable and dangerous events occur at random, horrific sights assail the eyes and minds of witnesses trapped within, and nothing works as it should. The Storyteller should flex her imagination to come up with strange and awful things with which to plague the area.

The successes on the evocation roll form a dice pool that can affect characters within the area in different ways. If a character encounters a dangerous hazard, such as a cloud of fanged mouths, the pool is the amount of damage she might suffer (bashing or lethal as appropriate). If a character attempts an action, the pool is rolled to resist that action (even if it's not normally resisted), successes reducing the other roll's successes as normal. Players and Storytellers might find other ways to apply the successes to represent the unpredictable dangers of the affected area. Rolls made with this pool cannot botch.

Within the area, all appropriate dice rolls (including evocations) botch on a roll of 1 or 2. Mortals exposed to the horrors of the area gain a temporary derangement unless a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7) generates more successes than the evocation roll. (If the Willpower roll botches, the derangement is permanent.) The evocation lasts for the duration of the scene.

LORE OF CONTAMINATION

The Earthbound learned earlier in their existence how to force their own tainted essence onto a willing thrall, granting him power while corrupting and twisting his body and soul. Using that capability as a stepping stone, the Earthbound developed the lore of Contamination — a way to infuse their own sick energies into the spiritual matter of objects, mortals and even places. Using this lore, the Earthbound can create proxies of its own will or build twisted relics that glisten with obscene slime.

• CREATE PROXY

With this evocation, the Earthbound infuses an object with a portion of its own essence, attuning the item to its demonic spirit. By concentrating, the Earthbound can then focus its consciousness through that item, no matter where it is — seeing and hearing through the object, and even using it as the focus for evocations.



System: The Earthbound or its reliquary must be in contact with the item to be infused. Roll Strength + Crafts — if successful, the item becomes a proxy for the Earthbound. At any time, the Earthbound's player may make a Faith roll for the character to project its consciousness into the proxy for as long as it wishes. The Earthbound can sense things around the proxy just as it can through its reliquary, and it may perform any evocations it knows as if the proxy was its body. The object modified by the evocation cannot be larger than a human being. The proxy appears normal, but supernatural awareness will reveal it to be tainted with a dark power. The proxy retains its power for a number of days equal to the successes on the evocation. The Earthbound can permanently alter the object by spending a point of Willpower.

•• LASH OF CORRUPTION

With this evocation, the Earthbound can force a pulse of its own tainted energy into any being with which it is in physical contact. This black energy rips apart tissue and bone, imparting the Earthbound's essence into the victim's body with deadly results. Wounds from this attack are tattered, bleeding lacerations, weeping with pus and toxic fluids.

System: Roll Dexterity + Expression. Each success on the roll inflicts a health level of lethal damage onto the target. Mundane armor such as a Kevlar vest offers no protection against this evocation, but armor gained from evocations or visage features does. The Earthbound must be in physical contact with the target to perform this evocation.

••• TAIN THE LAND

This evocation forces the Earthbound's essence into the very earth it rests on, corrupting it and anything that grows in it. While the evocation is in effect, the Earthbound's senses spread to encompass the entire tainted area, and it can direct its evocations through the earth without being physically present. The area also gains a kind of foul pseudo-life and can be used to strike out at intruders.

System: Roll Stamina + Awareness. If successful, the evocation affects an area around the Earthbound's reliquary with a radius in yards equal to 10 times the successes rolled. The Earthbound can sense whatever happens within that area, just as an Earthbound in a location-reliquary can. It can target anyone within that area with evocations, but the difficulty of evocations performed through the earth increases by one.

As an action during its turn, the Earthbound can animate or control the land it has corrupted in order to attack intruders. Trees lash out with their branches, the earth falls away under an intruder's feet or cancer-riddled bees swarm onto a target. Roll Dexterity + Awareness (difficulty 7) to make these

attacks, with a basic damage pool equal to the successes generated by the evocation roll (plus any additional successes from the attack roll). The damage may be bashing or lethal, at the player's discretion.

The effects of Taint the Land last for a scene.

•••• CORRUPT RELIC

Just as the fallen (especially Malefactors) make relics with the Lore of the Forge, so too can the Earthbound create their own twisted relics of power by tainting an object with their own essence. These corrupt relics are similar to those of the fallen, but they are rarely subtle. Such objects grow cancerous nodes of pseudo-flesh or ooze with ichor and toxins. Mortals who handle a corrupt relic risk madness, as the corruption within the relic begins to eat at their sanity.

System: Tainting an object is not an overly long process, but it does require an investment in energy and the appropriate knowledge. To instill a corrupt power into an object, the Earthbound must possess a lore path that evokes the power in question. For instance, to create a pistol that shoots a stream of acid, the Earthbound must have at least one dot in the Lore of Storms. More complex powers that mimic the evocations of multiple bodies of lore require at least dot in each relevant lore. The Storyteller is the final arbiter on what lore is required. Any object can be tainted in this way, regardless of technological complexity.

To corrupt the object, the Earthbound must stay in contact with it for a full scene — either holding it in a physical body or having a thrall hold it against the reliquary. Roll Manipulation + Crafts (difficulty 7). If successful, the item has been corrupted with the Earthbound's power. To finalize the evocation, the Earthbound must spend an amount of temporary Faith equal to the successes rolled. Doing so makes the corruption permanent.

When used, corrupt relics have a dice pool for their power equal to the successes gained on the Corrupt Relic evocation. A mortal using a corrupt relic loses a point of Willpower for each success rolled to use the relic, while a demon *gains* a point of temporary Torment for each success rolled.

(A complete optional system for designing and building relics can be found in Chapter Five of the **Demon Players Guide**. Storytellers might want to adapt that system to encompass the corrupt relics of the Earthbound.)

••••• UNSPEAKABLE SERVITOR

The mortal worshippers of the Earthbound are poor vessels for its power, as they inevitably die in unspeakable agony hours after being possessed and used. With this evocation, the Earthbound can make a mobile vessel for itself, filling a specially prepared item with its own taint and transforming it into a

powerful, long-lived host. The servitor possesses more resilience and power than a mortal vessel, and it will last for far longer before eventually being destroyed by the Earthbound's power. Such vessels, though, are obviously inhuman, permanently mutated and deformed by the taint of the Earthbound. These monstrous hosts appear as imps, golems, hellhounds and other hideous creatures.

System: This evocation cannot be performed on just any item — it must be used on a statue or idol crafted by the Earthbound or its worshippers and made of primarily natural materials. When a suitable item is ready, spend a Faith point and roll Stamina + Crafts (difficulty 7). With even one success, the item is transformed into a vessel for the Earthbound, who can possess and animate the statue whenever it wishes.

The servitor gains a number of “form points” equal to the successes on the evocation roll, which the player can spend to give visage features to the construct (p. 93). These can be completely different features from those of the Earthbound's own apocalyptic form, and they remain as permanent features of the servitor. The Earthbound does not have to assume apocalyptic form to use these features, and it can continue to access them when it does take on its revelatory form. The servitor also has a number of grotesqueries (see p. 97) equal to the successes rolled, which are also permanent and cause the vessel to appear hideous and obviously inhuman.

When the Earthbound wishes to possess the servitor, it may do so instantly, without the need for a roll, and no matter how far away the servitor is. The servitor is tougher than a normal mortal, and it can soak lethal damage with a Stamina roll. Its Attribute ratings are the same as the Earthbound's. When the Earthbound ceases to possess the servitor, it becomes an inert — if grotesque — statue again.

The servitor will eventually be destroyed by the strain of containing the Earthbound. The character may possess the servitor a number of times equal to the successes of the evocation roll without any ill effect. After that, the player must make a Stamina + Crafts roll each time the Earthbound ceases possessing the servitor, with a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's permanent Faith rating. If the roll succeeds, the servitor can be used again. If it fails, the vessel breaks apart and is destroyed.

LORE OF VIOLATION

The rebel angels developed the Lore of Humanity after the Fall as a way of influence mortals subtly, touching lightly upon their emotions and perceptions. The Earthbound have their own ways to control humanity, though, and their touch is as light as a

sledgehammer. The Lore of Violation is a brutal power that allows the Earthbound to directly control and damage the minds of mortals, whether to enslave them or simply for its own sick pleasure. Demons are immune to the effects of this lore.

• NIGHTMARE SENDING

This evocation allows the Earthbound to send messages into the dreams of sleeping mortals. While this isn't a particularly potent effect, it has a staggering range. The Earthbound can direct nightmares into the minds of mortals dozens of miles away, without even needing to see its target. This evocation is also unique in that, unlike every other evocation, the Earthbound can perform it while devoid of spiritual energy, and can even perform it unconsciously, sending out dreams even while it rests in stasis, in the hope of drawing mortals into its influence.

System: Roll Manipulation + Expression. If successful, the Earthbound may send a telepathic message into the dreams of a sleeping mortal within a number of *miles* equal to 10 times the character's Faith rating. The Earthbound may target a specific mortal that it knows to be within range, or it may simply cast its mind out at random (in which case the Storyteller selects an appropriate victim).

The sleeping mortal's dream becomes corrupted by the Earthbound, turning into a disturbing nightmare. In that nightmare, the target hears the telepathic message of the Earthbound, which will reverberate in his subconscious even if he pays it no attention. The bad dreams and insidious power of the evocation leave the mortal drained and tired. The mortal loses a point of temporary Willpower (and does not recover any Willpower for a sound night's sleep) unless a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) on her behalf generates more successes than the evocation roll. If the Earthbound's message contains a command (such as, “Find my reliquary and worship me”), the mortal will obey this command if the effects of the evocation reduce his temporary Willpower to zero.

The Earthbound may target the same mortal every night in order to wear away his Willpower. This evocation can be performed even if the Earthbound has no Faith in its pool or is in stasis.

•• MIND RAPE

This evocation allows the Earthbound to probe the mind of a mortal that it can see, scanning her thoughts and memories for information. Material that the mortal doesn't feel is important is usually easy to find, while thoughts about things the mortal wishes to keep secret are more difficult to retrieve. The process of scanning a mortal's thoughts causes her appalling head-

aches, and possibly even leaves her bleeding from the nose, mouth and ears.

System: Roll Perception + Awareness (difficulty 7). If successful, the Earthbound can scan the mind of any mortal within line of sight. The number of successes on the evocation roll determine how far into the mortal's mind the Earthbound can probe. One success allows the Earthbound to skim surface thoughts and very recent memories; three successes grant access to memories of the last few weeks or thoughts that the mortal considers it important to keep private; five successes allow the demon access to all of the target's memories and thoughts, even her most private and secret feelings. The mortal suffers a number of bashing damage levels equal to the successes rolled in the evocation. This damage cannot be soaked with Stamina or armor, but it can be soaked with a Willpower roll.

••• VISION OF TERROR

This evocation projects terrifying visions into the mind of one or more mortals. The Earthbound can send a specific image or simply cause a mortal to see something that terrifies him. The mortal's brain conjures up an appropriate image to explain the sudden rush of fear. Mortals faced with these images are likely to panic and run away.

System: Roll Manipulation + Intimidation. If successful, the demon can affect a number of mortals equal to the successes rolled as long as they are within line of sight. The targeted mortals will see an illusionary vision, whether chosen by the Earthbound or determined by the Storyteller, that frightens them; those not targeted by the evocation see nothing. Each affected mortal panics and must flee the area as best he can unless a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) on her behalf generates more successes than the evocation roll. On a botch, the mortal also loses a point of permanent Willpower. The effects of the evocation fade after a scene, after which the mortals calm down and can return to the area.

•••• ENSLAVE

While the Lore of Humanity allows demons to only nudge and subtly influence mortal minds, this evocation goes far beyond those limitations. With this evocation, an Earthbound can completely control the mind and body of a mortal, making her do and say whatever it wishes. When the evocation fades, the mortal might suffer great emotional stress and lose her grip on her sanity.

System: Spend one Faith point and roll Manipulation + Subterfuge. The target must be within line of sight, and she resists with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). If the Earthbound gains more successes, it takes control of the mortal and can telepathically command

her to do its bidding. The mortal is forced to obey the demon's commands. If it orders her to do something that drastically violates her Nature or personality (such as killing the man she loves), another Willpower roll can be made to resist the successes of the evocation.

The Earthbound retains control of the mortal's mind for a scene (or until she throws off the control). When the mortal regains control of herself, a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) must be made. Failing this roll means she gains a temporary derangement, which lasts for a number of days equal to the successes of the evocation roll. Botching this roll means that the mortal gains a permanent derangement.

••••• DEVOUR THE SOUL

The most dreadful fate that can meet a demon is to have her soul devoured by another demon, her memories and energies fueling her enemy while her spirit is forever destroyed. Human souls, God's perfect creation, are protected from this horrific fate — except from the powerful Earthbound who have mastered this lore. With this evocation, an Earthbound can tear the soul from a living mortal and devour it, draining it of energy, memories and even precious Faith. The mortal's body lives in an irreversible coma for a time, while his soul is forever extinguished.

System: Spend a point of Faith and roll Wits + Occult (difficulty 8), targeting a single mortal within a number of yards equal to the Earthbound's Faith rating. The target resists with a Willpower roll (also difficulty 8). If the Earthbound succeeds, the mortal's soul is instantly ripped from his body and devoured by the Earthbound.

For each additional success on the evocation, the Earthbound gains one of the following at the player's discretion:

- A point of temporary Faith (to a maximum of the mortal's Faith potential). The Earthbound cannot exceed its normal maximum Faith pool.
- A point of temporary Willpower (to a maximum of the mortal's Willpower). The Earthbound cannot exceed its normal maximum Willpower pool.
- A temporary Ability increase if the mortal possesses the same Ability at a higher level than the Earthbound. No Ability may be increased by more than one dot, nor can the Ability rating exceed 5. The player chooses which of the demon's Abilities is increased in this fashion.
- A particular memory or linked set of memories, chosen by the player. The Storyteller is the final arbiter as to the depth and breadth of the stolen memories.

Memories and difficulty reductions last until the end of the scene, after which they fade away. Faith and Willpower points remain in the Earthbound's normal pool until used. The mortal's body falls into a coma until the end of the scene (or possibly longer, at the

Storyteller's discretion) before dying. During this time, it can be possessed as normal by other demons. Fallen cannot be targeted or affected by this evocation, but mortal thralls are not immune.

UNSPEAKABLE FLESH: EARTHBOUND VISAGES

The Earthbound are like *nothing* any mortal or demon has ever seen. There are no words to describe the utter horror of these monsters, of their deformed and hideous bodies and souls. Even a high-Torment fallen still retains some semblance of humanity, hidden under a fiery aura or stony skin, but the Earthbound have no connection with humanity, and their apocalyptic forms resemble only the stuff of nightmares. The visages of the Earthbound might sprout tentacles that drip with ichor, be limbless masses of diseased meat or towering giants of misshapen flesh covered with blood and matted fibers. Every Earthbound is unique, but all are horrid beyond compare.

Rather than choosing a visage based on your character's primary lore, you need to design a unique visage for the Earthbound. Doing so requires choosing eight features for the visage: special abilities and bonuses that benefit the character when it manifests its apocalyptic form. You also need to choose eight grotesqueries: mutations, deformities and hideous body parts that define the Earthbound's terrifying appearance.

Whenever your character manifests its apocalyptic form, it chooses which features are revealed. You can select specific features or elect to reveal all of them at once. All of the visage's grotesqueries manifest, however, no matter how many features the character activates.

VISAGE FEATURES

A character begins with 16 "form points" with which to build an apocalyptic form. The available features are listed here and have point values ranging from one to four. You must purchase eight features for the Earthbound, thus establishing the character's visage abilities. If you do not find a particular feature that you think would be appropriate for the character listed here, you are encouraged to design your own, with the Storyteller's permission. The Storyteller is the final arbiter as to the point cost of a custom visage feature.

All Earthbound characters have the following feature for free; it does not count against the eight-feature/16-point limit:

- **Face of Terror:** The Earthbound is so monstrously hideous that most mortals will instantly flee in terror when confronted by it, and even *demons* may be shaken and afraid in the Dread King's presence. Whenever the Earthbound manifests its apocalyptic form, make an Appearance + Intimidation roll. Witnesses resist this terror with a Willpower roll (difficulty 8 for mortals, 6 for demons). If the Earthbound gains more successes, the witness flees in terror from the scene or curls up into a ball and goes into shock.

The features listed here are available to all Earthbound. These abilities are fairly generic, so you should customize the look and feel of a feature to make it fit your character concept.

1-POINT FEATURES

- **Adhesive Grip:** The Earthbound can cling to walls and ceilings at will, moving along these surfaces at its normal walking speed.

- **Casts No Reflection:** The Earthbound's image does not appear in a mirror, nor can it be captured in a photograph or by a video camera.

- **Chameleon Skin:** The character's skin allows it to blend with its surroundings. The difficulties of all Stealth rolls decrease by one if the Earthbound is moving, or by two if it's standing still.

- **Distracting Aura:** The character's body is shrouded by a confusing display of shifting lights, concealing mists or some other obscuring material. The difficulties of all ranged attacks directed at the Earthbound increase by one.

- **Enhanced Movement:** The Earthbound's basic running and sprinting rates increase by five yards per turn.

- **Horns:** A pair of horns protrude from the character's head. If attacked in close combat, the Earthbound may make a free counterattack at its foe. Roll Dexterity + Brawl. If successful, the character inflicts Strength – 1 aggravated damage.

- **Improved Initiative:** Add two to the character's initiative score.

- **Lashing Tail:** The Earthbound manifests a long, reptilian tail tipped with a curved, bony spike that inflicts Strength – 1 aggravated damage.

- **Leaping:** The character's basic leaping and jumping distance is doubled; each success on an Athletics roll propels the Earthbound four feet vertically or eight feet horizontally.

- **Lore Sense:** The Earthbound has a special sense that relates to a body of lore it possesses. This could be

a capability to sense changes in the weather (Lore of Storms), to see ghosts and spirits (Lore of the Spirit), to sense objects buried in the ground (Lore of the Earth), a perfect direction sense (Lore of Paths) or any similar capability. The Storyteller determines the range of the sense based on how useful the sense is. Very useful senses have a range in yards or tens of yards equal to the character's Faith, while less useful or precise senses have a range in miles or tens of miles equal to the character's Faith.

- **Relentless:** The Earthbound can walk or run without need of rest, able to cover superhuman distances without pause. As long as it stays in motion, it is unaffected by fatigue or hunger.

- **Sense the Hidden:** The Earthbound is supernaturally adept at sensing mortals or demons who attempt to hide from it. The difficulties of all Perception rolls to detect hidden individuals within the character's line of sight decreases by two.

- **Supernatural Vision:** The character can see five times as far as a normal human can, and it is not affected by darkness or poor light conditions. This effect also lowers the difficulty of all visual-based Perception rolls by one.

- **Thorns:** The character's body is covered with needle-sharp thorns, spikes or quills that inflict one level of aggravated damage to any attacker who successfully strikes or grapples the Earthbound in unarmed combat.

2-POINT FEATURES

- **Aura of Dread:** The Earthbound is surrounded by an aura of fear that saps the will of its foes. Targets within a number of yards equal to the character's Faith lose their normal initiative, unless a successful Willpower roll is made against a difficulty equal to the demon's Torment. Affected individuals act last within a given turn. The Willpower roll is made every turn in which a mortal or demon is in the Earthbound's presence. Normal initiative resumes for a victim as soon as a successful Willpower roll is made.

- **Aura of Entropy:** Plants wilt in the character's presence, and living beings are suffused with an icy chill that saps their strength. Mortals and demons within a number of yards equal to the Earthbound's Faith lose one die from their dice pools unless a successful Stamina roll is made. The effects of this feature persist for the duration of the scene.

- **Claws/Teeth:** The character manifests claws and fangs that inflict Strength + 2 aggravated damage.

- **Cloak of Shadows:** The Earthbound is shrouded in a pall of darkness, making it difficult to see in the best light and rendering it near-invisible at night. The difficulty of all Stealth rolls decreases by two whenever

the Earthbound stands in shadow or moves in darkness. If the character is attacked, the rules for blind fighting apply to the attacker.

- **Enhanced Ability:** The difficulty on rolls involving any one Ability drops by two while the Earthbound is in its apocalyptic form. The player must specify which Ability this power affects at the time of purchase and cannot change to a different Ability later. Enhanced Ability may be purchased multiple times if desired, but each purchase takes up one of the character's eight available slots, and each one must be allocated to a different Ability.

- **Extra Limbs:** The Earthbound grows a second set of arms, a thick prehensile tail, a pair of writhing tentacles or a second set of legs at the player's discretion. Each set of extra limbs allow a character to parry or block one hand-to-hand or melee attack without sacrificing its own attack, or make up to two additional attacks of its own per turn using its full dice pool.

- **Frenzy:** The Earthbound flies into an insensate rage, hurling itself at its foes again and again despite the pain of its wounds. While frenzied, the demon is immune to wound penalties, but the player must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) each turn. If the roll fails, the Earthbound must attack the closest being, ally or enemy, with whatever weapon is at hand.

- **Gaping Maw:** The Earthbound can chew and digest anything it can get its teeth on. Metal, stone and flesh can all be ground up and digested with ease. The difficulties of bite attacks decrease by two and inflict Strength + 4 aggravated damage.

- **Huge Size:** The character's body grows to immense size, at least twice the size of a human, adding the following bonus traits: +2 Strength, +1 Stamina, and one extra Bruised health level. Difficulties to strike the character in ranged or close combat drop by one, and the difficulty of the Earthbound's Dodge rolls increases by one.

- **Ichor:** A foul black ichor covers the character's body, making it difficult to grab or restrain. The difficulty of any grapple attempts directed at the Earthbound increase by two.

- **Immune to Electricity:** The Earthbound suffers no damage from electricity or electricity-based attacks of any kind.

- **Immune to Falling Damage:** The Earthbound may fall any distance and land safely without taking damage.

- **Ink Cloud:** The Earthbound can spit a cloud of black ink that hangs in the air and blinds its foes. Individuals within a number of feet equal to the character's Faith score are blinded for 10 turns, unless a successful Stamina roll is made. The cloud of ink

lingers in the air for 10 turns. Victims are subject to the Blind Fighting rules on page 240 of **Demon**.

- **Irresistible Force:** The difficulty of any Feats of Strength (**Demon**, p. 232) performed by the character decreases by two.

- **Magnetic Field:** The Earthbound is surrounded by a magnetic field that is intense enough to disrupt electronic devices within a radius in yards equal to the character's Faith.

- **Miasma:** The character's breath is a noisome foulness that can debilitate its foes in close quarters. The Earthbound can affect victims up to a distance in feet equal to its Faith score. Mortals and demons caught in the path of its exhalation forfeit their actions for the turn unless a successful Stamina roll is made (difficulty 7). If the Stamina roll botches, the victim is also infected by a virus or disease at the Storyteller's discretion.

- **Multiple Eyes:** The demon gains at least four (and possibly dozens of) extra eyes, sprouting from its head and/or body. These extra organs give the demon 360° vision and reduce the difficulty of all Perception rolls by two.

- **Shocking Touch:** The character's touch inflicts a number of bashing levels of damage equal to its Faith score. This feature may be used only once per scene.

- **The Host:** At least two, and possibly dozens of, fanged mouths appear on the character's body. The Earthbound inflicts Strength + 3 aggravated bite damage per turn with a successful grapple. When they are not otherwise occupied, the mouths whisper blasphemies in any language the character knows.

- **Viscous Flesh:** The diseased flesh of the Earthbound sloughs away when pinned or trapped, leaving a would-be assailant covered in rotting, sticky flesh. The difficulty of grappling the Earthbound increases by two, and the character can escape from physical bonds with a successful Dexterity roll.

- **Vomit Acid:** The Earthbound is capable of vomiting a stream of corrosive bile at its foes, able to strike targets up to a number of feet away equal to its Faith score. A successful Dexterity + Athletics roll is needed to hit a target. The bile inflicts Strength - 1 aggravated damage.

3-POINT FEATURES

- **Alter Size:** The Earthbound can reduce its size in order to slip through narrow gaps or stretch its deformed body to avoid the attacks of its enemies. It can reduce its size to as little as a third of its original volume, or stretch its body or limbs to half again their original size. The difficulties of attacks directed against the reduced or deformed Earthbound increase by two.

- **Aura of Misfortune:** Any individuals within 10 yards of the Earthbound suffer a botch on any roll of 1 or 2.

- **Chimerical Attack:** Swirling illusions surround the Earthbound, and attack opponents engaged in close combat with it. These chimerical figures have the same initiative as the Earthbound, and they attack a single opponent in close-combat range. The chimera roll 10 dice as their attack pool, inflicting a base damage of four aggravated damage dice plus any extra successes.

- **Damage Resistance:** The Earthbound is capable of shrugging off damage that would cripple a human. It may ignore any wound penalties for the duration of the scene.

- **Disperse:** The character may dissolve its body into a mass of maggots, spiders, insects or other tiny creatures. The player rolls 10 dice at the standard difficulty; if successful, the transformation is instantaneous. The Earthbound retains control over this swarm, and may use this power to flow through tight openings or simply to terrify opponents. The character may choose to attack opponents while this power is in effect; see the Swarm rules on page 72 of the **Demon Storytellers Companion**. Successful attacks inflict aggravated damage.

- **Distortion:** The Earthbound's form shifts and shimmers, distorted by an illusory aura. The difficulties of all ranged attacks against the character increase by two, while those of close-combat attacks increase by one. Demons can resist these effects as they can any other illusion.

- **Enhanced Senses:** The character's five senses are heightened to superhuman levels, reducing the difficulty of its Perception rolls by two.

- **Extra Actions:** Faith points can be spent to gain extra actions in a turn at the rate of one point per action. These actions occur in order of descending initiative, so if a character with an initiative of 7 gains an extra action, it takes its normal action at 7 and its extra action at 6. The player must decide to purchase extra actions at the beginning of a turn before any other actions have been taken.

- **Extra Health Levels:** The character's vitality provides three extra Bruised health levels for the purposes of absorbing bashing, lethal and aggravated damage.

- **Hypnotic Visions:** An aura of disturbing lights and shadows surrounds the Earthbound, distracting and disquieting its foes. An attacker must make a Wits roll against a difficulty of the demon's Faith. If the roll fails, the attacker may not act until the end of the turn. Demons (and thralls gifted with the power) are able to resist the effects of these illusions thanks to their inherent powers.

- **Immune to Fire:** The Earthbound suffers no damage from fire or heat of any kind.

- **Primal Mind:** The character can make contact with the small part of a mortal's mind that retains its ignorance, that remembers what it is to live only to survive like a beast. To use this feature, the Earthbound must physically touch its intended target. The player rolls the character's Torment, while the mortal resists with a Willpower roll. If the Earthbound wins, the human loses all Knowledges and most Skills (though Abilities like Stealth or Survival may remain at the Storyteller's discretion) for one scene, and generally acts on survival instinct — fleeing from fire, attacking with tooth and claw if cornered, et cetera.

- **Reaper's Breath:** The Earthbound can exhale a chilling breath that affects victims up to 10 feet away. Mortals and demons caught in the path of the exhalation suffer a number of health levels of bashing damage equal to the character's Faith. This feature can be used only once per scene, and it has no effect on creatures that do not breathe.

- **Rend the Soul:** The Earthbound touches a target and shows him, for one split second, how infinitesimally small he is in the grand scheme of Creation. Roll the character's Torment (difficulty 7). For each success, the target loses one temporary Willpower point. If he is reduced to zero Willpower, the target can do nothing but sit and weep.

- **Spark of Faith:** The Earthbound can cause a mortal's Faith to flare up into a burning spiritual fire. The Earthbound must touch its target to use this feature; the player then makes a Torment roll with a difficulty equal to the target's Willpower. If successful, the character inflicts one health level of bashing damage per success.

- **Thunderous Voice:** The character's scream shatters glass and makes stone tremble. Individuals within a number of yards equal to the character's Faith suffer four dice of bashing damage. This power may be used only once per scene, and it requires an action to perform.

- **Touch of Death:** The Earthbound must touch its intended target to use this feature. Thereafter, as long as the Earthbound maintains physical contact, the target cannot move, speak or feel at all. The target cannot feel pain, but he is trapped in his own body as the Earthbound inflicts whatever damage upon him it wishes. The target can escape by spending a Willpower point, but then he must best the Earthbound in a resisted Dexterity + Brawl roll (difficulty 7) to get away. Otherwise, the power takes effect again. This power has no effect on demons or supernatural beings who are already dead.

- **Toxins:** The claws and saliva of the Earthbound are poisonous. Targets exposed to the venom (either by a successful claw or bite attack, through an open wound or via a kiss) are subject to a dice pool of lethal damage equal to the demon's Torment. This damage can be soaked.

- **Tremor Sense:** The Earthbound can sense the slightest tremors passing through the earth around it, allowing it to sense even the stealthiest movements. The character automatically acts first in combat, and it cannot be surprised unless a foe scores more successes on a Wits + Stealth roll than the Earthbound's Torment.

- **Venom:** The Earthbound's saliva contains an intoxicating venom that affects a victim's will. If a victim is exposed to the saliva (through a successful bite attack or through an already open wound), she loses all her Willpower points and falls into a deathlike coma for 10 days, unless a successful Stamina roll is made (difficulty 7).

- **Wings:** A pair of jagged, bat-like wings extend from the character's shoulders. At full extension, each wing is a third again as long as the character is tall. The character can glide up to three times its running speed per turn. At a cost of one extra form point, the Earthbound can take off from a standing position and actually gain altitude by flapping its wings.

4-POINT FEATURES

- **Armor:** Add four dice to the character's soak pools to resist bashing, lethal and aggravated types of damage.

- **Deadly Blood:** The character's blood is deadly — fire, acid, molten metal or a similar substance moves through its veins. Opponents in close combat suffer one level of lethal damage each time they successfully inflict damage on the Earthbound, and the blood could damage any object it touches.

- **Dread Gaze:** Individuals (mortal or demon) who meet the Earthbound's gaze and who fail a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) must forfeit their actions for the turn.

- **Enhanced Mental Traits:** The Earthbound adds four dots to its Mental Attributes in any combination at the player's discretion. The allocation must be determined when the feature is purchased, and it may not be changed afterward.

- **Enhanced Physical Traits:** The Earthbound adds four dots to its Physical Attributes in any combination at the player's discretion. The allocation must be determined when the feature is purchased, and it may not be changed afterward.

- **Enhanced Social Traits:** The Earthbound adds four dots to its Social Attributes in any combination at the player's discretion. The allocation must be

determined when the feature is purchased, and it may not be changed afterward.

- **Eyes of Fate:** The Earthbound knows instinctively whether a given being is important to its plans. The player rolls Perception + Awareness (difficulty 6). If successful, the character gains a general sense of whether or not a target is potentially important to the Earthbound's current plans or goals. As a side effect, the Eyes of Fate can often detect whether or not a mortal has an especially high Faith pool (at the Storyteller's discretion).

- **Immune to Bashing Damage:** The character suffers no damage at all from any attack that would normally inflict bashing damage.

- **Mist:** The Earthbound may summon up a concealing cloud of choking smoke. This requires a Torment roll; each success obscures a 10-foot by 10-foot area. The mist lasts for one scene if conditions are good — a strong wind will blow the mist away in a few turns.

GROTESQUERIES

Once you've decided on the features of your character's visage, you also need to choose eight hideous grotesqueries. These all have the same "value," and they don't hamper or impede the character in any way. They also don't *aid* the character — grotesqueries are always cosmetic changes with no game effect. Some grotesqueries might mimic the appearance of a useful feature. For instance, an Earthbound might be covered in multiple eyes, but the character gains no benefit unless it also has a feature to match that grotesquerie.

All Earthbound characters have the following grotesquerie, which does not count toward the eight required for the visage.

- **Unspeakably Hideous:** The Earthbound is a being of incomprehensible and shocking ugliness. It can never pass for human while in its apocalyptic form, and those mortals not panicked by its appearance will still be disgusted and sickened by its appearance.

The following list of grotesqueries is by no means exhaustive, and players are encouraged to come up with new, appallingly gross deformities to define their characters.

GROTESQUERIES

- **Abhorrent Sounds:** The Earthbound is constantly accompanied by bizarre and unpleasant sounds — perhaps benthonic groaning or the piping of incomprehensible music.

- **Bulging Muscles:** Huge slabs of muscle, knotted with tumors and obvious veins, swell from the Earthbound's limbs.

- **Decaying:** The Earthbound's body is rotting and decaying. Maggots crawl through its putrefying flesh, and its bones are visible as its body rots away.

- **Deformed Limbs:** The Earthbound's limbs still work, but they are deformed and out of proportion with its body, covered in lumps of gristle, tumors and fibers.

- **Extra Face:** The Earthbound has a second face (or even multiple faces) growing from its torso or limbs. This face is blind and cannot speak coherently.

- **Eyes:** The character's eyes are huge, hideous things; or possibly its body is covered with blind, unblinking eyes.

- **Genitalia:** The Earthbound possesses a set of human genitalia that are huge, deformed and hideous. It might sit in the demon's chest, head or other location.

- **Glow:** The Earthbound's entire body continually glows with a soft but unpleasant light or possibly crackles with sparks of poisonous raw Faith.

- **Misshapen Head:** The character's head is completely non-human — perhaps resembling an insect's head, a reptile's head or a vagina dentata.

- **Mouths:** The Earthbound has multiple mouths around its head, neck or body, or perhaps on the palms of its hands. These mouths cannot bite or speak.

- **No Arms:** The Earthbound has no arms. It cannot perform strikes, but it can kick without increased difficulty.

- **No Head:** The character has no head. It can still see, whether or not it has visible eyes. Horns, mouths and other facial features lie on the Earthbound's chest or torso.

- **No Legs:** The Earthbound has no legs, but it can still move as normal. It might have a serpentine lower body, or it might simply flop and undulate toward its destination.

- **Pustules:** Large tumors and oozing sores cover the Earthbound's body, constantly weeping with pus and unsavory mucus.

- **Skin:** The character's skin is unusual — mottled, scaled, hirsute, stone-like, constantly bleeding or possible nonexistent.

- **Slime:** The Earthbound's body is covered in an unpleasant, sticky slime or mucus.

- **Stench:** The character gives off an offensive and horrendous smell, reminiscent of rotting meat or raw sewage.

- **Unstable:** The Earthbound's body constantly pulses, shudders and changes shape, its torso and limbs swelling and stretching unpredictably.

- **Vestigial Limbs:** The character possesses a set of non-functioning limbs. These might include a pair of small secondary arms, useless and deformed wings or a clump of tentacles around its mouth or groin.

DAMNED SOULS: THRALLS OF THE EARTHBOUND

Lacking the power to control the world directly, the Earthbound work through their worshippers and slaves. Yet some tasks require more competent operatives — loyal worshippers who are a cut above the herd and who possess some tiny fraction of the Earthbound's power. Exceptional thralls are chosen to receive a gift of dark power and work for the grand purpose of their master, but the price is steep. The demon's gift causes irreparable damage to the body, mind and soul of a thrall, leaving them pitiful yet powerful creatures for whom death is the true mercy.

THE RITUAL OF EMPOWERMENT

When an Earthbound chooses a mortal to be its thrall, it selects a candidate from its followers based on the purpose it has in mind. The chosen worshipper is offered the chance to work directly for her master — to become a trusted lieutenant and receive vast power, if she will prove her loyalty. Few worshippers refuse the chance, indoctrinated as they are. Those rare people who refuse are killed by the rest of the cult.

Before the Earthbound can enhance its thrall, the mortal *must* agree to receive its dark gift and bond to her master. Only a willing mortal can be enhanced with the Earthbound's power; any reluctance or resistance blocks the transfer of power. Of course, the Earthbound can manipulate its follower to get her to agree — lying about the consequences of the empowerment, or coercing the mortal by holding her family hostage. As long as she agrees, it doesn't matter *why* she's agreeing.

With the agreement made, the candidate must undergo a ritual of obeisance, a long process of signing her will and loyalty over to the Earthbound. This ritual usually lasts an entire night, and it always involves an act of major sacrifice by the mortal. She has to murder someone close to her, for example, destroy an item close to her heart or break one of her closely held principles. The ritual itself is meaningless to the Earthbound — it doesn't need to go through this process to focus its power. It's the mortal who needs this long, terrible ritual. It focuses her will and Faith into a concentrated form that the Earthbound can manipulate, just as a worship ritual transforms her weak Faith into energy that the Earthbound can use.

With the ritual complete, the candidate must lay her hands upon the Earthbound's reliquary or be touched by the Earthbound in its apocalyptic form. With this physical contact, the Earthbound bleeds its own tainted



essence into the mortal, warping and reshaping her spirit into a form that suits its needs. This process isn't difficult for the Earthbound. It only needs to spend a point of temporary Faith to perform the alterations. For the mortal, it's an agony of pain and madness that leaves her permanently shaken and alienated from her former self. The thrall loses a point of permanent Willpower. The mortal gains power, but at a cost of sanity and much more.

THE PRICE OF POWER

The thralls of the Earthbound gain significant advantages from their demonic masters, perhaps even more than the thralls of the fallen. But these advantages come at the terrible cost of the gradual loss of sanity and free will, and the slow warping and degeneration of the thrall's body.

To imbue a thrall with a fraction of its own power, the Earthbound contaminates the mortal's soul with its own black essence. The tainted power of this energy causes the thrall's soul to warp and mutate, deforming in random and unpredictable ways. While the Earthbound reshapes part of the thrall's spirit to give her the power it wants to bequeath, it leaves the rest of the spirit alone to become deformed. This means that the newly empowered thrall suffers a number of permanent side effects, or stigmata, whenever she is "gifted" by the Earthbound. These marks might take the form of physical mutations, like a second, stunted face growing from her chest, a dulling of her senses or a need to drink blood to live. They could also be mental instabilities, such as a derangement. The Earthbound will suppress any side-effects that interfere with the purpose it plans for its thrall — it won't permit the muscles of a warrior-thrall to atrophy, for example — but it cares nothing for any other problems that might arise.

If that wasn't bad enough, woe betide the thrall who performs well for her master and accepts the offer of even more power. The Earthbound can empower the same thrall multiple times, each time requiring a new ritual of obeisance and a new reshaping of the thrall's spirit — and further degeneration of the mortal's body and mind. After three such empowerments, the thrall is permanently enslaved to the Earthbound. Her very spiritual essence is so attuned to the touch of her master that any kind of resistance or disobedience is utterly impossible.

An enslaved thrall is absolutely loyal to her master, regardless of its demands. The Earthbound could demand that she murder her entire family in cold blood or cut her own throat, and she will do it without hesitation. The thrall has no free will of her own, at least when it comes to her Lord's orders. She can make her own decisions in other areas of her life, but she will always obey any instructions from the

Earthbound. She is also incapable of betraying her master, even indirectly. Any attempt to win the thrall over by mundane means — bribery, intimidation, coercion, lies and tricks — will automatically fail. Supernatural methods, such as mind-control, might be effective, but the thrall will be very difficult to control. The difficulty of any Willpower rolls she makes to resist such control decreases by three, to a minimum of 3.

THRALL ABILITIES

Each time the Earthbound empowers one of its thralls, the player may spend 15 freebie points on improving her character's traits or adding new capabilities. The player can not only improve his thrall's mundane abilities, but can also add supernatural abilities to the thrall, ranging from physical mutations to limited versions of his character's own lore evocations. The powers granted to the thrall do not have to reflect the powers of the Earthbound. The character can craft its thrall's soul to bring out some capabilities that the demon does not possess itself.

Along with these new powers, however, comes the thrall's inevitable mutation and degeneration, manifesting as terrible stigmata. As well as the 15 freebie points, the player must spend three "stigmata points" on flaws, mutations and side-effects that afflict his new thrall.

MUNDANE ABILITIES

The thrall's normal abilities can be improved with freebie points. It costs five freebie points to raise one of the thrall's Attributes by a dot, and two freebie points to raise one of her Abilities by a dot (both to a maximum of five dots). Willpower, Virtues and Backgrounds cannot be raised.

LIMITED EVOCATIONS

The Earthbound can gift its thrall with a limited version of an evocation that it can perform itself. (It can't grant an evocation that it does not know.) Such abilities are very powerful, but expensive and difficult for the thrall to perform. It costs five freebie points to grant a one-dot evocation, 10 freebie points to grant a two-dot evocation, and 15 freebie points to grant a three-dot evocation (the highest possible). The thrall can perform only the high-Torment version of the evocation, and learns only a single evocation (so a thrall with a three-dot evocation cannot perform the one- or two-dot evocations).

To perform a limited evocation, the thrall must make a Willpower roll (difficulty 7) or spend a point of temporary Willpower. Any effects of the evocation that are based on Faith or Torment ratings are instead calculated using the thrall's permanent Willpower rating.

MUTATIONS AND POWERS

By reshaping its thrall's soul in unnatural ways, the Earthbound can grant her bizarre and terrible supernatural powers. These abilities are far more limited than the Earthbound's own evocations, but effective in their own way. The player can buy any of the powers listed here for his thrall, spending the listed freebie point cost. This list is not exhaustive, so players should consult with their Storyteller to come up with costs and definitions for new abilities.

- **Animal Control (2 points):** The thrall can summon any chosen animal or animals within the immediate area and command them to do her bidding. She cannot command the animal to perform any action it would not normally be able to do. Roll Manipulation + Animal Ken (difficulty 7). If successful, the thrall summons and commands an animal within 100 yards. The effects of the power last for a scene.

- **Cause Insanity (4 points):** The thrall can cause mortals to become temporarily insane. Spend a point of Willpower and roll Manipulation + Subterfuge against any target within line of sight; the mortal resists with a Willpower roll. If the thrall gains more successes, she may inflict any chosen derangement onto the target, which lasts until the end of the scene. If she gains four or more successes, the derangement is semi-permanent, and can only be removed through psychiatric help and counseling.

- **Claws/Fangs (1 point):** The thrall can grow two-inch fangs or claws at will. These weapons inflict Strength – 1 aggravated damage (lethal damage against mortals).

- **Corrupting Touch (4 points):** The thrall's touch infects others with a toxic fungal rot or slow physical degradation. Spend a point of Willpower and roll Stamina (difficulty 7). The target loses a dot from his Physical Attributes and Appearance each day, for a number of days equal to the successes on the roll. When the rot ceases to spread, the Attributes slowly recover at a rate of one dot per week. Demons are immune to this power.

- **Damage Resistance (5 points):** The thrall can soak lethal damage with her normal Stamina soak pool.

- **Darksight (2 points):** The thrall can see in total darkness, and he never takes any penalties for reduced light conditions (including blind fighting).

- **Extra Actions (4 points):** The thrall can gain extra actions in combat by spending Willpower. Each point of Willpower spent gives the thrall one extra action, which takes place one initiative step after her normal action. So if her initiative roll is 7, her extra action has an initiative of 6.

- **Extra Health Levels (3 points):** The thrall has two extra Bruised health levels.

- **Fast Healing (4 points):** The thrall can heal her injuries by spending Willpower. By spending a turn concentrating and spending one point of Willpower, the thrall heals one lethal health level or *all* her bashing health levels.

- **Frenzy (3 points):** The thrall can deliberately enter a state of berserk fury, during which she fights with lethal speed and without feeling pain. By spending a point of Willpower, the thrall gains +3 to her initiative, reduces any multiple action penalties by one and suffers no wound penalties. The effects of the power last for a number of turns equal to her Stamina rating. While frenzied, the thrall will attack the nearest target to her, whether friend or foe.

- **Immunity to Fear (1 point):** The thrall cannot be intimidated or frightened by any mundane or supernatural event; any attempt to frighten her will automatically fail. The thrall's Earthbound master is exempt from this protection.

- **Immunity to Mind-Control (2 points):** The thrall is not affected by any supernatural mind-control or influencing powers — except, of course, those of her Earthbound master.

- **Master's Voice (1 point):** The thrall can invoke her Earthbound master, as well as any other empowered thralls that serve the same lord. Roll Wits + Expression and compare the results to the listing on page 171 of the **Demon** core rulebook. The thrall cannot invoke other demons or Earthbound, even if she learns their True Names.

- **Mental Blast (5 points):** The thrall can overwhelm a mortal's mind with a wave of telepathic energy. Spend a point of Willpower, target a mortal within line of sight and roll Wits + Intimidation. The target resists with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). Each success inflicts a level of bashing damage to the target (which cannot be soaked), and leaves him stunned and unable to act for one turn. This power is invisible to onlookers but detectable with supernatural awareness, and it has no effect on demons.

- **Mind Eater (5 points):** The thrall can drain opponents of their mental faculties and grow smarter and more quick-witted in the process. The thrall must touch her target to use this power. Spend a point of Willpower and roll Intelligence + Occult. The target resists with a Willpower roll. Every success gained by the thrall drains a dot from one of the target's Mental Attributes and adds that dot to the thrall's corresponding Attribute — to a maximum of 5. This power affects both mortals and demons. Mortals remain unaware that they have been affected, while demons may make a supernatural awareness roll to detect the power's use. Mind Eater may be used only once per scene, and its effect last until the end of the scene.

• **Resistance to Illusion (2 points):** Like demons and the Earthbound, the thrall has the capability to see through most illusions. Roll Perception + Alertness to see through illusions, as described on page 171 of the **Demon** core rulebook.

• **Scream of Terror (4 points):** The thrall can let out a blistering scream that frightens any mortal who hears it. Spend one point of Willpower and roll Manipulation + Intimidation. Mortals who hear the scream resist with a Willpower roll (difficulty 7). If the thrall gains more successes, witnesses are terrified for the remainder of the scene, and they may run, panic or faint as appropriate.

• **Superhuman Attribute (4 points):** One of the thrall's Attributes becomes superhumanly effective. Choose an Attribute; the thrall receives an automatic success on any and all rolls involving that Attribute. This power can be selected multiple times, either adding further successes to one Attribute or improving a number of different Attributes.

• **Supernatural Awareness (3 points):** The thrall has a limited version of her master's power to sense supernatural energies. The thrall can make a Perception + Awareness roll to detect supernatural power, as described on page 172 of the **Demon** core rulebook, but the range of her awareness is much shorter — 100 yards for every dot of her permanent Willpower rating.

• **Tainted Bile (3 points):** The thrall can spit acidic bile at a nearby target. Roll Dexterity + Athletics to hit a target within a number of yards equal to the thrall's Strength; the bile inflicts Stamina + 1 lethal damage.

• **Water Breathing (1 point):** The thrall can breathe underwater just as if she were breathing air.

• **Webbing (4 points):** The thrall can vomit sticky webbing onto her foes to immobilize them. The thrall suffers a level of bashing damage (which cannot be soaked) every time she uses this power. Roll Dexterity + Athletics against a target within a number of yards equal to the thrall's Stamina. The webbing can be dodged but not parried. If the roll succeeds, the target is enveloped in webbing that has a Strength equal to the thrall's Willpower + 3, which the target must overcome in a resisted roll to escape. The webbing can be cut open. It has a soak rating and health levels equal to the thrall's Willpower.

STIGMATA

For every 15 freebie points the player spends on enhancing his character's thrall, he must also inflict three points of stigmata and flaws on the thrall. Most flaws can be inflicted on a thrall multiple times, each time weakening her in a different way. The following

list is not exhaustive. Consult your Storyteller if you think of a new and interesting stigmata for your character's thrall. Stigmata are never worth more than three points.

• **Attribute Atrophy (2 points):** One of the thrall's Attributes decreases by one dot and can never be increased with experience points or by the thrall's Earthbound master.

• **Derangement (2 points):** The thrall gains a derangement, which is chosen by the Storyteller.

• **Feeding Requirement (2 points):** The thrall needs to ingest a specific substance in order to survive. This requirement isn't just an addiction, though. The thrall's body has actually changed so much that it needs this substance in order to live. Possible substances might be blood, human feces, human flesh, pure heroin or similar unpleasant or hard-to-obtain materials. The thrall takes a level of bashing damage each day she goes without this substance, and this damage cannot be healed until she finally fills her need.

• **Minor Physical Mutation (1 point):** The thrall's body changes slightly, in a way that can be hidden or disguised without too much effort. Examples include a strange scar or 'birthmark' that symbolizes the Earthbound, eyes with split or double pupils, patterns of fur, scales or mottled skin, albinism, becoming a hermaphrodite or losing all body and head hair.

• **Major Physical Mutation (2 points):** The thrall's body mutates in a way that is difficult to disguise without major effort, and that will probably disgust or horrify witnesses. Examples include a second face growing from the torso, grotesque amounts of body fat, small vestigial limbs that can be strapped down under clothing, withered limbs, lack of ears or eyes, cloven hooves instead of feet or constantly bleeding wounds on the hands and feet.

• **Severe Physical Mutation (3 points):** The thrall's body has mutated so much that disguising the change is impossible. Mortals react to the thrall with fear, disgust and horror. Examples include a second head, limbs swollen to twice their normal size, skin covered with slime and oozing sores, extra limbs, a tail, a set of horns or rotting flesh that sloughs off in clumps.

• **Sensory Impairment (1 or 2 points):** The thrall has a sense that is either damaged or that has failed completely. If the thrall has lost her sense of taste, touch or smell, or if she suffers a +2 difficulty penalty to sight or hearing-based Perception rolls, this flaw is worth one point. If she is completely blind or deaf, it's worth two points.



I write this now, so that there is some record after they have taken me away again, for I doubt I shall return this time. All I can hope is that someone else reads my story, chooses against every argument of rationality to believe me and heeds the warnings I did not. Then, perhaps, they will avoid sharing my fate.

My name is Alexander Davidson, and I am a scientist. That is, I have been researching the effects of altitude upon the human physique and spirit since the flying machines of the Great War have carried man higher than ever before, and it is worth studying.

I was traveling in the – well, best not to name it, but a remote and desolate mountain range. I had been taking readings on my companions' physiques, when I was distracted by a dark smear on the mountain I had not seen before – a cave mouth. I tentatively pushed aside curtains of desiccated vines, which crumbled in my hands and delivered a load of crawling insects that I still feel now, creeping up my arms. Foolishly, I continued down the passageway, calling for my assistant to bring the lamp. After hours, an impossibly long walk, we emerged into a rough-hewn cavern, and what I saw there I can never forget.

The same vines adorned the walls, crawling with tangles of insects and worms. The chamber was a near-perfect circle, and deeply inscribed channels crisscrossed the floor in eye-breaking patterns. Entranced, I stared at one for moments, and it seemed even to my rational eye that they twisted and danced as I gazed. The walls were daubed with flaking brown sigils, a rusty color that almost looked like dried blood. And then my gaze turned, almost irresistibly, to the altar at the chamber's back.

Positioned before it was a graven image, ten feet tall. It seemed congealed of solid alabaster or inhumanly translucent bone, a grotesque and compellingly beautiful idol that had shaded eyes, yet stared straight through me and into my heart and mind. I thought I heard an impossible whispered voice echoing in my bones. I must be mad, for I thought it called my name and said, "I am Azrael. Worship me, and I shall bless thee with thy heart's longing."

As I watched, unable to tear my gaze away, my mind reeled with flickers of images, visions that I pray could never have been true. I saw the channels in the floor running with blood and liquid gold and black oily water. I saw people thronging around the altar, prostrating themselves in adulation. I saw idolaters gyrating in ecstasy, defiling each other with violence and unspeakable depravity, and I saw the idol smiling in approval. And I saw myself, standing before the altar with a book in my hand and power in my voice, dictating my commands and they were so. And it was good. In a moment of horror I could hear my own voice speaking the terrible word "Yes," and I knew that it was no vision but truth. I could bear no more.

They tell me I ran screaming from the passageway and flung myself off the mountain path without stopping. I have been in the hospital ever since, they say.

They are here again for me. Apparently I'm insane, and this new therapy with the wires and currents will make me well again, but even behind my closed eyelids all I can see is that blank-faced idol staring into my soul. Had they seen that, they would know that if I am mad, it is kinder than the curse of cold sanity, where I would have to try to understand where I have been.



CHAPTER FOUR: FORBIDDEN ARCANIA

If superior minds were ever placed in fullest contact with the secrets preserved by ancient and lowly cults, the resultant abnormalities would soon not only wreck the world, but threaten the very integrity of the universe.

—H. P. Lovecraft, “The Horror at Red Hook”

Hidden away in lands where men do not walk lie the ancient and dreadful bastions of the old gods. These forgotten strongholds, seats of power, hold the antiquities of the Earthbound. Within lie artifacts, ancient lore, hidden refuges for the dark gods that once ruled these lands. Some fallen seek to rob these fortresses of their hoarded relics, unaware (or in spite) of the spiritual peril they invite. The hidden troves of the Earthbound are feared and desired in equal measure. And now the Earthbound, newly awakened, are using all the wealth and knowledge that the modern world can offer to create new and terrible tools for the hands of their servitors and slaves.

The powerful creations of the Earthbound are like those of the other fallen, and yet unlike. By virtue of their imprisonment, the fallen have not changed at all since the War of Wrath — in nature, if not in attitude. Millennia of unnatural interaction with mortal society,

however, has twisted and molded the Earthbound into something they never were, and they have become creatures almost entirely alien to the rest of demonic society. Their power notwithstanding, the gulf that separates the Earthbound from the rest of the fallen can be seen in their creations. Their relics, their rituals and their supernatural strongholds all reflect their nature as creatures of corruption and carnality. Regardless of the individual Earthbound’s nature, its creations could never be confused for those of an ordinary demon.

RELICS

The Earthbound are responsible for just as many magical artifacts as any other demons are. In fact, their long years of mastery over the Earth, while other fallen were confined to the Abyss, allowed them unequalled experience in creating relics best suited to their needs.

Earthbound relics serve a variety of purposes. The following are examples of common Earthbound items usually bestowed upon their mortal servants. When developing new items for the Earthbound and their servants, see Chapter Five of the **Demon Players Guide** to create relics, as well as pp. 87-92 of this book for new Earthbound lore paths that these items can also evoke.

Compared with many other fallen artifacts, the relics of the Earthbound are quite powerful. This difference is due primarily to ages of experience in shaping mortal tools to suit their needs. Not only have the Earthbound had more time on Earth to perfect their techniques and refine their knowledge of relic-crafting, but they are not restricted by the limitations of a mortal body. Compared with a typical newly escaped fallen, an Earthbound has power beyond compare. The relics created by such monsters approach the might and glory of ancient war-era artifacts as closely as is possible in these modern faithless days.

Protective items and weapons are relatively common, since the Earthbound trapped in their nonliving reliquaries are more vulnerable than other demons. More powerful relics work upon the minds of mortals. Some tempt them with irresistible lures to accept the gifts of the Earthbound in exchange for their worship; others subtly spread madness and chaos among mortals and their society, preparing humans for the re-emergence of Earthbound dominance. The most cunningly created relics do both. The mortal user knows that the item helps him with a particular aspect of his life, while surreptitiously the item works to twist the user's perceptions, desires or goals to meet the Earthbound's needs.

Earthbound items have a certain aura of taint about them, an unavoidable side effect of the Earthbound demons' long-ago descent into corruption and bloodlust. This sense of "wrongness" can be detected with the same supernatural senses that demons use to find the other works of their kind. The relics of the Earthbound are items of mystery like any other, just with a faint touch of perversion. The true nature of Earthbound relics becomes clear to a fallen who attempts to use them; such users rarely survive the attempt completely unscathed.

REVEALING A TRUE NAME

When in the hands of a newly freed demon, some relics allow the Earthbound creator to glean fragments of the wielder's True Name. In such a case, make a resisted Willpower roll (difficulty 7) against the Earthbound each time the item is activated. If the Earthbound wins the contest, she gains one portion of the wielder's True Name. If the demon wins the roll, or if it's a tie, he gives away no secrets — this time. The ultimate size of a demon's True Name — and thus the proportion of

it discovered with this effect — is at the Storyteller's discretion. (See the guidelines for uncovering a demon's True Name on page 256 of the **Demon** core rulebook for more details.) The greatest pitfall for the fallen is that they're usually unaware of these revelations until it's too late.

If the relic in question was created by an enslaved demon at the behest of an Earthbound, the Earthbound can still discover True Name fragments by this method. The bond of slavery between the creator and his Earthbound master is strong enough for the Earthbound to detect the resonance of the wielder's True Name. All of the True Name fragments, however, are evident to the enslaved demon as well, who has been a conduit for the information.

ENHANCED ITEMS

Permanently enhanced items, being subtle improvements of mundane possessions, are favored tools of the Earthbound. Although the haste implicit in their creation is often unnecessary for a long-sighted Earthbound, their simplicity and low cost make them valuable as lures to tempt mortals to worship. The gift of an enhanced item often impresses the recipient without intimidating him unduly, preparing his mind to place his Faith in the Earthbound's power.

Unlike most enhanced items, those created by the Earthbound often require certain sacrifices and activation conditions, but they will operate for anyone who is willing to pay their price. Over their long years of life in the absence of the rest of the fallen, the Earthbound learned how to manipulate the energies of Creation more efficiently and how to use those energies to tempt and taint the mortal souls they desired.

ALTAR KNIFE

Used for ritual purposes or just as a gruesome demonstration of loyalty, sacrifice became a common part of Earthbound worship rites long ago. The knives used in these ceremonies were ideal tools for enhancement. Touched by the power of the Earthbound or one of his enslaved fallen, these knives became powerful weapons in the bloodied hands of their wielders, all the while reinforcing the brutality such cults demanded.

The gifts of the Earthbound were never without cost, however. Many rites of devotion involved sacrifice and bloodshed on the part of the senior participants as well as hapless victims, and these traditions were incorporated into the enhancement of the altar knives. Most such relics are merely inert lumps of sharpened metal until their enhancement is invoked with the wielder's own blood.

Altar knives of this ilk are usually ancient remnants of the Earthbound's days of power, and they reside as family heirlooms with the descendents of powerful thrall families. Some lie discarded, rusted



with the blood of the last victim. Now, with the reawakening of many Earthbound, similar relics are being created anew.

System: The enhancement of an altar knife must be activated with the wielder's own blood. She must inflict one health level of lethal damage to herself in order to activate its special properties. Otherwise treat the relic as a typical knife.

An enhanced altar knife inflicts Strength + 4 lethal damage, instead of the usual Strength + 1. Further, the difficulty of all to-hit rolls using the knife decrease by four, to a minimum difficulty of 3. These bonuses apply no matter how the knife is used, whether as a thrown blade or in hand-to-hand combat.

Used by the Fallen: Merely laying hands on an altar knife could count as a sin based on the character's permanent Torment score and the circumstances at hand. Doing so requires an appropriate Virtue roll (**Demon** p. 161) to avoid gaining Torment.

Activating and using an altar knife gives the fallen a point of temporary Torment. It also provides the Earthbound who created the knife (or master of an enslaved fallen creator) with a certain amount of information about the wielder's True Name.

ENHANCED BODY ARMOR

In stark contrast to ancient sacrificial knives, the Earthbound also exploit the fruits of modern science to their advantage. Enhanced armors have been popular since relics were first created, and it pays to keep up with technology in these dangerous times.

Trapped within an inanimate receptacle, an unguarded Earthbound demon is in more serious danger than she would like. The guards and toughs from among its flock are vital for its safety, and maintaining their usefulness is in its best interest. The latest combat armors are just as suitable for improvement as bronze breastplates, and they are usually bestowed on an Earthbound's more capable bodyguards and thugs. Although all forms of enhanced body armor are equally effective, they range in appearance from modern body armor to ancient suits of finely wrought mail.

A set of enhanced armor must usually be activated before its improvements take effect. Such armors are common enough that the Earthbound prefer not to shoulder the cost of creation themselves. The activation is an entreaty from the mortal to the Earthbound, calling his mistress for protection even as he acts in her name.

System: Enhanced body armor generally requires activation. The user must call upon the name of the Earthbound who created the relic and spend one Willpower point. Without activation, the armor has an Armor rating of 5 (**Demon**, p. 244).

Once the armor is activated, its rating increases to 8. The unholy enhancement also allows unhindered movement for the wearer. The user incurs no armor-based dice pool penalties once the armor has been activated.

Used by the Fallen: Acquiring Earthbound-enhanced armor causes no more than superficial harm to a demon's psyche and soul. Donning and using the armor, however, is another matter. The act of devotion required to activate it renders one of the fallen very vulnerable to enslavement by the Earthbound creator.

If the Earthbound later attempts to bind the target fallen into slavery within a number of months equal to the target's Torment, all Willpower rolls made to resist the enslavement lose one die for every time the user activated the armor's enhancement. This penalty applies whether the binding attempt is performed by the Earthbound personally (p. 82) or through one of the Earthbound's thralls.

FALSE ID

Temporal influence is very important for an Earthbound cult. An Earthbound demon is very limited in its movement, so it must work through mortal servants much more than other fallen. Unable to assume positions of power itself, a typical Earthbound will work to give its mortal servants as much mundane authority as possible.

The false ID is an oft-enhanced item prepared for Earthbound thralls. The procedure is usually performed on falsified identity documents for police officers and various government agents, although it can just as easily be applied to any form of identification. Enhanced false IDs are much more effective at convincing other mortals that the bearer is who he claims to be.

These items are usually given only to the Earthbound's more trusted servants, who are performing important tasks for the demon.

System: Such items usually do not require any particular sacrifice by the user for activation.

Enhanced false IDs provide the user an extra four dice for Subterfuge rolls to convince others that he is a legitimate police officer, CIA agent, Forest Ranger or whatever the ID says he is. In addition, the difficulty for the Subterfuge check decreases by one.

Used by the Fallen: If a fallen assumes an identity created by an Earthbound, it gives that demon some measure of control over the wielder's self. Identity is such an important part of one's nature that the Earthbound can glean some fragments of a demon's True Name when that demon uses the ID or the persona associated with it.

UNSCALED EYES

In a world of corruption and deceit, the Earthbound and their minions are among the least trusting

of all beings. It is impossible to control the minds of others if you cannot tell truth from falsehood. Such a principle was the motivation for creating relics such as the unscaled eyes. These relics often take the form of finely made spectacles or sunglasses — most are antique, although some hail from the modern era — that show the wearer the difference between truth and lies in everything he hears and sees.

System: Activating the relic requires a Willpower roll in the case of a mortal user or a Faith roll if the wielder is a demon. Unlike many Earthbound relics, these eyeglasses do not require a sacrifice from the wearer to activate its properties.

Once the relic is activated, the wearer can more easily detect falsehoods and deception perpetrated in his presence. The wielder gains an additional four dice for all Perception-based rolls to detect or resist the use of Subterfuge in his presence, and the difficulty for the rolls decreases by one.

Used by the Fallen: Although these artifacts are not particularly evil in and of themselves, they still resonate with the power of the Earthbound. A demon loses one point of Willpower each time she uses the glasses unless her player makes a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 7).

ENCHANTED ITEMS

These powerful items are usually planned carefully by an Earthbound, and the actual construction and enchantment is commonly performed by one of the Earthbound's infernal servants. The more powerful Earthbound seek to control a stable of competent relic-crafters who are skilled in the abilities needed to create enchanted items. Even if the actual maker was an enslaved demon, the nature of the infernal slavery passes control of created items like this to the demon's Earthbound master.

ATTUNEMENT

Instead of constantly paying an activation cost, a relic's owner can attune himself to the artifact. (See Chapter Five of the **Demon Players Guide** for more details.) When dealing with the relics of the Earthbound, however, such an attunement can have a grim cost.

A mortal who attunes to an Earthbound item becomes unbalanced and possibly insane. Make a Willpower roll against a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's Torment; failure indicates that the mortal has acquired a derangement (**Demon**, p. 260). Attuning to an Earthbound item also increases the mortal's vulnerability to enthrallment by the demon. The difficulty drops by two for any Manipulation rolls made for the Earthbound — or one of his minions — when attempting to convince the mortal to become the demon's thrall.

A fallen who attunes to an item created by an Earthbound acquires an additional point of *permanent* Torment, as well as paying one point of Faith. The attunement also gives the Earthbound a measure of power over the fallen, making enslavement that much easier. If the Earthbound attempts to enslave the fallen while the fallen is still attuned to the relic, the fallen has one less die for his Willpower roll and the Earthbound (or its proxy) gains one additional die (**Demon** page 258).

Note that the unfortunate side effects of attunement come in addition to the price one of the fallen pays for merely using a relic, as listed in the relic's description.

CELESTIAL GAUNTLETS

People who lack power have always craved it, especially those victimized by people who do have it. Despite humanity's veneer of civilization, physical prowess is still a common measure of power, and with relics such as the celestial gauntlets, its lack is easily remedied.

Once constructed as large armored metal gloves, gauntlets are usually crafted more subtly for the modern era. Most modern celestial gauntlets appear as a pair of fine red or black leather gloves, often made from human skin.

When activated, these gauntlets improve the user's physical capabilities to incredible levels. With the aid of the gloves, an Earthbound's faithful servants can be faster, stronger, tougher — all the things they've always wished they were.

The Earthbound often bestow these gifts with a two-fold purpose in mind. The first is obvious — more capable servants are more useful to an Earthbound master. The second is more insidious, though. Those without power can easily become addicted to it once it's within their grasp. Mortals who rely on a supernatural artifact to feel powerful are easily swayed by the lure of more.

Like every Earthbound gift, the gauntlets are not without cost. The taint of Earthbound corruption extracts a price from the user. In the case of the gauntlets, constant use saps the wearer's independence and self-control. Occasionally they can go horribly wrong, leaving the user with psychoses and an uncontrollable predilection for violence.

System: The gauntlets evoke effects similar to *Manipulate Flesh* (Lore of the Flesh •••). It costs one point of Willpower for a mortal to activate the gauntlets, unless he has already attuned himself to the item. Demons who use these gauntlets spend one point of Faith to activate them unless they have attuned themselves to the gloves.

Each time the gauntlets are activated, roll five dice against a difficulty of 6. Each success increases a single Physical Attribute by one, at the wielder's discretion.

Attributes increased in this way can go higher than the normal mortal maximum of 5. If the roll fails, the user's Attributes remain the same, but he suffers a temporary derangement that incites him to violence. If that roll botches, however, the derangement is permanent.

Channeling high amounts of power can severely strain a wielder's mind and body. Compare the total number of successes gained against the wielder's Wits. Every success in excess of the wielder's Wits removes one point of the wielder's Willpower. If the wielder has no Willpower remaining, each success inflicts one health level of bashing damage. This damage cannot be soaked.

The extra Attribute points bestowed by the gauntlets last for one scene. The Willpower loss and damage caused are permanent until replaced or healed.

Used by the Fallen: Fallen who use Earthbound relics of this type must make a Virtue roll as if they had committed a sin appropriate to their experience and Torment (**Demon**, p. 159). Otherwise, they acquire a point of temporary Torment.

VEIL OF SECRETS

The meetings and places of worship of Earthbound followers have always been threatened by their enemies' seeking to disrupt rituals, destroy the organization or usurp power. The resting-places of Earthbound reliquaries are equally vulnerable, and they require just as much protection. Thralls in enhanced body armor are useful, but cautious Earthbound prefer to ensure their safety and privacy with a veil of secrets, a relic crafted to keep out unwelcome visitors.

A veil of secrets usually takes the form of a braided rope crafted of hide or hair. Sometimes the relic is a chain, a paneled screen or other item capable of forming a symbolic barrier when stretched from point to point. When employed, it is placed around the area to be warded — stretched from one stanchion to another, unfolded and positioned to screen the area or even looped through rings on poles like a theater rope, as appropriate for the relic's form.

A veil of secrets is usually reserved to protect the Earthbound's sanctum, but spare relics are sometimes bestowed on thralls in positions of importance to protect their persons or their privacy.

System: A veil of secrets draws on the Lore of Portals to seal an area and preserve it from intrusion. Activating the veil requires a point of Willpower for a mortal or a point of Faith for a demon unless he has been attuned to the item. The effects of the item last for the duration of the scene.

When the relic is activated, roll 10 dice against a difficulty of 6 to determine the strength of the ward. Once active, the veil protects an area with a radius of five yards, centered on the relic itself. If desired, the wielder can expend one or more of the successes rolled

to increase the radius by five yards per success, sacrificing power for coverage. The effects are similar to the Create Ward evocation (Lore of Portals ••). Doorways become blocked with a cloud, and doors and windows seal and become unbreakable. Evocations cannot be directed at the warded area from the outside unless the evocation roll generates more successes than the ward's strength.

Used by the Fallen: A veil of secrets has relatively mild effects on the fallen. Demons who activate a veil must make a Virtue roll (depending on their permanent Torment score) to avoid gaining a point of temporary Torment.

PAIN OF THE AGES

These loathsome relics are all too common among the older Earthbound and their more depraved servants. The pain of the ages was developed as an instrument of supreme torture, capable of inflicting every agony of which the Earthbound were capable. Originally conceived as devices for extracting information and punishing wrongdoers, they came to be used for the sheer sadistic pleasure of the wielders in any number of debauched permutations.

These relics usually take the form of finely crafted, gleaming tools of unidentifiable shape and sinister purpose. Adorned with flanges, points, ridges and serrated edges, the devices are as varied in form as they are uniform in purpose.

System: The pain of the ages combines the Lore of the Flesh and the Lore of Longing to induce sensations of agony in its victims. Activating the relic requires a point of Willpower for a mortal or a point of Faith for a demon.

The device must make physical contact with the target's skin to cause its effect. Roll seven dice against a difficulty of 6; each success inflicts a wound penalty of one die, as if the target were physically injured. If the wound penalty exceeds the victim's Stamina + 5, the victim passes out from sheer agony and will not regain consciousness until the end of the scene. In addition, every success in excess of the victim's Stamina inflicts a health level of lethal damage from neural overload.

Used by the Fallen: The use of this relic requires a Virtue roll (based on the circumstances) with a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's Torment to avoid gaining a point of temporary Torment. If the roll botches, the character also loses a point of Willpower as her darker nature is emboldened by the sheer sadistic power of the item.

Variation: Some relics of this type also include effects similar to the high-Torment version of Revelation (Lore of Radiance •••••), adding spiritual pain to the mental and physical agony that the victim is already suffering. These versions of the relic can be activated only once a day, and they have a pool of only

six dice for their effects. Even after the agony ceases, however, a Willpower roll with a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's Willpower must be made or the victim acquires a temporary derangement. If the roll botches, the derangement is permanent.

PRESS OF VOICES

The press of voices is a novel creation, dreadful in its ingenuity. Created by a fallen slave of the Earthbound Hedammu, the relic is a newspaper printing press engineered to reach the minds of potential worshippers and prepare them for the cult of Hedammu.

The press calls upon the power of the Lore of Humanity to reach the minds of mortal readers. It requires activation by a user, so Hedammu must make sure that the publishing house employs at least one of his thralls. When functioning, though, the press affects a certain proportion of the newspapers it prints, making their stories seem more credible and believable to the mortals who will eventually read the papers. Naturally, this power is most effective when combined with stories that further some strategy of Hedammu's. To date, the press has been used in a tabloid newspaper operation where several of his thralls have gained employment as journalists and production staff.

Triggering the press's demonic power takes a considerable toll on the thralls who secretly operate it. This toll has limited the relic's usefulness and the penetration of Hedammu's message thus far. Doubtless the enslaved artificer responsible for the press has already been instructed to develop an enchantment that will counteract these weaknesses.

System: The press of voices uses a power similar to Insinuate (Lore of Humanity ••). Once activated, the power of the press lasts for as long as it is being fed paper, but it affects only five percent of the papers printed — affecting every paper printed is beyond even its means. Activating the press requires a point of Willpower in the case of a mortal operator, or a Faith point if the operator is a demon. If the press ceases printing at any point, its power must be reactivated to take effect again. The high cost of using the press means that Hedammu encourages his thralls to attune to the device wherever possible.

Once the press has been activated, the effects of its powers are not rolled immediately. Instead, the Storyteller should determine the effects when the appropriate mortal reads the tabloid. Assuming the mortal has one of the affected copies of the paper, the Storyteller rolls the press's pool of eight dice in a resisted roll versus the target's Willpower.

Success indicates that the reader has accepted the words of the newspaper and believes them absolutely. In the past, these papers have caused several bouts of mass hysteria that have led to race riots, widespread looting and even lynchings in normally placid urban

settings. The enchanted papers retain their potency for a number of days equal to the Earthbound's Willpower. Fallen are immune to the relic's mind-altering effects.

The press is a modern newspaper printing press, so it is absolutely massive. Moving the relic any considerable distance requires heavy machinery and large trucks. It can be changed to print other flat-paper items (such as magazines or banners), but doing so requires an Intelligence + Crafts roll against a difficulty of 8. If the roll succeeds, the press prints the new media successfully but still affects the same percentage of finished products.

Used by the Fallen: Fallen who operate the press as intended gain a point of temporary Torment with each activation unless a successful appropriate Virtue roll is made with a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's Torment.

DEMONIC ITEMS

Unlike most relics, many Earthbound items — especially demonic items — are intended to be used by unwilling or unknowing victims. The item's true nature is usually concealed, and its owner is in fact not the wielder but the victim of its powers, which are controlled by the spirit bound within. Fortunately, Earthbound demonic items are rare, as the Dread Kings usually have more direct uses for the demons they enslave to their service.

BLACK WHIP OF RUIN

The legends of angels and demons often speak of flaming swords and glowing shields, and the Earthbound have their own twisted equivalents. In their years upon the Earth these demons had a war to fight — for the adulation and allegiance of the mortals who fed them Faith — and every war needs its weapons.

These whips are prized weapons and marks of status for Earthbound servants, given to the elite fighters and assassins of the demon's inner circle. They channel the Lore of Contamination (p. 89) to taint the wounds of their foes. To those who've faced wielders of these whips in combat, it seems that the whips have a malevolent intelligence of their own, their barbed tails snaking past the most determined defense to leave a poisoned kiss along the victim's skin.

System: A black whip of ruin is a vicious weapon that can bring down even the noblest opponents. It always functions as a regular whip (inflicting bashing damage equal to the wielder's Strength), and it can be activated to deliver an additional lash of toxic energy that can be devastating to the victim. The activation cost is a point of temporary Torment, paid by the soul of the demon trapped within the whip. Once it has been activated, its powers remain in effect until it leaves its wielder's hand or at the end of the scene, whichever comes first.

When activated, the whip increases a wielder's Initiative rating by two and adds three dice to the wielder's Dexterity + Melee pool. The wielder may perform disarm and sweep maneuvers without an increase in difficulty (**Demon**, p. 242), and the weapon ignores mundane armor. Enchanted armors and protections from evocations and apocalyptic visages function normally. Finally, activated black whips inflict aggravated damage. The wounds inflicted by the weapon are ragged and suppurating, oozing unhealthy fluids and leaving livid red and purple scars.

Relic Traits: Binding ●●● (completely controlled by the Earthbound); Empowerment ●●● (Enhanced Durability, Spiritual Infusion, Vessel Control).

Used by the Fallen: These relics embody all that is vile and tainted about the Earthbound. Merely wielding one as an ordinary weapon without activating it can contaminate the soul. Any fallen who does so automatically acquires a point of temporary Torment. Activating the whip is another matter entirely, however. Make a Faith roll against a difficulty of 8; failure indicates that the temporary Torment point becomes permanent. If the roll botches, the demon loses a point of Willpower as well.

INFERNAL GRIMOIRE

Infernal grimoires are rare and insidious devices employed by the Earthbound as research tools. They entrap demonic souls, but unlike other demonic items, the powers of the relic are actually trained upon the soul that inhabits it.

Such books are usually finely wrought, unique tomes that contain a wealth of arcane information. The most powerful of tomes are intricately ornamented with gems or precious metals and crafted from the finest paper and bindings. The book will fly open at its owner's unspoken command, pages flipping past in a blur until it arrives at the information for which the reader is searching.

An infernal grimoire usually employs a powerful version of Speak with the Dead (Lore of the Spirit ●) to compel the spirit within to reveal any knowledge it possesses that may be of use to its owner. In a literal sense, the entrapped spirit is an open book to the owner. Its memories, Abilities and lore can be learned at will by poring over the book's pages. Advanced versions of these books also possess evocations of the Lore of Patterns, the better to predict the needs of the book's master before a demand is even made.

System: The grimoire's powers are relatively minor and are focused on extracting information from the spirit housed within. Given the compulsions implicit in the binding of a spirit into a demonic item, the powers involved merely improve the spirit's cooperation.

Activating the tome requires a Faith roll for a fallen reader or a Willpower roll for a mortal. Reading

the book has serious risks for unwary mortals, however. A Willpower roll must be made with a difficulty equal to the bound demon's Torment; if the roll fails, the mortal loses a point of Willpower. If the roll botches the mortal loses a Willpower point and gains a temporary derangement. The book can be activated once every scene. The user can read from it for as long as he wishes, but if he looks away or is distracted, he must activate the item again. Inactive grimoires cannot be read. Their pages contain lines of apparent gibberish, if their covers can be opened at all.

In order to use the grimoire, the reader must pose a specific question for the book to answer. Depending on the type of grimoire, the Storyteller rolls the relic's dice pool against a difficulty of 6. The number of successes determines the depth of the answer that the book provides. One success provides only the most basic information about the subject. Two successes provide detailed knowledge about the subject, adding contextual and analytical data that provide a broader picture than before. Three successes provide a wealth of data, including cross-references to situations and facts that provide an expanded picture of the topic requested. Four or more successes provide a comprehensive picture of the topic requested. The demon shares everything it knows on a subject, possibly providing insights that the reader hadn't considered but could be potentially useful. It is important to note, however, that the spirit trapped in the book is not going to be innately helpful to anyone delving into its memories. In fact, most books actively attempt to sabotage readers with incomplete information if they can. A book will provide the exact information requested by the reader, in the amount of detail determined by the roll, but if the question is not framed in precise terms, the spirit will attempt to mislead the reader. Finally, the Storyteller is the final arbiter as to whether the trapped spirit even possesses the information that the reader requires. Grimoires are not omniscient — if the trapped demon has no knowledge of the topic requested, the pages will remain unreadable.

Infernal grimoires generally fall into three broad categories, depending on how much information about the trapped soul they reveal. Grimoires can teach lore paths and rituals to fallen and mortals as though they were mentors (as per the Background).

- **Limited:** These tomes describe a single trait of the trapped spirit, usually an Ability or lore path. The books are relatively simple, compared with the baroque glories of more advanced relics, and they allow only limited communication with the trapped spirit. Such grimoires are the easiest to create, so they are the most common. The grimoire has a dice pool of seven.

- **Informative:** These grimoires completely describe the Abilities and lore of the spirit within.

They often contain other memories of the demon, such as known rituals, some or all of the demon's history since his release from the Abyss and access to other useful modern-day information. Informative books are easier to interact with and will move independently to suit the owner's needs. The grimoire has a dice pool of nine.

- **Comprehensive:** These books contain everything the demon inside has ever known, felt, thought or done. The reader has full access to all Abilities, lore paths, rituals and memories of the demon, including historical information from before the rebels' banishment to Hell. These grimoires have dice pools of 12.

Relic Traits: Binding ••• (completely controlled by the Earthbound); Empowerment ••• or •••• (Communication, Enhanced Durability, Vessel Control and sometimes Spiritual Infusion).

The Vessel Control capability allows the demon within the book to not only open and close in response to the reader's wishes, it also gains a limited form of movement. It can fall off a shelf into a person's open book bag, fall out an open window or be "blown" across the ground by the wind and the like. This power makes it very difficult for a reader to lose or dispose of the grimoire. It also allows the book to desert its owner just when it is needed most.

Used by the Fallen: Fallen who use a grimoire gain a point of temporary Torment with each use. Additionally, the player must make a resisted Willpower roll versus the demon trapped within the book. If the trapped demon wins the contest, it learns a piece of the reader's True Name.

CHILD'S COMPANION

Horribly ingenious, the child's companion is a relic designed to bring future generations of minions to an Earthbound's worship. These relics are crafted in the form of a child's toy — often a teddy bear, doll or other huggable toy taken to bed at night — and then imbued with the bound spirit of a malicious demon who whispers sweet nothings into the ear of the dreaming child every night.

The relic draws upon evocations of the Lore of Longing and Lore of the Celestials for its effects. Controlled by the demonic spirit imbued in the item, the toy fills the child's mind with nightmares, twisted visions and strange imaginings. Slowly, the child begins to change, warped by the nightly perversions that flood her mind. Such manipulation prepares a future worshipper from an early age to accept the Earthbound as her master. Some children are given these toys by knowing parents who are already thralls, who want to make sure that their child doesn't rebel.

Child's companions are relatively rare. The relic itself is simple enough to create, but few Earthbound are willing to entrust the mind and soul of a future



worshipper to a compelled and potentially treacherous demon-spirit.

System: A child's companion is a powerful relic capable of inflicting long-term psychological damage on a subject. The item is "used" by the demon residing within it, under the command of an Earthbound. It can operate once a day, but only when the target is sleeping. It can be used to affect adults, though children are usually the targets. The activation cost — a point of temporary Torment — is borne by the demon within, further eroding its self-control.

When the relic is activated, roll six dice in a resisted roll versus the target's Willpower. If the relic wins the contest, the target is visited with disquieting visions, usually involving the subject performing twisted and disturbing acts that are somehow oddly satisfying.

After 14 nights of visions (consecutive or not), the target loses a point of temporary Willpower. When the target has no temporary Willpower remaining, she acquires a permanent derangement and is successfully indoctrinated as a servant of the Earthbound (see Chapter Three for more details). The demon plays carefully upon the victim's mind, slowly warping it over time — the goal is to create a perverse and twisted worshipper, not a psychopath.

Relic Traits: Binding •• (may resist only those orders directly contrary to its nature); Empowerment

•••• (Communication, Keen Senses, Spiritual Infusion, Vessel Control).

The demonic spirits bound into such relics are often Scourges or Defilers, and most have access to three or four evocations that they use to protect the child while subverting her with the powers of the relic itself. These evocations are usually drawn from lore paths such as Humanity, Radiance, Awakening or Longing. If possible, the bound demon will forge a Faustian pact with the child, providing protection (or other gifts) in exchange for her Faith.

Using the Vessel Control power, the demon can make the toy move around. Doing so requires subtlety to avoid the attention of adults, but it can be invaluable in securing the adulation and Faith of the child.

Used by the Fallen: Should a fallen happen to sleep next to one of these relics, the effects can be far more dramatic. Make a resisted Willpower roll against the demon within the relic, but the difficulty of the victim's roll is equal to the relic demon's Torment. If the demon should fall prey to the item, however, instead of gaining a derangement, he becomes more vulnerable to Earthbound enslavement as his mind is manipulated and weakened to accept the Earthbound's command. Under these circumstances, the fallen has one less die on any Willpower roll to resist the Earthbound's attempts at enslavement.

This weakening lasts for a number of months equal to the Earthbound's Torment. If the demon is subject to multiple exposures to the relic, the dice loss is cumulative.

GHOST COIN

Ghost coins are cunning creations that play upon the misery and loneliness of the recently bereaved. A ghost coin can be enchanted from any item, as the form of the relic has little to do with its function, but most are crafted from fine jewelry or sentimental trinkets.

A ghost coin contains an enslaved soul, but unlike most Earthbound items, the spirit bound therein is that of a mortal, usually one recently deceased. The mortal soul is bound into a relic that has been enchanted from one of the dead mortal's mundane possessions. For example, canny Earthbound demons often acquire the dead mortal's wristwatch or wedding ring and enchant it as a relic. They force the dead soul into the item and return it to one of the dead person's loved ones.

Forced to do the bidding of its Earthbound master, the enslaved spirit whispers to the living owner in dreams. The spirit tells the recently bereaved about the afterlife he's found and how blissful it is; how the worship of a powerful god led him there; how only the worship of that god—the Earthbound—will allow the loved ones to be together in eternal afterlife as well. Slowly the bound spirit works to convert its living loved ones to the worship of the Earthbound, despite the spiritual anguish it causes.

System: A ghost coin uses the power of the Lore of Humanity and the Lore of Longing on the living owner. Its affects can be brought to bear only when the person who possesses the relic is in a dreamlike state, such as when she is asleep, daydreaming or under the effects of a hallucinogenic drug. The spirit inside the ghost coin expends a point of Willpower to activate its effects. Once the spirit exhausts its Willpower supply, it must then spend its Faith potential. Once that is lost, the spirit is consumed and the relic becomes inert until it is infused with another spirit.

When activated, roll 10 dice in a resisted roll versus the target's Willpower. If the mortal loses the contest, the victim will listen willingly to the spirit within as it extols the virtue of the great spiritual leader who showed it the afterlife. Once the relic accumulates a number of unresisted successes equal to the victim's Willpower, the victim becomes indoctrinated into the worship of the Earthbound (see Chapter Three).

If the victim wins the resisted roll, she is not affected by the honeyed words of the relic's bound spirit, though the effects of being constantly haunted by the ghost of a dead loved one is bound to affect her

in almost every aspect of her life. Her job, relationships and mental health are certain to suffer unless she can escape the source of the haunting.

Relic Traits: Binding ••• (completely controlled by the Earthbound); Empowerment ••• (Communication, Enhanced Durability, Keen Senses).

The spirits in these items are mortal, and they cannot improve the effects of the relic with their own power. They can merely direct the relic's programmed effects.

Used by the Fallen: Ghost coins have no effect on the fallen. Indeed, demons possessing the Lore of the Spirit can attempt to interact with and possibly command the spirit bound within the coin.

Variations: Some versions of the ghost coin allow the Earthbound and her demon servants to draw spiritual sustenance from the mortal soul trapped within. A demon can drain one point of Faith from the spirit per scene, but a coin can only provide total Faith equal to the spirit's Faith potential. Once that's exhausted, the entrapped spirit is completely consumed, taking the item's enchantment with it.

RITUALS

As beings of longevity and caution, the Earthbound are well used to the perseverance required for the development and casting of effective rituals. Through the long years of their earthly existence, the Earthbound and their servants have refined and redeveloped the rituals of the fallen to suit their own dreadful ends. Some are as ancient as the oldest rituals of the fallen, while others are newly developed to exploit the opportunities of the modern world of technology.

The following are examples of some Earthbound rituals. There are many others not described here. Most focus on subtly affecting the minds of potential worshippers and thralls, luring new mortals to the worship of the Earthbound. Other common rituals cause chaos and terror among human society, to destabilize the population and pave the way for the rule of the Dread Kings.

Earthbound rituals, unlike those of the fallen, do not have low-Torment effects. Fallen participants in one of these rituals automatically gain a temporary point of Torment whether the ritual works successfully or not.

For more information on infernal rituals and how they work please see Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide**.

UNDQUIING FIRE

This ritual was originally developed from the Devils' ritual Resist Fire as a tool for punishment, although

it has been put to use as a weapon on occasion. It sets the victim of the ritual on fire, inflicting hideous agony without the release of unconsciousness or death.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Flesh ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Flame ••

Base Cost: 12

Restrictions: The ritual must be cast in sunlight, and the target must be within sight of the Ankida.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Roll Stamina + Survival. The target suffers dice pool penalties as if he had taken a number of health levels of damage equal to the successes rolled. A Willpower point may be spent per health level of penalty to ignore its effects for the duration of a single turn. The target does not take any physical damage from the flames.

The flames are not just illusory, however — the target really is on fire. Any inflammable articles on the target's body will catch fire as well. This may cause damage to the target if he is carrying ammunition, aerosol cans or the like.

The effects of this ritual last for the duration of a scene. Once its effects expire, make a Willpower roll for the victim against a difficulty of 8. If the roll fails, the victim loses a point of permanent Willpower. If the roll botches, the target also gains a temporary derangement.

UNHOLY GEAS

The Unholy Geas ritual inflicts a long-lasting and irresistible compulsion to obey the will of the Earthbound, which hapless mortal on whom it's inflicted feels every moment. The geas manifests itself as whispered voices, hallucinations and near-uncontrollable urges to follow the Earthbound's commands. Even sleep offers no refuge, being filled with pointed dreams and nightmare visions directing the mortal to her fate. This ritual only affects mortals; the fallen are immune.

Primary Lore: Lore of Violation ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of the Celestials ••

Base Cost: 12

Restrictions: The sigil must be drawn in human blood and bile, and the Ankida must know the name of the mortal she wishes to affect. The victim does not have to be present at the ritual site to be affected. The Ankida can affect a victim up to a number of miles away equal to her Faith score.

Minimum Casting Time: 36 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Leadership; the target resists with a Willpower roll (difficulty 8). If the Earthbound succeeds, the geas takes effect. The target also suffers one level of bashing damage for every extra success the Earthbound gets, as the mortal's mind is crushed beneath the weight of the Dread King's will.

The geas can be a number of discrete commands equal to the unresisted successes gained by the ritual



effect roll. A valid command can be communicated in a single, simple sentence. (*Rob a bank. Kill your husband. Go to 1251 Main Street.*) The more unresisted successes the roll garners, the more complex the instruction set can be. If the ritual effect roll generated three unresisted successes, a valid set of commands might read as follows: *Rob a bank, take the money to 1251 Main Street, and leave the money in the mailbox.*

The victim may attempt to resist the geas each day with a successful Willpower roll (difficulty 9), or by spending a Willpower point. If successful, the victim can resist the geas for the rest of the day. Otherwise the victim will attempt to fulfill the geas to the best of her capability and regardless of the risk to herself or others.

The ritual's compulsion lasts for a number of days equal to the Ankida's Willpower. If the mortal fulfills the compulsion or performs the task demanded of him before this time, the effects cease. When the ritual's monstrous sendings end, make a Willpower roll (difficulty 8) for the victim. If the roll fails, the mortal gains a temporary derangement. If the roll botches, the derangement becomes permanent. A mortal can be subject to only one geas at any given time.

SONG OF SINUOUS QUESTIONING

This ritual is usually employed on captured demons to secure them and force the truth from them. It uses all the Earthbound's expertise with seduction and corruption to overcome the will of the trapped fallen and extract information from her. Rather than physically restraining the demon's form, the ritual paralyzes her spirit, and can therefore be used on disembodied demons whether they are anchored to physical objects or not.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Spirit •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Violation ••

Base Cost: 14

Restrictions: The demon must be within the ritual sigil, and the Ankida must know the demon's Celestial or True Name.

Minimum Casting Time: 49 minutes

System: The Song of Sinuous Questioning was first developed by the Earthbound Agashunakzar for use against other, weaker Earthbound, but it can be employed against the fallen as well. The ritual requires a Manipulation + Awareness roll resisted by the target's Willpower.

The number of unresisted successes determines how much information the Earthbound gleans from the target. One success allows trivial acquaintance with the subject's mind — superficial recollections of the target's thoughts and recent history. Three successes grant access to deeper memories and information about the demon's supernatural abilities — particularly lore paths and rituals. Five successes allow an

Earthbound to rummage through every compartment of the demon's mind, perhaps even accessing memories the fallen no longer remembers (including those of times before the banishment to the Abyss).

If the ritual does not reveal enough information for the Earthbound's satisfaction, it can be repeated. It is less efficacious each time, however, and each repetition against the same demon after the first casting increases the difficulty of the Manipulation + Awareness roll by one.

SOIL CASCADE

This ritual provides an emergency escape route for an Earthbound demon should its existing resting-place be destroyed.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Forge •••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Patterns •••

Base Cost: 16

Restrictions: The sigil must surround the intended backup reliquary and must be performed on a night with no moon.

Minimum Casting Time: 64 minutes

System: The reliquary-to-be can be prepared for only one Earthbound; other demons gain no benefit from inhabiting it. The ritual is performed when the spare reliquary is prepared, while the Earthbound is still safely ensconced in her original idol. The effects of the ritual last for a number of months equal to the Ankida's Faith score before it must be renewed to maintain the link to the Earthbound. Each Earthbound may have only one such backup reliquary.

Roll Intelligence + Occult against a difficulty equal to the Earthbound's Willpower. If it succeeds, a channel is opened from the Earthbound to the backup reliquary. This channel can be detected like other manifestations of demonic powers, but the difficulty to detect it is 9.

If the ritual is successful and the Earthbound's existing reliquary is destroyed while the ritual is still in effect, the demon becomes subject to the same system for discarnate demons detailed on p. 259 of the **Demon** core rulebook. The channel to the new reliquary anchors her to this world somewhat. The difficulty of the Willpower roll to avoid being dragged back into the Abyss decreases by one as a result.

The new reliquary item automatically counts as attuned for a disembodied soul, so the Willpower roll to inhabit it is made against a difficulty of only 6. The link from the Earthbound also eases the trauma of discorporation somewhat, so the demon does not lose the point of Faith ratings she otherwise would. These effects apply only to the Earthbound demon for which it has been prepared. Other demons attempting to inhabit it find the difficulty increased by one, as the Earthbound's lingering resonance is an obstacle to successful possession.

Before it is inhabited, however, the potential reliquary can make the Earthbound somewhat vulnerable. The relic is linked with its essential nature, and it resonates with this link. Should it fall into the hands of the demon's enemies, they might be able to glean some or all of the Earthbound's True Name from it over time (**Demon**, p. 256). Therefore, most Earthbound guard such items jealously, if they ever create them at all.

PLAGUE TIDE

Previous uses of this ritual have been responsible for awful contagions and plagues throughout history. Using Plague Tide, the Earthbound can command hordes of vile beasts to spread across a city or area of the country, trailing disease and misery in their wake.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Beast •••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Awakening ••; Lore of Contamination ••

Base Cost: 21

Restrictions: The creatures to be affected must all be gathered within the sigil.

Minimum Casting Time: 49 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Animal Ken. This ritual allows the Earthbound to possess and control a number of animals, equal to 10 times the number of successes rolled, although it works only on animals the size of a cat or smaller. The Earthbound often use rats, mice, bats, snakes, crows, eels and insects as their instruments of contagion. The possession lasts for a number of hours equal to the Ankida's Faith score. For more information on animal swarms and their capabilities, please see page 72 of the **Demon Storytellers Companion**.

The horde of creatures spreads disease throughout human communities. In addition to the usual damage from a creature of that type, a bite or claw from an infected animal inflicts a wasting disease on its victims. Make a Stamina roll each time a victim suffers a health level of damage from a member of the swarm. If the roll fails, the victim suffers an additional level of unsoakable bashing damage and becomes infected by the disease. Every day thereafter, the victim suffers an additional level of bashing damage and loses one temporary Willpower point until the disease has run its course. The sickness afflicts sufferers for a number of days equal to the Earthbound's Faith score, and it cannot be cured with medical attention. If another demon attempts to cure the disease with the Lore of Awakening, the evocation roll becomes a resisted roll versus the Ankida's Willpower. If the fallen loses the contest, the victim cannot be cured.

NETWORKING

This newly developed ritual creates an Internet presence for the demon, an online persona who is witty, charming and interesting. This "imaginary

friend" preys upon the honesty and trust of those naïve souls who listen to him, and it slowly converts them to friendship with — and then worship of — the Earthbound.

Primary Lore: Lore of the Firmament ••••

Secondary Lore: Lore of Humanity •••; Lore of the Forge •••

Base Cost: 30

Restrictions: The ritual must be cast during the hours of darkness, and it requires a computer connected to the Internet to be placed within the sigil. This computer must remain there as long as the ritual effect continues.

Minimum Casting Time: 100 minutes

System: Roll Manipulation + Technology. The ritual allows the demon to interact with the Internet as if it were sitting at a computer using it directly. Messages sent to the demon require a Perception + Technology check to notice them, unless he's paying attention to the Internet at the time.

To affect other Internet users with the online persona, roll Manipulation + Empathy — targets may resist with Willpower (difficulty 7). The demon can affect a number of individuals equal to the successes rolled for the ritual effect. If the targets fail their Willpower roll — or choose not to resist, whether knowingly or not — they trust the demon and will talk honestly with him. The difficulty of all future Manipulation-based rolls against an affected target decreases by one.

Though seemingly benign, this ritual allows an Earthbound to interact with and influence mortals on an even broader scope than would be possible using only its thralls and infernal servants. Used imaginatively, it can provide the demon with useful information or sow discord and chaos. Innocent victims can be lured from the safety of their homes and into the arms of waiting cultists, or vulnerable mortals can be indoctrinated to the worship of the demon over a period of time.

The effects of the ritual last for a number of weeks equal to the Ankida's Faith score.

BASTIONS

Bastions were developed long before the final defeat of the fallen, and the Earthbound recall these havens of safety with clarity. The immobile Earthbound are more motivated than any other demon to find a defensible stronghold or construct one themselves if no suitable fortress could be found.

Indeed, many of the bastions currently existing are of Earthbound provenance. Earlier bastions were destroyed during the war, or in the angelic purge afterward, and most of the recently released fallen have not had a

chance to recall or develop the complex rituals required to build a bastion anew. The Earthbound were free of angelic interference when building their own citadels, however, and their enemies of the time generally lacked the knowledge to locate or destroy the demons' bastions. As the Earthbound retreated into stasis over the course of the Medieval period, they sought safety in their bastions and slumbered there unharmed through the years to the modern day.

Unlike ancient bastions, which were commonly designed to house large numbers of mortal followers and subjects, modern Earthbound bastions are limited in size. This is partly because they require less space — concerns of security dictate that only the most trusted thralls of the Earthbound have access to its inner sanctum. Largely, however, modern bastions must be more compact because the world has grown smaller since the war between the rebels and the Heavenly Host. There are few unexplored areas of the Earth remaining. Between the satellite eyes-in-the-sky constantly surveying the earth's surface and the press of humanity pushing across every scrap of usable land, little space remains to conceal sprawling citadels of basalt and silver.

Earthbound bastions are created just like those of any other demon. (See Chapter Six of the **Demon Players Guide** for more details.) They often include elements drawn from the evocations of Earthbound lore, as the Earthbound developed new means to extend their powers during their sojourn on Earth.

IL-ILUM

Doom of sailors and seaside folk by many a seashore, Il-Ilum was a bastion on the floor of the sea. It has become the last, watery resting-place of countless mortals entranced by the siren lure of the mysteries within.

The Earthbound master of Il-Ilum was Ocaedien, once an embittered Defiler whose step from fallen angel to monstrous Earthbound was a surprisingly short one. He constructed Il-Ilum as his own private sanctum, not for the protection of his flock — even by Earthbound standards Ocaedien was a cruel and exacting master, rather than a whisper-soft perverter of souls. The bastion was located on a sea floor in the Mediterranean, inhabited by Ocaedien's reliquary and schools of bizarre sea creatures. Ambulatory squid crossed paths with shoals of fish with maidens' faces and sharpened fins, while darker things scuttled in the hidden places of the bastion and eyed the world balefully.

Il-Ilum appeared whole from the sea floor. Although it remains well underwater, its creation prompted terrible storms and waves in the sea for a year or more as the seas adjusted to the unnatural current flows caused by Ocaedien's idle tinkering.

The bastion itself is an undersea temple, albeit with no human worshippers. Constructed as a mockery of human-style holy places, the architecture is twisted and uses diffraction and murky water to play with the senses and appear impossibly shaped and yet all too real, all at once.

Eventually, as undersea life palled, Ocaedien began luring mortals by the seaside to their doom. On ships they would see visions of divine females sunning themselves on rocks, drawing them onward. Reflections of undersea treasure or anything else the heart could desire would appear by the seashore in the moonlit waves. As the waves whispered a mortal's name, he would wade into the sea, never to be seen again by mortal eyes. The mortal's final journey would be accompanied by unnatural sea creatures, he would find himself oddly able to breathe underwater, and his mind would be filled with visions of the joys and pleasures awaiting him at Il-Ilum. Eventually, once Ocaedien had tired of toying with him, his bones would join all the others.

As well as the unnatural sea creatures who are Ocaedien's flocks and companions, the bastion is defended by powerful water currents that can twist the path of any intruder, making it almost impossible to gain access to the temple without Ocaedien's approval. Equally, Ocaedien has the power over the currents to draw in any luckless mortal his fancy has settled upon. Claiming mastery over the silent undersea currents, the bitter Defiler could taint the waters of his home into toxic swirls of choking acid and syrupy black oil with but a thought.

Now Il-Ilum lies still and silent, scoured clean and alabaster-white by centuries of tides scrubbing the pillars with sand. Within lie thickets of bones twisted into disturbingly beautiful sculptures that would bring ironically high prices in the galleries of sophisticated cities. Discarded beneath them are trinkets of Ocaedien's devising, bone and shell rubbed smooth by the passage of the waves and imbued with unholy evocations to craze and lure unwary mortals. Schools of unusual fish and other sea creatures swim in and out of the temple. They listlessly pass the days in anticipation of the return of their master, whose idol has been silent for a long time now.

NACTIRUM

Many Earthbound bastions are not entirely hospitable to mortal visitors, and Nactirum was one example. The bastion was constructed out of a solid rock face in an isolated valley in southeastern Europe; it lies now in the modern lands of Turkey. Its mistress was Onianiel, once a demon of the Fourth House before she was summoned and grew to rule as a latter-day goddess. Powerful rituals raised the realm of Nactirum as the heart of her small fiefdom.

Nactirum was a disquieting curiosity, a bastion forever in the grip of darkest night. Neberu lore was incorporated into its creation, evocations of light and death weaving a soup of inky blackness to flood the passages and chambers of Onianiel's secret places. The bastion was deathly cold, leaching warmth from visitors' bones and chilling them to the heart. The air was dead and lifeless, a muffling veil lying across vivacity and enthusiasm. Sound traveled but a short way before being dampened and replaced with eerie echoes. Sources of illumination simply did not function — or if they did, the light never traveled far enough for any observer to see it. Nactirum quickly became a place of silence and stillness, dolorous in its joylessness.

Unlike most areas afflicted with the accursed darkness of the Neberu — often seen elsewhere as the results of an exhausting ritual — Nactirum was not a deathtrap for its mortal residents. Physically, they continued to function. They did not sicken and weaken and die like so many others in similar areas. Their spiritual health was another matter, though. While their bodies did not suffer, many became heartsick and listless, the joy slowly leached out of them by the eternal darkness. Onianiel's servants were not as depraved or corrupt as the thralls of many Earthbound cults. Instead, they were heartbroken and weary.

Onianiel's motives in creating Nactirum were her own, but other demons speculated that she still bore the curiosity she had once displayed as a Fiend of the Silver Legion fascinated with experimentation and exploration. If true, Nactirum was likely created as an experiment in how mortals would adapt to a life with far less stimulation than they were used to, both physically and mentally.

The fall of Nactirum has never been reported, and fallen rumors bear no whispers of its discovery or destruction. It was always safe, both hidden and virtually unassailable. Those few unwelcome visitors who breached it reported the blackness wrapping around them like arms of the night, wrenching and squashing and driving intruders away. Whatever Onianiel's researches uncovered, the secrets remained in her control.

Yet visitors to a certain cave-riddled valley in Turkey have reported strange disappearances of late, in nights blacker than charcoal, and the locals have a strange dull-eyed feyness to them. It will doubtless not be long before someone puts two and two together, choosing to investigate what mysteries are shrouded by the choking blackness of Nactirum.

NGAANTI'IIYA

Few were the cultures without rituals for summoning the spirits to aid them. Whether ancient European cultures invoking the gods of the pantheon they worshipped or tribal peoples of the Americas entreating

the spirits of nature to aid them, almost every civilization called to the higher powers.

The Aboriginal people of Australia were no exception, revering the spirits of their ancestors and often petitioning them for guidance and assistance. So it was that one tribe, now consigned to anonymity, long ago called the demon Afigorith from the Abyss to aid and protect its people. Afigorith — a Malefactor of some note — naturally consented to serve his new people as they would serve him, and he assumed the identity of Muku-Ngaanta, the guardian-in-the-rocks.

Like the other Aboriginal tribes, Muku-Ngaanta's people were nomadic, constantly traveling to ease the burden they placed on the ecology. Such constant movement left Muku-Ngaanta more vulnerable than he liked, however, so he ordered that he would occupy a sacred site in the tribe's lands and guide and guard their way from there.

Therefore, the Earthbound and his faithful conducted a mighty ritual to shape the land to his satisfaction. A complex system of caves and tunnels was formed beneath the dusty rock of the southwestern plains, the bastion Ngaanti'iiya. The inner channels and chambers flooded with water, and Muku-Ngaanta's idol triumphantly assumed residence in the center.

Ngaanti'iiya was a bastion capable of twisting the mind just by its structure. The Earthbound constantly refined his original creation, until the bastion became an impossibly intricate labyrinth of interconnecting caves whose very dimensions defied the laws of ordinary physics. For much of the year, Muku-Ngaanta's people occupied the outer chambers of his bastion, protected from the ravages of the land, while his favored thralls — those with his blessings that allowed them to move underwater without harm — were permitted to visit the inner sanctums of the bastion. Those who did often returned with an uncanny look in their eyes and a sense of perception that was never quite the same. It was said that to look upon the inner corridors of Ngaanti'iiya was to gaze at the minds of the spirits, and such revelation would daunt and derange a man.

Muku-Ngaanta was not forced to retreat and relent by the advent of Christianity. The forces of competing religion came late to the shores of his land. Instead, what weakened Muku-Ngaanta was another kind of invasion — the cultural kind. His land was settled by colonists from other countries, and his people were bound into different kinds of slavery or killed outright. As the last of his tribe faded into nothing, Muku-Ngaanta's own strength waned in proportion, and he was rendered almost helpless. It might be that he still sits in the flooded labyrinth of Ngaanti'iiya like a spider in its web, patiently re-weaving his plans and his creations, awaiting new prey to find him and worship him.

OCEAN OF STORMS

The Ocean of Storms is notorious among organized fallen society. Although no traces of it have yet been found, scholars have perused countless mortal texts and have gradually identified the Ocean of Storms as an ancient bastion of a terrible Earthbound.

Ophegel was a goddess of her people, horrifying and wonderful to behold. A fallen Lammasu, Ophegel was summoned from the Abyss as one of the earliest Earthbound, and she quickly established her hold upon the people who served her. As the nature of her worshippers' belief reinforced itself, she slowly became the dread queen they believed her to be. As word spread of the goddess Ophegel and her cult, her flock swelled enormously, and she became a power to rival all but the most ancient and powerful of the Earthbound.

At the peak of her power, Ophegel commenced construction of a bastion worthy of her glory, to mark her realm upon the world and shield her peoples from all but her. The rituals to raise the bastion from the earth were performed largely by other, conquered Earthbound enslaved to her will.

The bastion took the form of a mighty citadel of glass thrust upward from a mountain range in Europe — no text agrees on exactly where the bastion lies. From far away, the walls are completely magically transparent, shielding even mortals and mundane items inside from the sight of would-be trespassers. Gradually an approaching traveler — one who knows the knack of actually seeing the bastion — would see the castle take on translucency and then opacity, until he could see it in its true form. Other visitors, the unwelcome, could walk right up to it without seeing it — until they walked into a wall and were physically set afire by the passions trapped in it.

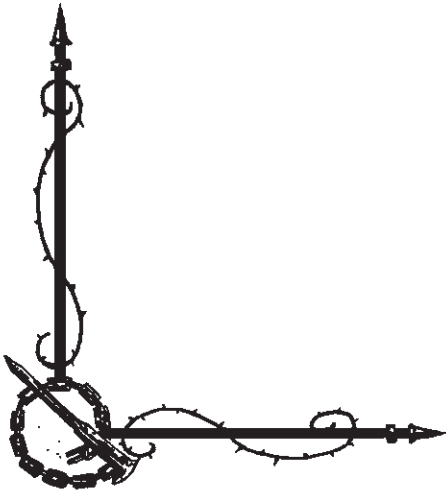
The Ocean of Storms is walled with delicate, sheer slabs of glass with a roseate tint. The outermost walls are so translucent as to be nearly transparent, while the glass darkens to murky opacity as one approaches the heart of the citadel. Cloudy veins taint the walls, and they appear to be coated with the

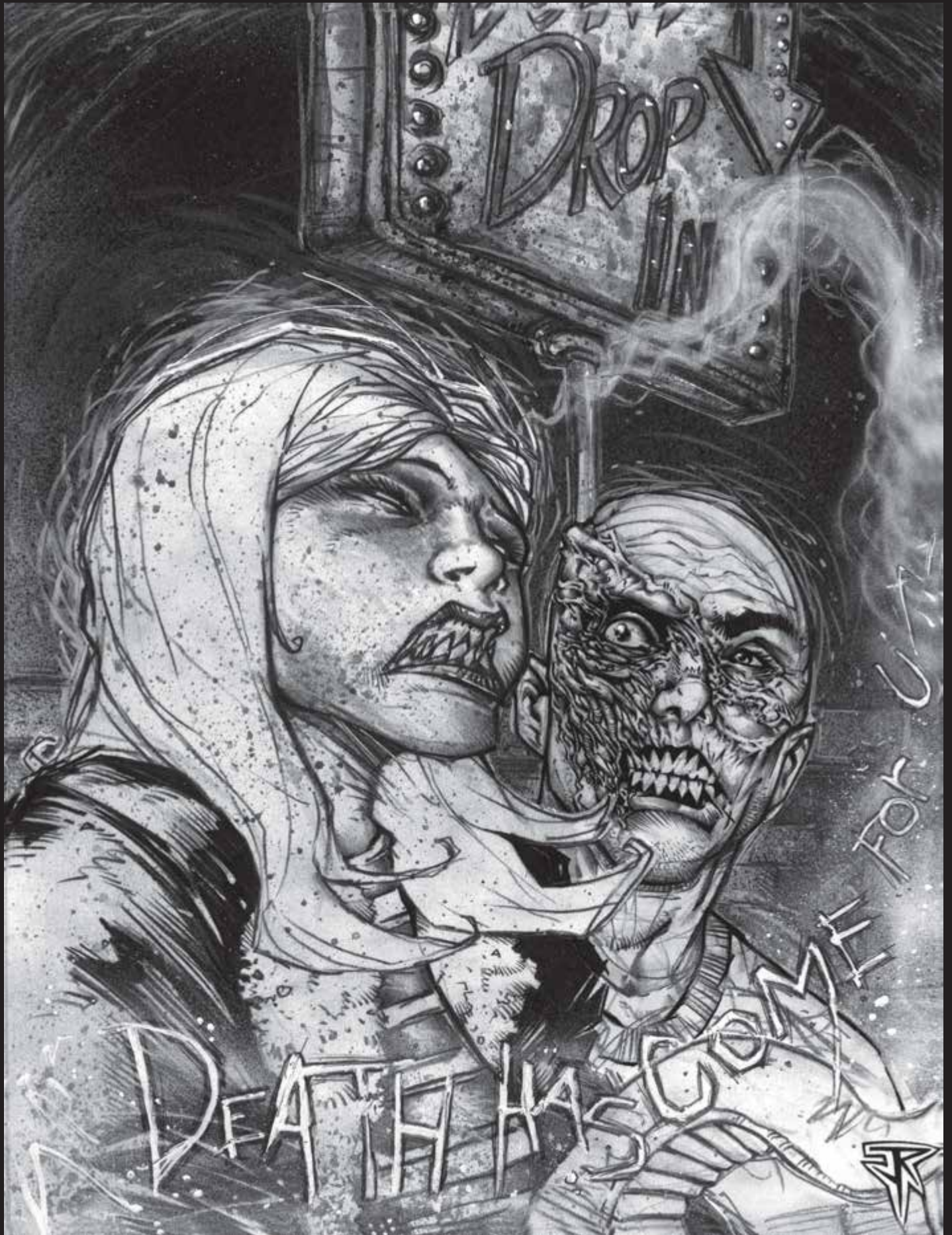
grime of centuries of pollution, although they are cool and perfectly clean to the touch. The outer walls can char a man to cinders if he but touches them unwisely, from the force of the lusts and rages contained therein. In the wind — which is almost omnipresent in the mountains — the walls moan with the echoed sighs of Ophegel's beloved oceans, the sounds of crashing waves and beating tides rising to a deafening crescendo during the mountain's storms.

Like everything to come of an Earthbound, the beauty of the Ocean of Storms is rotten at heart. The darkening walls reflect the perversion and corruption growing as one approaches the core of the bastion. Some texts tell that merely to look upon the inner walls was to be overwhelmed by one's darkest desires. The depravity of Ophegel's worshippers was legendary even for the cults of the Earthbound, and the relentless Defiler worked hard to make it so. Although daily life for mortals living in the bastion was ostensibly normal, every action and every part of the day was tainted with the unwholesome influence of Ophegel that would slowly drive every worshipper to weak-willed acquiescence.

Despite the rumored horror of the Ocean of Storms, it was not without its pilgrims. Ophegel's vices were rumored to extend to avarice and greed, and her followers were once rapacious in their plunder of other Earthbound. No one knows what wonders lurk within the walls of this bastion, but many have guessed. Of those who might see them one day, it's unlikely that any visitor would leave alive.

Even now, the bastion is protected by its camouflage, being all but invisible to those who don't know where to look. Further defenses are provided by the ritual that created the bastion. Rather than raining rocks down upon the heads of attackers, the very gates and spires draw on evocations of Humanity, Longing and darker lore to inspire irresistible desires and depraved madness in unwanted visitors. For those who choose to succumb to those urges, the gates of the Ocean of Storms will then open.





Across the seaside town of Asher's Mist, there was an air of tension, a taut piano wire tugging on everyone's minds. People were anxious. A fog slipped in over the docks and into the streets. Animals howled while the cuticle sliver of the moon disappeared behind dark clouds. At midnight, it began.

It started with a rash of suicides. Mary Herron carved plus-signs into her wrists as she sat in her claw-foot tub. Binod Poddar went down the aisles of the 24-hour grocery store and began uncapping medicine bottles and choking down the contents. Bobby Weatherbee took his father's .45 ACP from the old man's roll-top desk and pressed it to the soft palate of his twelve-year-old mouth. There were others, too... many others.

Then came the murders. By 1:00 AM, Verdell Watson strangled his elderly mother, Alice, while she sat on the toilet. Charise Clark stabbed her bartender boyfriend sixteen times in the head and neck with a ballpoint pen. The brothers Peter and Roger Hartwell shot one another in the middle of their cul-de-sac while the rest of the neighborhood slept. Others died inexplicably, their faces frozen in a grim rictus of horror. The power went out at the hospital, and the backup generators mysteriously failed. Two cars slid off of Route 909 and toppled into the foamy caps of the night-tossed Pacific. Another man slipped on a puddle of dog piss and broke his back in three places, the vertebrae cracking like brittle toffee.

Two fallen angels sat atop the roof of the Dune Drop Inn as the plague of deaths raged unchecked across the town. They held one another, shivering in the cold, sea-mist air. Daitya whispered to her lover, "Did you feel that? What's happening?"

Kadath shuddered. "I felt it, but I don't know what it is," he said, hoping she wouldn't sense the lie. It felt like someone had injected a core of liquid nitrogen straight into his spine. Azrael, the Angel of Death, had come for him. Hadn't he served the great archduke so many years before? Stalking battlefields thick with flies, stealing souls for his master? He'd been having dreams. A skeletal statuary draped with old cloth (or old skin, he couldn't tell) sat somewhere, deep underground. The setwers, maybe? Men encircled the osseous idol, their bodies laced with fresh cuts. Women stabbed at their breasts with small knives and pulled at their own hair, howling promises to the grim effigy. All of them ate dust and moaned in sorrow. While on the streets above, the people of Asher's Mist died.

Kadath shuddered. He felt empty. The ride was over, wasn't it? There would be no proving himself to Heaven again. He felt his guts churn and his mind tighten as someone, somewhere, whispered his name in a series of guttural sounds. There would be no safety, he was marked. And if Daitya stayed with him, then she too would be brought to heel. This was the way things worked. There was nothing they could do. Or... was there?



CHAPTER FIVE: STORYTELLING

There are horrors beyond horrors, and this was one of those nuclei of all dreamable hideousness which the cosmos saves to blast an accursed and unhappy few.

—H. P. Lovecraft, “The Shunned House”

The Earthbound are beings of immeasurable evil and madness. They do not have the luxury of a mortal mind to temper their eternal Torment, nor a human soul to mitigate their madness and hate. Their malevolence is raw and untempered, born in the mists of prehistory and later hammered into shape by the cruel blow of the Abyss. Though driven into stasis centuries ago, these Dread Kings have awakened once more, blasted out of their slumbers by the fury of the Maelstrom and the return of the fallen. The descendents of their old priesthoods, now countless generations removed, are being pulled back into the orbit of these fanatical gods, strengthening their new masters with offerings of Faith and blood. Implacable as death, restless as the sea, these ancient gods are once more returning to their eternal dreams of conquest, corrupting and enslaving the souls of mankind to remake Creation itself. Only the fallen stand in their way.

This chapter provides tips and advice to assist you, the Storyteller, in making the Earthbound a focus of your **Demon** chronicle. The question is, how will you incorporate these malevolent monsters from outside of time and space? Do you want them to serve as the ultimate adversaries, enemies who are the antithesis of all existence? As adversaries, do you wish to portray them overtly, or should they be concealed behind so many layers of deception that your protagonists can never truly gauge what they're up against? Or perhaps you have a chronicle in mind in which the players are themselves the villains. Everybody loves a bad guy, and perhaps your players want to fill the roles of Earthbound servants or take on the challenge of portraying Earthbound demons themselves. As this chapter illustrates, you have a wide range of options to choose from to tell exciting and compelling chronicles concerning the rise of the dark gods.

EARTHBOUND ANTAGONISTS

The Earthbound are epic adversaries in every sense of the word, combining vast power, ancient knowledge and an implacable, eternal will to further their terrible plans. Unlike the fallen, these monstrous beings operate from the shadows, exerting their influence through webs of conspiracy and corruption. Hidden behind secretive and fanatical cults and served by enslaved demons, these dark gods are towering forces of evil that also serve to reflect the perils of the protagonists' own Torment. The following section provides tips and suggestions on defining an Earthbound antagonist's agenda, the extent of its temporal influence and the nature of its mortal and demonic servants.

INDIVIDUAL AGENDAS

All Earthbound share one principal purpose — to subvert humanity's will and use God's children to remake the cosmos into their own grisly image of reality. This purpose sets them apart from all the other fallen and their Hell-bound elders. Earthbound demons are still individuals, however, and they should possess their own particular agendas. As the Storyteller, you should devote significant effort toward portraying the Earthbound as well-rounded characters, not just cardboard gods pulling their puppets' strings for the sake of destroying the world. The following are suggestions for alternative or subordinate agendas that an Earthbound might pursue.

POWER

Next to swelling the ranks of their worshippers, the pursuit of power is one of the Dread Kings' most important agendas. Many demons (especially Earthbound) see the world as their property. They created it; it is theirs to shape as they will. Hence, it is their playground for whatever horrendous experiments they wish to perform. These monkeys called "humans" have too much power, and the Earthbound don't approve, so the demons opt to subvert and steal that power. All aspects of power are rife for Earthbound domination, including power through financial influence, power through governmental control and power through manipulating religious institutions. They collect political figures and business CEOs like trading cards, and they move against other Earthbound (or other unaffiliated mortal institutions) in vast games of grim strategy, using their power to spawn displays of their personalities through wars, terrorism, executions or other state-sanctioned depravity. To these Earthbound, humans are posable dolls, to be corrupted and leashed for amusement, rather than destroyed. In their eyes, the world has been sliced up among grand supernatural

powers (mostly themselves), and it's all about getting the biggest piece of the pie.

OBLIVION

Material power means little to Earthbound seeking the annihilation of Heaven. Power is only good if it serves the end — and that end is literally *The End*. These Earthbound do not concern themselves with the big chess game, and in fact their only plan is to break the chessboard so no one else can play. They're not looking to mold reality according to their own hateful vision, they want to crush it into so fine a dust that it

PERSONAL AGENDAS

Does an Earthbound demon need such lofty goals? Probably. Monstrous demons have monstrous agendas. While it's true that most of these mad gods maintain grand plans, though, you're more than welcome to think outside the box when it comes to what they want. As such, is it possible that the Earthbound support smaller and more personal goals? Absolutely, and in fact, we recommend them in addition to the larger goals. Consider Belial. Here's an archduke who essentially couldn't give a damn whether humanity is corrupted or not. He wants one thing, and one thing only — *to find Lucifer*.

Is it possible that an Earthbound could seek something as seemingly mundane as personal pleasure? Yes. Maybe that mad god constantly hops from body to body, slaking insane lusts on whom ever the demon can get his temporal hands on. Ripping people apart with sexual gratification, combining murder and lust in a horrid duality, raping the populace using puppet bodies. Also consider what happens as the Earthbound grow madder and madder. Their agendas, once cunning and sharp, devolve into bizarre missions. Maybe an Earthbound thinks of itself as a vindicating goddess hell-bent on wiping all men from the earth. Or perhaps another Earthbound is so far gone that its only goal is to burrow a hole into the Earth's center to "release all the other demons from the Abyss," even though the Earthbound should damn well know that the Abyss isn't a physical place that can be reached. Some of the older Earthbound are likely to espouse very alien goals that seem utterly inscrutable and could no longer even serve as much of a use. Yet still they continue.

The bottom line is, when puzzling out an Earthbound's goals, make sure that they fit the character. It's all well and good to say that an Earthbound wants simple temporal power, but you must ask yourself *why* it does. Does it have better goals in mind? More complex crusades instead of the same-old "control-the-world" conspiracy?

can never be rebuilt. Why? Doesn't the obliteration of the world also mean the obliteration of the Earthbound? It does, and they know it. (Though some Earthbound are so insane that they believe destroying the universe doesn't actually involve destroying *themselves* in the bargain.) These demons are suicidal, and they believe that the world they once helped to create is nothing more than a festering shit-pile that deserves an ignominious end. They want to close the book on the planet and its inhabitants, murdering Creation in the process. Any power they obtain is a tool meant solely for destruction. Earthbound who espouse this agenda might seek military power (including nuclear, chemical or biological weaponry) first and foremost, though some believe that such monkey tools are meant for, well, the monkeys. Some demons rely on their own supernatural might (as fueled by worshippers), which means that they hope to shake the very foundation of the world by waylaying coastlines with tidal waves, cities with earthquakes, islands with volcanic eruptions. Others seek corporations that can provide fall-out in the form of widespread ecological destruction (rainforests chopped to nubs, lakes coated with poisoning oil, layers of atmosphere choked with carcinogens).

REVENGE

Like every other demon, the Earthbound seethed with hate in the timeless abandonment of the Abyss.

Unlike the newly escaped fallen however, the Earthbound were never buffered from their Torment, and their hatred has had a long time to grow roots. Many Earthbound used this time to direct their hate at specific targets, carving out elaborate revenge schemes in an effort to satisfy their rancorous urges. As Storyteller, it's your task to determine who or what the Earthbound seeks vengeance against. Lucifer is a popular target, for the Lightbringer is perceived as having abandoned his fellow fallen at the 11th hour. The Creator could be a target for bullying the demons and trapping them in the first place. And obviously, humanity is a common victim. But what else? Earthbound might hold a candle of revenge toward another Earthbound or another fallen for real (or imagined) betrayals during the war. Vindication might be sought against a specific House or faction. It's even possible that, in a fit of irrationality, the mad god holds a grudge against a particular human, mortal organization, religion or entire nation. Decide whom the Earthbound wants revenge against, then figure out how the Earthbound plans to carry out his vengeance.

MADNESS

The Earthbound are irreversibly insane. Their minds are broken jumbles of lunatic processes reinforced by terrible supernatural power. Some Earthbound are so far gone that they are incapable of a single



rational action. They're unable to logically process concepts of power or revenge, and their only knowable goal is to take their own personal madness and impress it upon the world. These demons believe that for them to become sane once more, the world must become *insane* like them. They promote sickness of the mind on a global scale, fomenting madness and then encouraging their deranged followers to spread the chaos. These demigods are the hardest to predict and perhaps even the hardest to stop because their methods and motives are positively alien. Their patterns, too, are erratic. They might sink a cruise ship one minute, then command their followers to murder all the infants of a particular town the next. Why do they do this? Why would they send their disturbed slaves to riot in the streets? Why do they birth serial killers, rapists and molesters at every turn? Is there a reason other than imprinting their own tormented brainwaves on the human race? Sadly, the answer is no. Their goal is the spread of madness, and it is also a means to an end.

THE HANDS OF THE EARTHBOUND

Once you've created the specific powers and capabilities of your Earthbound antagonist (see Chapter Three) and determined the basics of its agenda, the next step is determining how the Dread King will go about furthering its plans. One of the key ideas regarding the Earthbound is that they tend to act sight-unseen, hidden behind considerable obfuscation. Earthbound demons are incapable of directly controlling mortal institutions (and are frankly not always sane enough to understand mortal organizations), so they require the middlemen of human or infernal servitors. The Dread Kings might recruit or enslave someone who is already a part of one of these institutions, or they might rely on their already existent slaves to infiltrate and direct these organizations. What follows are a few aspects of the mortal world that the Earthbound can manipulate to achieve their fatal designs.

THE MEDIA

The global media have humanity's ear. They tell us what to think, what to wear, how to act and react. We aren't required to do what they say, but if everyone else is doing it, then shouldn't we? While humankind isn't so obviously a puppet of the worldwide media, the media industry has serious sway over global opinion in the World of Darkness. They are the modern mouthpiece prophets of the world, and the Earthbound would be fools not to use and abuse such a commodity.

The ancient demons need belief. What better way to foster belief (or more importantly, destroy belief in other faiths) than to use the global media to achieve this end? The Earthbound don't approve of the world's major religions because these die-hard faiths are seemingly

insurmountable. Faith in these monument religions can be dented and dinged, however, through the proper media manipulations. If CNN provides a sound-byte barrage of "Islamic terrorists" or "Christian fundamentalists," then people begin to lose faith in their own creeds. Of course, this subversion leaves the door open for the Earthbound to foster a new faith, should that become possible. But even worse, the media is particularly good at making people lose faith in themselves. Breaking the spirit of humanity can't be done on an individual basis, and the media helps blanket the worldwide populace with such negative personal propaganda, helping to erode an individual's faith in herself.

The Earthbound can't directly affect the media, of course, but having thralls or cultists within the various media organizations allows them some control. (Or, if not control, it allows them to have trusted moles in the media who can make sane decisions.) They can suppress hopeful stories and amp up terrible ones. Through their pawns, the Earthbound tell us that we look fat and need to lose weight. Radio ads chide us for our poor sexual performance and offer ways to "increase size, last longer!" Magazine articles bombard us with just how *unlike* celebrities and supermodels we really are. All of these dings and dents in our collective self-image leave people vulnerable to cockeyed self-help schemes or bizarre religious practices, many of which could be Earthbound cults in the making. As people's souls are whittled away, people become more susceptible to their urges of violence, lust and other moral degradations.

THE GOVERNMENT

Earthbound can affect a country's government in one of two ways. The first is passive and requires little more than having a few key figures in places of power. This setup doesn't create wholesale control of a country's administration, but it does allow an Earthbound to exert control when needed. This is the way Earthbound often deal with the ruling bodies of major powers (USA, China, European countries). In Third-World countries, however, the Earthbound can hold more active influence essentially by subjugating the whole damn government. It doesn't mean that every soldier or every secretary carves infernal runes in their bodies late at night as slaves of the Earthbound. It does mean that many members of the ruling body are pawns of the dark god. In these places, achieving a place of power means "joining the team." And joining the team means offering fealty to whatever lunatic demon heads that regime.

Why would an Earthbound want governmental control? First, and perhaps most importantly, is that in many countries where freedom is ludicrously restricted, the government dictates religion to the people. Religion means Faith, and Faith means power. While

Earthbound manipulation of this system is rarely so overt as saying, “You must worship Moloch the Abomination or you will be summarily executed,” other religious faiths can be oppressed while the more radical dogma (i.e., that which transmits Faith to the mad demon) escapes unmolested. Characters in these countries might find strange sigils carved on doors or odd amulets worn beneath men’s shirts. If asked, the people shrug it off and chalk it up to superstition, or dismiss it as worship of “some old tribal god.” Regardless, it all adds up to Faith for the ruling demon.

Another use is the power that’s implicit in governmental control. A government might not have the material push of Big Business, but it does have the ability to take a body of individuals and rule them in whatever fashion — and in the case of the Earthbound, this fashion can be considerably cruel. While countries that are not under the sway of ancient demons are still capable of brutality, the ones ruled by an Earthbound regime tend to be doubly so. News channels report executions in the streets, rapists going unpunished (even encouraged) or cruel biological/chemical tests on unsuspecting villagers. And this power needn’t remain solely within the country’s borders either. Any country is capable of affecting the world at large through guerilla or military action, buy-outs, trade embargoes or terrorist attack — anything to help the Earthbound wrest control or assert influence. Many of these governments are pockets of poison slowly destroying the global soul, and the Earthbound revel in it.

CORPORATIONS

Some say that corporations are the governments of the future world. Why pay homage to the government when it’s the corporation that clothes you, feeds you and keeps you healthy? While the global climate hasn’t gone that far yet, it’s still obvious that Big Business has substantial impact on the world at large. Corporations fuel whole countries with jobs and resources. They hold political sway in this nation and abroad. Their CEOs and corporate masterminds hold the ear of major politicians, including the president of the United States. Ever hear of the gun lobby? The cigarette lobby? These corporations donate money to campaign funds and hence offer “political guidance” in key situations where they might find some advantage. Big companies are owned by even *bigger* companies, and at the top of the pyramid sit megaconglomerates that own everything part and parcel. A company such as Microsoft has more material wealth than the majority of *countries* across the globe. Would the Earthbound ignore such a base of influence? Not a chance.

Corporate culture is ripe for Earthbound manipulation. The ingenuity of men made corporations what they are, but the Earthbound have caught up and now have servitors in key places of corporate power. Men are certainly capable of evil all by themselves, but the

Earthbound have a definite hand in illicit business practices. Corporations use sweatshops in South Asian countries where children are paid in pennies and abused through long hours and diseased food. Cigarette companies are explicitly aware that they market one of the world’s most addictive products to every age group and practically invented lung cancer. Commercial giants steal from their stockholders while simultaneously killing the environment with oil, pesticide and medical waste. Through Big Business, the mad gods are capable of worldwide destruction and corruption.

But corporations aren’t only used for active destruction — they can be recruitment tools, as well. In certain companies, climbing the corporate ladder means suckling at the infernal breast somewhere along the way. A man wants to ascend the ranks? Getting that promotion might mean going to a meeting with his immediate superior where he begins learning, in tiny increments, just how deep the sickness goes. By the end of his days at the company, when he ends up as a Chief Financial Officer, the man’s debased worship is constant and unyielding. Many corporate cults are founded thus. The price of corporate success could very well be a man’s soul.

RELIGIONS AND SECTS

Any religion is associated with belief, and thus is a wellspring of potential Faith. The Earthbound know this, and they use it to their advantage. The Earthbound deal with two different types of religion, and each requires a different approach. The first type are the “major” religions, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism and so on. The second type are the cults and splinter sects of the world, like Aum Shinryko in Japan or the Raelians in the USA and Europe.

The three major religions have proven resilient to Earthbound control. Just when the demons think they have a grip, their influence seems to slip from their fingers. That’s not to say the cause is hopeless, however. The religions themselves might be pure, but the institutions that support them are just as corruptible as government or business. The Catholic Church suppresses birth control in Third-World countries despite deepening conditions of disease, famine and drought. (Or worse, consider the sex abuse scandal.) Some “peaceful” Buddhists also bomb factories and monasteries in Southeast Asia. Islamic terrorists load up trucks with explosives and drive them into shopping malls. The religions themselves are not corrupt, but some of their members are. Worse, some of the members are obligated to Earthbound masters. These demonic servitors are the “middlemen” who help steer the spiritual and religious away from moral paths and onto the road of degradation.

Also, it helps to foment distrust and suspicion toward these major branches of the big religions. When

a Muslim terrorist executes a journalist on television, the rest of the world grows wary of all Muslims. When a Catholic cardinal is accused of covering up several cases of molestation by his priests, the Catholic faith suffers. It is this suffering that the Earthbound are after.

On the other end of the spectrum lie cults and sects. Some existed previously and are merely infiltrated by Earthbound agents, whereas others are created solely for the express purpose of gaining Earthbound worship. The existing cults are ones that already advocate radical causes, such as Hindi cults celebrating gods of death and destruction, Japanese apocalypse cults or suicide cults (ones exemplified by Jonestown or Heaven's Gate). The members of these cults already exist on the fringes of social norms, and they usually fall in line with Earthbound ideals. Some Earthbound need to specifically *create* a cult, however — sometimes mimicking existing cults, other times producing a whole new entity. These cults take on many guises. One might be very straightforward and offer “self-empowerment” to those who come and worship an ancient god who has the name of a real, mythological being. Doing so lends credence to those who feel like they're part of some pagan uprising when, in truth, they're really offering their Faith up on the altar of an Earthbound. Another cult might be veiled behind more modern conventions. Take, for example, a self-awareness group that proposes ascending levels of meditation. The meditation starts of simple at first (*Clear your mind*), but it eventually takes on sinister imagery (*Open your heart to the terrible things you want to do and let them play in your mind, for this is the only way to set them free*). The self-awareness group suddenly splinters off, and those who belong for long enough might find themselves giving into the dark impulses they were encouraged to “let free.” Thus begins the path of enslavement. The key difference between these cults and practices and other self-help, pagan or New Age groups is that *these* cults have only one inevitable purpose in mind to gain worshippers for the mad god. The other groups are ultimately harmless. They reflect genuine spiritual advancement and exist largely uncorrupted.

INDIRECT INFLUENCE

The Earthbound do not need to announce their presence in every action. In fact, many of them feel that the action is signature enough — especially if the action is not necessarily one meant to fill their coffers with Faith. If they're looking to remove an obstacle, punish the unfaithful or just cause general destruction, they might not consider it necessary to “mark” the event with their autograph, so to speak. Regardless of their intent, however, *any* action an Earthbound makes still leaves a mark — just not one

that is so overtly found. An Earthbound might bring a tidal wave to bear upon a small coastal town or direct its zealous followers to destroy an opposing Earthbound's high priest in a massive terrorist act. Or maybe it acts more simply through individual murders, suicides, molestations or rapes. It doesn't do so in an effort to secure new followers, but simply in an effort to *get something done*. Can the characters in your game still detect the presence of Earthbound handiwork? Is there any way for them to decipher the name and intent of the maddened demon responsible? As shown in **Demon** (p. 172), the fallen can detect changes in the supernatural landscape of a place or even a person. From there they can uncover hints as to the cause of the strangeness, and even identity and motive. In the case of an Earthbound, the roll is Perception + Awareness (difficulty 8). Follow the success guidelines in the **Demon** core rulebook. Four or five successes might allow the fallen to know the Celestial Name of the Earthbound at work. It is in this way that you can portray to your players the presence of these mad gods in seemingly “random” occurrences.

DIRECT CONTACT

Direct contact with an Earthbound is exceedingly rare. Earthbound demons don't *need* direct contact to get the job done. They have a thousand-and-one ways to get what they want, none of which really involve them taking personal action. Also, from the perspective of the characters in the game, direct contact with an Earthbound is going to leave them dead, dying or permanently deranged. It's no small thing to be confronted by one of these mad gods, and it shouldn't be considered lightly. It's not impossible that an Earthbound demon would take personal interest in a situation, though. Why would they? First, perhaps they're simply of the idea that if they want something done right, they have to do it themselves. Archduke Belial is perhaps the best example of this idea. Since the Great Beast's reliquary is small (and therefore portable), this Earthbound often *personally* goes where the work needs to be done. Belial's goals are single-minded, so he has no problem entering bodies to oversee or affect a situation. Also, some Earthbound engage in direct contact if they're looking to recruit a particularly powerful (or merely favored) fallen or mortal. (It makes a better impression and helps to guarantee the binding alliance.) For the sake of the story, you might just want to invest the Earthbound with a voice and a presence that you feel can't be carried through second-hand contact. Just remember that, should the characters seek open conflict with the Earthbound, it's best to steer them clear (or at least have the Earthbound play with them but not leave them broken or dead in an alleyway).

EARTHBOUND SERVITORS

The Earthbound have many minions, as has been discussed. There are essentially three types of Earthbound pawn: the worshipper, the thrall and the infernal servant.

The worshipper is the most common pawn in the Earthbound's stable of faithful. Most worshippers are standard mortals obeying certain strictures (prayer, ritual or other forms of veneration) without any bargain other than that of a worshipful individual praying to his god. Rarely does a worshipper ever grasp the truth or implications behind its worship. Some know they're paying homage to a being greater than themselves, and some don't, but it's uncommon for them to actually comprehend the fact that there is literally a disturbed god feeding from their contributed Faith.

Who end up as worshippers? Anybody can be a target for recruitment, but the young are especially willing to defy social norms, buck the system and pray to some deviant god — if only to piss off Mom, Dad and the guidance counselor. But they're not the only targets. Anybody with even the tiniest vacancy in his soul is vulnerable. The abused, the disenfranchised, the addicted, the depressed — all are potential worshippers, as they tend to look for *anything* to help fill the holes bored into their self-images. How do they get hooked into such practice? Many ways exist. A heroin addict might be brought into "counseling sessions" (which might even be state-sanctioned) to clean himself up, only to be offered a new addiction in the form of this strange worship. Sometimes, fliers will get posted on high school or college bulletin boards to get curious and experimental adolescents into the practice of worshipping, which might involve other grim practices such as self-scarification, ritualized drug usage or depraved sexual practices. For everyone else, there are classified ads, self-help books or simply the presence of "that strange church on the corner" to help lure soon-to-be servants like moths to lamplight. Remember, though, that worshippers don't need rewards granted from on-high. They're able to see "gifts" from their god in everyday things: a good test score, a lucky break at work or a 10-dollar bill on the sidewalk.

Once enmeshed in their worship, some worshippers take another route besides that of thrall, and that's route is cultist. Cultists are essentially worshippers with the volume knob turned up to 10. Cultists are more clued-in to the nature of their practice, and they have some vague idea that they're literally revering some actual deity or demon. They expect little in return, and they often become quite the fundamentalists in their ritual customs. Their flesh might be laced with scars, or their hair might be shaved to the scalp. They might wear certain clothes (robes, armbands) or jewelry (necklaces, rings or other piercings) to indicate

allegiance. They often reject their jobs, becoming hard-core ascetics or ribald hedonists (whichever the Earthbound demands), all in an effort to please their mad god. Cultists are often used as cannon fodder as well. As they've essentially given their lives over to "the cause," they have little left but their worship, and martyring themselves for their dark deity is perfectly acceptable behavior.

Thralls are almost exclusively chosen from among the ranks of the most faithful worshippers, and they rarely come from outside (though particularly shining students can advance quickly from worshipper to thrall if they show both intelligence and eagerness). Enthraling a mortal is not taken lightly. Thralls are meant to be selected for varying uses — like items in a toolbox — based on their charisma, strength, eagerness and willingness to sacrifice themselves. These thralls have no choice what gifts are bestowed upon them by their Earthbound masters — they are merely offered great power in return of eternal servitude. They then have the choice to agree, which grants them a boost to their Attributes and Abilities along with other supernatural rewards conferred by their new bond. They might turn the offer down, at which point they are either coerced into accepting their thralldom or they're simply murdered. The ritual of obeisance performed to seal the deal often involves the thrall taking an action that guarantees the damnation of his soul. He might be required to rape or murder a loved one or somehow engage in an activity that would otherwise be reprehensible to him in his previous life. After this test is administered (and if he passes), he is considered to be above humans. He might even be given a new name to represent his new lease on life.

Characters who encounter thralls shouldn't take long to learn that these individuals are beyond mere mortals. These worshippers were notable before accepting the pact and entering into immemorial servitude. After thralldom occurs, they are granted even further skills and gifts by the nature of the covenant, making them even more formidable.

Last but not least are the infernal servants, or fallen who have been corrupted, seduced or coerced into serving an Earthbound demon. These infernal pawns are considered a precious resource by many Earthbound, and they are often reserved for particularly important or sensitive tasks. Some come to an Earthbound willingly, choosing to bind themselves to the alien gods in an effort to secure some sort of power (or information), but most are fettered to an Earthbound with little to no choice. Agents of the Earthbound might uncover a demon's True Name and attach them physically and supernaturally in an effort to weaken the fallen. The True Name is reserved for the final moments of enslavement, after which the damaged

ANCIENT PRIESTHOODS

During their time awake centuries ago, most of the mad gods fostered spectacular cults across many nations (see Chapter One). Heretic priests, monks or sorcerers usually led these cults, and they managed to maintain some degree of life even up through the time when the Catholic Inquisition set fire to all of Europe, burning pagans and cultists at every turn. When the Earthbound finally began succumbing to inescapable sleep, the elder gods made eternal bargains with the priests of their faith. These bargains said that, should the Earthbound ever again awaken, the descendents of their dark servitors would be called to action by a covenant of blood and spirit.

Now, the Earthbound are awake again, and many of their servants (primarily thralls and cultists) unknowingly possess ancestry that links them to these once-bound priests. While some of the cults managed to remain extant even while the Earthbound demons slept, most faded away or were destroyed. But now these priesthoods are emerging anew as the mad gods call their children home. As such, fallen characters could encounter the forebears of these dark priests, so as the Storyteller, you will want to figure out how these servitors can fit into (and change) a chronicle. Are these descendents appalled by their forced servitude, becoming potential allies, or have they quickly fallen in line, their blood practically *singing* for atrocity?

demon is bound through unspeakable rituals. These demon servants often end up as high-Torment fallen with strong lore abilities and potentially a few derangements. These elements combine to create a dangerous and unpredictable foe.

MADNESS IN SLAVERY

So, how exactly do these servants act upon the world? Different Earthbound use their servitors in different manners. Some use their slaves sparingly, selecting only a few choice individuals to carry out their deeds. The Earthbound demons' general lack of trust lends credence to this notion. (Why use a whole gaggle of unreliable proles when they can count on a few critical soldiers to get the job done instead?) The door swings the other way, as well, however. Consider that, while many Earthbound have trust issues, they also often have out-of-control God-complexes that cause them to over-state their servitors' loyalty and ability. Seeing themselves as the unstable god-kings that they are, the Earthbound instead use a whole host of servants, to get the job done, because in their lunatic minds who would ever defy a demon-god? This rationale might cause them to "unleash the hounds," so to

speak, and maintain little control over a vast horde of wild minions.

Regardless of the number of minions a single Earthbound has, the other question is that what it uses them for. Just as there are countless tools in the world with countless functions, each servant might have a selection of tasks for which the Earthbound uses him. The first and foremost use is obviously worship. Nobody gets off easy in that department, and every servitor is bound to deliver adulation to his invisible god. But the servitors have other roles, as well, so be sure to define the roles of Earthbound subordinates. Does the demon use them solely for combat purposes? Are they soldiers, trained in the arts of murder? Are they defenders of the reliquary, always on the lookout for those attempting to cause harm to the unholy idol that houses their dark god? Do they serve more subtle purposes?

It's possible that an Earthbound will use its slaves as spies, always watching out for newly escaped fallen who could be "turned" under the proper circumstances. Once spies have identified such a fallen, thralls or infernal slaves who are sent out to recruit other fallen (or members of once-worshipful mortal bloodlines) "into the fold." It's important to remember that when an Earthbound needs something done, it must turn to its servants. An Earthbound wants a war in Southeast Asia? Perhaps the demon recruits a Burmese drug lord, manipulates him into building an army, and then has him contract out for biological weapons or other tools of genocide. In the process, the demon ensures that the army serves to employ *other* slaves into an incestuous circle of worship. The great demon will strike when the time is right and all the pieces are on the playing field, having all its forces play their roles at the same time in an effort to hasten the eventual destruction of the world and the enslavement of humanity's belief.

One key element of the Earthbound's servants is this: *They are pervasive*. They can be everywhere, and their numbers grow every day (especially considering the sheer number of Earthbound that are waking from their centuries-old slumbers). As such, they can be quite ubiquitous if handled correctly. So what's the correct way? Drop hints and images, but never show it outright. If the characters are in somebody's house, maybe scrawled on a notepad is an ancient sigil that they almost recognize with a phone number beneath it. Maybe there are fliers up all over town for a new "self-help seminar" geared toward losing weight, but sketched on each corner of each flier is the infernal crest of some long-forgotten demon. Maybe a random stranger comes up to them out of the crowd at a bar or a nightclub and begins preaching the ways of Dagon or some other Earthbound monster — all moments before the stranger douses himself with gas and presses a lit match to his clothes. Point is, these slaves can be anywhere and

everywhere. Should an Earthbound set its sights on one of the characters, that character should probably *never* feel safe, always uncertain as to where the next encounter will come from. An Earthbound essentially has an unstoppable stream of servants (though using them up so callously could diminish their own Faith, and thus diminish their power), so make it as convenient as the story demands.

One final note regarding slaves: Feel free to color outside the lines when it comes to designing an Earthbound demon's minions. In other words, the servants don't necessarily have to be your standard set of mortal cultists or malicious fallen. Could a Devourer, for instance, have a pack of wolves or wild dogs as servants? Could crows and rats be spies? What kind of minions could a Defiler have? Prostitutes and addicts? What about an Earthbound Fiend? Could its "faithful" slaves be scientists, priests or professors? Minions needn't be throwaway characters designed merely to serve as faceless villains. While it's okay to have a certain number of these to help increase a feeling of invasiveness, you should always be able to create three-dimensional characters out of the slaves just as you can out of the fallen characters in your story. Flesh them out. Give them names, histories and personalities. Doing so will make them all the more frightening when the time comes when your fallen characters witness the blasphemous

LEGACY AND EMINENCE

How do the two backgrounds, Legacy and Eminence, fit into the grand scheme of things when dealing with Earthbound?

Legacy is simple. The higher the Legacy score is, the more likely it is that a fallen remembers the Earthbound from the time before the Abyss, and the time *within* the Abyss. Typically, seeking specific memories of any given Earthbound (including its Celestial Name) relies upon an Intelligence + Legacy roll (difficulty 8). As Storyteller, you determine how much information to dole out to the players and their characters based on the successes gleaned on that roll. (Critical information won't be remembered without at least three or four successes, however.)

Eminence is essentially the opposite in this case. A higher score in this Background reveals just how likely it is that a singular Earthbound remembers that particular fallen. Eminence reflects just how high up on the infernal ladder a single character is, and while the higher-ups have more temporal power, it also lets them stand out like a beacon to other demons. So, remember that any character with an Eminence rating of 4 or 5 is almost certainly going to get put on one of the Earthbound's "big list of potential recruits" somewhere down the line. The only variable is *when*.

worship that the cultists engage in. The servitors are reflections of their Earthbound masters, and they can serve as tools to show your players exactly what their characters are dealing with.

OPPOSING THE MAD GODS

How can the characters in a **Demon** chronicle truly oppose the Earthbound? With an initial glance, it appears impossible. After all, these are extremely powerful demons — timeless and seemingly indestructible. Predicting their movements seems like an impossible goal, and even if their actions could be foreseen, how could anyone — fallen or otherwise — stand in the way of these juggernauts? Wouldn't the characters topple like a line of dominoes? In the face of these arguments, however, you can insinuate that rebellion is in the very nature of every fallen. Demons owe everything to the fact that they turned away from the Holiest of Holies in brash mutiny. Resisting the commands of the Earthbound comes a little more naturally after putting that in perspective. Second, the crucial thing to remember is that opposing an Earthbound isn't like a single battle. It's not something that can be won or lost in a single game session. The characters don't go charging into the fight with the express goal of physically defeating the Earthbound and their pawns in one, full-blown conflict. Fighting the Earthbound isn't a directly physical endeavor. It's a war, but it's more like a shadow war. A lot is at stake, and this war is fought on many fronts using many tactics, some of which are explored here.

FAITH

Faith is the currency of the fallen. It is the very essence of everything they hunger for; without it, they are powerless. From the lowliest Pit demon to the greatest of the archdukes, it is as essential as oxygen, water or food is to a human. This critical resource, however, is like any resource in that it can be purchased, stolen or destroyed. In times of war, one can make an opposing army weak by poisoning food, cutting off water supply, or stealing the monetary resources that fuel the army's efforts. The same thing can be done with the Earthbound. Their most vital power supply is their Faith. Undermine an Earthbound demon's Faith, and you have scored a small victory against that monster. But how exactly can fallen characters undermine Earthbound Faith?

Stealing worship is one way to dent the armor of the ancient demons. Doing so is difficult, because the servitors of the Earthbound appear to be irreversibly bound to their dark masters. Still, though, it's not impossible. Wise fallen would attack the lower ranks of an Earthbound's minions, because many of these

“faithful” do not directly worship the ages-old demons. They unknowingly provide Faith, but they do not consciously devote themselves to being the chess pieces of such dangerous deities. Examples of these types of faithful are many. Take, for instance, someone who buys a New Age self-help book that encourages personal prayer to an inner god. These prayers evolve into rituals as the person purchases further volumes in the set of books, and perhaps the person begins taking drugs or engaging in self-abuse in an effort to “see the light.” Caught in the initial stages of mistakenly offering themselves to an Earthbound, individuals such as these can be turned away from the path of worship. Clever fallen can watch for these individuals and mount a campaign to divert their Faith from the Earthbound to themselves. A fallen can reveal his presence to these individuals, taking their potential worship and using it for his own devices. Doing so is not easy, of course, as it takes time and effort to secure such a relationship (and a single fallen is one while the Earthbound’s assault is legion). It’s still doable, though, and it helps diminish an Earthbound’s supply of Faith. On top of that, the Faith doesn’t go to waste, per se. Instead it can be turned around and used by the fallen — possibly even to combat the Earthbound from whom he stole it in the first place!

The other idea is to destroy sources of Faith, primarily through physical confrontation. Within each mortal worshipper is a lamplight of Faith that helps fuel the Earthbound’s power. Destroy the embodiment of that lamplight (i.e., destroy the worshipper), and one has successfully removed a small amount of power from the elder god. Stealing Faith is a one-on-one basis, and is often slow, but destroying the faithful can be done quickly by taking out many slaves or cultists in a single attack. The disadvantage is that once the faithful are destroyed, so is their Faith — no fallen can claim it for herself. Still, it gets the job done, and it can be done in broader, more sweeping strokes. If the characters discover that the attic of a local mental asylum is being used as a temple devoted to the gruesome worship of an Earthbound, then the characters have the option to attack and destroy the cultists — or the whole building — to remove many birds with one big stone. If they see a clutch of thralls stealing ancient relics from the local museum, they can attack the thralls directly. Removing the thralls eliminates sources of Faith from the Earthbound.

A way exists to destroy sources of Faith that doesn’t involve physical conflict, however. It is a more abstract and it takes significantly more work, but if the fallen characters are clever enough to cut to the root of the problem, they can sever many faithful ties in one massive movement. Doing so destroys Faith by undermining the worshipper’s very beliefs. If a fallen is

capable of showing potential cultists that their “god” is nothing more than a lowly spirit (or is non-existent), the flow of Faith is undermined as the people stop believing in their divine master. (This degree of spiritual warfare could be the focus of an entire story.)

For example, say your fallen characters discover that a group of corporate executives is giving consistent worship to an Earthbound (perhaps through nightly rituals, altars in their penthouses or blood tithes from the secretary pool) in exchange for vast wealth and executive success. It’s possible, then, that the characters could undermine these executives’ belief by showing them that for all their hard work, they’re still not getting what they desire. How? Drain their bank accounts. Burn their beautiful mansions. Orchestrate corporate takeovers. Somehow, the characters have to reveal to these men and women that their sacrifices are for naught, and no matter how much prayer they offer the Earthbound, they’re still going to lose everything in what they come to realize is a diabolical bargain. Suddenly, the executives stop worshipping. They cease their prayers. They no longer offer their blood and belief, and their Faith is successfully cut off.

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

One strategy to take when combating the monstrous authority of the Earthbound is simple defense. Doing so means anticipating the “moves” (in the chess game parlance) of the mad demon, then attempting to stand in the demon’s way in an effort to trump its plans. The hard part is anticipating an Earthbound’s movements before the demon makes them, since these demigods are inexplicably mad and their plans don’t always take on a logical form. Figuring out what an Earthbound and its servitors will do next is hard enough to warrant a significant chunk of a story. (An Earthbound’s thought processes are a thorny tangle, and characters who follow the trail of the demon’s lunacy could become lost in the madness themselves.) How can they anticipate these moves? Is it as simple as examining the previous depredations of the demon to know where it might strike again? Do they have to attempt to crack a thrall (via torture or other “encouragements”) to get the slave to spill the goods on what might happen next? Maybe you, as the Storyteller, can drop obscure hints through dreams and flashbacks (potentially incorporating the Legacy Background) to help them piece together the enigma of an Earthbound’s blueprints.

Once they have an idea of what could happen next (remember that they don’t always have to be right), the characters can attempt to stand in the way of an Earthbound’s movements. Such is far easier said than done, of course, since the mad gods don’t do things half-heartedly. Still, characters can have success, especially if their defensive maneuvers are

unexpected. If a cult tries to place several key members in high schools across the area (as recruiters), the characters could attempt to foul up the plans in varying ways. Some efforts would be more passive than others. For instance, they could take a subtle approach and attempt to block the cultists' entry into the school, especially if the cultists are being specifically "hired" as teachers, counselors or even janitors. The characters could also defend the school simply by offing the cultists or recruiting them for their own demonic causes. Some defense requires pre-empting the attack, whereas other times it requires staving off the attack. ("Attack" here is a figurative term; the Earthbound don't always deal in strictly physical attacks. Their assaults upon the world have gone unseen for millennia, so don't assume that their movements are always so overt.) Pre-empting an attack might involve the characters learning that pawns of the Earthbound are planning to enter the archives of the new Library of Alexandria in Egypt because they seek an ancient text containing information about other demons. Pre-empting this plan, the characters go in themselves and steal the text before the pawns ever get a hold of it. Sometimes, this tactic requires fallen characters to defend a targeted location. If they expect cultists of the Earthbound Enshagkushanna to kidnap several patients from the Los Angeles General Hospital, for instance, but the fallen don't know when to expect such an attack, they might have to actively set up shop in the hospital to help prevent the assault.

UNDOING DAMAGE

Sometimes, the damage is done, and little can be done to stop it. A group of fallen might arrive in town too late to stop an Earthbound attack. It might be too late to stop the riot, the flash flood, the plague or whatever ghastly "event" the mad god caused. The demon-gods leave much horror in their wake, and many fallen feel that there's little to be done once the destruction has been unleashed.

Other fallen think differently. Some groups (Reconcilers, mostly, but other factions can be involved) actively pursue an agenda of *undoing* the damage left by an Earthbound. Sometimes this endeavor is purely physical. The Earthbound can cause material devastation, summoning the elements to cause substantial disaster, and as such, many fallen serve in a "disaster clean-up" capacity. A Scourge might pull people from dangerous places (wrecked cars, subterranean pockets, beneath heavy objects), whereas a Malefactor or Devourer might use his physical gifts to help put things back the way they were (or at least make an environment less precarious). Aiding in these clean-up situations has a twofold benefit to it. First, it does undo some of the ruin brought by the Earthbound and



ultimately helps lessen the blow (and by proxy, lessen the Earthbound's power). Second, it can foster Faith. Manifesting demonic abilities while acting like an angel (a "guardian angel," specifically) could potentially work in the demon's favor, granting him the belief he needs to survive.

Not all damage is physical, however. Much of what the Earthbound reap and sow ends up being maddeningly subtle. They might manipulate minds from afar, fomenting insanity in an unknowing populace. Minions might do one of a thousand small things to help whittle away the world's independence (and faith in other gods). Such things could include destroying a popular preacher's sanity, poisoning the children at a day-care or sermonizing to madmen and criminals to recruit them into a cult. Anything that deprives people of hope or serves to sway them to the Earthbound's cause is ripe with possibility. How do characters undo this work? In the case of the aforementioned preacher, they might either help restore some semblance of sanity to his mind, or a Faustian might place another, more controllable preacher (or even herself) at the pulpit. In the case of the children at the day-care, the damage has clearly been done because the children are dead, but they can at least lessen the effects by aiding the children's families or coming to the families with promises of vindicating their deceased sons and daughters.

OFFENSIVE TACTICS

Taking the fight directly to an Earthbound (or, more specifically, to an Earthbound's minions) is a much more dangerous endeavor. A fallen character who attacks an Earthbound's resources will soon find herself on a rather nasty hit-list, but that's not to say that open conflict isn't possible. Should characters seek to actively attack an Earthbound, there are a few ways to succeed and escape final destruction.

As mentioned before, one of the key ways of attacking an Earthbound and undermining its power is to destroy its minions. Sometimes doing so is easy — an individual mortal cultist might not be so hard to dispose of. Other times it's more difficult — those demons and thralls who work for the Earthbound are certain to have powerful boons from their dark master to aid them in their cruelty. Yet destroying an Earthbound's pawns is like chopping off bits of their fingers, piece by piece. Over time, their effectiveness and power base will be eroded by the characters' actions, and they might ultimately have less of a grip.

What else could characters "attack" in reference to the Earthbound? Physical assets, for one. These mad demons are powerful, and not just in the supernatural sense. They have collected material wealth, some since before Christ. Even individual pawns can be considerably prosperous, especially if that was part of their

"bargain" for coming aboard. Still, while their capital wealth remains widespread and enormous, that's not to say that characters couldn't affect it. The point would be less about making a dent and more about hobbling key assets. If a main Earthbound center of power is a local mental health clinic, could the characters feasibly either destroy the building or find some way to evict its residents and claim it for themselves? Could they sink a cargo freighter sitting off port that's used for some of the Earthbound's more grisly ceremonies? Using either cunning or lore powers, is it possible that a group of fallen could manage to drain countless offshore accounts that the Earthbound servitors use to fund their crusades? As the Storyteller, it's up to you to determine exactly what pieces of an Earthbound's material goods are essentially up for grabs and vulnerable to attack.

Another item that constitutes an attack — and this is a dangerous option for characters to consider — is an assault upon the reliquary. This cuts right to the heart of the Earthbound demon, and it could very well destroy the beast totally. Is this possible? Yes, but with colossal difficulty. First, this act is so difficult that it shouldn't ever be considered by an inexperienced group of fallen characters. And if one does decide to go for it, it should become the focus of an entire chronicle. Destroying a reliquary means (potentially) destroying the Earthbound by sending it back to the Abyss, which involves literally ousting an insane god from power. No small task, to be sure.

That being said, before characters ever annihilate a reliquary, they must find it. And most Earthbound don't keep their physical homes in public sight (though rumor has it that at least *one* Earthbound keeps its idol in the Museum of Natural History in New York City). In fact, many reliquaries are so far removed from civilization that just getting *near* them is a Herculean task. They might be kept atop mountains, deep in the rainforest or cached so deep in the sewers of the city that it's literally miles below the concrete surface in the bowels of the urban blight. Aside from the location, no Earthbound demon leaves its reliquary unprotected. This idol is an Earthbound's house and body. One would never leave it vulnerable for fear of losing the infernal transubstantiation that keeps it on this planet in the first place. As such, no reliquary should be without extreme protection.

Remember that the Earthbound have pull in many of the major corporations, armies and governments of the world. Don't just imagine that the reliquary is surrounded by a bunch of guards. That's too simple. No, a reliquary's defenses are often quite complex. Maybe the reliquary is way down a tiny tributary of the Amazon River, and there are guardhouses every quarter-mile mounted with machine weapons. Getting past these stations requires having

signed government papers (that can never truly be obtained), and even the slightest resistance gets the characters shot or imprisoned. Should the characters get past this, then the dangers mount as they get closer. (Vicious traps, armed men and precarious landscapes are not out of the question.) More obscure, supernatural dangers might be present as well. Perhaps the characters begin to go mad as they approach. Maybe the very land itself comes alive, and is protected by animated plants and feral beasts. Should characters manage to pass all of these horrors, then there's the reliquary itself to deal with. Whatever it's made of, whether it's obsidian or olive branches, it's going to be tough as hell to destroy. Blasting it with shotguns or hacking at it with machetes is unlikely to scratch it, no matter how feeble it looks. How are the characters going to do it? Demolitions? Fire? Drag it away and drop it off a cliff? Encourage the players to be creative when it comes to their characters' solutions to this problem, and always be sure to present the dangers as well.

BINDING THE FALLEN

Old habits die hard. Prior the Abyss, and even once inside the Pit, the fallen host fell into a great infernal chain of being, with dukes serving archdukes, all the way down the lowest ranks who were nothing more than combat fodder and demonic vassals. Most demons had a place in the hierarchy. They served a fallen angel above them, and they themselves had servants in turn. Now, things are significantly less clear. Position in the chain of being is earned, not enforced, and it has become a flexible, survival-of-the-fittest situation. But the Earthbound don't subscribe to such adaptability, so they have quickly moved to supplant any freedom with the old ways and old hierarchies. Any demon who served them once (even indirectly) is vulnerable to being "drafted." And the Earthbound have many ways to coerce fallen into serving them anew.

THREATS

An Earthbound's threat has great weight behind it. It's like a loaded gun pressed to one's temple. Can a character ignore an Earthbound warning? Threat tactics are likely to come into play when Earthbound agents seek to recruit lesser fallen (and the players' characters tend to fit this mold). While the idea that one catches more flies with honey than with vinegar holds true, it's important to remember that the agents of the mad gods would *prefer* to use vinegar, if only for the sheer delight brought on by watching the fly squirm. Why offer something of value to a meager demon? Throwing pearls before swine seems foolish, especially when threats work just as well, and nothing has to be given up in the process. Instead of reward, agents offer averted punishment. Instead of saying, "If

you serve the Earthbound, you will be granted power," they might instead say, "If you *don't* serve the Earthbound, we will flay the skin from your mortal wife and make you watch. Join us, and she remains unharmed." Earthbound servitors might be trained to look for the things that lesser fallen love, and once they know what a character loves most, they will put that person or thing into immediate jeopardy. Some characters deny the Earthbound and suffer the consequences, and others relinquish their autonomy in hopes that the agents will honor their promise. Agents might target anything. They might threaten the minds and bodies of loved ones. They might steal or destroy material items. Cunning agents even threaten to whittle away a demon's power base (be it mortal or supernatural). Whatever it takes to put the pawns in danger and the demon in checkmate.

SEDUCTION

Some demons are disinclined to care about threats (especially higher-Torment fallen), whereas others are strong enough to actively resist threats and protect their interests from the hostilities of Earthbound agents. In such cases, another tactic must be considered — the seduction that comes with every demonic deal. Realizing that vinegar won't work to attract the fly, Earthbound servitors must rely upon honey, although even the honey is impure. Rewards offered might never be truly fulfilled, or if they are, they might have consequences similar to those of a wish granted by a djinn. A Faustian Devourer who wants an "army of beasts" at his disposal might get just that, but in not specifying which beasts, he could find that he has an army of worms, flies or spiders at his command instead of the expected lions and wolves. A Cryptic Fiend who seeks memory of her former life as an angel before the door to the Abyss was locked shut might be given such information, but there's no rule that says the information has to be true. The Earthbound might fill her head with lies, showing her an illusory landscape of memories where the Fiend was not a helper of humanity but was instead a strategic destroyer of the race of dust. Some particularly valuable fallen might be given the extent of their wishes without deception, but only if the price of their soul is truly worth it to the Earthbound in question.

CAPTURE TEAMS

Some Earthbound refer to these teams in the Latin, calling them *Verus Praenomen*, whereas others have different names. Yet their one purpose remains the same regardless of title — to hunt down the True Names of significant fallen to use against them in an effort to enforce recruitment. These thralls and infernal servants are usually the most highly trusted pawns an Earthbound has, because should a demon's True

Name fall into the hands of a servitor whose allegiance is questionable, it might come back to haunt the mad god later. Aside from being highly trusted, these pawns are also highly skilled. It takes great ability, patience and precision for these demonic detectives to track down a fallen's True Name. These agents skulk in the shadows, watching a fallen's every move. Every time the demon expresses a power that requires touching his store of Faith, that fallen has a chance of leaving behind a supernatural imprint behind. Tiny fragments of their True Name are left behind — caught in the reflection on a piece of broken glass, warbled by a sick bird drinking from an oily puddle nearby or even carried on the wind in a foul odor. These capture teams are prepared with highly attuned awareness and specialized rituals in an effort to uncover the faint remnants of a fallen's True Name left at a scene. Over time (sometimes months, sometimes *years*), these teams can piece together enough of a demon's True Name to use against them in an effort to recruit and bind them to their Earthbound master.

NARRATIVE TOOLS

Portraying the Earthbound can be difficult. It's not as easy as having one walk up to the diner booth where the characters are sitting and have him gallantly announce his infernal presence. The Earthbound exist in whorls of smoke, in the madness of men, in shadowed circles out of the corner of one's eye. Much of this chapter has been devoted to the Earthbound's presence in all things and how characters can react to it, but what follow now are some quick items to help you

DOMINO EFFECT

Some fallen are preternaturally stubborn. They resist the call to service presented by Earthbound servitors. They accept the threats and the losses that occur. They deny any gifts. They defeat capture teams. What else can be done aside from eliminating the demon and moving on? There is one remaining tactic (and some Earthbound favor using this tactic right from the beginning). That tactic is to initiate something of a domino effect, whereupon agents corrupt and cajole all of the individuals within a demon's life, bringing them over to the side of darkness. They accost the mortals in a demon's life, offering them power and pleasure. They separate the other fallen, too, and begin reeling them in one by one. By the end, the fallen is alone, and anyone he ever considered a friend or an ally has been subjugated, their souls raped and blemished. Should a demon *still* resist, the only solution is to murder him and consume his soul, for it is the only way that he can be useful.

describe the Earthbound, dropping clues to their nature without bashing players over the head. These narrative tools will assist you in slowly pulling back the curtain, revealing the Earthbound evil in a manner that *shows* and doesn't just *tell*.

DREAMS, NIGHTMARES AND HALLUCINATIONS

Dreams are an evocative part of consciousness. People sleep at night and wake up with the scattered remnants of a dream's story scattered all around, and each piece gets more and more slippery with every attempt to pick it up and understand it. Do demons dream? Maybe, maybe not. Yet the fallen do because their minds are so intrinsically tied to their mortal host, so they are left at night to dream like any mortal. In these dreams, the Earthbound reveal their presence.

Sometimes, Earthbound purposefully enter a sleeping fallen's dreams, filling that phantasmagoric landscape with grueling imagery meant to ingrain the mad god's psyche upon the fallen's own. These dreams are often horrific violations — vivid nightmares that leave a fallen feeling somehow mind-raped in the morning. Sometimes waking up allows the demon to remember, other times, the nightmare's imagery is lost and only the stained feeling remains. These nightmares often feature the fallen being forced to bow down and supplicate himself before the Earthbound's reliquary, servicing it in violent or bizarrely sexual manners. Sometimes the Earthbound simply show off, giving glimpses of potential futures in an attempt to boast and brag. The sleeping fallen might see grisly images of a building's collapse, feeling each bone crushed by each brick while a voice whispers constantly in the background. The next day, the dream is forgotten until a news story appears about the collapse of an office building in a nearby suburb... and then the dream comes back, playing out in full Technicolor horror.

You might want to use dreams not as a manipulation from an Earthbound, but as a foretelling of things to come (or events of the past). These dreams can drop hints and clues as to an Earthbound's nature or even whereabouts. Feel free to make them as alien and enigmatic as you like. Some might be clear, like a dream featuring a circle of blood-painted cultists castrating themselves in front of an ivory sculpture of some unfamiliar mollusk god. Others might be more inscrutable, like a series of staccato flashes revealing a series of innocent faces that will die over the next few weeks due to the depredations of one of the Earthbound. In the background, maybe the dream features jabbering and chanting that can haunt the character for the rest of the day. Then, after the character wakes up, you allow his player an Intelligence + Awareness roll (difficulty set at your prerogative, but probably no less than a 7) to help decipher the mysterious clues you

laid out within the dreamscape. You might also consider an Intelligence + Legacy roll to help the character decode some of the more infernal bits of the dream, or even an Intelligence + Occult roll to allow access to some of the strange sigils or guttural mantras featured in the dream.

Also remember that these dreams don't need to occur only when characters are asleep. They can come rather inconveniently during the day as hallucinations flitting at the edges of their sight or even as full-blown visions that leave them unconscious for a time.

Ultimately, just remember that dreams (or visions) can serve multiple functions. Not only can they give crucial bits and hints of plot, but they can do so in a manner that actually enhances the eerie, alien mood that Earthbound chronicles provide.

FLASHBACKS

Flashbacks have been used in fiction since time immemorial — sometimes effectively, sometimes awkwardly. Some stories simply aren't meant to feature flashbacks, for they would feel unnecessary and out-of-place. But in **Demon** stories, flashbacks are often quite appropriate, if only because the characters have a whole host of memories that they can't fully access. Flashbacks are a great way to tap into these perplexing memories without simply telling players, "Yeah, you suddenly know that his name is Adramalech." Flashbacks give you a narrative device with which to show players exactly how and what they remember. Thus you reveal to them instead: "For a moment, you recall a time when this man stood with you on the field of battle, slicing the Heavenly Host in twain with a lambent saber. After the battle, you believe he told you that his name was Adramalech." Again, it's a case of showing rather than telling.

In the case of the Earthbound, flashbacks are especially useful, because one might be the only way a character can actually learn something about his seemingly unfathomable enemy. In fact, feel free to throw in a Legacy roll to actually lend some game mechanics to the flashback so that the player actually feels in control of his character's own head. For instance, a character might stumble across the scene of a grisly double-homicide, two neighborhood children who were brutally murdered in their backyards, their guts draped across the boughs of dead trees like decorations. On one of the trees, the character might see a strange sigil, almost like an angular Chinese character. You know, as the Storyteller, that this is a sign from the time before the Abyss, which represents the "signature" of a particularly powerful member of the Alabaster Legion, but how can the character determine this? Have the player roll an Intelligence + Legacy roll as per the core book rules (**Demon**, p. 156). Depending upon the successes gained, the character could learn critical parts of the back

story. She might learn that the sigil belongs to a jealous Halaku known as Gruagach. Further successes might even tell her that this particular Slayer vanished from the Abyss millennia ago, thus giving her a clue that an Earthbound is behind these horrid murders. Further Legacy rolls in the game could reveal vivid flashbacks (which could take up large portions of whole game sessions and even involve the other characters) that help the characters learn more and more of what's really going on.

BUILDING A CHRONICLE

In building a chronicle in which an Earthbound serves as the central adversary, you have to take all the elements listed thus far and add them up into a cohesive story for your players to enjoy. Probably the most basic of these chronicle ideas is the one we'll call "The Recruitment Drive," in which the fallen characters are targeted by an Earthbound with the intention of bringing them into the fold. Here are just a few guidelines to help you build a strong chronicle out of all the disparate bits presented in this chapter.

CREATING THE EARTHBOUND

With the guidelines presented in this chapter, and the systems provided in Chapter Three, you should be able to come up with a solid Earthbound enemy. But remember that the players' own characters come first, and you should mold your demon-god antagonist into one that serves the fallen characters. You have to decide how best to connect your enemy and the fallen in the story. Did the Earthbound once rule them, or has it only recently come across their True Names? Or is the Earthbound simply the living antithesis to everything that the fallen characters hold near and dear? Some connection must help the players accept (and hate or even love) this new adversary.

START SMALL

Throwing an Earthbound at fallen characters right out of the gate is likely to frustrate players and imbalance the story. An Earthbound demon is an ancient, powerful adversary, and it should be revealed slowly. But how? Perhaps the characters are given disturbing dreams or seemingly unconnected flashbacks (as mitigated by their Legacy Background). Maybe a few riots pop up across the city and seem to be nothing too worrisome at the time. Also look to see what kind of mortal institutions might be affected by this particular Earthbound. Is it possible that a prominent media figure suddenly becomes interested in one of the characters? Starting small simply involves dropping hints and scraps for the players to ponder. They are allowed to have the sense that something is coming, but they shouldn't know what.

RECRUITMENT

How will the Earthbound attempt to recruit the players? Ideas are given toward this end earlier in the chapter, but what method does your Earthbound choose? Are the fallen ripe for threats or more subtle seductions? And what happens when the recruitment fails the first time out? Perhaps the Earthbound servitors try a whole other tactic, or maybe they just decide it's not worth it and opt to hunt and destroy the fallen characters. Also, make sure that the recruitment makes sense. Would a vicious Devourer really seek to employ a circle of Reconciler Fiends? Maybe he would, but only to enjoy the grim irony. Or maybe the Fiends have something that the Devourer wants. Just remember that there's always a reason.

FREE WILL

Your players have free will to apply to their characters. They should never feel forced into a decision. Of course, the Earthbound is going to attempt to force them, but it should never feel like the *Storyteller* is forcing them. If they want to give in and join forces with the Earthbound (either in an effort to destroy the demon-god from the inside or because they just liked what the Earthbound had to offer), then that's fine. If they decide to claim the upper hand and start systematically hunting down the Earthbound's slaves one by one, then that's fine too. You've created the shell and the enemy, but your players are really the ones who fill the story. In an Earthbound chronicle, it's easy to use the big bad enemy to steer the fallen characters one way or another, but you should avoid doing so whenever possible. It only serves to frustrate players and harm the outcome of the chronicle.

AGENTS OF DARKNESS

One of the options you can choose as the *Storyteller* is to run a game in which the players assume the roles of Earthbound servitors. The characters knowingly serve an Earthbound demon (though perhaps not willingly), and are essentially bound to the beast for the duration of their very existences. Stories and chronicles based upon this premise tend to be of a slightly different flavor. For one, the players are filling the shoes of the bad guys, or at the very least, the reluctant pawns of the bad guy. Also, these games tend to be more desperate and disturbing. What the Earthbound demand of their slaves can often leave even the most devout Ravener as little more than a twitching mess. They might call upon their fallen servants (who are really the front-line agents) to commit any manner of atrocity, so deciding to run this type of game shouldn't be done lightly. If you do want to go ahead, it might help to answer some of the following questions to help further define the game and make it a better experience for all.

WHY DID THE EARTHBOUND CHOOSE THE CHARACTERS?

While it's always possible that an Earthbound could attempt to recruit and bind a fallen character just for the backup, it's to be expected that it has some reason for using the characters. (And its reasons don't need to be logical or known by the characters, either.) Maybe the Earthbound has been watching the fallen's actions, and it admired some breach of morality (a theft, a bit of Torment-induced violence or something else along those lines) enough to warrant a recruiting attempt. Or possibly the Earthbound has a memory of the character during the time before the Abyss, even if the character herself has little recollection of her own history. The fallen could now be a Reconciler, but perhaps she was a member of the Iron Legion who left battlefields pooled with the enemy's blood, which has forever been lodged in the Earthbound's memory such that it just had to have the character for its collection.

Any number of different reasons exists for recruitment. Was the character enslaved by the Earthbound previously, in the Abyss or earlier? Is the character's hope for humanity and desire for reconciliation with the Creator a beacon to the Earthbound — a beacon that the mad demon wants to gleefully crush like a lamp-bulb? Or did the Earthbound's anarchic nature play a part? Maybe the mad god simply detects a core of potential malfeasance deep within the character's soul. Doesn't matter if it's true or not, because if the Earthbound perceives it as such, you can be certain that the demon will act.

HOW ARE THE CHARACTERS BOUND?

Infernal servants can be linked to an Earthbound in many different ways, so it's important to determine what manner best suits you and the players. It's possible that the character is receiving nothing in the deal and has been compelled into servitude by judicious use of his True Name. Some Earthbound diligently hunt down these powerful Names (see page 82), and having one is like a gateway to a demon's most private territory — his soul. The True Name conquers any willpower the character has, forcing him into compliant defeat. No matter how many agents an Earthbound has scouring the Earth looking for True Names, however, they're still harder than hell to find. So other methods of servitude must sometimes be employed. Pacts could be struck. A fallen might want something that is monumentally difficult to achieve, but that an Earthbound has easy access to. The Earthbound could make an offer the

character can't refuse, so to speak — and it's a pay-to-play situation. If the character wants it bad enough, she'll sell her soul, and the binding rituals and tests of loyalty that follow are sure to secure the character's service until the end of the world.

WHAT IS THE EARTHBOUND'S AGENDA FOR THE CHARACTER?

An Earthbound does not enslave a fallen character frivolously. These entities are always looking miles down the road. They concoct intricate schemes and plans, and any fallen they recruit have some part in these designs. This is not to say that a fallen recruit has to have any inkling of what part he's to play, but you must have some idea as to the Earthbound's inevitable plans for the character. Perhaps an Earthbound recruits a Devil character because of her charismatic influence, and it hopes to move the character into a position securing pacts with key low-level politicians. Or maybe an Earthbound merely has designs to take a Reconciler Scourge and slowly break down his hope and conviction until he is a mirror of the Earthbound's own hatred. Does the Earthbound plan on keeping the fallen around for long periods of time, considering the character a crucial element to its plans? Or does the Earthbound instead hope to run the character through some quick gauntlet, using her up and spitting her out when she's finally served her ultimate purposes? The mad gods believe that they are the arbiters of fate, and this includes the fate of their servants. Be sure to nail down exactly what their strategies are in using and abusing fallen servants.

CHARACTER ARCHETYPES

Fallen characters who end up enslaved by Earthbound demons are not all cut from the same cloth. Some fit the stereotypical role of high-Torment evil beings hell-bent on serving every whim of their dark god, but most tend to be more complex than that. You should encourage your players to create characters who exhibit depth and complexity, as this isn't just an in-game excuse to go out, wreak havoc and torture people (though, technically, that's an option). Here are a few ideas to throw at players in an effort to get them to create realistic infernally bound fallen servants. Character groups can be all of one type, or for a very in-depth game, you can run a chronicle using varying archetypes to enhance conflict.

- **Reluctant:** Probably the most challenging and complex servants are ones who never wanted to be bound in the first place yet have been brought to heel in some way. They might have been forced via usage of their True Names or threatened to the point of submission. Regardless, they don't want to serve the Earthbound, they're simply made to. These characters



are always looking for a secret way out, trying to hide their dissenting thoughts from their masters but always keeping an eye out for the exit sign. Can they do it, or are they hopelessly mired?

- **Low Rank:** Fallen characters aren't going to start out as the right-hand men of the Earthbound. Others probably already fill those shoes. As such, individual characters can be pretty low on the ladder when it comes to the Earthbound hierarchy, possibly even below favored mortal thralls. Is this enough to sow discord among them with clandestine aims to overthrow those above them (even the Earthbound itself), or does it give them impetus to climb the infernal ladder and obtain greater power in the hierarchy?

- **Insane:** Some fallen are broken by their servitude, and others still are deranged *before* they are enslaved by an Earthbound. This insanity is not the kind that leaves them gibbering and weird but is distinctly more insidious. They see things... hear things. They develop fleeting, sudden phobias or exhibit feelings of megalomaniac power or terrible weakness. Willpower points help temporarily, but they can't stave off the dementia for long. Do these characters grow more and more demented, or can they pull themselves out of the fire long enough to maintain lucid thought? If they do, can they escape the depredations of the Earthbound, or does it instead make them more loyal and able servants?

- **Willing:** These characters are the ones who probably sought out the Earthbound in hopes of claiming power for themselves. (Faustians and Raveners are the most common types to do so.) If they didn't seek out the Earthbound, they at least gave in willingly when the time came to be "recruited." This choice doesn't make them patently evil, of course, but it does imply a distinctly pervasive self-interest. The question becomes, however, whether the self-interest is strong enough for them to suffer the debasement to their souls that Earthbound servitude requires. Or do they simply grow to see that the power they seek isn't worth the damage their spirit takes? It's possible that they believe that it is worth it, and they will gladly become depraved if it means reaching their goals.

- **Evil:** Some fallen grow evil as their Torment builds, and others accept it willingly from the very beginning. Their powers certainly permit them to be brutal, cruel creatures, and some give in to their superiority. Truly evil characters have little problem siding with an Earthbound, accepting their shackles of slavery happily if it means that they are allowed to truly express themselves upon the world at large. These characters are also the most likely to ascend the ranks in the Earthbound's stable of slaves, because they're pretty much willing to do anything it takes, no matter how debased and disturbed the action is. Be careful

allowing players to assume these character types. Evil fallen, especially those who serve Earthbound masters, are not Snidely Whiplash villains. They are complex beings who murder and rape for the sake of the grisly delights it allows. They are steeped in madness and suffering, and they know how to accept it and cause it in due turn. You and your players should be aware that such an exploration of human (and inhuman) evil is unlikely to be a comfortable one.

CREATING AN EARTHBOUND CHRONICLE

This chronicle is the other side of the coin from the chronicle idea presented earlier. It can either start on its own or actually be a continuation of the last one (provided that the recruitment attempt succeeds, of course). In this instance, the players actually assume the roles of the capture team.

THE TARGET

Who are they recruiting, and why? The Earthbound has designated a fallen for the characters to employ or capture, but it has to have a reason (though that reason may be alien, since this is an Earthbound). First, you have to make this idea make some kind of sense in game. (Again, a Devourer wouldn't recruit a handful of Reconcilers without a good reason.) But second, it has to make sense in an abstract sense in an effort to hook the characters. Perhaps the fallen target is much like they once were, and now they're able to see themselves as truly the dark reflections. Or perhaps the fallen is an old friend, love or opponent. Somehow, the target must be important to the Earthbound, not just some random demon marked for capture.

TACTICS

The best way to present this chronicle to players is to allow them the freedom to choose their own path in recruiting the target. The mad demon and his thralls might have "suggestions," but you shouldn't force the characters into one method or another. Allowing them to choose invests them personally. If it succeeds, they feel confident and able. If they fail, the characters will feel all the more afraid and threatened. Either way, they feel personally connected to the outcome. (You might even want to outline some of the methods of recruitment here in this chapter to give them options that they might not have considered.)

PREPARE FOR THE OUTCOME

You probably have ideas for how it'll all play out, and that's good. You also need to be prepared for just about any outcome that could happen, though, and not directly impede the players just because their characters' path doesn't mesh with your own blueprints for the chronicle. Be prepared for anything. What if the

characters somehow manage a sudden coup and are actually able to attack the Earthbound reliquary in an attempt to free themselves from the demon's grip? What if they go the completely opposite way and decide that they like the power and command that comes with being soldiers for the lunatic Earthbound, and they become unexpectedly successful in their recruitment endeavor? You have put all the pieces on the table according to all the things gone over in this chapter, but it's ultimately up to the players and their characters to decide how it truly plays out.

BECOMING EARTHBOUND

Legend says that 666 demons were freed from the Abyss and allowed to become Earthbound. Whether this is true or just infernal speculation doesn't matter, because new Earthbound are still created in this modern age. Yet these Earthbound aren't dragged from a hole in the Abyss, they're actually *made* into an Earthbound during the course of play (see Chapter Three, p. 67). Somehow the mortal host was destroyed and the spirit was left with no other option but to be bound to an object or location, which then becomes the demon's reliquary. (Typically these reliquaries are of the improvised nature, but it's possible that a demon's host is destroyed on purpose so that she can inhabit a designated perfect reliquary.) This event can happen randomly. If a player's character is left with no other choice to occupy a nearby object, then you now have an Earthbound character on your hands. It's also possible that you work with a player to move her character into this position for the sake of taking the story in a new direction. No matter how it happens, there are things to consider when molding a story around this occurrence.

SPIRAL OF TORMENT

With her Virtues blasted away and replaced by Earthbound Urges, the reliquary-bound fallen is going to begin to change. Her Torment will rise more quickly in this new state, and once it hits the maximum, her character is effectively lost and becomes a force of alien evil. Of course, you could allow the character to carry on in play, but it's more likely that the demon will become a character in your hands as a Storyteller-controlled individual. You might not want it to get to this point, though. For instance, if this is a random occurrence in the game and not one designed by you or the player, you have to be careful. The player probably doesn't want her fallen to become some grotesquely permanent monster, so you might have to tweak the rules to allow her to combat

the gruesome urges that come to buffet her sanity. For instance, you can allow her to keep her Virtues *and* designate her new Urges as well. This way you have an opportunity for roleplaying instead of an inevitable downward spiral forced upon the player's character. She will have to weigh the options against one another. Now she has new power and a different sense of self, but the old one still calls to her. Can she find a new mortal host in time, or will she inevitably choose the path of power over the path of hope? It's your job to make these options clear and possible.

FINDING A NEW MOST

Should the character decide to find and inhabit a new mortal host (thus making the reliquary more of a way station than a permanent home), you then have the responsibility of making this task part of the story line. Obtaining a new host isn't a simple chore. It's not as easy as grabbing any old human and jumping into his body. For one thing, the fallen character is going to overtake the mortal's mind but still retain part of it as memory. As such, jumping into the body of an unsatisfactory and incompatible soul (a schizophrenic, perhaps, or someone who is otherwise mentally disabled) can be a dangerous endeavor. Also, taking over too strong a personality could cause the demon to lose further memory and submerge beneath the mortal mind.

So, a mortal must be selected. One doesn't want to inhabit a hastily chosen host, but by the same token, taking too much time in the searching can allow Torment to build higher and higher. Also, how does one procure the mortal? Do the other characters help, or is it all up to the new Earthbound to somehow ensnare the new host (perhaps through the use of thralls)? Plus, human bodies aren't doorways to open and close when one feels. They're vessels that must be prepared. Either they have to be found instantly dead, murdered directly or worn down to the point where their soul vacates and the fallen can enter. Is the fallen prepared to undertake this action? And if she fails, is it too late?

SUCCUMBING TO TORMENT

The Earthbound engages in a struggle that she can lose. She might want to maintain her sanity and soul, and she hopes to someday occupy a new mortal vessel. But Torment is like a terrible undertow, and it can pull a fallen character down quickly — especially when she is Earthbound and has less of a buffer against the memories of the Abyss. As Storyteller, it's up to you to present the struggle against Torment and show how much harder it becomes once the fallen becomes Earthbound.

How do you portray this? Do you give the character opportunity to revel in her newfound power, showing

her what an advantage it can be? Maybe she has a burgeoning cult and has never felt such Faith before, or perhaps an old problem of hers goes away with the use of her new lore evocations. But you must also portray the challenges of being Earthbound. For one, the Torment she feels isn't just some small price, it's a blast of horrid memory — a cold scalpel that begins scraping the meat from her very soul. Don't just tell the character, "Put another dot in your Torment, please," but *show* her just how bad it can get. Have the player roll Willpower, and if she fails, perhaps her character is lost for a day, trapped in the memory of the seemingly ceaseless Abyss, constantly reminded of the Creator's dismissal of the fallen angels. If she botches, perhaps she gains another Urge point and you can describe to her the new monstrous feelings that blossom in her mind. One way or another, you have to depict Torment's dismal inertia so the character feels it.

And if she falls to Torment and becomes one of the "true" Earthbound, then so be it. You can give her the choice to continue playing the character, or you can take it away and assume the role of this now wholly malevolent creature.

OTHER CHARACTERS

It's unlikely that all the fallen characters become Earthbound. This end will probably come to only one of them, and you have to provide opportunity for the other characters to deal with this event. (In fact, it can make the focus of an entire chronicle.) Do they try to rescue their ally from the slow slide of Torment, or do they attempt to secretly keep her bound so that they can harness and direct her newfound power? It's your task to make this as much of a plot line as it deserves and involve the other

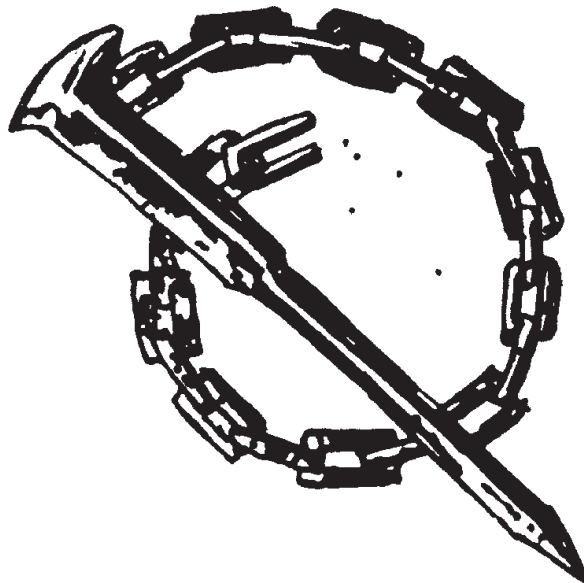
players without focusing too much on the new Earthbound. A balance must be achieved, and it's your job to help instill such equilibrium.

OTHER EARTHBOUND

Once a character is Earthbound, tremors are felt throughout the infernal world. Other demons might not be aware of it right away, but they'll soon feel it. And inevitably this information will work its way up to one of the *real* Earthbound, and this ancient demon will have a decision to make. New Earthbound could be a threat to the extant order, especially if they begin cultivating willing cults and collecting strong waves of Faith.

There are essentially three options that any of the ancient demon-gods will have when they find that a new Earthbound has been "born." First, they might simply sit back and let the demon go mad and self-destruct. Many fallen who become Earthbound simply can't handle the responsibility and haven't had millennia out of the Abyss to grow used to it. Second, an Earthbound might attempt to make an ally of this new reliquary-bound demon, because the ingenue will be untrained and unaware of its true potential. One of the ancient Earthbound can make good use of this relative naiveté, thus gaining an "ally" to direct and manipulate. Finally, the third option is destruction. An Earthbound might decide that this new opponent is too strong (or too insignificant) to remain, and it will begin a war to defeat and destroy the character.

These three options are not necessarily the only ones (you might not even wish to involve other Earthbound), but they're the standard choices. As Storyteller, it's your job to figure out how these elder gods react and what your story's own fallen characters do about it.





"Chicago Police Department," a pleasant, if somewhat tired, voice said on the other end of the line.

Detective Lyman straightened in his chair. "Hello. This is Detective Albert Lyman. I'm calling from Los Angeles. I'd like to speak to someone in Homicide regarding a murder that took place at the Chicago Film Festival recently." A pause at the other end of the line. The woman asked for his badge number; he gave it. He found himself on hold.

Lyman cocked the phone against his ear and glanced around his office. My office, he thought. He'd only had it for a few weeks, but it was becoming his space little by little. It probably would have taken him years to get this promotion if not for—

The voice on the other end of the phone snapped him out of his thoughts. "Lieutenant McAllister speaking."

"Lieutenant McAllister, my name is Albert Lyman. I'm a detective with LAPD. I'm calling about the death of Nolan Brenner." Silence. "He was a film director. He died in the Drake Hotel on... hang on, let me find the date." Lyman rustled some papers around. He knew the date, but he wanted McAllister to start talking.

"I know who you mean." McAllister's voice was steady and rough. He sounded like a longtime smoker. "He was pushed out of a window at the Drake — thrown through it, more like. We've got someone in custody."

This surprised Lyman. "Really? Who?"

A sigh. Exasperated. "A guy named David Williams. Apparently there was some sort of fight over a girl. We found the guy Williams was rooming with in an alley near the hotel. Drowned in a puddle. So far Williams has admitted that he and this other guy — Gavin Rogers — had a fistfight over a girl they met at a screening of Brenner's movie. Then Brenner wound up eating dinner with her the next night. We know her name is Kirsten; that's all. No photos, no last name, no nothing." Pause. "Any thoughts?"

"No," Lyman said slowly. Something wasn't right. "Rogers was drowned in a puddle?"

"We think so." McAllister paused; Lyman waited. There had to be more. "There was a lab report that came back weird. Said he had seawater in his lungs, but that's not real likely."

"Guess not." Lyman shook his head. He had learned enough to confirm his — and his superior's — suspicions. "If anything else comes up, or if this Williams guy confesses, will you contact me?"

"Sure." Lyman hung up the phone and stared out his window until a shadow appeared in the glass as though superimposed on his reflection. "As you thought, master," he whispered. "She killed him. Do you think she knows of your involvement?"

IT DOESN'T MATTER, came the bass rattle of the Enshagakushanna's "voice." SHE IS A WORM. A pause, much like McAllister's, pregnant with thought. BUT BEWARE JUST THE SAME.

Lyman looked about his new office again and reminded himself who he had to thank for all this. "I certainly will, master."



CHAPTER SIX: DARKNESS RISING

*“There is in Hell a vast and sloping ground/called Malebolge,
a lost place of stone/as black as the great cliff that seals it round.”*
—Dante, *The Inferno*

By the time the Age of Enlightenment drove the last of the Dread Kings into faithless slumber there were 666 surviving Earthbound hidden in the bleak places of the world. Now that the fallen have returned these mad gods are stirring in their sanctuaries, sensing the use of Faith like a shark smells blood and rising up from the darkness to feed. The passing centuries have isolated many beneath mountains of earth, fathoms of water or layers of blacktop. Some are forced to summon their legacy thralls and wait to be excavated from their sanctums, while others are now trapped beyond the reach of mortal hands, forced to interact with the mortal world through nightmares and terrifying visions. Like their Abyssal brethren, the weakest among the Earthbound are the first to free themselves, requiring less of an infusion of Faith to whet their appetites. The

greatest of the Dread Kings (with the exception of the Great Beast himself), likely still slumber in their hidden reliquaries, only dimly aware of the changes occurring in the world beyond but growing ever more alert with each passing day as more and more demons stoke the fires of human belief. When the time is right they will call to their believers and rise from their hallowed tombs, and the world will tremble beneath their tread. In the meantime, however, newly-returned demons suffer terrible injuries to their physical forms, and *in extremis* are driven to inhabit improvised vessels or locations, creating a new generation of Earthbound that might well usurp the plans of their elders by claiming the world before the ancient ones are ready. Regardless of who wins the race, the earth and the fallen alike will suffer should the Dread Kings triumph.

This chapter presents six Earthbound characters that Storytellers can use to draw inspiration from or employ whole-cloth as antagonists in their **Demon** chronicle. You are encouraged to treat the Traits and powers provided for each character as general guidelines – the “youngest” of the slumbering Earthbound spent a century or more loose on Earth before sinking into stasis, and thus had plenty of time to learn new lore paths, increase their Traits, etc. Keep the parts that work best for your chronicle and change the rest to suit your needs. This includes adding rituals and relics for the demon (and her cult) to use. Chapter Four contains a number of examples of relics and rituals unique to the Earthbound, but the Dread Kings can also employ any of the rituals and items available to the fallen as well. See Chapters Five and Six of the **Demon Players Guide** for examples of other rituals and relics available to the fallen, or you can use the systems presented there to create your own. Fallen rituals performed by an Earthbound always produce their high-Torment effect, for obvious reasons.

CHARACTER PROFILE FORMAT

Each Earthbound character is presented in a two-page profile presented in the following format:

- **Background:** This section briefly describes the character’s House and actions during the war, as well as information concerning the circumstances of her escape from the Abyss. Details of the demon’s reliquary are provided, as well as her current whereabouts and her agenda now that she has awakened from her long slumber. Finally, a number of insights into the demon’s relative strengths and weaknesses are intended to provide the Storyteller with some suggestions as to how the character can be employed in her chronicle, and ways in which the fallen can try to gain the upper hand in any confrontation. Storytellers are encouraged to view the information provided in this section as a starting point from which to flesh out the details of the demon’s history and the specific plans she has for pursuing her goals. It is essentially a detailed outline that can be expanded upon to whatever extent the Storyteller’s chronicle requires. As always, the Golden Rule is in effect; take what you like and alter or discard the rest to suit your needs.

- **The Cult:** This section describes the nature, size and rough capabilities of the demon’s cult, beginning with its general composition in ancient times and showing how the Earthbound ensured that it survived to the present day. The section also explains the basics of when, where and how the demon’s veneration rituals are performed, as well as any particular details that the demon demands in

order to gain Faith. Finally, some suggestions are presented governing the general gifts (if any) that the demon prefers to bestow upon her thralls. (Expanded rules for empowering thralls can be found in Chapter Four of **Damned and Deceived: The Book of Thralls**; details on powers and gifts unique to Earthbound thralls can be found on pages 98-101 in Chapter Three.) Again, the information presented in this section is a starting point that Storytellers can build upon in a way that best suits the antagonist’s role in the chronicle. Refer to pages 47-54 in Chapter Two for guidelines on developing an Earthbound cult, tailoring the group’s activities, resources, recruiting patterns and internal security to suit the chronicle’s needs.

- **The Demons:** This section provides basic information on the infernal servants of the Earthbound; demons who have joined the Dread King’s ranks willingly or have been enslaved by ritual or sheer force of will. This section describes these servants’ general responsibilities and provides some insight into their personal agendas with respect to their dark master. Storytellers are free to build upon this basic information as they wish, fleshing these servants out further using the rules for character creation in Chapter Six of the **Demon** core rulebook; in most cases these servants possess a high permanent Torment rating, but recently-enslaved fallen might not be quite so far gone. An infernal servant still clinging stubbornly to the tattered remnants of her host’s humanity is a compelling character that could well be the lynchpin in any plan to defeat the Earthbound who controls her.

- **Character traits:** Each profile contains a sidebar that provides the demon’s traits, as well as information on her reliquary and the lore she possesses plus the various facets of her apocalyptic form. The Traits listed for these characters were not allocated using the character creation process in Chapter Three, but were adjusted to reflect their relative age and experience as opposed to a newly-formed Earthbound. The reliquary type listed in the profile shows the number of Faith points it is capable of storing in parentheses; for details on the specific capabilities of each reliquary type, see Chapter Three, page 69. For details on Earthbound-specific Backgrounds, see pages 75-78. Details on the demon’s apocalyptic form facets and grotesqueries can be found on pages 93-97; if you have a different vision for how the character should appear, feel free to alter these facets (or create new ones) to suit your concept. By the same token, feel free to add, change or delete lore paths as desired; given their breadth of experience an Earthbound could conceivably possess *any* lore path available, regardless of their original House.

SARISEL, THE GARDENER OF HELL

Sarisel was once a member of the House of the Fates, one of the angels responsible for creating patterns between facets of creation. He worked in close tandem with the Wild House inventing ways for plants to spread their seed, since he always considered the clumsy method of sexual reproduction to be laziness on someone's part. When the rebellion began, many of the angels serving him were surprised to see him join. They had always thought him a Loyalist.

Indeed, while being cursed as one of the Neberu, he cried that he never should have joined the rebellion at all. Lucifer didn't exactly cast him out for his weakness, but the rest of the host treated him as something of a deserter from there on out. Yet, after the Civilization of Ashes fell, he was cast into Hell just like the rest of the demons.

Even today, Sarisel isn't sure how a small cabal of Chinese wizards managed to summon him, but he isn't one to look a gift horse in the mouth. Freed from Hell several centuries before Christ was born, Sarisel bound himself to a verdant garden and reaped a harvest of Faith from the wizards and their descendants. His rise to power was much slower than that of the more powerful Earthbound in other civilizations, but Sarisel also did not find himself in danger of extinction with the rise of Christianity. Like an oak from an acorn, the Fiend grew slowly, instructing his followers in the use of plants as divining tools and poisons, waiting for an opportunity. Wars in Asia nearly destroyed him on several occasions, but he managed to weather the storm until the 20th century began, when stories of the West filtered back to him through his small but loyal cult.

Sarisel knew that his chance had come. His followers were wealthy, and they moved all of their holdings — including the garden housing their patron — to San Francisco at his instigation. He was there only a few decades before the Maelstrom blew wide the gates of Hell, and he quickly found and enslaved two of the demons he had known before the Fall. Working with them, he drew on his years of experience with both plants and Faith, and he designed a potent weapon against the new, soulless world.

Sarisel calls his creation the "soul orchid," and to all appearances, it is simply a beautiful crimson flower. Properly prepared, though, it can be used to create a storm of Faith. Any demon caught in this storm immediately assumes her revelatory form, and any mortal lashed by the rain recognizes the luminous being that stands before him. The Faith generated, however, reverberates back upon Sarisel — such is the plan, at least. Sarisel has not had the chance yet to test the soul orchid, but he is nothing if not patient.

Sarisel's reliquary is a garden measuring nearly 40 feet on a side, located behind the Chinatown residence of his most prominent thralls. The garden is adorned with various types of exotic plants and trees, but only the soil truly holds the soul of Sarisel. The demon controls every plant in the garden completely, and he can animate and mutate them using the Lore of the Wild at a second's notice. The only beings allowed to set foot in the garden are sacrifices and thralls; even Sarisel's enslaved demons are only allowed to hover over the ground.

THE CULT

In China, Sarisel's cult consisted mostly of older men, descendants of the wizards who summoned him from Hell so long ago. As this order of wizards died out, however, Sarisel took pains to make sure that at least one member of his cult knew the summoning ritual to call him back, should he ever be returned to Hell. Since so many years have gone by without this ritual having been performed (as there has been no need), Sarisel was unsure whether the current holder of the ritual would even be able to make it work. After the move to America, he changed his strategy somewhat. Rather than teaching the rite to one member in a generation, he chose his most trusted thrall (a man named Chen) and granted him vast arcane knowledge and ageless youth, at the price of what remained of his will. Chen is the legal owner of the property that hides Sarisel's garden as well as a certain greenhouse in which the soul



orchid grows. (Sarisel is afraid to keep the orchid in his garden. Someone might come looking for it, after all, and he does not wish to have all his eggs in one basket.)

His cult currently numbers about two dozen mortals, all Chinese or Chinese-American. They range in age, but none are younger than 21. Sarisel distrusts children, believing that they are capricious and incapable of the patience and discretion that he requires. Of the cultists, a few are thralls. Sarisel prefers to grant knowledge, intelligence and powers of perception rather than physical strength or fortitude; he is well aware that the human body can be tempered and trained to impressive levels without any supernatural tampering. Many of his cultists are accomplished martial artists, and some are low-level Triad members. Sarisel has never chosen to exploit this resource, but if he did, he could probably bring considerable criminal influence to bear.

The cult meets monthly, on the new moon, to worship the “god.” Sarisel presents himself as a god of rain and plants and bestows his favor on young grooms. He disdains female worshippers (although the wizards gave birth to this tradition, not the demon himself) and accepts sacrifices of blood and burnt plants. In addition to the new moon rites, he demands that his thralls visit him on any night that a thunderstorm breaks over his garden; he summons them on such occasions. He has been known to slay any thrall who does not appear in such circumstances. As a result, his thralls rarely leave the San Francisco area.

INFERNAL SERVANTS

Sarisel was an angel of some influence before the Fall, responsible among other things for the process of pollination and growing plants from seeds. As a result, he knew the True Names of several members of the House of the Wild and at least one member of the House of the Deeps. After the Maelstrom freed many of the fallen, Sarisel began invoking the names that he knew and bringing the demons that he could to San Francisco. Two of these demons arrived expecting answers and perhaps a mentor. Instead, they were ambushed by Sarisel’s cult and bound into slavery.

The first such demon was Zaliel, a Defiler with an impressive knowledge of the Lore of Storms. Already in the city, she trusted Sarisel, remembering him only as a kind and diligent angel. When she arrived in Chinatown, his cult met her and led her to the garden, whereupon they beat her into submission and anointed her forehead with blood and ash from the burnt offerings from the previous night’s sacrifice. Sarisel invoked her True Name, and Zaliel — back on Earth for less than a week for the first time in millennia — belonged to him. While she feels she should despise Sarisel for taking away her freedom and tricking her, she is morbidly curious about his plans for the soul orchid and how it involves her beloved rainstorms.

The second of Sarisel’s demonic slaves is Lalaroth, a Devourer with whom Sarisel worked before the Fall. Lalaroth would not have been Sarisel’s first choice among the Rebels of the Wild that he knew. The steadfast but uncreative angel was largely a messenger, contributing only occasionally to the processes of spreading pollen and other plant life. Still, a demon is a demon, and Sarisel has trained Lalaroth to near mastery in the Lore of the Wild. Lalaroth’s main task is to guard the soul orchids at the greenhouse, and his massive apocalyptic form, riddled with thorns and dripping with poisoned sap, makes him a superb protector.

Neither of Sarisel’s slaves has had enough contact with other demons to choose a faction. If free will were a factor, Zaliel might lean toward the Luciferans. She never really believed that the Morningstar abandoned the rebels, and she knows how difficult it is to find one raindrop in a storm. Lalaroth, on the other hand, was never very bright, and his possession of a very strong but mentally handicapped man did nothing for his intellect. Like many of his House, he is a Ravener, held in check only by his subservience to Sarisel. Unlike Zaliel, who is intrigued enough by the possibility of Sarisel’s “faith storms” to serve him even without chains (maybe), Lalaroth would rebel given a bit of prodding and aid. And as a former Angel of the Wild, he knows the makeup of Sarisel’s garden in detail.

SARISEL, THE GARDENER OF HELL

Nature/Demeanor: Architect

Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 5, Intelligence 5, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 4, Bureaucracy 3, Expression 3, Finance 4, Intimidation 3, Leadership 4, Medicine 3, Melee 3, Performance 2, Politics 3, Recall 3, Stealth 1, Subterfuge 5

Backgrounds: Cult 2, Eminence 3, Hoard 3, Mastery 2, Thralls 3, Worship 2

Relic Type: Location (25 Faith points)

Willpower: 10

Faith: 8

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 4, Flesh 2, Thought 3

Apocalyptic Features: Armor, Chameleon Skin, Claws/Teeth, Disperse, Extra Health Levels, Huge Size, Primal Mind, Thorns

Grotesqueries: Abhorrent Sounds, Decaying, Eyes, Glow, Skin, Stench, Unstable, Vestigial Limbs

Lore: Earth 3, Flesh 3, Chaos 5, Violation 4, Spirit 2, Storms 4, Wild 3

BEZARIEL, THE BLOOD ANGEL

In the long days of the War of Wrath, Loyalist angels feared the Halaku as no other. The Angels of the Second World had become the Slayers, the very incarnations of death, and they knew how to tread worlds that God Himself had never seen. Every war has its heroes and its reviled warriors (often the same people fill both roles), and during the War of Wrath, Bezariel was no exception.

Bezariel was one of the Namtar, an Angel of Death. After the Fall, he quickly became embittered with his task of reaping mortal souls and attempted to make himself look as appealing as possible to his hapless charges. But no matter how innocent a face he constructed, he could not ease their fear and pain upon death. As the war wore on, Bezariel fought against the Host with a bitter determination. He wanted humanity to love and trust him as the Abelites had loved the Loyalist angels.

And yet, for all their dread prowess in battle and skill in opening gateways to other realms, the Halaku were cast into the Abyss like all the other rebels, Bezariel among them. As the years wore on, the Slayers were the demons least often freed as Earthbound. Perhaps God placed extra safeguards against freeing the realm-walkers from Hell, or perhaps they had simply kept their names and natures so well hidden from humanity that the mystics didn't know how to call them up.

In fact, it wasn't until the late 20th century that Bezariel was freed from his prison, by the hand of a mortal wizard called Joseph Stranvitch. Stranvitch, however, was not acting on his own. Bezariel found himself pressed into service

by an undying creature of such surpassing evil that the demon nearly paled in comparison. This witch, called Baba Yaga in human legend, mumbled her ill-conceived plans to Bezariel. They involved forging pacts with other supernatural beings and draining the land of its holy power.

Bezariel was unimpressed. He knew the price of such hubris all too well, but he was in no hurry to return to Hell. When Baba Yaga bade him collect spiritual energy from the land, he did so. When she gave him the power to warp the bodies of the living into mindless slaves, he used it. When she gave him an army of wretched spirits to command, he played the role of general. All the while, his Torment grew, until by the time Baba Yaga met her death. Just less than a decade after Bezariel arrived from Hell, he had become completely consumed by his Torment.

Bezariel knew that something was coming, of course. Stranvitch, with whom Bezariel had kept some contact, had been murdered along with the rest of his sorcerous companions. The Blood Angel was a creature of fate and death, so he could sense it coming, even for a being as powerful as the Iron Hag.

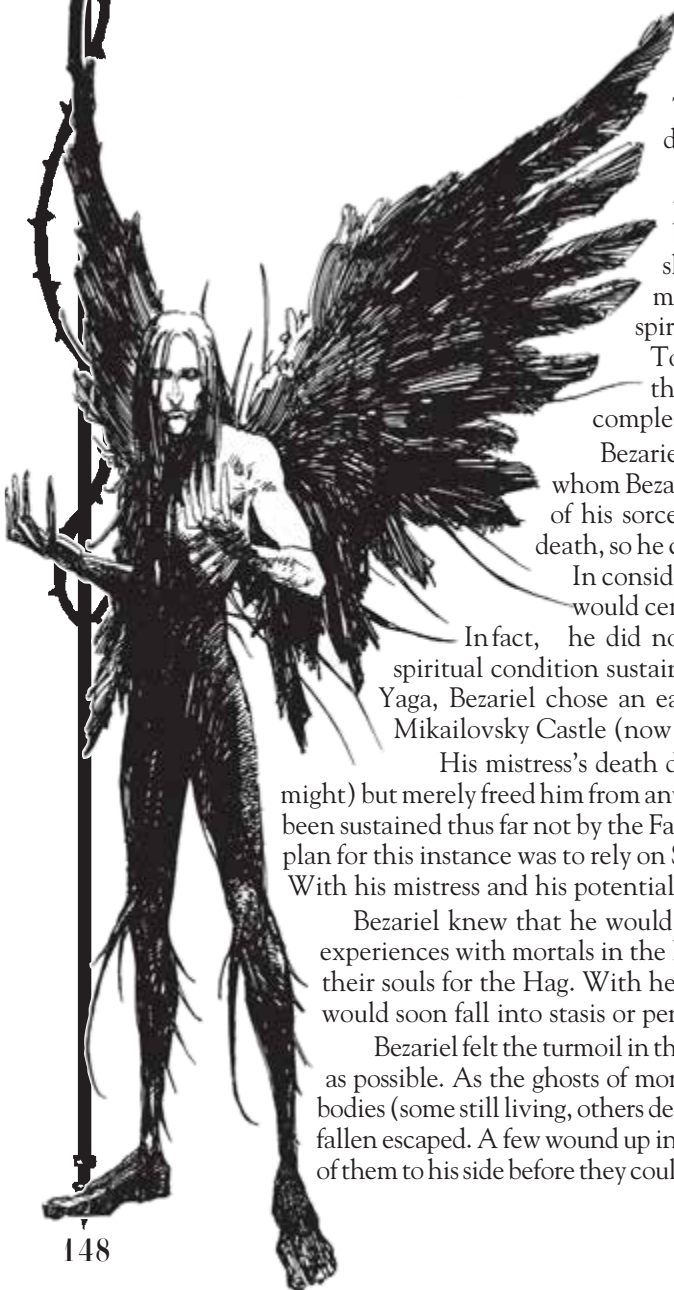
In considering the future, Bezariel realized that if Baba Yaga were to die, he would certainly have problems. She was responsible for much of his power.

In fact, he did not even have a reliquary, being accustomed to Russia's unique spiritual condition sustaining him. In the days before destiny finally caught up with Baba Yaga, Bezariel chose an earthly resting place — a ritual dagger hidden behind a wall in Mikailovsky Castle (now a St. Petersburg museum).

His mistress's death did not send Bezariel screaming back into Hell (as he thought it might) but merely freed him from any and all dominance. He faced a greater problem, however. He had been sustained thus far not by the Faith of mortals but by the raw power of Baba Yaga's magic. His only plan for this instance was to rely on Stranvitch's devotion, but he and his followers were already dead. With his mistress and his potential slaves gone, Bezariel he felt himself growing steadily weaker.

Bezariel knew that he would not be able to survive on Earth long without followers, but his experiences with mortals in the last few years had largely been limited to flaying them and taking their souls for the Hag. With her dead, he assumed that their souls were gone and feared that he would soon fall into stasis or perish. And then, a miracle occurred — the Maelstrom.

Bezariel felt the turmoil in the lands of the dead and reached out to absorb as much of that energy as possible. As the ghosts of mortals were flung far and wide, destroyed and even blown back into bodies (some still living, others decaying) Bezariel watched in delight as Hell cracked and many of the fallen escaped. A few wound up in Russia, and Bezariel wasted no time invoking them. He drew three of them to his side before they could get their bearings and, using the knowledge of the country gleaned



from years at the side of the Little Grandmother, began finding and suborning some of the few cults that remained in her service. It was a desperate strategy, but it seems to be working. After all, the alternative is Hell.

THE CULT

Bezariel's cult, such as it is, consists mainly of former worshippers and servants of Baba Yaga. Fortunately for the Blood Angel, the Hag kept her worshippers largely in the dark about the nature of their mistress — she needed their Faith as much as the demon, if for a different reason. Bezariel knows that more of these cells of followers exist across Russia, and he likewise knows that other unholy beings might already have suborned them. He sees them as his right, however, and he intends to retake the Faith of these mortals and find a way to roam Russia as a spirit once again.

The largest cult is centered in Saint Petersburg, and it numbers about 20. Bezariel has made pacts with a few, but the results have been less than satisfactory. Years of spiritual taint from Baba Yaga have altered the demon's ability to grant power to mortals, and his thralls tend to grow steadily more psychotic after making the pact. In his cult, based as it is on human sacrifice and torture, this is rarely a bad thing, of course.

Bezariel's methods, like Baba Yaga's before him, might prove a bit too heavy handed for the modern world, but that remains to be seen. In the meantime, his followers devote their Faith to the Blood Angel, a god of pain and beauty who tells them that only in the moment of excruciating agony can life truly be appreciated.

THE DEMONS

Three demons appeared in St. Petersburg in the wake of the Maelstrom, and Bezariel quickly snapped them up as servants. None of them are very powerful on their own, and Russia holds many supernatural dangers. Bezariel, however, is a veritable expert in the whiles and ways of these beasts, so the demons he has suborned find it beneficial to obey him.

The first is Marash, a Devil who burned with Holy Fire in better days. Like many of his House, he excels in playing to the masses, and it is he who leads the cult and performs the sacrifices. Unlike Bezariel himself, Marash has taken well to making pacts, and several of the cultists (as well as many everyday mortals) now supply him with Faith. Given a bit of time, Marash could easily become more powerful than Bezariel, but he also realizes that he needs the Blood Angel's protection from the supernatural guardians of Russia. Marash is a true Faustian, and he understands the need to be used occasionally.

A Malefactor named Yrreck acts as Bezariel's personal bodyguard. A former Angel of the Earth, Yrreck is a Luciferan who wants nothing more than to go to America and search for his lofty hero. Bezariel promises that he would like nothing better than to find the Morningstar, but he cautions Yrreck that travel is dangerous for the fallen. (In fact, this promise is a lie; Bezariel hasn't even thought about his former leader in years.) Yrreck accepts the assurance — as Bezariel knows his True Name, he has little choice — but Marash notes his compatriot's true goals.

Bezariel's third demonic servant is less of a servant and more a confidante. During the War, Bezariel and Neriel were friends, even lovers in some sense of the word. Like Bezariel, Neriel was an Angel of Death, but she didn't feel the sting of mortals' fear as keenly as her lover. After being released from Hell, she was initially overjoyed to find Bezariel again — then horrified at what he'd become. She stays with him in part because he knows her True Name and could probably call her back, and in part because she desperately wants to redeem him. She holds out little true hope, however. While she once knew his True Name, his association with Baba Yaga has so warped Bezariel that even this essential part of him has grown tarnished and corrupted.

BEZARIEL, THE BLOOD ANGEL

Nature/Demeanor: Survivor

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 3, Manipulation 3, Appearance 2, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 4, Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 4, Melee 4, Occult 5, Recall 3, Stealth 5, Subterfuge 2

Backgrounds: Cult 3, Eminence 1, Hoard 2, Influence (St. Petersburg) 2, Mastery 4, Thralls 3, Worship 2

Relic Type: Perfect (20 Faith points)

Willpower: 9

Faith: 10

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 2, Flesh 3, Thought 4

Apocalyptic Features: Casts No Reflection, Dread Gaze, Frenzy, Enhanced Ability (Melee), Lore Sense, Relentless, Touch of Death, Wings

Grotesqueries: Abhorrent Sounds, Bulging Muscles, Decaying, Eyes, Glow, Skin, Stench, Unstable

Lore: Awakenings 3, Death 5, Violation 2, Realms 5, Spirit 5

Ix Tab, THE SUICIDE GODDESS

Ancient Mayan legend speaks of Ix Tab, the goddess of suicide. This being is usually portrayed hanging from the sky by a noose. Mayans believed that suicides, like priests, warriors killed in battle and mothers who died in childbirth went immediately to Heaven upon death. The being who inspired those legends, however, still lives, and is a far cry from what the Mayans imagined.

Centuries upon centuries ago, the demon who would become known as Ix Tab was summoned to Earth by a band of shamans in eastern Central America. What means of summoning the demon they used is unknown, and it is not likely to ever be uncovered — Ix Tab (then known by another name, of course) decimated the village in a mad rage, saving the body of a young girl to inhabit. She quickly discovered, of course, that any human body she possessed began to disintegrate almost immediately. Unwilling or unable to devote the time necessary to bond with a reliquary or form a cult, Ix Tab began moving west, massacring anything in her path and feasting on the Faith thus released. After destroying a village, she would inhabit the body of a young girl and move onward. In time, some villages heard of her depredations and left sacrifices of young girls for Ix Tab. These sacrifices staved off death for only a short time, however. Ix Tab is a Devourer, and not given to negotiation or placation.

Yet her bloody rampages ended when the jungle's ancient protectors, the jaguar-men called the Balam, rose up and destroyed her... or so they thought. In fact, they only managed to force her to become spirit for a brief moment, after which she finally took a reliquary. This object, a massive stone altar, escaped the skinchangers' notice, and they disappeared into the jungles whence they came, sure of their victory.

Ix Tab lost little in the way of power, however, because the altar was still in use. A cult in the area used that altar in reverence to their goddess of suicide. A volunteer would kneel on the altar

and then slit her own throat, while the others watched and chanted. Over time, a curious legend arose — the body of young girl who performed this act might rise again and disappear into the jungle to hunt.

With the coming of the Spaniards, the cult was decimated, and Ix Tab sank into slumber. Her altar became overgrown by vegetation, and not until shortly before the Maelstrom did she darken Creation again.

In 1998, a crew clearing a section of jungle happened across the altar. It was immediately transferred to a museum in Monterrey, yet still Ix Tab slept.

And then one evening, a young girl named Maria Dominguez wandered through the museum. Depressed and a little unbalanced, she read the placard next to the altar and saw that once, people had died and been reborn on the stone slab. Taking a razor blade from her pocket, she climbed onto the altar and cut her own throat.

While her body was removed before Ix Tab could rouse the strength to possess it (a good thing for anyone in the city of Monterrey) her hot blood, given willingly on the altar, woke the ancient demon. In the weeks that followed, she began building a cult of followers out of anyone who lingered long enough at the altar for her to invade their thoughts. By the



time the Maelstrom opened cracks into Hell, Ix Tab was ready once more to take human form and continue her march westward. That she has not done so is due almost entirely to the efforts of her only demonic servant, Naraumiel.

THE CULT

Ix Tab's cult comprises mainly young locals, some of whom have toured the museum on school outings and been entranced by the demon. The cult's tenets are similar to those espoused by the native people who fed Ix Tab with their blood and Faith so long ago. Namely, they believe that to commit suicide in deference to Ix Tab ensures a place in Heaven. Likewise, anyone who dies in defense of the goddess reaches paradise. Ix Tab has enthralled several of the most physically capable of her cult, granting them enhanced strength and sometimes access to her martial lore. While most of her cultists are teenagers, only a few older than 18, they are easily a match for anyone who might come looking for the altar.

As much as Ix Tab wants to be free, she has abstained from possessing the body of any of her followers thus far. As the cult has grown, six young women have committed suicide on the altar, all of them in full view of the rest of the cult. (One of the few adult members of the cult is the museum's head of security, and he facilitates both the late-night rituals and any cleanup required thereafter.) While Ix Tab accepts tribute from either gender, she prefers that men prove themselves by dying in battle. Of course, this would be easier in Mexico City, and the demon is contemplating having her reliquary moved to a larger museum in that city so as to build a larger cult base. Since most of her followers are children, however, and therefore unable to simply pick up and move with her, she has not pursued this plan yet.

THE DEMONS

Before the rebellion, the angel who would become Ix Tab was a minor Elohim in the House of the Wild. She was responsible for putting finishing touches on predators, such as the subtle shadings of fur or the curves of fangs. Her immediate superior was an angel called Naraumiel, and it was he who encouraged her to join Lucifer's revolt. It was a decision he has come to regret.

During the War of Wrath, Naraumiel watched his protégé grow bloodthirsty and vicious, even toward humans. As the war ended, the more powerful Devourer decided to destroy her before she could inflict greater

suffering on the world, but he never got the chance. Both demons were flung into the Abyss.

After the Maelstrom, Naraumiel found himself in the body of a surgeon in Texas. Struggling to remember the events of the war, he let his instincts guide him to Mexico and then to Monterrey, where he found to his horror that his former subordinate — the demon that he had inadvertently created by talking her into joining the rebellion — was now leading innocent children to suicide. Ix Tab, as she was now known, was far too powerful for him to confront directly, but since she never knew of his intention to kill her, she accepted him as a servant. She charges him with protecting her from any supernatural incursion and advising her on the state of the world.

Naraumiel is in a tight predicament, indeed. He knows that he does not have the power to directly challenge Ix Tab, and he doesn't know how much longer he can talk her out of possessing one of her victims and rampaging across the land as she once did. He has, however, heard legends of her defeat at the claws of the jaguar-men, and he wonders if these beings are myth or reality.

IX TAB, THE SUICIDE GODDESS

Nature/Demeanor: Judge

Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 2, Brawl 3, Crafts 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Leadership 2, Melee 5, Recall 4, Stealth 5, Survival 5, Subterfuge 3

Backgrounds: Cult 2, Hoard 2, Mastery 3, Thralls 2, Worship 1

Relic Type: Perfect (20 Faith points)

Willpower: 6

Faith: 8

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 4, Flesh 5, Thought 2

Apocalyptic Features: Armor, Claws/Teeth, Cloak of Shadows, Extra Health Levels, Horns, Lashing Tail, Sense the Hidden, Supernatural Vision

Grotesqueries: Abhorrent Sounds, Decaying, Eyes, Glow, Skin, Slime, Unstable, Vestigial Limbs

Lore: Beast 5, Death 3, Earth 3, Flesh 5, Violation 3, Realms 3, Wild 4

ORANASH, THE WIND FROM THE SEA

Savannah is a beautiful city. The historic district boasts houses that have been fully restored to their original glory. Every block contains a square with benches, statues and trees adorned with Spanish moss. Walking and carriage tours take visitors all around the city, and every street corner has a story attached to it.

But Savannah has seen its share of misery. In 1820, one of many yellow fever outbreaks killed more than a 10th of the population. That same year, a hurricane ripped through the city destroying homes and businesses. Savannah later escaped the fate of many Southern cities during the Civil War. William Sherman stopped at Savannah and simply stayed there for a time, rather than burning it (though since there isn't anything beyond the city except for open ocean, that decision might not have been born of kindness).

While it wouldn't be entirely true to say that Savannah's difficulties over the years were due entirely to the Earthbound demon lurking there, Oranash, once Angel of the Rising Wind, certainly hasn't helped matters.

Summoned by a native tribe so long ago that even he can't remember exactly when, Oranash appeared on the coast of what would later become Savannah, Georgia. He chose as his reliquary a wooden fetish, which the shamans of the tribe kept holy and protected from wear and tear over the years. While many Earthbound were consumed by Torment, Oranash actually came to appreciate and even love his followers. He protected their fishermen from the elements and their shamans from baleful spirits. For centuries, he was patron to the people, aiding them in war, guiding them through famine. There was even a time that he wondered if perhaps his escape from Hell had been God's way of forgiving him.

And then, in 1733, James Ogelthorpe arrived on the shores, and all was lost. His retinue smoothed out the mounds that the natives had built, rousing their ancestors' spirits. The English brought smallpox with them as well, and the tribe slowly died out. For Oranash, watching this devastation happen brought the tortures of Hell crashing back. He vowed that these interlopers would pay horribly for what they had done.

Savannah suffered terribly over the next few centuries. Oranash called upon his mastery of storms, disease and fire to ravage the citizenry. It was never enough, however, and as the last of his worshippers died out, he despaired of ever having his revenge. When General Sherman gave the city of Savannah to President Lincoln as a Christmas present in 1864, Oranash dropped into stasis, his fetish now interred in a stone coffin beneath a Savannah house.

He did not awaken until the Maelstrom, and when he did, he discovered that the many ghosts of Savannah were in turmoil from the storm. His love for his people twisted in a mad desire for blood and revenge, he gathered what power he could and issued a summons to any demon who could hear him through the din. As it happened, of course, that summons reached the Halaku most clearly. Four of them heard, and as they struggled to come to grips with their new existences, they answered.

Oranash could sense that these demons did not share his goals, but he needed them to build him a following. Therefore, he presents himself as the patron of modern Savannah, giving the citizens the strength they need to weather the fires, the diseases and the storms. The ghosts of Savannah, meanwhile, still struggle to survive the storm without being torn to pieces, and Oranash's followers attempt to provide that as well.

Oranash's ultimate goal is to find a way to reap Faith from ghosts instead of (or as well as) living mortals. Ghosts, after all, are nearly as numerous as the living, and they don't need to be protected from the supernatural to the same degree.



Besides, many of them are just as desirous of revenge as Oranash himself. While he searches for a way to achieve this goal, he attempts to push his small circle of Slayers deeper into Torment, that they, too, will come to share his goal of depopulating Savannah.

When the squares are empty and the only movement in the city is the Spanish moss shaking in the breeze, then Oranash plans to burn the city to cinders and sweep the ashes into the sea. And, perhaps, his people will come back to him.

THE CULT

Oranash's cult is still very small, including only a dozen members. Oranash insists that his demons recruit from the decadent rich (not hard to find in Savannah), and at first blush, the cult seems nothing more than an exclusive club. This makes it enticing for others of the upper crust to join. It isn't until they take their vows (and seal the pact) that they realize the true nature of the club.

Oranash devotes very little attention to the cultists; most of them are thralls of his four servants. He soaks up their Faith by calling up thunderstorms when he requires their worship, and is slowly teaching them the long-forgotten rites of the native tribe that revered him, although it pains him to do so. Oranash takes great pains to shield his cult from the truths of the supernatural. He allows his demons to grant them power in the form of knowledge and mental faculty, but nothing overtly magical. He wants them to be just as surprised as everyone else when the city dies.

Since his cultists are rich, Oranash can call upon fairly vast amounts of money when he needs to, but as he is unfamiliar with modern commerce, he usually tries to resolve problems in more direct ways.

Although they are not technically cultists, Oranash has many followers among the city's ghosts, who look to him as a sort of spiritual father. Since very few of them are native (those spirits seem to have disappeared long ago) Oranash doesn't feel any more kindly toward these restless souls than he does toward the mortal citizens, but ghosts provide unparalleled intelligence about the city. As a result, Oranash knows virtually everything that goes on in Savannah.

THE DEMONS

Oranash's four servitors are all Slayers, summoned by a shrieking chain of ghosts during the Maelstrom. Their names are Jusfiel, Sirsirhass, Ulak and T'Ishog. They converged on Savannah to see what was happening and found Oranash apparently attempting to succor these spirits. While only one of them is a Reconciler, they were all savvy enough to appreciate that a powerful patron who still seemed naïve enough to care about human souls was a good tool to have. (Ironically, of course, their patron thinks the same thing about them.)

Originally an angel in charge of destroying animals that had served their purpose, Jusfiel understands finality. He

possessed the body of a man in a deep coma, brusquely told the man's family good-bye and followed Oranash's summons. Jusfiel suspects that his patron is not all he appears, but that only intrigues the demon more — he is a Cryptic, and is particularly interested in the Earthbound. As Oranash knows only Jusfiel's Celestial Name, the Slayer feels confident that he could escape at any time if it became necessary.

A true Angel of Death, Sirsirhass found herself in the body of a young woman in the throes of postpartum depression. Her young son already lay dead before her; the woman didn't even have the strength of will to take her own life when the Slayer possessed her body. Another demon might have been overcome with the guilt, but Sirsirhass was accustomed to killing, so she was able to ignore the remorse long enough to flee the scene. Of the four demons, Sirsirhass is the only true Reconciler, but she is also the most susceptible to Oranash's nudges towards Torment.

Ulak and T'Ishog were friends and co-workers before the rebellion and brothers-in-arms during the war. Reunited almost immediately after Hell cracked open, they incarnated into the bodies of two lovers who had taken a suicide vow. Overjoyed to be together again, but having little else in the way of plans, they set off to investigate the call for help that they'd heard from Savannah. After finding Oranash, the two Faustians became instrumental in assembling his cult. Over time, however, the bond between them has frayed, as they both vie for Oranash's attention and favor. This, of course, is exactly how the Earthbound wants it. Nothing pushes a demon into Torment like love betrayed, after all.

ORANASH, THE WIND FROM THE SEA

Nature/Demeanor: Judge

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Charisma 4, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3, Perception 3, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 4, Dodge 3, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Leadership 2, Medicine 4, Stealth 4, Subterfuge 3, Survival 3

Backgrounds: Cult 1, Hoard 3, Mastery 2, Thralls 4, Worship 1

Relic Type: Location (25 Faith points)

Willpower: 7

Faith: 6

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 4, Flesh 3, Thought 4

Apocalyptic Features: Chameleon Skin, Extra Actions, Improved Initiative, Lore Sense, Miasma, Mist, Supernatural Vision, Toxins

Grotesqueries: Eyes, Glow, No Legs, Pustules, Skin, Slime, Stench, Unstable

Lore: Awakening 5, Death 4, Contamination 2, Humanity 3, Realms 3, Storms 4, Spirit 3

VERAKUK, THE WARDEN

Different cultures have differing ideas about how to treat prisoners and criminals. In many cultures, the death penalty is applied often, to a variety of offenses. In others, it is rarely used (if ever).

And then, some prisons are such that the inmates might wish for the release of death, even if it never comes. Such a prison exists outside Tallah, Egypt. The conditions in the prison are deplorable — the prisoners are underfed and beaten regularly, and they rarely see the light of day. And yet, the prison was probably better off before the newest warden arrived. The new warden answers to a higher master than the state — he answers to the demon Verakuk.

Verakuk is a Malefactor, one of those demons who pioneered the Lore of the Forge during the war and constructed weapons of surpassing craft and power for the rebels. Imprisoned in the Abyss, he marveled bitterly at how perfect a prison Hell was. It contained no materials to work with or wear down; it was completely apart from matter. The time in Hell changed Verakuk. He decided that if he ever escaped, he would work toward that sort of perfection — an earthly prison that not even an angel could escape. He had some angels in mind, in fact.

Then, a circle of Egyptian spell-casters summoned the demon forth to aid them in crafting jewelry and gifts to appease the Pharaoh. He did, but he formed a cult around himself, posing as the protector god Sopd. While Verakuk enjoyed worship in the Eastern Desert, he never ascended to the same level of power as such Earthbound as the five archdukes. Eventually, his reliquary — a man-sized statue built in Sopd's image, with eyes of turquoise — was stolen and carried west, across the Nile. The thieves barely made it across the river when Verakuk, enraged at their temerity, killed them all... and then discovered that he had no way to contact his followers. He lay there in the sand for millennia, slumbering as the world passed around him.

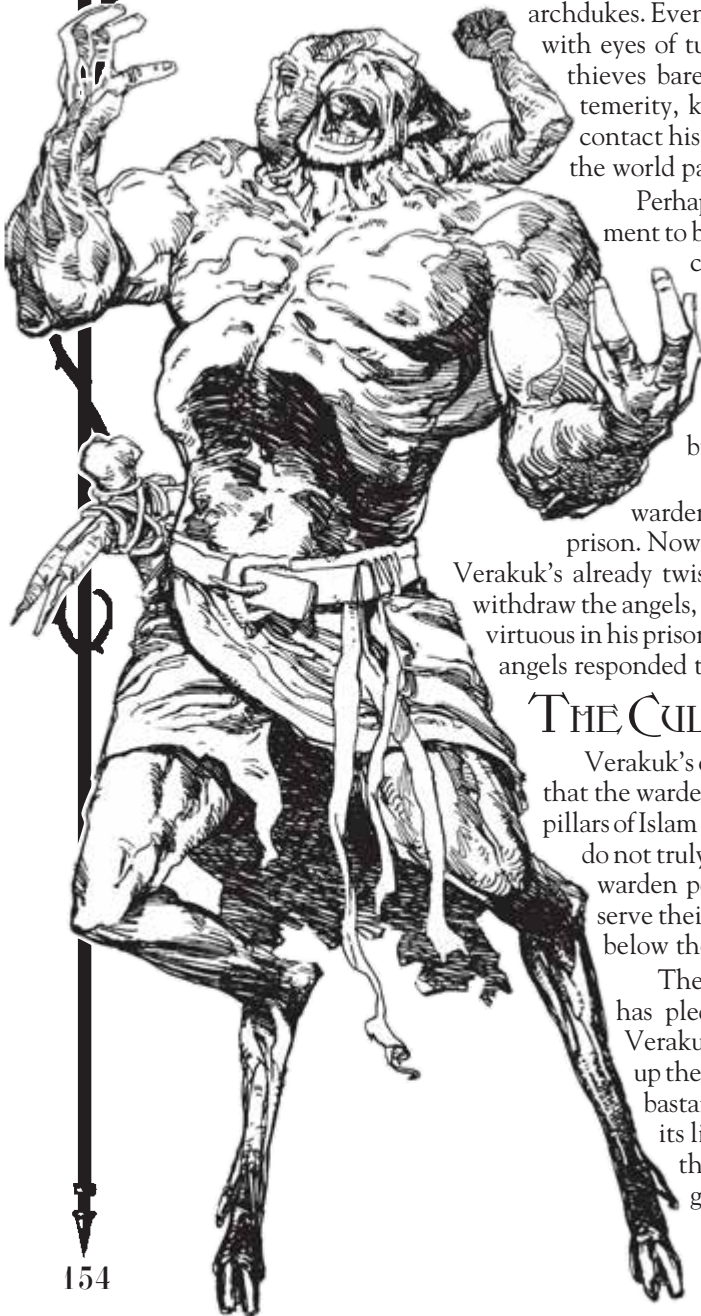
Perhaps it was his own resonance that prompted the Egyptian government to build a prison on the site, perhaps just coincidence. Whatever the case, a new warden arrived at the prison in 1987. He immediately blocked off the bottom level, forcing many inmates to sleep four or more to a cell, and began searching for something. Two years later, he found it — a falcon-headed statue with turquoise eyes. Moving the statue proved beyond his ability, but he was able to summon Verakuk from slumber once again. He then began building a cult to the demon from among the guards and inmates.

Verakuk appreciated the efforts, and of course the Faith that the warden provided, but the demon still wished to create his perfect prison. Now, however, there seemed to be no angels left to incarcerate, and Verakuk's already twisted plan became even more warped. If God had seen fit to withdraw the angels, Verakuk would find a way to call them back. He would hold the virtuous in his prison (which meant making good men out of sinners), and when the angels responded to this travesty, he would be ready.

THE CULT

Verakuk's cult operates on three levels. Every prisoner incarcerated knows that the warden is a deeply religious man. He insists on observance of the five pillars of Islam and encourages the inmates to revere Allah. Even prisoners who do not truly believe learn quickly to at least pay lip service to Islam, lest the warden point their impiety out to the guards. Such prisoners typically serve their terms (usually life) without ever knowing that a demon dwells below them.

The second level knows of Verakuk, but knows him as a djinn who has pledged service to Allah and recommends they do the same. Verakuk never grants power to men such as these, but he happily soaks up their Faith. (The Malefactor considers modern religion a laughable bastardization of the truth and refuses to empower anyone caught in its lies.) Most of the inmates fall into this category. They are aware that a supernatural presence dwells in prison with them, and this gives them hope and Faith.



Finally, some 30 of the inmates, 10 of the guards and the warden know the truth that Verakuk is a demon, capable of creating wonders from metal and moving the Earth with his will. These men have all given themselves entirely over to the demon. They enact his rites, passed down from the warden (though how exactly the warden learned of them is still something of a mystery) and pledge their blood and Faith to Verakuk. The warden knows the ritual to summon the demon from Hell, should it ever be necessary, as does one seemingly mute inmate. Verakuk has granted this inmate the ability to vanish from plain sight and charged him with surviving and remaining at the prison. The guards are forbidden to harm him or allow him to come to harm, though no one, not even the warden, knows why.

Verakuk has granted most of the guards and a few of the inmates power, usually simply enhancing their strength or ability to work with metals. The warden, however, has never asked for any mystical power, yet he seems to wield a good measure of it by himself. While Verakuk was initially simply grateful that the warden has awakened him and assembled a following, he is now growing concerned about this mortal. For several years, he wished for a way to learn more without any information getting back to the warden — and in the wake of the Maelstrom, he has a way.

THE DEMONS

The fallen incarnated into many different types of people as their souls flew free from the Abyss. Perhaps the most unfortunate were those who incarnated into prisoners — they had simply traded one cell for another. Of course, the powers of the fallen allow for miraculous escapes in some cases, but for the two demons who found bodies at Verakuk's prison, there was to be no early release.

One of these demons was Opiel, a Devil. During the war, Opiel had led armies of loyal mortals into battle and fought the ophanim as a true Angel of Radiance. Upon his release from Hell, he found the body of a prisoner who had been wrongly incarcerated for murder. In keeping with the warden's demands, the man had tried to be pious, but he had found no faith in his heart. He was nothing more than a shell of man, longing for death when Opiel arrived.

Afterward, Opiel began preaching to the prisoners with a new zeal. He quickly came to Verakuk's attention, and faced with the prospect of being beaten to death by the cultists, he revealed his True Name to the Earthbound and swore fealty to him. Now he serves as a spiritual leader, converting and counseling the other

inmates, as well as watching out for any of them who might merit induction into the "true" faith.

The other demon is a Fiend called Paogh. Shortly before the Maelstrom, a curious inmate followed several cultists to Verakuk's resting place. The demon noticed him, of course, and turned the cultists loose on the unfortunate man. When they were finished with him, he lay blind, bleeding and broken at the foot of a staircase. He drew his last breath just as Paogh arrived.

Paogh is probably Verakuk's prize asset. As a former Angel of Patterns, Paogh might very well be able to discover something useful about the warden. As such, Verakuk has maneuvered him into a position to watch the warden — cleaning the floors outside the offices and so forth. The Fiend has discovered nothing of import thus far, but even if he did, he might not share it. For one thing, Verakuk does not know Paogh's True Name, so the Earthbound cannot command him easily. More importantly, Paogh carries the memories of the cultists being set on his host, and he knows very well the source of that order.

Opiel is a classic Faustian, while Paogh is a Cryptic. Both of them would escape if given the chance, but they both understand that Verakuk might well have them found and slain if they try to leave.

VERAKUK, THE WARDEN

Nature/Demeanor: Autocrat

Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5, Charisma 2, Manipulation 2, Appearance 3, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 4

Abilities: Alertness 3, Awareness 3, Brawl 4, Crafts 5, Dodge 3, Intimidation 4, Leadership 3, Melee 3, Recall 2, Science 4, Technology 5

Backgrounds: Cult 3, Hoard 5, Influence (Prison) 2, Mastery 4, Thralls 2, Worship 2

Relic Type: Perfect (35 Faith points)

Willpower: 7

Faith: 8

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 3, Flesh 3, Thought 3

Apocalyptic Features: Armor, Aura of Dread, Immune to Bashing Damage, Irresistible Force, Lore Sense, Magnetic Field, Relentless, Shocking Touch

Grotesqueries: Abhorrent Sounds, Bulging Muscles, Eyes, Misshapen Head, Skin, Stench, Unstable, Vestigial Limbs

Lore: Awakenings 4, Celestials 3, Earth 5, Forge 5, Paths 5, Contamination 3

CHELNIEL, THE STONE—CIRCLE

Little is known about the Picts, a prehistoric civilization that once lived in what is now Scotland. Kenneth mac Alpin conquered them in the ninth century, and few reliable records exist.

Chelniel, a demon of the House of the Morning Star, remembers them. They summoned him up from Hell, after all.

Before the rebellion, Chelniel was a pioneer of the concept of leadership. The alpha wolf, the strongest ape, the lion who leads the pride — these creatures were the work of Chelniel and his Zaltu compatriots. But the angel with whom he most enjoyed working was one of the Ishhara, an Angel of Longing named Indina. Together, they provided the earliest humans with the means to be leaders and the inspiration to take the mantle of leadership. Of course, it didn't work out that way — the earliest humans had no reason to lead, for they had no reason to be uncomfortable. It seemed clear to both Chelniel and Indina that for their work to culminate, humans would need to rise to a challenge. When Lucifer came looking for recruits, they saw their chance.

Despite the misery that followed, they were not disappointed in humanity. While the vast majority of them were weak, there were always a few who rose up and claimed the crown, the scepter or whatever else might be appropriate in the face of adversity. When these demons were cast into Hell, they felt that humanity would survive despite it all.

Chelniel found himself called from the Abyss and bound into a circle of stones around the same time that Geshua of Nazareth was born, hundreds of miles away. The people who summoned him had called out for a champion, someone to lead them in a war against another tribe. Chelniel refused to lead, of course, but he guided the tribe's leaders to war and then watched as the humans killed each other with ferocity and tenacity that surprised even a demon.

For hundreds of years, the Picts worshipped Chelniel, calling on him for advice in times of strife, until finally their civilization fell. Always able to recognize the strongest of humans, Chelniel saw the end coming and asked that his stone circle be converted into a broch, a small stone tower of such strength that even a siege engine had difficulty breaking it. His circle was located on a hilltop far away from anything that invaders needed, and so like many of the other brochs, it remained standing for centuries.

While much of the lore of the Picts was lost, some of it survived to the modern age. As "modern paganism" rose in popularity, some of that lore was revealed to those who knew how to look. On a dark night in October of 1977, a small coven performed an ancient rite inside a small, stone tower in the Scottish Highlands. The fact that much of the rite was fabricated did not matter. Enough of the original ritual was intact, and Chelniel rose again.

THE CULT

Chelniel's followers fancy themselves warriors, but today's culture has a somewhat different take on warriors than the Picts did. All of them know how to fight (and indeed, the Devil grants his loyal followers gifts to strengthen the body and rally others to their cause), but they cannot prove themselves by making war on other tribes. Similarly, attacking normal people is not a challenge (nor a viable means of spreading the cult). Chelniel was able to maintain the cult for two decades on the pretense of being some ancient, Celtic night-god, but in the late 1990s, his flock began to drift away. And then one night, during a ritual with an especially weak turnout, a creature attacked.

It was an immense, red-furred wolf-man, and it tore apart three of the cultists before anyone could react. Most of the others ran



screaming, but one man drew his blade and screamed for the others to attack. Finally recognizing the spark of greatness in a human once again, Chelniel lent his power to the man and the cult slew the werewolf and took its skin. Finally, Chelniel had found a way to inspire his cult. They would hunt the creatures of darkness, not for any false pretenses of purity or doing God's will, but simply for the glory of battle.

Over the next few years, the cult has spread across the British Isles. The majority of the Cult of Chelniel has never visited — or indeed does not know of — the broch in which their patron resides. Many of them, however, are accomplished hunters, and some even have ties to other similar organizations, such as the Society of Leopold. A few, those furthest removed from the demon, are even imbued individuals (**Demon Storytellers Companion**, Chapter Five, p. 60) who have discovered the cult in their search for answers. Members of the Cult of Chelniel do not discriminate in its targets — anything supernatural will do — but they prefer beings that can satisfy their lust for battle. As such, vampires, werewolves and other demons tend to be their most common targets. The cult is very loosely organized, but most major cities in the British Isles have at least one cell, led by a thrall of Chelniel. These thralls are always gifted with the power to see through illusion and sense magic; Chelniel has never stopped searching for Indiana.

Chelniel discourages his cult from hunting the Highlands around his broch, although he does maintain a cell of his finest warriors in a village nearby, under the watchful command of one of his demonic servants, Kroskyn. He tells the cult that any creatures in that area are subservient to him, but in fact, he knows that the creatures who stalk the nights in the Highlands of Scotland are the worst sorts of monsters. If they were to discover him, they might well be able to enslave him.

THE DEMONS

Chelniel takes a keen interest in the fallen. In fact, he is quite reasonable about sparing a demon's life if the hapless demon gives up a portion of his True Name (provided the cell that attacks the given demon is in contact with Chelniel). Once this happens, Chelniel releases one of his two full-time demonic servants, Hajriel, to find the rest of the Name. Hajriel is a Devourer and a bloodhound par excellence, skilled at remaining invisible and ferreting out other demons. As one of the world's very few Devourer Cryptics, he enjoys his work, and has, in

fact, bought into Chelniel's dogma about the strongest warrior being the fittest to lead and so on.

Chelniel's other major servant is Kroskyn, a Scourge. Kroskyn is a former Angel of the Firmament, and is charged with keeping watch over the area surrounding Chelniel's reliquary. While it would have taken a siege engine to destroy the stone circle in olden times, now all it would take is some explosives, and Chelniel worries that someday, some creatures seeking vengeance will track his cultists back to the broch and destroy it. Thus far, no one has come close to doing so, although Kroskyn, a Ravener, has killed various beings who have approached the area. Most recently, he slew a small circle of spellcasters seeking to use the area's energy for their own purposes. Time will tell if any recriminations follow.

Chelniel has other demonic servitors scattered across the Isles, but he doesn't attempt to rule them or use them for anything other than information. He recognizes that ruling over anyone, human or demon, too closely stifles their potential for inspired leadership, and he knows that this sudden flash of brilliance might save his life once again someday.

CHELNIEL, THE STONE-CIRCLE

Nature/Demeanor: Director

Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Charisma 5, Manipulation 4, Appearance 5, Perception 4, Intelligence 4, Wits 5

Abilities: Alertness 2, Awareness 3, Bureaucracy 3, Dodge 4, Empathy 2, Etiquette 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 4, Law 3, Leadership 4, Melee 3, Politics 5, Recall 3, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 5

Backgrounds: Cult 2, Eminence 5, Hoard 4, Mastery 3, Thralls 2, Worship 2

Relic Type: Location (30 Faith points)

Willpower: 9

Faith: 8

Torment: 10

Urges: Emotion 3, Flesh 2, Thought 4

Apocalyptic Features: Distracting Aura, Dread Gaze, Eyes of Fate, Frenzy, Horns, Huge Size, Relentless, Sense the Hidden

Grotesqueries: Abhorrent Sounds, Decay, Deformed Limbs, Eyes, Glow, Skin, Unstable, Vestigial Limbs

Lore: Beast 4, Celestials 5, Humanity 5, Violation 4, Radiance 5, Storms 4

NOTES



WHAT IS THE ONYX PATH?

WINTER 2011-2012: (VTM) V20 COMPANION

SPRING 2012: (VTM) CHILDREN OF THE REVOLUTION

SUMMER 2012: (VTM) HUNTERS HUNTED 2

FALL 2012: (WTA) WEREWOLF: THE APOCALYPSE - 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

WINTER 2012-2013: (MTA) MAGE CONVENTION BOOK



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